

## ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2012/13

### Strategy & Performance Advisory Committee – 3 December 2013

Report of Chief Officer Corporate Support

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

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**Executive Summary:** This report updates Members regarding customer complaints and feedback monitoring for the year 2012/13, as compared to 2011/12 and provides projected figures for 2013/14.

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

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Peter Fleming

**Contact Officer(s)** Amy Wilton x7280 Julie Heather x7125

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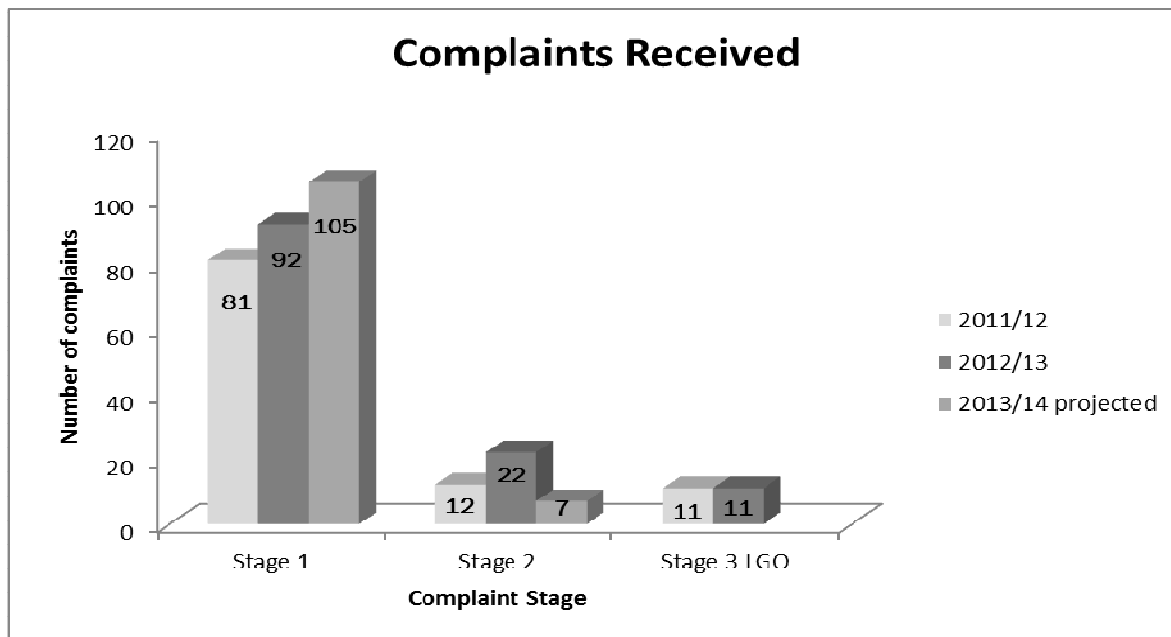
**Recommendation to Strategy & Performance Advisory Committee:** That the report be noted

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### Introduction and Background

1. This report provides details of formal complaints received by Sevenoaks District Council during the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013. Complaints data is viewed by the Council as providing a useful tool to highlight specific concerns, assist in the identification of trends 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.

4. A review of the Complaints process has been carried out through the summer by the Customer Service Manager. The purpose of the review was to build on existing processes to further improve customer focus and to increase officer understanding from lessons learnt. Responsibilities for complaints were also re-aligned with the new Senior Management structure commencing September 2013.
5. Stage 1 complaints are now investigated by the relevant Service Manager or Head of Service and signed off by the Customer Service Manager and Stage 2 complaints are now investigated by an independent Service Manager or Head of Service and signed off by an independent Chief Officer.
6. By signing off all Stage 1 complaints, the Customer Service Manager is ensuring a consistent and customer focused approach is being used across the organisation. Letters are being reviewed to include empathy, compassion and humility where appropriate. In addition the Corporate Complaints Officer is now co-ordinating all complaints administration for the Council and a vetting stage has been introduced at each stage of the complaints process to verify that complaints letters are being logged appropriately and to the correct Officer.
7. The results year to date for 2013/14 show a significant decrease in the number of Stage 2 complaints being received, which suggests more complaints are being resolved satisfactorily at Stage 1 of the new process.
8. Monthly reports are being prepared for Service Managers and the appropriate Chief Officer to provide detail on complaints received in individual areas and highlight areas for lessons to be learnt. Quarterly reports will be shared with Senior Management Team to show trends across the organisation and to feedback how lessons learnt have been implemented across Service Areas.
9. The Council received 125 complaints in 2012/13, an increase of 21 received in 2011/12. The following graph shows at which stage of the complaints process each of the complaints were received and includes data for 2013/14, based on projections for the full year.



#### Stage 1 complaints

#### 10. Stage 1 complaints received

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14*	Projected figures 2013/14
<b>Total</b>	81	92	61	105

\*YTD figures (April 13 to Oct 13)

11. 2012/13 saw an 11% increase in the number of stage 1 complaints received. Development Services and Local Tax and Benefits are the main areas of complaint. For a break down of stage1 complaints received by service area see appendix A.
12. Of the 92 Stage 1 complaints received during 2012/13, 36% were found to be not valid. This was because customers had made incorrect claims, unrealistic claims or had contacted the wrong organisation. 54% were given partial consideration/ consideration with no local settlement and 10% of were given consideration with settlements agreed.

13. Outcome of complaints at Stage 1

	Total 2012/13	YTD 2013/14
Complaint invalid	33	27
Complaint given partial consideration – no local settlement	9	10
Complaint given partial consideration – local settlement	3	0
Complaint given consideration – no local settlement	41	21
Complaint given consideration –local settlement	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>61</b>

14. Four financial payments were made at stage 1 totalling £1,029.04, £500 relating to a building control complaint, £40 relating to a direct services complaint, £60 in respect of a local tax complaint and £429.04 in respect of a business rates complaint. These payments were met from within the relevant service budget.

**Stage 2 complaints**

15. Stage 2 complaints received

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14*	Projected figures 2013/14
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>

16. There was a 54% increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints received during 2012/13 with Development Services attracting the highest number at this stage. For a breakdown of Stage 2 complaints received by service area see appendix B.
17. Out of the 22 Stage 2 complaints investigated during 2012/13, 50% were found to be not valid. This was because customers had made incorrect claims. 41% of complaints were given consideration with no local settlement and 9% were given consideration with a non financial local settlement agreed.

18. Outcome of complaints at Stage 2

	Total	YTD 2013/14
Complaint invalid	11	3
Complaint given partial consideration – no local settlement	0	0
Complaint given partial consideration – local settlement	0	1
Complaint given consideration – no local settlement	9	0
Complaint given consideration –local settlement	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>

19. No compensation payments were made at Stage 2.

**Stage 3 complaints – Local Government Ombudsman**

20. In 2012/13 the Local Government Ombudsman received 11 complaints about this authority. Of the 11 complaints 8 decisions were made. This compares to the following average number:

District/Borough Councils – 10 complaints  
 Unitary Authorities - 36 complaints  
 Metropolitan Councils - 49 complaints  
 County Councils - 54 complaints  
 London Boroughs - 79 complaints

21. This year the Ombudsman only presented the total number of complaints received and did not provide more detailed information as it has done in previous years. The reason for this is they changed their business processes during the course of 2012/13 and would not be able to provide a consistent set of data for the entire year. More detailed information will be provided in next year’s letter. For Local Government Ombudsman complaints received by service area see Appendix C.

22. No compensation payments were made at this stage.

## 23. Complaints investigated by the LGO – Comparison to other Kent Councils

Local Authority	2011/12	2012/13
Tonbridge & Malling	5	4
Gravesham Borough	17	4
Ashford Borough	25	9
Shepway Borough	15	9
Swale Borough	8	10
Thanet District	14	10
Sevenoaks District	11	11
Tunbridge Wells Borough	8	11
Dartford Borough	11	13
Maidstone Borough	29	14
Canterbury City	9	18
Dover District	15	21
Medway	59	48
Kent County	147	129

Source: Local Government Ombudsman website

### Key Implications

#### Financial

The Council made four financial payments as compensation in 2012/13 to resolve complaints. Any such payments are met from within the relevant service budget.

	Compensation Paid (£)	
	2011/12	2012/13
Stage 1	150	1,029.04
Stage 2	100	0
LGO	250	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>1,029.04</b>

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The complaints process meets all legal requirements, and recognises Human Rights through the comprehensive 3 stage process. The complaints process gives good opportunity to identify and deal with any service problem from a customer perspective.

The operation of the system is subject to external rigorous appraisal by the LGO stage 3 processes. This and the results of the last year indicate that the current system is working well.

### Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	This is an information report. A full Equality Impacts Assessment in place for the Customer Services Team.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	No	
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		Include steps that could be taken for all decision options being presented.

### **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 for Corporate Support**

Appendix A – Stage 1 complaints received by service area

	Stage 1 Complaints received			
	2011/12	% of total	2012/13	% of total
Benefits	5	6.2	6	6.5
Building Control	0	0	3	3.3
Communications	0	0	0	0
Community Development	2	2.5	2	2.2
Customer Services	0	0	1	1.1
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0
Development Services	22	27.2	27	29.4
Direct Services	11	13.6	14	15.2
Electoral Services	1	1.2	0	0
Environmental Health	4	4.9	4	4.3
Finance	0	0	0	0
Housing	10	12.3	7	7.6
Human Resources	0	0	0	0
IT Services	0	0	0	0
Legal	0	0	0	0
Licensing	2	2.5	0	0
Local Tax	14	17.3	13	14.1
Parking and Amenities	10	12.3	11	12
Planning Policy	0	0	0	0
Property	0	0	4	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>



Appendix B – Stage 2 complaints received by service area

	Stage 2 Complaints received			
	2011/12	% of total	2012/13	% of total
Benefits	1	8.3	0	0
Building Control	0	0	1	4.5
Communications	0	0	0	0
Community Development	1	8.3	0	0
Customer Services	0	0	0	0
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0
Development Services	7	58.3	9	41
Direct Services	0	0	3	13.6
Electoral Services	0	0	0	0
Environmental Health	0	0	3	13.6
Finance	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	0	1	4.5
Human Resources	0	0	0	0
IT Services	0	0	0	0
Legal	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	0	0	0
Local Tax	2	16.7	1	4.5
Parking and Amenities	1	8.3	3	13.6
Planning Policy	0	0	0	0
Property	0	0	1	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>

Appendix C – Local Government Ombudsman complaints received by service area

LGO Complaints received 2012/13	
Community Development	1
Development Services	3
Environmental Health	3
Parking and Amenities	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>