

COMPLAINTS MONITORING REPORT 2017-18

This report will analyse the performance of the council’s formal Corporate Complaints Procedure and other corporate complaints between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018.

Stage 1 Complaints

Stage 1 complaints are investigated by the manager of the service complained about. This gives the manager oversight of what issues customers are unhappy with and allows them to try to resolve problems at the earliest opportunity.

Over the past few years the council has outsourced many of its services and some of these providers follow their own complaints processes, whilst others follow the council’s corporate process. The chart at figure 1 shows the number of complaints received under the corporate complaints process, including those for Serco and Skanska who process complaints via the council’s complaints process and separate columns for Amey and Vivacity who both have their own distinct complaint processes.

Not included in the volumes above are statutory complaints for both Adults and Childrens Social Care complaints which both have separate statutory complaints processes which are reported annually to other scrutiny committees.

Complaint volumes received under the corporate complaint process has increased over the past year. Whilst complaints for Vivacity and Amey have largely stayed the same.

The report will go into further details of where the main increases have been seen.

Figure 1. – Total corporate complaints received for council services

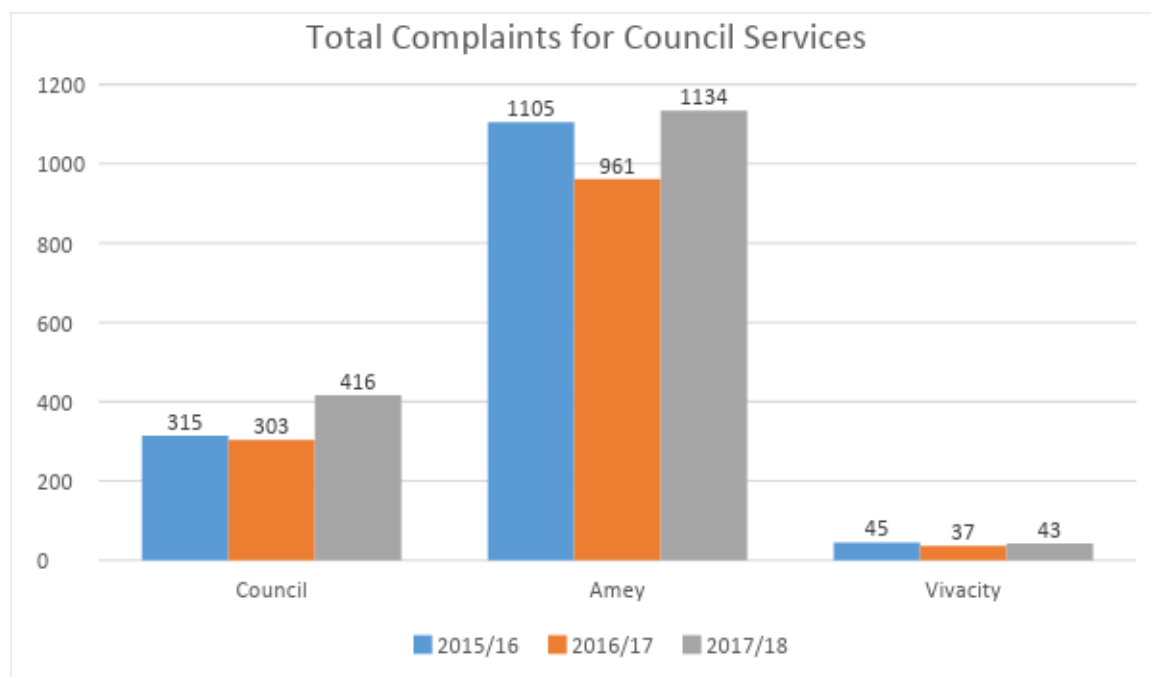


Figure 2: Breakdown of complaints by Directorate for the past 2 years

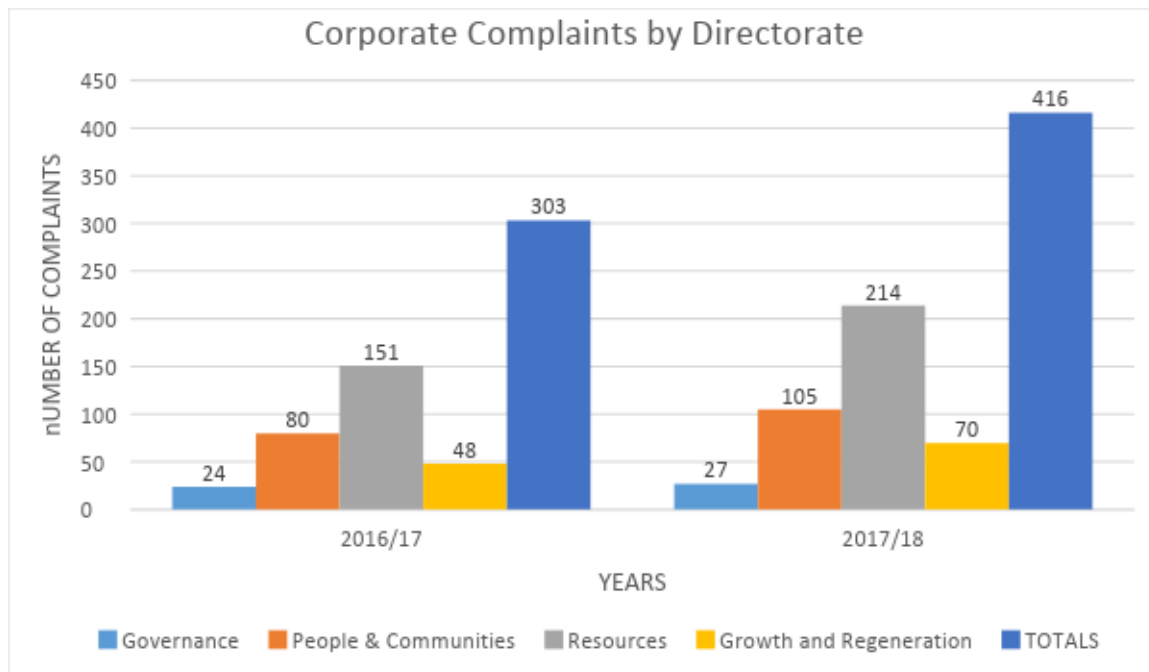


Figure 2 shows the breakdown of complaints by Directorate over the past 2 years. Although a three year comparison is usually provided this was not possible this year due to two factors. In 2015-16 there was considerable change in the composition of Directorates and many departments were realigned to new directorates. Secondly the corporate complaints process was changed from a three stage to a two stage process in July 2015. This did not allow a direct comparison to 2015/16.

The two stage complaints process involves the following stages

- Resolution informally by contacting the complainant within 3 working days
- Formal written response within 20 working days
- An option to meet with the Head of Service if the written response does not resolve the complaint.
- Escalation to Stage 2 review by the Chief Internal Auditor/Director of Governance

The table below details the stage at which complaints were resolved over the past year, with the previous years figures shown for comparison.

Figure 3: Complaints registered in 2017-18 by Stage

Complaint Stage where the complaint was resolved	2016/17	2017/18
Informal	65	92
Stage 1	202	277
Stage 2 review*	9	15
LGO	16	7
Withdrawn	11	25
Totals	303	416

Figure 3 shows that around 25% of complaints are resolved informally. This is where the service contacts the customer within three working days and they agree a resolution. The outcome of these complaints is not formally recorded, the focus being prompt resolution of the issue for the customer.

Stage 1 complaints require a written response and the outcomes are recorded. The outcomes from these complaints are as follows:-

- 25.5% Upheld
- 32% Partially Upheld
- 42.5% Not Upheld

The aim of a robust complaint process should be putting issues right and learning from mistakes. Clearly council services are identifying where mistakes are being made and putting things right for customers.

Stage 2 Reviews

There is a low level of escalation of complaint to Stage 2 review which supports the view that the two stage complaint process introduced in 2015 is ensuring focus on resolution at the earliest stages of complaint.

Figure 4. Total of Stage 2 reviews held and Outcomes

Outcomes from Stage 2 Reviews	Total Stage 2 Reviews	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Referred to LGO
2016/17	13	1	1	4	7
2017/18	18	1	3	7	7

A Stage 2 review is conducted when a customer is not satisfied with the formal response to their complaint at Stage 1. Some customers will subsequently agree to meet with the service managers to try and resolve outstanding issues. If this is not successful or the customer does not wish to engage in a meeting a review can be completed by the Chief Internal Auditor.

The Stage 2 review will occasionally make findings which differ from those made at Stage 1 but may also determine that further investigation is not warranted and a recommendation is made for referral to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Figure 4 details the number of cases which had a Stage 2 review in both of the past 2 years and the outcomes.

In both years the volume of Stage 2 reviews is less than 5% of the total complaints received.

In 2017-18 following the determination at Stage 2 complainants took the actions detailed in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Complainants Actions Following Stage 2 Review

Actions following Stage 2 Review		
Referred to LGO	7	3 cases – no approach to LGO 3 cases – LGO Closed After Initial Enquiry 1 case - Under investigation
Not UPHELD	7	4 cases – no approach to LGO 1 case – LGO Closed After Initial Enquiry 2 Cases – Upheld at LGO
Partially UPHELD	3	1 - LGO are investigating 2 – no approach to LGO
UPHELD	1	No approach to LGO

This table illustrates that even when the complainant has the right to approach the LGO at the end of the complaints process, many do not exercise this right and where they do the complaint is often not investigated by the LGO (Closed After Initial Enquiry).

Local Government Ombudsman Decisions

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) review complaints they receive from residents about council services. The number of enquiries they have received about Peterborough City Council has remained constant over the past 3 years as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Enquiries by PCC residents to the LGO in 2017/18

Enquiries to the LGO			
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Upheld	4	2	8
Not Upheld	3	5	6
Advice given	0	1	1
Closed after initial enquiries	11	16	8
Incomplete/ Invalid	3	6	2
Referred back for local resolution	28	20	22
Overall	49	50	47

In the past year the LGO passed more of the complaints they received from PCC complainants to their investigation team. The LGO's assessment team review whether the LGO have the jurisdiction to investigate and then whether there is any merit in investigating. For example they will only investigate if they believe there is any personal injustice caused to the complainant.

There were 14 complaints passed to investigations by the LGO in 2017/18 compared to 7 in 2016/17. There were 8 complaints that were upheld by the LGO following investigation from the 14 investigated.

When the LGO record a complaint as Upheld this will often be a case that the council have already upheld at Stage 1 or Stage 2. However some complainants are not happy with how the council has offered to resolve the complaint and will therefore ask the LGO to review their complaint further. Therefore although more complaints were passed for investigation by the LGO and then upheld in the majority of cases these complaints were already upheld by the council.

As the LGO stress in their Annual Letter to the council the volume of complaints does not, in itself, indicate the quality of the council's performance. They see evidence that high volumes of complaints can be a sign of an open, learning organisation and that conversely a low volume can be a worrying sign that an organisation is not alive to user feedback, rather than always being an indicator that all is well.

The 8 cases upheld by the LGO are detailed below in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Detail of complaints Upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman

Service Type	Date of decision	Type of Complaint	Recommended Actions
Education & Childrens Services	17/05/2017	Child protection	Apology, Training, Addendum to personal records
Benefits & Tax	18/05/2017	Housing Benefit Processing	Satisfied with council's proposed remedy
Highways & Transport	27/06/2017	Disabled Parking Bay Consultation	Apology, Financial Redress, Procedure Change
Corporate & Other Services	29/01/2018	Delays in Sale of council land	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial Redress: Quantifiable Loss
Highways & Transport	29/11/2017	Failure in Parking Enforcement process	Apology
Benefits & Tax	01/09/2017	Delays in complaint handling	Satisfied with council's proposed remedy
Education & Childrens Services	26/10/2017	Admission Appeal hearing procedural failure	New appeal/review or reconsidered decision, Procedure or policy change/review
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	08/02/2018	Delay in handling complaint about Noise pollution process	None

The complaint decisions above are almost all about cases which went through the complaint process in 2016/17. So complaints decided at Stage 2 in 2017/18 may not be investigated by the LGO until the following year.

Although relatively few there are some cases which the LGO will investigate before the council has considered them, particularly Admission Appeal hearing complaints, as they treat these complaints with due urgency. One of the complaints upheld this year was an Admission Appeal case.

The LGO have introduced a new regime which requires the council to update the LGO within 3 months confirming delivery of the agreed actions on each upheld case. In future years the LGO will be commenting in their annual letter how well the council are meeting this requirement. The LGO will also publish on their website where council's have identified service improvements from complaints which have helped the wider community.

The LGO is committed to local scrutiny and in the annual letter they ask that guidance is shared with elected members on how to access this resource on their website. The annual letter is attached as Appendix B for reference.

Accessibility

A growing percentage of complaints are received by web form or email. Over 65% of complaints are being received this way with 25% by telephone. Relatively few customers still write in by letter or make their complaint in person. This compares favourably with 3 years ago when only 50% of complaints were being received by email.

Complaint Themes

In the past 3 years there has been a significant shift in some of the reasons for complaint.

The main categories of complaint in 2017/18 were as follows

Delayed/Failed Service	40%
Not to Standard	24%
Staff Attitude	12.5%
About Policy	10%

Both 'Not to standard' and 'About Policy' have increased as a reason for complaint, with a corresponding fall in the percentage of Delayed/Failed Service complaints which is the category that has previously dominated. Three years ago both these categories added up to less than 5% they now account for 35% of complaints. This may also account for part of the the growth in complaint numbers. Customers are increasingly willing to complain and have higher standards and expectations. The increase in customers using social media/internet options mean it is quicker and easier to provide feedback to organisations.

Nationally most organisations are seeing increasing complaint numbers.

A report in 2015 by the Institute of Customer Service indicated an 8 fold rise in complaints by social media. The attached link provides detail of this report.

<https://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com/media-centre/press-releases/article/customer-complaints-see-8-fold-rise-on-social-media-1>

To provide a description of 'Not to Standard' and 'About Policy' complaints a few examples of both are attached as Appendix C.

Service Improvements

As detailed previously the aim of a robust complaint process should be putting issues right and learning from mistakes. Clearly council services are identifying where mistakes are being made and putting things right for customers.

Attached as Appendix D is a table showing the majority of cases where fault has been found and provides detail of the type of actions taken to rectify issues and any steps that have been identified to improve services.

Compliments

Whilst the majority of complaints are registered centrally by the Central Complaints team the majority of compliments are received direct by the services involved and registered on local logs.

The central complaints team are reliant on service areas providing this data at the end of each year to inform the annual report. Compliment data is not being sent to central complaints by all service areas on a regular basis.

The Complaint Manager has recently contacted all Heads of Service in the council reminding them of the importance of sending all their data to the Complaints team to be included in the annual report.

Although there is an online form for compliments it was discovered earlier this year that the link was not working. The complaint manager arranged for this to be fixed and linked into her team and some compliments are now being received in this way but the volume is low. These figures will be included with the compliments received by service areas in next year's report.

For both these reasons the number of compliments being reported this year are restricted to those teams who have provided the data to the Central Complaints team

Department	External Compliments	Internal Compliments
Planning	31	0
Highways	42	5
Customer Services	134	21
STS	13	1
Vivacity	42	
Amey	87	
Legal & Democratic	7	
Human Resources		
Community Safety		1
TOTALS	356	28