

<b>Cabinet Meeting</b>		<b>Agenda Item: 7</b>
<b>Meeting Date</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2016/2017	
<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	Cllr Andrew Bowles, Leader	
<b>SMT Lead</b>	Martyn Cassell, Head of Commissioning & Customer Contact	
<b>Head of Service</b>	Martyn Cassell, Head of Commissioning & Customer Contact	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Carol Sargeant, Customer Service Manager	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	
<b>Classification</b>	Open	
<b>Forward Plan</b>	Reference number:	
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. Members are asked to note the report	

## 1. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the annual summary of complaints, compliments and comments received by Swale Borough Council (SBC) during the year from April 2016 to March 2017.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 This annual report summarises the Complaints, Compliments and Comments (CCC) received by the Council during the ensuing year. Swale's corporate complaints system comprises the following process:
- (i) an initial request for service or enquiry should be made to the service area it relates to in the first instance. A request or enquiry may become a complaint if the council fails to meet our service standards;
  - (ii) Stage 1: this is whereby the complainant is not satisfied with the response (or lack of response) from the service area or the complaint relates to a member of staff. Stage 1 complaints will be responded to within 10 working days by a manager or Head of Service;
  - (iii) Stage 2: the Chief Executive who will investigate and respond direct to the complainant within 10 working days. If the timeframe cannot be met the complainant will be notified and kept informed of progress; and
  - (iv) Local Government Ombudsman: if after following our complaints process customers are still unhappy, they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman, an independent service set up by the Government to investigate complaints about council matters. The Ombudsman will not usually investigate most complaints until they have been through the Council's complaint process.

- 2.2 The current CCC system, which has now been in operation for six full years, is now well established throughout the organisation. It has contributed to a much more robust and transparent approach to the management of CCC, with greater ease of access to the system for our customers.
- 2.3 The system provides monitoring, including weekly summaries to Heads of Service, so we can be assured that all complaints are logged, tracked, and responded to, as well as improved reporting facilities so we can ensure that our response times are meeting the standards we have set and learn from feedback.
- 2.4 The CCC process:
- (i) raises the profile of the importance of CCC to Swale as a customer-centric organisation through managers' meetings, all staff briefings, and individual team meetings;
  - (ii) carries out surveys of all customers who have raised a formal complaint in order to gain feedback from them and seek to improve the process accordingly;
  - (iii) publishes performance reports on the intranet and provide quarterly reports on complaints at service level, which is used to inform the quarterly performance report to the Strategic Management Team; and
  - (iv) publishes this annual report in order to provide accountability and transparency to residents and service users.

### Customer Service Excellence

- 2.5 During the past year, the Customer Service Centre, Environment Response Team, Housing Services, and Revenues & Benefits all gained a renewal of the externally verified Customer Service Excellence (CSE) assessment.
- 2.6 One of the components of the CSE accreditation process is to examine the complaints procedures within an organisation. Again, during this year's assessments, Swale's CCC system was cited as an example of good practice.

### Complaints Received

- 2.7 The total number of CCCs received during 2016/17 was 891 compared with 927 in 2015/16, a decrease of 4%. The number of complaints decreased by 1%, compliments by 20%, and an increase of 16% of comments.

Category	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Trend against previous year
Complaints received	441	<b>356</b>	<b>351</b>	-1%
Compliments received	344	<b>337</b>	<b>268</b>	-20%
Comments received	319	<b>234</b>	<b>272</b>	+16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,104</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>-4%</b>

2.8 Further details by service areas for Complaints are on Appendix I.

2.9 During 2016/17, a total of 32 complaints (9%) were escalated to Stage Two (Chief Executive review).

### Responding to Complaints

2.10 The CCC system requires that a response to complaints be made (whether justified or otherwise) within a corporate standard of 10 working days. The target for 2016/17 was 90%, which was met - during 2016/17, 92% of complaints, whether or not justified, were responded to within the corporate standard.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/2017
Percentage of complaints responded to within 10 working days	89%	<b>94%</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>Target</b>	87.5%	<b>90%</b>	<b>90%</b>

2.11 The Customer Service Manager regularly monitors performance standards, both corporately and in local areas, and has dialogue with the respective Heads of Service to address any performance issues, which include administrative efficiency improvements as well as seasonal or service-related issues which will inevitably cause occasional peaks in levels of complaints.

### Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints

2.12 It is recognised and emphasised by the Ombudsman, that the statistics in their letter comprises the data they hold, and may not necessarily align with the data the authority holds.

2.13 The outcomes for the 20 complaints that were formally received by the LGO are set out in the table below.

Ombudsman Action	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Closed after initial enquiry	7	8	4
Not upheld	2	1	3
Referred back for local resolution	1	11	11
Incomplete/invalid	0	2	1
Upheld	2	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>

2.14 In the breakdown of detailed decisions and investigations made by the Ombudsman these are the findings.

<b>Decision</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Final Ombudsman Decision</b>
<b>Upheld</b>	Housing	There was one fault in the way the Council dealt with Miss X when she asked for assistance as a homeless person but that did not cause her injustice. The Ombudsman did not investigate Ms X's complaint about the Council's decision on her homelessness application because she successfully challenged it by using the statutory review procedure.
<b>Not Upheld</b>	Planning and Development	There is no evidence of fault in the way the Council considered a planning application for the development of a housing estate.
<b>Not Upheld</b>	Planning and Development	Any delay by the Council has not caused Mrs X a significant enough injustice to warrant further investigation. On balance, I am not persuaded the outcome of the planning process would have been any different even if the Council had responded to her more quickly.
<b>Not Upheld</b>	Planning and Development	Mr A complains the Council failed to properly consider the impact its decision to grant planning permission for a new build bungalow in a garden adjacent to his property will have on his amenity. There is no evidence of fault by the Council and we will not pursue the complaint any further.

### **Feedback on the complaints system**

2.15 During 2016/17 courtesy telephone calls by Customer Service have been attempted to all complainants. This approach allows a more qualitative discussion to take place, and as such more positive feedback is being received than various methods that have previously been used to seek feedback from complainants. We have learnt that customers still find it difficult to separate the outcome of the complaint (which may not be to their satisfaction), from the way in which their complaint was handled.

2.16 Some examples of customers comments from the courtesy calls include:

- (i) "My issue was all sorted within half an hour of my complaint";
- (ii) "Your call has explained in more detail about the problem, it's a shame that the response to my complaint wasn't explained so well";
- (iii) "I still had to chase up this issue to get the issue resolved" and
- (iv) "It took a while to get sorted, but pleased it has now been resolved".

### **Reviews and improvements**

2.17 Within the year of 2016/17, an internal audit was carried out by Mid Kent Audit Partnership. The audit outcome was a final assurance rating of 'Sound'. It made four recommendations for action and three advisory notes which are being progressed this year.

2.18 One aspect of effective complaint handling is to inform service improvements. Whilst we need to continue to improve the capturing of examples where this has happened, some examples from 2016/17 are as follows:

- (i) CSC have worked with the automated payment provider to make amendments to scripting that some customers were experiencing difficulties with;
- (ii) Open Spaces have changed procedures on how they record issues;
- (iii) Contracts are using complaints to monitor trends in contractual issues;
- (iv) Changes have been made to the set up of the screen in the Committee Room so it should no longer go into sleep mode;
- (v) Customer First training programme developed.

## Summary

2.19 In summary, therefore, of the 351 complaints received by Swale Borough Council during 2016/17, 32 (9%) were escalated to the Chief Executive (stage 2), and two (0.5%) ultimately required responses to the Ombudsman, with only one upheld.

<b>Categories</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
Total complaints	441	356	351
Justified complaints*	279	202	198
Non-justified complaints*	141	150	152
Partially justified	21	2	1
Justification not stated	0	2	0
Stage 2 (Chief Executive)	18	22	32
Ombudsman	12	4	2

\*Definitions used:

Justified: where it is deemed that the relevant process/procedure has not been followed.

Unjustified: where it is deemed that the relevant process/procedure has been followed.

It should be noted that this criteria is open to the interpretation of the officer and their opinion at the time of completing the complaint.

## 3 Proposals

3.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

## 4. Alternatives

4.1 None.

## 5. Consultation

5.1 There has been no formal consultation relating to this report, as it is a summary of statistics for the year in question. However, the Complaints, Compliments and Comments system is by definition a process by which customers are able to deliver feedback on the current provision of services.

## 6. Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Dealing well with Complaints, Compliments and Comments is core to the Corporate Plan priority of being 'A council to be proud of'.
Financial, Resource and Property	None.
Legal and Statutory	None.
Crime and Disorder	None.
Sustainability	None.
Health and wellbeing	None.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None.
Equality and Diversity	Responding to complaints in a positive and effective manner demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that access to Council services is available to all.

## 7. Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Complaints by Service Area 2016/17
- Appendix II: Local Government Ombudsman's Summary Review of Swale Borough Council 2015/16

## 8. Background Papers

8.1 None.

**Complaints by Service Area 2016/17**

Service Area	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Total 2016/17	Total 2015/16	Responded within 10 working days			
							2016/17		2015/16	
							No.	%	No.	%
Chief Executive	0	0	1	2	3	0	3	100%	0	0
Commercial	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100%
Communications	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Safety	1	0	0	1	2	0	2	100%	-	-
Contracts (incl.Waste & Streets)	41	60	29	38	168	146	166	99%	144	99%
CSC	2	1	2	2	7	2	7	100%	2	100%
Democratic Services (Electoral)	2	4	0	1	7	6	6	86%	5	83%
Development Services	6	12	4	10	32	50	32	100%	45	90%
Economy & Regeneration	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100%
Engineering	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	100%	1	100%
ERT	4	9	15	4	32	31	28	88%	30	97%
Gateway	0	1	0	1	2	0	2	100%	-	-
Grants	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0%	-	-
Hackney Carriages	0	2	0	1	3	1	1	33%	1	100%
Housing Environmental	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	100%	1	100%
Housing Options	1	5	2	4	12	11	11	92%	10	91%
ICT	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	100%	-	-
Legal	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	100%	-	-
Open Spaces	3	9	3	4	19	11	12	63%	9	82%
Parking	13	13	6	6	38	49	29	76%	43	88%
Pollution	0	0	0	0	0	3	-	-	2	67%
Properties	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	100%	-	-
Regeneration	0	0	0	0	0	2	-	-	1	50%
Revenues & Benefits	5	3	6	3	17	38	15	88%	36	92%
Staying Put	0	0	2	1	3	1	3	100%	1	100%

**Local Authority Report:** Swale Borough Council  
**For the Period Ending:** 31/03/2016

For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our website:  
<http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/interpreting-local-authority-statistics>

## Complaints and enquiries received

Adult Care Services	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Education and Children's Services	Environment Services	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
0	0	1	0	5	2	3	10	1	22

## Decisions made

				Detailed Investigations			
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate	Total
2	0	11	8	1	1	50%	23

### Notes

Our uphold rate is calculated in relation to the total number of detailed investigations.

The number of remedied complaints may not equal the number of upheld complaints. This is because, while we may uphold a complaint because we find fault, we may not always find grounds to say that fault caused injustice that ought to be remedied.

The compliance rate is the proportion of remedied complaints where our recommendations are believed to have been implemented.

### Complaints Remedied

by LGO	Satisfactorily by Authority before LGO Involvement	Compliance Rate
1	0	100%