



Complaints: Annual Report 2014-15

Summary of Complaints to Bassetlaw District Council – to year ended 31/3/15

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to present a summary of the number and nature of complaints made to the Council between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015. It also details the level of adherence to the Council's timescales for dealing with complaints and shows the way in which complaints were made to the Council.

2. Information and background

2.1 The Council has a 3-step procedure in place for complaint handling. Stage 1 of the procedure is for the appropriate head of Service/Service Manager to respond to the complaint, escalating the complaint to stage 2 of the procedure ensures a review by the Council's Chief Executive is carried out and stage 3, the final stage, is referral to the Local Government Ombudsman.

2.2 Responding to stage 1 complaints within 15 working days is measured as a Local Performance Indicator (PI) with a target for 2014-15 of 93% of all stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 15 working days. The PI was achieved with 93% of all stage 1 complaints being responded to within 15 working days.

3. Summary of complaints

3.1 During the period 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, there were a total of 83 complaints received, although slightly higher than the 76 received for the previous year this would indicate that the Council is continuing to successfully resolve complaints at a local (service) level.

3.2 Of the total number of complaints received, 90% were received directly by the Executive Assistant/Office of the Chief Executive, with the remaining received by the Services directly or by Customer Services.

3.3 The breakdown figures for each service area are detailed below (2013-14 figures are included below for comparison). Although it should be noted that following the organisational review, service areas have been re-configured as follows:

- Finance & Property *(incorporating Revenues and some Support Services)*
- Corporate Services *(incorporating Customer Services, Community Engagement & Performance and some Support Services)*
- Regeneration *(incorporating Community Prosperity)*
- Neighbourhoods *(incorporating Environment & Housing)*

Service Area	2014-15	Service Area	2013-14
Finance & Property	22	Community Prosperity	20
Corporate Services	9	Community Engagement & Performance	1
Regeneration	32	Environment & Housing	19
Neighbourhoods	20	Finance & Property	8
		Revenue & Customer Services	27
		Support Services	1
TOTAL	83		76

3.4 Customers may complain in a variety of ways. The financial year analysis shows us that customers' preferred way of getting in touch to make a complaint is by writing/e-mailing the Council followed by telephone or by utilising the on-line form.

3.5 A breakdown of the way in which complainants chose to lodge their complaint for 2014-15 is shown below:

Method of contact	Number
Written letter/e-mail to Executive Assistant/Office of the Chief Executive	35
E-mail/Letter to service or customer service	8
On-line form submission	18
Telephone	19
Face to face	1
Referred by Ombudsman/other	2

3.6 The agreed timescales for responding to complaints for all three stages of the complaints procedure are set out below with reference to days being "working" days.

3.7 Stage 1 complaints: responded to by Head of Service/Service Manager, during 2014-15, 93% of all complaints were responded to within 15 working days, meeting the target.

3.8 Stage 2 complaints: review and response by the Council's Chief Executive, during 2014-15, out of the 9 complaints reviewed, 8 were responded to within 15 working days with the remaining complaint being responded to within 18 working days due to officer availability and complexity of the case. The outcome of these complaints is: 5 not upheld; 4 partially upheld. Comparatively, there were 16 stage 2 complaint reviews for the previous year (2013-14).

4. Outcomes

4.1 Overall out of the 83 complaints received, 61% were either upheld or partially upheld.

5. Categories

5.1 Categories of complaints for 2014-15 are shown below, with 2013-14 included for comparison.

Category	2014-15	2013-14
Communication (delays) or lack of communication	10	7
Officer (decision)	2	2
Advice (officer)	3	2
Service delivery (lack of action)	6	4
Procedural (delays)	1	-
Procedure	3	1
Action (delays)	1	4
Conduct (officer)	3	6
Standard of work (officer)	9	3
Standard of work (contractor)	2	-
Dissatisfied (general)	10	22
Lack of response	19	5
Lack of information	2	5
Conduct (external agent)	3	3
Lack of consultation	1	1
Officer (attitude)	8	8
Straight to stage 2 complaint	3	3

Nb: some complaints may overlap more than one service area

6. Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

6.1 Once the Council's 2-step internal process is exhausted, a complainant may exercise their right to seek advice and refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). On publication of her Annual Review Letter to the Council, it was shown that the Ombudsman's office had received 14 complaints and enquiries about the Council during 2014-15 compared to 22 complaints for 2013-14.

6.2 There were 14 LGO decisions made during this financial year; 1 upheld, 3 not upheld, 4 closed after initial enquiries and 6 referred back for local resolution.

7. Learning from Complaints

7.1 One of the benefits of having a recognised Complaints Procedure in place is to identify service improvements where appropriate as a result of a complaint being made that can bring benefits to both the organisation and to the customer. Here are some examples which illustrate the Council making improvements as a result of a complaint received and demonstrable of how the Council has responded positively to Customer needs.

7.2 Service Improvement – Customer Service

A gentleman complained that he was given incorrect advice after contacting the Council about a car parking ticket he had received at the Priory Shopping Centre car park. Although the matter did not fall within the Council's jurisdiction, the customer service adviser, with a view to being

helpful, advised the gentleman to visit the Car Park office. The advice was taken, but only for the gentleman to find there was no one available to help when he arrived. The Customer Service manager met with the Priory Centre Manager to ensure the correct advice was given by the Council in the future should any residents contact them rather than the Priory Centre.

7.3 Service Improvement – Refuse Collection

A lady complained that she was unhappy that her bin was being missed due to inaccessibility by the refuse loader. Improvements have been put in place concerning reporting methods when crews have failed to access wheeled bins on their rounds.

We have also introduced a new flyer/compliment slip, giving residents information about the service and an easier direct route to contact us with any issues that may arise to ensure that any problems can be resolved quickly.

7.4 Service Improvement – Office systems/procedures

Complaints upheld in relation to internal office systems have resulted in reminders being issued to officers, refresher training and the need for further training needs being assessed to improve the overall customer experience.

8. Equality Opportunities Monitoring

As part of our commitment in ensuring we provide good service to all parts of the community, we routinely ask our customers who have complained to supply information about their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status and disability.

8.1 This information is only given where the customer is willing to do so. The majority of customers do not supply this information either in part or in full. However, for those who do provide the information, it can offer useful insight.

8.2 All but one of the complainants for the period can be described as White British, with a clear 50/50 split of complainants being both male and female. Four complainants reported to have a disability of some kind.

8.3 All but one of the complainants were reported to be over the age of 50 years, with just one complainant reported to be between the age of 22-30 years.

8.4 The data collated does not give rise to concern relating to service provision or complaint handling with regard to particular groups, ie ethical or other.

9. Complaint handling

9.1 As part of the Council's continued commitment to good complaint handling, we will continue to ensure that the complaints policy and procedure is fit for purpose and accessible to all. The formal complaints process forms part of the Digital by Default Phase (I) Project, enabling optimum usage and accessibility in terms of customer feedback.

10. Compliments

The Council also likes to hear from customers who have received good service. Here are some examples of the compliments we have received this year:

10.1 A lady wanted to thank the street cleaning team – she says that:

'The team have been out early this morning cleaning our streets. It looks so nice and I only wish the public would keep it that way by not dropping litter and dog owners respecting the areas where we live. Thank you for this service which often goes unnoticed and is taken for granted – I just wanted the team to know we do notice and are grateful.'

10.2 A lady and gentleman wanted to express their gratitude to all the staff involved in helping make their wedding day so memorable at Retford Town Hall:

'We found the venue one day whilst visiting the Retford market, from that moment forward everyone linked to the venue have been the most accommodating group of people I've ever met. Everyone from the staff in the mailroom/support office to the caretakers – nothing has been too much of an ask. Every e-mail has been responded to promptly by yourselves and a visit to your offices was so very helpful with pictures to visualise the potential of the room... you are all doing a wonderful job.'

11. Future developments

11.1 Through Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) liaison and feedback we will continue to learn how best to handle the most complex and difficult complaints in the most effective way possible utilising the LGO standards.