



Bassetlaw

DISTRICT COUNCIL

— North Nottinghamshire —

Complaints: Annual Report 2019-20

Summary of Formal Complaints to Bassetlaw District Council – to year ended 31/3/20

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 2019 and 31 March 2020. 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 2019-20 of 80% of all stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 15 working days. The PI was achieved with 82% of all stage 1 complaints responded to within 15 working days for the financial year. Whilst the target is achieved, it is slightly down for a consecutive year comparatively, 89%, 93% and 94% respectively. Officers will be reminded of the importance of responding to complaints within the customer standard time-frame of 15 working days to avoid uncertainty for complainants.

3. Summary of complaints

3.1 During the period 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, there were 116 complaints received, in line with previous years of 111 complaints received in 2018/19, 116 complaints received for 2017-18 and 122 for 2016-17.

3.2 Of the total number of complaints received in 2019-20, 75% were made digitally by on-line form submission or by e-mail,

3.3 The breakdown figures for each service area are detailed below (2017-18 figures are included for comparison).

Service Area	2018-19	Service Area	2019-20
Finance & Property	28	Finance & Property	21
Corporate Services	5	Corporate Services	8
Regeneration	23	Regeneration	24
Neighbourhoods	55	Neighbourhoods	29
-	-	Housing	34
TOTAL	111	TOTAL	116

3.4 Customers may complain in a variety of ways to enable accessibility to all. The financial year analysis shows us that 75% of 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 The remainder chose to write a hard copy letter to the CEO office or direct to the service, making a telephone call or face to face contact, were the least preferred options.

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 2019-20, 82% 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 11 stage 2 complaints, compared to 17 for the year 2018-19. Out of the 11 complaints reviewed, 10 were responded to within 15 working days. The outcomes of these complaints are: 1 upheld, 6 not upheld and 4 partially upheld.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Overall out of the 116 complaints received, 60% were either upheld or partially upheld.

5. Categories

5.1 Categories of complaints for 2019-20 are shown below, with 2018-19 included for comparison:

Category	2018-19	2019-20
Communication (delays) or lack of communication	8	5
Lack of information	-	1
Officer (decision)	3	11
Advice (officer)	5	4
Service delivery (lack of action)	28	19
Service delivery (delay)	4	7
Conduct (officer)	7	4

Standard of work /quality (officer)	16	12
Standard of work (contractor)	1	-
Dissatisfied (general)	26	29
Lack of response/response delay	8	18
Conduct(external agent/contractor)	1	1
Officer (attitude)	4	5
Straight to stage 2 complaint (as appropriate level)	-	2

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 13 complaints and enquiries about the Council during 2019-20, again a consistent decrease from the 14 received in 2018-19, 17 received in 2017-18 and 20 received in 2016-17.

6.2 There were 16 decisions made by the Ombudsman during this financial year; 5 referred back for local resolution, 7 cases closed after initial enquiries, 2 not upheld and 2 cases 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 2019/20 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. In addition, making 'reasonable adjustments' for customers where appropriate to do so is included within the policy.

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 on-line 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 Council's policy is explicitly 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 on behalf of the Council) that requires a response*'.

9.4 General Data Protection Regulations (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.

9.5 The Council brought the Housing Services 'ALMO', (Formerly, 'A1 Housing Bassetlaw Ltd') back 'in-house' in October 2018. As part of that process, Formal Complaints for the Housing Service have been considered in line with all other Council Services, ie in conjunction with the Council's formal complaints procedure with effect from 1st April 2019. As a result of this, the Council's formal complaints procedure was adapted to incorporate appropriate and relevant information concerning the 'Designated Persons' process and the Housing Ombudsman Service effective from 1st April 2019.

10. Future developments

10.1 The sound working relationship between the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Council continues. Through the ongoing LGSCO liaison and feedback, we will continue to learn how best to handle the most complex and challenging complaints in the most effective way possible utilising the LGSCO standards and best practice guidance.

10.2 In light of the above (9:5), the Council will now also work closely with the Housing Ombudsman Service and work in conjunction of the guidance and principles of the Housing Ombudsman's 'Complaint Handling Code'. The purpose of the code is to enable the Council 'to resolve complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It will also help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and residents.'