



Bassetlaw
DISTRICT COUNCIL
— North Nottinghamshire —

Complaints: Annual Report 2017-18

Summary of Formal Complaints to Bassetlaw District Council – to year ended 31/3/18

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 2017 and 31 March 2018. 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 and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

2.2 Responding to stage 1 complaints within 15 working days is measured as a Local Performance Indicator (PI) with a target for 2017-18 of 80% of all stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 15 working days. The PI was achieved with 94% of all stage 1 complaints responded to within 15 working days for the financial year and an improvement on the 93% achieved last year.

3. Summary of complaints

3.1 During the period 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, there were 116 complaints received, a slight decrease, down from 122 for 2016-17.

3.2 Of the total number of complaints received in 2017-18, 79% were made digitally by online form submission or by e-mail. The financial year has shown a year on year increase in the digital approach by customers, up from 33% for 2015-16 to 75% for 2016-17 and 79% for 2017-18.

3.3 The breakdown figures for each service area are detailed below (2016-17 figures are included for comparison).

Service Area	2017-18	Service Area	2016-17
Finance & Property	30	Finance & Property	38
Corporate Services	10	Corporate Services	10
Regeneration	28	Regeneration	25
Neighbourhoods	48	Neighbourhoods	49
TOTAL	116	TOTAL	122

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 2017-18 is shown below:

Method of contact	Number
Digital – on-line form submission or e-mail	75
E-mail	17
Written letter to Office of the Chief Executive or the Service area in question	11
Telephone	9
Face to face	2
Referred by the Local Government Ombudsman	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 the Head of Service/Service Manager, during 2017-18, 94% 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 were 24 stage 2 complaints, compared to 25 for the year 2016-17. Out of the 24 complaints reviewed, 19 were responded to within 15 working days. The outcomes of these complaints are: 17 not upheld and 7 partially upheld.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Overall out of the 116 complaints received, 57% were either upheld or partially upheld.

5. Categories

5.1 Categories of complaints for 2017-18 are shown below, with 2016-17 included for comparison:

Category	2017-18	2016-17
Communication (delays) or lack of communication	14	7
Officer (decision)	10	4
Advice (officer)	4	3
Service delivery (lack of action)	16	32
Service delivery (delay)	9	8
Conduct (officer)	4	5
Standard of work (officer)	12	23
Standard of work (contractor)	3	2
Dissatisfied (general)	38	29
Lack of response/response delay	0	5
Conduct (external agent)	4	1
Lack of consultation	0	1
Officer (attitude)	2	2
Straight to stage 2 complaint (as appropriate level)	6	3

6. Local Government Ombudsman (LGSCO)

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 and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). On publication of the Annual Review Letter to the Council, it was shown that the Ombudsman's office had received 17 complaints and enquiries about the Council during 2017-18, a slight decrease from the 20 received in 2016-17.

6.2 There were 18 LGSCO decisions made during this financial year; 1 advice given, 4 referred back for local resolution, 7 closed after initial enquiries, 3 not upheld and 3 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 2017/18, 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.

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 and Social Care 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'*.

9.4 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR): Under General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR), any personal details or information obtained in order to appropriately process formal complaints in line with the procedure will be stored securely and will only be used for the purposes as intended in conjunction with the GDPR principles.

10. Future developments

10.1 The sound working relationship between the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the Council continues to work well. 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 LGSCO standards and best practice guidance.

10.2 The LGSCO has developed a network of Link Officers, which the Council's 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.