

**Surrey Heath Borough Council**  
**Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee**  
**14 September 2022**

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**Complaints Monitoring Report 2021/22**

**Strategic Director:** Bob Watson, Strategic Director: Finance and Customer Service  
**Report Author:** Lynn Smith, Customer Relations Manager  
**Key Decision:** No  
**Wards Affected:** Not Applicable

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**Summary and 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 2021/2022

**Recommendation**

The Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee is advised to note and comment on the complaints reported for 2021/22.

**1. Background and Supporting Information**

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).

**Current Position**

1.2 Most complaints received are dealt with informally under Stage 1 of the Council's complaints policy.

1.3 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.

1.4 In 2021/22, 26 formal complaints were made to the Council at Stages 2 and 3. The table below details the formal complaints made for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 22, by quarter year and dealt with in accordance with the Council's complaints policy.

1.5 The figures for the same period in 2020/21 have also been included in the table as a comparison.

	2020/2021	2021/2022
Total for Quarter 1 (April – June)	5	6
Total for Quarter 2 (July – September)	10	8
Total for Quarter 3 (October to December)	3	5
Total for Quarter 4 (January – March)	10	7
Total for year	28	26

- 1.6 To give some perspective to the number of complaints received against contacts managed, calls into the Contact Centre, Revenues and Benefits and Theatre numbered 70,926 for the same period. Demand for a face to face service has remained low. Interactions across email, web and face to face accounted for another 11,943 contacts

#### Complaints by Service Area.

Number of complaints received	2020/21
CEO Office	2
Community	1
Finance	3
Regulatory	21
Corporate	
Legal	1
Transformation	
Total	28

Number of complaints received	2021/2022
CEO Office	4
Environment and Community	8
Finance and Customer Service	13
Transformation	1
Total	26

- 1.7 Following the restructure services have moved within directorates. It may therefore not be immediate apparent, where reductions in complaint levels have occurred. The Planning service, previously reported under Regulatory and now within Finance and Customer Service always generate a high number of complaints given the controversial nature of the services within this area. However I can report a very positive reduction in complaints received.

#### Complaints by Department within the Service Area

Service Area	Department	Stage 2	Stage 3	Total
CEO Office	Housing		1	
	Revenues and Benefits		1	
	Refuse and Recycling		1	
	Corporate Enforcement		1	

Environment and Community	Private Sector Housing	2		
	Housing Enforcement	2		
	Refuse and Recycling	2		
	Corporate Enforcement	2		
Finance and Customer Service	Revenues and Benefits	4		
	Development Control	9		
Transformation	FOI-	1		
Total		22	4	

### **Service Standard**

1.8 Of the 26 complaints received:

- All were acknowledged within 2 days.
- 23 were resolved within 10 days.
- 3 complaints took longer than 10 days to investigate, however the Customer was made aware of the reason for delay.

### **Complaint Status**

1.9 Of the 26 complaints received:

- 23 were not justified
- 1 was part justified
- 2 were justified.

### **Lessons Learned**

1.10 The 3 complaints, that upon analysis were considered justified or part justified, related to operational matters. Below are the lessons learned from the 3 complaints.

#### **Stage 2 escalated to Stage 3 Environment and Community**

1.11 This complaint originated during a customer's interaction with Amey/JWS. When the matter reached us at stage 2 then 3. We felt the matter initially partly and then fully justified. Feedback was given to Amey in terms of the missed opportunity to be more proactive and focused which would have stopped the issue from escalating.

1.12 Ultimately the feedback was taken on board culminating in an apology letter being sent out from Amey to the customer.

#### **Stage 3 Finance and Customer Service**

1.13 Originally a well-managed planning application. This complaint came about as communication became insufficient as the case progressed and the customer was not kept sufficiently informed. It was identified that officers have to be more proactive in dealing with cases, regular 1-2-1's are now in place to review applications much

sooner and to improve communication overall. Officers have improved in keeping customers updated on a regular basis.

- 1.14 This positive approach has been further demonstrated in a second case, worthy of prematurely including in this report. The Ombudsman was involved, although just outside of the timescale of this report, therefore not one of the cases reported within their annual review letter. Leading to the planning department embarking on a robust review of the Development Management service overall, implementing structural changes which will improve the department in the medium to long-term. This will improve customer service satisfaction within the department going forwards.
- 1.15 In addition to the lessons learned stated above. As part of our drive to continually focus our attention on delivering the very best service. All staff appraisals now include targeted service related objectives and training will be made available in support of achieving those objectives. Specifically the training of staff in services to understand complaint handling and the management of customers. To enable them to view an informal Stage 1 complaint as an opportunity to resolve rather than criticism that must be rebutted.

### **Local Government Ombudsman complaints**

- 1.16 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.
- 1.17 In 2021/22 The LGO investigated and concluded 12 complaints and enquiries in respect of Surrey Heath Borough Council services.
- 1 Incomplete/Invalid
  - 6 Referred back to Surrey Heath for local resolution
  - 3 Closed after initial enquiries
  - 2 Advice given
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- No recommendations were due for compliance in this period.
  - The Ombudsman carried out no detailed investigations during this period.
  - No recommendations were due for compliance in the period.
  - The Ombudsman did not uphold any detailed investigations during this period
- 1.18 It is reassuring to see that none of the 12 complaints considered by the LGO were upheld given the below extract taken from their website in respect of all Annual Reviews.

*One complaint can have immense power to change things for the better, and we're increasingly focusing on to how we, and the local authorities we investigate, take the learning from those complaints and improve service provision.*

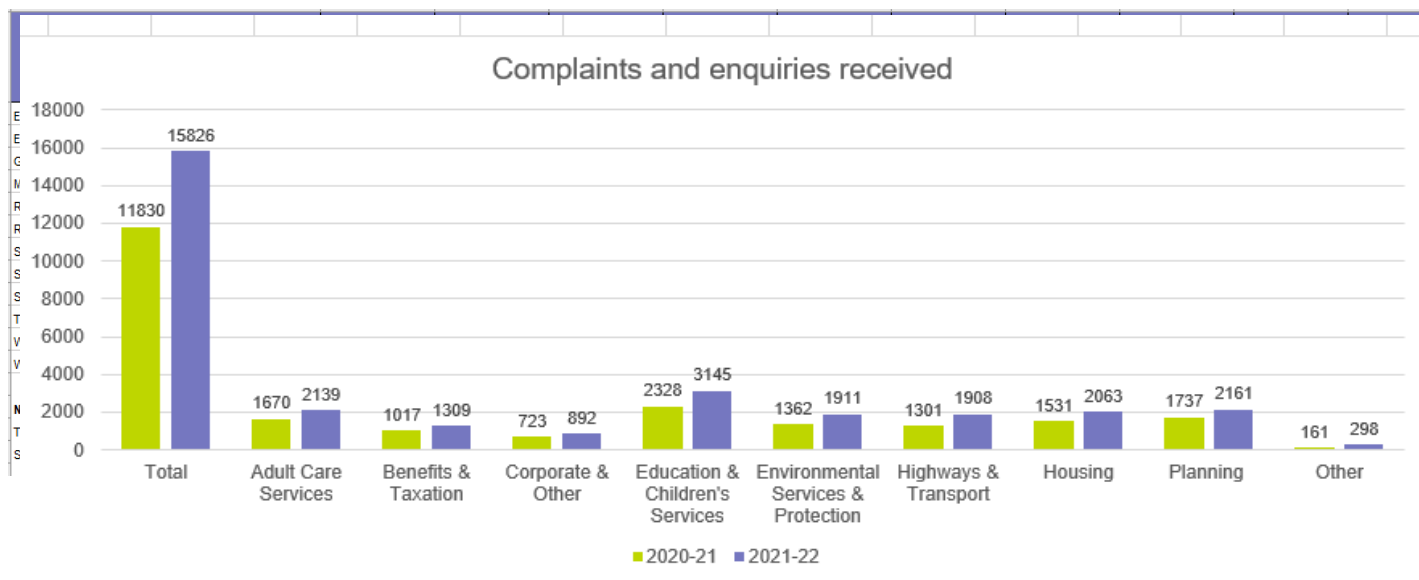
*"The vast majority of councils agree to the recommendations we make and see them as common-sense ways of providing better services for people in their area. However this can only happen when councils act swiftly when they have committed to do so.*

*"Unfortunately we are seeing some councils taking longer to make those changes, which put them at risk of making the same mistakes again. In 18% of cases we found compliance was late.*

*“While I welcome the professional way in which the majority of councils continue to work with us, I would urge those authorities who are having problems to pay close attention to this final, but crucial, step in the complaints process.”*

**Michael King Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.  
Complaints and Enquiries received by Category 2021-2022**

**Comparison Chart 2020-2021 and 2021-2022**



**Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN**

**Complaints and Enquiries Decided (by Outcome) 2021-22**

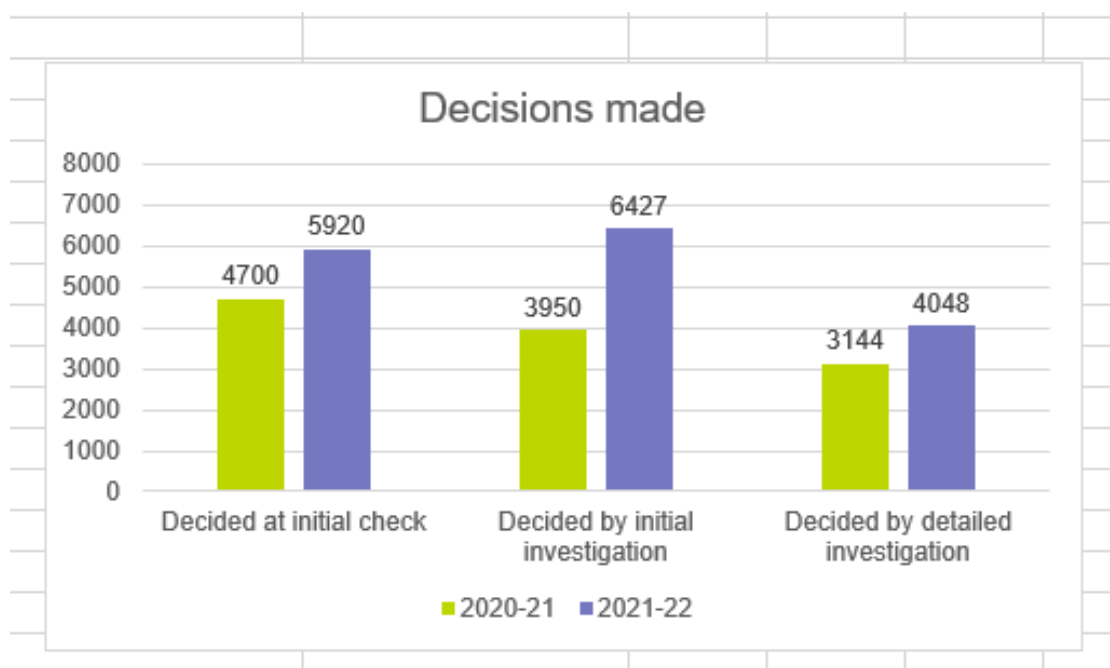
Authority Name	Invalid or Incomplete	Advice Given	Referred Back for Local Resolution	Closed after Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Total	Uphold rate (%)	Average uphold rate (%) of similar authorities
Elmbridge Borough Council	0	1	2	8	4	0	15	0%	51%
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council	0	0	11	8	1	2	22	67%	51%
Guildford Borough Council	2	4	4	9	0	2	21	100%	51%
Mole Valley District Council	0	0	0	10	2	0	12	0%	51%
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	0	0	3	6	1	3	13	75%	51%
Spelthorne Borough Council	1	0	8	6	0	1	16	100%	51%
Surrey County Council	5	2	35	66	10	52	170	84%	71%
Surrey Heath Borough Council	1	2	6	3	0	0	12		51%
Tandridge District Council	0	0	7	2	1	4	14	80%	51%
Waverley Borough Council	0	1	4	11	2	2	20	50%	51%
Woking Borough Council	2	1	1	6	0	1	11	100%	51%

**Notes**

These statistics include all complaints and enquiries that were decided from 01 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Some cases are received and decided in different business years. This means the number of complaints and enquiries received may not match the number of decisions made.

## Comparison Chart 2020-2021 and 2021-2022



### 2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To ensure that Councillors are kept abreast of the types of complaints received by the Council.

### 3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 No alternatives.

### 4. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

- 4.1 As set out in the body of the report.

### 5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 As set out in the body of the report.

### 6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 6.1 Nothing further to add.

### 7. Legal and Governance Issues

- 7.1 Nothing further to add.

### 8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

- 8.1 Nothing further to add.

### Annexes

None

**Background Papers**

None