

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2019/20

Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee - 8 October 2020

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer Customer & Resources

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report updates Members on the number and outcome of customer complaints and feedback for the year 2019/20, as compared to 2018/19.

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 Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee:

The report is noted.

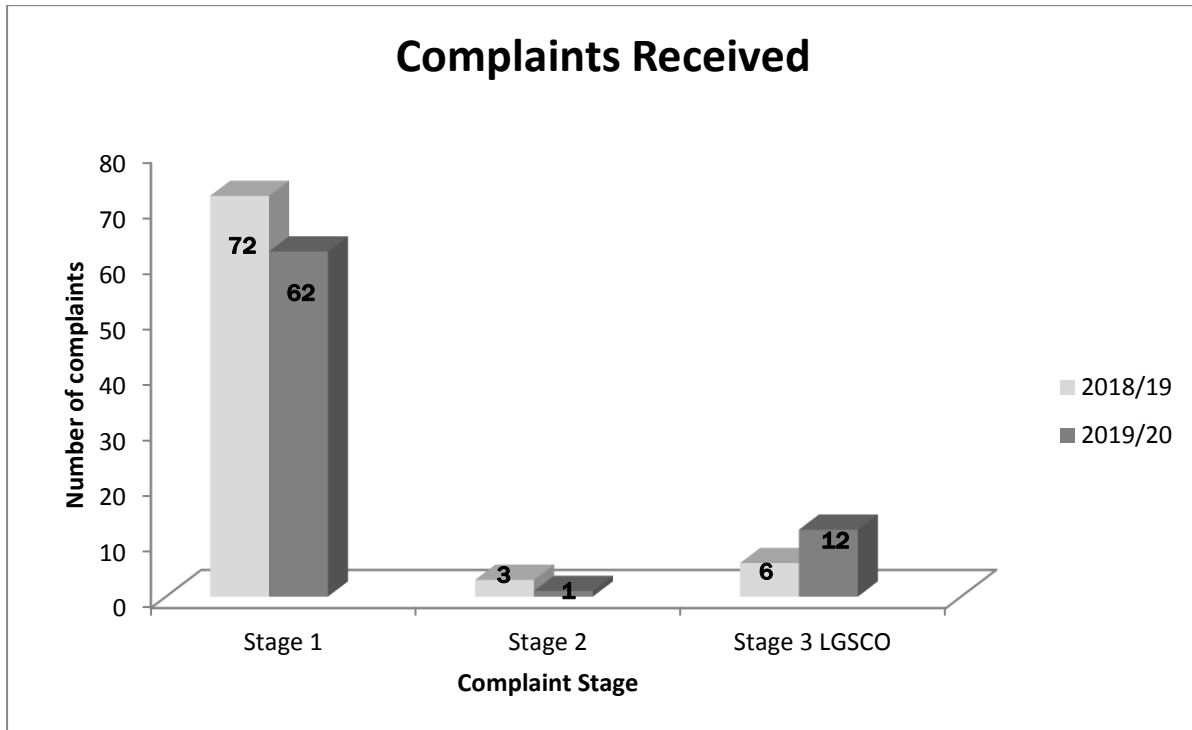
Introduction and Background

- 1 This report provides details of formal complaints received by Sevenoaks District Council during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. 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 dissatisfied with the outcome after both Stage 1 and Stage 2, they can then

request the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigate at Stage 3.

2019/20 Complaints figures

- 4 The Council received a total of 75 complaints across all stages in 2019, a reduction of 6 since 2018. 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

	2018/19	2019/20
Total	72	62

- 6 2019/20 saw a reduction in Stage 1 complaints received. The Planning and Revenues services received the most complaints, which is in line with the higher number of customers and customer interactions that they manage each year in comparison to other services. Benefits, Housing, Direct Services and Parking Services have all seen a reduction in complaints compared to last year. A breakdown of Stage 1 complaints received by service area is provided at Appendix A.
- 7 Of the 62 Stage 1 complaints received in 2019/20, 74% were found to be invalid. This was because customers had made incorrect claims, unrealistic claims or had contacted the wrong organisation. No financial payments were made at Stage 1.

8 Outcome of complaints at Stage 1

	Total 2018/19	Total 2019/20
Complaint invalid	52	46
Complaint upheld	20	16
Total	72	62

Lessons Learnt

- 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 62 in 2019/20.
- 11 There have been 16 occasions this year 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 some 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.

Stage 2 Complaints

- 14 Stage 2 complaints received

	2018/19	2019/20
Total	3	1

- 15 This year also saw a fall in Stage 2 complaints, with just one Stage 2 complaint received across the whole year. The Stage 2 complaint investigated during 2019/20 related to Development Management. The

complaint was not upheld and as a result no financial payments were made at Stage 2.

16 Outcome of complaints at Stage 2

	Total 2018/19	Total 2019/20
Complaint invalid	2	1
Complaint upheld	1	0
Total	3	1

Stage 3 complaints - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- 17 In 2019/20, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGCSO) received 12 complaints about this authority and made thirteen decisions. The number of complaints received by the Ombudsman will not always be the same as the number of decisions made as some complaints are received in one year and a decision taken in the next financial year.
- 18 The Ombudsman carried out three investigations in the year and two of those were upheld, one with a finding of maladministration with no injustice caused and one complaint was remedied before it reached the Ombudsman.
- 19 Seven complaints were closed after initial enquiries, one had advice given and two were refereed back as premature. The table below shows the decisions made by the LGSCO by service area. A summary of LGSCO complaints received by service area is provided at Appendix B.
- 20 No financial payments were made as a result of judgements by the LGCSO.

LGSCO Decision	Service area	No. of decisions
Upheld: Maladministration, no injustice	Planning Enforcement	1
Upheld: Maladministration, no further action LA already remedied	Housing	1
Not Upheld - no maladministration	Planning	1
Closed after initial enquiries - no further action	Environmental Health	1
	Legal	1
	Planning Enforcement	1

LGSCO Decision	Service area	No. of decisions
Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction	Development Management	2
	Planning Enforcement	1
	Revenues	1
Advice given	Transport & Highways	1
Premature - <i>usually referred back to the Council for consideration</i>	Planning	1
	Transport & Highways	1
Total		13

Key Implications

Financial

The Council made no financial payments as compensation in 2019/20.

	Compensation Paid (£)	
	2018/19	2019/20
Stage 1	0	0
Stage 2	0	0
LGO	0	0
Total	0	0

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 LGSCO complaints received by service area

Background Papers None.

Jim Carrington-West
 Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer Customer & Resources

Appendix A - Stage 1 complaints received by service area

	Stage 1 Complaints received			
	2018/19	% of total	2019/20	% of total
Benefits	8	11	2	3
Community & Wellbeing	0	0	2	3
Development Management	17	24	18	29
Direct Services	6	8	3	5
Environmental Health	6	8	5	8
Emergency Planning & Property Services	1	1	1	2
Housing Services	10	14	3	5
IT & Digital Services	1	1	1	2
Licensing	0	0	1	2
Parking Services	12	17	7	11
Planning Enforcement	Not available	Not available	5	8
Private Sector Housing	0	0	2	3
Property	0	0	1	1
Revenues	11	15	11	18
Total	72	100	62	100

Appendix B - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints received by service area

LGSCO Complaints received 2019/20	
Development Management	5
Highways & Transport	2
Legal	1
Planning Enforcement	3
Revenues	1
TOTAL	12