

07 December 2015

Audit, Scrutiny & Transformation Committee

Corporate Complaints Monitoring and Freedom of Information Requests

Report of: *Steve Summers, Head of Customer Services*

Wards Affected: *None*

This report is *Public*

1. Executive Summary

This report is before Members to monitor and review the complaints received through the Council's formal complaints process and provide information on the number of Freedom of Information requests received during the period April to September 2015.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 That the Committee notes the complaints received through the Council's formal complaints process and the number of Freedom of Information Requests received.

3. Introduction and Background – Corporate Complaints

3.1 Following a recent review of its complaints procedure the Council has introduced a three stage complaints process which is intended to improve on the previous procedure for customers to take issue with any perceived failure to provide a service, failure to respond to requests or failure to adhere to standards on the part of the Council and its officers.

3.2 The new process itself has three stages. In the first instance, the complaint is forwarded to the service Investigator for a meaningful and informed review. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response then it will be forwarded to the Head of Service for the department concerned to conduct a second stage investigation into the matter. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response from the Head of Services they can request a third stage investigation into the matter. At all stages, the Council aims to respond fully following the investigation within 20 working days.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

4.1 During 2014/2015 financial year there were 23 complaints for first stage investigation, 43 complaints have been received from April to September in 2015/16.

4.2 The table below shows the breakdown for the financial year 2012/13 to 2014/15 and the complaints received for the period April to September 2015/16.

Stage One

Department	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 April - September
Assets	0	0	2	0
Housing	10	10	11	21
Planning	8	10	4	12
Revenues and Benefits	6	9	2	5
Governance	2	0	0	0
Legal and Debt Recovery	2	3	0	2
Health, Safety and Localism	2	0	1	1
Street Scene & Environment	4	1	3	2
Total	34	33	23	43

4.3 Details of the 43 complaints included

- Housing repair issues
- General housing issues
- Refusal of planning application and pre application advice
- Delay in planning application validation
- Length of process of pre application advice
- Strategic Growth Options Consultation validity

4.4 Eight complaints have progressed to the second stage for the period April to September 2015/2016. The table below shows a comparison for previous years.

Stage Two

Department	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 April - September
Housing	1	2	3	2
Planning	3	3	1	5
Revenues and Benefits	2	3	0	1
Environmental Health	0	0	1	0
Governance	2	0	0	0
Streetscene & Environment	0	0	1	0
Legal	0	1	0	0
Total	8	9	6	8

4.5 Four complaints have progressed to Stage 3 in the period April to September 2015/16, one for Planning and three for Housing.

4.6 Set out in the table below are details of the outcome of the complaints received in the period April to September.

Department	Upheld	Upheld in Part	Not Upheld	Ongoing	Total
Housing	0	6	13	2	21
Environmental Health & Licensing	1	0	0	0	1
Legal	0	0	1	1	2
Planning	1	1	5	5	12
Parking	1	0	0	0	1
Operational Services	0	0	1	0	1
Revenue & Benefits	0	0	1	4	5
Total	3	7	21	12	43

4.7 However, it is inevitable that there will be a proportion of cases where the complainant is unhappy with the outcome. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage 3 response, it would be appropriate for them to approach the Local Government Ombudsman should they choose to do so.

4.8 In 2014/15 three complaints had progressed to the Local Government Ombudsman. A comparison with previous years is included in the table below. Up to September 2015/16 there has been 2 complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Department	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 April - September
Housing	1	2	1	1
Planning	2	3	0	0
Revenues and Benefits	0	2	1	1
Building Control	1	0	0	0
Governance	0	0	1	0
Total	4	7	3	2

5. Freedom of Information Requests

5.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities. It does this in two ways:

- Public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities; and
- Members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings. The Act does not cover access to individual's own personal data, such request need to be made under the Data protection Act 1998.

5.2 Set out in the table below is a breakdown by department of the number of Freedom of information Requests received in 2014/15 and for the period April to September 2015/16. This information is available for public viewing on the Council's website. The total number of requests received in 2012/13 was 432 and in 2013/14 was 661.

Department	2014/15	2015/16 April - September
Revenues and Benefits	164	69
ICT	31	17
Corporate Services	103	40
Environmental Health	73	41
Housing	49	38
Streetscene	86	32
Finance Services	47	21
Built Environment	44	19

Community Services	18	3
Democratic Services	7	4
Total	622	284

6. Implications

Financial Implications

Name & Title: Chris Leslie, Finance Director

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6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Christopher Potter, Monitoring Officer

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6.2 None - although a robust complaints mechanism contributes towards good governance.

7. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

7.1 None.

8. Appendices to this report

8.1 None.

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