

# Corporate Complaints and Information Annual Report 2020-21

Author: Karen Wright, Complaints and Access to Information Manager



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

During 2020/21 the impact of the COVID pandemic, has not only affected the volumes of queries coming through, but the capacity for officers and services to respond to those in a timely manner.

The number of Ombudsman cases coming to Enfield has remained the same as in 2019/20 at 117, although there was an increase in the number that were not upheld or closed without investigation

There continues to be a high volume of information requests, with greater complexity and increase in Information request reviews but more casework is being responded to within time.

During 2020/21, compliance with responses timescales was 82.7% for Subject Access Requests, 84.5% for Freedom of Information Requests and 84.9% for Member Enquiries. Additionally, 144 compliments were received praising services across the Council.

## **1. Introduction and Context**

This annual corporate report covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. 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.

During March 2020 a COVID pandemic was declared and this has impacted over the following 12 months on how officers and services have been able to respond to complaints, FOIs, SARs and MEQs and has often impacted on timelessness of responses, also with reduced staffing levels due to COVID, it has generally affected all departments responses for all areas. At the same time, we also saw an increase in volume in some areas, as residents were at home more due to lockdowns and were reporting issues more readily

## **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.

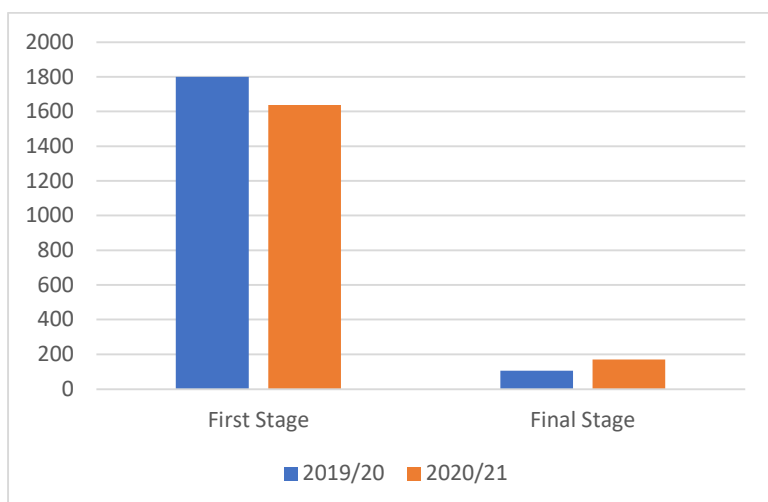
During 2019, the complaints process changed from a 3-stage process to a 2-stage process, we no longer have a recorded early resolution stage. Therefore, a higher number of cases would show as First stage during 2019, than in 202/21. All complaints are logged under First Stage or Final Stage

Overall 79.8% (1308 of 1638) of 1<sup>st</sup> stage complaints were completed within timescale; which is a slight drop on 2019/20 where 81% (1458 of 1800) First Stage complaints were completed within timescale.

The number of Final Stages in 2020/21 has increased by 64 cases compared to 2019/20, with 68.6% (116/169) completed on time, compared to 55.2% (58/105) completed in 2019/20.

The following chart shows a breakdown of completed complaints by stage for each year.

*Figure 1: Breakdown of complaint stages*



	2019/20	2020/21
First Stage	1800	1638
Final Stage	105	169

#### 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 2020/21 reporting period, the LGSCO contacted the Council regarding 102 cases which has significantly increased in comparison to last year where the LGSCO contacted regarding 68 cases. This will also be impacted by COVID, when the LGSCO closed in March 2020, so several cases from the latter part of 2019/20 were not dealt with until 2020/21.

In 2020/21, the HO made contact for 15 cases., which has dramatically decreased from the 49 in 2019/20. The HO has not yet determined in the 4 cases being investigated.

The HO and LGSCO both closed during the 1<sup>st</sup> Lockdown in March 2020 and slowly reopened during the summer of 2020. Therefore, decisions from the HO and LGSCO are taking longer for them to determine and therefore we are unable to give a 100% reflection on the case outcomes at this time

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

*Figure 2: Breakdown of all 202/21 Ombudsman cases*

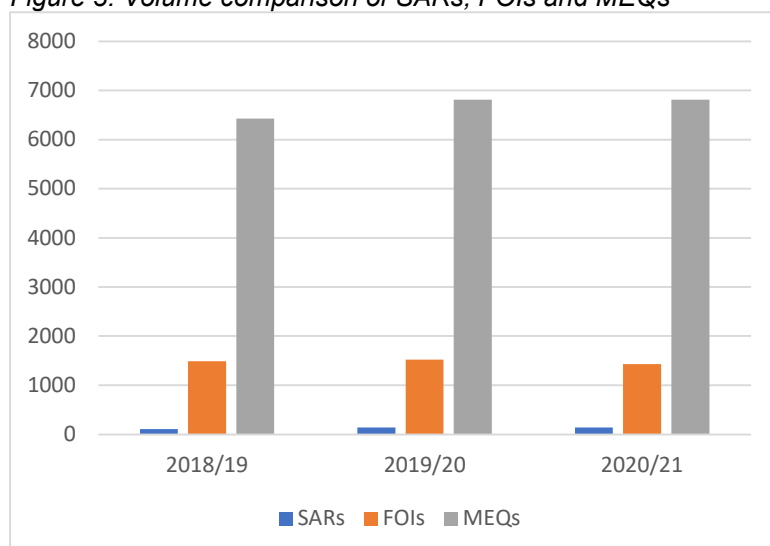
	Not Upheld	Upheld	Closed after initial enquiries	% of enquiries closed or not upheld	Total
LGSCO	3	17	82	83%	102
HO	TBC	TBC	11	73%*	15
<i>Total</i>	3	17	93	82%	117

\*The 73% figure does not include the upheld Figures as the HO have not yet made a determination on the 4 cases

## 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



	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
SARs	103	139	139
FOIs	1485	1521	1429
MEQs	6432	6816	6911

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

	2019/20	2020/21
SARs	<b>81%</b> (113 of 139)	<b>82.7%</b> (115 of 139)
FOIs	<b>82.2%</b> (1251 of 1521)	<b>84.5%</b> (1208 of 1429)
MEQs	<b>80%</b> (5454 of 6816)	<b>84.9%</b> (5870 of 6911)

During 2020/21 there were 50 FOI reviews completed, which is the escalation stage when a requestor is unhappy with the information provided in an FOI. This data was

not previously recorded, but this number is an increase on previous years based on team experience

## **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**

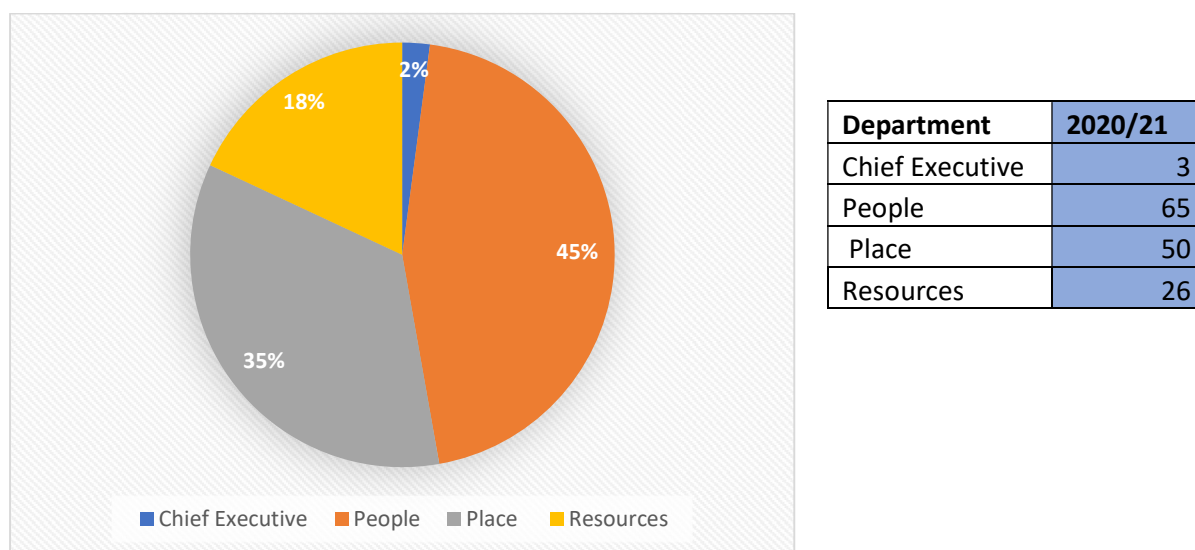
The Complaints Team have systems in place to ensure that response timescales are met. This includes sending reminders of the deadline for responses to the assigned managers; escalating to a senior manager if there is no response within the specified timeframe; reporting to Directors regularly and highlighting 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 144 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. Therefore, there may be compliments that Services have received but not centrally logged

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 ICT 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