

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2013/14

Strategy and Performance Advisory Committee – 24 June 2014

Report of Chief Officer Corporate Support

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

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

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 Ext. 7280 Julie Heather Ext. 7125.

Recommendation to Strategy & 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 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014. 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.

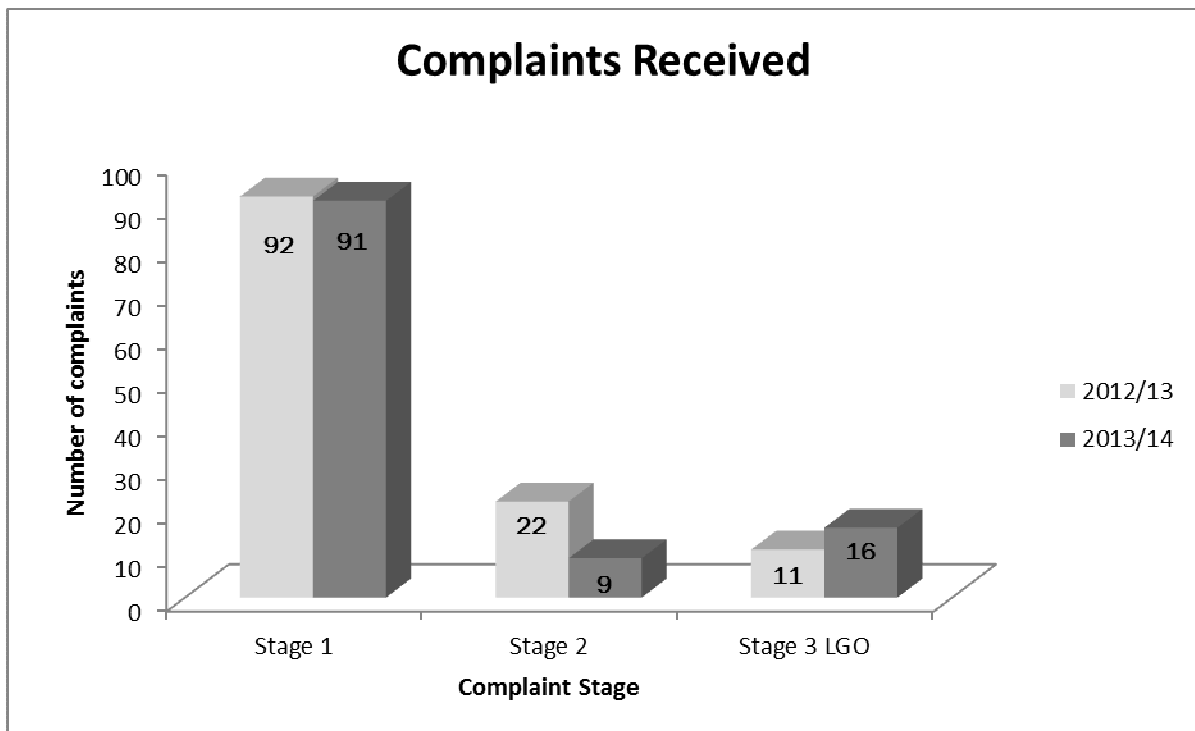
2013/14 Review and Improvements

4. A review of the Complaints process was undertaken during 2013/14 by the Customer Service Manager. The review focused on re-aligning complaints investigation within the new management structure, reducing paperwork and

introducing an independent review of each Stage 1 response before it is sent out. The independent review is carried out by the Customer Service Manager to ensure consistency across the organisation and that the replies that are sent are customer focused, regardless of the outcome for the customer. A significant decrease in Stage 2 complaints has been recorded since this review has taken place.

2013/14 Complaints figures

- The Council received a total of 116 complaints in 2013/14, a decrease of 9 received in 2012/13. The following graph shows at which stage of the complaints process each of the complaints were received



Stage 1 Complaints

- Stage 1 complaints received

	2012/13	2013/14
Total	92	91

- 2013/14 saw a very minimal decrease in Stage 1 complaints received. As in previous years Development Services, Revenues and Benefits are the main areas of complaint. For a break down of Stage1 complaints received by service area see appendix A.
- Of the 91 Stage 1 complaints received in 2013/14 51% were found to be invalid. This was because customers had made incorrect claims, unrealistic claims or had contacted the wrong organisation.

9. Outcome of complaints at Stage 1

	Total 2012/13	Total 2013/14
Complaint invalid	33	46
Complaint upheld	59	45
Total	92	91

10. 3 financial payments were made at Stage 1 totalling £290.00. £100 relating to a Benefits complaint, £110 relating to a Local Tax complaint and £80 in respect of a Development Services complaint. These payments were met from within the relevant service budget.

Stage 2 Complaints

11. Stage 2 complaints received

	2012/13	2013/14
Total	22	9

12. This year saw a decrease in Stage 2 complaints by 60%. Development Services attracted the most complaints at this stage. For a breakdown of Stage 2 complaints received by service area see appendix B.
13. Out of the 9 Stage 2 complaints investigated during 2013/14, 56% were found to be invalid. This was because customers had made incorrect or unrealistic claims. 44% were upheld.
14. Outcome of complaints at Stage 2

	Total 2012/13	Total 2013/14
Complaint invalid	11	5
Complaint upheld	11	4
Total	22	9

15. No compensation payments were made at Stage 2.

Stage 3 complaints – Local Government Ombudsman

16. In 2013/14 the Local Government Ombudsman received 16 complaints about this authority. Of the 16 complaints 4 were premature and 4 were not investigated. 7 decisions were made and one case is still open. The following table shows the decisions made by the LGO

LGO Decision	Service area	Number of decisions
Investigation complete no maladministration	Development Services	2
Investigation complete & satisfied with authority action	Parking Services	1
Not in jurisdiction & no discretion	Development Services	1
	EH	1
	Local tax	2
Total		7

17. This year the Ombudsman has yet to provide the annual letter. No comparison can be made to other Local Authorities as in previous years. For Local Government Ombudsman complaints received by service area see Appendix C.
18. No compensation payments were made at this stage.

Key Implications

Financial

The Council made three financial payments as compensation in 2013/14 to resolve complaints. Any such payments are met from within the relevant service budget.

	Compensation Paid (£)	
	2012/13	2013/14
Stage 1	1,029.04	290.00
Stage 2	0	0
LGO	0	0
Total	1,029.04	290.00

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
Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	A full Equality Impacts Assessment in place for the Customer Services Team.
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	No	
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 Corporate Support

Appendix A – Stage 1 complaints received by service area

	Stage 1 Complaints received			
	2012/13	% of total	2013/14	% of total
Benefits	6	6.5	8	8.8
Building Control	3	3.3	3	3.3
Communications	0	0	0	0
Communities & Business	2	2.2	0	0
Customer Services	1	1.1	2	2.2
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0
Development Services	27	29.4	27	29.7
Direct Services	14	15.2	5	5.5
Electoral Services	0	0	0	0
Environmental Health	4	4.3	3	3.3
Finance	0	0	0	0
Housing	7	7.6	4	4.4
Human Resources	0	0	0	0
IT Services	0	0	1	1
Land Charges	0	0	0	0
Legal	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	0	0	0
Local Tax	13	14.1	27	29.7
Parking Services	11	12	8	8.8
Planning Policy	0	0	0	0
Print	0	0	0	0
Property	4	4.3	3	3.3

Total	92	100	91	100
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Appendix B – Stage 2 complaints received by service area

	Stage 2 Complaints received			
	2012/13	% of total	2013/14	% of total
Benefits	0	0	1	11.1
Building Control	1	4.5	1	11.1
Communications	0	0	0	0
Communities & Business	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	0	0	0	0
Democratic Services	0	0	0	00
Development Services	9	41	5	55.6
Direct Services	3	13.6	0	0
Electoral Services	0	0	0	0
Environmental Health	3	13.6	0	0
Finance	0	0	0	0
Housing	1	4.5	1	11.1
Human Resources	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	1	4.5	1	11.1
Parking Services	3	13.6	0	0
Planning Policy	0	0	0	0
Print	0	0	0	0

Property	1	4.5	0	0
Total	22	100	9	100

Appendix C – Local Government Ombudsman complaints received by service area

LGO Complaints received 2013/14	
Development Services	8
Environmental Health	1
Housing	2
Local Tax	3
Parking Services	1
Property	1
TOTAL	16