

Corporate Complaints and Information Annual Report 2018-19

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Executive Summary

Complaints are continuing to be resolved as part of early resolution; this year 2,131 concerns were resolved locally; an increase from 2,114 concerns resolved locally last year. There were 450 formal complaints which is consistent volume to last year where 451 formal complaints were addressed. More formal complaints, 65.6%, have been resolved within timescale which has increased from 65.4% achieved last year. There has also been a rise in ombudsman cases; 123 cases during this reporting year compared to 77 during 2017/18. There has also been a large increase in the volume of information requests, but more casework is being responded to within time. During 2018/19, compliance with responses timescales was 77.7% for Subject Access Requests, 72.7% for Freedom of Information Requests and 74.3% for Member Enquiries. Additionally, 133 compliments were received praising services across the Council.

1. Introduction and Context

This annual corporate report covers the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. It highlights how the Directorate has 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

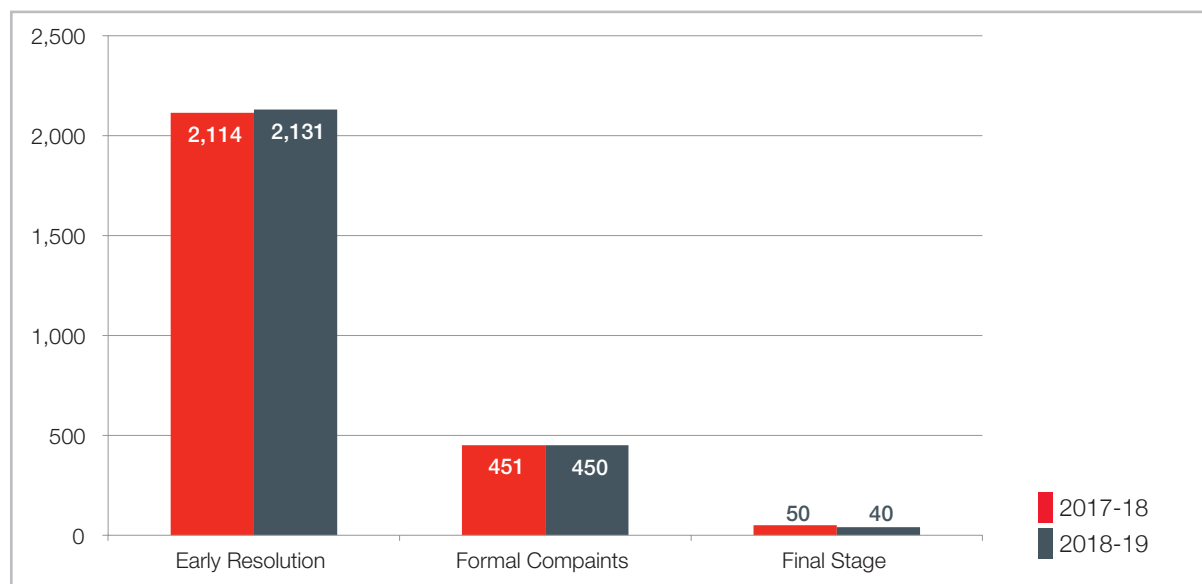
There is a dedicated team that works with departments and manages complaints and information requests, ensuring a central record and consistency across the Council.

3. Complaints Summary

The complaints policy promotes early resolution of complaints so we initially aim to address issues informally. If matters cannot be resolved locally with services, complainants may then progress matters through the formal complaints procedure.

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

Figure 1: Breakdown of complaint stages



Overall 65.6% (295 of 450) of formal complaints were completed within timescale; similar performance to previous 2017/18 year where 65.4% (295 of 451) formal complaints were completed within timescale.

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 this 2018/19 reporting period, the LGSCO contacted the Council regarding 87 cases and the HO made contact for 36 cases. This has significantly increased in comparison to last year where the LGSCO contacted on 67 cases and the HO made contact on 10 cases.

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

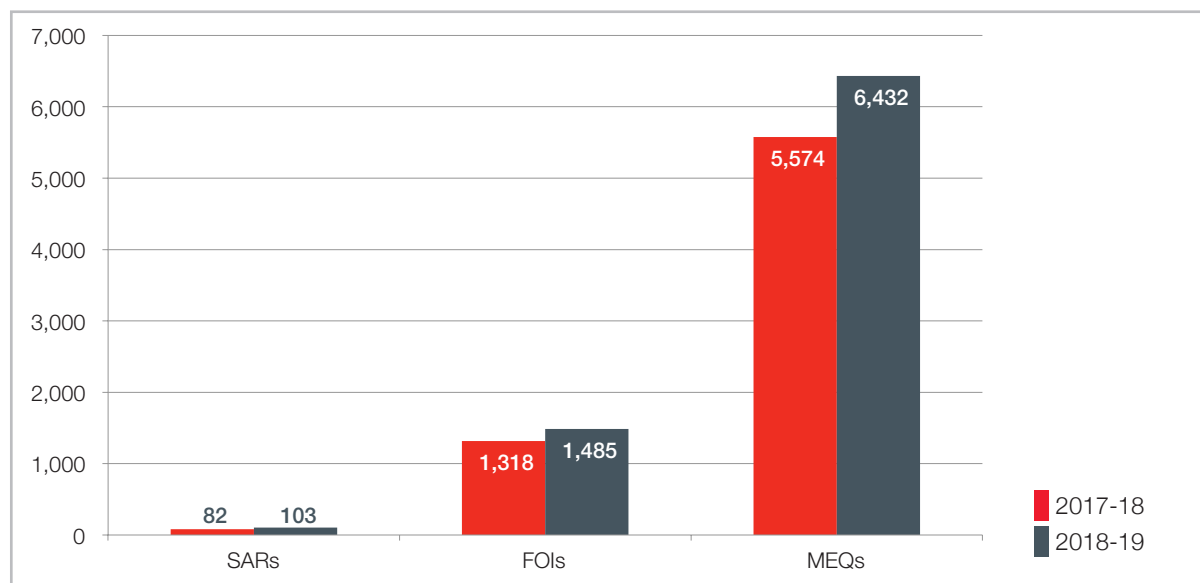
Table 1: Breakdown of all 2018/19 Ombudsman cases

| | Not Upheld | Upheld | Closed after initial enquiries | Referred to the Council to investigate | Total |
|--------------|------------|-----------|--------------------------------|--|------------|
| LGSCO | 6 | 23 | 20 | 38 | 87 |
| HO | 3 | 7 | 2 | 24 | 36 |
| Total | 9 | 30 | 22 | 62 | 123 |

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 2: Volume comparison of SARs, FOIs and MEQs



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

Table 2: SARs, FOIs and MEQs response times

| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|------|------------------------|------------------------|
| SARs | 95.1% (78 of 82) | 77.7% (80 of 103) |
| FOIs | 65.8% (867 of 1,318) | 72.7% (1,080 of 1,485) |
| MEQs | 74.3% (4,142 of 5,574) | 74.3% (4,781 of 6,432) |

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

38% (15 of 40) of the final stage corporate complaints were upheld and 24.4% (30 of the total 123) of all ombudsman cases were upheld.

Apologies were given to all the complainants and learning from these 45 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

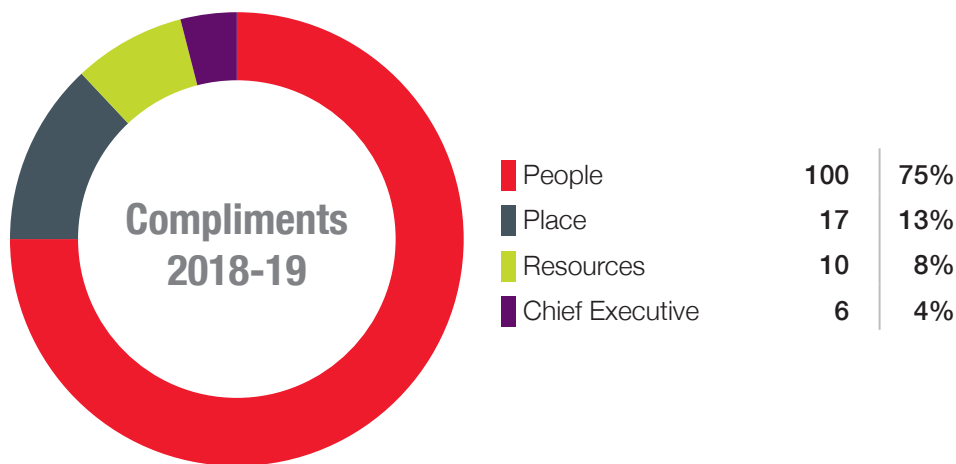
The Complaints Team have systems in place to ensure that response timescales are met. This includes sending reminders of the deadline for responses to the assigned managers; escalating to a senior manager if there is no response within the specified timeframe; reporting to Directors regularly and highlighting 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 133 compliments received across the Council.

Figure 3: Breakdown of all Compliments



9. Development plans

Key priorities for the year ahead are:

- 1.** Effectively transitioning into two team structures – Complaints and Information team (dealing specifically with complaints, FOIs and SARs) and MEQ team (dealing specifically with all Member Enquiries).
- 2.** ICT development for case management systems.
- 3.** Implementation of FOI Publication scheme.
- 4.** Working with departments to improve compliance with response times.

