

**Annual report on complaints, comments and compliments**

**Cabinet Member:** Cllr Mrs Squires  
**Responsible Officer:** Head of Customer Services

**Reason for Report:** Annual report on complaints, comments and compliments received as part of our 1.4 million contacts with customers in 2014/15.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

1. **To note the record of complaints, comments and compliments**
2. **To note the progress on the improvements to the corporate complaints monitoring system.**

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** To ensure that people have access to the services they need, particularly those on low incomes and those who are sick or disabled. People also need easy access to information about services at the right time and in the right place, whether that is by telephone, website or face-to-face.

**Financial Implications:** None

**Legal Implications:** None

**Risk Assessment:** Accurate recording and monitoring of complaints is good practise and ensures that we are open and accountable to all of our customers.

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council receives contact from customers in a variety of ways for all services. In 2014-15 we had 106,234 visitors to our offices for enquiries or to make payments, answered 510,851 phone calls (in the call centre and direct to officers) and received over 833,702 emails. Added to this contact by post, internet, Facebook and Twitter, we received in excess of 1.4 million contacts from our customers during the year. The total number of contacts is increasing year on year for phone, email and other electronic channels, but decreasing for face to face contacts.
- 1.2 This report provides a summary of the number of complaints, compliments and comments received for each service from 1/4/2014 to 31/3/2015 that were recorded on the corporate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. 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.
- 1.3 All complaints, comments and compliments 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 recorded. Statistics on the complaints, comments and compliments recorded in 2014-15 can be found at appendix 1. There was an increase in the number of complaints last year for waste due to the introduction of new routes at the start of the year.

- 1.4 The Customer First team also record many service requests and services also record customer contacts on their own ICT systems. Members are provided with performance statistics quarterly via Spar.net. A summary of contacts logged by Customer First is included at appendix 2.

## **2.0 Performance statistics**

- 2.1 Complaints are recorded on the CRM and, based on the information recorded, we are able to abstract the number of complaints raised as a level 1 complaint. These are investigated by the service manager. We are also able to abstract the number raised as level 2 complaints which are investigated by a member of Management Team.
- 2.2 The percentage of complaints that, as a result of investigation are up-held, is also recorded.
- 2.3 As a measure of how promptly we deal with the complaint we also record the percentage acknowledged within 3 working days and the percentage resolved within our agreed timescales. These two performance statistics are reported on Spar.net quarterly.
- 2.4 There has been an issue with reporting for 2014-15 the number of acknowledged complaints. The target for acknowledging complaints was to acknowledge 80% of all complaints within 3 days and we are unable to reliably report our performance. The upgraded system makes acknowledging the complaint mandatory when it is logged, so this will improve in 2015-16.
- 2.5 The second target is to resolve 90% of all complaints within timescale and a detailed manual check was made of our records and this proved that 97% were resolved within the timescales agreed in our complaints policy, which is above target.

## **3.0 What does feedback tell us?**

- 3.1 It is important that our customers are able to let us know when we have done a job well and when we have not. The complaints procedure is an open and easy system to use and complaints can be made at our offices, on line, in writing (letter or email) and over the telephone.
- 3.2 As a result of investigations into complaints received, service managers have made changes to working practices; a record of these changes is also recorded. This is an excellent way to improve our services and respond to customer comments. Details of some of the changes made in 2014-15 can be seen at appendix 3.

3.3 Compliments are fed back to staff and acknowledged by line managers.

#### 4.0 Moving forward

4.1 The corporate complaints procedure is now embedded in all services. A review of the monitoring system has been carried out and the system has been upgraded to incorporate the good practice currently undertaken in Housing. The upgrade took place in May 2015 so does not impact on the statistics for last year.

4.2 Additional functions added to the monitoring system include:

- improvements to letter templates
- improved reports and statistics
- improved functionality to link to Document Management System (DMS)
- the ability to record and monitor vexatious complaints.

4.3 There is a discussion of the annual statistics at Management Team. This covers the variance in the levels of complaints and compliments that have been logged for services and identifies areas of good practice that can be shared.

4.4 Investigating complaints ensures we learn and make improvements to service delivery and improve customer service. The Head of Customer Services will annually provide training for officers on identifying and recording complaints. Information on the corporate complaints system and how to help customers log complaints is provided at induction.

#### 5.0 Referrals to the Ombudsman complaints service

5.1 There were 18 complaints to the Ombudsman during 2014-15.

5.2 A summary of complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman 2014-15 are provided at appendix 4.

5.3 The Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review letter 2015 is provided at Appendix 5. A review of our policy is due this year and will take into account the user led views and research included in the report called “My expectations”, which is included in the Annual review Letter under the heading “**Encouraging effective local complaints handling**”. There is also a guide for Members under the heading “**Supporting local scrutiny**”.

**Contact for more Information:** Liz Reeves (01884 234371 – lreeves@middevon.gov.uk)

**Circulation of the Report:** Cllr Margaret Squires, Simon Johnson, Management Team.

<b>Feedback 1.4.2014 to 31.3.2015</b>	<b>Volumes - 13/14</b>	<b>Volumes - 14/15</b>
Complaints received	334	424
Invalid or withdrawn complaints		32
Comments received	18	37
Compliments received	199	229
<b>Total</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>722</b>
Number of complaints at level 2	30	30
Number of complaints at level 2 upheld	5	8
Number of complaints at level 1 upheld	73	88
Number where a change was made to the service procedures as a result of the complaint	17	7

<b>Service 2014-15</b>	<b>complaint</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>compliment</b>
Abandoned vehicles	2	2	9
Bulky Waste	1		1
Business rates	1		1
Cemeteries			1
Car parks	7		
Community development	7		1
Community safety	1	1	
Council tax	7		1
Customer Services	14		5
Dogs strays or fouling	3		
Economic Development	1		
Electoral registration	1		
Environmental issues	12	1	3
Fly tipping	1		
Forward Planning	1		2
Grass cutting	2		1
High hedges	1		1
Homelessness	3		2
Housing benefits	8		4
Housing repairs	86	12	151
Housing Tenancy (& other housing services)	36	1	5
ICT Services	5		1
Leisure	3	1	
Licensing	1		
Markets	1		1
Parks and flower beds	5		1
Payment Facility Charges	1		1
Planning	23	1	2
Play Areas	2		
Pollution and noise	3		
Private housing	2		1
Property services	1		
Public Consultation			1
Public Toilets	2		
Recycling	49	7	12
Refuse collection	126	10	18

Shrubs and hedges	2	1	
Street cleansing			3
Trade waste	2		
Warden services	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>229</b>

NB: Leisure has its own complaints monitoring system, details are not recorded here.

## Customer First service request logged on the CRM 2014-15

<b>Service</b>	<b>Volume</b>
Abandoned Vehicles	44
Benefits	1137
Building control	141
Building Maintenance	5139
Bulky waste service requests (WEE and fridges)	2044
Cadavers	73
Care services ( service requests and reporting faults)	458
Car park faults	6
Clinical waste service requests	871
Communications logs from Media	124
Council tax <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discounts</li> <li>• General enquiries</li> <li>• Moving home</li> <li>• Payment queries (instalments, payment methods)</li> <li>• Refunds</li> <li>• Band look ups</li> <li>• Recovery</li> <li>• Business rates</li> </ul>	530 2005 2152 7374 463 * 493 129
Dogs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dangerous dogs</li> <li>• Dog Fouling</li> <li>• Dog micro chipping</li> <li>• Lost found dogs</li> </ul>	29 136 13 *
Street scene (various) Graffiti, flooding, pests etc.	1396
Fixed penalty notices, noise etc.	35
Electoral services	495
Fly Tipping	143
Grass cutting- enquiries incidents	*
ICT	219
HR	52
Housing , tenancy, housing needs, other	1014
Licensing	135
Parking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long stay permits</li> <li>• Parking charge notices</li> <li>• Parking permits</li> </ul>	25 35 184
Payments (telephone & Web)	24,352
Planning & forward planning	358
Street cleaning requests	150
Trade waste	328
Waste & recycling - missed collections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recycling</li> <li>• Refuse (Black &amp; Brown bin collections)</li> </ul>	1286 3151
Waste & recycling –change container requests	827
Recycling & waste general information	4756
Waste & recycling- assisted collection requests	64
Waste & recycling- pilot (Feb 2015)	135

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Collection day look up	2105
Waste sales and bio bags	824
Welfare assistance	489
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,919</b>

\*data not available.

1. Switch board transactions and messages taken for services/officers are not included in the table.
2. Transaction direct into service area systems are not captured in this table.
3. Missed waste collections are those reported to Customer First over the phone, email or on line by customers.

## Procedure changes as a result of a complaint 2014-15

(Details taken from the corporate complaints system).

<b>Service</b>	<b>Complaint</b>	<b>Improvement</b>
Council tax	About the letter sent out when investigating entitlement to single person discount.	Improved wording to make the letter clearer
Customer Services	Complaint about the procedures for identify the date an item of post is handed in at Phoenix house	Procedure reviewed and improved to ensure the correct date is recorded to all items handed in at the reception, even if they are not opened at the time.
Housing	Complaint about lack of communication when work is being carried out.	Suite of letters to be produced to keep tenants informed of the different stages of work carried out.
Housing	Complaint about notification of inspections.	Amendment to clause 8.2.1 has been drafted of the tenancy agreement, to include 24 hour notice of repair inspections but not for neighbourhood walkabouts inspections.
Housing & Customer Services	Complaint about items of post that have been lost when returned to a void property.	Review and improve procedures for dealing with post sent to empty properties.



## Ombudsman complaints

## Appendix 4

	<b>Ref</b>	<b>Authority</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Decision date</b>	<b>Decision</b>
1	14002550	Mid Devon DC	Housing	05/Jun/2014	Referred back for local resolution
2	14004213	Mid Devon DC	Planning & Development	12/Jun/2014	Referred back for local resolution
3	13020704	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	13/Jun/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
4	14005232	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	30/Jun/2014	Referred back for local resolution
5	14004629	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	16/Jul/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
6	14004980	Mid Devon DC	Corporate & Other Services	17/Jul/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
7	14008202	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	14/Aug/2014	Referred back for local resolution
8	14008342	Mid Devon DC	Planning & Development	18/Aug/2014	Referred back for local resolution
9	14009168	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	16/Sep/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
10	14008833	Mid Devon DC	Corporate & Other Services	24/Sep/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
11	13016583	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	21/Oct/2014	Upheld
12	14014064	Mid Devon DC	Housing	25/Nov/2014	Advice given
13	14014190	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	26/Nov/2014	Referred back for local resolution
14	14014149	Mid Devon DC	Benefits & Tax	02/Dec/2014	Referred back for local resolution
15	14014620	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	06/Jan/2015	Closed after initial enquiries
16	14003373	Mid Devon DC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	13/Jan/2015	Not Upheld
17	14006098	Mid Devon DC	Planning & Development	13/Jan/2015	Not Upheld
18	14012659	Mid Devon DC	Housing	29/Jan/2015	Closed after initial enquiries

18 June 2015

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*By email*

Mr Kevin Finan  
Chief Executive  
Mid Devon District Council  
Dear Mr Finan

### **Annual Review Letter 2015**

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2015. This year's statistics can be found in the table attached.

The data we have provided shows the complaints and enquiries we have recorded, along with the decisions we have made. We know that these numbers will not necessarily match the complaints data that your authority holds. For example, our numbers include people who we signpost back to the council but who may never contact you. I hope that this information, set alongside the data sets you hold about local complaints, will help you to assess your authority's performance.

We recognise that the total number of complaints will not, by itself, give a clear picture of how well those complaints are being responded to. Over the coming year we will be gathering more comprehensive information about the way complaints are being remedied so that in the future our annual letter focuses less on the total numbers and more on the outcomes of those complaints.

### **Supporting local scrutiny**

One of the purposes of the annual letter to councils is to help ensure that learning from complaints informs scrutiny at the local level. Supporting local scrutiny is one of our key business plan objectives for this year and we will continue to work with elected members in all councils to help them understand how they can contribute to the complaints process. We have recently worked in partnership with the Local Government Association to produce a workbook for councillors which explains how they can support local people with their complaints and identifies opportunities for using complaints data as part of their scrutiny tool kit. This can be found [here](#) and I would be grateful if you could encourage your elected members to make use of this helpful resource.

Last year we established a new Councillors Forum. This group, which meets three times a year, brings together councillors from across the political spectrum and from all types of local authorities. The aims of the Forum are to help us to better understand the needs of councillors when scrutinising local services and for members to act as champions for learning from complaints in their scrutiny roles. I value this direct engagement with elected members and believe it will further ensure LGO investigations have wider public value.

### **Encouraging effective local complaints handling**

In November 2014, in partnership with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and Healthwatch England, we published *'My Expectations'* a service standards framework document describing what good outcomes for people look like if complaints are handled well. Following extensive research with users of services, front line complaints handlers and other stakeholders, we have been able to articulate more clearly what people need and want when they raise a complaint.

This framework has been adopted by the Care Quality Commission and will be used as part of their inspection regime for both health and social care. Whilst they were written with those two sectors in mind, the principles of *'My Expectations'* are of relevance to all aspects of local authority complaints. We have shared them with link officers at a series of seminars earlier this year and would encourage chief executives and councillors to review their authority's approach to complaints against this user-led vision. A copy of the report can be found [here](#).

### **Future developments at LGO**

My recent annual letters have highlighted the significant levels of change we have experienced at LGO over the last few years. Following the recent general election I expect further change.

Most significantly, the government published a review of public sector ombudsmen in March of this year. A copy of that report can be found [here](#). That review, along with a related consultation document, has proposed that a single ombudsman scheme should be created for all public services in England mirroring the position in the other nations of the United Kingdom. We are supportive of this proposal on the basis that it would provide the public with clearer routes to redress in an increasingly complex public service landscape. We will advise that such a scheme should recognise the unique roles and accountabilities of local authorities and should maintain the expertise and understanding of local government that exists at LGO. We will continue to work with government as they bring forward further

proposals and would encourage local government to take a keen and active interest in this important area of reform in support of strong local accountability.

The Government has also recently consulted on a proposal to extend the jurisdiction of the LGO to some town and parish councils. We currently await the outcome of the consultation but we are pleased that the Government has recognised that there are some aspects of local service delivery that do not currently offer the public access to an independent ombudsman. We hope that these proposals will be the start of a wider debate about how we can all work together to ensure clear access to redress in an increasingly varied and complex system of local service delivery.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jane Martin  
Local Government Ombudsman  
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England