

REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2020/21

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the report be noted;
- 1.2 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;
- 1.3 That Service Managers and Executive Heads be reminded to review complaints about their services regularly, and to implement any learning from them.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report provides an overview of complaints received, and dealt with, by the Council's Complaints Team during the period 1 April 2020–31 March 2021. It includes those complaints which the Council is aware were made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsmen (the Council is not always advised of complaints made direct to the Ombudsmen). Some comparisons with previous years are included.

3. PROCEDURE AND RECORDING OF COMPLAINTS

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure can be found on the Council's [website](#). 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; and
 - 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.
- 3.2 A tiered approach to complaints is commonplace amongst other authorities and in line with Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman advice.

4. INFORMATION GOVERNANCE AND COMPLAINTS TEAM

- 4.1 Following a recent review of the Information Governance and Complaints arrangements at the Council, undertaken by the Executive Head of Governance and Housing and the Executive Head of Finance and Corporate Services, there have been some changes to the central team with responsibility for corporate complaints.
- 4.2 One of the Council's Solicitors has now been appointed as the Information Governance and Complaints Manager and reports directly to the Executive Head of Governance and Housing on all Information Governance and Complaints matters. The role of the Information Compliance and Complaints Officer remains as it was

previously and, there has been the appointment of a new Information Governance and Complaints Assistant.

- 4.3 These new arrangements are intended facilitate the Council's Information Governance agenda and support the efficient handling of corporate complaints.

5. COMPLAINTS FOR 2020/21

- 5.1 Please see the following tables of information which all provide a breakdown of information for 2020/21 compared to 2019/20:

- **Appendix 1** - Complaints received by the Council
- **Appendix 2** - Complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care or the Housing Ombudsman.
- **Appendix 3** – Complaints found to be justified locally and financial settlements.

- 5.2 At meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel on, 24 September 2020, officers undertook to provide members with a visual representation of any trends in relation to corporate complaints. Accordingly, **Appendix 4** has been prepared. This covers the years 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 with a comparison of the total number of complaints per year, together with a comparison between complaints by business area and findings locally for the years 2019/20 and 2020/21.

- 5.3 It will be noted that a total of 73 complaints were received and logged in 2020/21, compared with 78 in 2019/20, 97 in 2018/19 and 66 in 2017/18.

6. COMPLAINTS TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OR THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

- 6.1 On 21 July 2021, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman wrote to the Council with an annual review letter, providing statistical information regarding complaints received about the Council. The total number of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints recorded by the Council for 2020/21 was 7. Of those 7 only 3 were subject to detailed investigations and 1 complaint was upheld (33%). This was regarding Planning Development and there was no injustice caused as included in **Appendix 2**. The average number of complaints upheld in similar authorities was 53%.

- 6.2 The Ombudsman will generally not investigate a complaint unless the complainant has exhausted all stages of a Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. However, there are instances where complainants contact the Ombudsman directly and, therefore, in **Appendix 1**, there are some examples where a complaint is being recorded as having progressed to the Ombudsman without being recorded as having progressed to Level 3 of the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.

- 6.3 For the year 2020/21 there were no complaints to the Housing Ombudsman.

7. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE

- 7.1 In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman published a Complaint Handling Code. This Code has been prepared to provide a high-level framework to support landlords in handling housing related complaints.

- 7.2 One of the requirements of the Code is that landlords are expected to carry out regular self-assessments against it and take appropriate action to ensure that

complaint handling is in line with the Code. The initial self-assessment was due to be completed and published by 31 December 2020. The Council carried out the self-assessment and it is published on the Council's [website](#).

- 7.3 In accordance with the Code, the Council is required to report the outcome of the self-assessment to elected members. A copy of the Council's 2020 self-assessment is included as **Appendix 5**.

8. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 When undertaking stage 3 reviews or responding to complaints to an Ombudsman, the Executive Head of Governance and Housing will discuss the complaint 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, those services are involved.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure continues to provide a robust system for investigating and resolving complaints.
- 9.2 It is important that all services of the Council accurately record complaints received and notify the Information Governance and Complaints Team so that proper records are maintained and action monitored.
- 9.3 The Ombudsman has upheld one complaint for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. This was regarding Planning Development and there was no injustice caused.

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Background Papers:

Public documents and
exempt info