

7. OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS – 2016/2017

REPORT OF: Simon Hughes, Head of Digital and Customer Services
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Wards Affected: (All)
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Customer Service and Service Delivery
Date of meeting 11th October 2017

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with annual information about formal complaints received by the Council from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. It also summarises the complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) during the same period.

Background

2. In 2016/17 the Council received 207 complaints, an increase compared to 171 in the previous year. All complaints were investigated and responded to, mostly within the target times set out within the Council's complaints procedure. In the same period the Council also received 357 compliments. Both the number of complaints and compliments have increased this year. More complaints does not necessarily mean increased service issues. Increasing awareness of the complaints process is important as complaints and compliments provide an opportunity to review procedures and initiate improvements if needed.
3. The LGO received 16,863 complaints and enquiries which was a reduction from 2015/16 and 54% of their investigations were upheld, which increased from 51% the previous year. A complaint is classed as upheld if the LGO find some fault in the way the local authority acted. This includes where it has been acknowledged that a fault has been made and action offered to be taken, but the person still requires an independent review. For the Council this is normally when the complainant, having received a response from the Business Unit Leader at stage one and then by an independent Head of Service at stage two, is still dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

Recommendations

4. Members are recommended to:

Note the report

Complaints Process

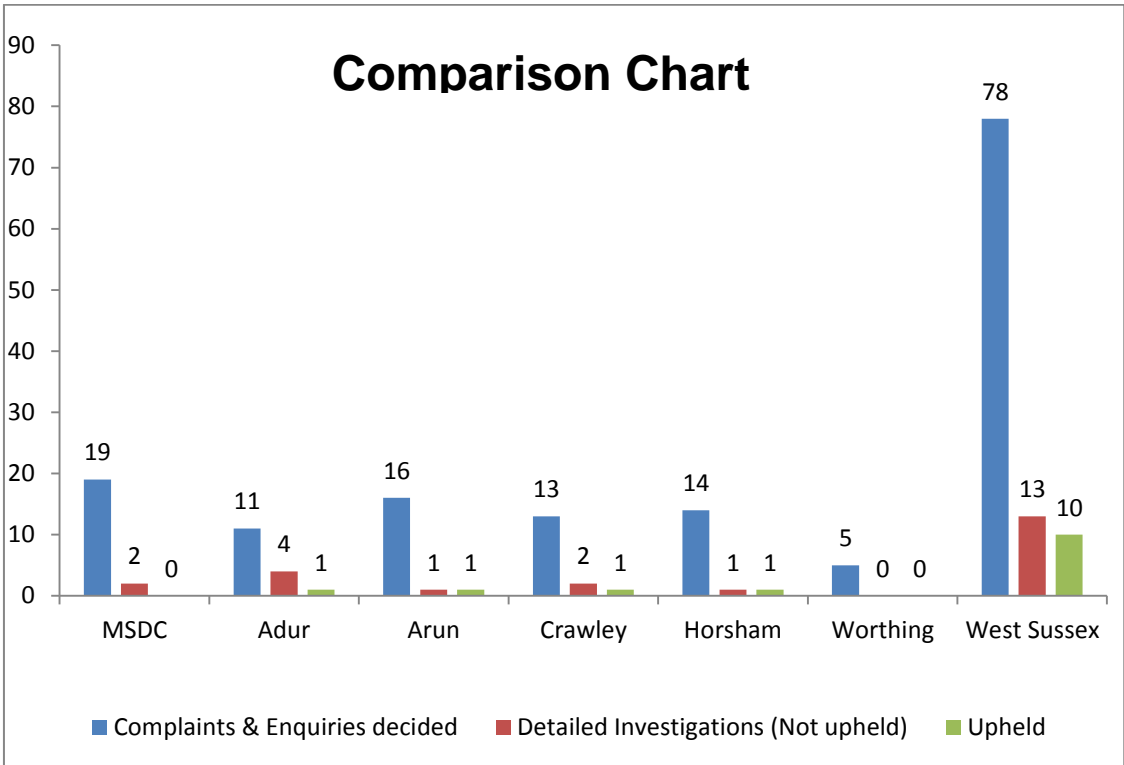
5. The Council has a formal complaints procedure, a copy is attached at appendix B. A summary of all complaints and compliments received are reported to the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services on a monthly basis and reviewed by Business Unit Leaders at their bi-monthly meeting. We are also preparing a monthly report for Business Unit Leaders and Heads of Service to summarise complaints in progress and resolved.

Complaints and Enquiries received from LGO

- 6. Complaints and enquiries received by The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) for Mid Sussex District Council for the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 are detailed below. A copy of this annual review letter can be found at Appendix A.
- 7. The numbers of complaints and enquiries received do not always equate as a number of complaints will have been received by the LGO during the year, but decisions are reached on them in different business years.
- 8. For comparison, during 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017, the LGO received complaints and enquiries from neighbouring local authorities as follows:

Adur	Arun	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing	West Sussex County Council
9	16	14	18	16	5	82

- 9. Decisions made by the LGO for the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 in West Sussex were as follows:



** Upheld complaints are those where the LGO finds some fault in the way a council acted, even if it has agreed to put things right during the course of the investigation or has accepted it needs to remedy the situation before the complainant made the complaint.

Financial Implications

10. There are no financial implications.

Risk Management Implications

11. Complaints that indicate process risks are reviewed by the Business Unit Leaders to ensure appropriate mitigation is in place.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

12. Complaints are an opportunity to improve service and staff performance. Each complaint is reviewed to highlight any service failures that need to be addressed to prevent a recurrence. Where complaints, even if not upheld, indicate that services or information can be improved for customers then action is taken.

Other Material Implications

13. There are no other material implications arising from this report.

Appendices:

LGO Annual Review letter of 2017 - Appendix A

Council's complaints procedure – Appendix B

<http://www.midsussex.gov.uk/media/76948/current-msdc-complaints-procedure-amended-feb-2016.pdf>

Background Papers

Link to Local Ombudsman upholding more complaints about local government –

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/local-government-complaint-reviews>

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/interpreting-local-authority-statistics>