

**Key Decision - No**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Annual Complaints Report 2021/22

**Meeting/Date:** Corporate Governance Committee

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor Stephen Ferguson, Executive  
Councillor for Customer Services

**Report by:** Louise Sboui

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

The report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) during 2021/22. 15 complaints were received by the LGO, five were investigated. Of the four complaints investigated, one was upheld. The report also provides data relating to Stage One and Stage Two complaints received by the Council between April 2021 – March 2022, broad themes, actions taken/service improvements from these have been considered.

### **Recommendation(s):**

The Committee is invited to comment on the LGO local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council (2021/22) and the data relating to formal Stage One and Stage Two complaints received (2021/22).

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the LGO and those received by the Council between April 2021 – March 2022.

## 2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 One of the purposes of the annual summary of statistics on complaints made to the LGO is to help ensure that learning from complaints helps inform service provision. The LGO statistics show complaints and enquiries received by service area and whether a decision was upheld, not upheld, advice given, closed after initial enquiry, incomplete/invalid, or referred back for local resolution.
- 2.2 A further purpose of this report is to provide Members with data relating to Stage One and Stage Two complaints received by Service area. The Council offers a two-stage process, if the customer remains dissatisfied after Stage One, they may escalate to Stage Two, for review by the relevant Senior Manager or a manager who is independent of the service that is the subject of the complaint.

## 3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 There were 15 complaints received by the LGO during 2021/22 (22 received during 2020/21) this includes those which did not progress to the LGO assessment stage or beyond.
- 3.2 Of these 15 complaints, there were five detailed investigations carried out (four carried out 2020/21), of the five complaints investigated, one was upheld. In summary:
- **Community –**  
Customer complained the Council dismissed their complaints about noise nuisance from neighbours, customer also complained about how the Council Officers handled the complaint. The LGO did not find fault with the Council's decision about statutory noise nuisance (no statutory nuisance found). However, as there were delays in responding to the customer, fault was found but the apology already provided was sufficient remedy to address the fault.

Learning points from this complaint were around making sure the service is clear with the advice being given and that customers fully understand what is being said. It was recognised that in any contact with customers, the team need to be aware that language used, tone and other factors can all lead to a customer taking different feelings from their experience. The team agreed to review the standard outcome letter for when statutory nuisance not found, customers will be provided with more explanation as to why.

### Three were **not upheld**

- Community - customer complained about the way the Council handled complaints about noise nuisance from a neighbour. There was no fault in the way the Council dealt with the complaint.

- Planning Enforcement – customer complained that the Council had not taken suitable enforcement action against a developer. There was no fault with how the Council has handled this case.
  - Test & Trace Support Payment – customer complains about the Council’s refusal to provide financial support when they had to isolate due to COVID-19. There was no fault in the Council’s decision-making process.
  - Covid/Business Grants – customer complained about the Council’s decision not to award business rates relief and a business grant to his businesses. There was no fault in the Council’s decision-making process.
- 3.3 The LGO has created a new interactive map - [Your Council's Performance](#) the site also provides helpful links to decisions made on all cases where the LGO have been involved. It should be noted that most cases are closed after initial enquiries made (investigation not warranted, alternative appeal/tribunal routes available or no worthwhile outcome achievable by investigation) or referred back for local resolution (complaint premature). Please see App 6 for comparison data with neighbouring authorities.
- 3.4 The number of Stage One complaints (233) recorded on Complaints Tracker has increased from last year (109), but these figures are more in line with pre-covid figures (280 in 2019/20). To provide context, for the Services with the higher number of complaints received, the higher volume customer transactions for these Services have also been indicated below.
- 58 complaints received by Development & Growth (47 relating to Development Management and 11 for Enforcement), these related mainly to delays in response or decision making or dissatisfaction with decision (3083 planning decisions made, and 354 cases raised alleging possible breaches of planning control for investigation)
  - 44 complaints received by Customer Services (Customer Services includes a number of different services e.g., council tax, benefits, housing needs, and customer services/call centre), these related mainly to decisions about council tax or benefit decisions (Council Tax administered for 81,00 properties; live case load of 7800 benefit claims)
  - 103 complaints received by Operations, these related mainly to missed bins (approx. 5.9 million bins collected per year)
  - 10 complaints received by Community these related to a mixture of issues around licensing or investigations (1742 licensing applications received)
  - 3 complaints received by Leisure & Health (1,207,734 “registered” attendances)
  - 5 complaints received by Corporate Services, these related to issues around postal votes (2,208 postal votes processed and added to the register and 80,000 initial canvass forms issued).
  - 10 Covid related/business grant complaints (in total the Council paid over 11k businesses over £54million in grants during the pandemic) Complaints related mainly to eligibility criteria. There was a high proportion of complaints escalated to stage 2, reflecting the importance, priority and frustrations felt by our customers during this difficult economic period.

- 3.5 33 Stage Two complaints were received, (36 last year). 15 of these related to Development and Growth.

Themes, actions taken/service improvements from Stage One and Stage Two complaints are included in Appendix 3 and 4.

- 3.6 Annual Performance monitoring:
- 90% of Stage One complaints were resolved within time (PI 32) against a target of 90%.
  - 71% of Stage 2 complaints were resolved within time (PI33) against a target of 90%. Late responses were mainly for Planning. There were significant issues within the Service during 2021/22 which affected complaints handling; these have been/continue to be resolved through recruitment.

- 3.7 Unreasonable Complainants
- Two customers continue to be managed under the Council's Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy, both have a single point of contact at HDC; and we are continuing to manage both cases in a way that does not entail a disproportionate amount of time at the expense of other residents. Close working with Information Governance Team continues to work well.

#### **4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 4.1 With complaints, there is always a risk that we do not record all the complaints we receive and so do not have the full picture or identify trends. Following changes to web content and web form (early 2020), the majority of complaints are now being received via the online form. As a result of improved online processes and content, we continue to see a significant reduction in complaints about issues that are not within HDC remit (e.g., on street parking issues, highways) with customers being redirected to the correct organisation from the website. Less than 10 non HDC complaints received 2021/22 (16 received 2020/21, 47 received 2019/20).
- 4.2 The impact of Covid and lockdown measures was clearly visible in last year's figures, when there was a significant drop in the number of complaints received. The figures are now more comparable to previous years.
- 4.3 The Council's internal monitoring and recording system for complaints (Complaints Tracker) continues to provide a significant aid to improving how complaints are both recorded/monitored and handled on time. The system sends deadline reminders to Officers, who have reported is a helpful function.
- 4.4 Where possible, the identification of lessons learnt and service improvements as a result of complaints by Service area (you said – we did) has been reflected in App 3 and 4 below. Highlights include – web content reviews, reviews of various internal processes, refresher training for staff, refunds and recruitment.

4.5 Complaints are just one aspect of customer feedback, it is important that we also record, monitor and report upon compliments, 276 were received in 2020/21. These are set out by service area in App 5 below. Primarily Housing, Call Centre and Refuse/Recycling teams received most compliments, but some also received for Planning and Leisure.

4.6 Further to the review of the Council's complaints process, work has been completed on updates to the Customer Feedback Policy, staff guidance, webpage content and intranet page content, along with some staff training. Work will continue on development of the process to demonstrate evidence on how complaints lead to service improvements.

## **5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

[See Corporate Plan](#)

5.1 Complaints handling links to the following Strategic Priority within the Corporate Plan – Becoming a more Customer Focused Organisation.

## **6. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

6.1 Members are invited to note the LGO Local Authority Report for Huntingdonshire District Council and note the data relating to Stage One and Stage Two complaints and compliments received by the Council.

## **7. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1	LGO statistics for HDC
Appendix 2	HDC recorded complaints by Service
Appendix 3	Complaints – Stage 1 themes/actions taken/service improvements
Appendix 4	Complaints – Stage 2 themes/actions taken/service improvements
Appendix 5	Compliments
Appendix 6	LGO statistics – neighbouring authority comparison

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Appendix 1

LGO Local Authority Report – Huntingdonshire District Council

**Complaints and Enquiries Received (by Category) 2021/2022**

HDC	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Environment Services, Public Protection and Regulation	Planning and Development	Housing	Highways and Transport	Adult Care Services*	Total
2021/22	3	4	3	5	0	0		15
2020/21	11	1	3	6		0	1	22
2019/20	2	0	5	10	3	3		23

**Complaints and Enquiries Decided (by Outcome) 2020/21**

HDC	Upheld	Not upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiry	Incomplete/invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total	Uphold rate (%)	Average uphold rate (%) of similar authorities
2021/22	1	4	1	7	1	4	18	20	51
2020/21	3	1	0	9	0	10	23	75	53
2019/20	2	2	1	10	1	4	20	50	45

A number of cases will have been received and decided in different business years, this means the number of complaints and enquiries received will not always match the number of decisions made.

**Appendix 2 - HDC Recorded Complaints by Service April 2021– March 2022**

Service	Stage One			Stage Two			Total			LGO investigations		
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Community	4	8	10	-	4	3	4	12	13	-	1	2
Covid	N/A	22	10	N/A	16	5	N/A	38	15	N/A		2
Customer Services*	37	27	44	2	6	5	39	33	49	1	2	
Development	44	28	58	11	7	15	55	35	73	2	1	1
Operations	161	21	103	1	2	4	162	23	107	1		
Finance and Corporate Services	4	1	5	1	1	0	5	2	5			
Leisure and Health	30	1	3	1	0	1	31	1	4			
Shared Services	0	1**	0	0	0	0	0	1	0			
Other (cross cutting)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	-	0			
<b>Total</b>	280	109	233	17	36	33	297	145	266	4	4	5

\*Customer Services includes a number of different services e.g., council tax, benefits, housing needs, and customer services/call centre \*\*3CICT/building control

### Appendix 3 - 2021/2022 Stage One complaints - summary of themes and actions taken/service improvements

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<b>Community</b> (10) Upheld - 1 Not upheld – 5 Partially upheld - 2 On-going -2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome of investigation</li> <li>• Signage/parking on grass</li> <li>• Process for reporting lost/found dogs</li> <li>• Fly tipping process</li> <li>• Timescales/process for MOT and renewal of taxi plate</li> <li>• Private hire/licensing issue</li> <li>• Questions in knowledge test</li> </ul>	Clarity and signposting to further advice Site visits Webpage content review Review of process for handling team inbox and telephone calls Review of knowledge test in line with updated and policy and statutory guidance.
<b>Covid/Business Grants</b> (10) Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 7 Partially upheld - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eligibility for test &amp; trace support payment</li> <li>• Eligibility criteria and how Omicron Grant application handled</li> <li>• Eligibility and process for how Growth Grant handled (first come first served basis)</li> <li>• Eligibility for Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)</li> <li>• Eligibility and process for applying for ARG and Restart Grant (use of Customer Portal)</li> </ul>	Clarity and reassurance provided Additional checks before passing to payment and training for staff  Further explanation and clarity provided  Further explanation and clarity provided  Procedures reviewed, additional support provided to the customer, further explanation and clarity provided, apology for error
<b>Customer Services</b> (44)  Upheld - 4 Not upheld - 13 Partially upheld – 3   Upheld - 4 Not upheld - 3 Partially upheld – 3	<p><b>Council Tax</b> (20):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council tax liability, bill calculations and reminder notices</li> <li>• Summons/collections process</li> <li>• Lack of response or difficulty in making contact with the team</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> <li>• Time taken to provide a refund</li> <li>• Incorrect contact details use</li> </ul> <p><b>Benefits</b> (10):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefit calculation</li> <li>• Incorrect contact details used</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> <li>• Failure to respond</li> </ul>	Further explanation, advice and clarity provided Reminder to property inspector to add more information to card left at properties Review of web page content to see if it can be simplified Procedures reviewed, reminders to team Refresher training for Customer Service team Council tax line fault reported   Reminders to staff Further explanation, advice and clarity provided Apologised for length of time taken to deal with issue



Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<p>Upheld - 5 Not upheld - 3 Partially upheld – 2</p> <p>Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 1 Partially upheld - 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties getting through to talk to someone</li> </ul> <p><b>Customer Services (10)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process for reporting missed bin</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> <li>• Process for verifying documents</li> <li>• Time spent on hold</li> <li>• Advice provided</li> <li>• Holding message</li> </ul> <p><b>Housing Needs (4)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorrect advice provided/way in which case handled</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Clarity/advice provided Letter of apology Training for staff Review of how customers handled at reception Process improved (to ensure customer provided with appropriate email upon request) Reminder to staff Multi skilled training for more advisors planned</p> <p>Refresher training for customer service advisors Clarity/advice provided Advice to team Review undertaken</p>
<p><b>Development &amp; Growth (58)</b></p> <p>Upheld - 7 Not upheld - 23 Partially upheld – 17</p> <p>Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 7 Partially upheld – 3 Non-HDC - 1</p>	<p><b>Planning applications (47):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to respond</li> <li>• Delays in decision making</li> <li>• Dissatisfied with decision</li> <li>• How objections are considered</li> </ul> <p><b>Planning Enforcement (11)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Way case handled</li> <li>• Delays in case progress</li> <li>• Lack of response</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Further clarity and reassurance provided. The Service acknowledges and apologise for any delays in response. Review of case allocation system when officer leave Reminders to staff and improvements to processes Site visit Recruitment programme Application decision escalated for determination/queries resolved New system for chasing invalid application IT issue with application management system resolved</p> <p>Clarification/advice provided Review of voicemail messages Advice to team re updates to customers, complaints handling Implemented quarterly case reviews with Team Leader</p>

<b>Service</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Actions taken/service improvements</b>
<p><b>Operations</b> (103)</p> <p>Upheld - 31 Not upheld - 23 Partially upheld – 16 On-going - 3</p> <p>Upheld - 8 Not upheld - 4 Partially upheld – 1 Non-HDC – 2</p> <p>Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 7 Partially upheld – 1 Non-HDC – 1</p>	<p><b>Waste/recycling</b> (73)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed bin</li> <li>• Missed bins (assisted collection)</li> <li>• Bin too small</li> <li>• Not enough refuse sacks</li> <li>• Return of bins after collection</li> <li>• Contaminated/rejected bins</li> <li>• Crew behaviour</li> <li>• Delays in delivery of additional (or replacement) bins</li> <li>• Process for reporting missed bins</li> </ul> <p><b>Streetscene</b> (15)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog mess</li> <li>• Lack of response</li> <li>• Gully clearance</li> <li>• Damage to property by trees/bushes</li> <li>• Grass cutting in wildflower area</li> <li>• Overgrown tree</li> <li>• Litter near riverside</li> <li>• Damage to road by vehicle</li> <li>• Missed public bin collection</li> </ul> <p><b>Parking</b> (11)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resident parking permit</li> <li>• Issues with MiPermit App</li> <li>• Publicity around closure of car park for event</li> <li>• Usability of ticket machines</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Apology and further explanation provided Telephone call to customer Map and advice to crew More sacks provided Larger bin provided (for flats) Refund Monitoring of collection</p> <p>Site visits Advice to team Advice/signposting to customer Maps updated Meeting arranged with customer to gain feedback and insight into their experience</p> <p>Wider communications when car park will be closed Refund issued</p>

<b>Service</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Actions taken/service improvements</b>
Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 0 Partially upheld – 2 Non HDC - 2	<b>Other (4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishing pontoons</li> <li>• Cars parked on highway during events at country park (non HDC)</li> <li>• Condition of drainage ditch</li> <li>• Chorus Homes (non HDC)</li> </ul>	Site visit, clearance arranged Advice and signposting to relevant organisation
<b>Finance and Corporate Services (5)</b> Elections/Democratic Services, HR, Finance, Audit Upheld - 3 Not upheld - 2	<b>Elections (5)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues with postal votes</li> <li>• Issues with name change</li> <li>• Issues with annual canvas</li> </ul>	Contract/supplier contacted to resolve Advice/clarity provided Additional support measures considered Exploring internal data sharing
<b>One Leisure (3)</b> Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 0 Partially upheld – 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleanliness of swimming pool</li> <li>• Damage to floor</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> </ul>	Advice to staff member Reminder to staff re complaints handling More frequent schedule put in place

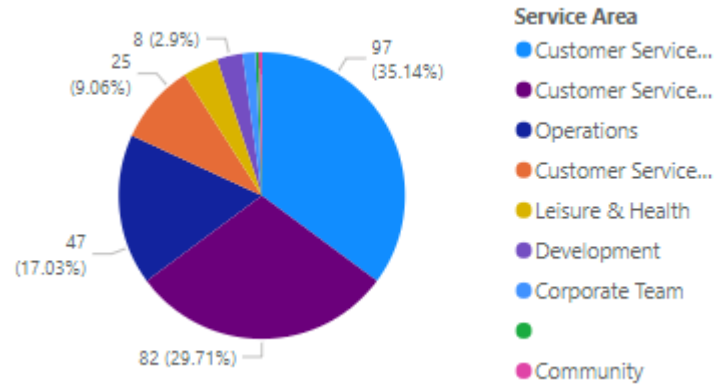
#### App 4 - 2021/22 Stage Two complaints – summary of themes and actions taken/service improvements

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<b>Community (3)</b> Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 3	<b>Licensing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timescales/process for MOT and renewal of taxi plate</li> <li>• Questions in knowledge test</li> <li>• Process around when a live music license is required.</li> </ul>	Opportunity to provide further clarity, apology for delay in response; plus, commitment to review how complaints are handled within the service to ensure timescales are adhered to Review of the webpage to ensure clear guidance is available Update of the Knowledge test in line with policy and statutory guidance
<b>Covid/Business Grants (5)</b> Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 3 Partially upheld - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eligibility for Growth Grant, Test &amp; Trace Support Payments, Omicron Grant</li> <li>• Process for allocation of Growth Grant</li> <li>• Lack of response to queries</li> <li>• Difficulties in using customer portal to apply for a grant</li> </ul>	Training for staff using spreadsheets Consideration of how to support non online applicants further
<b>Customer Services (5)</b>  Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 2 Partially upheld – 1	<b>Council Tax/Business rates (2):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delays in response</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> </ul> <b>Benefits (3)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charging order wrongly applied</li> <li>• Delays in response</li> <li>• Officer conduct</li> </ul>	Apology to customer Further clarity provided to customer  Advice to staff Process reviewed Further explanation provided to customer
<b>Development &amp; Growth (15)</b>  Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 7 Partially upheld – 4 Ongoing - 1  Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 1 Partially upheld - 2	<b>Planning Applications (12):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unhappy with planning decision</li> <li>• How neighbour objections considered</li> <li>• Delays with decision</li> <li>• Unhappy with way in which application handled</li> </ul> <b>Planning Enforcement (3):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alleged planning enforcement failure</li> <li>• Delay in response</li> <li>• Way application handled</li> </ul>	Website wording amended to make clear that stage 1 complaint may be handled by officer involved at previous stage (service resolution) Reminder to staff to check consultations required for applications Conversation with customer helped to diffuse issue  Reminder to team re complaints handling, review of processes for handling complaints Review of process for taking calls

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
		Further advice and clarity provided Implemented quarterly case reviews with Team Leader
<b>Operations (4)</b> Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 3	<b>Other (1):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking on public highways during events</li> </ul> <b>Refuse/recycling (1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed bins/assisted collection</li> </ul> <b>Street Scene (1):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condition of riverside</li> </ul> <b>Parking services (1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking ticket and requirement for blue badge</li> </ul>	Further clarity provided, signposting to Town Council and event mitigation forwarded to SAG and Highways Authority.  Crews given maps for collection points. monitoring period in place  Site visited, bank reinstated. Area seeded with wildflower mix to support local wildlife.  Further clarity provided
<b>Leisure &amp; Health (1)</b> Partially upheld - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damage to floor</li> </ul>	Further clarity and reassurance provided
<b>Finance and Corporate Resources (0)</b>		

## Appendix 5 – Compliments recorded on Compliments Tracker April 2021 – March 2022

Service Area	2021	Total
Community	1	1
Corporate Team	4	4
Customer Services (Call Centre)	97	97
Customer Services (Housing Needs)	82	82
Customer Services (Housing)	25	25
Development	8	8
Leisure & Health	11	11
Operations	47	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>276</b>



One Leisure – (460 complimentary scores recorded via Net Promoter Score Survey)

Compliments received in 2020/21 - 351

## Appendix 6 LGO Neighbouring Authority Statistics

Cambridgeshire Councils	Detailed investigations decided (by outcome) 2021/22		Complaints and enquiries received	
	Not upheld	Upheld	2020/21	2021/22
<b>Huntingdonshire</b> (*population 180,800)	4	1	22	15
<b>South Cambridgeshire</b> (*population 162,000)	0	2	14	Data not available
<b>Fenland</b> (*population 102,500)	0	0	7	Data not available
<b>East Cambridgeshire</b> (*population 87,700)	0	2	8	Data not available
<b>Cambridge City</b> (population 145,700)	3	4	12	Data not available
<b>Cambridgeshire County Council</b>	5	13	39	Data not available

\* [Cambridgeshire Insight – Population – Census 2021 – First Results](#)