

SUBJECT:	ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2017-2018
DIRECTORATE:	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 and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
- 1.2 To report on the overall number of complaints received by the Council on a Directorate basis for the full year 2017-2018, including response times and percentage of complaints upheld.

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 LGSCO. The LGSCO will look into both the merits of the complaint 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.
- 3.2 There has been a slight improvement in the amount of time it is taking officers to respond to complaints. The average response time over all four directorates is 6.2 days. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) publishes guidance for the public on how to complain. This guidance states that local authorities should reply to customers within a reasonable time which should normally be within 12 weeks.

3.3

Year	Number of complaints	Average response time
2014-2015	417	8.4 days
2015-2016	378	6.0 days
2016-2017	368	7.0 days
2017-2018	361	6.2 days

4 Breakdown of Complaints

4.1 Of the 361 complaints received for 2017-2018 the broad categories they relate to are set out in the table below. The figures for the previous 2 years are included for comparative purposes.

4.2

Service area or responsibility	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Responsive repairs	47	69	71
Tenancy issues	75	53	51
Housing Investment	41	40	41
Housing Solutions	27	27	41
Council Tax / NNDR	18	35	30
Parking	10	20	23
Community Services	56	22	17
Bus Station	0	4	16
Planning and building control	9	12	13
Benefits	29	27	9
Christmas Market	7	11	6
PPASB service	8	9	6
Sport and Leisure	3	7	6
Customer Services	10	10	5
Private Housing	2	2	5
Major developments	0	0	5
Legal Services	0	4	4
Environmental Health	1	2	4
Finance	1	1	3
Democratic Services	1	3	2
Licensing	2	1	1
Bereavement Services	1	2	1
Central Market	0	0	1
Business Development & IT	0	7	0
Total complaints	378	368	361

4.3 Upheld Complaints

Of the 361 complaints responded to in 2017-2018, 127 or 35% of them were upheld. In these cases customers were offered an explanation and an apology. Additionally the officer upholding the complaint completes a feedback form for the directorate complaint monitoring officer outlining lessons learned, training needs and any changes that are required to procedures.

5. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Report

5.1 The LGSCO 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 LGSCO 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 LGSCO received 12 new complaints and made decisions on 15 complaints about City of Lincoln Council Services. This compares to 10 complaints in the previous year and 27 in the year 2015-2016.

5.4 The general service areas of the were as follows:

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

5.5 Eight 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 LGSCO 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 LGSCO'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 LGSCO 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 LGSCO could achieve, for example overturning a court order.

- 5.7 In one case there was advice given: These are cases where the LGSCO 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 LGSCO and were investigated. This compares with six investigations undertaken last year.
- 5.9 Of these complaints one is reported as being upheld. A reported “Uphold rate” of 50%.

6. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Upheld Complaints

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

Mrs W – This was a complaint that the council failed to make a compensation payment following an ombudsman decision in 2016 that advised an apology, payment of court costs and £100 compensation. The customer had been pursued for Council Tax arrears in spite of having made a valid and complete claim for Council Tax Benefit. The LGSCO advised that the redress increase by a further £100 to compensate her for having to chase the compensation.

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 2017-2018 there were three complaints to the HOS, this compares to four in the previous year. Of these three, one is still under investigation. The two that we have received decisions on were not upheld.

8. Complaint Trends

- 8.1 There has been a small overall reduction in the number of complaints received.
- 8.2 Complaints about Repairs and the Housing Repairs Team are still our most common complaint at 71. Last year the figure was 69. 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 continued to decrease. This year there were only 17 formal complaints.
- 8.4 Complaints about Benefit have reduced from 27 to 9. This is a reduction of 66% and largely reflects the work that the team have done to reduce the backlog of work. This has been aided by the work that the business development team, under the customer experience strategy, have undertaken to move routine work on-line.
- 8.5 Customer Service complaints have reduced by 50% from 10 in the previous two

years to 5 this year.

- 8.6 There have been 16 formal complaints about the Bus Station. These were about access to the toilets, the toilet charge, the lack of litter bins, the lack of adequate waiting seats and the ambient temperature.

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 2017-2018.

Is this a key decision?	No
Do the exempt information categories apply?	No
Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?	No
How many appendices does the report contain?	None
List of Background Papers:	None
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