

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2017/18

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee - 21 June 2018

Report of Chief Officer Corporate Services

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report updates Members regarding customer complaints and feedback monitoring for the year 2017/18, as compared to 2016/17.

This report supports the Key Aim of improving the key services we deliver to the public

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Fleming

Contact Officers Amy Wilton, Ext. 7280, Julie Heather, Ext. 7125.

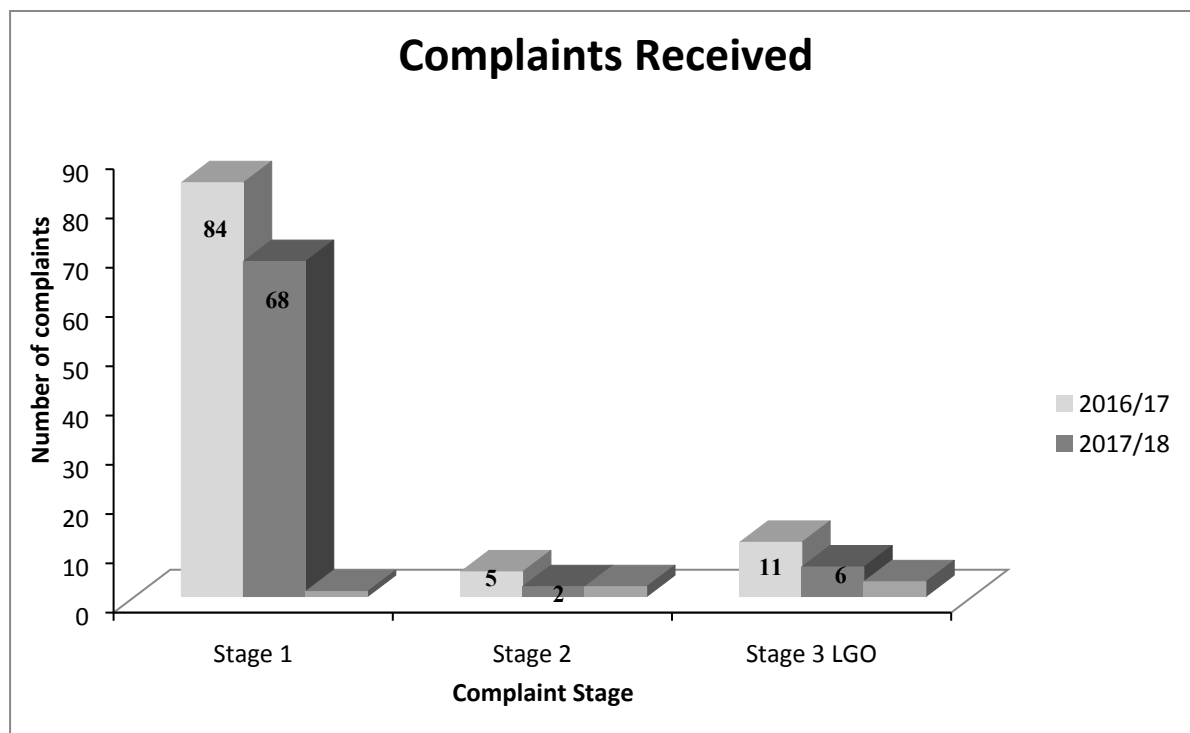
Recommendation to Policy & Performance Advisory Committee: That the report be noted.

Introduction and Background

- 1 This report provides details of formal complaints received by Sevenoaks District Council during the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. Complaints data provides the Council with a useful tool to highlight specific concerns, assist in the identification of trends and common areas of concern and act as a guide to which remedial action may be required to deliver service improvement.
- 2 The Council's formal complaints procedure defines a complaint as '*any expression of dissatisfaction with our services whether justified or not*'. If a customer is contacting the Council for the first time regarding assistance for a Council service, then this will be dealt with as a service request. The complaints process will be used if a customer specifically states they would like us to follow the "complaints process" and/or they make reference to items from within the formal process (e.g. Stage 1) or the customer is contacting us for a second time regarding the same matter and wishes to make a complaint.
- 3 The procedure is based on a two-stage internal process. If complainants are still dissatisfied with the outcome after both Stage 1 and Stage 2, they can then request the Local Government Ombudsman investigate at Stage 3.

2017/18 Complaints figures

- 4 The Council received a total of 76 complaints in 2017, a decrease of 24 since 2016/17. The following graph shows at which stage of the complaints process each of the complaints were received.



Stage 1 Complaints

- 5 Stage 1 complaints received

	2016/17	2017/18
Total	84	68

- 6 2017 saw a reduction in Stage 1 complaints received. Benefits, Development Services and Direct Services attracted the most complaints. Development Services, Local Tax, Electoral and Parking Services have all seen a reduction in complaints compared to last year. For a breakdown of Stage 1 complaints received by service area see appendix A.
- 7 Of the 68 Stage 1 complaints received in 2017 57% were found to be invalid. This was because customers had made incorrect claims, unrealistic claims or had contacted the wrong organisation.

8 Outcome of complaints at Stage 1

	Total 2016/17	Total 2017/18
Complaint invalid	68	39
Complaint upheld	16	29
Total	84	68

One financial payment was made at Stage 1. £990.50 was recommended, which included the re-imbursement of planning fees and £100 goodwill payment. This payment was met from within the relevant service budget.

Lessons Learned

- 9 An integral part of the Council's corporate complaints process is ensuring that the outcomes are evaluated and any areas where lessons can be learnt to improve the way we do things and prevent similar errors occurring in the future are documented and action is taken.
- 10 Over many years the Council has continually applied the learning from previous complaints to improve our services. This is reflected by the ongoing fall in the number of Stage 1 complaints to the Council to just 68 in 2017/18. As we work harder to ensure customers receive the service that they want from the Council we are also finding that more complaints are upheld as we seek to drive up standards.
- 11 Since April this year there have been 27 occasions where learning has been taken from complaints made to the organisation at Stage 1 or Stage 2 in order to improve our service to the customer.
- 12 In the majority of these cases the lessons learnt are about the way information is communicated to customers. That can be the timeliness or clarity of writing to a resident or about a lack of available information that has caused a customer a difficulty.
- 13 The Corporate Customer Services and Delivery Manager continues to work closely with Service Managers to ensure that improvements to services continue to address the learning coming from complaints. This is evidenced in part by the low number of complaints received by the Council and the fact that the LGO has not been required to uphold complaints about us.

Stage 2 Complaints

14 Stage 2 complaints received

	2016/17	2017/18
Total	5	2

This year saw a reduction in Stage 2 complaints by 60%. For a breakdown of Stage 2 complaints received by service area see appendix B.

Out of the 2 Stage 2 complaints investigated during 2017/18, 1 was partially upheld with some minor recommendations for improvement. 1 of the complainants requested their concerns be reviewed by the Local Government Ombudsman. This relates to Parking Services and is still under investigation.

15 Outcome of complaints at Stage 2

	Total 2016/17	Total 2017/18
Complaint invalid	5	1
Complaint upheld	0	1
Total	5	2

No financial payments were made at Stage 2.

Stage 3 complaints - Local Government Ombudsman

- 16 In 2017/18 the Local Government Ombudsman received 6 complaints about this authority. Of the 6 complaints 1 was premature, 2 were closed after initial enquiries with no further action and 3 are still under investigation. The following table shows the decisions made by the LGO by service area. For Local Government Ombudsman complaints received by service area see Appendix C.

LGO Decision	Service area	Number of decisions
Closed after initial enquiries - no further action	Environmental Health Planning	1 1
Total		2

17 The Ombudsman has yet to provide the annual letter. Therefore, no comparison can be made to other Local Authorities.

18 No financial payments were made at this stage.

Key Implications

Financial

The Council made one financial payment as compensation in 2017/18 to resolve a complaint. This payment was met from within the relevant service budget.

	Compensation Paid (£)	
	2016/17	2017/18
Stage 1	0	990.50
Stage 2	0	0
LGO	0	0
Total	0	990.50

Equality Impacts

There are no decisions recommended through this paper. There is therefore a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Appendices

Appendix A - Table to show Stage 1 complaints received by service area.
Appendix B - Table to show Stage 2 complaints received by service area
Appendix C - Table to show LGO complaints received by service area

Background Papers None.

Jim Carrington-West

Chief Officer Corporate Services

Appendix A - Stage 1 complaints received by service area

	Stage 1 Complaints received			
	2016/17	% of total	2017/18	% of total
Audit	0	0	0	0
Benefits	2	2.4	11	16
Building Control	0	0	0	0
Communications	0	0	0	0
Communities & Business	2	2.4	3	4.5
Customer Services	2	2.4	0	0
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0
Development Services	24	28.6	18	26.5
Direct Services	1	1.2	10	14.7
Electoral Services	7	8.3	0	0
Environmental Health	2	2.4	3	4.5
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0
Housing Advice	4	4.8	4	5.8
IT Services	0	0	1	1.5
Land Charges	0	0	0	0
Legal	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	0	1	1.5
Local Tax	19	22.6	9	13.2
Parking Services	20	23.7	7	10.3
Planning Policy	0	0	0	0
Print	0	0	0	0
Private Sector Housing	1	1.2	1	1.5
Property	0	0	0	0
Total	84	100	68	100

Appendix B - Stage 2 complaints received by service area

	Stage 2 Complaints received			
	2016/17	% of total	2017/18	% of total
Audit	0	0	0	0
Benefits	0	0	0	0
Building Control	0	0	0	0
Communications	0	0	0	0
Communities & Business	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	0	0	0	0
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0
Development Services	2	40	0	0
Direct Services	0	0	0	0
Electoral Services	0	0	0	0
Environmental Health	0	0	1	50
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	0	0	0
Housing Standards	0	0	0	0
IT Services	0	0	0	0
Land Charges	0	0	0	0
Legal	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	0	0	0
Local Tax	0	0	0	0
Parking Services	3	60	1	50
Planning Policy	0	0	0	0
Print	0	0	0	0
Property	0	0	0	0
Total	5	100	2	100

Appendix C - Local Government Ombudsman complaints received by service area

LGO Complaints received 2015/16	
Community Safety	1
Development Services	3
Environmental Health	1
Parking Services	1
TOTAL	6