



Complaints



Corporate Complaints & Compliments Annual Report 2016 - 2017

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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 2016 to 31st March 2017.
- 1.2 To outline the 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 received in 2016-17

2.1 The work of the Complaints 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 Complaints 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 but are managed by the Complaints Team and are subject to separate reports to the relevant directorate and scrutiny groups.

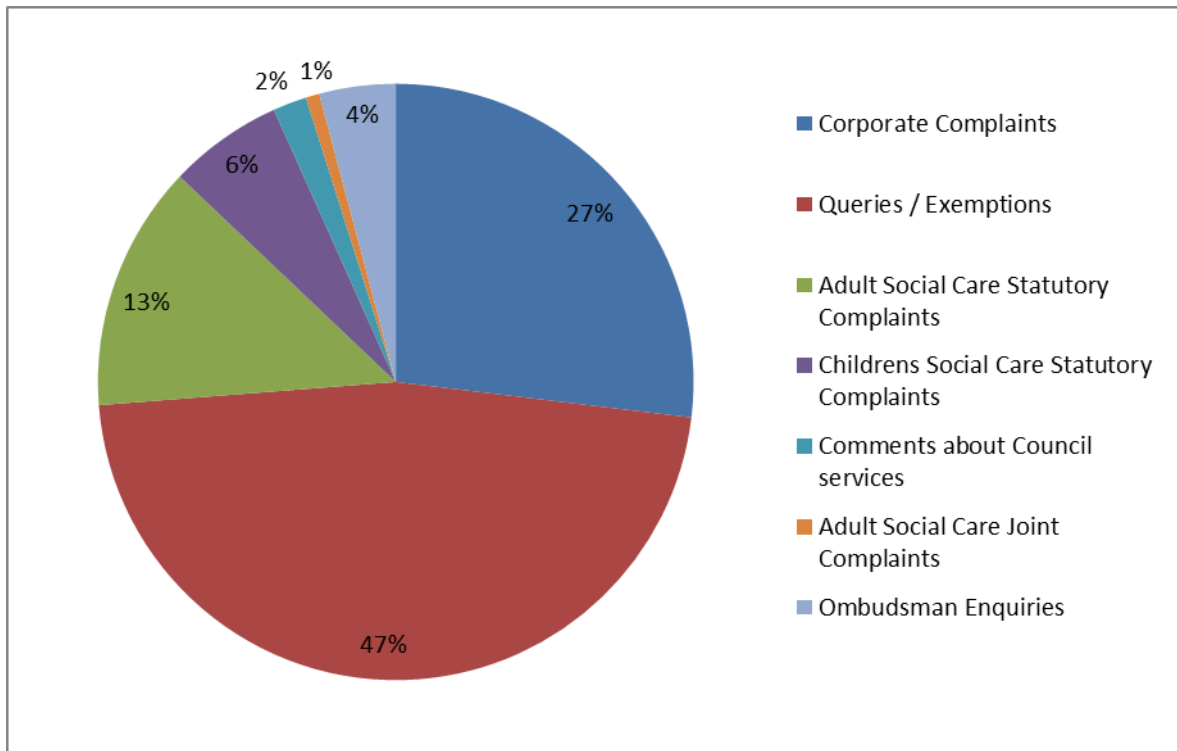
In addition, the team deals with a wide range of interactions with customers that do not go on to become formal complaints. These include general queries, as well as matters which are exempt from consideration under our complaints policies. Further detail is provided in Section 2.4.

Whilst many of the queries are quickly resolved, those where exemptions from the complaints procedure apply can often generate significant correspondence and phone calls.

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 Complaints Manager acts as the nominated Link Officer and handles all correspondence between the Council and the Ombudsman.

In total, the Complaints Team dealt with 1286 enquiries during 2016/2017, as depicted in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1: Breakdown of cases handled by Complaints team

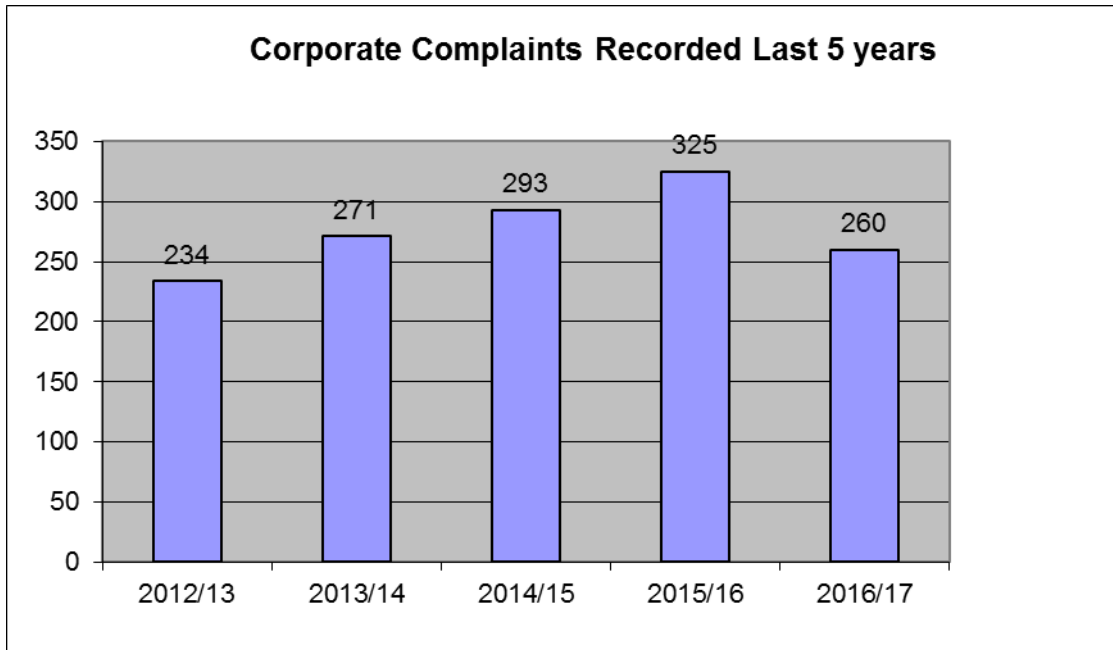


This represents an overall decrease of 9% on prior year (1414)

The Complaints Team itself remains a small operation of two fte comprising the Complaints Manager and an Administrative Officer. Extra administrative capacity is provided by the wider Business Services team when required.

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 decreased in the last year by 20%. This is the first decrease within the last 5 years.

Table 3: Corporate Complaints by Department

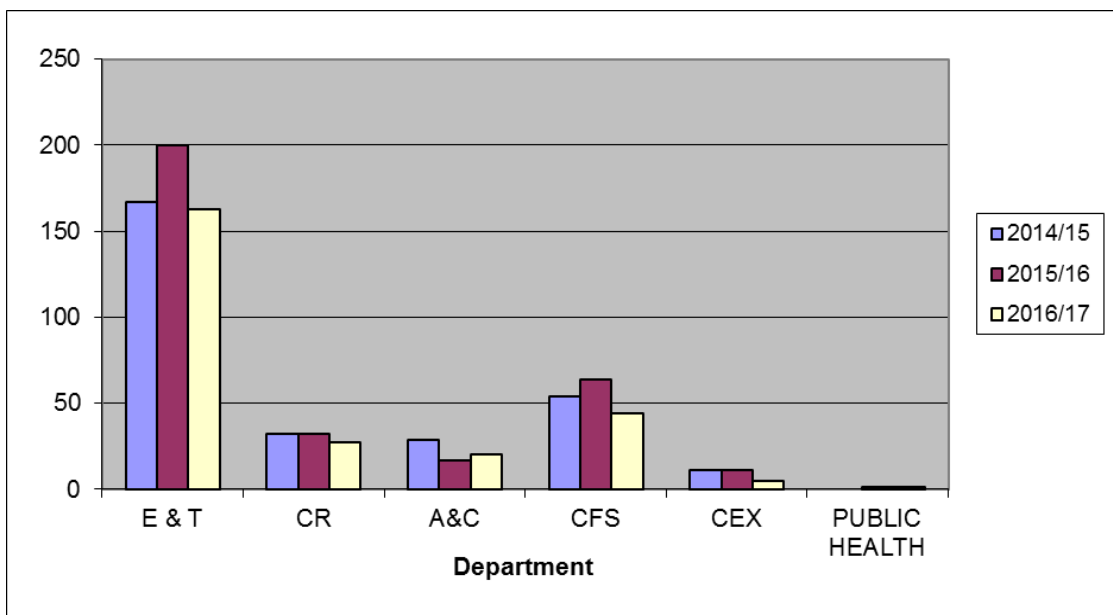


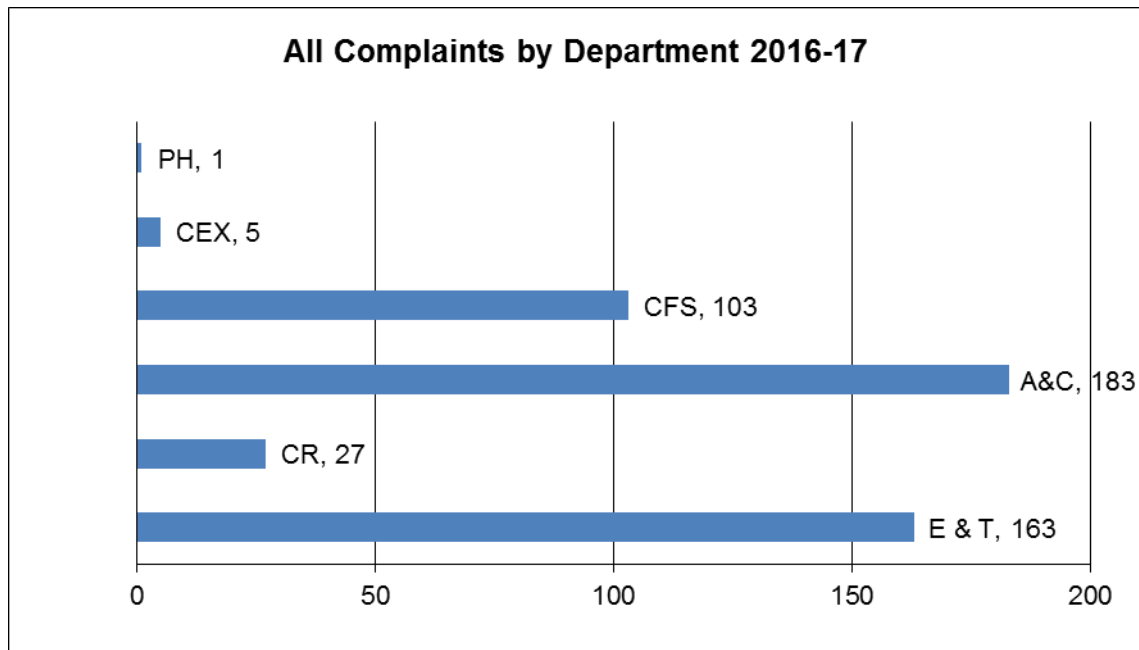
Table 3 shows the departmental breakdown of all corporate complaints received across the last 3 years.

As mentioned already, it is important to note that for both Children and Families (CFS) and Adults and Communities (A & C), the majority 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 2016-17, the most common areas were all within the Environment & Transport section, with the top five subjects recorded as follows. For comparative purposes, 2015-16 figures are also included

Service	2016 / 17	2015 / 16
Traffic & Safety concerns ¹	18	36
Footway & Carriageway condition	16	13
Network Management (Utility Companies)	16	9
Recycling & Household Waste sites	16	13
Grass Cutting	13	24

It is pleasing to see the reduction by 50% of complaints relating to Traffic and Safety matters. Further data analysis suggests this is primarily down to improved management of expectations, a theme highlighted in last year's annual report.

Grass-cutting complaints were also at the lowest level for the last 5 years. This reflects improved operational performance, the addition of an extra cut as well as improved information available to the Customer Service Centre. Complaints insight clearly shows that complaints can often be resolved at an early stage through provision of accurate and up to date information.

The biggest change has been the increased volume of complaints about utility companies working on Leicestershire Highways. A significant factor in this has been the activity of Virgin Media across the County.

Recycling and Household Waste complaints have also seen a slight increase this year. This was expected due to the policy changes and implementation of charges. The increase has not however been as significant as anticipated.

2.4 Queries and other contacts received

As well as managing formal complaints, the Complaints Team is also 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.

A request for service is not a complaint (e.g. a request for service could be a request to repair an unlit lamp post). A complaint would only arise should the request for service not be properly dealt with. The Complaints Team do however regularly take calls of this nature and liaise with the department to ensure they are responded to and to avoid any public perception of lack of ownership.

During 2016-17, the Complaints Team handled 535 miscellaneous interactions, consisting primarily of:

¹ This includes traffic calming requests, parking concerns, safe walking and cycling routes and requests for crossing points

- Providing advice and signposting to the correct organisation e.g. District Councils, Academies, Health (82).
- Requests for service which were passed to the relevant Customer Service Centre or other access point (97)
- Providing advice and signposting to alternative procedures for redress, for example internal appeals procedures, subject access requests, HR procedures (104)
- Informal resolution by direct contact with departments within 24 hours (112)
- On-going correspondence around complaints which have already been considered and responded to (67)

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

During 2016-17, the complaints team received a significantly higher number of first time requests for Highways services. From feedback received it was established these were linked to website visits. Some changes have now been made to better promote the Customer Service Centre, including the new online reporting tool.

Wherever possible, the Complaints 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 112 such cases were able to be resolved at this stage.

All of the above enhances the reputation of the Council, but also helps avoid costly escalations both internally and to the Local Government Ombudsman.

2.5 Compliments received

253 compliments were recorded across all services during 2016-17, a healthy increase on the 206 recorded in 2015-16.

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 about corporate services can be found in Appendix A of this document.

3. Complaints resolved during 2016-17

3.1 Foreword

The key performance indicators for speed of response, outcomes, causes and identified learning are linked to complaints that have been *resolved* within any given reporting period rather than received.

This is important as it ensures that full data sets are able to be presented, both to departments on a quarterly basis, and at year end. It also closes a historical gap (particularly relevant to Ombudsman complaints) where outcomes might not appear in annual reports as the complaint remained open at the time of production.

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

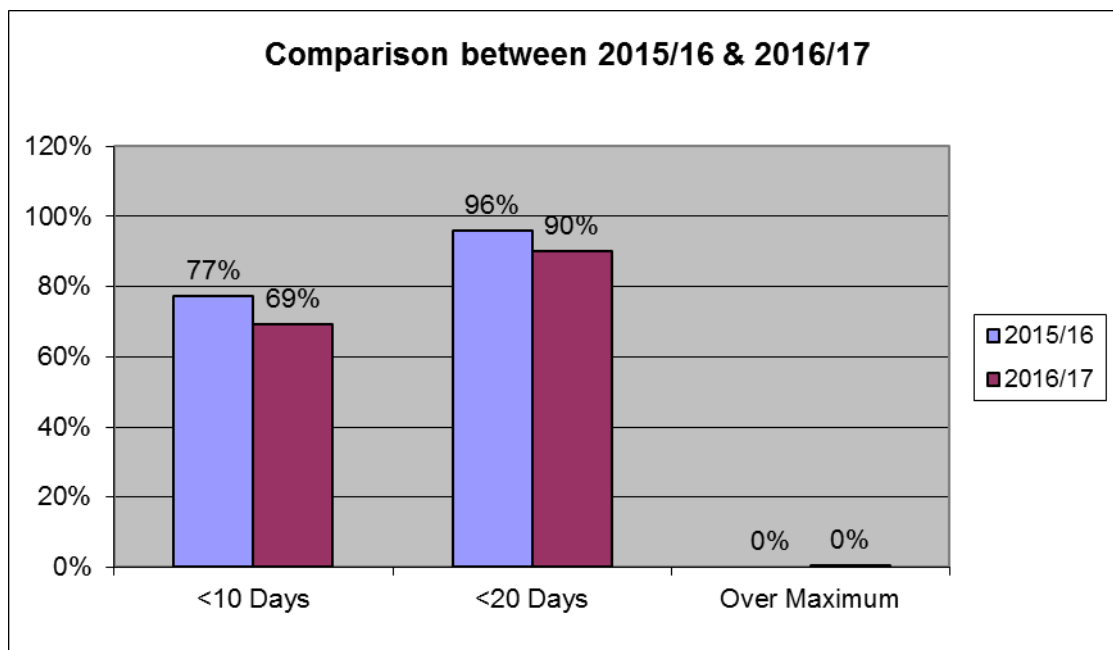


Table 4 above shows a summary of time taken to respond to complaints, providing a comparison between the current reporting year and the previous one.

The table above shows a drop in performance. This was impacted predominantly during Quarter 3 where response timescales dropped to 55%. Discussions took place with senior leadership teams to emphasise the importance of timely resolution and quarter 4 performance showed a clear improvement.

There were 3 complaints which were not resolved within 65 working days. Of these 2 were because of the need to interview a member of staff who was on long term sickness whilst the other was protracted whilst the department were taking legal advice.

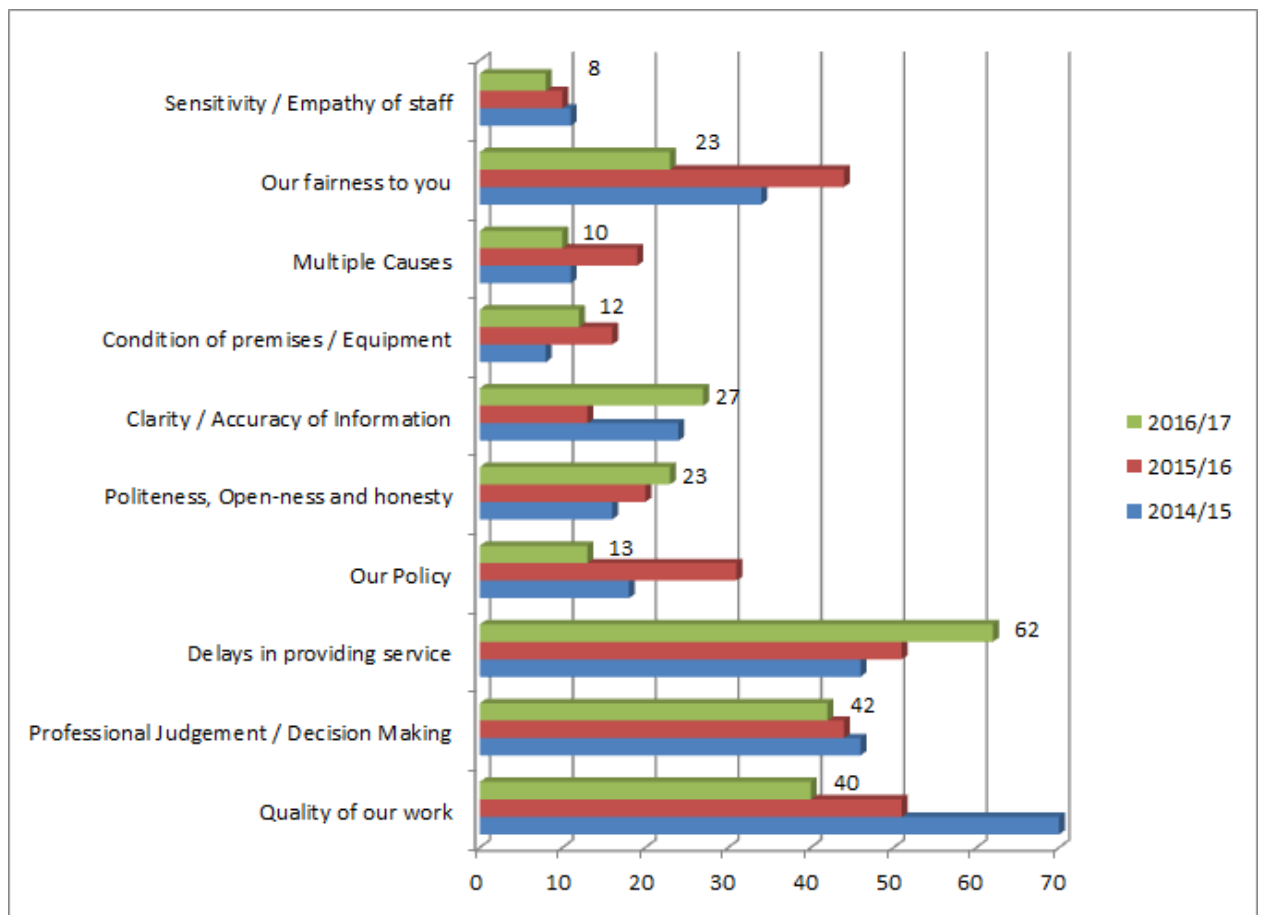
On the whole, these remain healthy results and meet our internal targets of 60% and 90% respectively.

3.3 Primary cause of complaints

All complaints are analysed by the Complaints Team 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?



The key changes this year are:

- Increased numbers citing Delay as the primary factor

There were a range of topics within this area but the top 3 areas recorded were as follows:

Service	Fault Found	No Finding	Not Upheld	Grand Total
E&T - Gully Emptying/Drainage	7	1	4	12
E&T - Grass & Hedge Cutting (inc weed spraying)	2		5	7
E&T - Carriageway & Footway condition	4		1	5

As identified in Section 2.3, there have been some areas where we have significantly improved our response times to enquiries, however there is clearly more still to be done to both improve our responsiveness and / or expectation management.

- A decrease in complaints about quality of work

This continues the improvements seen in 2015/16 about “doing the basics” well. In particular there are significantly less reports of calls not being returned.

- Rise in complaints citing quality of information

This is a mixture of information provided on our website (for example opening times of waste sites) and other bespoke correspondence which has either been unclear or inaccurate.

- Reduction in complaints regarding policy changes

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 or applied.

Complaints were predominantly received around Waste Charges, School Transport Policy changes and the switch to LED lighting

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

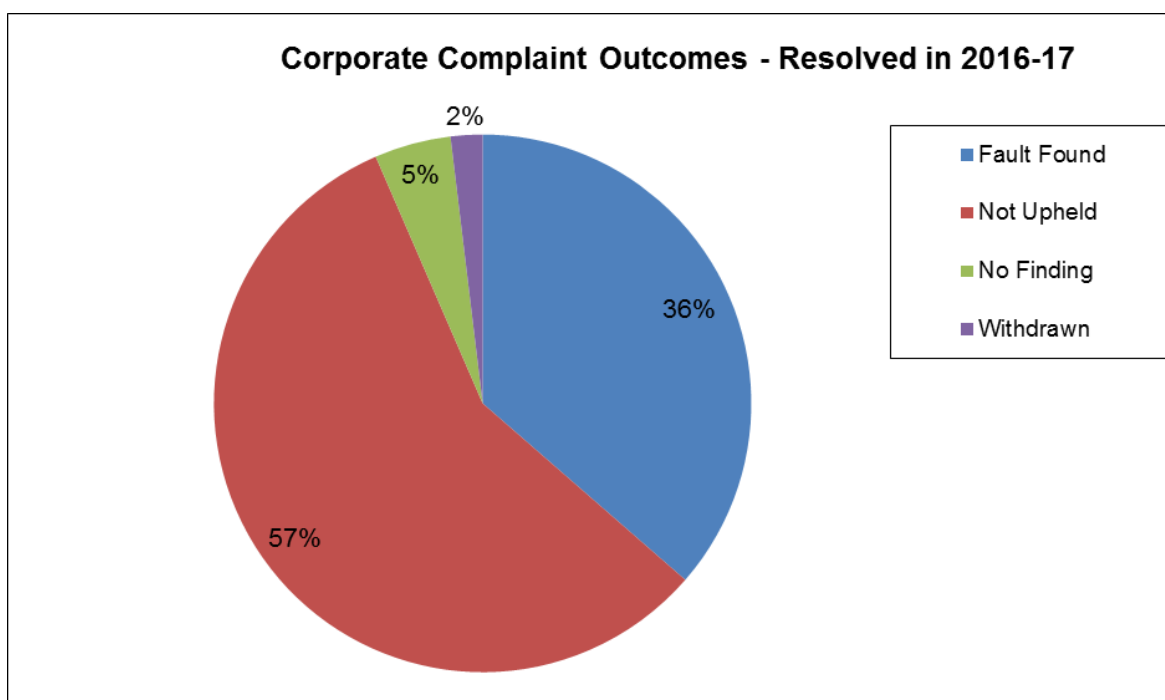
Table 6: Complaint Causes

Cause	Number	% Fault Found
Accuracy / Clarity of Information	27	44%
Quality of our Work	40	30%
Delays in providing services	63	51%

Condition of our premises or infrastructure	12	25%
Our Policy	13	0%
Sensitivity / Empathy of staff	8	50%
Politeness, Openess and Honesty	23	48%
Professional Judgement / Decision making	42	21%
Our Fairness to you	23	26%
Multiple	10	60%

3.4 Complaints Outcomes & Resolutions

Table 7: Corporate complaints recorded by outcome.



In order to align with Local Ombudsman data classification and simplify our own reporting, the Council no longer differentiates between whether a complaint was partly or fully upheld. Instead, the Complaints team will assess all complaints responded to and classify as either “Fault Found” or “Not Upheld”

Table 7 above shows that 57% of complaints were not upheld following investigation, with some fault being found in 36% of complaints. This is a slight increase on the previous year (30%)

Eleven complaints were resolved with no finding. This is 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.

4. Complaints resolved during 2016-17

4.1 Foreword

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

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints received where complaints are upheld (and in many cases where the complaint was not upheld but the Authority recognises that improvements to services can be made).

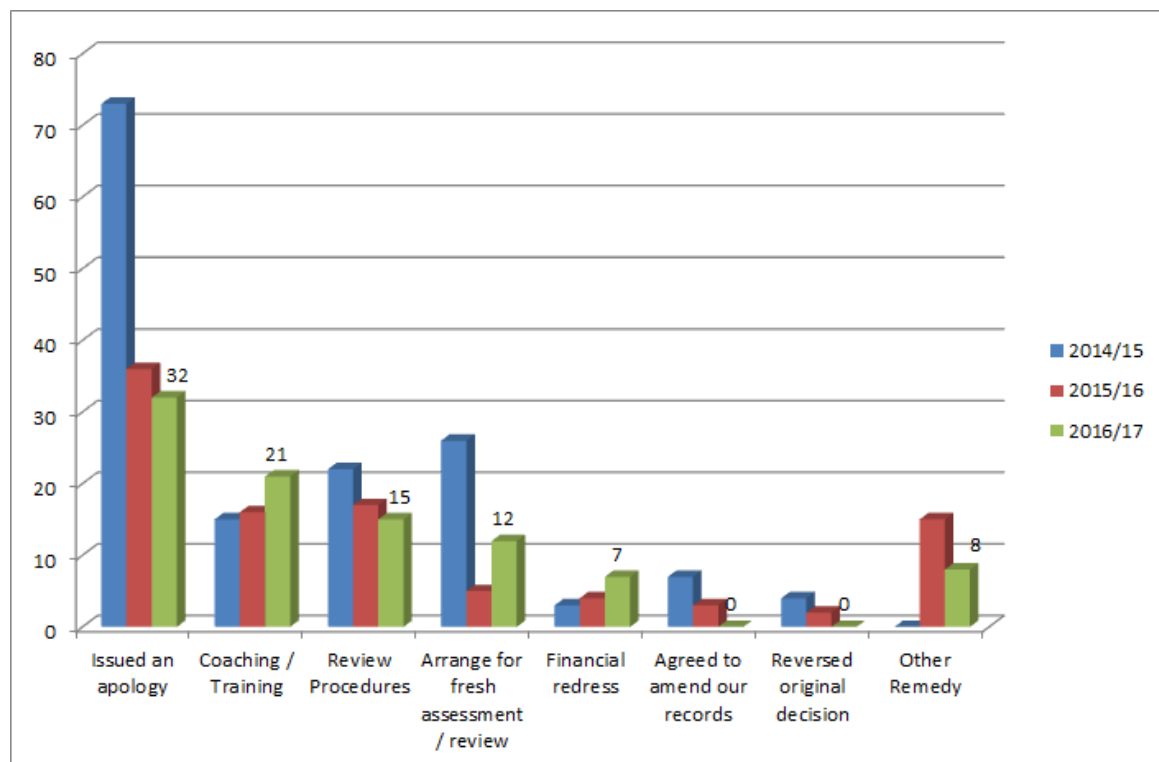
Occasionally during the course of an investigation issues will be identified that need to be addressed over and above the original complaint. The Complaints Team will always try to look at the “bigger picture” to ensure that residents receive the best possible service from the Council

4.2 Remedial actions taken from resolved complaints 2016-17

All of the 95 complaints where fault has been found have been reviewed by the Complaints 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



A key element of an effective complaints procedure is being able to get to the root cause of why faults are happening and address these through process change or targeted coaching.

There will always be some cases whereby fault can be considered a “one-off” and no process or system flaws are identified, but it is pleasing to see that the percentage of complaints where Managers identified a clear issue to address rose this year to 38% (34%). This marks the positive progress made over the last 3 years in identifying issues.

A sample of positive improvements the Council has made are set out below.

You said	We Have
It is not clear enough that you restrict entry to Waste sites 5 minutes before the closing time	Reviewed our web content and signage at the sites. Ensured that Customer Service Centre mention this when issuing or discussing waste permits
It takes too long to action drainage work	Highlighted the concerns with Environment & Transport Senior Leadership Team and a programme of work specifically on this area has been instigated
Delayed Entry Panel hearings are not considered promptly enough	We now ensure all appeals lodged before the prescribed deadline are heard before National Offer day
There is a disconnect between your debts team and the adult social care finance team	Commissioned an end to end review of the finance pathway to improve our processes
Your terms and conditions when marketing library events are not clear enough	Reviewed the wording on the back of this complaint and now have clearer terms and conditions
Responses being sent by First Response and generic and do not cover the specific issues I raised	Accepted that we need to create additional letter templates
It is not clear that your SEN team are going to contact Schools without first gaining parent's consent	Revised the wording on parental preference form to make more explicit why we need to contact other schools

You failed to acknowledge my request for traffic calming consideration	Identified this was an old web-form. This has now been routed into the main Customer Service entry point
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4.3 Lessons learned – Improving service delivery

Complaint themes have always been discussed with departments, but this year there has been a specific focus in improving how we demonstrate that learning is directly feeding and driving service planning and improvements.

The main development over the last 12 months has been fully embedding a new process within A&C which involves Senior Leadership Team providing their response to the themes raised within each quarter's complaints report. Whilst predominantly this focuses on social care issues, the model is now being rolled out across CFS and E&T departments.

This model allows the Complaints Manager to better evidence systemic improvements that have been made to address specific themes highlighted and provide some assurance that improvements are being actively implemented.

5. Complaints resolved during 2016-17

5.1 Foreword

Should a complainant remain dissatisfied following internal consideration of their complaint, they can take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman to seek independent investigation.

The Ombudsman will usually check with the Authority whether or not the complaint has exhausted the Local Authority's complaints procedure. Where this has not been done, the Ombudsman will usually refer the complaint back to the Authority, to give us an opportunity to attempt to resolve the complainant's concerns through our internal complaints processes first.

The Ombudsman publishes some headline information on each Council's performance every year, although at time of writing this report this information has not been released. The official data is expected late July 2017

It is important therefore to note that the figures below are the details the Council holds for LGO enquiries.

5.2 New enquiries made to the Local Government Ombudsman 2016-17

During the year 2016-17, the Local Government Ombudsman made 44 new enquiries of the County Council. This can be further segmented as follows:

Department	2016/17	2015/16
Environment and Transport	13	20
Children and Family Services (includes social care)	13	13
Adults and Communities (includes social care)	14	8
Corporate Resources	2	5
Chief Executives	2	4

This is a slight reduction on the previous year (50)

5.3 Decisions made by the Local Government Ombudsman 2016-17

The LGO made Final Decisions on 47 cases during the year with outcomes recorded as:

- Two identified as premature and referred back to the Council for further consideration under the appropriate complaints procedure.
- Seven identified as outside of the Ombudsman's remit and discontinued on this basis

- Fourteen 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.
- Seven were closed after detailed investigation and with no maladministration found
- Four cases of maladministration but with no injustice arising (or fault had already been remedied appropriately)
- Twelve cases of maladministration and injustice
- One case was withdrawn at complainant's request

Brief details of the cases (excluding statutory social care complaints) citing maladministration and the settlements agreed appear below

Case 1 - Corporate Resources:

Mr A complained about the Council's failure to ensure the operator of a local football ground applied and maintained an appropriate safety certificate. The LGO found fault in that the Council was unable to provide evidence of their inspection records.

The LGO recommended that steps be taken to undertake a fresh inspection and to take steps to improve their record-keeping. The Council agreed to this.

Case 2 - Environment and Transport:

Mrs B complained that the Council failed to advise of known re-surfacing works when offering a quote for a dropped kerb. A discounted price was offered to other residents.

The Council made an offer to re-imburse Mrs B the difference between the costs incurred and those she would have paid if the work had been done at the time of the re-surfacing scheme (£425). This was accepted by the Ombudsman

Cases 3 & 4 - Children and Family Services:

Two parents complained that the Council's Delayed Entry Panel hearings were unnecessarily delayed and when convened that there were flaws in the process.

The Council was at fault for not following the Admissions Code of Practice and for delaying setting these panels up.

The Council agreed to make remedy payments to each parent of £300, undertake a review of our policy and procedures and offer fresh panel hearings.

The remaining 12 cases where fault was found relate to either Adults or Childrens Social Care and details will appear within the respective statutory reports.

6. Oversight and support provided by Complaints service

The Complaints 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

The Complaints Manager has offered assistance in a number of complex cases to utilise the Complaints Team as a single point of contact within the Authority. This has helped manage protracted disputes and ensure consistent responses are issued.

In line with the Council's Unreasonable Complainants Policy, the Complaints Manager has also on rare occasions written to individuals seeking to restrict contact with the organisation due to the frequency of contact and the impact this has on officer time. Three such protocols have been issued in the last 12 months.

During this reporting period, complaints training has been delivered by the complaints manager for new children's and adult social care managers. This continues to be well received and contributes to the positive cultural improvements. A bespoke workshop for Highways managers was also delivered during the year focused on how complaints are triaged and assessed.

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 Complaints Manager also regularly meets quarterly with each department's Intelligent Client to talk through complaints matters.

The Complaints Manager is the Chair of the Eastern Region complaints managers group which represents the interests of some 18 local authority complaints professionals and ensures knowledge of the latest policy developments across all complaint types. This group allows for benchmarking and the sharing of good practice in complaints resolution.

7. Complaints service priorities for 2017-18

During 2017/18, the Complaints team will focus on a number of key priorities, as follows:

- Improving the resource library for Managers responding to complaints and encourage more self-help.
- Continue the roll-out of the learning pilot (Section 4.3) to improve how we use complaints learning to improve service delivery.
- Continue to deliver targeted complaints training and explore opportunities to further assist managers with effectively responding to complaints
- Explore the delivery of complaints training for other organisations (e.g. Schools)
- Maintain and further improve the Council's strong track record of timely complaint responses.

8. Concluding Comments

This has been the first year that corporate complaints volumes have reduced since the complaints function was centralised.

The key reason for this reduction is the better up-front management of initial requests, particularly for high volume areas.

There have been notable successes in reducing complaints for Grass Cutting, School Transport, School Admissions and other such areas by improving the ability of the primary access points to resolve queries in a timely fashion.

Notwithstanding this, there remain clear opportunities to improve other high volume highways areas. The Complaints Manager will continue to work with senior leadership teams to effectively utilise complaints intelligence to support positive improvements to service delivery.

APPENDIX A – Sample of compliments received

- John has been a very big help and friend to us both sorting things out and getting things moving. He is the best thing we have had– **Public Health**
- Please thank all the members of the CSC team, for locating 2 missing VA applications, for guiding me through the process and for not alienating me for being dyslexic. LCC is the best authority I have come across in my life and would like the staff to be praised for their every effort in resolving this matter for me. Everything you are doing is perfect keep up the good work – **Customer Services (Highways)**
- Rang Highways to see if they could assist with a new LED lamp stopping daughter sleeping...very next night lamp was switched off at midnight as well as being dimmed...cannot tell you how pleased we are with this prompt and happy outcome – **Streetlighting**
- I just wanted to thank you for the quick and efficient manner you sorted the issue of the boundary fence. Today the fence panels were replaced by Mick and his team and I really have to commend them for the way they worked on a difficult fence and how they cleaned up the area after they had finished. You and your staff are a credit to the council – **Operational Property (Hard FM)**
- Shobha was absolutely fantastic, nothing was too much trouble to her. She was very pleasant and professional in all aspects of my enquiry regarding my Blue Badge and bus pass renewal – **Main Reception**
- I have seen the fantastic development of the Governors' Support Service at County Hall over many years , from nothing to its present highly valued facility, even in times of financial restraints. You and your colleagues are much appreciated – **Governor Development Service**
- Standard of grass cutting in Loughborough has been much improved this year. There have been no complaints at all in the Loughborough Echo this season..Communication with LCC has really helped and they hope the good relationships continue next season...Presence of LCC staff at meetings is much appreciated and a special thank you to Dave for attending the Working Groups. – **Highways**
- I am writing to thank the Local Authority for the new build which we received at the official handover ...The whole process has been made lighter by the expertise and good relationship between the architect, Sanjeev and the site manager. They have always explained what is going on; and always informed us of progress and set- backs – **Strategic Property**
- I can't thank you (Imogen) enough for your effort this morning on sorting out my child's place at sketchley hill. You in my mind went above and beyond the call off duty to get this sorted for me- **School Admissions**

- I wanted to share with you my very wonderful experiences with Anne and Steve of the Educational Psychology Services. I cannot thank them enough ,their support and advice in a very turbulent time has been outstanding – **Educational Psychology**
- I am contacting you to express my gratitude for the service we have recently received from the Autism Outreach (AO) team in Leicestershire. During a very difficult time for our daughter, a referral was made to the AO team. We were lucky enough to be allocated Caroline as our contact who responded very quickly to our daughter’s referral. We will be forever grateful that Caroline came into a frantic situation and provided such expert guidance and advice – **Autism Outreach**

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