

Report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report summarises the customer feedback received by the Council during 2018/19 and provides a comparison to previous performance as well as other authorities. Key points include:
- 51 complaints were received by the Council during 2018/19 at Stage 1 of its complaints process
 - The percentage of complaints escalated to Stage 2 has decreased from 32.5% in 2017/18 to 17.6% (9 from 51)
 - Consistency in handling complaints has stayed at a high level, as has the number of complaints that are responded to within target time – 49 out of 51
 - Analysis of the 51 complaints received in 2018/19 showed that 62.7% were unjustified
 - The Council received 105 compliments about its services in 2018/19 – 36 more than the previous year
 - The number of complaints received by the Local Government Ombudsman in relation to Rushcliffe Borough Council were the lowest in Nottinghamshire.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Overview Group note the key points highlighted in this report and identify any areas of concern requiring further scrutiny.

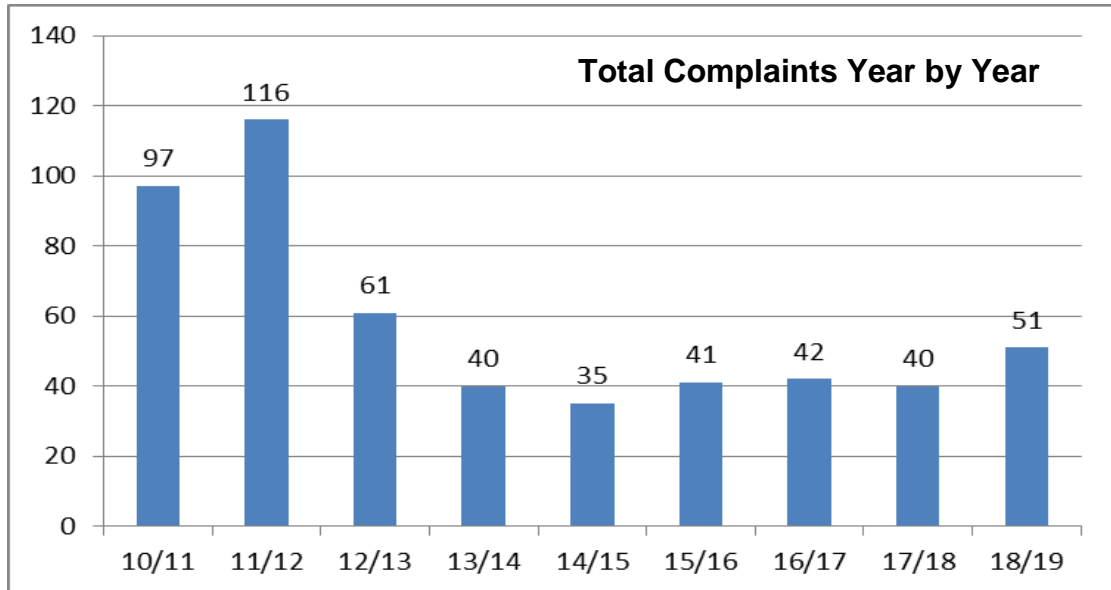
3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. Officers work hard to investigate complaints quickly and thoroughly. Learning points are identified and fed back at team meetings. Where the interpretation of policy is at the root of the problem this is considered and changes made where necessary.

4. Supporting Information

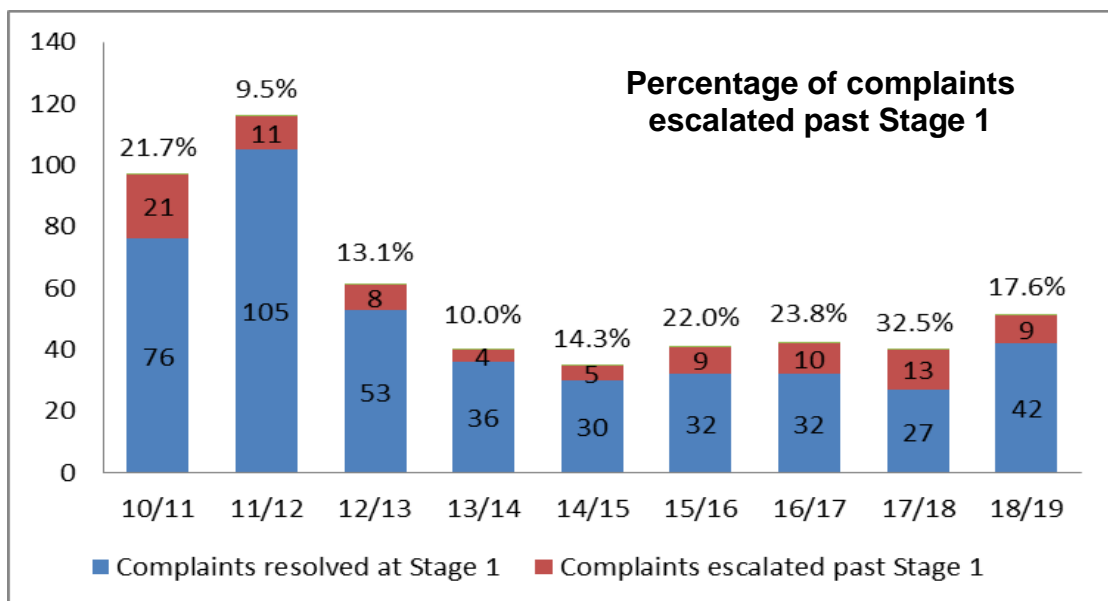
- 4.1. The total number of complaints received by the Council in 2018/19 was 51. This shows an increase of around 25% compared to last year, and indeed the five years before that. The trend for complaints received by the Council over the last few years is shown in the graph below. It initially showed a positive downward trend, and has evened out over the last few years to show a very consistent level. It must be remembered that the current slight increase in

complaints is against a background of reducing resources resulting in officers doing things differently and changing services to make them more efficient.



4.2. The standard of response to complaints remains high and, more often than not, the complaint is concluded at this stage. However, 9 out of 51 complaints were escalated to stage two of the Council's customer feedback procedure, the subjects being:

- The handling of a Council tax case
- A neighbouring farmer's activities
- Pre-application planning advice
- The transparency of the Local Plan
- The actions of a member of the Planning staff
- The actions of members of the Licencing staff
- Concern that proper Planning procedures were not followed (three).



The percentage of escalations past Stage 1 in 2018/19 is 17.6%, significantly lower than last year (32.5%). The reason for this is a combination of the slightly higher number of complaints received, and the lower number of escalations (9 in 2018/19 compared to 13 in 2017/18).

- 4.3 In 2018/19, 49 out of 51 complaints were answered within target time. Figures for each service area are shown in the table below. It is felt that complaints were well-handled in all cases.

Service Area	Total Complaints	In Target Time	%
Communities	21	20	95.2
Neighbourhoods	15	15	100.0
Finance and Corporate Services	14	13	92.9
Transformation	1	1	100.0
Total	51	49	96.1

- 4.4 A complaint is adjudged to be justified if an individual or service area has done something wrong to cause the complaint, or if the level of service does not come up to the standard expected. If learning points arise as a result of someone complaining about a particular service area, they are raised at team meetings as part of on-going training for staff. This year, 19 out of 51 (37.3%) complaints were judged to have been justified. This is a significantly lower total than last year, when 21 out of 40 (52.5%) were felt to have been justified.

- 4.5 Complainants who remain dissatisfied after complaining to the Council can escalate their complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman. During 2018/19, the LGO received 9 complaints and/or enquiries about services offered by Rushcliffe Borough Council:

- five were about Planning and Development
- two were about Corporate and Other Services
- one was about Housing
- one was about Adult Care Services

The LGO issued nine decisions on complaints received about the Council in 2018/19: three were closed after initial enquiries; three were not upheld; three were referred back for local resolution. The LGO data is shown in the table below, along with a comparison with other local authorities in the immediate area.

Local Authority	Decisions made 2018/19						
	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid or incomplete	Referred back for local resolution
Rushcliffe	9	0	3	0	3	0	3
Ashfield	16	1	1	0	5	1	8
Bassetlaw	12	1	4	0	3	2	2
Broxtowe	13	1	0	2	4	1	5
Gedling	14	0	5	0	3	2	4
Mansfield	14	0	1	2	7	1	3

Newark and Sherwood	10	2	2	0	6	0	0
Charnwood	22	1	4	0	7	0	10
N W Leics	11	2	1	2	1	1	4
Melton	7	1	0	0	3	1	2
S Kesteven	14	0	1	2	4	0	7

4.6 The table in **Appendix 1** gives brief details of the complaints received during the year 2018/19, how they were distributed across the four service areas, whether they were resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2, and whether or not they were felt to be justified.

4.7 The satisfaction rate for the handling of complaints in 2018/19 was 100%. Two complainants returned monitoring forms. Of those, both were satisfied. The level of response remains very sporadic, and as such, no firm conclusions can be drawn. The feeling is that where a problem has been easy to fix, and the customer has got their desired outcome, satisfaction tends to be higher. Where the complaint involves a protracted case, involving services such as benefits or planning, the complaint is as of a result of misinterpretation / misunderstanding of policy, and so satisfaction tends to be much lower.

4.8 The number of recorded compliments has risen significantly. The distribution among service areas is shown in the table below, along with a comparison to last year:

Service Area	Number of Compliments 2018/19	Number of Compliments 2017/18
Communities	28	24
Neighbourhoods	50 (+ 1 for Streetwise)	24 (+ 3 for Streetwise)
Finance and Corporate Services	8	9
Transformation	18	8
Total	105	68

5. Risks and Uncertainties

5.1. Serious reputational damage could be suffered if the Council fails to respond appropriately to complaints. Annual training is offered to those investigating and responding to complaints, and support is given to individuals during the process to ensure a thorough investigation is undertaken and the response to the complainant is clear, complete and customer focused.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

Very occasionally compensation is given where complainants find themselves out of pocket due to an error made by the Council.

6.2. Legal Implications

Should complainants remain dissatisfied after the Council has concluded its investigation they can take their complaint to the Local Government

Ombudsman. This report confirms the Council has a robust process for complaint handling.

6.3. **Equalities Implications**

Those wishing to complain have the ability to do so in a variety of different ways and each complaint is treated on its own merits independently.

6.4. **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications**

There are no Section 17 implications.

7. **Link to Corporate Priorities**

The successful resolution of complaints can support all three of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

8. **Recommendations**

It is RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Overview Group identify any areas of concern requiring further scrutiny.

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Background papers available for Inspection:	
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Complaints by Service Area

Appendix 1

Service Area	Number of Complaints	Subject of complaint	Resolved at Stage 1 or 2	Justified?
Communities	21	14 x Planning application / decision 2 x Staff attitude / behaviour 1x Pre-app advice 1 x Transparency of Local Plan 1 x Advice re hire of RBC venue 1 x Assets of community value issue 1 x Injury at RBC venue	3 x Stage 2; 11 x Stage 1 1 x Stage 2; 1 x Stage 1 Stage 2 Stage 2 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1	1 x Yes; 13 x No 1 x Yes; 1 x No No No Yes No Yes
Neighbourhoods	15	4 x Staff attitude / behaviour 2 x Homelessness case 2 x Cleanliness of RBC facility 1 x Lack of EH enforcement 1x Condition of public toilets 1 x Condition of neighbour's house 1 x Pest control payment 1 x Neighbouring HIMO 1 x R2 go collection issue 1 x Streetwise cleansing issue	1 x Stage 2; 3 x Stage 1 2 x Stage 1 2 x Stage 1 Stage 2 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1	2 x Yes; 2 x No 2 x No 2 x Yes No Yes No No No No Yes
Finance and Corporate Services	14	12 x Council tax issue 1 x Level of service 1 x Handling of FOI request	1 x Stage 2; 11 x Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1	7 x Yes; 5 x No No Yes
Transformation	1	Staff attitude / behaviour	Stage 1	Yes