

Annual complaints report 2021/22

Report of: Chief Officer Customer & Resources

Status: For Information

Also considered by: N/A

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report updates Members regarding customer complaints and feedback monitoring for the year 2021/22, as compared to 2020/21.

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

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Peter Fleming

Contact Officer: Amy Wilton Ext. 7280

Recommendation to Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee:

That the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation: This report is for information only.

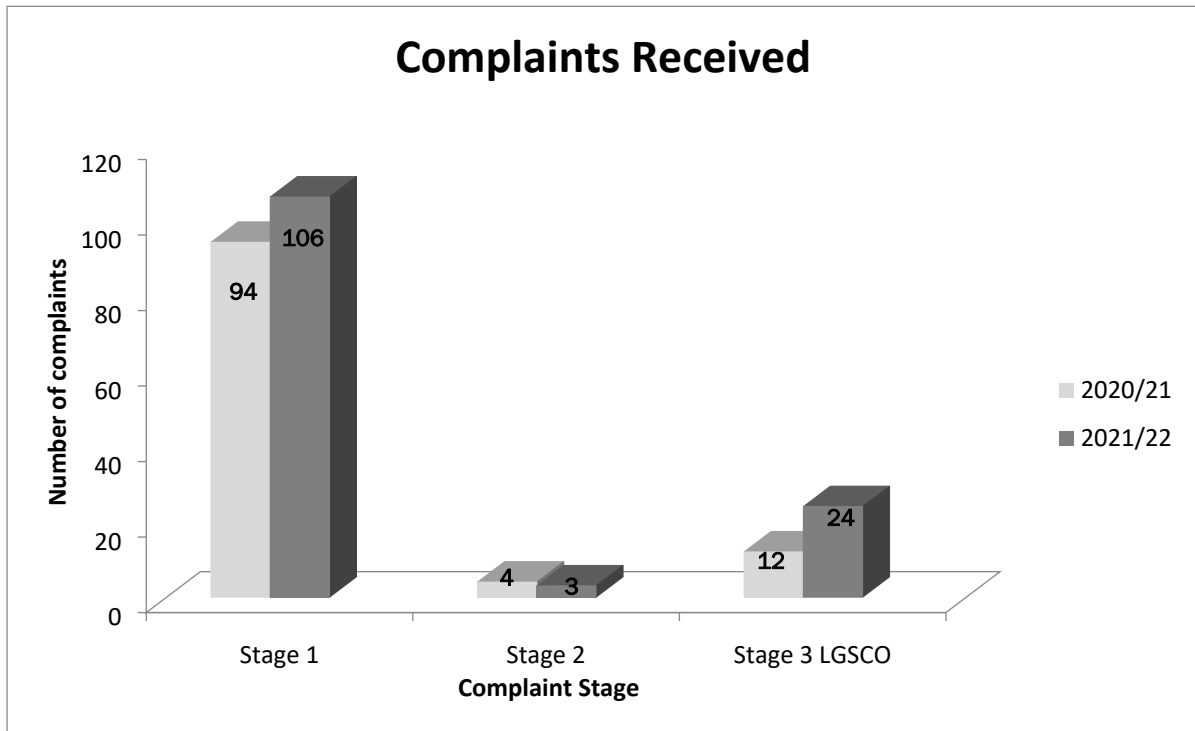
Introduction and Background

1. This report provides details of formal complaints received by Sevenoaks District Council during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. 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 refer 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 and Social Care Ombudsman investigate at Stage 3.

2021/22 Complaints figures

- The Council received a total of 133 complaints across all stages in 2021/22, an increase of 23 since 2020/21. The following graph shows at which stage of the complaints process each of the complaints were received.



Stage 1 Complaints

- Stage 1 complaints received

	2020/21	2021/22
Total	94	106

- 2021/22 saw an increase in Stage 1 complaints received. Development Management, Parking and Housing attracted the most complaints. For a breakdown of Stage 1 complaints received by service area see Appendix A.

Of the 106 Stage 1 complaints received in 2021/22, 83% were found to be invalid. This was because customers had made incorrect claims, unrealistic claims or had contacted the wrong organisation.

- Outcome of complaints at Stage 1

	Total 2020/21	Total 2021/22
Complaint invalid	69	88
Complaint upheld	25	18
Total	94	106

No financial payments were made at Stage 1.

Lessons Learned

8. 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.
9. Over many years the Council has continually applied the learning from previous complaints to improve our services.
10. 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.
11. The Head of Information and Customer Solutions continues to work closely with Service Managers to ensure that improvements to services continue to address the learning coming from complaints.

Stage 2 Complaints

12. Stage 2 complaints received

	2020/21	2021/22
Total	4	3

This year saw a reduction in the number of Stage 2 complaints received. For a breakdown of Stage 2 complaints, see Appendix B.

13. Outcome of complaints at Stage 2

	Total 2020/21	Total 2021/22
Complaint invalid	3	2
Complaint upheld	1	1
Total	4	3

No financial payments were made at Stage 2.

Stage 3 complaints - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

14. In 2021/22, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) received 24 complaints about this authority and made 24 decisions. The Ombudsman carried out 5 investigations in the year and of these 3 were upheld. The following table shows the decisions made by the LGSCO by service area. For LGSCO complaints received by service area see Appendix C.

LGSCO Decision	Service area	Number of decisions
Not Upheld - no maladministration	Planning and Development Benefits and Tax	2
Closed after initial enquiries	Planning and Development	8
	Benefits and Tax	2
	Environmental Health	2
* Premature	Planning and Development	3
	Housing	2
	Environmental Health	1
Incomplete/Invalid	Other	1
Upheld	Environmental Health	1
	Housing	1
	Parking	1
		24

**Premature complaints are usually referred back to the Council for consideration*

Two financial payments were made at this stage.

£250 paid - Housing

£350 - Environmental Health

15. The average number of complaints upheld by the LGSCO across all Kent authorities (excluding Kent County Council and Medway Council) was 3.
16. Each year the LGSCO write to each Local Authority to provide an annual summary of complaints statistics from their organisation. The letter focuses on 3 key areas: complaints upheld, compliance with recommendations and satisfactory remedy provided by the authority. The following table details how they found against Sevenoaks District Council. For the full LGSCO letter, see Appendix D.

Ombudsman complaints	
Complaints upheld	3
Compliance with recommendations	100%
Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority before the complaint reached the Ombudsman	0%

Key Implications

Financial

The Council made two financial payments as compensation in 2021/22 to resolve complaints.

	Compensation Paid (£)	
	2020/21	2021/22
Stage 1	0	0
Stage 2	0	0
LGO	0	£600
Total	0	£600

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.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There are no legal or risk implications related to this report

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment

Conclusions

This report is for information only and Members are requested to note the report.

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 LGSCO complaints received by service area

Appendix D - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2022

Background Papers

None

Jim Carrington-West

Chief Officer - Customer & Resources

Appendix A – Stage 1 complaints received by service area

	Stage 1 Complaints received			
	2020/21	% of total	2021/22	% of total
Benefits	5	5	6	6
Building Control	2	2	2	2
Community Safety	4	4	1	1
Customer Solutions	2	2	1	1
Development Management	27	29	25	24
Direct Services	7	8	11	10
Environmental Health	3	3	5	5
Property Services	0	0	1	1
Fraud	1	1	0	0
Housing Services	18	19	16	15
IT & Digital Services	0	0	0	0
Legal	1	1	0	0
Licensing	2	2	0	0
Parking Services	5	5	18	17
Planning Enforcement	6	6	8	7
Private Sector Housing	0	0	1	1
Property	1	1	1	1
Revenues & NNDR	10	11	11	10
Total	94	-	106	-

Appendix B – Stage 2 complaints received by service area

	Stage 2 Complaints received			
	2020/21	% of total	2021/22	% of total
Development Management	2	50	2	67
Housing Advice	2	50	-	-
Parking	-	-	1	33
Total	4	-	3	-

Appendix C – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints received by service area

LGSCO Complaints received 2021/22		
	Received	Upheld
Building Control	1	0
Business Rates	1	0
Direct Services	1	0
Development Management	9	0
Environmental Health	3	1
Housing	1	1
Parking	1	1
Planning Enforcement	3	0
Property	1	0
Revenues	2	0
Other	1	0
TOTAL	24	3