

COMPLAINTS MONITORING 2018/19

Portfolio: Corporate

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose

To report on the Council's corporate complaints monitoring arrangements, lessons learned from complaints and Local Government Ombudsman complaints received for the financial year 2018/2019.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee receive a comprehensive annual report on the Council's complaints monitoring arrangements, lessons learned from complaints received and complaints received by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

2. Current Position

- 2.1 Most complaints received are dealt with informally under Stage 1 of the Council's complaints policy.
- 2.2 Stage 2 complaints are formal complaints normally identified when the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the informal complaint. These complaints are dealt with by the relevant (Executive) Head of Service. Should a complainant be dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 2 complaint, they can request the matter is considered by the Chief Executive under Stage 3 of the complaints policy.
- 2.3 In 2018/19, 37 formal complaints were made to the Council at Stages 2 and 3. The table below details the formal complaints made for the period 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019, by quarter year and dealt with in accordance with the Council's complaints policy. The figures for the same period in 2017/18 have also been included in the table as a comparison.

	2017/18	2018/2019
Total for Quarter 1 (April – June)	10	13
Total for Quarter 2 (July – September)	7	13
Total for Quarter 3 (October to December)	8	5
Total for Quarter 4 (January – March)	13	6
Total for year	38	37

- 2.4 To give some perspective to the number of complaints received against contacts managed. Calls into the Contact Centre, Revenues and Benefits and Theatre numbered 65,000 for the same period. Visitors to Surrey Heath House managed via meet and greet and or by interview were an additional 26923.
- 2.5 The following tables set out details of complaints received by Service Area and Department.

Complaints by Service Area.

Number of complaints received	2017/18	2018/19
Business	1	5
Community	5	7
Finance	10	4
Regulatory	22	21
Total	38	37

Complaints by Department within the Service Area

Service Area	Department	Stage 2	Stage 3	Total
Business	Parking	3	2	5
Community	Environmental Health	3		3
Community	Refuse & Recycling		3	3
Community	Health & Safety	1		1
Finance	Revenues and Benefits	1	1	2
Finance	Audit and Investigation	2		2
Regulatory	Development Control	13	7	20
Regulatory	Private Sector Housing	1		1
Total		24	13	37

Service Standard

2.5 Of the 37 complaints received:

- All were acknowledged within 2 days.
- 22 were resolved within 10 days.
- 15 complaints took longer than 10 days to investigate, however the customers were made aware of the reason for delay.

Complaint Status

2.6 Of the 37 complaints received:

- 27 were not justified
- 8 were part justified
- 2 were justified.

3. Lessons Learned

Community

3.1 For Community the issues related to complaints about noise and dust associated with the demolition and construction of a Care home.

3.2 There was a delay between the time the complaint was made and investigated and when the complainant was advised of the outcome.

- 3.3 Similarly with regard to a complaint regarding a vermin (pigeon) issue. Again although resolved there was a delay in responding to the customer.
- 3.4 The lesson learned would be to notify the complainants of the outcome of the investigations in a timely manner.

Regulatory

- 3.5 One complaint was regarding a decision notice to refuse a planning application and that the Council had changed the description of the proposed development without properly advising the customer. Another related to the time taken to deal with a planning application.
- 3.6 The lesson learned was the importance of keeping applicants properly informed.
- 3.7 A complaint regarding a Tree Preservation Order identified that although the advice given regarding the trees was accurate there was some confusion over advice given with regard to the responsibility to undertake a survey. The matter was addressed by the Executive Head of Regulatory with Officers reminded of their responsibilities.

Business

- 3.8 A complaint was received regarding the incorrect issuing of a penalty charge notice caused by an administration error. Letters of apology were sent and the ticket was cancelled.
- 3.9 Another complaint related to a delay in response to a challenge to a Parking ticket.
- 3.10 With regard to lessons learned. These delays occurred during the transition of on street responsibility to Woking when the parking teams were in a state of flux. The new parking team structure is now fully established with added resilience and wider staff training.

4. Local Government Ombudsman complaints

- 4.1 Following the response to a Stage 3 complaint, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome then their recourse is via the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).
- 4.2 In 2018/19 the LGO received 15 complaints and enquiries in respect of Surrey Heath Borough Council services. The outcomes of the complaints submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman are set out in the table below. Of the 15 complaints submitted to the LGO one was upheld.

Complaints and enquiries received

Adult Care Services	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Education and Children's Services	Environment Services	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
0	2	2	0	3	2	1	5	0	15

Decisions made

				Detailed Investigations			
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate (%)	Total
2	0	2	5	4	1	20	14

Note: The uphold rate shows how often we found evidence of fault. It is expressed as a percentage of the total number of detailed investigations we completed.

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

Complaints where compliance with the recommended remedy was recorded during the year*	Complaints where the authority complied with our recommendations on-time	Complaints where the authority complied with our recommendations late	Complaints where the authority has not complied with our recommendations	
1	1	0	0	Number
	100%		-	Compliance rate**

Notes:
 * This is the number of complaints where we have recorded a response (or failure to respond) to our recommendation for a remedy during the reporting year. This includes complaints that may have been decided in the preceding year but where the data for compliance falls within the current reporting year.
 ** The compliance rate is based on the number of complaints where the authority has provided evidence of their compliance with our recommendations to remedy a fault. This includes instances where an authority has accepted and implemented our recommendation but provided late evidence of that.

Complaint Upheld - Lessons Learned

- 4.3 The Planning Authority was at fault and the complaint was justified because the Planning Authority failed to determine the application within 56 days; used the wrong legislation to determine the application; and failed to update its website and failed to notify consulted residents and objectors of the revised outcome of the application.
- 4.4 Whilst these identified faults would not have altered the outcome of the application, the complainant was caused an injustice because he had been put to avoidable time and trouble pursuing the matter. The service has taken on board the Ombudsmans recommendations and will ensure that improved procedures are in place to prevent a repeat situation from occurring. A personal letter of apology from the officers involved, was sent to the customer.

Comparison Table

- 4.5 The table below sets how the complaints submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman compares to the other Surrey Borough and County Councils.

Local Government & Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

Complaints and Enquiries Received (by Category) 2018-19

Authority Name	Adult Social Care	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Education and Children's Services	Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
Elmbridge Borough Council	0	1	1	0	1	2	3	7	0	15
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council	0	4	1	0	6	3	4	5	0	23
Guildford Borough Council	0	5	2	0	3	1	6	13	0	30
Mole Valley District Council	0	0	1	0	4	1	2	7	0	15
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	4	0	9
Runnymede Borough Council	0	1	0	1	0	0	5	4	0	11
Spelthorne Borough Council	1	1	0	0	3	3	5	3	0	16
Surrey County Council	48	0	6	76	8	25	1	3	1	168
Surrey Heath Borough Council	0	2	2	0	3	2	1	5	0	15
Tandridge District Council	1	2	2	0	1	1	0	6	3	16
Waverley Borough Council	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	9	0	14
Woking Borough Council	0	3	1	0	1	1	2	5	0	13

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 The Committee is advised to consider and comment on the complaints figures reported for 2018/19.

Background Papers None

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