

REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2019/20

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of complaints received, and dealt with, by the Council during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. It includes Local Government and the Housing Ombudsman complaints of which the Council is aware (the Council is not always advised of complaints made direct to the Ombudsman). Comparisons with the previous year (1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019) 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 Governance and Housing on behalf of the Chief Executive.
- 2.2 A tiered approach to complaints is commonplace and in line with LGO advice.

3. COMPLAINTS FOR 2019/20

- 3.1 Please see:

Appendix 2 - Complaints received by the Council for 2019/20 compared to 2018/19
Appendix 3 - Complaints referred to the Local Government or the Housing Ombudsman for 2019/20 compared to 2018/19
Appendix 4 – Complaints found to be justified or partly justified including delays in dealing with complaint

- 3.2 It will be noted that a total of 78 complaints were received and logged in 2019/20, compared with 97 in 2018/19. A summary of the nature of the complaints is contained within Appendix 4 together with resolution details as appropriate.

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 also 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 2019/20 was 15. Of the 15 only 7 were investigated and referred to the Council. None of the 7 complaints were upheld. See Appendix 3. This is positive in that there have been no findings of maladministration against the Council in 2019/20.

5. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

- 5.1 It remains vitally important for Services to review each complaint received, ensure a timely response and, where appropriate, to take action to avoid or to minimise complaints of a similar nature occurring again. As part of the initial response to any complaint received, Service Managers are expected to address any issues that might resolve in the complaint being resolved.
- 5.2 If complaints are escalated to Stage 2 (where the complainant is not happy with the Council's initial response), the Executive Head for the service area concerned will review the complaint and, if justified, will take action to resolve the matter, which includes offering an apology or taking some other action.
- 5.3 If complainants are still dissatisfied, they are entitled to escalate their complaint to the Council's final stage of the Complaints Procedure, level 3, where the Executive Head of Housing and Governance (on behalf of the Chief Executive) will consider the complaint afresh.
- 5.4 If there are findings that demonstrate that improvements need to be made these will be discussed with the relevant Service Manager and the Executive Head for the service area and new processes implemented or training needs will be addressed.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The Council's Complaints Procedure continues to provide a robust system for investigating and resolving complaints.
- 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 It is positive that the Ombudsman has not upheld any complaints to their office during the period reported on in this report.
- 6.4 In respect of non Ombudsman complaints, it is noted that numbers have decreased compared to last year, however, all services will need to ensure that appropriate action is taken to further minimise future complaints.

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 and in a timely manner 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.

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Background Papers:

Public documents and exempt
information