

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**12 APRIL 2019**

**Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services**

**COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS OVERVIEW 2017-2018**

**1. Purpose of the Report**

To inform the Committee about compliments received during the financial year 2017-2018 and to outline progress on the ongoing review of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

**2. Information and Analysis**

The terms of reference of the Standards Committee include *“the overview of complaints handling.”* Accordingly, the Committee is invited to receive the report which was presented by the Strategic Director for Commissioning, Communities and Policy to CMT on 22 January 2019 entitled “Compliments and Complaints 2017/18” which is attached at Appendix 1.

**3. Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors have also been considered: financial, legal and human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

**4. Background Papers**

The file held by the Strategic Director for Commissioning, Communities and Policy.

**5. Officer’s Recommendation**

PUBLIC

Agenda Item 4c

To note the report of the Strategic Director of Commissioning, Communities and Policy to CMT entitled "Compliments and Complaints 2017/18."

**Janie Berry**  
**Director of Legal and Democratic Services**

## **CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**22 January 2019**

### **COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS 2017/18**

#### **1. Purpose of the Report**

To inform CMT of compliments reported by the Council during the financial year 2017/18 and to outline progress on the ongoing review of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

#### **2. Information and Analysis**

The Council has a longstanding commitment to deliver high quality services as detailed in its Customer Care Charter. In view of the large number of clients and individual transactions completed in any year, a key mechanism for assessing success against this commitment is to record, monitor and review individual feedback in the form of compliments and complaints. The recording and analysis of both compliments and complaints, enables the Council to address and record specific issues and provides an indication of the effectiveness of, and general satisfaction with, the Council's services.

This report presents an overview of compliments reported and complaints received by the Council during 2017/18. Where possible, trends have been identified and these will be used to support service improvement and to share best practice. This report also provides a summary of complaints received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

#### **Overview of complaints received and compliments recorded**

This report has been collated using data recorded in accordance with the Putting People First customer charter. Additional detail about the level, validity and processing of complaints is included to help understand the effectiveness of complaint handling.

The data for 2016/17 and 2017/18 has been taken from detailed departmental submissions or, where possible, extracted from departmental recording systems. This has led to more accurate and comprehensive reporting and a greater level of detail at a corporate level, allowing more information and detailed analysis to be included against the last two years. For this reason, comparisons in the report with previous years should be treated with caution.

It should also be noted that historical data in this report has been taken from the original pre aggregated departmental data submissions and, therefore,

some figures may differ slightly from the figures in previous annual reports. Additionally, following a departmental restructure the historical data before 2016-17 for Corporate Resources, Chief Executives, Cultural and Community Services and Health and Communities has now been combined into a single line within this report.

In summary, during 2017/18, the Council recorded 2,084 compliments, an increase from 1,164 recorded in 2016/17. Over 65% of compliments in the last two years were recorded by Public Health, Adult Care Primary Support, Trading Standards, Highways and Libraries and Heritage.

The number of complaints received by the Council has increased from 704 in 2016/17 to 755 in 2017/18. The overall increase in complaints during 2017/18 is due to a rise in complaints received by Children's Services, where complaints received rose from 206 in 2016/17 to 302 in 2017/18. Adult Social Care and Health, (ASC & H) Economy, Transport and Environment (ETE) and Commissioning, Communities and Policy all recorded a decrease in complaints received during 2017/18 compared to the previous year. In the case of ASC&H and ETE complaints are at very similar levels to 2013/14. In 2017/18, over 50% of complaints related to a specific service decision, the standard of service or communication.

40.3% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld, significantly down from the previous year's 47.4%, and previous years. 68.1% of complaints were responded to within target, down slightly from the previous year's 70.3% but in line with the overall performance of the previous four years of 68.7%.

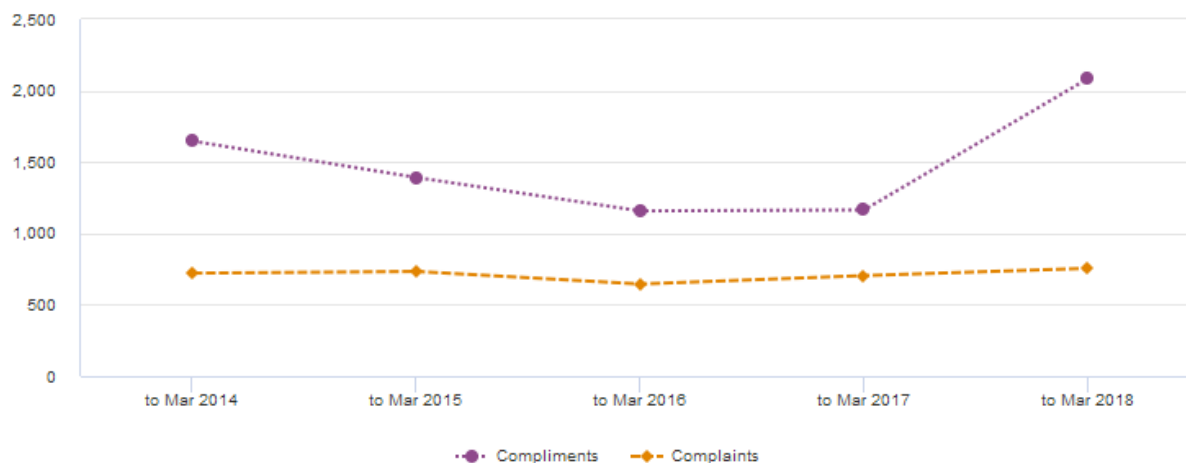
During 2017/18 the average number of days taken to respond to all complaints for Stage 1 was 26.7 days, this differs significantly from the standard target of 10 days. The Stage 2 average was 29.4 days, again higher than the standard target of 20 days.

Response within timescales varies substantially between departments. Economy, Transport and Environment have consistently achieved a high response performance over the last five years with 92.4% of complaints responded to within timescales during 2017/18. For all other departments more than a third of complaints were not responded to within timescales. This variation in performance does reflect the difference in severity and complexity of some complaints received and indicates the differences in the complaint processes. Where data is available, all departments show lower response performance in 2017/18 compared to 2013/14.

The number of compliments recorded and complaints received over the last 5 years is set out in Table 1 overleaf. Whilst the increase in complaints is a concern, and explored in more detail in the report, due to the review of data supplied at a corporate level some of this increase can be attributed to

improved and more comprehensive reporting. This is clearly reflected in the increase in compliments for 2017-18.

**Table 1. Number of compliments recorded and complaints received**



	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Compliments recorded	1,646	1,391	1,157	1,164	2,084
Complaints received	721	733	645	704	755

## Compliments

Compliments provide important feedback to individuals and service areas regarding the quality of work, the appreciation of clients and the impact of services. Compliments provide a helpful counterpoint to the trend in number of complaints received, however the recording process is not as comprehensive as it is for complaints. This means that the following figures only represent a proportion of the total compliments received by individual officers in the course of their work, and therefore the number of compliments reported and complaints received should not be directly compared.

Data for this report has been collected based on the following guidelines for compliments:

*“Any contact outside of the usual courtesies where a member of the public, service user or partner agency has been in touch with a specific compliment or expressed the difference our work has made to them.”*

Table 2 shows the overall trend and a breakdown by department for recorded compliments. There were 2,084 compliments recorded in 2017/18, a substantial increase from 2016/17 when 1,079 compliments were recorded. It should be noted however that new data has been made available for 2017/18 in relation to Public Health. The like for like trend with the 1,005 Public Health compliments removed, shows a figure for 2017/18 of 1,079 compliments, and this continues the gradual decline in recording over the last 5 years.

There is wide variation in the number of compliments recorded across departments, with 1,345 for Adult Social Care and Health compared to 81 for Children's Services, perhaps reflecting the different emphasis placed on the recording of compliments within departments.

**Table 2. Number of compliments recorded overall and by department**

Number of Compliments Recorded	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Overall	1,646	1,391	1,157	1,164	2,084
Adult Social Care and Health	473	470	391	390	1345
Children's Services	157	175	128	109	81
Economy, Transport and Environment	388	357	262	294	323
Commissioning, Communities and Policy	-	-	-	371	335
Former Departments	628	389	376	-	-

### Compliments by service area

Compliments are generally recorded with an indication of the relevant service area. However this is dependent on the accuracy of the recording and the level to which individual services are grouped within departments. It therefore favours the more distinct and public facing services.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of the top 15 service areas recording compliments. Over 65% of compliments in the last two years were recorded by Public Health, Adult Care Primary Support, Trading Standards, Highways and Libraries and Heritage. Compliments recorded by Public Health services make up 32% of all compliments recorded, this is almost 3 times higher than the next service area. Public Health services are supported by a comprehensive feedback process with a feedback card left with clients to record a range of information. This has facilitated the easy recording of comments and where a specific compliment or positive impact is noted this is included in the compliment data.

Compliments across other service areas are also significant with an average of 21 compliments recorded every week, during the last two years.

**Table 3. Compliments recorded by top 15 service areas 2016/17 and 2017/18 combined**

Service area	Department	Compliments	Percentage
Public Health	Adult Social Care and Health	1,005	32.3%
Primary support	Adult Social Care and Health	347	11.1%
Trading Standards	Commissioning, Communities and Policy	313	10.0%
Highways Network Planning	Economy, Transport and Environment	252	8.1%
Libraries and Heritage	Economy, Transport and Environment	205	6.6%
Direct Care	Adult Social Care and Health	178	5.7%

Prevention and personalisation	Adult Social Care and Health	151	4.9%
Waste Management Service	Economy, Transport and Environment	139	4.5%
Countryside Service	Economy, Transport and Environment	76	2.4%
Early Help	Children's Services	54	1.7%
Road Safety	Economy, Transport and Environment	47	1.5%
Call Derbyshire	Commissioning, Communities and Policy	39	1.3%
Property Services	Commissioning, Communities and Policy	30	1.0%
Schools and Learning	Children's Services	24	0.8%
Commercial Fleet	Economy, Transport and Environment	20	0.6%

## Complaints

Data for this report has been collected based on the following definition from the Corporate Complaints Policy:

*“An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet by a service user or their representative which requires a response in writing.”*

However, in practice, recording has included additional complaints dealt with verbally or where a response in writing has not been possible. The report focuses on the requirements of the Corporate Complaint Procedure which forms the basis for complaint handling. However the majority of complaints made to Adult Social Care and Health and Children's Services are subject to statutory complaint procedures that take precedence. These complaints and non-statutory complaints to all departments are all included within the report.

Table 4 shows the overall trend and a breakdown by department of complaints received. The number of complaints received by the Council has increased from 704 in 2016/17 to 755 in 2017/18. This follows a period of decreasing complaints for the period 2013/14.

The overall increase in complaints during 2017/18 is due to a rise in complaints received by Children's Services, where complaints received rose from 206 in 2016/17 to 302 in 2017/18. Adult Social Care and Health, (ASC & H) Economy, Transport and Environment (ETE) and Commissioning, Communities and Policy all recorded a decrease in complaints received during 2017/18 compared to the previous year. In the case of ASC&H and ETE complaints are at very similar levels to 2013/14.

It should be noted that recent increases in complaints may be due to efforts to ensure all complaints are reported, and not necessarily an indication of increased levels of dissatisfaction.

**Table 4. Number of complaints received overall and by department**

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Overall	721	733	645	704	755
Adult Social Care and Health	255	308	235	272	257
Children's Services	231	183	191	206	302
Economy, Transport and Environment	119	150	135	136	118
Commissioning, Communities and Policy	-	-	-	83	74
Former Departments	116	92	84	-	-

**Complaints received by stage**

Complaints are normally dealt with by the staff in the relevant service area and are classified as Stage 1. In more complex cases or where there has been no resolution, complaints can be escalated to a senior manager or the departmental complaints officer and are classified as Stage 2. However this process does differ between departments and Adult Social Care and Health currently deal with all complaints at the Stage 1 level for statutory reasons.

Table 5 shows the number of complaints received by stage over the last five years. During 2017/18, there were 720 Stage 1 complaints and 35 complaints which were dealt with at Stage 2. The overall increase in complaints received during 2017/18 is due to an increase in Stage 1 complaints.

With the exception of 2016/17, where there was difference in recording complaints within Adult Social Care and Health for that year only, Stage 2 complaints have remained fairly static over the last five years, with 34 stage 2 complaints recorded during 2013/14 compared with 35 in 2017/18.

**Table 5. Complaints received by stage**

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Stage 1 – Dealt with by front line officer or line manager	687	579	611	590	720
Stage 2 – Investigated by senior manager or complaints officer	34	46	34	114	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>645</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>755</b>

**Type of complaint**

For the last two years' data, a standardised list of categories has been applied to complaints across the Council. Each complaint is given a single category, based on the most significant issue raised, following the broad guidelines and examples set out below. This has been used to help identify and understand the nature of complaints.



Type	Guidelines/Examples
Access to service	Difficulties in finding services Problems with access to buildings Websites not working Complex or difficult forms
Communications	Information difficult to find or understand Lack or absence of communication Delays in communication
Driving incident	Discourteous, careless or dangerous driving
Officer behaviour/attitude	Inappropriate, impolite, discourteous, unhelpful or rude behaviour
Service decision	Disagreement with a decision to provide, withdraw or limit a service Disagreement with the process leading to decisions being made
Service policy	Service delivered in accordance with any policy but where there is disagreement with the policy or it is felt it disadvantages or discriminates against an individual
Speed of service	Service outside of published target dates Missed deadlines Timescales outside reasonable expectation
Standard of service	Not following service standards or policies Incorrect information or advice Products or workmanship not up to reasonable expectations
Use or storage of data	Incorrect client information Information not readily available or lost Not complying with established data policies or procedures Not complying with regulations relating to data (not including specific issues relating to subject access or FOI requests)

Table 6 shows the breakdown based on a single category for each complaint. The top 3 categories make up 53% of all complaints with Service Decision being the highest cause of dissatisfaction followed by Standard of Service and Communications. Service policy makes up a further 16% of complaints, however this usually indicates dissatisfaction with a policy rather than the way it has been implemented or carried out.

**Table 6. Breakdown of complaints by type**

Type of complaints	2016-17	2017-18	Overall % 2016-18	Change in % within year
Service Decision	143	148	20%	Same
Standard of Service	88	164	17%	9%
Communications	136	99	16%	-6%
Service Policy	133	98	16%	-6%

Officer Behaviour/Attitude	90	107	14%	1%
Speed of Service	36	28	4%	-1%
Use or Storage of Data	13	33	3%	2%
Access to Service	14	16	2%	Same
Driving Incident	4	7	1%	Same
Not Specified/Not Recorded	47	55	7%	Same
<b>Total</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>755</b>		

### Assessment of Complaints

On completion of a complaint and to help identify possible improvements an assessment is made of the validity of the issues raised against the relevant service standards or reasonable expectations.

Table 7 shows the percentage of complaints that have been either upheld or partially upheld from all of the complaints completed. In 2017/18, 40.3% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld. This is lower than figures for the previous four years and is a significant reduction from 2016/17.

The percentage of complaints upheld figure varies significantly between departments, for example 48.1% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld in Adult Social Care and Health compared to 34.2% in Economy, Transport and Environment and 11.1% in Commissioning, Communities and Policy. In the last two years, Children's Services have had a substantially higher number of complaints upheld or partially upheld compared to the previous three years.

**Table 7. Percentage of complaints upheld or partially upheld overall and by department**

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Overall	44.2%	42.0%	45.4%	47.3%	40.3%
Adult Social Care and Health	48.5%	43.7%	45.2%	41.6%	48.1%
Children's Services	29.5%	31.1%	27.5%	52.0%	44.3%
Economy, Transport and Environment	48.6%	33.5%	53.4%	45.5%	34.2%
Commissioning, Communities and Policy	-	-	-	67.9%	11.1%
Former Departments	39.6%	28.3%	53.4%	-	-

### Assessment by Stage

More detail on the assessments by stage in the last two years is shown in Table 8. Overall less than a quarter of complaints (23.3%) were fully upheld. This figures reduces when a more detailed Stage 2 investigation has been conducted, with 18.9% of Stage 2 complaints upheld in 2017/18, compared to 14.4% in 2016/17. Overall just over half the complaints were not upheld indicating that whilst there was dissatisfaction, there was no evidence to suggest the service was below expected levels.

**Table 8. Breakdown of complaint assessment by Stage**

	2016-17				2017-18				Overall 2016-18
	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 1		Stage 2		
Upheld	177	30.5%	15	14.4%	129	18.7%	7	18.9%	23.3%
Partially Upheld	82	14.1%	20	19.2%	119	17.3%	6	16.2%	16.0%
Not upheld	272	46.8%	62	59.6%	365	53.0%	24	64.9%	51.3%
Other	25	4.3%	6	5.8%	12	1.7%	-		3.1%
Not recorded	25	4.3%	1	1.0%	64	9.3%	-		6.4%

Percentages are calculated based on the column total

### Complaint assessments by type of complaint

It is useful to understand the type of complaints which are more frequently upheld or partially upheld. Table 9 provides a breakdown of the assessment for each of the different complaint types. 57% of complaints upheld or partially upheld were related to speed of service and this probably reflects the nature of these complaints based on available evidence. This is also the case for Standard of Service, Use or Storage of Data and Communications which are between 40% and 46%.

**Table 9. Breakdown of complaint assessments by type of complaint**

Complaint type	Upheld		Partially Upheld		Not Upheld		Other		Not Recorded	
Speed of Service	81	35.4%	50	21.8%	90	39.3%	3	1.3%	5	2.2%
Use or Storage of Data	13	28.9%	7	15.6%	23	51.1%	1	2.2%	1	2.2%
Driving Incident	3	27.3%	0	0.0%	8	72.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Communications	59	25.7%	36	15.7%	118	51.3%	12	5.2%	5	2.2%
Standard Of Service	57	23.5%	53	21.8%	111	45.7%	5	2.1%	17	7.0%
Officer Behaviour/ Attitude	36	19.3%	31	16.6%	104	55.6%	3	1.6%	13	7.0%
Access to Service	5	19.2%	2	7.7%	13	50.0%	0	0.0%	6	23.1%
Service Decision	42	15.0%	41	14.6%	166	59.3%	16	5.7%	15	5.4%
Service Policy	8	13.1%	3	4.9%	42	68.9%	1	1.6%	7	11.5%
Not Specified/ Not Recorded	24	24.7%	2	2.1%	48	49.5%	2	2.1%	21	21.6%

Table sorted by combined upheld and partially upheld percentage which is calculated based on the row total

### Responding to complaints

The Putting People First Customer Charter makes the commitment *“If you make a complaint we will provide a written response within 20 working days.”* In addition, the Complaints Procedure sets out the expected response times for Stage 1 complaints of 10 working days and Stage 2 complaints of 20 working days. In respect of Stage 2 complaints only, it also states *“Where it is*

*not possible to respond within this timescale, an explanation will be given to the complainant within the first 20 working days and a full response will always be made within 3 months except in exceptional circumstances.”*

Performance against the response commitment is calculated by comparing the response date against the target date. This ensures the complaint stage, different departmental processes and any adjustments made to reflect the complexity of an individual complaint are accurately reflected.

Table 10 shows response performance over the last five years. The overall figure of 68.1% of complaints responded to within timescales is slightly lower than the previous year and in line with the average for the previous four years of 68.7%.

Response within timescales varies substantially between departments. Economy, Transport and Environment have consistently achieved a high response performance over the last five years with 92.4% of complaints responded to within timescales during 2017/18. For all other departments more than a third of complaints were not responded to within timescales. This variation in performance does reflect the difference in severity and complexity of some complaints received and indicates the differences in the complaint processes. Where data is available, all departments show lower response performance in 2017/18 compared to 2013/14.

**Table 10. Percentage of complaints responded to within timescales overall and by department**

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Overall	78.3%	63.7%	59.7%	70.3%	68.1%
Adult Social Care and Health	64.4%	55.8%	72.8%	72.0%	59.9%
Children's Services	75.5%	41.0%	33.1%	63.2%	58.3%
Economy, Transport and Environment	98.6%	96.4%	96.9%	82.3%	92.4%
Commissioning, Communities and Policy	NA	NA	NA	83.3%	62.3%
Former Departments	92.9%	91.7%	95.8%	NA	NA

Data for the last two years has been analysed at a corporate level to understand how response times have been adjusted in agreement with complainants and the length of time complaints outside of the target have taken to resolve.

Table 11 shows that the average number of days taken to respond to complaints by stage. During 2017/18 the average number of days taken to respond to all complaints for Stage 1 is 26.7 days. This differs significantly from the standard target of 10 days. The Stage 2 average was 29.4 days, again higher than the standard target of 20 days.

The average of over 30 days for Stage 2 complaints being responded to within target shows that adjustments are being made in response to individual cases. This does not appear to be as common with Stage 1, where the average of 9.9 days is very close to the 10 day standard target.

During 2017/18 for Stage 1 complaints, the average number of days taken to respond increased from the previous year, for all complaints and those responded to within target. The average number of days taken to respond to all Stage 2 complaints over the same time period reduced significantly from 51.1 days in 2016/17 to 29.4 days in 2017/18.

**Table 11. Average number of days taken to respond to complaints by stage**

	2016-17		2017-18	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
All complaints responded to	20.1 days	51.1 days	26.7 days	29.4 days
Complaints responded to within target	9.9 days	35.1 days	12.8 days	30.9 days

## Demographics

Table 12 shows the gender recorded for complainants by stage. Where gender has been recorded there are significantly more female complainants with the overall figure for the last two years being 59% compared to males at 39%. The gender of the complainant was not recorded in 29% of instances during 2016/17 and 27% during 2017/18.

Demographic data is not currently collected as part of the complaint handling process and a high proportion is therefore not recorded. This makes any meaningful analysis or comparisons across the full range of demographic information unreliable.

**Table 12. Complainant Gender**

	2016-17				2017-18			
	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 1		Stage 2	
Female	233	39.5%	53	46.5%	334	46.4%	0	0.0%
Male	174	29.5%	37	32.5%	192	26.7%	3	8.6%
Joint female and male complainants	0	0.0%	1	0.9%	25	3.5%	0	0.0%
Not recorded	183	31.0%	23	20.2%	169	23.5%	32	91.4%

## Learning from Complaints

Complaints are dealt with on a case by case basis with a view to resolving any issues. In addition, complaints are reviewed to identify any improvements that can be made going forward. The following are some examples of key changes made as a result of this process:

- Within Adult Social Care and Health the system for completing communication plans has been reviewed and an action plan implemented.
- Within Children's Services best practice in the recording and storage of information arising from job interviews has been identified and included in the staff training programme.
- Within Commissioning, Communities and Policy the layout of library books was changed to ensure specific genres could be easily identified.
- Within Economy, Transport and Environment the process for identifying service improvement has been formalised and incorporated into the Quality Management System.

### **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)**

The LGSCO's Annual Review Letter 2017/18, giving details of the total number of complaints for Derbyshire County Council for the year ending 31 March 2018, is attached as Appendix A for consideration. All of the Ombudsman's annual review letters are published on their website ([www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)) and copied to the Audit Commission.

Derbyshire's Annual Review Letter will also be published on the Council's website <http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/council/complaints/ombudsman/default.asp>. The aim of the Annual Review Letter is to provide councils with information which will help them assess their performance in handling complaints.

For the period ending 31 March 2018, the LGSCO received 93 complaints relating to Derbyshire County Council. The 93 complaints compares to 84 complaints for Derbyshire in the period 2016/17 (an increase of 11.7%). Looking specifically at the decisions made by the LGSCO for the period ending 31 March 2018, there were 16 detailed investigations carried out, of which 8 were not upheld and 8 were upheld. This gives an upheld rate of 50%.

In 2016/17, the LGSCO upheld 12 cases following investigation compared to 8 cases in 2017/18. This represents a decrease in cases where there were findings against the Council of 33.3 %.

In respect of the 8 complaints upheld by the LGSCO in 2017/18 the LGSCO found fault and suggested a remedy in respect of each case and the remedies were acceptable to the Council. As a result of this there were no reports issued against the Council.

In terms of the 8 complaints upheld by the LGSCO these can be identified in relation to the following County Council departments:

Department	Number of decisions against the Council
Property Services	1
Adult Social Care and Health	4
Children's Services	3

Details of the 8 complaints and the remedies undertaken are set out in Appendix B.

One of the purposes of the LGSCO's annual letter to councils is to help ensure learning from their complaints informs scrutiny at the local level. Sharing the learning from their investigations and supporting the democratic scrutiny of public services continues to be one of the LGSCO's key priorities. The LGSCO has created a dedicated section of its website which contains a host of information to help scrutiny committees and councillors to hold their authority to account – complaints data, decision statements, public interest reports, focus reports and scrutiny questions. This can be found at [www.lgo.org.uk/scrutiny](http://www.lgo.org.uk/scrutiny) The LGSCO has asked that elected members and scrutiny committees are encouraged to make use of these resources.

The LGSCO shares the issues they see in their investigations to help councils learn from the issues others have experienced and avoid making the same mistakes. The LGSCO does this through the reports and other resources which are published. Over the last year, the LGSCO has seen examples of councils adopting a positive attitude towards complaints and working constructively with them to remedy injustices and take on board the learning from our cases. The LGSCO refers to one example, where a county council has seized the opportunity to entirely redesign how its occupational therapists work with all of its districts, to improve partnership working and increase transparency for the public. This originated from a single complaint. The LGSCO considers that this is the sort of culture that everyone benefits from – the learning taken from complaints is used to improve services.

The LGSCO has a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. In 2017-18 the LGSCO delivered 58 courses, training more than 800 people. The LGSCO also set up a network of council link officers to promote and share best practice in complaint handling, and hosted a series of seminars for that group. More information is available at [www.lgo.org.uk/training](http://www.lgo.org.uk/training)

### **Corporate Complaints Procedure**

The Corporate Complaints Officers Group has reviewed the current Corporate Complaints Procedure and identified the need to update the definition of complaints as well as standardise the timescales for response as outlined above. It is also proposed to include compliments in the procedure and merge the existing procedure for dealing with unreasonably persistent complainants and complaint behaviour into a single procedure. As part of this the possibility of including unreasonably persistent requests for service is being explored.

It is intended to prepare a draft of the combined Corporate Complaints Procedure for departmental comment by the end of January 2019, and for CMT approval by the end of February 2019.

### **Next steps**

Compliments and complaints are a useful source of feedback for the Council, and it is important that learning from the feedback continues to be identified, shared across departments and used to inform service improvement. The Corporate Complaints Officers Group will continue to work together to share learning, ensure consistency in complaint handling across departments and share efficiency and accuracy in the collection of the statistics.

As part of this work the Corporate Complaints Officers Group have identified the following issues arising from both the production of the report and the report itself. These issues are set out below:

- Delays in providing data for corporate reporting.
- The wide variation in the number of compliments recorded by different departments and service areas.
- The difference in the classification of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints between departments.
- The difference in minimum response timescale applied to complaints within departments.
- The low response performance of 68.1% of complaints responded to within timescale, and the difference between departments.

The following actions regarding the recording and reporting of complaints are recommended to address these issues:

- To ensure timeliness in corporate reporting, where transfer to APEX is not automated, departmental data should be submitted in the correct format no later than 6 weeks after quarters end.
- The Corporate Complaints Officers Group identify best practice in the recording of compliments and a report on the options and implications is brought to CMT for consideration.



- As part of the review of the Corporate Complaints Procedure outlined below CMT should consider adopting the existing practice within some departments of having a single standardised response target for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.
- To ensure consistent and accurate reporting of response times across the different departmental data sources the response target should be set at 28 calendar days.
- Where the complexity of a complaint or the gathering of evidence requires an extension to the timescales this can be agreed with the complainant but should only exceed 90 days in exceptional circumstances.
- To address delays in responding to complaints CMT agree a target for the percentage of complaints responded to within timescales and ensure there are sufficient resources in departments to meet this target.

In addition, the report will be used to support priority actions identified as part of the Enterprising Council Strategy. A key programme of work is currently being developed by the Customer Focus Work Stream and further updates on progress will be presented to CMT in due course.

### **Officer recommendations**

It is recommended that CMT:

1. Continue to use the information contained within the report to support key processes and service improvements within their departments.
2. Consider and feedback on the recommendations regarding the recording and reporting of compliments and complaints.
3. Note the review of the Corporate Complaints Procedure and receive further updates on progress in due course.

**Emma Alexander**  
**Strategic Director for Commissioning, Communities and Policy**