



**Bassetlaw**  
**DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
— North Nottinghamshire —

## Complaints: Annual Report 2016-17

Summary of Formal Complaints to Bassetlaw District Council – to year ended 31/3/17

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### 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 2016 and 31 March 2017. It also details the level of adherence to the Council's timescales for dealing with complaints and shows the method of how 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 2016-17 of 80% of all stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 15 working days. The PI was achieved with 93% of all stage 1 complaints responded to within 15 working days for the financial year.

### 3. Summary of complaints

3.1 During the period 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, there were 122 complaints received, an increase up from 78 complaints received in 2015-16.

3.2 Of the total number of complaints received, 75% were made digitally by online form submission or by e-mail. The financial year has shown an increase in the digital approach by customers, up from 33% for 2015-16 to 75% for 2016-17. This may also explain the 56% increase in the complaints received, ie the ease and accessibility of registering the complaint.

3.3 The breakdown figures for each service area are detailed below (2015-16 figures are included for comparison).

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>2015-16</b>
Finance & Property	38	Finance & Property	25
Corporate Services	10	Corporate Services	16
Regeneration	25	Regeneration	18
Neighbourhoods	49	Neighbourhoods	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>78</b>

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 utilising the digital approach, via the on-line form submission or by e-mail.

3.5 A breakdown of the way in which complainants chose to lodge their complaint for 2016-17 is shown below:

<b>Method of contact</b>	<b>Number</b>
Digital – on-line form submission or e-mail	92
Written letter to Office of the Chief Executive or the Service area in question	16
Telephone	12
Face to face	1
Referred by the Local Government Ombudsman	1

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 the Head of Service/Service Manager, during 2016-17, 93% of all complaints were responded to within 15 working days.

3.8 Stage 2 complaints: review and response by the Council's Chief Executive, there was an increase of stage 2 complaints, up from 22 to 25 for the year 2016-17. Out of the 25 complaints reviewed, 19 were responded to within 15 working days with the remaining complaints being responded to within an average of an additional 5 working days; this was largely due to officer availability and/or complexity of the casework involved. The outcomes of these complaints: 21 not upheld; 3 partially upheld and 1 upheld.

#### 4. Outcomes

4.1 Overall out of the 122 complaints received, 45% were either upheld or partially upheld.

#### 5. Categories

5.1 Categories of complaints for 2016-17 are shown below, with 2015-16 included for comparison.

<b>Category</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2015-16</b>
Communication (delays) or lack of communication	7	4
Officer (decision)	4	1
Advice (officer)	3	1

Service delivery (lack of action)	32	10
Service delivery (delay)	8	10
Conduct (officer)	5	3
Standard of work (officer)	23	15
Standard of work (contractor)	2	1
Dissatisfied (general)	29	14
Lack of response/response delay	5	16
Conduct (external agent)	1	-
Lack of consultation	1	-
Officer (attitude)	2	3
Straight to stage 2 complaint (as appropriate level)	3	4

## 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 further 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 20 complaints and enquiries about the Council during 2016-17 equal to that in 2015-16.

6.2 There were 20 LGO decisions made during this financial year; 1 incomplete/invalid, 2 upheld, 5 referred back for local resolution, 5 closed after initial enquiries and 7 not upheld.

## 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 to do so as a result of complaints being made that can bring benefits to both customers and to the organisation going forward.

7.2 Throughout 2016/17, a number of wide-ranging improvements were identified by Service Managers as a result of complaints made, which included revised administrative/processes being implemented, staff reminders and refresher training, and the recognition that closer cross-service working should be undertaken where appropriate to do so whereby complex complaints involve more than one service area.

## 8. Equality Opportunities monitoring and developments

8.1 The Council is committed in ensuring we provide good service to all parts of the community, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, marital status or disability.

8.2 Data collated historically does not give rise to concern relating to service provision or complaint handling with regard to particular groups, ie ethical or other.

8.3 As part of the drive towards the 'digital first' approach and streamlining in respect of complaint monitoring going forward, the option of an on-line form completion and submission for those customers that wish to provide relevant information that will assist us with equality monitoring and analysis is being considered.

## 9. Complaint handling and developments

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 formed part of the Digital by Default Phase (I) Project, enabling optimum usage and accessibility in terms of customer feedback.

9.2 Following on from a report to the Council's Cabinet in April 2016: *'Digital First - Customer Programme'*, and the objective to *'facilitate as many customers as possible to access our services through digital channels'*, the Complaints Policy was refreshed to both encourage and support the drive towards digital for those customers wishing to complain. Whilst the procedure itself remains unchanged, more emphasis was given within the Policy towards the digital process and the help and guidance that is available for those that may require it in order to encourage optimum use of the facility.

9.3 Local Government Ombudsman guidance states that they will treat any complaint about a service provided by a third party on behalf of the Council as being *'against the Council'*. The refreshed policy provides the opportunity to be clear about the definition of a complaint as *'An expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response'*.

## 10. Future developments

10.1 The sound working relationship between the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the Council continues. Through the ongoing 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 and best practice guidance.

10.2 The LGO is currently developing a network of Link Officers, to which the Council's LGO liaison officer has been invited to join. The remit of this network will include supporting complaints-handling practitioners and identifying, developing and evaluating best practice. There could also be a role for the network in offering expertise and advice on relevant complaints matters, contributing to consultations and supporting relevant events.