

Corporate Complaints and Information Annual Report 2019-20

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2019 the corporate complaints policy and process was amended from a formal 3-stage process to a 2-stage process, with a change on how pre-complaints/ informal requests are logged. Unless it is a clear service request, all are now logged as 1st stage complaints. Throughout the year, there was an emphasis on improving the responses completed within timescales and this continues to be a service and corporate priority. Ombudsman cases has seen a small decrease in the number reported from 123 in 2018/19 to 117 this year.

There continues to be an increase in the volume of information requests, but more casework is being responded to within time. During 2019/20, compliance with responses timescales was 81% for Subject Access Requests, 82.2% for Freedom of Information Requests and 80% for Member Enquiries. Additionally, 135 compliments were received praising services across the Council.

1. Introduction and Context

This annual corporate report covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. It highlights how the directorates have performed against corporate timescales; organisational learning and service improvements that have been made from a result of listening and responding to complaints; and plans for future development.

2. Overview of the Service

There is a dedicated team that works with departments and manages complaints and information requests, ensuring a central record and consistency across the Council.

3. Complaints Summary

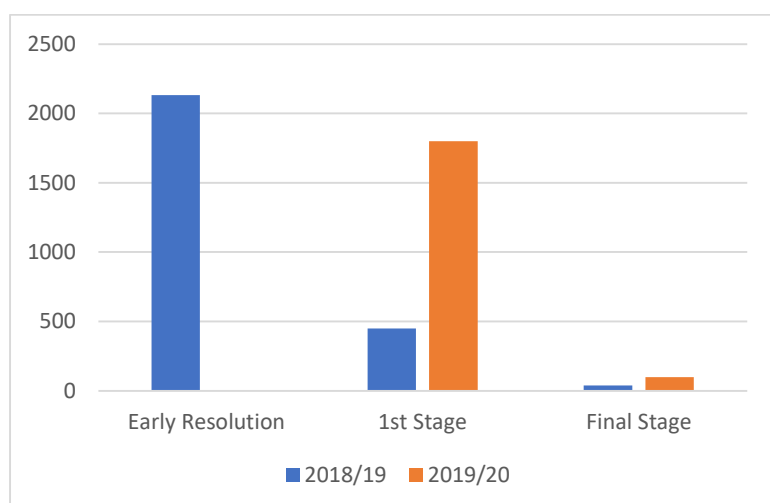
The complaints policy promotes early resolution of complaints, so we initially aim to address issues informally, however from July 2019, these are no longer logged in this way. If matters cannot be resolved locally with services, complainants may then progress matters through the formal complaint's procedure.

During 2019, the complaints process changed from a 3-stage process to a 2-stage process, we no longer have a recorded early resolution stage. All complaints are logged under 1st stage or Final stage

Overall 81% (1458 of 1800) of 1st stage complaints were completed within timescale; this is an improvement compared to the previous year of 2018/19 where 65.6% (295 of 450) formal complaints (excluding final stages) were completed within timescale

The following chart shows a breakdown of complaint stages against each year.

Figure 1: Breakdown of complaint stages



	2018/19	2019/20
Early Resolution	2131	
1st Stage	450	1800
Final Stage	40	100

4. Ombudsman contact

If a complainant remains dissatisfied, they can ask for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or the Housing Ombudsman (HO) to review the Council's final response.

During the 2019/20 reporting period, the LGSCO contacted the Council regarding 68 cases which has significantly reduced in comparison to last year where the LGSCO contacted regarding 87 cases. In 2019/20, the HO made contact for 49 cases., which has increased from 36 cases last year. Although the overall number received by the council is down by 6 cases.

The following chart provides a breakdown of ombudsman cases for this reporting period.

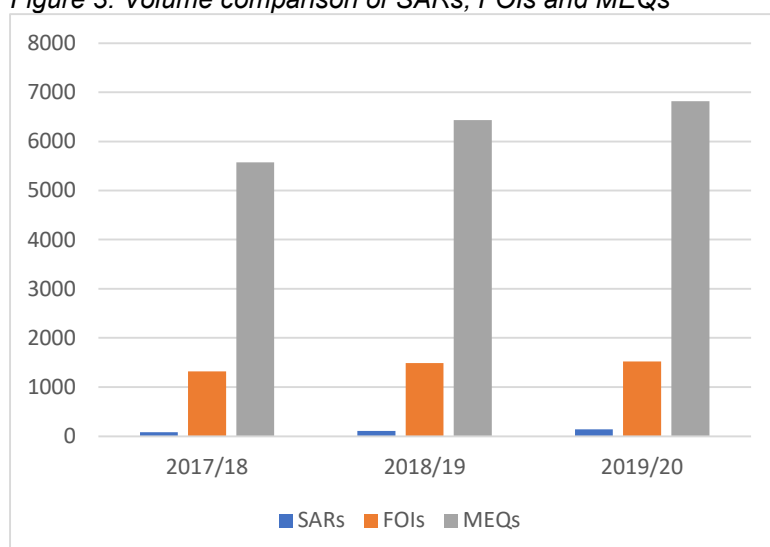
Figure 2: Breakdown of all 2019/20 Ombudsman cases

	Not Upheld	Upheld	Closed after initial enquiries	% of enquiries closed or not upheld	Total
LGSCO	12	19	37	72%	68
HO	5	3	41	94%	49
<i>Total</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>81%</i>	<i>117</i>

5. Information Requests (SARs, FOIs, MEQs)

The following chart shows a breakdown of the Subject Access Requests (SARs), Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) and Member Enquiries (MEQs) each year.

Figure 3: Volume comparison of SARs, FOIs and MEQs



	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
SARs	82	103	139
FOIs	1318	1485	1521
MEQs	5574	6432	6816

The following chart summaries compliance with response timescale and shows improving performance; as a higher volume of cases with more responses in time.

Figure 4: SARs, FOIs and MEQs response times

	2018/19	2019/20
SARs	77.7% (80 of 103)	81% (113 of 139)
FOIs	72.7% (1080 of 1485)	82.2% (1251 of 1521)
MEQs	74.3% (4781 of 6432)	80% (5454 of 6816)

6. Learning from complaints

The Council welcomes feedback about its services as this provides valuable information about customers' experiences of the services that they use. We publicise details of how to complain on the Council's website and in areas where the public has access. We also provide information on how to comment or complain whenever a new service commences.

Complaints are taken seriously, investigated and responded to with appropriate redress. The Council can address complaints in several ways and, at times, it is appropriate for meetings to take place between the complainant and the relevant manager to facilitate resolution.

Feedback from complaints is used for organisational learning and reports on complaint themes and actions taken are regularly presented to senior managers. Complaint action points are identified and monitored to ensure that any practice or service improvements are implemented and that information is shared across the Council.

6.1 Actions taken from complaints

Apologies were given to all the complainants and learning from these cases has resulted in the following summarised action:

- Apologies and information given to complainants
- Financial remedies
- Reminders, feedback, guidance and training given to staff
- Review of policies, procedures and systems
- Implementation of new procedures, practice and IT systems
- Updating of published information
- Adjustments of bills to customers
- Recruitment of more staff
- Reassessments of housing applications
- Appointments arranged for repairs and surveys

7. Quality Assurance

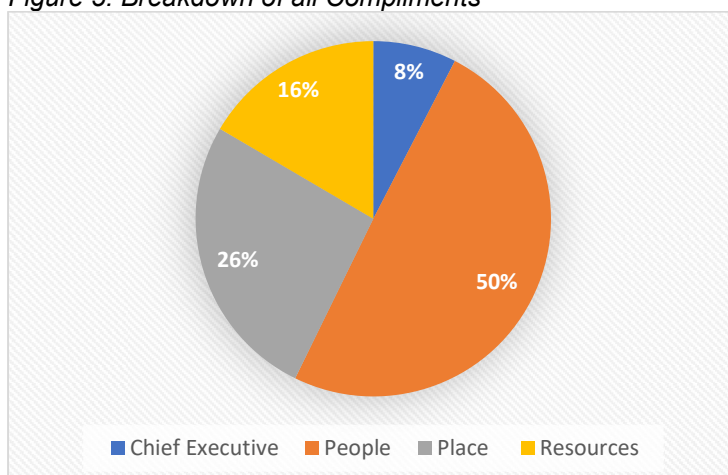
The Complaints Team have systems in place to ensure that response timescales are met. This includes sending reminders of the deadline for responses to the assigned managers; escalating to a senior manager if there is no response within the specified timeframe; reporting to Directors regularly and highlighting to staff the importance of compliance in training programmes. The Complaints Team also monitor and assist with complaint responses to ensure that standards are met and all aspects of the complaint are addressed. The support offered by the Complaints Team includes:

- Quality checking responses
- Arranging and chairing complaint meetings
- Liaising with complainants regarding timescales and desired outcomes
- Identifying key themes from complaints, devising action plans and ensuring organisational learning is implemented
- Regularly providing management and performance information
- Service development to improve how we respond to and learn from complaints

8. Compliments

The Council welcomes compliments from its users. Compliments help to highlight good quality service and give staff encouragement to continue delivering service of the highest standard. The following chart shows a breakdown of the 135 compliments received across the Council. In November 2019, a link was added to the council website, enabling customers to raise a compliment centrally. These figures represent the compliments received via this link and compliments passed to the team from services

Figure 5: Breakdown of all Compliments



9. Development plans

Key priorities for the year ahead are:

1. Embedding staff structures into the team processes and cross-training across the department
2. Progressing CRM development of new systems
3. Progressing the implementation of FOI Publication scheme
4. Working with departments to improve compliance with response times
5. Promotion of compliment recording centrally