

Complaints



Corporate Complaints & Compliments Annual Report 2017 - 2018

CONTENTS

1. Purpose of Report	2
2. Complaints and Compliments received in 2017-18	2
3. Service Performance 2017-18.....	8
4. Learning from corporate complaints.....	11
5. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman enquiries	13
6. Oversight and support provided by Complaints service	15
7. Complaints service priorities for 2018-19.....	16
8. Concluding Comments.....	16
APPENDIX A – Sample of compliments received	17

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1** To report statistical information to Members and Officers detailing Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) corporate complaints and compliment activity from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.
- 1.2** To provide an open resource to anyone who wishes to scrutinize local services
- 1.3** To outline the key developments and planned improvements to the complaints processes operated by the Council.
- 1.4** To consider how some of the learning from complaints and compliments and can be used to improve the overall customer experience.

2. Complaints and Compliments received in 2017-18

2.1 Introduction

The Complaints Team manages and co-ordinates complaints relating to 3 separate complaints systems –

- i) Adult Social Care statutory process
- ii) Children's Social Care statutory process
- iii) Corporate Complaints process – these are complaints relating to other services provided by the Council where there is no access to a statutory complaints procedure.

In addition, the team deals with a wide range of interactions with customers that do not go on to become formal complaints. These include general queries, as well as matters which are exempt from consideration under our complaints policies. Further detail is provided in Section 2.4.

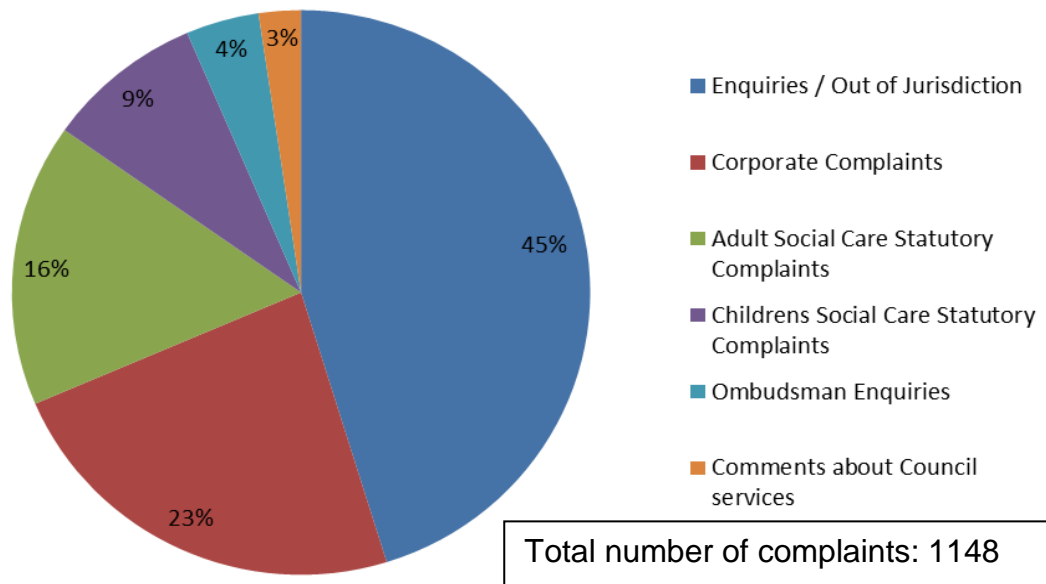
Whilst many of the queries are quickly resolved, those where exemptions from the complaints procedure apply can often generate significant correspondence and phone calls.

Finally, in liaison with the Director of Law and Governance, the team also manages all complaints that are referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Complaints Manager acts as the nominated Link Officer and handles all correspondence between the Council and the Ombudsman.

2.2 Summary of all complaints received in 2017-18

In total, the Complaints Team received and processed 1148 enquiries during 2017/2018, as depicted below

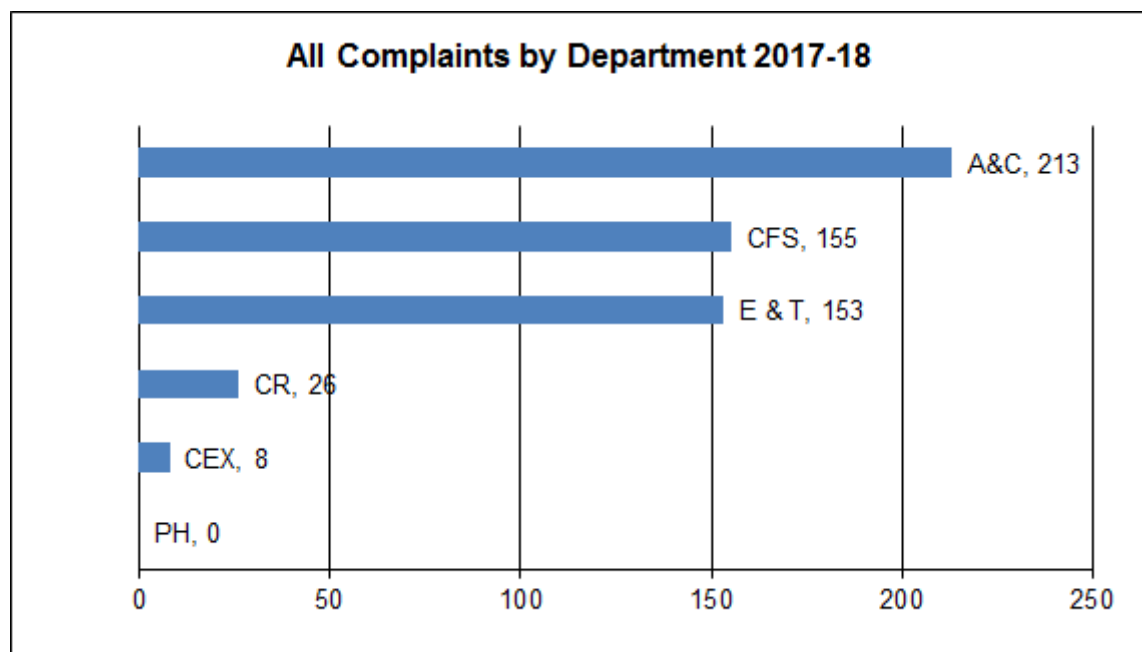
Table 1: Breakdown of all complaints and enquiries received by the Complaints team



This represents an overall slight decrease of 5% on prior year (1208)

Complaints were received across all departments in 2017-18 with the exception of Public Health. The graphic below segments all complaints by department.

Table 2 – All complaints (statutory and non-statutory) by Department

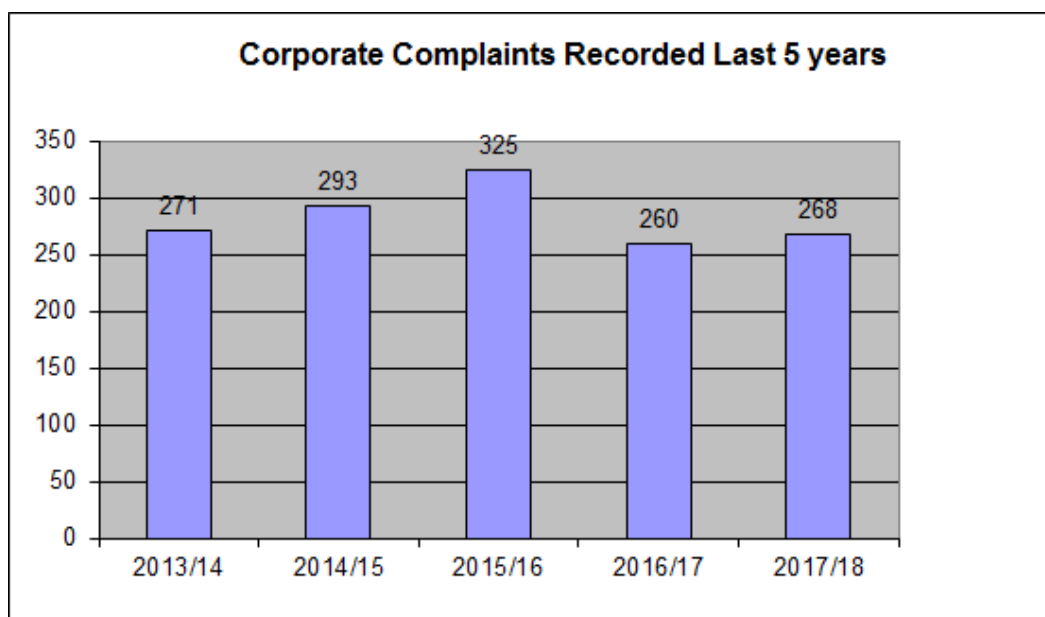


2.3 Corporate Complaints trend analysis

This report relates solely to the Council's corporate complaints and compliments processes.

The total number of corporate complaints received increased very slightly during 2017-18 following a significant reduction in 2016-17. The long term trend shows a stable and consistent volume.

Table 3: Corporate Complaints recorded during the last 5 years



2.4 Analysis of corporate complaint themes and significant changes from 2016-17

A key part of an effective complaints system is to highlight areas for improvement and to seek improvement of those services year on year. During 2016-17 the 5 services detailed below received the most complaints. The comparative data for 2017-18 shows significant reductions in volumes received.

Service	2016 / 17	2017 / 18
Traffic & Safety concerns ¹	18	14
Footway & Carriageway condition	16	5
Network Management (Utility Companies)	16	15
Recycling & Household Waste sites	16	15

¹ This includes traffic calming requests, parking concerns, safe walking and cycling routes and requests for crossing points

It is pleasing to see a continuing downward trend in grass-cutting complaints. This is down to improvements made to information available online which, quickly and dynamically, enables residents to find information about when grass cuts are due and whether issues have been reported. This has also led to a 57% reduction in contact to the Customer Service Centre.

The other big improvement to note is around complaints about repairs to highways or footways. This report does not take a view on the overall number of requests being made, which are high given the severe winter, but rather shows good evidence that when reported, prompt action is being taken. Delay in responding has previously been at the heart of these complaints so this reduction provides good evidence of improvement in this area also.

Whilst the above are notable successes, it is also important that all of the areas identified previously have seen a relative reduction in complaints received this year.

2.5 Analysis of most common corporate complaints in 2017-18

There have also been several new areas which have featured prominently this year and the list below details the 5 most frequent areas complained about during 2017-18

Service	2017 / 18
Travel and Transport Services	32
Gullies, Drainage & Flooding issues	23
Special Educational Need (SEN) / Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) Assessments	15
Network Management (Utility Companies)	15
Recycling & Household Waste sites	15

For Travel and Transport services, a rise in complaints this year was expected. A full review of fleet arrangements has been undertaken which saw a number of instances whereby SEN students received an unwelcome change to their transport provision.

Although the volume of complaints was less than anticipated (9) it largely explains the increase from 2016-17 volumes.

Flooding and drainage is a complex area and often not straightforward to resolve. Nevertheless, complaints intelligence suggests this is an area we can improve on. There have been a number of poor customer journeys exposed through complaints consideration with unreasonable delay and

lack of expectation management being the key failure points. The Environment and Transport senior management team have fully accepted these concerns and have a number of plans in place to generate service improvement.

The final new theme is around SEN assessments. This is another complex area and where complaints can have overlap into other appeals procedures (Tribunal). The main themes were about delay or “drift” in care planning or placement decision making.

2.6 Enquiries and Out of Jurisdiction complaints

As well as managing formal complaints, the Complaints Team is also well placed to proactively assist customers where they simply looking for assistance or struggling to contact the service they need.

Many such matters can be quickly and informally put right and where this is the case, the intervention is not formally recorded as a complaint. Our complaints policy specifies a window of opportunity of up to 24 hours to achieve such informal resolution. In all instances the complaints team will track the case to ensure resolution is made.

Similarly under our policy a request for service is not a complaint (e.g. a request for service could be a request to repair a pot-hole). A complaint would generally only arise should the request for service not be properly dealt with or there is evidence this has been reported previously.

The Complaints Team regularly handles calls of this nature and takes ownership of the case, liaising with the department to ensure they are responded to promptly.

During 2017-18, the Complaints Team handled 519 miscellaneous interactions, consisting of:

- Requests for service which were passed to the relevant Customer Service Centre or other access point (185)
- Informal resolution within 24 hours (167)
- On-going correspondence around complaints which have already been considered and responded to (81)
- Providing advice and signposting to the correct organisation e.g. District Councils, Academies, Health (47).
- Providing advice and signposting to alternative procedures for redress, for example internal appeals procedures, subject access requests, HR procedures (39)

Sometimes, these are simple matters for the team to resolve. Others can be extremely difficult cases; especially when managing expectations and where nothing more can be achieved through the complaints process.

Wherever possible, the Complaints Team aims to resolve customer complaints and concerns without the need to escalate into the formal complaints process. This is good complaints handling practice with complaints being resolved as close to the point of origin as possible. It is encouraging to see that 167 such cases were able to be resolved at this stage

During 2017-18, the complaints team did however receive a significantly higher number of calls which were simply that callers were unable to contact officers dealing with enquiries. This suggests further work is required on ensuring that all staff are aware of the Council's commitments to customer services and prompt acknowledgement of calls.

These are all important issues as prompt communication and resolution both enhances the reputation of the Council and helps avoid costly escalations both internally and to the Local Government Ombudsman.

2.7 Compliments received

188 compliments were recorded across all services during 2017-18, a reduction on the recorded numbers in 2016-17.

It is always encouraging to see visibility of the good work that is being delivered by the Council and it will remain a topic for discussion with departments to encourage and promote sending compliments in for central collation

A small selection of the compliments received about corporate services can be found in Appendix A of this document.

3. Service Performance 2017-18

The key performance indicators for speed of response, outcomes, causes and identified learning are linked to complaints that have been *resolved* within any given reporting period rather than received.

This is important as it ensures that full data sets are able to be presented, both to departments on a quarterly basis, and at year end. It also avoids the scenario whereby Ombudsman findings of maladministration might not appear in annual reports (where outcomes are not known at the time of production).

It follows from all of the above that the figures presented below will not match the data presented in section two of this report which focused on complaints *received*.

3.1 Responsiveness to corporate complaints

Table 4: Corporate Complaints Performance against timescales

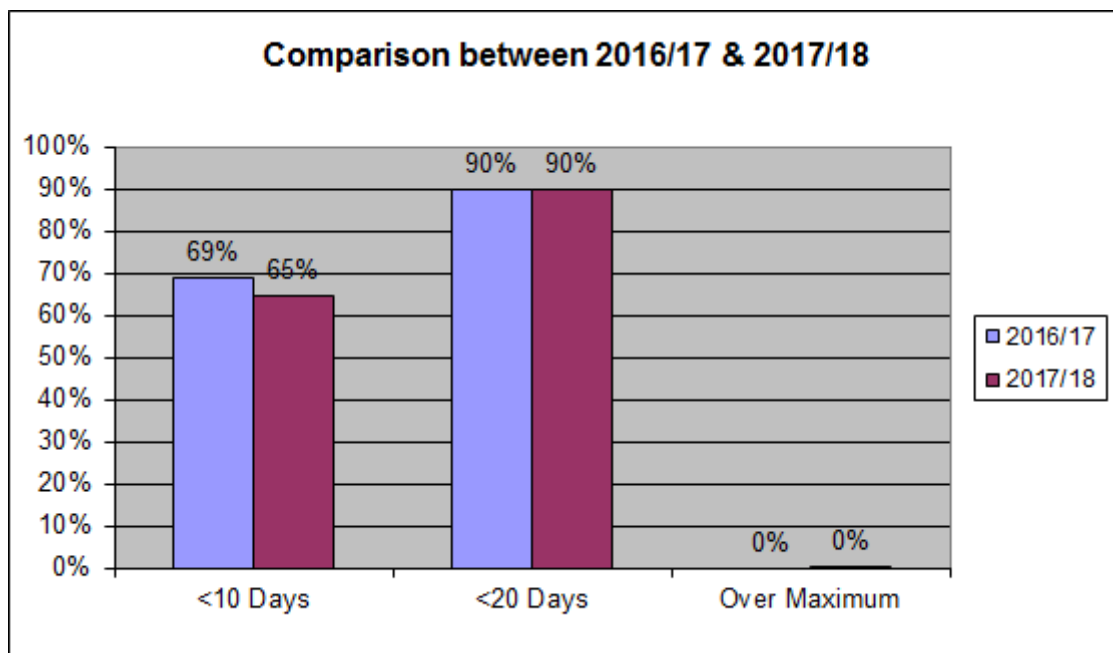


Table 4 above shows a summary of time taken to respond to complaints, providing a comparison between the current reporting year and the previous one.

The table above shows fairly consistent performance and adherence to our key performance indicators of 60% within 10 working days and 90% within 20 working days.

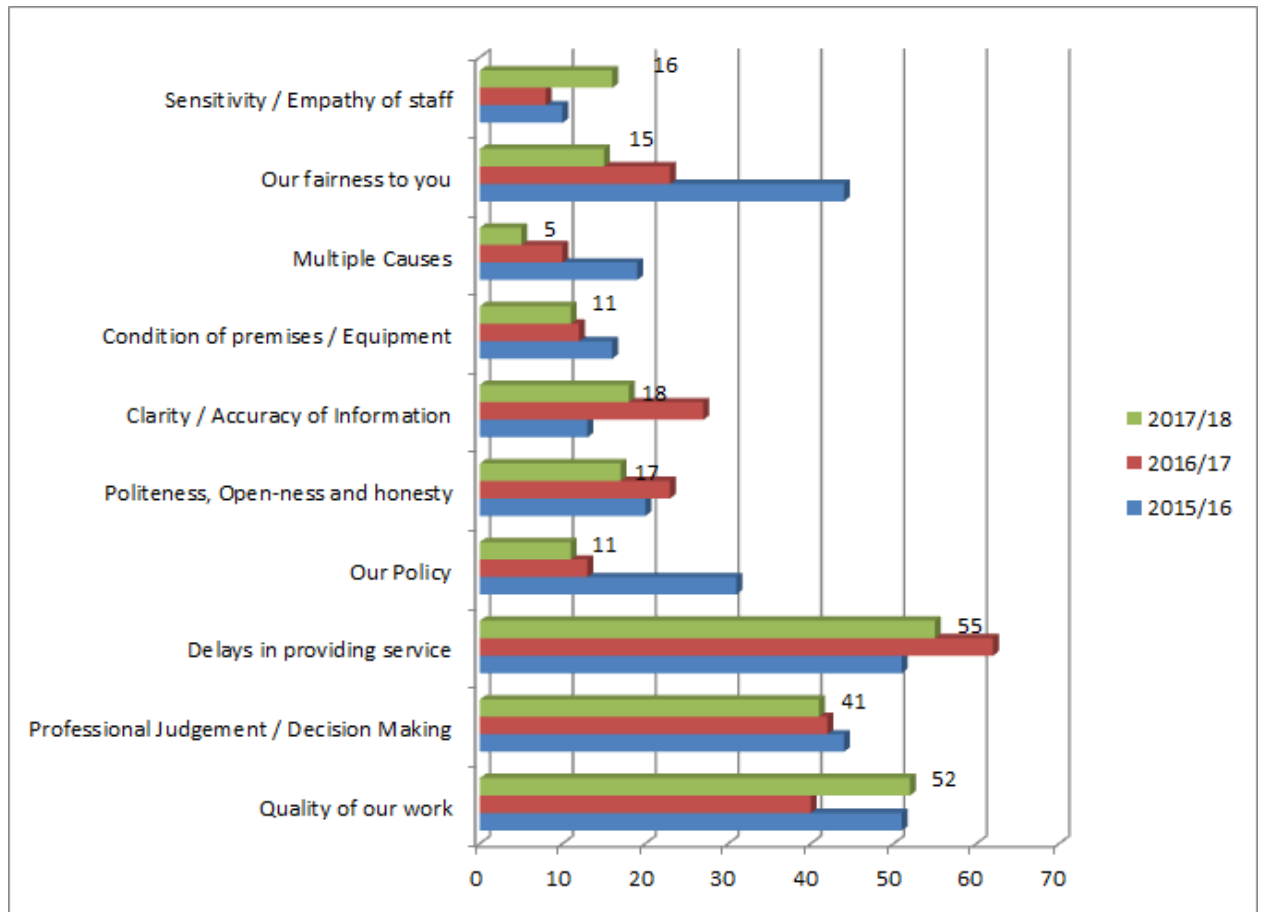
Just 1 complaint was not concluded within 65 working days. This was delayed due to a number of cancelled resolution meetings which had been offered by the department.

3.2 Primary cause of corporate complaints

All complaints are analysed by the Complaints Team to try to establish the principal cause. Whilst in some instances, complaints do cover multiple issues and it would not be right to focus on one specific area, this can prove an instructive way of understanding where the organisation needs to target improvement.

The graphic below shows the comparative data for the preceding 3 years

Table 5 – What were complaints about?



There are no noteworthy changes this year, with delay remaining the most commonly identified trigger of complaint.

As identified in Section 2.3, there have been some areas where we have significantly improved our response times to enquiries, however there is clearly more still to be done to both improve our responsiveness and / or expectation management.

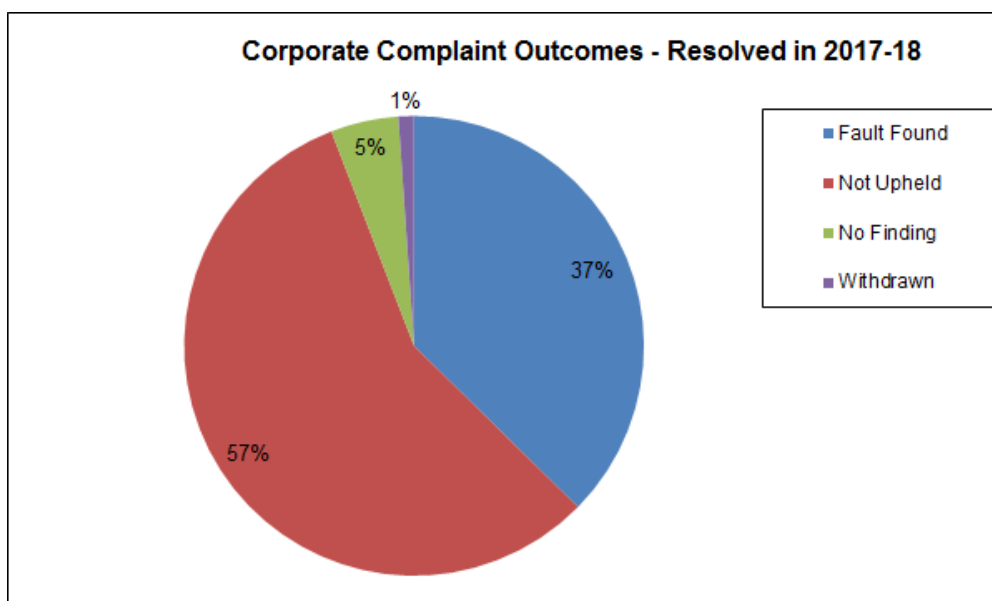
The full breakdown of complaint causes and their respective outcome appears in table 6 below.

Table 6: Corporate Complaint Causes

Cause	Number	% Fault Found
Accuracy / Clarity of Information	18	61%
Quality of our Work	44	53%
Delays in providing services	55	51%
Sensitivity / Empathy of staff	16	48%
Politeness, Openess and Honesty	17	35%
Our Fairness to you	15	27%
Multiple	5	20%
Condition of our premises or infrastructure	11	18%
Professional Judgement / Decision making	41	15%
Our Policy	11	9%

3.3 Corporate Complaint Outcomes & Resolutions

Table 7: Corporate complaints recorded by outcome.



In order to align with Local Ombudsman data classification and simplify our own reporting, the Council no longer differentiates between whether a complaint was partly or fully upheld. Instead, the Complaints team will assess all complaints responded to and classify as either “Fault Found” or “Not Upheld”

Table 7 above shows that 37% of complaints were upheld following investigation, this is in line with 2016-17 (36%) and expected range.

Thirteen complaints were resolved with no finding. This is where there was insufficient evidence to make a finding (e.g. two irreconcilable versions of events).

4. Learning from corporate complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information which can help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. We know that numbers alone do not tell everything about the attitude towards complaints and how they are responded to locally. Arguably of more importance is to understand the impact those complaints have on people and to learn the lessons from complaints to improve the experience for others.

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld but also in some instances where no fault was found but the Authority recognises that improvements to services can be made.

Occasionally during the course of an investigation issues will be identified that need to be addressed over and above the original complaint. The Complaints Team will always try to look at the “bigger picture” to ensure that residents receive the best possible service from the Council

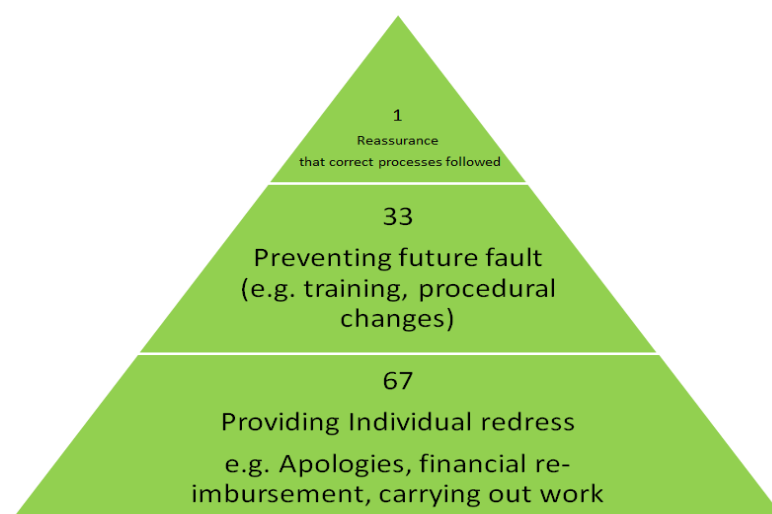
4.1 Remedial actions taken from resolved complaints 2017-18

All of the 101 complaints where fault has been found have been reviewed by the Complaints Team to ascertain what action the relevant department has taken, both in remedying the fault, and any wider learning to avoid such issues occurring in the future.

Remedial action typically consists of both individual redress (e.g. apology, carrying out overdue work) and wider actions that may affect many. On occasions, fault has already been remedied so the complaints process is used to re-assure that appropriate action has been taken.

The diagram below shows the actions taken during 2017-18. 33% of complaints upheld resulted in actions that should improve service for other residents. This is a slight reduction on 2016-17 (38%)

Table 8: Summary of actions taken following complaint investigation



A sample of positive improvements the Council has made is set out below.

You complained that	We Have
One of our taxi contractors was running an unsafe and unreliable service	Terminated the contract following thorough investigation and other concerns received
You mixed up my daughter's details and contacted the wrong school re her placement	Apologised and reviewed processes the team used in handling multiple requests
Carer support grants are not processed in a timely way	Reviewed the process for this within our customer service centre and taken on ring-fenced resource to improve the position
You don't make it clear enough that your waste sites restrict entry 5 minutes before closing	Reviewed the content on our web-site to make this clear and installed clearer signage at sites.
You don't provide any feedback on what is happening once a request is with the drainage team	Set in place a number of long term actions to bring about improvements in this area

5. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman enquiries

Should a complainant remain dissatisfied following internal consideration of their complaint, they can take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to seek independent investigation.

The Ombudsman will usually check with the Authority whether or not the complaint has exhausted the Local Authority's complaints procedure. Where this has not been done, the Ombudsman will usually refer the complaint back to the Authority, to give us an opportunity to attempt to resolve the complainant's concerns through our internal complaints processes first.

The Ombudsman publishes some headline information on each Council's performance every year, although at time of writing this report this information has not been released. This data is expected late July 2018 and will be reported through the Corporate Governance Committee in October 2018.

It is important therefore to note that the figures below are the details the Council holds for LGO enquiries.

5.1 New enquiries made to the Local Government Ombudsman 2017-18

During the year 2017-18, the Local Government Ombudsman made 47 new enquiries of the County Council. This can be further segmented by department and alongside last year's figures:

Department	2017/18	2016/17
Environment and Transport	9	13
Children and Family Services (includes social care)	19	13
Adults and Communities (includes social care)	14	14
Corporate Resources	0	2
Chief Executives	5	2

5.2 Decisions made by the Local Government Ombudsman 2017-18

The LGO made Final Decisions on 40 cases during the year with outcomes recorded as:

- Five identified as premature and referred back to the Council for further consideration under the appropriate complaints procedure.
- Fourteen identified as outside of the Ombudsman's remit and discontinued on this basis
- Ten were closed after initial enquiries (the Assessment stage) with no further action. Typically this is where the LGO feel they are unlikely to find any fault or are satisfied with the Council's response.

- Seven were closed after detailed investigation and with no maladministration found
- Four cases of maladministration and injustice

The numbers of cases where the Ombudsman highlighted maladministration reduced significantly this year (12 in 2016-17) and this is a good indicator of the Council's improvement in identifying and remedying any fault appropriately through our complaints procedure.

Only one of the four maladministration findings related to corporate services with brief details set out below:

Case 1 – Chief Executives:

Mrs A complained about a School Admissions appeal panel. The Ombudsman found procedural fault in that the Council had considered the matter on the wrong terms.

The LGO recommended that a fresh appeal hearing be heard which the Council agreed to.

The remaining 3 cases where fault was found relate to either Adults or Childrens Social Care and details will appear within the respective statutory reports.

6. Oversight and support provided by Complaints service

The Complaints Team continues to support departments to both manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered by the team are:

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Production of Performance Reports
3. Liaison with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
4. Quality Assurance of complaint responses
5. Complaint handling training for managers
6. Acting as a critical friend to challenge service practice
7. Support with persistent and unreasonable complainants

The Complaints Manager offers regular assistance in a number of complex cases and to act as a single point of contact within the Authority. This helps manage protracted disputes and ensures consistent responses are issued.

In line with the Council's Unreasonable Complainants Policy, the Complaints Manager also supports departments with managing challenging complainants. This can include seeking to restrict contact with the organisation due to the frequency of contact and the impact on officer time. Two such protocols have been issued in the last 12 months.

Complaints training continues to be offered to departments, including a new course focusing on investigation and response techniques. This has been well received and contributes to the positive cultural improvements.

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to managers in drafting comprehensive responses to complaint investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response and that due process is followed.

Quarterly complaints reports are produced and presented to Departmental Management Teams or Senior Leadership Teams as appropriate. The Complaints Manager also regularly meets quarterly with each department's Intelligent Client to talk through complaints matters.

The Complaints Manager is the Chair of the Eastern Region complaints managers group which represents the interests of some 18 local authority complaints professionals and ensures knowledge of the latest policy developments across all complaint types. This group allows for the sharing of good practice in complaints resolution.

7. Complaints service priorities for 2018-19

During 2018/19, the Complaints team will focus on a number of key priorities, as follows:

- Procurement and implementation of a new complaints, FOI and subject access requests (SAR) case management system.
- Continuing to improve the resource library for Managers responding to complaints and encourage more self-help.
- Continue the roll-out of complaints training to managers
- Maintain the low levels of maladministration findings by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
- Maintain and further improve the Council's strong track record of timely complaint responses.

8. Concluding Comments

Although the overall volume of corporate complaints did increase in 2017-18, this was not by a significant factor.

Customer service improvements have been seen in high volume services such as Grass cutting and gritting which has helped limit this increase and more importantly reduce frustrations over lack of information in these areas.

Despite the ongoing pressures on service delivery, there has not been an impact on responsiveness to complaints and the Council is achieving against target in this area. The absence of any significant findings of fault by the Ombudsman suggests that for the most part complaints are dealt with openly and fairly.

Notwithstanding this, there remain clear opportunities to improve in a number of areas and the Complaints Manager will continue to work with senior leadership teams to effectively utilise complaints intelligence to support positive improvements to service delivery.

APPENDIX A – Sample of compliments received

- Your contractor did an excellent job and went the extra mile to tidy the site. I would just like to thank you again for the way in which you dealt with my complaint so swiftly – **Public Rights of Way and Complaints**
 - Whenever I ring adult social care I am impressed by the kind professional help I receive from the customer services team...I'm sure they must have a very high workload but I have always been treated with care and patience and offered appropriate advice – **Customer Service Centre**
 - Thank you to Jamie and Bernard for resolving a situation quickly. I just wanted to express my gratitude for supporting it – thank you. – **Highways Schemes**
 - I visited Lutterworth Recycling centre today to deposit some rubbish. I am currently suffering from a knee injury which is affecting my mobility. The staff were so incredibly helpful – **Waste Management**
 - Thank you so much for everything today Paula. Superb customer service. – **School Admissions**
 - I just wanted to let the department know that I think that the report (risk assessment) is an excellent one and true to O's needs and difficulties. It is worded thoughtfully and ensures that any potential triggers can be avoided or coped with – **SEN Transport**
 - The website is a pleasure to use, clear, fast, easy to navigate. I found the answer to my query in a couple of quick clicks, thank you. - **Digital Services**
 - I would just like to thank you and your team for sorting out the nuisance lamp outside our property. It may have taken a little longer than hoped but it has certainly made a big difference to our quality of life - **Streetlighting**
 - I went today to arrange a copy of my marriage certificate at County Hall Registration office. Wonderful service from the lady who took my details and from the receptionist – **Registration Services**
 - I called and spoke to Sadie to try and see what I have to do and can I just say she was lovely. I was a little upset as I was dropping off some clothes and belongings from a family member that had died, and felt the parking ticket was a bit too much for me at the moment. Her kind words made me feel a lot better. So thank you to Sadie – **Notice Processing Unit**
 - Yesterday morning Main Street and Beacon Road in Woodhouse Eaves had been gritted. These roads aren't normally done, so it was great to see the hard working staff providing additional support and keeping everyone moving. Great work – **Winter Maintenance**
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