

Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Annual Complaints Report

Meeting/Date: Corporate Governance Committee – 27th September 2023

Executive Portfolio: Councillor Stephen Ferguson - Executive Councillor for Customer Services

Report by: Business Change Manager

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to constant review of and improvements to the delivery of services for customers. Customer feedback is valued to allow services to be maintained and improved. Complaints, in particular, are an important way for the Council to be accountable to the public, as well as providing valuable insight into performance and processes are in place to support the Council to become more effective at driving change and improvements, as result of feedback. Appendices 3 and 4 provide examples of actions taken/service improvements arising from complaints.

The report provides Members with information on data relating to Stage One and Stage Two complaints received by the Council between April 2022 – March 2023. There has been a reduction in the number of Stage One complaints (175) compared to previous year (233). There has also been a reduction in the number of Stage Two complaints (21) compared to previous year (33).

The Report also provides data on complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) during 2022/23. Twelve complaints were received by the LGO, three were investigated, all three were upheld.

Recommendation:

The Committee is

RECOMMENDED

(a) to comment on the data relating to formal Stage One and Stage Two complaints received (2022/23); and

**(b) to comment on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Local Authority Report for Huntingdonshire District Council
(2022/23).**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on complaints received by the Council between April 2022 – March 2023 and complaints referred to the LGO.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 One of the purposes of this report is to provide Members with data relating to Stage One and Stage Two complaints received by the Service. 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
- 2.2 A further purpose of this report is to provide Members with data relating to the annual summary of statistics on complaints made to the LGO. 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.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 The number of Stage One complaints recorded on Complaints Tracker (175) has reduced from last year (233). 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:
- 98 complaints were received by Operations, these related mainly to missed bins (approx. 5.9 million bins collected per year);
 - 37 complaints received by Development & Growth (27 relating to Development Management and 7 for Enforcement, with others relating to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), or combination of issues), these related mainly to delays in response or decision making or dissatisfaction with decision (3023 planning decisions made, and 331 enforcement cases registered);
 - 18 complaints received by Customer Services (Customer Services includes: council tax, benefits, housing needs, and customer services/call centre), these related mainly to decisions about Council Tax or housing case handling (Council Tax administered for 81,733 properties; live case load of 7,565 benefit claims);
 - 13 complaints received by Community these related to a mixture of issues around investigations;
 - 3 Energy Bill/Covid grant related complaints (in total the Council paid £9.5m to over 61k households, these related mainly to eligibility criteria;

- 4 complaints received by Corporate Services, these related to local land charges search/enforcement notice, (125k poll cards issued to eligible electors for May 2022 elections, 2,157 official Local Land Charges searches completed) and solar panel scheme;
 - 2 complaints received by Leisure & Health (1,425,849 “registered” attendances).
- 3.2 The number of Stage Two complaints (21) received has reduced from last year (33). 10 of these related to Development and Growth.
- 3.3 Themes, actions taken/service improvements from Stage One and Stage Two complaints are included in Appendix 3 and 4.
- 3.4 Annual Performance monitoring:
- 93% of Stage One complaints were resolved within time against a target of 90%.
 - 87% of Stage 2 complaints were resolved within time against a target of 90%.
- 3.5 There were 12 complaints received by the LGO during 2022/23 (15 received during 2021/22) this includes those which did not progress to the LGO assessment stage or beyond. Of these 12 complaints, there were three detailed investigations carried out, all three were upheld.

In summary:

Case 1: Case relates to the way in which the Council handled a report of breaches of planning control, primarily delay in progressing enforcement proceedings. The Council provided a formal apology for the delays. The LGO recommended a payment of £100 be made in recognition of the uncertainty and frustration the customer experienced.

Learning points from this complaint:

- The team have introduced measures to ensure, where possible, such delays with enforcement investigations are avoided in future;
- Extra staff have been recruited to the team;
- Quarterly case reviews of all cases with the manager of the team have been introduced.

Case 2: The LGO found fault with regards to failing to ensure planning conditions for works on a site near to a resident’s home were complied with, including for a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP). The Council delayed reaching a decision on the submitted Plan and delayed dealing with the

formal complaint. The Council provided a formal apology for the delays. The LGO recommended a payment of £250 be made in recognition of the avoidable injustice caused by the fault.

Learning points from this complaint:

- The team have introduced measures to ensure where possible, such delays with enforcement investigations are avoided in future;
- Extra staff have been recruited to the team;
- Quarterly case reviews of all cases with the manager of the team have been introduced;
- Weekly enforcement forums with the Planning Service Manager have been introduced to ensure any applications that may impact on upon enforcement proceedings are prioritised by Planning Officers;
- A review of formal complaints process within the Planning Service was also undertaken.

Case 3: The LGO found fault with regards to a combination of a resident not having the opportunity to comment on the amended plans and the case officer's report not providing accurate information about levels or direct reference to overlooking affecting a resident's garden and that this has caused unnecessary time and trouble trying to understand how the Council had considered the impact of the neighbouring development. The Council provided a formal apology for the fault. The LGO recommended that a payment of £200 be made to reflect the uncertainty and the time and trouble in making a complaint.

Learning points from this complaint:

- The team agreed to review case officer guidance around the consideration of whether to reconsult on amended plans, to take into account the wider issue of fairness to those who may wish to make additional representations on amended applications.

It is worthwhile to note that the above cases relate to complaints raised in financial year 2021/22, and investigated by the LGO in 2022/23. These are therefore historical cases. There has been a comprehensive programme of work within Planning and improvements continue to be delivered.

3.6 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 are made (investigation not warranted) or

referred back for local resolution (complaint premature). Please see App 6 for comparison data with neighbouring authorities.

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 the Council. Both cases are managed 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. The majority of complaints are received via the online form. As a result of improved online processes and content, the Council continues to see a significant reduction in complaints about issues that are not within its remit (e.g. adult social care, highways) with customers being redirected to the correct organisation from the website. Three recorded non-Huntingdonshire District Council complaints were received 2022/23, (10 received 2021/22, 16 received 2020/21, 47 received 2019/20).
- 4.2 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 it as a helpful function.
- 4.4 Where possible, the identification of lessons learned and service improvements as a result of complaints by service area (You Said – We Did) are reflected in Appendix 3 and 4. Highlights include: reviews of various internal processes, refresher training for staff, review of payment methods.
- 4.5 Complaints are just one aspect of customer feedback, the Council also records, monitors and reports upon compliments. 233 were received in 2022/23 (276 in 2021/22), as set out in Appendix 5. Primarily Housing, Call Centre and Refuse/Recycling teams received most compliments, but some were also received for Planning, Community and Leisure.
- 4.6 Work will continue on development of the process to demonstrate evidence on how complaints lead to service improvements alongside continued staff guidance and training, and some focused work with Planning.

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

[See Corporate Plan](#)

- 5.1 Complaints handling links to the following priority within the Corporate Plan – Delivering good quality, high value-for-money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.

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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LGO Local Authority Report – Huntingdonshire District Council

Complaints and Enquiries Received (by Category) 2022/2023

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
2022/23	1	2	3	6	0	0	0	12
2021/22	3	4	3	5	0	0	0	15
2020/21	11	1	3	6	0	0	1	22

Complaints and Enquiries Decided (by Outcome) 2022/23

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
2022/23	3	0	1	5	0	3	12	100	59
2021/22	1	4	1	7	1	4	18	20	51
2020/21	3	1	0	9	0	10	23	75	53

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.

HDC Recorded Complaints by Service April 2022 – March 2023

Service	Stage One			Stage Two			Total			LGO investigations		
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Community**	8	10	13	4	3	3	12	13	16	1	2	
Covid	22	10	0	16	5	0	38	15	0		2	
Customer Services*	27	44	18	6	5	3	33	49	21	2		
Development & Growth***	28	58	37	7	15	10	35	73	47	1	1	3
Operations	21	103	98	2	4	4	23	107	102			
Corporate Services	1	5	4	1	0	0	2	5	4			
Leisure and Health	1	3	2	0	1	0	1	4	2			
Shared Services	1**	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0			
Other (cross cutting)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Energy Bill	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	4			
Total	109	233	175	36	33	21	145	266	196	4	5	3

*Community includes environmental health, community protection and enforcement, licensing.

Customer Services includes a number of different services e.g., council tax, benefits, housing needs, and customer services/call centre, Fraud **3CICT/building control. * includes Growth (Housing/Regeneration).

2022/2023 Stage One complaints - summary of themes and actions taken/service improvements (175)

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<p>Community (13) Upheld - 4 Not upheld – 5 Partially upheld - 2 On-going -2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Way in which smoke nuisance complaint handled • Way in which request for a housing inspection handled • Way in which two noise nuisance complaints handled • 3 complaints relating to members of staff member • Way in which abandoned vehicle report handled • Complaint about pest control service • Way in which a high hedge complaint handled • Way in which complaint about abandoned vehicle handled • 2 complaints relating to dog kennels 	<p>Review of resources, recruitment. Development of multi skilled approach to service requests. Reminder to team re checks required when evidence gathering. Introduction of new high hedge complaints process and payments process . Review of payment methods.</p>
<p>Customer Services (18) Not upheld - 6 Partially upheld – 2 Not upheld – 1 Partially upheld – 1 Not upheld - 1 Partially upheld – 1</p>	<p>Council Tax (8):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council tax liability, bill calculations and reminder notices • Summons/collections process • Empty property premium • Lack of response or difficulty in making contact with the team • Allegation of data breach <p>Benefits (2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit entitlement <p>Customer Services (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officer conduct • Way in which Council Tax payment handled 	<p>Staff reminder about call notes. Ensure contractors aware of council policies. Case reviewed and recovery level reassessed. Training for staff.</p>

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<p>Not upheld - 1</p> <p>Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 3 Partially upheld - 1</p>	<p>Fraud (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Way in which fraud case handled <p>Housing Needs (5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues relating to temporary accommodation • Complaint about member of staff/failure to respond • Time spent waiting for rehousing • Issues around housing plan and way case handled • Impact of temporary housing on neighbours 	<p>Clarity/advice provided.</p>
<p>Development & Growth (37)</p> <p>Partially upheld – 1 Not upheld - 2</p> <p>Upheld - 3 Not upheld - 12 Partially upheld – 9 On-going - 3</p> <p>Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 5 Partially upheld – 1</p>	<p>Growth (3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two complaints about CIL • Complaint about contents of Economic Development newsletter <p>Planning applications (27):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to respond • Delays in decision making • Dissatisfied with decision • How objections are considered • Complaint about staff member <p>Planning Enforcement (7)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Way cases handled • Delays in case progress • Lack of response 	<p>Staff training and review of process. Re-introduction of pre-application service, no longer accepting amendments. recruitment are all improvements that will address some of the issues raised in complaints.</p> <p>Recruitment programme implementation of quarterly case reviews with Team Leader likely to address some of the issues raised in complaints.</p>
<p>Operations (98)</p> <p>Upheld - 53</p>	<p>Waste/recycling (73)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missed bin • Missed bins (assisted collection) 	<p>Reminder to crews. Monitoring of collection.</p>

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<p>Not upheld - 15 Partially upheld – 5</p> <p>Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 1 Partially upheld – 6</p> <p>Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 3 Partially upheld –1</p> <p>Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 4 Partially upheld – 4 On-going - 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return of bins after collection • Contaminated/rejected bins • Crew behaviour • Bin store doors left open • Noise from early morning collections • Damage to property • Delays in delivery of new bin <p>Street scene (9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to property by trees/bushes/weeds • Issues with public bins • Road not swept • Poor work re grass cutting • Fly tipping <p>Parking (5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with use of social media • Parking appeal due to lack of signage • Car parking for 3 wheeled motorcycles • Issues with Mi Permit App <p>Other (11)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overgrown trees/vegetation • Parking ticket machines not working • Splinter from park bench • Process for reporting missed bin online • Issues with land encroachment 	<p>Reminder to crews in team meeting re customer interaction. Management instruction. Reminder to crews about spillages. Bin delivered as priority. Bin repair as priority. Advice to customer . Map and advice to crew.</p> <p>Monitoring of area. Road swept. Area cleared. Site visit. Wider review of site. Arrangement for grass to be cut again.</p> <p>Charge notice waived and signage issue addressed. Worked with the contractors involved to restore power to the Pay & Display machine.</p> <p>Staff training. Internal process amended to ensure staff absences do not impact service provision . Back-office process improved, Support Team provided with more information to provide customers with quicker response to enquiries. Amendment to web content re reporting of missed bins online. Site visit and agreement on work.</p>
<p>Finance and Corporate Services (4) Elections/Democratic Services, HR, Estates, Finance, Audit</p>	<p>Elections (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local land charges search • Issue with annual polling card 	<p>Systems issue to be addressed.</p>

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
Upheld - 2 Not upheld – 1 Non-HDC - 1	Estates & Facilities (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar panel contractor • Bus station refurbishment 	Work with partners to resolve issues.
One Leisure (2) Upheld - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officer conduct • Delays in customer contact 	Advice to staff member. Review of process to ensure cover for staff absences.
Other (3) Not upheld - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process relating to applications for Energy Bill Rebate 	

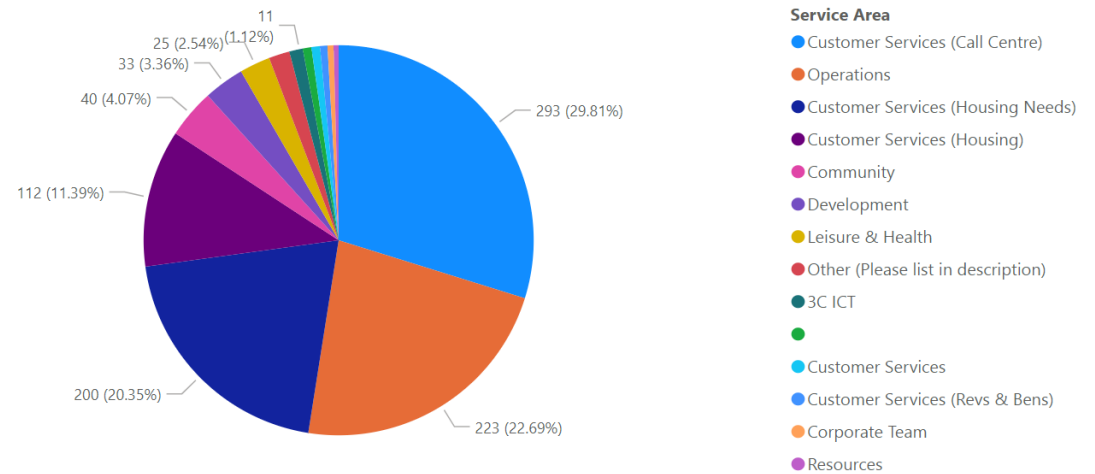
2021/22 Stage Two complaints – summary of themes and actions taken/service improvements (21)

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
Community (3) Upheld - 0 Not upheld - 3	Environmental Health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Way noise nuisance complaint handled • Way abandoned vehicle complaints handled 	Opportunity to provide further clarity. Review of resources, recruitment. Development of multi skilled approach to service requests.
Customer Services (3) Not upheld - 2 Non HDC – 1	Customer Services (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data protection issue • Non HDC issue Council Tax/Business rates (1): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays in response/tone of correspondence • Officer conduct 	Further clarity provided to customer.
Development & Growth (10) Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 3 Partially upheld – 2 Not upheld - 2 Not Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 1	Planning Applications (6): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissatisfaction with decision • Delays in decision • How neighbour objections considered Planning Enforcement (2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alleged planning enforcement failure Planning Growth (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding opportunity in Economic Development newsletter Development Other (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of CIL 	Opportunity to provide further clarity and apology for delays. Action Plan to reduce backlog will address issues raised in complaints. Conversation with customer helped to diffuse issue. Quarterly case reviews with Team Leader.
Operations (4) Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 2	Street Scene (2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overgrown vegetation Parking services (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officer conduct 	Further clarity provided. Apology for delay. Review of wider site. Change to processes.

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
	Refuse/recycling (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="450 197 696 229">• Bulky waste cost	
Other (1) Not upheld - 1	Energy Bill Rebate Scheme (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="450 261 725 293">• application process	

Compliments recorded on Compliments Tracker April 2022 – March 2023

Service Area	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
3C ICT		5	1	1		7
Community	4	7				11
Corporate Team	1	21	1	13	3	39
Customer Services		1	4			5
Customer Services (Call Centre)		7				7
Customer Services (Housing Needs)	2	79	97	81	24	283
Customer Services (Housing)			82	88	24	194
Customer Services (Revs & Bens)	1	86	25			112
Development		6				6
Leisure & Health	1	14	8	9	1	33
Operations	1	5	11	6	1	24
Other (Please list in description)	18	114	47	27	14	220
Resources	2	2		8	3	15
Total	30	351	276	233	70	960



One Leisure – (409 complimentary scores recorded via Net Promoter Score Survey)

Compliments received in 2022/23 - **233**

Compliments received in 2021/22 - **276**

Compliments received in 2020/21 - **351**

LGO Neighbouring Authority Statistics

Cambridgeshire Councils	Detailed investigations decided (by outcome) 2022/23		Uphold rate <i>Average uphold rate</i>	Complaints and enquiries received	
	Not upheld	Upheld		2021/22	2022/23
Huntingdonshire (*population 180,800)	0	3	100% (59%)	15	12
South Cambridgeshire (*population 162,000)	1	5	83% (59%)	14	24
Fenland (*population 102,500)	3	0	0% (59%)	5	10
East Cambridgeshire (*population 87,700)	4	1	20% (59%)	9	10
Cambridge City (population 145,700)	1	5	83% (59%)	19	25
Cambridgeshire County Council	5	18	78% (80%)	60	76

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.

In 2022-23 the LGO changed their investigation processes, contributing towards an increase in the average uphold rate across all complaints, therefore advisable to consider comparing individual council uphold rates against the average rate rather than against previous years.

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