

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>ANNUAL COMPLAINTS SUMMARY REPORT 2019-2020</b>
<b>DIRECTORATE:</b>	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>JOANNE CROOKES, CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER</b>

## **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) and detail of the decisions of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 1.2 To report on the overall number of complaints received by the Council on a Directorate basis for the full year 2019-2020, including response times and the percentage of complaints which are 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 final response, they can seek redress from the LGSCO. The LGSCO will investigate 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 an additional 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 Departmental Management Teams (DMTs). Staff are encouraged to seek solutions at the first point of contact or otherwise resolve the issue at the earliest opportunity. This helps to prevent simple complaints escalating.

## **3. Internal Formal Complaints**

- 3.1 The number of complaints received over the year has increased slightly, on the back of several years where the number was reducing, but the total is still relatively low. Please see the figures in the table below at 3.3
- 3.2 There has been a slight decrease in the amount of time it is taking officers to

respond to complaints over the previous year. The average response time over all four directorates is 7.4 days. This remains well within the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) guidelines. In their published best practice guidance for the public on how to complain, it indicates that local authorities should reply to customers within a reasonable time which should normally be within 12 weeks.

3.3

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of complaints</b>	<b>Average response time</b>
<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>6.0 days</b>
<b>2016-2017</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>7.0 days</b>
<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>6.2 days</b>
<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>7.6 days</b>
<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>7.4 days</b>

#### **4 Breakdown of Complaints**

4.1 Of the 338 complaints received for 2019-2020 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	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Responsive repairs	71	43	96
Tenancy issues	51	35	63
Council Tax / NNDR	30	26	36
Housing Solutions	41	46	34
Housing Investment	41	26	20
Parking	23	25	18
Community Services	17	19	13
Benefits	9	9	12
Events	6	10	9
PPASB service	6	4	8
Planning and building control	13	7	7
Recreation and Leisure	6	7	7
Environmental Health	4	3	5
Democratic Services	2	3	3
Major developments	5	9	2
Private Housing	5	2	2

Customer Services	5	8		2
Licensing	1	0		1
Market and Cornhill area	1	3		0
Bus Station	16	3		0
Legal Services	4	3		0
Finance	3	0		0
Bereavement Services	1	0		0
Total complaints	361	291		338

- 4.3 Upheld complaints: Of the 338 complaints responded to in 2019-2020, 40% (134) were upheld. This is a small increase on the percentage upheld in the previous year which was 34%. In instances where a complaint is upheld customers are 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 recommended changes to procedures.
- 4.4 The lessons learned are reported through each DMT by the Directorate monitoring officer. DMT are therefore fully aware of the complaints received and where any changes to procedure are required or potential policy developments are needed these are discussed and taken forward as appropriate.

## 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 the year to 31 March 2020 the LGSCO made decisions on 14 new complaints about City of Lincoln Council services. This represents an increase on the previous year, which saw only 11 complaints moving to the Ombudsman stage.

The general service areas of these were as follows:

Service Area	2018- 2019	2019-2020
Environmental Services	4	4
Housing	3	4
Revenues and Benefits	2	4
Corporate Services	1	1
Highways and Transport	0	1
Planning and Development	1	0
Totals	11	14

- 5.4 Three 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.
- 5.5 Four of the 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.
- 5.6 In three cases 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 complaint handling organisation or advice agency was best placed to help them.
- 5.7 Four complaints were deemed appropriate for the jurisdiction of the LGSCO and were investigated. This compares with three investigations undertaken in the previous year.
- 5.8 Of the investigated complaints none were upheld. This is reported as an "Uphold rate" of 0%.

## 6. Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints

- 6.1 Tenancy related complaints i.e. those which are classed as a landlord function, are now referred to The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS), rather than being dealt with by the LGSCO.
- 6.2 In 2019-2020 there were no complaints investigated by the HOS, this compares to 3 in the previous year.

## 7. Complaint Trends

- 7.1 In the full year to 31 March 2020 there has been a small increase in the number of complaints received compared to the previous year, however they still number less than the 3 years before that.

- 7.2 Complaints about Repairs and the Housing Repairs Team have increased significantly in the last 12 months. They are our most common complaint. Last year the number of complaints about repairs was 43 which was a reduction on the previous year, however the reduction has not been maintained.
- 7.3 Complaints about Tenancy Services have also increased, from 35 to 63. There does not appear to be a theme to these complaints. Complaints about housing allocations and investment programmes have decreased.
- 7.4 Other areas which have seen small increases include Public Protection and Anti-Social Behaviour (PPASB), Council Tax and Benefits, but the numbers remain small and do not reveal any major issues.
- 7.5 There have been decreases in complaints about Parking, Customer Services, major developments and private housing.

## **8. Compliments**

- 8.1 On a more positive note, despite the current challenges and pressures, the council continues to receive several 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.

## **9. Organisational Impacts**

- 9.1 Strategic Priority: High Performing Services
- 9.2 Finance – There are no direct financial implications arising from this report
- 9.3 Legal – There are no direct legal implications arising from this report
- 9.4 Equality and diversity – All complaints forms include an equality monitoring form and form part of the corporate monitoring of access to our services
- 9.5 Community engagement and communications. We welcome feedback from customers and clearly promote the Complaints procedure on our website and in our public buildings

## **10. Recommendation**

To consider and comment on the complaints report for 2019-2020

**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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