

ANNUAL COMPLAINT REPORT FOR CORPORATE SERVICES FOR 1 APRIL 2017 TO 31 MARCH 2018

Committee name	Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee
Officer reporting	Ian Anderson - Business Manager, Complaints and Enquiries
Papers with report	Appendix A

HEADLINES

This report provides information and analysis of complaints and Members' Enquiries received between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 for Corporate Services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

- 1. note the contents of the annual complaint report; and**
- 2. discuss any concerns with the relevant Cabinet member.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Report information can be found in Appendix A.

Implications on related Council policies

None.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Provides assurance that complaints and Members' Enquiries are being processed in accordance with our published policies.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Informal complaints

- Informal complaints (service requests) have fallen by 47% (194) when comparing the same period for 2016/17 of 416 with 2017/18 of 222.

Stage 1 complaints

- There were 15% (42) fewer Stage 1 complaints when comparing the figure for 2016/17 of 285 with 2017/18 of 243. The average time taken to respond to a Stage 1 complaint is 6.81 working days. with 99% of Stage 1 complaints being responded to within ten working days.

Stage 2 complaints

- There were 43% (17) fewer Stage 2 complaint when comparing the figure for 2016/17 of 40 with 2017/18 of 23. The average time taken to respond to a Stage 2 complaint is 4.30 working days, with 100% of Stage 2 complaints responded to within ten working days.

Stage 3 complaints

- There were no Stage 3 complaints registered for 2017/18.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) referrals

- Ten complainants escalated their complaint to the LGO, but the Ombudsman either decided not to investigate or found no evidence of fault.

Compliments

- Four compliments were recorded for this period.

Members' Enquiries (ME)

- 8,502 MEs were recorded for 2017/18. This is 683 (7%) fewer than 2016/17 figure of 9,185. The service areas with the highest number of MEs is Waste (3,340), Anti-Social Behaviour (1,273) and Planning (1,227) Services. These are outlined at the end of this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. The Council's Vision

The Council's vision is about 'putting our residents first'. Feedback in the form of complaints and compliments is seen as a very important source of information from residents about the quality of services and care provided by the Council. In cases where something has gone wrong, we are committed to putting it right and ensure that it does not happen again.

2. What is a Complaint?

In general terms, a complaint can be considered as:

"an expression of dissatisfaction by telephone, personal visit or in writing, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff affecting an individual or group of customers."

3. How can people complain?

Complaints can be made in person, by telephone, in writing, via our website or email, either directly to the service area, Contact Centre or to the Complaints and Enquiries Team.

4. Remedies for redress

The purpose of redress is to remedy the injustice or hardship suffered, and, where possible, to return a complainant to the position they would have been before the situation went wrong. Types of redress include:

- an apology;
- providing the service that should have been received at first;
- taking action or making a decision that the Council should have done before;
- reconsidering an incorrect decision;
- improving procedures so that similar problems do not happen again; and
- if after an investigation by council staff or the Ombudsman, it is concluded that as a result of maladministration there is no practical action that would provide a full and appropriate remedy or if the complainant has sustained loss or suffering, financial compensation may be the most appropriate approach.

5. Mediation

For some complaints it will not be appropriate, or possible, to resolve a complaint through the complaint process - particularly where there has been a breakdown in the relationship between the service provider and the service user, or where emotions are running high. In such situations, the Business Manager for Complaints and Enquiries, will consider whether mediation is an option that should be considered. If both parties are agreeable, mediation by an independent mediator allows both parties to come together to see if they can reach a solution through dialogue.

CORPORATE SERVICES

The Complaint Procedure

For those complaints where this Local Authority has a statutory duty to investigate, we will deal with these complaints under the corporate complaints procedure as follows:

- The Informal Complaint (service request)
- Stage 1 – response from the Deputy Director for Housing, Environment, Education, Health and Wellbeing or a Head of Service.
- Stage 2 – response from the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Residents Services.
- Stage 3 – response from the Chief Executive of the Council.
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

A more detailed explanation of how the complaint procedure operates, the main complaint themes and statistical data for each stage of the complaint process is provided below.

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

The Corporate complaints procedure includes complaints registered against all services provided by the Council, except for Children and Adults services, which have their own statutory complaint procedures. Set out in table 1 is the total number of formal Stage 1 complaints registered under the Corporate complaints procedure.

Please be aware that many of these complaints are reported on to the Residents', Education and Environmental Services and Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committees. This report contains annual complaint information in relation to Administration and Finance Services namely Housing Benefit and Council Tax.

Table 1 - Total number of Stage 1 Corporate complaints

Period	Corporate complaints (except Housing Benefit and Council Tax)	Housing Benefit and Council Tax	Total number of Corporate complaints registered
2017/18	489	243	732

A. THE INFORMAL COMPLAINT

This local authority will attempt to consider all concerns as close to the point of contact as possible, and in cases where minor or day-to-day concerns are raised, these are dealt with as service requests.

1. THE INFORMAL COMPLAINT

Table 2 - Informal complaints received – (Service requests)

Year	1 April to 30 June (Q1)	1 July to 30 Sept (Q2)	1 Oct to 31 Dec (Q3)	1 Jan to 31 March	Total
2016/17	97	73	64	182	416
2017/18	129	36	26	31	222

47% (194) fewer informal complaints (service requests) when comparing 2016/17 figure of 416 with the 2017/18 figure of 222. The main reason for the significant fall in informal complaints when comparing quarter 1 with quarter 2, 3 and 4 is the change in service providers from Northgate to Liberata.

2. STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS

Table 3 – Total number of Stage 1 complaints Admin and Finance

Period	Housing Benefit	Council Tax	Finance	Total
2016/17	105	179	1	285
2017/18	91	141	11	243

15% (42) fewer Stage 1 complaints when comparing 2016/17 figure of 285 with the 2017/18 figure of 243.

Table 4 – Outcome of complaints

Period	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Withdrawn	Total
2016/17	72	34	174	5	285
2017/18	40	37	161	5	243

Proportionally, the number of upheld complaints has fallen from 72 in 2016/17 to 40 for 2017/18. The outcome in the other areas remains broadly similar to previous years.

Table 5 – Time taken to respond to a complaint at Stage 1 – working days

	Administration and Finance directorate average
2016/17	6.22
2017/18	6.81

The average time taken to respond to a complaint was 6.81 working days, which compares favourably against the target of 10 working days.

Table 6 - Number and % of complaints dealt with within 10 working days

Period	Total number of complaints	Number responded to within 10 working days	% responded to within 10 working days
2016/17	285	283	99 %
2017/18	243	241	99 %

99% (241 out of 243) of the Stage 1 complaints were responded to within the 10 working day target. This continues to remain a high performing area.

3. STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS

Table 7 - Total number of Stage 2 complaints - Admin and Finance

Period	Housing Benefit	Council Tax	Finance	Total
2016/17	11	28	1	40
2017/18	7	16	0	23

The number of Stage 2 complaints has fallen from 40 for 2016/17 to 23 for 2017/18. This was expected and will continue to fall as officers are using their discretion to escalate a complaint direct from Stages 1 and/or 2 to the Local Government Ombudsman where it is felt that the decision cannot be overturned through the complaint process.

Table 8 – Time taken to respond to a complaint at Stage 2 – working days

	Administration and Finance directorate average
2016/17	5.35
2017/18	4.30

The average time taken to respond to a Stage 2 complaint is 4.30 working days against the target of 10 working days.

Table 9 - Number and % of complaints responded to within 10 working days

Period	Total number of complaints	Number responded to within 10 working days	% responded to within 10 working days
2016/17	40	38	95 %
2017/18	23	23	100 %

All Stage 2 complaints were responded to within 10 working days.

3. STAGE 3 COMPLAINTS

Table 10 – Total number of Stage 3 complaints Admin and Finance

Period	Total number
2016/17	3
2017/18	0

There were no Stage 3 complaints registered. This was expected.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATION (LGO)

Where it appears that a Council's own investigations have not resolved the complaint, the complainant is entitled to refer their complaint to the Ombudsman and at any stage of the complaint process. However, the Ombudsman normally refers the complaint back to the Council if it has not been considered fully using local procedures first.

Table 11 – Total number of LGO investigations - Admin and Finance

Period	Total number
2016/17	8
2017/18	10

The findings and decision of the LGO are set out below.

Complaint details	LGO decision
Complaint ref: 5824745 Ms X complained about the way Council dealt with her council tax account for a property she owns but does not live in.	Not Upheld The Ombudsman found no evidence of fault in how the Council dealt with Ms X council tax account.
Complaint ref: 6123536 Mr X complained that the Council had failed to properly consider his claim for housing benefit as a student.	Did not investigate The Ombudsman will not investigate this complaint because the matter has been determined and there remains a right of appeal to a tribunal.
Complaint ref: 6065376 Ms X complained about the Council's decision to take enforcement action against her over an unpaid council tax bill.	Did not investigate The Ombudsman will not investigate Miss X's complaint about the Council's enforcement action over an unpaid council tax bill. This is because there is no evidence of fault by the Council and it is unlikely further investigation would find any.

<p>Complaint ref: 6224085 Ms X complained that the Council had incorrectly calculated her housing benefit.</p>	<p>Did not investigate The Ombudsman will not investigate this complaint because there is a right of appeal to a tribunal.</p>
<p>Complaint ref: 6241355 Mr X complained that the Council unfairly charged £125 costs in relation to his council tax account. Mr X wanted a refund.</p>	<p>Did not investigate The Ombudsman will not investigate this complaint about council tax arrears. This is because there is insufficient evidence of fault by the Council</p>
<p>Complaint ref: 6032964 Mrs X complained that the Council unreasonably asked her to supply her child's birth certificate & delayed processing her claim for housing benefit.</p>	<p>Did not investigate The Ombudsman cannot investigate this housing benefit complaint because the complainant has appealed to the tribunal.</p>
<p>Complaint ref: 6147262 Mr X complained that the Council will not backdate his housing benefit.</p>	<p>Did not investigate The Ombudsman cannot investigate this housing benefit complaint because the complainant has appealed to the tribunal.</p>
<p>Complaint ref: 6483322 Mr X complained about the Council's decision to bill him rates for a business he did not own.</p>	<p>Did not investigate The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint because the matter has been remedied by apology from the Council. Any remaining issue is for the Information Commissioner Office.</p>
<p>Complaint ref: 6458643 Mr X complained about the Council's decision to end his housing benefit.</p>	<p>Did not investigate The Ombudsman cannot investigate this complaint about a housing benefit decision because the complainant is appealing to the tribunal.</p>
<p>Complaint ref: 6545699 Miss X complained about the Council's refusal to backdate her housing benefit.</p>	<p>Did not investigate The Ombudsman will not investigate this complaint because Miss X has appealed to a tribunal and a complaint about the wording of the letter does not warrant an investigation.</p>

5. COMPLIMENTS

Table 12 – number of compliments received

Period	Total number
2016/17	0
2017/18	4

Officers are being asked to send copies of compliments to the complaint team so that they can be recorded.

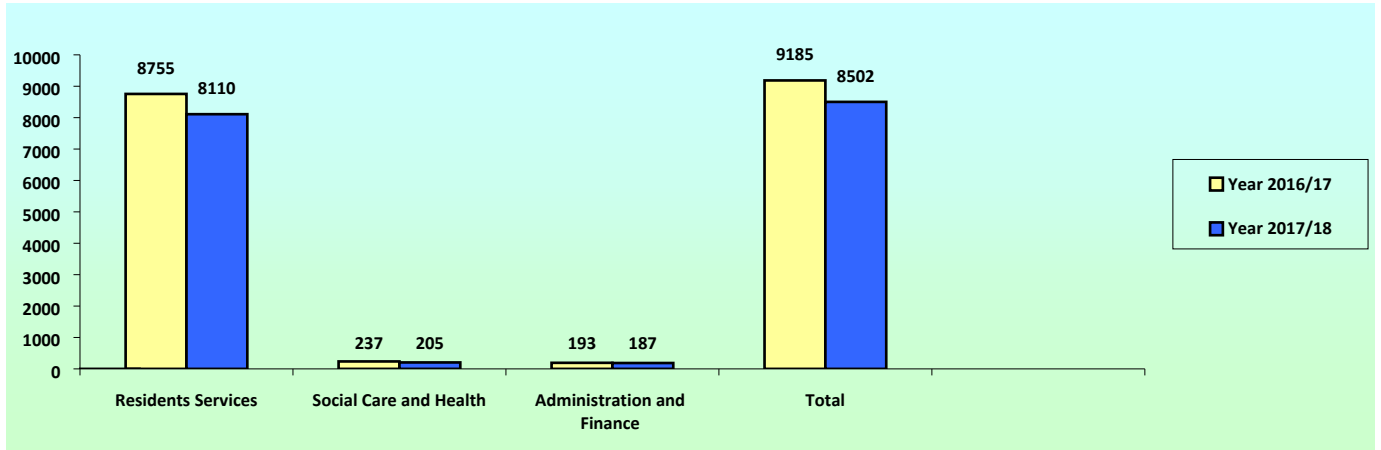
Classification: Public

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6. MEMBERS ENQUIRIES

Enquiries can be submitted to officers by Elected Members on behalf of their constituents.

Total number of Enquiries from Elected Members



- Housing Benefit and Council Tax account for 2% (187) of all Members' Enquiries received.
- Overall, there has been 7% (683) fewer enquiries from Elected Members when comparing the figure for 2016/17 of 9,185 with the figure for 2017/18 of 8,502.
- Residents Services accounts for 95% of all enquiries from Elected Members. Please see below for a breakdown of enquiries received for Residents Services.

