

REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2018/19

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of complaints received, and dealt with, by the Corporate Complaints Team during the period 1 April 2018–31 March 2019. It includes those complaints of which the Council is aware were made to the Local Government and the Housing Ombudsmen (the Council is not always advised of complaints made direct to the Ombudsmen). Comparisons with the previous year (1 April 2017–31 March 2018) are included.

2. PROCEDURE AND RECORDING OF COMPLAINTS

- 2.1 The Council's complaints procedure is attached at Appendix 1. It provides that
- all complaints at stage 1 are dealt with by the relevant Service Manager
 - if the complainant is not satisfied with the Service Manager's response, the complaint is dealt with at stage 2 by the relevant Executive Head
 - if the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may pursue their complaint to stage 3, when it is investigated by the Executive Head of Housing and Governance on behalf of the Chief Executive.
- 2.2 A tiered approach to complaints is commonplace amongst other authorities and in line with LGO advice.

3. COMPLAINTS FOR 2018/19

- 3.1 Please see:

Appendix 2 - Complaints received by the Council for 2018/19 compared to 2017/18

Appendix 3 - Complaints referred to the Local Government or the Housing Ombudsman for 2018/19 compared to 2017/18

Appendix 4 – Complaints found to be justified locally and financial settlements

- 3.2 It will be noted that a total of 97 complaints were received and logged in 2018/19, compared with 66 in 2017/18. In common with previous years, the highest numbers of complaints relate to housing or planning issues.

4. COMPLAINTS TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OR THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

- 4.1 The Local Government Ombudsman has provided statistical information regarding complaints received about the Council. The numbers of complaints referred to in the Ombudsman's communication do not match the records held by the Corporate Complaints Team – the Ombudsman accepts that differences will occur as the Council will not be notified of complaints received which they consider to be groundless. The Ombudsman will not investigate a complaint unless the complaint has exhausted all stages of a Council's complaints procedure.

- 4.2 The total number of Ombudsman complaints recorded for 2018/19 was 21. Of the 21 only 3 were investigated and referred to the Council. Of these 3 complaints, only 1 was upheld. This related to a housing matter involving delay and the provision of incorrect information. The Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council's apology was sufficient to remedy the injustice caused. See Appendix 3.

5. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

- 5.1 It remains important for Services to review each complaint received and, where appropriate, to take action to avoid or to minimise complaints of a similar nature. As part of their initial responses to any complaints received, Service Managers are expected to address any underlying causes that might remove the reason for the complaint.
- 5.2 If complaints are escalated to Stage 2, the Executive Head will examine the reasons for the complaint and, if considered appropriate, ensure that changes in practices are put in place.
- 5.3 When undertaking stage 3 reviews or responding to complaints to an Ombudsman, the Executive Head of Housing and Governance will discuss the complaint in detail with the relevant Service Manager and/or the appropriate Executive Head, and encourages actions or changes. If the matter is one which appears to affect other services as well, she ensures that those services are involved.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The Council's Complaints Procedure continues to provide a robust system for investigating and resolving complaints. Whilst there has been an increase in the number of complaints, there does not appear to be any single cause or underlying factor which needs to be addressed.
- 6.2 It is important that all services of the Council accurately record complaints received and notify the Corporate Complaints Officer so that proper records are maintained and action monitored.
- 6.3 The Ombudsman has found that the Council was at fault with only one complaint.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That the report be noted;
- 7.2 That Service Managers and Executive Heads be encouraged to ensure that employees respond appropriately to customers who appear not to have received an expected standard of service from the Council;
- 7.3 That Service Managers and Executive Heads be reminded to review complaints about their services regularly, and to implement any learning from them.

For further information please contact:

Andrew Kinghorn
Legal Services Manager
Tel: 023 8028 5588
Email: andrew.kinghorn@nfdc.gov.uk

or

Karen Grimes
Information Compliance and Complaints Officer
Legal Services
Tel: 023 8028 5588
Email: karen.grimes@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Public documents and exempt
information