

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Complaints

**Meeting/Date:** Corporate Governance Committee 13 September 2017

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor Stephen Cawley - Executive Councillor for Transformation and Customers

**Report by:** Adrian Dobbyne, Corporate Team Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All or list individual Ward(s)

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**Executive Summary:**

The report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) 2016/17 along with data relating to stage 1 and stage 2 complaints received by the council between April 2016 – March 2017.

**Recommendation(s):**

Members are invited to comment on the LGO local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and the data relating to formal stage 1 and stage 2 complaints received.

## **1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?**

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman and those received by the council April 2016 – March 2017.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 One of the purposes of the annual summary of statistics on complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (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. A further purpose of this report is to provide Members with data relating to stage 1 and stage 2 complaints by Service area.

## **3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS**

- 3.1 There were less complaints/enquires received by the LGO with just two detailed investigations carried out by the LGO in 2016/17 (same as 2015/16). In summary:

- An investigation related to a complaint about the council not informing a resident about a planning application at a neighbouring property; not considering the development's impact on amenity and not taking enforcement action against a breach of planning control at the property. The Ombudsman ended investigation of this complaint as no fault with the council found.
- An investigation related to a complaint about the council failing to respond to reports of breaches of planning consent by a nearby depot. The LGO upheld the complaint but found that although the Council failed to keep a record of/acknowledge an initial report, there was no injustice and the council dealt with this complaint properly.

- 3.2 The council's complaints policy and procedure was reviewed in 2015 and a more consistent approach to how complaints are being recorded has been introduced. The number of stage 1 complaints has increased, particularly for those services with higher levels of customer interaction; these services have confirmed that the increase is likely to be the result of a more rigorous focus on the customer, including a more robust approach to the recording and resolution of complaints within set timescales. Figures indicate that complaints are largely being resolved at stage 1; this is a positive indication that formal complaints are being dealt with effectively in the first instance.

- 3.3 One Leisure and Active Lifestyles record complaints through their own system. It has previously been agreed that a clear reporting and monitoring process for Leisure and Health formal complaints should be agreed and put in place as a priority and to ensure the process aligns with the corporate approach. This was not developed in 2016/17 and will become a priority in 2017/18.

- 3.4 In Operations, following a significant reconfiguration of the waste collection rounds in February 2017, the number of complaints went up. Given the focus to address staffing shortages, deliver the changes and managing the complaints, resources were diverted away from the administrative side of complaints management and our recording on the database did not show most Complaints received in this period (approx. 200 were not recorded). Additionally we had much poorer response times. This has been reported through the Integrated

Performance Report as it is one of our key Corporate Plan Performance Indicators.

To help put the figures in context, the service collects 8,000 bins on a daily basis and, although the majority of changes were implemented successfully, a significant number were not. Improvement actions since Easter have continued to reduce missed bins from 40-50 to 30-40 daily (0.5%).

- 3.5 In Quarter 3 2016/17, an Internal Audit review was undertaken of the customer feedback procedures. The action recommended was that to provide a better system to meet customer need and to be able to manage the process much better, a Lean Review should be undertaken. In March, this Review was undertaken. This has led to a number of suggestions and these are now being worked through to produce a revised complaints policy, procedure and recording system

This will be implemented during Quarter 3 of 2017/18.

- 3.6 A new system will also be designed to enable us to be able to learn more from Complaints.

- 3.7 In 2016/17, we recorded a number of Unreasonable Complainants and reviewed three cases. It became increasingly clear that the application of our policies was not being followed as strictly as it should and was subsequently placing some staff in difficult positions. In a couple of cases, we have reiterated our position to the management of such cases so that far greater proportionality is achieved in the amount of time spent on these cases. This has led to us withdrawing some of our services to these complainants, save for statutory obligations. Our approach was influenced by an open discussion with the LGO on the management of such complainants.

- 3.8 Also in 2016/17 and in the early part of 2017/18, we have had several cases where some Complainants have been very rude and used inappropriate language and tone to our employees. Following discussion with the LGO, we have reviewed our approach to this and our adopting a firmer line and will not tolerate such behaviour.

#### **4. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?**

- 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. Complaints can come in by a variety of means and so it relies on too many systems and people to comprehensively and accurately record them all. By making the changes, we will have a system and process in place that gives us the best opportunity to have a comprehensive recording system, where we can record the details and manage the process and leading to revise practices where we are learning from complaints.

#### **5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN**

- 5.1 Complaints handling links to the following Strategic Priority within the Corporate Plan - Ensuring we are a customer focused and service led council.

#### **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 1 and stage 2 complaints received by the council.

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

Appendix 1	LGO statistics for HDC
Appendix 2	HDC internal complaints
Appendix 3	LGO statistics – neighbouring authority comparison

## **CONTACT OFFICERS**

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Appendix 1

LGO Local Authority Report – Huntingdonshire District Council

Complaints and Enquiries Received

HDC	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Environment Services	Planning and Development	Housing	Highways and Transport	Total
2016/17	2	2	2	8	0	2	16
2015/16	7	2	2	11	1	0	23
2014/15	3	3	3	7	0	0	16
2013/14	2	1	2	4	2	0	11

Decisions Made

HDC	Upheld	Not upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiry	Incomplete/invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total
2016/17	1	1	0	5	0	9	16
2015/16	1	1	0	11	0	8	21
2014/15	0	3	1	7	0	5	16
2013/14	3	4	2	2	0	4	15

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**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
Number of complaints	58	40	43	22 Stage 1	15 Stage 1 14 Stage 2	237 Stage 1 15 Stage 2	284 Stage 1 12 Stage 2

<b>Service</b>	<b>Stage 1</b>		<b>Stage 2</b>		<b>Total</b>		<b>LGO investigations</b>	
	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
<b>Community</b>	5	13	0	1	5	14		
<b>Corporate Team</b>	4	3	3	2	7	5		
<b>Customer Services</b>	24	24	4	2	28	26	1	
<b>Development</b>	19	18	7	3	26	21	1	2
<b>Operations (1)</b>	62	149	1	3	63	152		
<b>Resources</b>	1	1	0	0	1	1		
<b>Leisure and Health (2)</b>	120	76	0	0	120	76		
<b>Shared Services</b>	2	0	0	0	2	0		
<b>Community/Development/Legal</b>				1		1		
<b>Total</b>	237	284	15	12	252	296	2	2

Notes (1) Operations do not include most complaints relating to Bin Collections made in Quarter 4 2016/17, following the introduction of new waste collection rounds. (2) 2015/16 and 2016/17 include those recorded by One Leisure which were not shown in previous years.

Appendix 3

LGO Neighbouring Authorities Statistics

Cambridgeshire Councils	Complaints and enquiries decided (by outcome)		Complaints and enquiries received
	Not upheld	Upheld	<a href="#">2016/17</a> ( <a href="#">2015/16</a> )
<a href="#">2016/17</a>			
HDC	1	1	16 (23)
South Cambridgeshire	1	1	22 (18)
Fenland	2	3	17 (30)
East Cambridgeshire	1	0	6 (7)
Cambridge City	2	2	18 (17)
Cambridgeshire County Council	7	6	51 (57)