

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Corporate Complaints Update</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Audit Committee on 5 December 2016
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Graham Ebers, Director Corporate Services

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

We proactively engage with our residents and customers if they express dissatisfaction about a service we deliver. There is also a statutory responsibility to operate a complaints process for all social care complaints received by the authority.

These processes help us to understand issues from their perspective, learn, and continuously improve and improve how we do things to serve our community. In addition, we keep record of all positive feedback received and report this to the relevant service areas.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to provide comments which might further improve this area of work.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

Corporate complaints are managed by Information Services, which currently sits within the Customer Services and IMT department. The statutory social care complaints for Children's Services are managed within service by their Complaints Officer, with some involvement from Information Services for those complaints escalated past stage 1.

This year there were some formal changes to the corporate complaints process, including introduction of an early resolution stage and closer partnership working with service areas at stage 1. The aims of these changes were to focus on (i) dealing with customer complaints at an early a stage as possible and (ii) the resolutions the customers were seeking.

For quarters 1 and 2, we have seen a year on year reduction in the number of complaints responded to at stages 1 and 2 of the corporate complaints process.

### **Corporate complaints** (Appendix 1, slides 4 and 6)

From April to September 2014 we received a total of 122 complaints at stage 1. In the same period for 2015 we received 50 stage 1's. In 2016, we have received 39 – a reduction of 22% compared with 2015 and a 51% reduction compared with 2014.

For 2014 and 2015, approximately 26% of stage 1 corporate complaints escalated to stage 2. For 2016, only 18% of complaints escalated to stage 2, a total of 7.

The most common reasons for corporate complaints are about processes and decisions.

The 8 complaints received via the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and Housing Ombudsman (HO) has remained consistent with 2015, with 10 being received in the same period last year. 5 of the 8 corporate complaints received from the LGO relate to either school admissions or school transport appeals, which do not go through the Council's internal complaints process.

The remaining complaints escalated to the LGO, 2 were in relation to planning applications, 1 was in relation to highways and transport. These were all complaints which we declined to consider at stage 2 as there were no grounds for further investigation. The LGO have upheld our decisions on these 3 complaints.

### **Children's Social Care complaints** (Appendix 1, slides 5 and 7)

From April to September 2014 we received a total of 22 complaints at early resolution stage. In the same period for 2015, there were 8 and in 2016, 16 cases were received.

For 2014, 9 complaints were escalated to stage 1 and in 2015, no complaints were escalated. In 2016, 2 complaints have been escalated to stage 1.

There have been no complaints escalated to stages 2 or 3 in 2016.

The most common reason for Children's complaints is in respect of the quality/accuracy of assessments; although, the 'reasons for complaints' table on slide 5 shows that there is no real 'stand out' area.

There has been no contact from the LGO in respect of social care complaints received in quarters 1 and 2; although, as they will investigate complaints within 12 months of them being reported, we may yet see some escalate to the LGO.

Whilst none of the complaints received in quarters 1 or 2 of this financial year have been escalated, there have been some historical complaints which have taken up a considerable amount of officer time over the last year. There are currently two ongoing stage 2 investigations.

## Background

The complaints team deal with both corporate (including Housing) and social care complaints, and there are formal processes published for all.

Customers can refer to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) or Housing Ombudsman (HO) should they remain dissatisfied after completing the process.

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/how-to-complain/>

The team has kept its focus on resolving complaints as soon as possible to negate the need to escalate to further stages, which not only reduces the council resource committed to responding to complaints, but also prevents our customers going through a potentially laborious complaints process to have their concerns resolved.

Earlier this financial year, considerable work was put in to implementing and communicating the changes to the corporate complaints process council-wide, which was also used as an opportunity to improve our partnership working with all council services.

## Analysis of Issues

The statistics produced, in our view, demonstrates that the implemented changes to the corporate complaints process – and the continuing partnership working with services – are beginning to have the desired impact. The number of stage 1 and 2 complaints – which are the most resource intensive – have reduced significantly. It also means that there are much fewer cases where our customers have to progress through what can be a lengthy complaints process to resolve their concerns.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

N/A

### Cross-Council Implications

Complaints cut across all Council services.

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
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Complaints report – April to September 2016.
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