

<b>DECISION-MAKER</b>		GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE		
<b>SUBJECT</b>		SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL COMPLAINTS 2014/15		
<b>DATE OF DECISION</b>		14 SEPTEMBER 2015		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>		HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES		
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Name:	Customer Relations Manager	Tel:	023 8083 3258
	E-mail:	mark.naylor@southampton.gov.uk		

#### **STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

N/A

#### **SUMMARY**

This report summarises the type and number of complaints received from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.

The Customer Relations Team administers complaints from all directorates within Southampton City Council that the service area has been unable to resolve at point of contact, and are based in Legal & Democratic Services.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the report be noted.

#### **REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

To update members of this Committee on performance trends and any learning points arising out of complaints made by the public via Southampton City Council's Complaint's Procedures during 2014/15. Identifying these issues assists the Council in understanding where things have "gone wrong" in the past year in order to improve service delivery.

#### **CONSULTATION**

1. This report is presented to Governance Committee for information purposes.

#### **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

2. N/A

#### **DETAIL**

3. The effective and responsive management of complaints is a vital part of the Council's overall approach to customer care. In addition, the customer feedback that valid complaints provide can be used to improve service delivery, facilitate council wide learning and demonstrate continuous improvement.

4. At the end of a complaints investigation, the customer is advised that if they are still not satisfied with the outcome, they may pursue their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) or the Housing Ombudsman (HO). This provides the customer with an entirely independent source of redress if they remain aggrieved and the Council works closely with the LGO or HO to resolve outstanding complaints where appropriate..

**Corporate Complaints (1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31 March 2015)**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the council received a total of 1104 corporate complaints. This represents a 32 % increase on the 743 complaints receive in 2013/14. This is the first increase after three consecutive years of significant decrease in the total number of complaints received.

5. In 2014/15 five customer facing service areas accounted for 50% complaints received in the corporate complaint area.  
 In previous years, following the adoption of an “immediate service recovery” ethos, customer facing areas have been able to decrease the number of complaints recorded by taking immediate effective action on receipt of an issue from a member of the public. Where immediate action was not possible or the issue is identified as a continuing failure within the service area, matters are recorded as complaints and enter the complaints procedure and therefore recorded as such.  
 By adopting this approach, members of the public are receiving an immediate resolution to the issue, which is generally what is required.
6. Table 1 below lists the five Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints for 2014/15 and compares this with figures for 2013/14 and 2012/13.

<b>TABLE 1</b>					
<b>Rank of 5 Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints for 2014/15</b>					
<b>2014/15</b>		<b>2013/14</b>		<b>2012/13</b>	
Housing Services	21%	Capita Services	10%	Housing Services	27.7%
City Services (waste etc)	12%	Local Taxation	6%	Waste and Fleet Management	22.5%
Local taxation	8%	Housing Repairs	6%	Local Taxation	9.5%
Capita Delivered	6%	Waste Management	5%	Customer Services	6.3%
Planning	3%	Housing Services	4%	Regulatory Services	5.6%

Table 2 lists alphabetically those Divisions that have been included in the five with the highest proportion of complaints from 2012/13 to 2014/15.

<b>TABLE 2</b>			
<b>Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints 2011/12 to 2013/14</b>			
	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
Capita/Customer Services	6%	10%	5.6%
Highways & Parking	0.4%	N/A	N/A
Housing Services	21%	4%	27.7%
Housing Repairs	13%	6%	
Local Taxation	8%	6%	9.5%
Waste & Fleet Transport	12%	5%	22.5%
Regulatory Services	0.015%	N/A	5.6%

Complaints are recorded into one of a number of categories. The table below indicates the percentage of complaints within each category and compares this with figures for the last two years.

<b>TABLE 3</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
Discrimination	0%	0%	0.5%
Misinformation	2%	2%	8%
Charges	2%	4%	10%
Speed	1%	2%	3%
Behaviour	8%	11%	17%
Performance	29%	21%	38%
Other	27%	21%	12%
Avoidable Contact	1%	0%	2%
Disagree with Decision	12%	12%	10.5%

Despite repeated attempts to encourage Investigators of complaints, at service level, to use the “other” box as a last resort to define a complaint resolution, the percentage of “other” has now risen to 27%. In June 2015 a request was submitted for the “other” facility to be removed from the system.

7. Table 4 below provides a breakdown of this Council's performance in relation to complaints compared to the Council's statistical neighbours (as used for formal audit purposes). This helps the Council compare like for like in terms of type of authority, geographical area within the country and broadly similar population sizes and make-up. The Corporate Complaints policy is not a statutory requirement. However, failure to have a Corporate Complaints policy in place would lead to an adverse report from the LGO and would likely be viewed as maladministration by the LGO in itself. The systems and processes that individual councils have in place are based on LGO guidance and are tailored to individual council structures and services. Comparison between authorities is, therefore, difficult, as other Council's may operate variations in their complaints regimes. The following table sets out the overall figures for the number of complaints received.

<b>TABLE 4</b>				
<b>Authority</b>	<b>Corporate Complaints received 2014/15</b>	<b>Corporate Complaints received 2013/14</b>	<b>Adult Population 2011</b>	<b>Complaints per head of adult population 2014/15</b>
Southampton	1104	743	236,900	0.0046
Portsmouth	474	438	207,100	0.002
Brighton & Hove	1701	1786	273,400	0.006
Plymouth		1329	207,877	
Bristol	2201	2331	432,500	0.005

8. Table 5 below shows the number of complaints responded to at each stage of the procedure. Those complaints that cannot be responded to within the target period are frequently those that are more complex, and can involve investigating actions across more than one service area or division. Where this situation occurs the complainant will be contacted and a revised completion date agreed.

<b>TABLE 5</b>				
	<b>Working days to close 2014/15</b>		<b>Working days to close 2013/14</b>	
<b>Stage</b>	<b>≤ 20 days</b>	<b>&gt; 20days</b>	<b>≤ 20 days</b>	<b>&gt; 20 days</b>
1	86%	14%	90%	10%
	<b>≤ 20 days</b>	<b>&gt;20 days</b>	<b>≤ 20 days</b>	<b>&gt;20 days</b>
2	92%	8%	81%	19%

As of the 1 June 2015 there are no outstanding Corporate complaints that have not been responded to, which were recorded prior to the 31 March 2015.

## Children's Services (Social Care) Complaints (1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 –31<sup>st</sup> March 2015)

9. Children's Services and Learning complaints are classified according to the following definitions:
  - Social care complaints are those investigated under the Children's Social Care Complaints Policy (which reflects statutory regulations);
  - All other Children's Services complaints are investigated using the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy;
  - Referrals are requests for help which are passed to the relevant council directorate and partner services;
10. During the financial year 2014/15, there were 253 Stage 1 complaints made about Children's Social Care. This compared to 154 in 2013/14 and shows a 34% increase in complaints received.
11. The majority of complaints continue to be resolved at the first stage of the procedure through work by managers and staff in the service, consistent with good customer care. Where resolution is not possible in this way, the Council commissions an Independent Investigator (external to the Council who is responsible for investigating the complaint) and an Independent Person (whose role is to oversee the investigation to ensure fairness and that the child(ren) involved in the process are represented), to look into complaints at Stage 2 of our procedure.
12. Only 5 Stage 1 complaints (1.97%) required independent investigation. One of which was withdrawn following mediation.
13. Table 6 sets out the number of complaints which progress to Stage 2, and shows how this has changed since 2012/13 to 2014/15.

TABLE 6		
External Investigation of Complaints (Stage 2)		
Year	No of Stage 1 Complaints	Percentage (and number) progressing to Stage 2
2012/13	179	1.12% (2)
2013/14	154	1.81% (4)
2014/15	235	1.97% (5)

14. Complaints unresolved after Stage 2 (and not covered by the Statutory process) can be referred to the LGO.
15. Table 7 shows a slight increase in the total number of contacts (complaints, representations, comments and compliments etc) received in 2014/15 compared to 2013/14.

This is unlikely to be a true reflection of the number of compliments received by staff but recording is historically an issue. All staff should be encouraged to send copies of compliments and letters they receive to the Customer Relations Team in order that they can be recorded and reported to the relevant service Director so that good service can be recognised.

TABLE 7				
	2013/14		2014/15	
Record Type	Number		Number	
Stage 1 complaints	154		235	
Comments	10		7	
Referrals	7		0	
Compliments	63		8	
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>		<b>250</b>	

16. Table 8 provides a breakdown of complaints by complaint issue and type and highlights some of the major themes and issues contained within the contacts and complaints we receive. As most complaints relate to more than one issue, this approach to breaking them down allows us to maximise our learning from them. For example, many of the complaints relate to either about the service provision, individual staff or poor communication. Some of these are consistent with the period of high staff turnover that impacted upon the wider consistency.

TABLE 8

Complaint Issue	Number
Communication/Information	40
Unhappy with social worker	94
Unhappy with service provided/received	97
Policy/Procedure	0
Financial Issues	3
Eligibility Criteria	5
School Admissions	2
Bullying/ Exclusions	0
Environment Housing	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>241</b>

17. Table 9 shows an overall increase in response rates (within policy timescales) to complaints in Children's Services and Learning in 2014/15.

<b>TABLE 9</b>				
<b>Overall Performance Report -01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014</b>				
<b>Record Type</b>	<b>Acknowledgment</b>		<b>Full Response</b>	
	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
<b>Safeguarding: Social Care</b>				
Stage 1 complaint	98.65%	99.5%	84.16%	73.5%
<b>Learning Services</b>				
Corporate Stage 1 Complaint	84.16%	92.9%	75%	75.0%

The below tables indicate the outcomes of complaints

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Partially upheld</b>	<b>Not upheld</b>	<b>Stopped / Withdrawn</b>
Stage 1 (statutory)	39	53	111	6
Stage 1 (corporate)	5	2	9	0
Stage 2 (statutory)	2	0	0	1
Stage 2 (corporate)	1	0	1	0
Stage 3 (statutory)	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>7</b>

#### **Remedies used**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Apology	41
Explanation	114
Review process / policy	4
Training needs	3
Reimbursement of expenses	0
Meeting offered	2
School place offered	2
In court process /arena	6

As of the 1 June 2015 there are no outstanding Childrens complaints that have not been responded to, which were recorded prior to the 31 March 2015.

#### **Adults Services (Social Care) Complaints (1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015)**

18. For the financial year 2014/15, there were 113 stage one complaints made about Health & Adult Social Care compared to 154 in 2013/14. This represents a 26.62% decrease.

The majority of complaints continue to be resolved at the early stages of the procedure as a result of work by the team manager or senior manager. However, where resolution is not possible in this way stage two investigations are undertaken by the Customer Relations Team.

19. Table 12 sets out the number of complaints by age. The highest number of complaints (53 (46.90%)) is from the 76+ age group, which should be expected in part because this age group is the largest in the service population served by Health and Adult Social Care.

<b>TABLE 12</b>		
<b>Adults Complaints by Age</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
16-19	0	
20-24	3	2.65%
25-59	27	23.90%
60-64	8	7.08%
65-75	13	11.50%
76+	53	46.90%
Not known	9	7.97%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

20. Table 13 provides a breakdown of complaints by complaint issue and highlights some of the major themes and issues contained with the complaints we receive. The issues raised can be classified in ten specific ways.

<b>Reason / Issue for complaint</b>	<b>No of Issues</b>
Disabled Parking Badge	10
Eligibility criteria	8
Finance	46
Information / Communication	12
Miscellaneous: Housing Environment	1
Policy and Procedure	0
Unhappy with care manager	16
Provider Services	5
Unhappy with service	47
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>145</b>



21. The majority of complaints were regarding service provision and professional practice.

TABLE 14	
H&ASC AND CORPORATE COMPLAINTS BY SERVICE AREA	
How Received	2014/15
Safeguarding	1
Single Point Access (SPA)	9
Disabled Parking Badges	10
Hospital Discharge Team	6
Long Term Team One	38
Long Term Team Two	8
Day Care Services	2
External Provider – Domiciliary Care	4
Internal Provider – Residential Care	7
Internal Provider – Domiciliary Care	0
Mental Health Services	2
Finance: Benefits (Assessment)	6
Debtors Team	18
Direct Payments/Personal Budget	12
Sensory Services	0

- 22.

#### OUTCOMES

Outcome	Number
Complaint withdrawn	2
Not Upheld	47
Partially Upheld	20
Upheld	30
Safeguarding investigation	4
Ongoing	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>106</b>

23. Adult Social care complaints are assessed by risk level. Complaints are classified as low, medium and high risk as follows:
- *Low risk* - an unsatisfactory service or experience not directly related to care and which has no or minimal impact or risk to provision of care.
  - *Medium risk* - Service or experience below reasonable expectations in several ways, but not causing lasting problems. Has potential to impact on service provision. Some potential for litigation

- *High risk* - Significant issues regarding standards, quality of care and safeguarding or denial of rights. Complaints with clear quality assurance or risk management issues that may cause lasting problems for the organisation and so require investigation. Possibility of litigation and adverse local publicity. Alternatively, serious issues that may cause long-term damage, such as grossly substandard care, professional misconduct or death. Will require immediate and in –depth investigation. May involve serious safety issues. A high probability of litigation and strong possibility of adverse national publicity

24. These risk levels will affect the pathway and timescale of how we deal with these complaints. (See Table 17).
25. Overall performance has declined since last year and the reasons for some of the delays are reported to have been shortages of staff in some services.
26. Under the adult social care complaints procedure, the council aims to send complainants a full reply within 20 working days if possible, or if the matter is more complicated, this can be extended and the complainant informed. For extremely complex cases, which may require independent investigation, a target of up to 60 working days may be necessary depending on risk category or number of people to be interviewed.

TABLE 17					
OVERALL PERFORMANCE REPORT					
Complaint Type	Acknowledgement within timescale		Full response within timescale		
	Adult Statutory Complaint	2013/14	98.8%	LOW	2013-14
2014/15		100%	2014-15		N / A
			MEDIUM	2013-14	46.75% (72)
				2014-15	60.0% (57)
			HIGH	2013-14	33.3% (1)
				2014-15	55.6%

As of the 1 June 2015 the number of outstanding Adult complaints that have not been responded to, which were recorded prior to the 31 March 2015, is as follows:

Receipt Date	Reference	Due date	Overdue by days
09/12/2014	A/CRT086	08/01/2015	100
16/03/2015	A/CRT154	15/04/2015	33
23/03/2015	A/CRT157	17/04/2015	31
23/03/2015	A/CRT158	21/04/2015	29
28/10/2014	A/CRT073	25/11/2014	18
13/03/2015	A/CRT150	24/04/2015	40

## 2014/15 CONCLUSIONS

27. Overall the total number of complaints dealt with in 2014/15 increased by 23.7%.

### **Corporate**

Complaints increased by 32%

Stage 1 response within target time remained static

Stage 2 response within target time saw significant improvement

### **Childrens (incl learning Services)**

Complaints increased by 34%

Stage 1 response within target time saw significant decrease

Stage 2 response (independent investigation) remained static.

### **Adults**

Complaints decreased by 26.62%

Stage 1 response within target time saw a decrease in performance

Stage 2 response within target time remained static

28. **Learning from Complaints**

Each complaint when finalised is returned to the Customer Relations Team with a feedback/lessons learned document completed by the Investigating Manager

Whilst many issues are unique to that particular complaint, some highlight deficiencies in policy and process. They also highlight good or poor practice within individual departments or services.

These forms are returned with an Action Plan. This plan gives time scales for issues to be rectified. The return rate of completed forms varies. Directorate Management teams are impressing upon Service Managers the value of feedback.

The Customer Relations Team monitor these sheets to

- 1) ensure that the action plan is completed
- 2) identify issues forming patterns or trends
- 3) identify learning for individuals, teams or services as a whole.

Individual “lesson learned” continue to be recorded and improvements to services are made on those individual basis.

Examples of this are;

Complaint details were used in the recent update of the Council web site  
A review of the “dropped kerb” enforcement policy and letter wording used by the Highways Team.  
On going refinements to the communications available to service users in respect of both Adult and Social care including issues with telephone management, email generic boxes etc.

The Customer Relations Team Manager attends, every quarter, the Directorates management team meetings.

Quarterly figures are presented and trends and lessons identified.

Action plans are then endorsed by senior managers and used to improve performance and direct change in the following three months, before figures etc are presented again.

This allows continuous improvement, but in small manageable pieces, identifying trends early and providing solutions quickly.

During 2014 new templates and guides for dealing with complaints were prepared and the Customer Relations Team embarked on a programme of attending Service Manager Meetings, updating staff with common issues regarding complaint investigation, process and providing feedback regarding dissatisfaction expressed by customers after receiving stage 1 replies.

The templates have been refined during 2014 as a result of feedback and the programme is to continue to be rolled out during 2015 until all managers and departments have been seen.

It is intended that a generic training package will be formalised which can be used when demand requires (ie new managers to the authority).

The most significant issue recorded as cause for complaint continues to be communication, especially with individuals but also with individual departments.

This is more noticeable in Children’s and Adult Services.

Whilst the pressure on Corporate Teams is lessened by the availability of online forms and electronic contact processes, Social Care clients rely and require either face to face contact or telephone contact with staff who carry their own work load. This coupled with the fact that most Social care staff spend a considerable amount of time out of the office, leads to frustration and complaint on behalf of the customer.

Whilst clients are able to contact departments within the Social Care arena, it is the length of time for staff to re contact the customer that causes the frustration.

Communication issues within Childrens Services complaints still remains high and the service continue to seek remedies to these issues.

As with the Corporate Teams, a “service recovery” ethos has been adopted in Social Care where encouragement is given to try to deal with issues quickly without leading to formal complaint procedure. This has not had the same impact in Social care because of the very nature of the work and individuals being dealt with by the service.

## **29. Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints 2014/15**

Local Government Ombudsman complaints, the final ‘independent’ stage for all complaints processes, are dealt with by the Legal Services Manager (Corporate & Environment) on behalf of the Council. The Local Government Ombudsman (the Commission for Local Administration in England) is appointed by HM the Queen and operates under Act of Parliament to provide an independent review of all complaints falling within their jurisdiction.

In an effort to simplify outcomes for complainants the LGO has recently moved from findings of ‘Maladministration’ and ‘Injustice’ to a more commonly understood term ‘fault’. If ‘Fault’ is found a complaint is recorded as upheld, even if the Council has already taken steps to remedy that fault and the LGO is satisfied with the remedy offered by the Council.

All findings are now reported on the LGO website within 3 months of the decision being published.

Statutory Reports still remain the highest ‘fault’ finding the LGO can make. These require the Council’s Monitoring Officer to prepare a report for consideration at full Council following a period of statutory publication of the findings. Council’s that fail to co-operate with the LGO or any of their findings may be subject to Judicial Review.

It was noted in the last annual report on LGO complaints that the expected increase in complaints following the substantial service impacts caused by resource constraints had not yet worked through the system. It would appear, in considering this year’s figures, that those service reductions are now having a negative impact on the number of complaints being referred to the LGO with substantial increases in referrals overall. A very significant number of complainants are also either not using the Council’s own complaints mechanisms, or completing them, before attempting to engage the LGO. A 131% increase in premature complaints being referred back to the Council has been recorded this year. While the overall cause of this is not yet known, there are 2 significant factors that may be contributing. It will be seen within this report itself that a large number of complaints in certain areas are significantly overdue and delays in dealing with complaints locally do mean complainants attempt to refer matters to the LGO without completing the Council’s own complaints procedures.

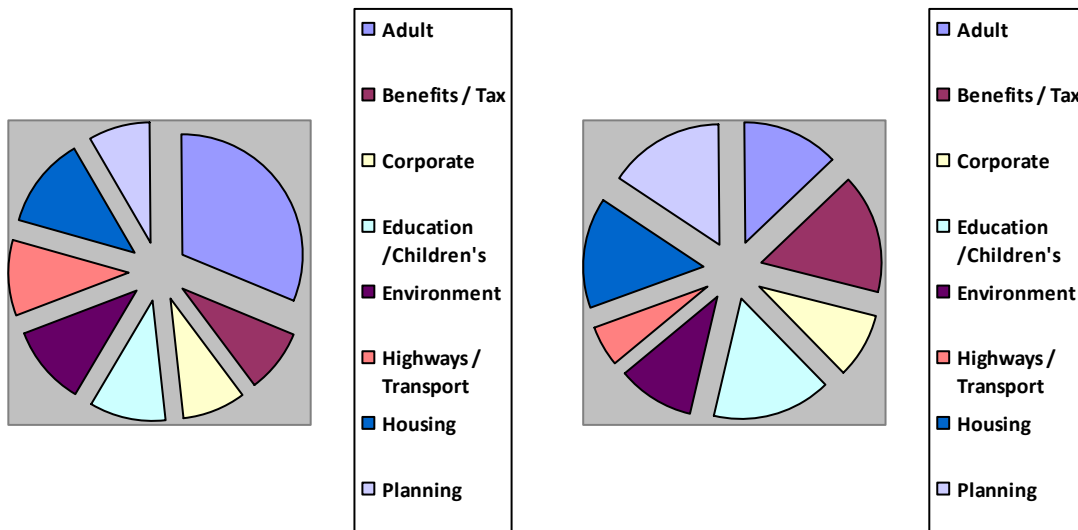
In response to a specific complaint several years ago the Council agreed to include a direct link to 'Complaints' on the front page of it's website. Following the review of the website last year, the site no longer includes a direct 'Complaints' button linking the public to the complaints system from the front page of the website (complaints are now listed on a subpage within 'Contacts'). Insufficient analytics are available at the time of writing this report to see if the 'hit count' from the web site shows a reduction in traffic as a result of the removal of the direct link but this is likely to be a contributing factor when taken alongside the increase in complaints generally.

	2013/14	2014/15	% increase / (decrease)
Complaints received	48	69	43.8%
Decisions made	45	70	55.5%
Statutory Reports	0	0	0
Upheld	8	7	(-14.3%)
Not Upheld	10	8	(-20%)
Closed / Invalid etc	14	25	78.6%
Premature Referrals	13	30	130.8%

### 30. Complaints Received by Area

2013/4

2014/15



### 31. Details of Complaints Upheld

Of the complaints upheld by the LGO last year, 5 related to Planning matters, 1 adult social services and 1 Housing.

Of the 5 planning complaints, 3 related to the same planning application. In that case an application for a granny annexe had been approved and the LGO was critical of the Council's failure to properly consider the plans showing a slope at the property and had neglected to impose a condition preserving the slope. The applicant subsequently raised the level of the land to provide an even surface resulting in some impact on neighbouring amenity. In 2 of the 3 cases, the impact was considered marginal and no action was required by the Council to remedy the complaints. In the third, the Council accepted there would be some overlooking as a result and offered an appropriate boundary treatment to remedy the complaint as part of its internal complaint response. The complainant remained unhappy and referred the matter to the LGO. The LGO upheld the complaint on finding fault but indicated that it was happy with the remedy offered by the Council. The total remedy in that case was a written apology, £50 in recognition of time and trouble pursuing the complaint and boundary treatment valued at £2523.57.

The remaining 2 planning complaints were remedied without financial cost to the authority. In one case the planning decision was held as valid but the complaint was upheld on failings in the Council's handling of the complaint. The LGO found fault in the way the stage 1 complaint was addressed by the Head of Service (having been named as the officer who made the delegated decision on the original planning application) without explanation of why he could investigate and by the failure to address this point or a discrepancy in plans submitted with the application in the Council's stage 2 response. Further officer training on responding to complaints was offered to 2 officers accordingly and clear guidance issued to Heads of Service in relation to responding to complaints where a prior decision had been issued by more junior officers acting in their name. The final planning complaint related to a perceived failure to take enforcement action against a business operating out of a residential property. The substantive planning decision was again found to be without fault but faults were identified in the way the matter was investigated by the services area, including delays of some 5 months, poor communication and loss of evidence (DVD's). The LGO noted however that the complainant had significantly contributed to the delays, swamped the planning department with video recordings found to be of little relevance when viewed and contributed to a significant drain on resources. An apology for the errors in this case was deemed sufficient remedy.

The children's social care complaint related to failings in the way the de-registration of a foster carer was managed following the receipt of safeguarding concerns. Failings included inadequate instructions to social workers investigating the matter and failure to support other family members involved along with general poor communication while investigations were underway. The LGO was however satisfied that there was no significant injustice caused and the Council's offer to apologise and review procedures was an adequate remedy.

The adult social care complaint related to a joint decision by the Council and NHS Trust (joint complaints are investigated under a protocol engaging both bodies). The complaint related to the adequacy of rehabilitation and discharge procedures following a stay in hospital for stroke. The Council apologised for its part in the errors and the LGO accepted that the main faults lay with the NHS Trust. The Trust was ordered to apologise again and to produce an action plan for a review and changes to discharge procedures.

The Council remains in the top quartile nationally for speed and efficacy of its responses to and co-operation with the Local Government Ombudsman and has recently been recognised and congratulated at a national seminar for Ombudsman link officers for its proactive approach to staff training and working with the LGO to identify and deliver joint training for senior managers when the complaints service and processes were restructured. That said, the training offer previously provided has been largely superseded by high staff turnover in key areas and significant organisational restructures and further consideration to refresher training and training for new staff will need to be considered as the organisation settles into new operating models over the next 12 – 18 months.

Nationally, the Ombudsman has published a special report on the impact of resource constraints on Council's complaints handling. The LGO's *Annual Review of Local Government Complaints* suggests that many councils are dealing with increasing numbers of complaints and have less resource available to manage them due to resources being cut in service areas and complaint handling teams.

Research found that, on average, people spent nine months trying to resolve their complaint before going to the LGO, and 43% of people were not told that they could approach the LGO for an independent review.

Nationally in 2014/15 the LGO registered 18,211 complaints and enquiries about councils, and upheld 46% of all complaints where it carried out a detailed investigation. Within its total number of complaints there was a 10% increase in adult social care complaints and an 11% decrease in complaints about benefits and tax.

Local Government Ombudsman, Dr Jane Martin, said:

*"Our findings point to a local complaints system that is under real pressure. Complaint handling teams are having to do 'more with less' and the process is not as accessible and timely as it should be.*

*"More investment into complaints, both in terms of resources and developing an open culture, is a good value way of driving service improvement – and local government needs to challenge itself on this question. Complaints must be seen as a positive. They can provide an early warning system for issues and are an indicator of public sentiment."*

*"We hope that by sharing our data and knowledge from complaints, we can help with this process by promoting local accountability for actions, and allowing better scrutiny of services."*



### 32. So How Does Southampton Compare?

The table below shows how Southampton performs against key local and unitary comparators. This is an edited snapshot of total number of complaints and % Upheld and is not intended to give more than a brief overview of comparative pressures / performance. More detail, and statistics for all other Council's, is included in the LGO Annual Report referred to above.

	Total Complaints	% Upheld
Bournemouth	76	40%
Bristol	131	55.9%
Brighton & Hove	138	51.5%
Hampshire	107	53.6%
Plymouth	90	40%
Portsmouth	45	60%
Southampton	69	46.7%

Southampton continues to perform reasonably well compared to the national and local picture but still faces many of the same challenges including reducing staff and other resources both within service areas and the corporate complaints team this year. Full details of both the Council's annual performance letter and the LGO Annual Review can be viewed on [www.LGO.org.uk](http://www.LGO.org.uk)

### 33. Learning from Complaints

#### Communications

- Feedback used to form consultation and implementation of the Web Refresh project
- Changes made to voice recognition switchboard system

#### Highways & Parking

Enforcement Policy and letters sent to residents regarding dropped kerb requirements reviewed after customer complaints highlighted issues which appeared out of step with other similar council policy

- As a result of large number of major road projects outside the city boundary (which effected residents within the city due to the diversion etc, information distributed to alert residents to the complaint contact details for the respective companies and agencies for direct complaint management, rather than be referred after being received by SCC

#### Local Taxation

- Wording of standard letters reviewed due to complaints about apparent abruptness of the letters.

### Children's Services & Learning

Learning from complaints can be put into three categories, Individual learning, Team/Service Learning and Organisational learning. During the past year complaints have resulted in the following actions to improve future services. These include:

- Review of the SEND application and process systems
- Review of Police Disclosure information requests to speed up system and get offenders to court quickly thereby safeguarding child victims in a timely manner. Internal telephone system refined so that duty officers can intercept office calls and all social workers instructed to give out direct office and mobile telephone numbers to aid direct contact with service users.

### Health & Adult Social Care

- Charges waived or refunded
- Time and trouble payment reimbursement of legal fees
- Review of and changes to Care Package / Care Manager
- Mental Health assessment and process forms reviewed. Communications forms an on-going part of service area accessibility.

