

28 February 2017		ITEM: 5
Standards and Audit Committee		
Complaints & Enquiries Report – April 2016 to September 2016		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Lee Henley/Tina Martin – Information Management Team		
Accountable Head of Service: Lee Henley, Information Manager		
Accountable Director: Jackie Hinchliffe - Director of HR, OD & Transformation		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

- A total of 823 complaints have been received within the reporting period. For the same period last year this figure was 942. However, in view of the removal of the concern stage on 1st August 2016, a further 746 concerns which were received up to this point should also be included. This equates to a combined figure for concerns/complaints totalling 1569. For the same period last year this combined figure was 2295, therefore the reporting period represents a reduction.
- For the reporting period 98% of complaints were responded in timeframe.
- Some services, by virtue of the nature of the type of service provided, receive the highest volume of complaints. For the reporting period the top four expressions of dissatisfaction relate to:
 - Missed Bins
 - Housing Repairs
 - Housing Solutions
 - Estate Management
- Detailed feedback on common complaint trends/themes is attached for each Directorate (as Appendix 1). This includes data on complaint outcomes and the learning which the service has identified, coupled with additional learning from any stage 3 complaints.
- A total of 2534 Enquiries have been received from Elected Members, MEP and MPs’.
- 96% of MP/MEP Enquiries were responded to within timeframe. 98% of Members Enquiries were responded to within timeframe.

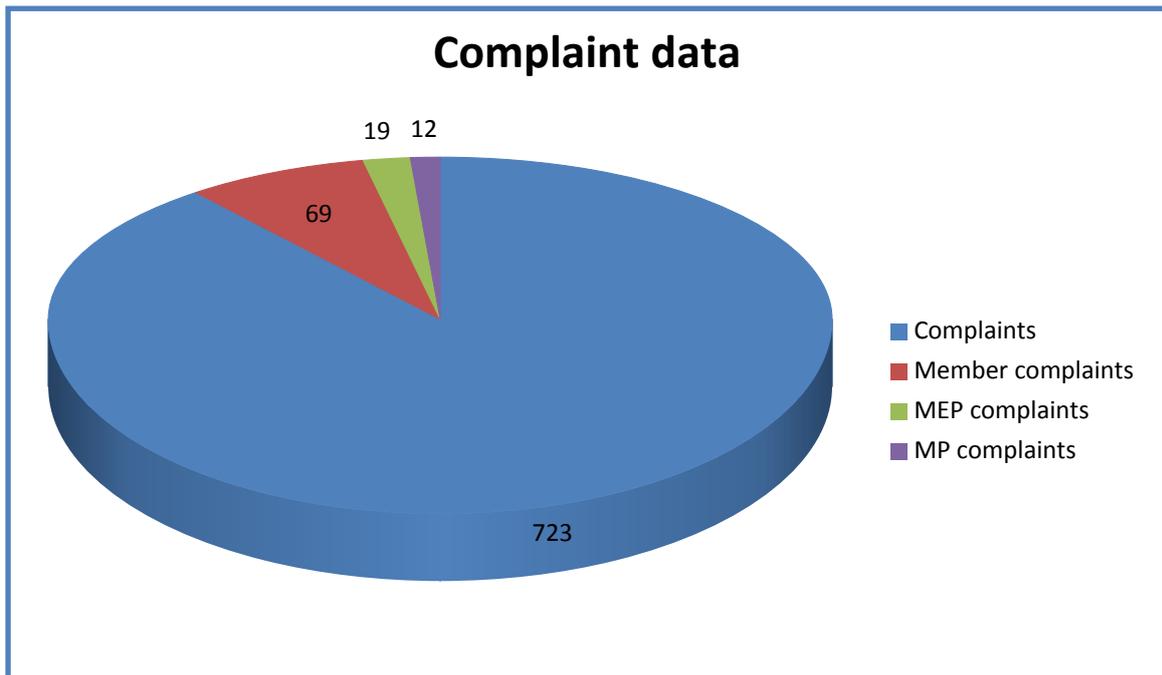
- 44% of closed complaints were upheld. This figure is above the target of 40% and a key focus is to improve this performance going forward. The direction of travel is positive at this stage (with quarter 3 at 34%) and this is subject to monitoring via Learning Action Plans.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the statistics and performance for the reporting period.**
- 1.2 To note the changes to the complaints procedure with effect from 1st August 2016;**
- 1.3 To note that further work is on-going with a number of service areas to establish the root cause for concerns/complaints received, reasons for complaint escalation and reasons why complaints are upheld.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report sets out the council's complaints statistics for the first six months of 2016/17.
- 2.2 Adults and Children social care services have separate statutory complaints procedures. Statistical data on social care complaints is summarised within 2.16 and 2.17.
- 2.3 Analysis of complaints for each Directorate has been produced and is attached as Appendix 1. This provides a high level summary of the top expressions of dissatisfaction and levels of escalation within the Directorates. Work remains on-going with a number of service areas to establish the root cause for concerns/complaints received, reasons for complaint escalation and reasons why complaints are upheld.
- 2.4 Directorates are also encouraged to undertake root cause analysis, monitor trends and themes. The Corporate Complaints Team expects that proactive steps are consequently implemented to improve the customer experience.
- 2.5 Changes to the complaints process were implemented during the reporting period and took effect from 1st August 2016. These changes included:
 - The removal of the concern stage from the procedure.
 - Some feedback from Members, MEP and MPs' now being recorded as formal complaints, as opposed to enquiries due to the nature of the presenting issue.
 - Shorter timeframes for responding to complaints across all stages.
- 2.6 Feedback for the reporting period has been received as outlined below. A total of 823 complaints were received. For the same period last year this figure was 942. It is important not to discount the 746 concerns which were also received prior to the cessation of this classification; this has subsequently increased this figure to 1569. For the same period last year the combined figure for concerns and complaints was 2295.



2.7 A significant volume of complaints are received directly from residents and visitors. A breakdown showing how complaints are received is detailed below:

Email	63%
Complaints Form	16%
Telephone	14%
Letter	5%
Website	0.5%
In Person	1%
Social Media	0.5%

2.8 It should be noted that the figure of 823 is attributed to **one** complaint. In line with the complaints procedure **one** complaint exhausts the process after 3 stages. For the purpose of this report a complaint is only counted once, however further analysis on escalated complaints has also been undertaken.

2.9 In order to evaluate the customer experience and to reduce costs (as complaint escalations result in costs to the council so getting it right first time is important), the Corporate Complaints Team has also focused on those complaints which have escalated through the complaint stages.

2.10 On average, a Stage 1 complaint takes 2.2 hours to investigate and a Stage 2 complaint takes 2.6 hours. It is difficult to arrive at an average cost to the council as Officers at all levels are involved in complaints responses. However the cost to investigate a Stage 1/2 complaint is estimated below:

- Stage 1 complaint - £40 (based on a Band 7 employee investigating using a mid-point salary scale).

- Stage 2 Complaint - £70 (based on a Band 9 employee investigating using a mid-point salary scale).

2.11 A requirement of the complaints procedure is that complaints which are escalated are assigned to a more senior officer than the officer who investigated the initial Stage 1 complaint. This allows for transparency and a full review of the initial complaint decision to take place.

2.12 Complaints which are escalated are initially assessed to ascertain if there is anything further to be gained for a stage 2 investigation and these are either sanctioned or rejected. This is a similar process for those escalating to Stage 3, however in addition Stage 3 complaints are returned to the Directorate if the assessment concludes that the service could undertake further work to negate a formal Stage 3 investigation. The complainant is always advised to refer back to the Complaints Team at any time for further advice.

2.13 A total of 116 complaints were escalated from Stage 1 onto Stage 2. Of those that were subject to a further investigation by a senior officer within the same service, a total of 68 were not deemed to be upheld and 23 had the original decision overturned. A total of 41 complaints were escalated from Stage 2 to Stage 3 and all complaints were assessed independently by the Complaints Team: Of the 41:

- 10 were assessed and then referred back to service with a request that the service area undertake additional work to avoid an un-necessary Stage 3 escalation. If this was not undertaken then these 10 would be classified as overturned and upheld complaints.
- 31 were assessed at Stage 3 resulting in:
 - 21 classified as not upheld.
 - 3 had the stage 2 decision overturned and were upheld.
 - 7 were cancelled as the Investigating Officer on assessing the complaint was happy that no further work was necessary at Stage 3.

2.14 There are also occasions when complaints are entered directly to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure, usually at the instruction of the Chief Executive and/or where it is clear that the service have not followed the complaints procedure in the first instance and continued but unsuccessful dialogue has taken place with the customer.

2.15 The above statistics demonstrate the need for services to address complaints more robustly at the initial stage of the complaints procedure. This may negate unnecessarily escalation onto the next stage, and ultimately reduce costs for the council if complaints were resolved at first point of contact.

2.16 **Children's Social Care** - Children's Social Care operates a statutory complaints procedure. For the reporting period:

- 46 Stage 1 complaints were recorded, 6 complaints were upheld, 4 complaints were partially upheld and 26 complaints were not upheld. 7 complaints were withdrawn, 2 were cancelled and 1 is ongoing.

- 2 complaints progressed to a Stage 2 independent investigation. Both complaints are currently pending investigation.
- Other representations received are shown below:
 - 40 compliments
 - 1 Ombudsman Enquiry
 - 10 MP Enquiries
 - 14 Member Enquiries
 - 1 MEP Enquiry
 - 10 concerns

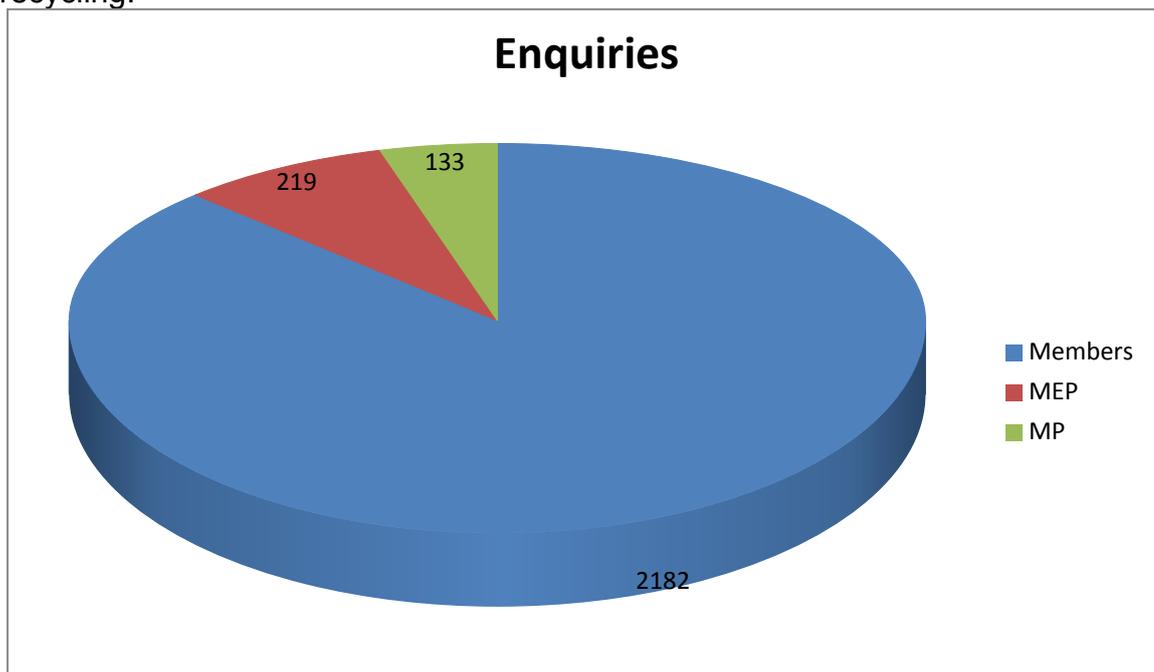
2.17 Adult Social Care – For the reporting period:

- 45 complaints were investigated in accordance with the statutory adult social care complaints procedure. 20 complaints were upheld, 3 were partially upheld, 13 were not upheld, 3 were withdrawn and 6 were in progress during the reporting period.
- Other representations received are shown below:
 - 4 Ombudsman Enquiries
 - 8 concerns
 - 3 MP Enquiries
 - 25 Member Enquiries
 - 3 MEP Enquires
 - 73 compliments

3 Enquiries

- 3.1 A total of 2534 enquiries were received from elected councillors, MEP and MPs' and a breakdown is shown below. The focus of these enquiries relate to Housing Services, including remedial repairs, homelessness and homeless prevention and also anti-social behaviour. Enquiries for the Environment & Place Directorate, focus on fly tipping, public protection and waste and

recycling.



3.2 MP/MEP Enquiries – 96% were responded to within timeframe.

3.3 Members Enquiries – 98% were responded to within timeframe.

4. Performance against indicators

4.1 The Complaints Team has a series of KPI's for monitoring complaint performance which incorporate both corporate performance and that of Directorates. Key measures are the timeliness of our response, the volume of complaints which are upheld at each stage and ensuring that learning from upheld complaints is embedded so that the customer experience is improved.

4.2 Quarter performance is outlined below for the key corporate indicators.

KPI'S	2015/16 OUTTURN	2016/17 TARGET	QTR 1	QTR 2	APRIL TO SEPT
% timeliness of responses to all complaints	98%	98%	99%	97%	98%
% of complaints upheld closed in month	50%	40%	46%	42%	44%

- 4.3 The KPI for upheld complaints is 40%, lower is better. At quarter 1 the volume of upheld complaints was 46%, at quarter 2 the figure was 42%. The direction of travel is therefore positive (quarter 3 is 34%), and the Learning Action Plan (LAP) process detailed in 6.5 below commenced during August 2016. The LAP process work should hopefully reduce the % of complaints upheld.
- 4.4 98% of complaints were responded in timeframe (on target).

5. Ombudsman Enquiries

- 5.1 Detailed below is a snapshot of formal enquiries received from Ombudsman Services within the reporting period. Outcomes of all enquiries are shared with the Heads of Service and respective Director. Learning and recommendations are tracked by the Corporate Complaints Team.

Ombudsman	Directorate / Service	Outcome	Compensation
Housing	Leaseholder Services	Active	-
LGO	Env & Place – Assisted waste collection	Active	-
LGO	Env & Place – Planning breach	No maladministration	-
LGO	School Admissions	No maladministration	-
LGO	School Admissions	Maladministration but no injustice	-
LGO	Housing Allocations	Active	-
HO	Caretaking Services	Active	-
HO	ASB	Active	-
LGO	Social Care Finance	Withdrawn	
LGO	Homelessness	No maladministration	-
LGO	Housing Benefit	Maladministration but no injustice	
LGO	Social Care	Active	-
LGO	Social Care	Active	-
LGO	School Admissions	Closed after initial enquiries	-
LGO	Council Tax	Maladministration and injustice	£100
LGO	School Admissions	Active	
LGO	Housing (various issues)	Discontinued	

6. Learning lessons from complaints

- 6.1 The most important aspect of any complaints management framework is the ability to demonstrate that the council can show evidence that it is learning from complaints received. Appendix 1 includes a high level summary of learning from upheld complaints which has been identified by the Directorates. Case studies showing learning from complaints are also uploaded onto the council's website.

- 6.2 Cumulative Management Information (MI) is submitted to senior performance officers to enable more detailed analysis to take place on the types of feedback received and address any common themes and trends. However the Corporate Complaints Team will continue to analyse data and lead to address any performance issues with Directorates.
- 6.3 The purpose of the Customer Service & Demand Board is to provide the strategic direction and oversight for the development and delivery of customer services across the council. It ensures that the importance of customer service is promoted to achieve high and consistent standards of delivery and customer satisfaction. The Board oversees initiatives to help manage and reduce demand on services by reducing avoidable contact and through prevention and early intervention to support achieving financial self-sustainability.
- 6.4 To this effect, the Complaints Team undertake further analysis on the volume of complaints that are upheld for services within each Directorate and has implemented a Learning Action Plan (LAP) process that commenced in August 2016, as a mechanism to reduce complaint demand and upheld complaints.
- 6.5 The LAP process is summarised below and is monitored by the Complaints Team as part of overall complaints analysis and service specific workshops are introduced if necessary.
- Each month, a report is produced by the Complaints Team detailing those service areas who have in excess of 35% of complaints upheld.
 - Upheld complaints will then be sent to service areas to ensure root cause analysis of the complaints is undertaken with a view to then producing a LAP. The LAP must:
 - Confirm what went wrong in the service and identify the cause of the problem.
 - Explain what action, targeted to address the cause of the problem, will be taken to stop it happening again and who will be responsible for ensuring this happens.
 - Provide a timescale for when that action took place or will take place.
 - Provide objective evidence of those actions.
 - Explain how the service will check that these actions have been taken, and are working – and when this will be done, and by whom.
 - LAP's are shared with respective Heads of Services and progress has been reported via the Customer Service and Demand Board.

7. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 7.1 There are no options associated with this paper.

8. Reasons for recommendations

8.1 This report is for noting purposes. There are no recommendations requiring approval.

9. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

9.1 This report was presented at Performance Board and Director's Board.

10. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

10.1.1 Complaints impact on the council's priority of delivering excellence and achieving value for money.

10.1.2 The complaints process seeks to create a culture of corporate learning from best practice from listening to our customers and by acting on complaints. All complaints received must have learning applied if the complaint outcome is upheld.

10.2 The complaints process aims to improve customers' and users' experience of accessing council services. This will support our customer services strategy.

11. Implications

11.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Management Accountant

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Deputy Head of Legal & Deputy Monitoring Officer

Both the Courts and the Local Government Ombudsman expect complainants to show that they have exhausted local complaints / appeal procedures before commencing external action.

The implementation of our learning from complaints and listening to our residents should lead to a reduction of complaints received and a reduction in those going to the Ombudsman or the Courts.

Social Care for Adult and Children are required to follow a separate procedure stipulated by the Department of Health (DOH) and Department for Education & Skills (DFES).

11.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

The Information Management Team will ensure that the Community Development and Equalities Manager are aware of all complaints that have an equality related expression of dissatisfaction.

11.4 Other implications

- None

12. Background papers used in preparing the report

- Information has been obtained from the council's complaints system.

13. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Directorate performance data analysis and learning outcomes.

Report Authors:

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