

SUBJECT: ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2016 - 2017

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK

LEAD OFFICER: JOANNE CROOKES, CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present an annual complaints report including reference to the Annual Review of Local Authority Complaints issued by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)
- 1.2 To report on the overall number of complaints received by the Council on a Directorate basis for the full year 2016-2017, and including response times

2. Background

- 2.1 The council's complaints procedure includes two levels in response to formal complaints. Once the complaint has been considered and responded to by two separate officers the complainant is advised that if they are not satisfied with the response they can seek redress from the LGO. The LGO will look into both the merits of the complaint itself and the way that the council dealt with it.
- 2.2 Complaints relating to the landlord function of the council, as a provider of social housing are escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) The HOS have introduced the role of "designated persons" (i.e. members of parliament, local councillors and designated tenant panels) into the complaints process. Therefore specific landlord related complaints have a further layer in the complaints process
- 2.3 There is no published time target for the handling of complaints. However resolution times are recorded and reported to DMTs. Staff are encouraged to seek solutions at the first point of contact or otherwise resolve the issue at the earliest opportunity.

3. Internal Formal Complaints

- 3.1 The number of complaints received last year has reduced overall compared to the previous three years. It is not possible to compare the trend on a directorate basis as we have reduced the number of directorates from four to three since the last annual report and the service areas have been altered so that the directorates are not the same as they were.
- 3.2 There has been a slight increase in the amount of time it is taking officers to respond to complaints but the average response is still considered as being well within acceptable levels.

3.3

Year	Number of complaints	Average response time
2013-2014	418	7.1 days
2014-2015	417	8.4 days
2015-2016	378	6.0 days
2016-2017	368	7.0 days

4 Breakdown of Complaints

4.1 Of the 368 complaints received for 2016-2017 the broad categories they relate to are as follows. The figure in brackets is the total of complaints about the service area in the previous year

4.2	Responsive repairs	69 (47)
	Tenancy issues incl. Rent/Housing staff/communal areas	53 (75)
	Investment	40 (41)
	Revenues (mainly Council Tax)	35 (18)
	Benefits	27 (29)
	Property shop and allocation issues including voids	27 (27)
	Community Services including clean streets/refuse etc.	22 (56)
	Parking – car parks and residents schemes	20 (10)
	Development management and Building control	12 (9)
	Christmas Market/Events	11 (7)
	Customer Services including waiting times	10 (10)
	PPASB Service	9 (8)
	Business Development IT	7 (0)
	Sport and Leisure provision	7 (3)
	Legal Services	4 (0)
	Transport Hub	4(0)
	Democratic Services	3 (1)
	Bereavement Services	2 (1)
	Environmental Health	2 (1)
	Private Housing	2 (2)
	Finance	1 (1)
	Licensing	1 (2)

5. Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Report

5.1 The LGO Advice team provides comprehensive information and advice to both the public and local authorities on complaints. It also produces an annual review of local government complaints which includes an overview of trends, followed by statistical tables detailing the numbers of complaints received from

each local authority area broken down into general service areas.

5.2 The second data set details the number of decisions made and the outcome of those complaints which the LGO has undertaken to investigate fully. In terms of outcome the only data published is whether the investigation has led to the complaint being upheld or not upheld. Details of the complaints themselves, the decision and any recommendations are now only available in the form of individual published decisions as they are released throughout the year.

5.3 In 2016/2017 the LGO considered **10** complaints about City of Lincoln Council Services. This compares to 27 complaints in the previous year

5.4 The general service areas were as follows:

- Housing - 1 complaint
- Environmental Services – 3 complaints
- Revenues and Benefits - 3 complaints
- Planning and Development – 2 complaints
- Corporate Services - 1 complaints

5.5 Two of these complaints were **referred back** for local resolution: These had not been through our own complaints procedure and we had therefore not had the opportunity to investigate or resolve the complaint before the customer involved a third party in the issue. In effect they are not LGO complaints.

5.6 Three complaints were **closed after initial enquiries**: These complaints are where the Ombudsman has decided that it could not or should not investigate the complaint; usually because the complaint is outside LGO's jurisdiction and they cannot lawfully investigate it. The early assessment of a complaint may also show there was little injustice to a complainant that would need an LGO investigation of the matter, or that an investigation could not achieve anything, either because there was no fault, or the outcome a complainant wants is not one that the LGO could achieve, for example overturning a court order.

5.7 In one case there was **Advice given**: These are cases where the LGO would not look at a complaint because they had previously looked at the same complaint from the complainant, or another complaints handling organisation or advice agency was best placed to help them.

5.8 Two complaints were deemed appropriate for the jurisdiction of the LGO and were investigated. This compares with six investigations undertaken last year. Of these complaints one is reported as being upheld. A reported "Uphold rate" of 50%.

6. Local Government Ombudsman Upheld Complaints

6.1 The detail of the complaint upheld by the ombudsman is as follows:

Mr B – This was a complaint that the council failed to take appropriate action to prevent flooding in the complainant's garden. In this case the LGO recommended a remedy of £150 to compensate Mr B and requested that a

formal apology be issued.

7. Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints

- 7.1 Tenancy related complaints (i.e. those which are classed as a landlord function) are now referred to The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).
- 7.2 In 2016-2017 there were four complaints to the HOS this compares to six in the previous year. Of these four, two were deemed premature and were dealt with by our internal complaints process. Of the two that were investigated one was upheld and one was not.
- 7.3 The complaint that was upheld was about our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy not being followed correctly in the case and resulted in the HOS awarding the complainant £150 in compensation.

8. Complaint Trends

- 8.1 There has been an overall reduction in the number of complaints received but this downward trend does hide some areas of significant change.
- 8.2 Complaints about Repairs and the Housing Repairs Team have increased from 47 to 69 and this is more in keeping with the numbers received in previous years. Some of these complaints are about the quality of workmanship or the time taken to complete repairs. It should also be noted that tenants have complained about the repairs policy and the increased adherence to the terms of the tenancy agreement which has resulted in us applying the policy more stringently.
- 8.3 Complaints about community services including refuse and Garden waste have decreased from 56 to 22. In the previous year the number had been 28 so this decrease shows that 2015/2016 was an anomaly and there were an unusually high number of complaints last year.
- 8.4 Complaints about Council Tax have increased from 18 to 35 and these complaints have largely been as a result of technical changes to Council Tax discounts which have been made as a result of a reduction in Central Government funding.
- 8.5 For the first time we have had complaints about the services of Business Development and IT. These are largely complaints about our website and reflect the importance that the public now place on on-line services. The functionality and reliability of our on-line presence is increasingly vital to how we communicate and interact with our residents.

9. Compliments

- 9.1 On a more positive note, despite the current challenges and pressures, the council continues to receive a number of compliments from the public. These tend to acknowledge the professionalism of staff and occur across all service areas. Residents often take the time to appreciate the care and consideration

demonstrated by our staff.

10. Organisational Impacts

Strategic Priority: High Performing Services

Finance – There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal – There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Equality and diversity – All complaints forms include an equality monitoring form and form part of the corporate monitoring of access to our services.

Community engagement and communications. We welcome feedback from customers and clearly promote the Complaints procedure on our website and in our public buildings.

11. Recommendation

To consider and comment on the complaints report for 2016-2017.

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