



# Bassetlaw

## DISTRICT COUNCIL

— North Nottinghamshire —

## Complaints: Annual Report 2015-16

Summary of Complaints to Bassetlaw District Council – to year ended 31/3/16

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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 2015 and 31 March 2016. 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 2015-16 of 93% of all stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 15 working days. The PI was slightly under achieved with 91% of all stage 1 complaints being responded to within 15 working days.

### 3. Summary of complaints

3.1 During the period 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, there were a total of 78 complaints received, and slightly lower than the 83 received for the previous year (2014/15) 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, 63% were received on line or by e-mail.

3.3 The breakdown figures for each service area are detailed below (2014-15 figures are included below for comparison).

Service Area	2015-16	Service Area	2014-15
Finance & Property	25	Finance & Property	22
Corporate Services	16	Corporate Services	9
Regeneration	18	Regeneration	32
Neighbourhoods	19	Neighbourhoods	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>83</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 writing to the Council followed by e-mail and on-line form submission.

3.5 A breakdown of the way in which complainants chose to lodge their complaint for 2015-16 is shown below:

Method of contact	Number
Written letter to Office of the Chief Executive or Service	28
E-mail/on-line submission	26
Telephone	22
Face to face	1
Referred by 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 Head of Service/Service Manager, during 2015-16, 91% of all complaints were responded to within 15 working days.

3.8 Stage 2 complaints: review and response by the Council's Chief Executive, during 2015-16, out of the 22 complaints reviewed, 16 were responded to within 15 working days with the remaining complaints being responded to within an additional 5 working days maximum overall, largely due to officer availability and/or complexity of the case work involved. The outcome of these complaints is: 13 not upheld; 8 partially upheld and 1 upheld. Comparatively, there were 9 stage 2 complaint reviews for the previous year (2014-15).

#### 4. Outcomes

4.1 Overall out of the 78 complaints received, 50% were either upheld or partially upheld.

#### 5. Categories

5.1 Categories of complaints for 2015-16 are shown below, with 2014-15 included for comparison.

Category	2015-16	2014-15
Communication (delays) or lack of communication	4	10
Officer (decision)	1	2
Advice (officer)	1	3
Service delivery (lack of action)	10	6
Procedural (delays)	-	1

Procedure	-	3
Action (delays)	-	1
Service delivery (delay)	10	-
Conduct (officer)	3	3
Standard of work (officer)	15	9
Standard of work (contractor)	1	2
Dissatisfied (general)	14	10
Lack of response/response delay	16	19
Lack of information	-	2
Conduct (external agent)	-	3
Lack of consultation	-	1
Officer (attitude)	3	8
Straight to stage 2 complaint	4	3

## 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 20 complaints and enquiries about the Council during 2015-16 compared to 14 complaints and enquiries in 2014-15.

6.2 There were 17 LGO decisions made during this financial year; 8 referred back for local resolution, 6 closed after initial enquiries (3 no further action, 3 out of jurisdiction), and 3 not upheld (no maladministration).

## 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 complaints being made that can bring benefits to both customers and to the organisation going forward.

7.2 Throughout 2015/16, 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, arrangements are in place for 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.

## 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', it was felt that the Complaints Policy should be refreshed to both encourage and support the drive towards digital for those customers wanting to complain. Whilst the procedure remains unchanged, more emphasis is given towards the digital process and the help that is available for those that require it in order to encourage this facility.

9.3 Recent 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 therefore also provided 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 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 and best practice guidance.