



Customer Relations



Corporate Complaints & Compliments Annual Report

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report statistical information to Members and Officers detailing Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) corporate complaints and compliment activity from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.
- 1.2 To identify a number of key developments and planned improvements to the complaints processes operated by the Council.
- 1.3 To evidence some of the learning captured from complaints and compliments and how this can inform and improve the overall customer experience.

2. Complaints and Compliments Analysis 2015-16

2.1 The work of the Customer Relations Team

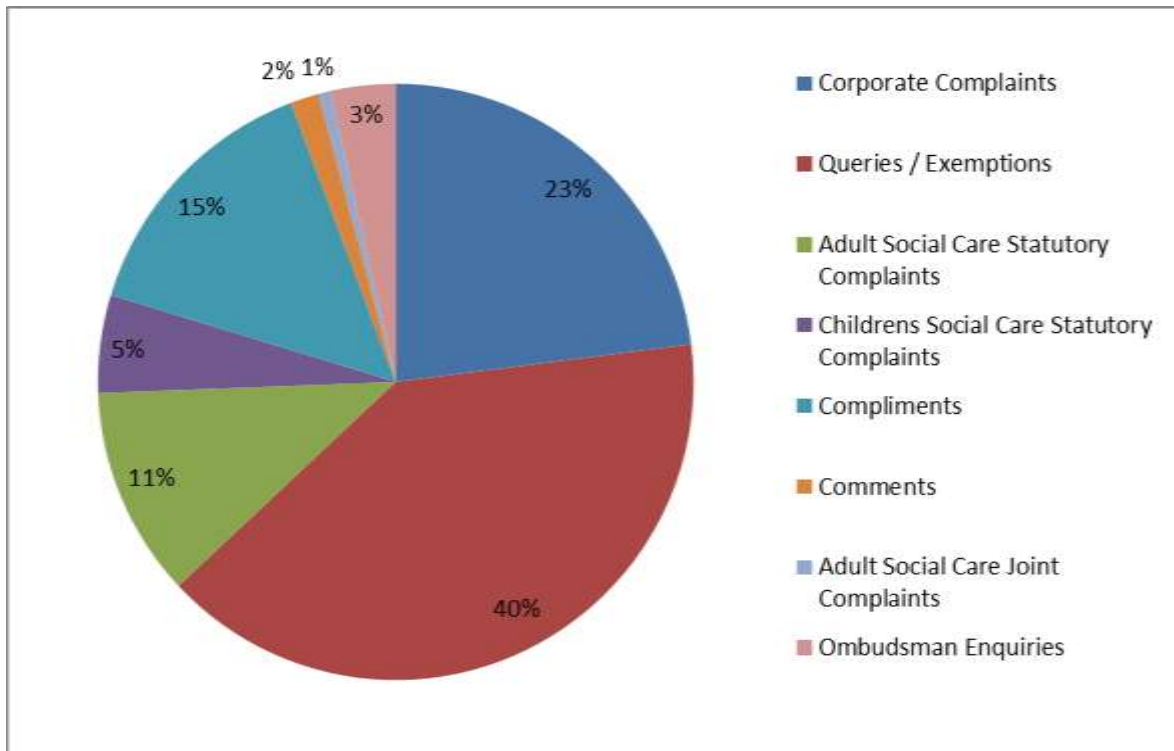
This report relates to the Council's Corporate Complaints and Compliments processes. However, to put the report within a wider context, it is worth referring to the broader work of the Customer Relations Team.

The Council has two other complaints processes – the statutory process for Adult Social Care and a similar statutory process for Children's Social Care. Both social care complaints processes are not considered within this report. Both statutory processes are however managed by the Customer Relations Team and are subject to separate reports to the relevant directorates and scrutiny groups.

In addition, the team deals with a wide range of miscellaneous interactions with customers that do not go on to become formal complaints. These include queries, as well as matters which are exempt from consideration under the complaints procedure. Examples of this include where alternative appeals routes are available or the matter has been before a court. Whilst many of the queries are quickly resolved, those where exemptions apply often can generate significant correspondence.

Finally, in liaison with the Director of Law and Governance, the team also manages all complaints that are referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Customer Relations Manager acts as the nominated Link Officer and handles all correspondence between the Council and the Ombudsman.

In total, the Customer Relations Team dealt with 1414 cases of various types during 2015/2016, as depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Breakdown of cases handled by Customer Relations team

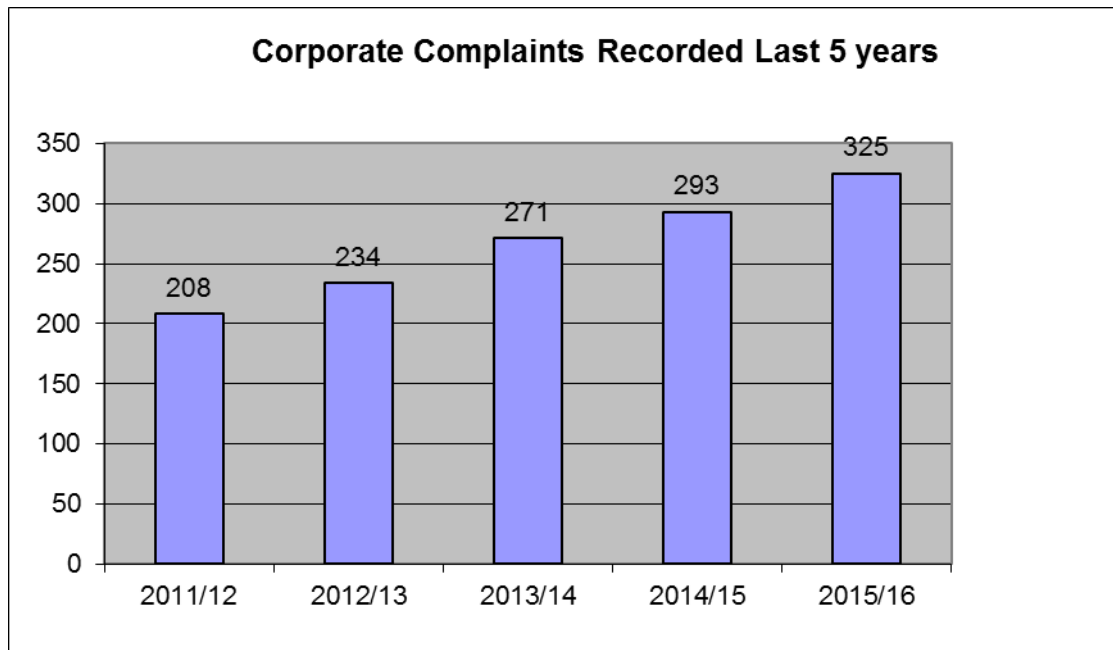
This represents an increase of 12% on prior year (1267). Predominantly this reflects greater diligence in recording interactions that are not appropriately recorded as complaints¹. This increase has been absorbed within existing resource levels.

The Customer Relations Team itself remains a small operation of two fte comprising the Customer Relations Manager and a Complaints Officer. Some administrative and telephony support is also provided by business support colleagues and during 2016-17 this will become more formalised as part of an organisational review and to help strengthen resilience within the function as well as explore synergy with other activities undertaken by this team.

¹ See Para 2.3 for further details

2.2 Corporate Complaints summary

Table 2: Corporate Complaints recorded during the last 5 years



As illustrated above, the total number of corporate complaints received has continued to grow with a 56% increase since 2011/12.

Over the last 3 years, there has been a relatively consistent year on year increase of around 10%.

These increased volumes are not in isolation a negative. Customer Relations has undertaken considerable work to promote access to the complaints procedure over the last three years and this work continues to ensure that complaints information is given out where requested and to encourage managers to see complaints as a positive.

With the increased financial pressures now being felt across departments it is perhaps also inevitable that the number of complaints received will continue to increase, but of greater importance is the culture of how the authority responds and learns from this vital customer insight.

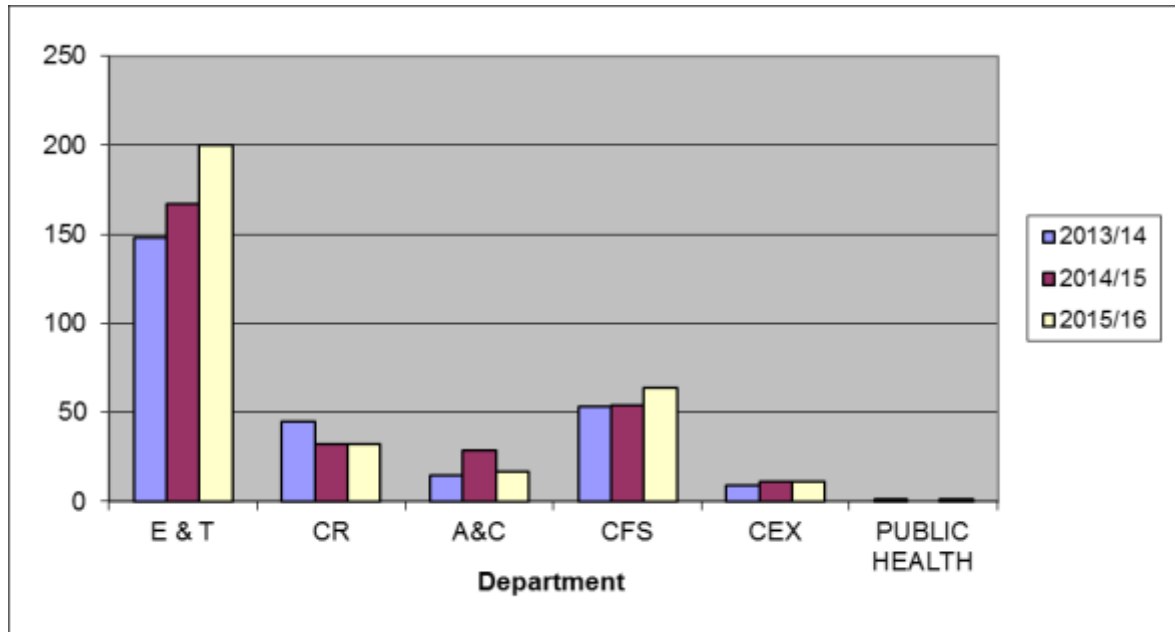
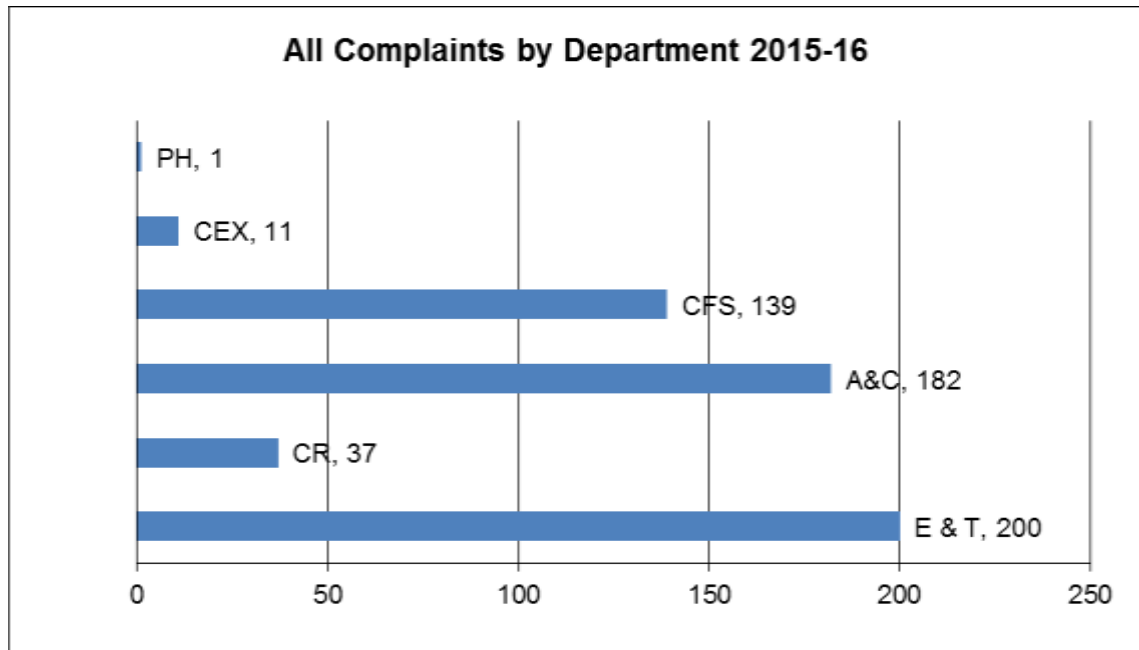
Table 3: Corporate Complaints by Department

Table 3 shows the departmental breakdown of all corporate complaints received across the last 3 years.

As mentioned already, it is important to note that for both Children and Families (CFS) and Adults and Communities (A & C), the bulk of their complaints relate to social care matters and as such, are not represented here. With this in mind, it is unsurprising, that by far the largest number of corporate complaints continue to relate to services delivered by the Environment & Transport Department, which has no separate statutory process.

To illustrate this better, Table 3b below shows the total volume of all complaints (both social care & corporate) by department and shows much closer alignment between Adults and Communities, Environment and Transport and Children and Family Services departments.

Chief Execs , Public Health and to a lesser extent Corporate Resources do not have such significant external service provision and as such volumes are inevitably lower in these areas.

Table 3b – All complaints (statutory and non-statutory) by Department

2.3 Most common topics

Of the corporate complaints received during 2015-16, the most common areas were all within the Environment & Transport section, with the top five subjects recorded as follows. This is the first year that detail at this level has been captured and improves our understanding of which services are generating complaints.

Traffic & Safety concerns ²	36
Grass Cutting	24
Home to School Transport	21
Footway & Carriageway re-surfacing	13
Waste Management	13

2.4 Queries and other contact received

As well as managing complaints, the Customer Relations Team is well placed to proactively assist customers where they are looking for assistance or things are going wrong. Many such matters can be quickly and informally put right and where this is the case, the intervention is not formally recorded as a complaint. Our complaints policy specifies a window of opportunity of up to 24 hours to achieve such informal resolution.

² This includes traffic calming requests, parking concerns, safe walking and cycling routes and requests for crossing points

The complaints policy should not be a mechanism to bypass service delivery channels and to this end, Customer Relations will filter out enquiries which are more properly considered as a request for service. This includes reporting potholes, mending a street-light or asking for traffic calming to be considered. If there have been multiple requests for action, then this would be considered a complaint, but first time-requests are passed to our Customer Service Centres for appropriate follow-up.

During 2015-16, Customer Relations handled 566 such interactions, the bulk of which consisted of:

- Providing advice and signposting to the correct organisation e.g. District Councils, Academies, Health (116)
- Requests for service which were passed to the relevant Customer Service Centre (106)
- Providing advice and signposting to alternative procedures for redress, for example internal appeals procedures, subject access requests, HR procedures (93)
- Informal resolution by direct contact with departments and within 24 hours (134)
- On-going correspondence around complaints which have already been considered and responded to (58)

Sometimes, these queries are simple matters for the team to resolve. Others, however, can be extremely difficult cases; especially when managing expectations and where nothing more can be achieved through the complaints process.

Wherever possible, the Customer Relations Team aims to resolve customer complaints and concerns without the need to escalate into the formal complaints process. This is good complaints handling practice with complaints being resolved as close to the point of origin as possible. It is encouraging to see that 134 such cases were able to be resolved at this level, an increase of 34% from prior year.

The Customer Relations Manager continues to push this cultural shift which not only enhances the reputation of the Council, but also helps avoid costly escalations both internally and to the Local Government Ombudsman.

2.5 Compliments received

206 compliments were recorded across all services during 2015-16, slightly down on the 235 recorded in 2014-15.

A fresh drive reminding of the importance of forwarding unsolicited compliments was undertaken during quarter 3 which prompted a sizeable increase in the numbers recorded during Q4 (83).

It is always encouraging to see visibility of the good work that is being delivered by the Council and it will remain a topic for discussion with departments to encourage and promote this.

A small selection of the compliments received can be found in Appendix A of this document.

3. Complaints resolved during 2015-16

3.1 Foreword

To counter historical gaps in reporting on information where complaints remain open, a change has been made to the mechanism of reporting. This change is reflected in this annual report and sees the key performance indicators for speed of response, outcomes, causes and identified learning being linked to complaints *resolved* rather than received during the reporting period.

This change will ensure that full data sets are able to be presented, both to departments on a quarterly basis, and at year end. It also closes a gap (particularly relevant to Ombudsman complaints) where outcomes did not appear in annual reports as the complaint remained open at the time of issue.

It follows from all of the above that the figures presented below will not match the data presented in section two of this report which focused on complaints received.

3.2 Responsiveness to complaints

Table 4: Corporate Complaints Performance against timescales

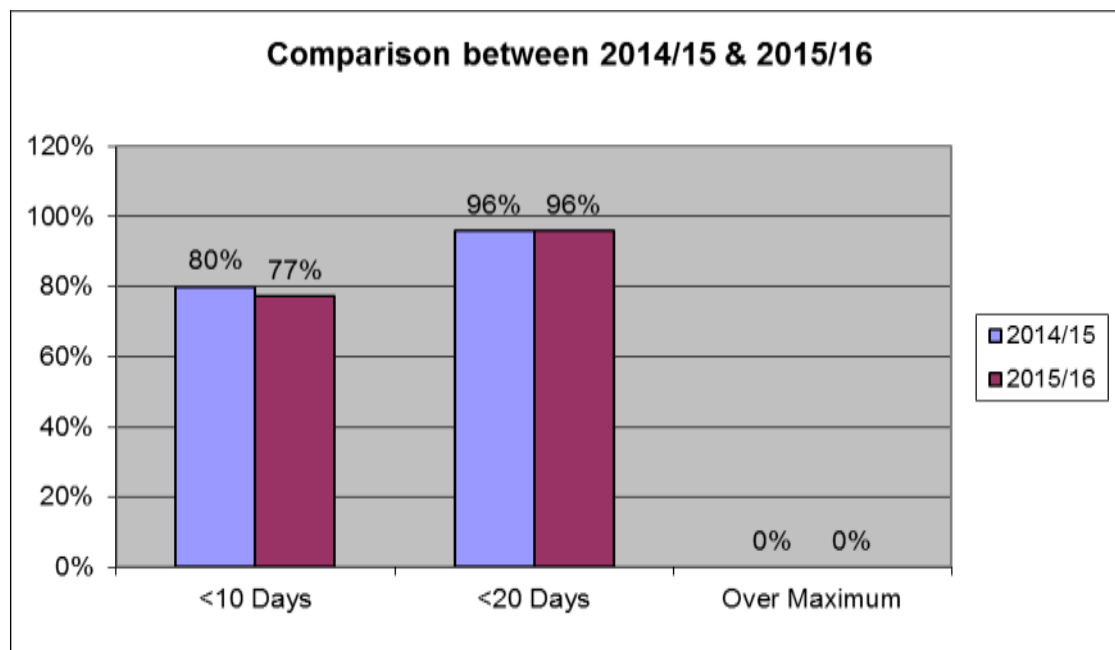


Table 4 above shows a summary of time taken to respond to complaints, providing a comparison between the current reporting year and the previous one.

Whilst the table shows a slight drop in the percentage resolved at 10 working days, these remain very healthy results. For the third successive year, no complaints exceeded the maximum 60 working days. This

continues the strong progress made since 2010-11 when an unacceptable 14 complaints exceeded this mark.

It is instructive to note that the Local Government Ombudsman published statistics in their annual report of 2014-15 suggesting that timeliness of response was a significant national issue and that 62% of individuals that had approached them had been trying to resolve their complaint locally for six months.

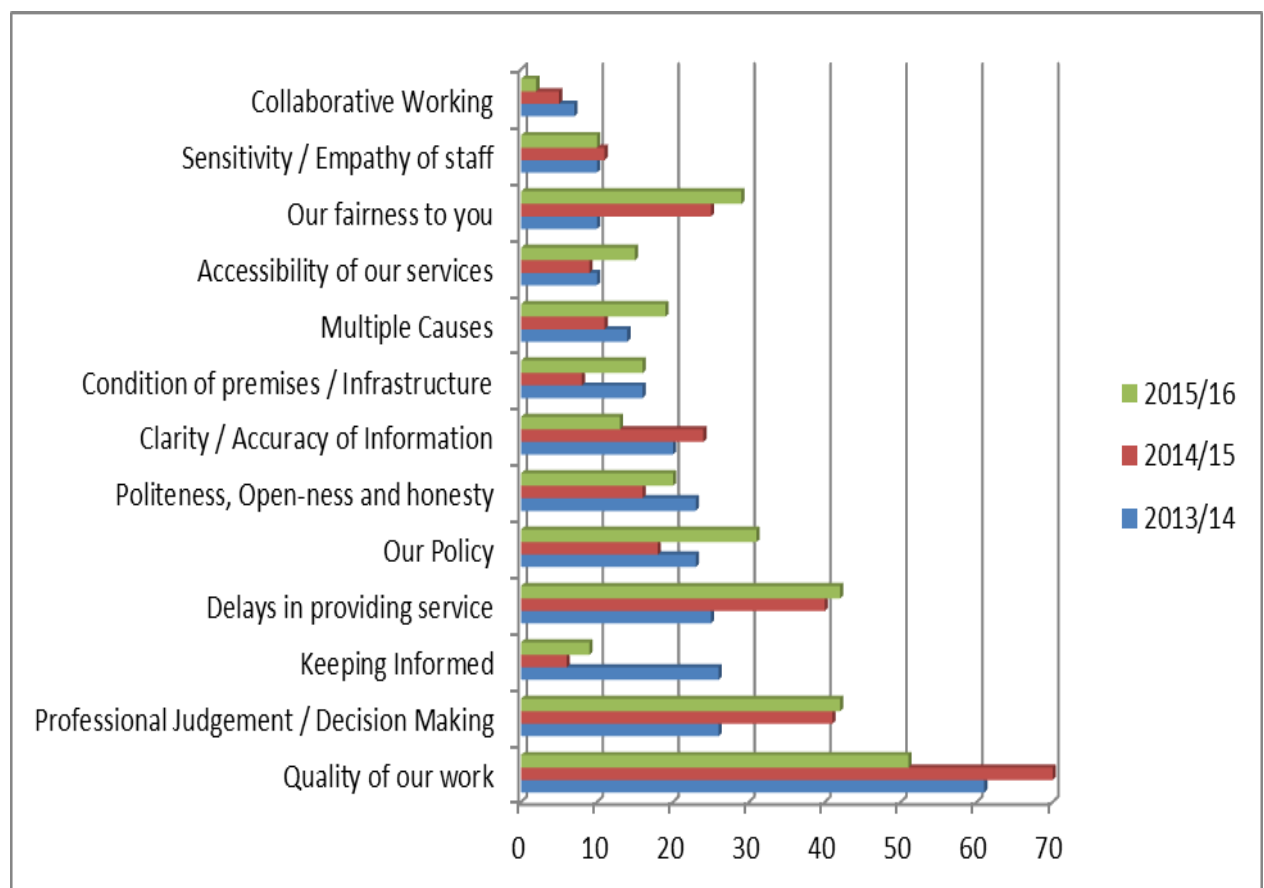
Set against this backdrop and the current financial challenges, our results continue to show the commitment to responding to complaints and continues to reflect the strong collaborative working between the Customer Relations Team and departmental managers.

3.3 Primary cause of complaints

Since the 2013/14 annual report, all complaints have been analysed to try to establish the principal cause. Whilst in some instances, complaints do cover multiple issues and it would not be right to focus on one specific area, this can prove an instructive way of understanding where the organisation needs to target improvement.

The graphic below shows the comparative data for the preceding 3 years

Table 5 – What were complaints about?



Whilst there are a number of areas which appear consistent, there are also some noteworthy differences this year. The key ones are:

➤ Increased numbers citing fairness as an issue

There were a range of topics within this area which included handling of PCN challenges, Blue Badge assessments, Transport Eligibility assessments, Fostering assessments and Sale of Council land. Just two of these complaints were partly upheld

➤ A sustained decrease in complaints about being kept informed

It is pleasing to see last year's significant improvement in this area being largely replicated. The actions taken during 2015 to develop a structured approach to delivering highways feedback have contributed greatly to this.

➤ Rise in complaints which are directly linked to Policy changes

This is an area where the Council expected to see a rise given the number of policy changes over the last 12 months. Common topics included:

- Grass cutting reductions (5)
- School Transport eligibility (4)
- Waste permit system (4)

Whilst technically outside of the corporate complaints remit (if the complaint is solely about a political decision), it was agreed with CMT that this intelligence would be invaluable data to capture especially as service reductions become more prevalent

In determining complaints in this category, investigations focus solely on whether the Council's policy has been correctly followed and it is noteworthy that none of the complaints in this area were upheld.

➤ Reduction in complaints regarding quality of work

This is quite a wide-ranging category and as such will always see high volume, however it is pleasing to see a reduction this year. Notably there has been a reduction in cases of not "doing the basics" well such as poor quality of letters / reports

The full breakdown of complaint causes and their respective outcome appears in table 6 below.

Table 6: Complaint Causes

Cause	Number	% Upheld (Partly or Fully)
Accuracy / Clarity of Information	13	62%
Quality of our Work	51	53%
Collaborative Working	2	50%

Keeping Informed / Updated	9	44%
Multiple	19	42%
Sensitivity / Empathy of staff	10	40%
Delays in providing services	42	38%
Politeness, Openess and Honesty	20	35%
Accessibility of our services	15	33%
Condition of our premises or infrastructure	16	25%
A failure to take action	21	24%
Professional Judgement / Decision making	42	14%
Our Fairness to you	29	10%
Implementing Our Policy	31	0%

3.4 Complaints Outcomes & Resolutions

Table 7: Corporate complaints recorded by outcome.

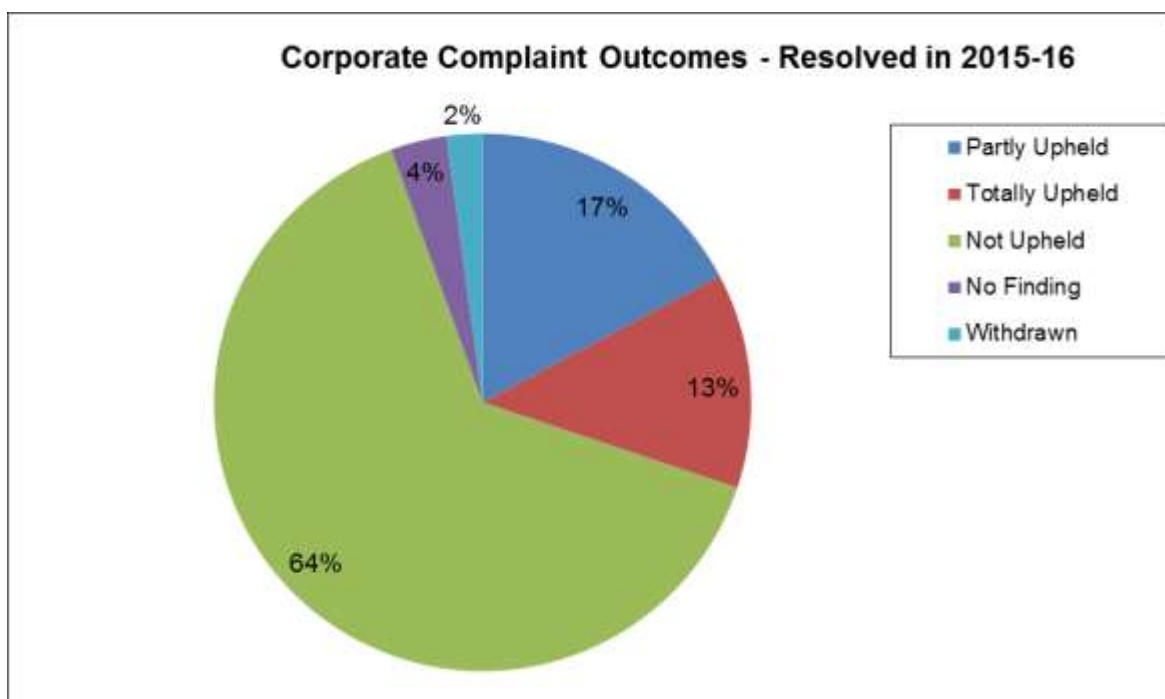


Table 7 above shows that 64% of complaints were not upheld following investigation. Just 13% were fully upheld, whilst a further 17% had some element of the complaint upheld (i.e. partially upheld).

Eleven complaints were resolved with no finding, either where there was insufficient evidence to make a finding (e.g. driving standards), or where it became clear there were two different versions of events with no objective evidence to substantiate either version.

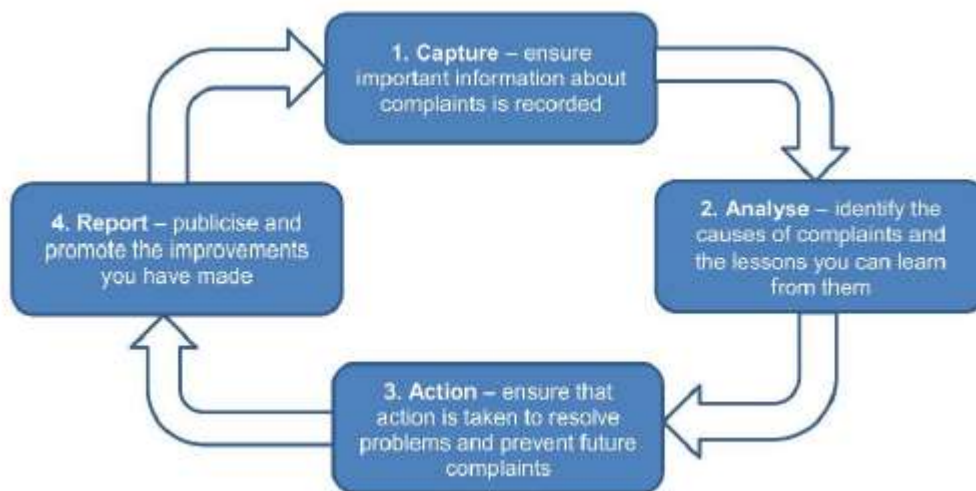
Comparative to last year, there has been a sharp reduction in complaints upheld (51% in 2014-15) This is encouraging to see and suggests that lessons are being learned from the complaints process.

4. Learning from complaints

4.1 Foreword

Complaints are a valuable source of information which can help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements.

Over the last year, significant work has taken place to improve both how the Council records and evaluates such information. Broadly, this can be depicted in the diagram below.



Complaint themes have always been highlighted to departments, but where there has been scope for improvement is in clearly articulating that the learning is directly feeding and driving service planning and improvements. This has been a key part of the Customer Relations Manager's work this year.

There have been a number of positive developments, which include:

- Stakeholder engagement has changed with quarterly attendance at DMT replaced by quarterly meetings with senior leadership teams (SLT) for both E & T and A & C departments. This allows for more direct engagement with Heads of Service over emerging complaint themes.
- New process agreed for trial within A & C to ensure SLT provide a response back to quarterly reports articulating what action is being taken and which is then presented to the Lead Member. This will start from Q1 in 2016-17
- New complaints cross-departmental steering group established which has a standing agenda item on organisational learning.
- Less reliance on completing forms in favour of conversations with responding managers to explore and probe any wider learning.

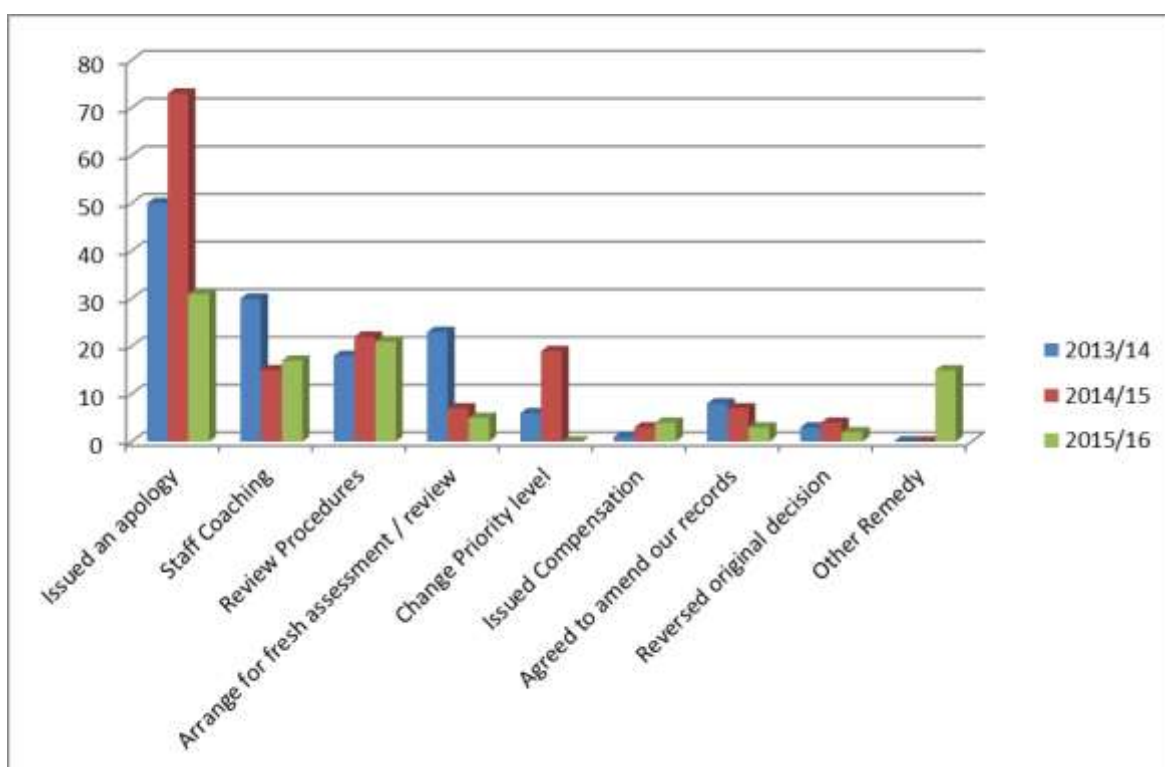
All of the above provides a strong platform to continually develop this vital area and is already delivering some tangible results.

4.2 Remedial actions taken from resolved complaints 2015-16

All of the 98 complaints that were partly or fully upheld have been reviewed by the Customer Relations Team to ascertain what action the relevant department has taken, both in remedying the fault, and any wider learning to avoid such issues occurring in the future.

In keeping with other comparative data in this report, results are shown for the last three years.

Table 8: Summary of actions taken following complaint investigation



In last year's annual report, an action was set to improve the number of instances where the service was able to identify remedial actions over and above an apology for the fault.

To add context to this, during 2014/15, 49% of the 150 complaints upheld had no wider actions committed to, beyond apologising for the fault. This reduced by 17% during 2015-16. This is pleasing to see and suggests that the measures highlighted above are starting to make a difference. There will always be some cases whereby fault can be considered a "one-off" and no process or system flaws are identified, but at 32% of cases, there is still scope to challenge this further with managers.

The most common additional action undertaken this year was again to instigate a review of procedures. Some good examples of the changes made are included below.

You said	We Did
<p>The Council is not responsive enough in processing Access to records requests</p> <p><i>*almost exclusively relates to CFS cases</i></p>	<p>Reviewed the resources allocated to this area.</p> <p>Agreed with CFS department to fund increased resources which would see less need for social worker time in completing these requests and improve handling times.</p>
<p>The amount and quality of grass cutting undertaken by the Council was not at a sufficient level</p> <p>Information was lacking as to when grass could be expected to be cut</p>	<p>Feedback from complaints and other intelligence was considered as part of a season end review. This resulted in an increase from 5 to 6 cuts for the 2016 season.</p> <p>Other process changes to vehicles and processes will mean that we can be more responsive this year rather than sticking simply to the schedule</p> <p>Weekly updates to the grass cutting schedule are now in place (previously this was done monthly)</p>
<p>Customer Service Centre staff do not have well defined escalation protocols and are not equipped to manage complaints effectively.</p>	<p>Improvements have been made including clear escalation routes and parameters for escalation through Team Leaders and Customer Relations Manager</p>
<p>There was extremely poor communication regarding my application for a protective entrance marking</p>	<p>Changes have been made to the application form which makes clear that this can take up to 6 months</p>

5. Local Government Ombudsman Enquiries

It is important to caveat the figures below which are the details the Council holds for LGO enquiries. Official figures are provided in the LGO Annual Letter which is expected mid-July 2016.

5.1 New enquiries made to the Local Government Ombudsman 2015-16

During the year 2015-16, the Local Government Ombudsman made 50 new enquiries of the County Council. This can be further segmented as follows:

Environment & Transport	20
Children's and Family Services (includes social care)	13
Adults and Communities (includes social care)	8
Corporate Resources	5
Chief Executives	4

This is significantly up on the previous year (33), though such a rise should not be seen as a negative as the Council is required to provide and promote details of the Ombudsman. It is more insightful to look at the outcomes of Ombudsman investigations and in particular any findings of maladministration.

5.2 Decisions made by the Local Government Ombudsman 2015-16

The LGO made Final Decisions on 53 cases during the year with outcomes recorded as:

- Five identified as premature and referred back to the Council for further consideration under the appropriate complaints procedure
- Eight identified as outside of the Ombudsman's remit and discontinued on this basis
- Twenty-four were Closed after initial enquiries (the Assessment stage) with no further action. Typically this is where the LGO feel they are unlikely to find any fault or are satisfied with the Council's response.
- Nine were Closed after detailed investigation and with no maladministration found
- Two cases of maladministration but with no injustice arising
- Five cases of maladministration and injustice

Brief details of the cases citing maladministration (with injustice) and the settlements agreed appear below

Case 1 Adult Social Care:

Mrs A complained about care the Council commissioned for her father. The LGO found fault in the provider's failure to report Mr T's deteriorating condition such that he did not receive an appropriate standard of care for a period of some 10 days. The Ombudsman was also critical of the time the Council took to resolve the complaint.

The LGO recommended a payment of £750 along with an apology for the failings identified. The Council agreed to this.

Case 2 School Admissions:

The Council's delayed school entry panel did not have the full view of its educational psychologist when refusing a request to delay school entry.

The Council agreed to reconvene a panel with the benefit of the EP's full view

Case 3 Adults Safeguarding:

The Council was at fault for errors in a safeguarding investigation. In particular it did not investigate allegations of neglect quickly or robustly enough.

The Council accepted there were faults and a comprehensive action plan was created. A remedy payment of £500 was also agreed

Case 4 Registrars:

There was fault in the Registrars action which contributed to the complainants' wedding ceremony being delayed and caused them avoidable distress.

Fault had been accepted in the Council's response to the corporate complaint and a remedy of £970 had been offered. This was rejected by the complainants who wished to pursue their complaint with the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman concluded that the remedy proposed by the Council was appropriate and fair.

Case 5 Fostering:

There was fault in how the Council assessed Ms X to be a foster carer for the Council. It failed to carry out a fair evidence based assessment before deciding not to support her approval. There were also issues in responding to her complaint.

The Council agreed to apologise, pay £300 and improve record-keeping and other procedures.

The continued relatively low levels of mal-administration findings are noteworthy at a time when the Ombudsman has published a number of press releases raising concerns with strain on local government complaints handling. It also validates that for the most part the Council promptly acts to put right any faults.

6. Monitoring the Complaints and Compliments Processes

The Customer Relations Team continues to support departments to both manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered by the team are:

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Production of Performance Reports
3. Liaison with Local Government Ombudsman
4. Quality Assurance of complaint responses
5. Complaint handling training for managers
6. Acting as a critical friend to challenge service practice
7. Support with persistent and unreasonable complainants

During this reporting period, further complaints training has been facilitated for both children's and adult social care managers. This continues to be well received and contributes to the positive cultural improvements.

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to managers in drafting comprehensive responses to complaint investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response and that due process is followed.

Quarterly complaints reports are produced and presented to Departmental Management Teams or Senior Leadership Teams as appropriate. The Customer Relations Manager also regularly meets quarterly with each department's Intelligent Client to talk through complaints matters.

The Customer Relations Manager is the Chair of the Eastern Region complaints managers group which represents the interests of some 15 local authorities complaints professionals and ensures knowledge of the latest policy developments across all complaint types.

7. Customer Relations Team - Work Priorities for 2016-17

During 2016/17, the Customer Relations team will focus on a number of key priorities, as follows:

- Building resilience within the complaints function to continue to absorb expected year on year increases.
- Developing a suite of model response templates to assist managers in responding to common complaint themes.
- Build on the progress made this year in identifying learning from complaints and in particular linking this back into departmental service planning.
- Continuing to promote complaints training and explore opportunities to further assist managers with effectively responding to complaints

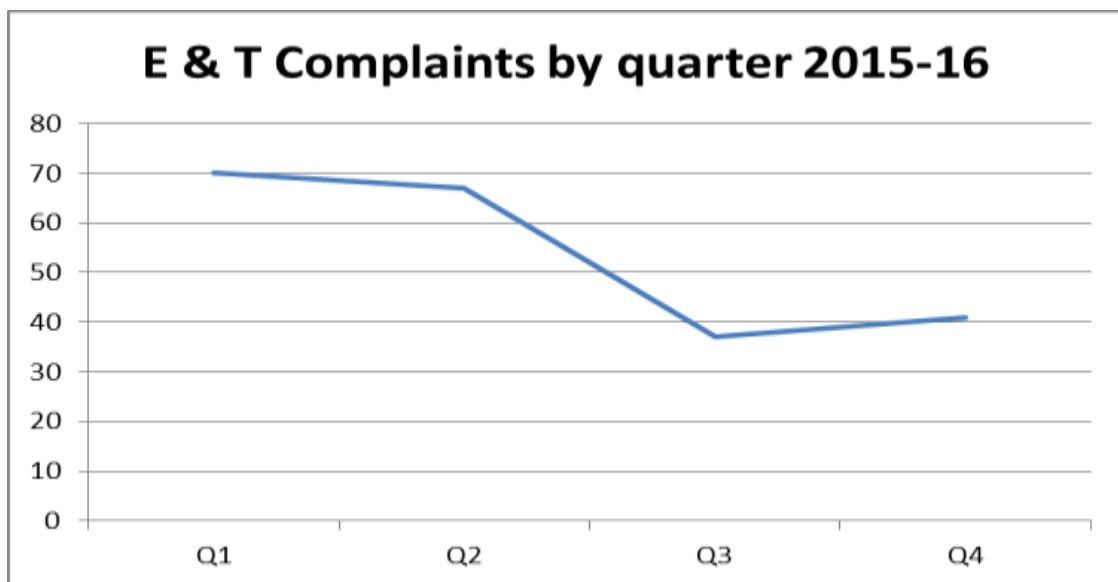
- Maintaining the Council's strong track record of timely complaint responses.

8. Key Learning Points

The Customer Relations Team would specifically highlight two general themes which have emerged from this year's annual report process -

- The importance of providing timely feedback

The consolidation and expansion of the Highways feedback role this year has been hugely positive. Whilst over the year, complaints about E & T services increased, it is instructive to note the drop-off in final two quarters as feedback and other expectation management processes became more embedded in the CSC.



- The importance of recording information.

This is the area that the Council continues to be most likely to receive criticism by the Ombudsman. The importance of clear concise case-noting when key decisions are made both protects the Council and enables swifter resolution of complaints which do arise.

Whilst outside the scope of this annual report, this is a theme of particular relevance within adult social care where a number of "debts" have been waived this year due to the lack of clear evidence to substantiate that families have been advised that charges would apply.

9. Concluding Comments

It is likely that complaints volumes will continue to rise. With this in mind it is vital that managers are equipped and committed to responding effectively and that the organisation is able to draw the learning for future cases.

This annual report shows clear evidence that in the vast majority of cases, the Council manages complaints well and is committed to putting right anything that has gone wrong.

It is noteworthy that this year has seen a significant reduction in the number of complaints where fault was found as well as an improvement in the number of identified process improvements. Both of these were actions flagged in last year's report.

The Customer Relations Team continues to receive strong support and commitment from Service Managers and Heads of Service, evidenced again by the response timescales achieved across all services despite the scale of organisational change being seen across departments.

APPENDIX A – Sample of compliments received

- I just wanted to say thanks very much for the support and Guidance you're giving S. He's enjoying the work placement and we feel sure he's gaining a great deal from it – **Get Set Programme**
- SEN Transport route 30...I would like to thank Mary and Donna on route number 30 for doing a fantastic job day in and day out. They really do make a difference, and our daughter is always happy to see the bus at 7.15 each weekday....Always positive, and great with our daughter, a credit to LCC – **Transport Operations**
- Can I say that in a world where few people have the time and inclination to give help and advice how good it was to speak to your Lorraine Hawkins in the above Dept this morning. She took the time to explain the situation and relevant details to me in such a clear way – **Highways Records**
- Thank you for addressing my concerns so quickly. I wasn't expecting such a prompt response, to be honest. I look forward to seeing the surface made safe and, hopefully, a longer term repair job being done. Great standard of service from the council – **Highways Operations**
- Mrs F phoned to say thanks for supporting her in her claim with CFS. She would not have got anywhere on her own and believes we achieved a great outcome on her behalf – **Customer Relations**
- Thanks to the Blue Badge team....you all do an excellent task helping the disabled....thanks also for your courtesy and excellent telephone manners which I find most refreshing. – **Customer Service Centre (E&T)**
- Called to advise that he wanted to personally thank Yvette Taylor for the support given in referring his father for the assessment of the front access. He has stressed that this referral has helped his father's life a lot and wanted to let us know. – **Customer Service Centre (A&C)**
- I just wanted you to know how well Michelle presented the Governor training session at the Ivanhoe College yesterday evening. She was very confident and clearly knew her subject. We were amazed when she said that this was her first training session– **Governor Support Services**
- I just wanted to take a bit of time to pass on my thanks to you and the AO team. We have had probably more than our fair share of involvement with your service and we have received a consistently high quality of support from everyone. Both in-school support, support for staff and some support for families struggling to manage their children has been incredibly valuable – **Autism Outreach Services**
- Thank you for being our support worker (Louise Reilly) and helping us and supporting us with everything – **Supporting Leicestershire Families**

- For several months we have had more than one client living here as a Community Client. Their needs are a little complex at times and there are often regular changes to their payments. The contact between Bridge St and your staff has been very good in that we receive responses quickly and regularly and questions and queries are answered too about what can happen when trying to find new ways to support clients with challenging financial situations. A clear improvement on situation 12 months ago –
Community Care Finance
- We absolutely love this library. The staff are so friendly and really helpful, my children really enjoy coming to this library, whether to read or use the computer and hire DVDs out. It's an amazing facility to Shepshed -
Libraries

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