

**ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr N Woollatt  
**Responsible Officer:** Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement

**Reason for Report:** Annual report on complaints, comments and compliments received as part of our 1.6 million plus contacts with customers in 2018/19

**RECOMMENDATION:** to note the record of complaints, comments and compliments

**Financial Implications:** None

**Legal Implications:** None directly arising from this report.

**Risk Assessment:** Accurate recording and monitoring of complaints is good practice and ensures openness and accountability to all customers.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** Complaints are received by a variety of means which ensures that there is equality of opportunity for all customers. In addition, where there is a need Customer Services staff will assist in the recording of complaints. There is also an interpretation service available. Equalities information is collected on a voluntary basis.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** To ensure that the Council provides access to services for customers in whatever way they choose to transact with us. Ensuring extended access via digital means and improving the way that we hold information and deliver our services to customers, placing them at the centre of what we do.

**Impact on Climate Change:** None

**1.0 Introduction/Background**

1.1 The Council receives contact from customers in a variety of ways for all services. The table below shows the overall number of contacts for each method for the years 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Contact Method	2017/18	2018/19
Number of visitors to the office making payments or for enquiries	30,202	23,078
Telephone Payments (including automated)	54,946	58,722
Calls to call centre	133,356	135,809
Calls to direct lines (not including calls to mobiles)	373,000+	303,271
Emails Received	Over 1 million	Over 1.4 Million
Digital Payments	78,926	84,707
Kiosk Payments	1045	3017
Online- forms submitted	33,946	38,723
Planning Applications via portal	1343	2312

- 1.2 This report provides a summary of the number of complaints, compliments and comments received for each service from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. An official complaint is recorded when a customer has been unable to resolve their issues with the service concerned or where the issue is more serious than a normal service request that can be resolved by officers as part of their day to day activities.
- 1.3 Complaints, compliments and comments are recorded on the CRM in accordance with our corporate complaints policy. The name, address and contact details of the complainant, the nature of the complaint and the outcome of the complaint investigation are all recorded.
- 1.4 Feedback recorded is not the totality of the expression of dissatisfaction with service delivery. For example, Customer Services record many service requests and services also record contacts/service requests in their own ICT systems. These include routine enquiries, requests for service and logging service failures which can be resolved quickly to the customers' satisfaction.

## 2.0 Performance Statistics

- 2.1 Feedback is recorded on the CRM, based on the information recorded we are able to extract the number of complaints raised at each level. Level 1 complaints are investigated by the Service Manager and Level 2 Complaints are investigated by Group Managers/member of Leadership Team.
- 2.2 Numbers of complaints upheld is recorded within the CRM.
- 2.3 As a measure of performance with complaint handling, the number acknowledged within 3 working days and resolved within timescales is recorded and reported on monthly.

## 3.0 What does feedback tell us?

- 3.1 As a result of complaints made, service managers may make changes to the working practices within service areas. These are also recorded in the CRM. Feedback on where a change can be identified is an excellent way to improve services and respond to the needs of our customers.
- 3.2 Compliments received are often for members of staff who customers feel have done a good job. These are fed back to staff by line managers.

## 4.0 Referrals to the Ombudsman complaints service

- 4.1 18 complaints were made to the ombudsman by residents. Only one of these was upheld by the ombudsman. A summary of complaints to the Ombudsman 2018-19 is provided at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.2 The Local Government Ombudsman Annual review letter is provided at **Appendix 4**. There is an interactive map to monitor how councils perform with regard to Ombudsman complaints and enables a comparison with other authorities. For example, in 2018/19, taking only the headline figures of the number of complaints made and the number of those upheld:

East Devon	21 complaints (2 upheld)
North Devon	25 complaints (5 upheld)

South Hams	17 complaints (4 upheld)
Teignbridge	30 complaints (5 upheld)
Torrige	25 complaints (0 upheld)
West Devon	10 complaints (2 upheld)

**Contact for more Information:** Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement

**Circulation of the Report:** Cllr Nikki Woollatt, Leadership Team

## Appendix 1

### Feedback recorded on CRM

	2017/18	2018/19
Complaints received	263	361
Invalid or withdrawn complaints		
Comments received	200	182
Compliments received	133	126
Number of complaints at level 2	31	42
Number of complaints at level 2 upheld	8	4
Number of complaints at level 1	230	346
Number of complaints at level 1 upheld	37	74
Number where a change was made to the service procedures as a result of the complaint	15	36

### Feedback by service

Service	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
Building Control	1	0	0
Business Rates	3	0	0
Car Parks	7	1	2
Community Alarms	3	0	0
Community Development	1	0	0
Community Safety	0	0	1
Council Tax Billing	10	0	1
Council Tax Recovery	4	0	1
Council Tax Reduction	2	0	0
Customer Services	13	3	14
Democracy and Members	0	0	11
Dog Strays or Fouling	1	0	2
Electoral Register	1	0	0
Environmental Services	2	0	0
Fly Tipping	0	1	0
Garden Waste	13	0	40
Grass Cutting	9	4	3
High Hedges	1	0	0
Homelessness	3	6	3
Housing Benefits	18	1	1
Housing Repairs	61	52	53
Housing Tenancy	34	19	3
Legal Services	1	0	0
Leisure	8	0	0
Licensing	0	0	1
Markets	1	0	0
Monitoring Officer	1	0	0
Parks and Flower Beds	2	1	0

Payments	2	0	3
Planning - Development Control	31	5	3
Planning - Forward Planning	3	0	0
Pollution incl Noise	2	0	0
Private Sector Housing	3	2	0
Property Services	12	0	3
Public Toilets	1	0	0
Recycling	41	16	18
Refuse Collection	62	11	17
Street Cleansing	2	4	3
Trade Waste	2	0	0
Rent Payments	0	0	1
ICT Services	0	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>186</b>

\*\*The above have all been logged via the CRM, Leisure record direct complaints separately and have dealt with a further 265 complaints and comments through their own systems.

## Ombudsman Decisions 2018-19

Decision			
Category	Decided		Decision Reason
Benefits & Tax	06 Apr 2018	Not warranted by alleged mal/service failure	Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate & Other Services	26 Apr 2018	26(6)(c) Court remedy	Closed after initial enquiries
Housing	01 May 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	15 May 2018	no mal	Not Upheld
Planning & Development	03 Jul 2018	Not warranted by alleged injustice	Closed after initial enquiries
Planning & Development	23 Aug 2018	26(6)(b) appeal to Minister	Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate & Other Services	25 Sep 2018	mal & inj - no further action, BinJ already remedied	Upheld
Planning & Development	31 Oct 2018	Not warranted by alleged injustice	Closed after initial enquiries
Planning & Development	08 Nov 2018	Premature Decision - referred to BinJ	Referred back for local resolution
Benefits & Tax	06 Dec 2018	26(6)(a) tribunal Other	Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate & Other Services	09 Jan 2019	Not warranted by alleged mal/service failure	Closed after initial enquiries
Benefits & Tax	17 Jan 2019	26(6)(a) tribunal Other	Closed after initial enquiries
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	18 Jan 2019	no mal	Not Upheld
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	18 Feb 2019	Not warranted by alleged mal/service failure	Closed after initial enquiries
Housing	22 Feb 2019	Signpost - go to complaint handling	Advice given
Corporate & Other Services	14 Mar 2019	Not warranted by alleged injustice	Closed after initial enquiries
Housing	27 Mar 2019	Insufficient information to proceed and PA advised	Incomplete/Invalid

Local Government &  
Social Care  
**OMBUDSMAN**

24 July 2019

*By email*

Stephen Walford

Chief Executive

Mid Devon District Council

Dear Mr Walford

### **Annual Review letter 2019**

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2019. The enclosed tables present the number of complaints and enquiries received about your authority, the decisions we made, and your authority's compliance with recommendations during the period. I hope this information will prove helpful in assessing your authority's performance in handling complaints.

### **Complaint statistics**

As ever, I would stress that the number of complaints, taken alone, is not necessarily a reliable indicator of an authority's performance. The volume of complaints should be considered alongside the uphold rate (how often we found fault when we investigated a complaint), and alongside statistics that indicate your authority's willingness to accept fault and put things right when they go wrong. We also provide a figure for the number of cases where your authority provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached us, and new statistics about your authority's compliance with recommendations we have made; both of which offer a more comprehensive and insightful view of your authority's approach to complaint handling.

The new statistics on compliance are the result of a series of changes we have made to how we make and monitor our recommendations to remedy the fault we find. Our recommendations are specific and often include a time-frame for completion, allowing us to follow up with authorities and seek evidence that recommendations have been implemented. These changes mean we can provide these new statistics about your authority's compliance with our recommendations.

I want to emphasise the statistics in this letter reflect the data we hold and may not necessarily align with the data your authority holds. For example, our numbers include enquiries from people we signpost back to your authority, some of whom may never contact you.

In line with usual practice, we are publishing our annual data for all authorities on our website, alongside our annual review of local government complaints. For the first time, this includes data on authorities' compliance with our recommendations. This collated data further aids the scrutiny of local services and we encourage you to share learning from the report, which highlights key cases we have investigated during the year.

### **New interactive data map**

In recent years we have been taking steps to move away from a simplistic focus on complaint volumes and instead focus on the lessons learned and the wider improvements we can achieve through our recommendations to improve services for the many. Our ambition is outlined in our [corporate strategy 2018-21](#) and commits us to publishing the outcomes of our investigations and the occasions our recommendations result in improvements for local services.

The result of this work is the launch of an interactive map of council performance on our website later this month. [Your Council's Performance](#) shows annual performance data for all councils in England, with links to our published decision statements, public interest reports, annual letters and information about service improvements that have been agreed by each council. It also highlights

those instances where your authority offered a suitable remedy to resolve a complaint before the matter came to us, and your authority's compliance with the recommendations we have made to remedy complaints.

The intention of this new tool is to place a focus on your authority's compliance with investigations. It is a useful snapshot of the service improvement recommendations your authority has agreed to. It also highlights the wider outcomes of our investigations to the public, advocacy and advice organisations, and others who have a role in holding local councils to account.

I hope you, and colleagues, find the map a useful addition to the data we publish. We are the first UK public sector ombudsman scheme to provide compliance data in such a way and believe the launch of this innovative work will lead to improved scrutiny of councils as well as providing increased recognition to the improvements councils have agreed to make following our interventions.

### **Complaint handling training**

We have a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. In 2018-19 we delivered 71 courses, training more than 900 people, including our first 'open courses' in Effective Complaint Handling for local authorities. Due to their popularity we are running six more open courses for local authorities in 2019-20, in York, Manchester, Coventry and London. To find out more visit [www.lgo.org.uk/training](http://www.lgo.org.uk/training).

Finally, I am conscious of the resource pressures that many authorities are working within, and which are often the context for the problems that we investigate. In response to that situation we have published a significant piece of research this year looking at some of the common issues we are finding as a result of change and budget constraints. Called, [Under Pressure](#), this report provides a contribution to the debate about how local government can navigate the unprecedented changes affecting the sector. I commend this to you, along with our revised guidance on [Good Administrative Practice](#). I hope that together these are a timely reminder of the value of getting the basics right at a time of great change.

Yours sincerely,



Michael King  
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
Chair, Commission for Friction in England



Local Authority Report: Mid Devon District Council  
 For the Period Ending: 31/03/2019

For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our [website](#)

### 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	2	4	0	3	0	3	6	0	18

### Decisions made

Decisions made				Detailed Investigations			
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate (%)	Total
1	1	2	10	2	1	33	17

Note: The uphold rate shows how often we found evidence of fault. It is expressed as a percentage of the total number of detailed investigations we completed.

### Satisfactory remedy provided by authority

Upheld cases where the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman	% of upheld cases
1	100

Note: These are the cases in which we decided that, while the authority did get things wrong, it offered a satisfactory way to resolve it before the complaint came to us.

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

Complaints where compliance with the recommended remedy was recorded during the year*	Complaints where the authority complied with our recommendations on-time	Complaints where the authority complied with our recommendations late	Complaints where the authority has not complied with our recommendations	
0	0	0	0	Number
	0%		-	Compliance rate**
<p>Notes:</p> <p>* This is the number of complaints where we have recorded a response (or failure to respond) to our recommendation for a remedy during the reporting year. This includes complaints that may have been decided in the preceding year but where the date for compliance falls within the current reporting year.</p> <p>** The compliance rate is based on the number of complaints where the authority has provided evidence of their compliance with our recommendations to remedy a fault. This includes instances where an authority has accepted and implemented our recommendation but provided late evidence of that.</p>				