

**Key Decision - No**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

<b>Title/Subject Matter:</b>	<b>Complaints and Compliments</b>
<b>Meeting/Date:</b>	Corporate Governance Committee
<b>Executive Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Stephen Ferguson, Executive Councillor for Customer Services
<b>Report by:</b>	Louise Sboui
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All

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### **Executive Summary:**

Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to a constant review of and improvements to the delivery of services for all of our customers. We value customer feedback to help us maintain and improve our services. Complaints, in particular are an important way for the Council to be accountable to the public, as well as providing valuable insight into our performance and we have processes in place to support our aim of becoming more effective at driving through 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 2023 – March 2024.

There has been an increase in the number of Stage One complaints (206) compared to previous year (175). There has also been an increase in the number of Stage Two complaints (33) compared to previous year (21). There has been a slight increase in complaints for Customer Services, Planning, Leisure and Health. However, there has been work with these services around complaint handling. An increase in complaints should not be a cause for concern as they provide opportunities for improvements and may indicate increased awareness of the councils complaints process. Appendix 2 contains comparative data by year and appendices 3 and 4 contain information on complaint themes.

The Report also provides data on complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) during 2023/24. 19 complaints were received by the LGO, three were investigated, one was upheld.

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

The Committee is invited to note the data relating to formal Stage One and Stage Two complaints received (2023/24) and the LGO local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council (2023/24).

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on complaints received by the Council between April 2023 – March 2024 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 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. Customers are then signposted to the LGO.
- 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 (206) has increased from last year (175). 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 received by Operations, these related mainly to missed bins (*approx. 5.9 million bins collected per year, 99.25% collection rate*). The Garden waste Subscription Service was introduced in April 24, so this report does not include data relating to complaints about this significant service change. However, some complaints were received between November 2023 – March 2024 regarding the introduction of the Scheme and the Early Bird Offer (12 complaints)
  - 50 complaints received by Development & Growth (36 relating to Development Management and 11 for Enforcement), these related mainly to delays in response or decision making or dissatisfaction with decision (*3079 planning decisions made, and 284 enforcement cases registered*)
  - 28 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 how housing case handled (*Council Tax administered for 81,870 properties; live case load of 7363 benefit claims*)
  - 13 complaints received by Community these related to a mixture of issues around investigations
  - 5 complaints received by Finance & Corporate Services, these related mainly to Estates management
  - 2 complaints received relating to 'Other' relating to how data handled
  - 10 complaints received by Leisure & Health (*1,426,420 attendances*).

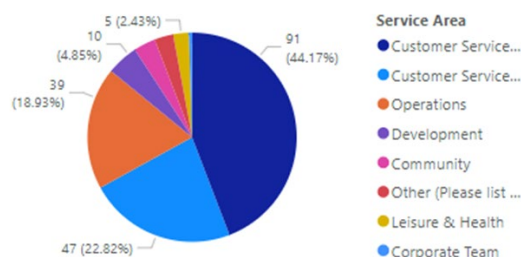
- 3.2 The number of Stage Two complaints (33) received has increased from last year, (21). 15 of these related to Operations and 10 of these related to Development and Growth.
- 3.3 Summary of themes, actions taken/service improvements from Stage One and Stage Two complaints are included in Appendix 3 and 4.
- 3.4 Annual Performance monitoring:
- 94.2% of Stage One complaints were resolved within time against a target of 90%.
  - 84.9% of Stage 2 complaints were resolved within time against a target of 90%.
- 3.5 There were 19 complaints received by the LGO during 2023/24 this includes those which did not progress to the LGO assessment stage or beyond. Of these 19 complaints, there were three detailed investigations carried out, one was upheld.  
In summary:
- 1) The Council failed to update the land charges register which meant a resident was not made aware of a planning contravention notice which affected the property the resident purchased. An apology, payment (£500) and procedural changes were deemed to be a satisfactory remedy. Please note that the same remedy was offered at Stage 2 of the councils complaints process.  
Learning points from this complaint:
    - A process put in place to ensure information input into the planning system is pulled through to the land charges system.
- 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 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 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. 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., private facilities, highways, housing association) with customers being redirected to the correct organisation from the website. Three recorded non HDC complaints received 2023/24, (3 received 2022/23, 10 received 2021/22, 16 received 2020/21.

- 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 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 – bin collection point moved, reminder and instructions to crews, review of grounds maintenance area, site meetings; process reviews; staff training; review of operating procedures.
- 4.5 Complaints are just one aspect of customer feedback, it is important that we also record, monitor and report upon compliments, 206 were received in 2023/24 (233 in 2022/23), see chart below and App 5. Primarily Housing, Call Centre and Refuse/Recycling teams received most compliments, but some 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.

**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 – Doing our core work well. 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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Appendix 1

LGO Local Authority Report – Huntingdonshire District Council

**Complaints and Enquiries Received (by Category) 2023/2024**

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
2023/24	3	2	4	9	1	0	0	19
2022/23	1	2	3	6	0	0	0	12
2021/22	3	4	3	5	0	0	0	15

**Complaints and Enquiries Decided (by Outcome) 2023/24**

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
2023/24	1	2	0	12	0	6	21	33%	63%
2022/23	3	0	1	5	0	3	12	100	59
2021/22	1	4	1	7	1	4	18	20	51

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 2023 – March 2024**

Service	Stage One			Stage Two			Total			LGO investigations		
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2021/22	2022/23	2022/23
<b>Community*</b>	10	13	<b>13</b>	3	3	<b>3</b>	13	16	<b>16</b>	2		
<b>Covid</b>	10	0	<b>0</b>	5	0	<b>0</b>	15	0	<b>0</b>	2		
<b>Customer Services**</b>	44	18	<b>28</b>	5	3	<b>3</b>	49	21	<b>31</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Development &amp; Growth***</b>	58	37	<b>50</b>	15	10	<b>10</b>	73	47	<b>60</b>	1	3	<b>2</b>
<b>Operations</b>	103	98	<b>98</b>	4	4	<b>15</b>	107	102	<b>113</b>			
<b>Corporate Services</b>	5	4	<b>5</b>	0	0	<b>1</b>	5	4	<b>6</b>			
<b>Leisure and Health</b>	3	2	<b>10</b>	1	0	<b>1</b>	4	2	<b>11</b>			
<b>Shared Services****</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>			
<b>Other (cross cutting)</b>	0	0	<b>2</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>2</b>			
<b>Energy Bill</b>	0	3	<b>0</b>	0	1	<b>0</b>	0	4	<b>0</b>			
<b>Total</b>	233	175	<b>206</b>	33	21	<b>33</b>	266	196	<b>239</b>	5	3	<b>3</b>

\*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.

\*\*\* includes Growth (Housing/Regeneration). \*\*\*\*3CICT/building control.

**Appendix 3 - 2023/2024 Stage One complaints - summary of themes and actions taken/service improvements (206)**

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<p><b>Community (13)</b>                      Upheld - 2                      Not upheld – 4                      Partially upheld - 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Way in which complaint about flooding handled</li> <li>• Way in which noise nuisance complaints handled</li> <li>• Way in which fly tipping report handled</li> <li>• Way in which private hire license application handled</li> <li>• Complaint about Community Protection Warning</li> <li>• Way in which noise nuisance/ASB complaint handled</li> <li>• Way in which environmental nuisance complaint handled</li> </ul>	<p>Liaison with landlord                      Reminder to team to ensure customer expectations are managed, communication and response times are met                      Advice and training for staff                      Review of case and liaison with another service to resolve                      Review of resources, recruitment                      Work with Community Admin team re complaints handling</p>
<p><b>Customer Services (28)</b>                      Upheld – 2                      Not upheld - 1</p> <p>Upheld - 3                      Not upheld - 3</p> <p>Upheld - 2                      Not upheld - 9                      Partially upheld – 2</p>	<p><b>Customer Services (3)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor access arrangements</li> <li>• Time on hold</li> <li>• Incorrect signposting</li> </ul> <p><b>Benefits (6)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Payment arrangements</li> <li>• Nature of correspondence</li> <li>• Delay in response</li> <li>• Amendments to local housing allowance</li> <li>• Disagreement over council tax support</li> <li>• Dissatisfaction with advice received.</li> </ul> <p><b>Council Tax (13):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council tax liability, attachment of earnings, bill calculations and reminder notices</li> <li>• Council tax support</li> <li>• Summons/collections process</li> <li>• Lack of response</li> </ul>	<p>Staff reminder/guidance                      Recruitment</p> <p>Apology, review of correspondence                      Records updated and signposting for support                      Account adjusted</p> <p>Staff reminder re customer contact in process for attachment of earnings                      Payment plan offered                      Case placed on hold whilst query resolved                      Costs and Summons cancelled, staff training</p>



Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 5	<b>Housing Needs (6)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues relating to tone of correspondence</li> <li>• Issues relating to temporary accommodation</li> <li>• Time spent waiting for rehousing</li> <li>• Issues relating to process for validating homelessness</li> </ul>	Reminder to staff Liaison with accommodation provider
<b>Development &amp; Growth (50)</b> Not upheld - 1  Not upheld - 2  Upheld - 10 Not upheld - 16 Partially upheld – 10  Upheld - 1 Not upheld - 8 Partially upheld – 2	<b>Growth (1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues relating to First Homes Scheme</li> </ul> <b>Development Other (2)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues relating to a curtilage wall</li> <li>• Complaint about staff member</li> </ul> <b>Planning applications (36):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delays in response</li> <li>• Delays in decision making</li> <li>• Dissatisfied with decision</li> <li>• How objections are considered</li> </ul> <b>Planning Enforcement (11)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Way cases handled</li> <li>• Delays in response</li> <li>• Complaint about staff member</li> </ul>	Advice and reminders to team (re provision of regular updates, ensure agreed actions are put in writing) Review of process (circulation of Decision) Agreement to monitor site Offer of face-to-face meeting Review of whether objection letters should be acknowledged Staff training Review of internal processes to address delays in determining applications  Liaison with Developer
<b>Leisure and Health (10)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleanliness</li> <li>• Submersibles in pool</li> <li>• Matters relating to lease</li> </ul>	Review of operating procedure and risk assessment Liaison with school

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
Upheld - 4 Not upheld - 4 Partially upheld - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vehicular gate access</li> <li>• Complaint about staff members</li> </ul>	Investigation/staff reminders New cleanliness procedures put in place
<b>Operations (98)</b>  Upheld - 30 Not upheld - 35 Partially upheld – 7   Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 2   Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 7   Upheld - 2 Not upheld - 10 Partially upheld – 1	<b>Waste/recycling (72)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed bin</li> <li>• Missed bins (assisted collection)</li> <li>• Return of bins after collection</li> <li>• Contaminated/rejected bins</li> <li>• Crew behaviour</li> <li>• Damage to property</li> <li>• Delays in delivery of new bin</li> <li>• Garden waste subscription service</li> <li>• Communication re changes to bin collections</li> <li>• Changes to collection points</li> </ul> <b>Street scene (4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delay in handling fly tipping incident</li> <li>• Overflowing bins</li> <li>• Maintenance of grassed area</li> </ul> <b>Parking (9)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking fine</li> <li>• Issues with parking machine</li> <li>• Parking appeal/Lack of disabled parking bays</li> </ul> <b>Other (13)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overgrown trees/shrubs</li> <li>• Damage caused by grass cutting</li> <li>• Introduction of garden waste subscription</li> <li>• Issue regarding market trader</li> </ul>	Reminder/instruction to crews Monitoring of collection Collection point moved Liaison with Insurance Advice to customer Map, memo and advice to crew          Issue included as part of wider street cleansing review Monitoring of area Arrangement for grounds maintenance in area          Charge notice waived Refund issued Internal investigation          Site meeting, liaison with Insurance Trees removed, tree surveyor site visit

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
<b>Finance and Corporate Services (5)</b> Elections/Democratic Services, HR, Estates, Finance, Audit  Upheld - 2 Not upheld – 1 Partially upheld – 1 On-going - 1	<b>Democratic Services (1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising of parish council vacancies</li> </ul> <b>Estates &amp; Facilities (4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighting on/near commercial estate</li> <li>• Delays with insurance claim</li> <li>• Incorrect email regarding lease</li> <li>• Delay in response</li> </ul>	Explanation to customer  Records amended Commitment to more regular updates
<b>Other (2)</b> Not upheld – 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How personal data handled</li> </ul>	Measures in place to prevent recurrence

**App 4 - 2023/24 Stage Two complaints – summary of themes and actions taken/service improvements (33)**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Actions taken/service improvements</b>
<b>Community (3)</b> Not upheld – 2 Partially upheld - 1	<b>Environmental Health:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Way noise nuisance complaint handled</li> </ul>	Opportunity to provide further clarity Offer of noise nuisance recording again to assist with on-going issue
<b>Customer Services (3)</b> Not upheld - 2 Partially upheld - 1	<b>Customer Services (1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How customer handled at reception</li> </ul> <b>Benefits (2)</b> Local housing allowance rates Council tax support	Opportunity to provide further clarity and reminder to team on need to introduce themselves  Further clarity provided to customer
<b>Development &amp; Growth (10)</b> Not upheld - 4 Partially upheld – 2  Not upheld - 4	<b>Planning Applications (6):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How application handled</li> <li>Dissatisfaction with decision</li> <li>Delays in decision</li> <li>How neighbour objections considered</li> </ul> <b>Planning Enforcement (4):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Way in which planning enforcement case handled</li> <li>Complaint about staff member</li> </ul>	Opportunity to provide further clarity New systems to be put in place to upload accepted amendments Removal of generic Executive Support email address  Opportunity to provide further clarity
<b>Leisure and Health (1)</b> Partially upheld - 1	Cleanliness of centre	Purchase of additional cleaning equipment, cleaners deployed at busy times
<b>Operations (15)</b> Not upheld - 4  Not upheld - 1  Upheld - 3 Not upheld – 5 Partially upheld - 2	<b>Ops (Other) 4</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Garden waste subscription service</li> <li>Overgrown trees</li> </ul> <b>Parking Services (1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parking fine</li> </ul> <b>Waste/recycling (10)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Missed bins</li> </ul>	Opportunity to provide further clarity  Opportunity to provide further clarity  Telephone call with customer, Opportunity to provide further clarity

Service	Themes	Actions taken/service improvements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return of bins to collection point</li> <li>• Garden waste subscription service</li> <li>• Rejected bins</li> </ul>	Monitoring, training and guidance for crews
<b>Finance and Corporate Services (1)</b> Not upheld - 1	<b>Democratic Services – 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising of Parish council vacancies</li> </ul>	Opportunity to provide further clarity

## Appendix 5

2023 indicates Corporate year 2023/2024

Service Area	2023	Total
Community	7	7
Corporate Team	1	1
Customer Services (Call Centre)	47	47
Customer Services (Housing Needs)	91	91
Development	10	10
Leisure & Health	5	5
Operations	39	39
Other (Please list in description)	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>206</b>

## Appendix 6 LGO Neighbouring Authority Statistics

Cambridgeshire Councils	Detailed investigations decided (by outcome) 2023/24		Uphold rate <i>Average uphold rate</i>	Complaints and enquiries received
	Not upheld	Upheld		2023/24
<b>Huntingdonshire</b> (*population 180,800)	2	1	33% (63%)	19
<b>South Cambridgeshire</b> (*population 162,000)	0	0		11
<b>Fenland</b> (*population 102,500)	2	0	0% (63%)	7
<b>East Cambridgeshire</b> (*population 87,700)	1	1	50% (63%)	3
<b>Cambridge City</b> (population 145,700)	0	1	100% (63%)	16
<b>Cambridgeshire County Council</b>	9	21	70% (85%)	63

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](#)