

Report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1. This report summarises the complaints received during 2019/20 and provides a comparison to previous performance. Key points include the following:

- 45 complaints were received by the Council at Stage 1 of its complaints process.
- The percentage of complaints escalated past Stage 1 has increase slightly from 17.6% in 2018/19 to 20.0% (9 from 45).
- Consistency in handling complaints has stayed at a high level, as has the number of complaints that are responded to within target time – 42 out of 45.
- Analysis of the 45 complaints received in 2019/20 showed that 75.6% were unjustified.
- The Council received 132 compliments about its services in 2019/20 – 27 more than the previous year.
- Local Government Ombudsman complaints for Rushcliffe totalled 5 and was the lowest in comparison to authorities in the immediate area.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that this report is accepted as a true record of customer feedback in 2019/20.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

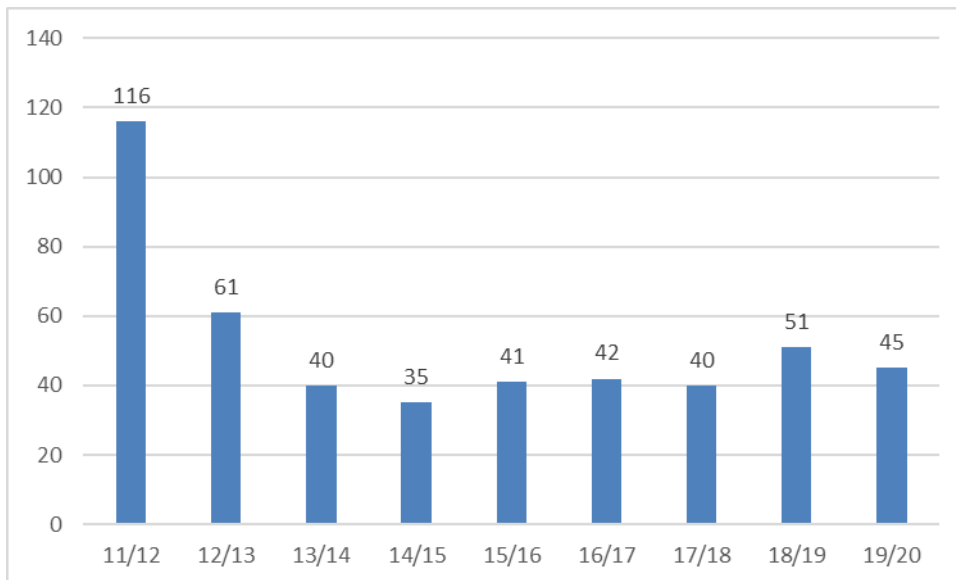
3.1 Officers work hard to investigate complaints quickly and thoroughly. Learning points are identified and fed back at team meetings. Where the interpretation of policy is at the root of the problem this is considered and changes made where necessary.

4. Supporting Evidence

4.1. Total Complaints

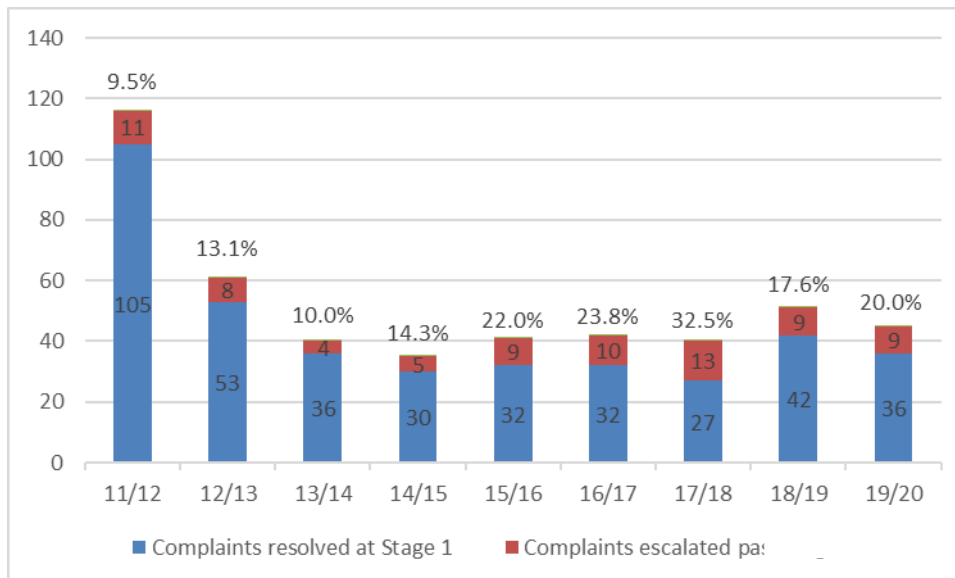
The number of complaints received by the Council in 2019/20 was 45. This shows a decrease of six compared to the previous year. The trend for

complaints received by the Council over the last few years is shown on 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. This is against a background of reduced resources and consolidation and, therefore, officers doing things differently and looking to improve services.



Total Complaints Year by Year

4.2. Escalation of Complaints



Percentage of complaints escalated past Stage 1

The standard of response at Stage 1 remains high and, more often than not, the complaint is concluded at this stage. However, 9 out of 45 complaints were escalated to Stage 2, the subjects being:

- Planning application / decision (three)
- Housing banding / allocation (two)
- Noise nuisance investigation
- Environmental Health enforcement action
- Environmental Health staff conduct
- Direct debit dates for Council Tax collection.

The percentage of escalations past Stage 1 in 2019/20 is 20.0% - slightly higher than last year (17.6%). The reason for this is that although the number of escalations is the same (9), there were fewer complaints than last year.

4.3 Complaints handling – Timeliness and Quality of Response

42 out of 45 complaints in 2019/20 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 (10 working days)	%
Communities	14	13	92.9
Neighbourhoods	17	17	100.0
Finance and Corporate Services	13	11	84.6
Transformation	1	1	100.0
Total	45	42	93.3

4.4 Justified Complaints

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 sectional team meetings as part of on-going training for staff.

11 out of 45 (24.4%) complaints were judged to have been justified. This is a significantly lower total than last year, when 19 out of 51 (37.3%) were felt to have been justified.

4.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Statistics

Occasionally, complainants escalate their complaints to the LGO. This is an option when the Council's process has been exhausted and the customer still does not consider that they have achieved a satisfactory outcome.

During 2019/20, the LGO received five complaints and/or enquiries about services offered by Rushcliffe Borough Council:

- two were about Planning and Development
- one was about Benefits and Tax
- one was about Housing
- one was about Environmental Services

The LGO issued five decisions on complaints received about the Council in 2019/20: one was upheld (the Council complied with the LGO in apologising to the injured party and agreeing to staff training to ensure the situation did not arise again); two were not upheld; one was referred back for local resolution; one was closed after initial enquiries.

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 2019/20						
	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid or incomplete	Referred back for local resolution
Rushcliffe	5	1	2	0	1	0	1
Ashfield	15	1	3	2	7	2	0
Bassetlaw	16	2	2	0	7	0	5
Broxtowe	15	2	4	1	6	1	1
Gedling	14	1	4	0	7	0	2
Mansfield	15	1	1	2	5	1	5
N & S	12	1	0	1	8	0	2
Charnwood	20	2	1	1	7	0	9
N W Leics	9	1	2	0	2	1	3
Melton	10	2	2	1	5	0	0
S Kesteven	17	1	4	2	3	0	7

4.6 Distribution of complaints between service areas

The table in **Appendix 1** gives brief details of the complaints received during the year 2019/20, 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 Complaints Monitoring

The satisfaction rate for the handling of complaints in 2018/19 was 67%. Three complainants returned monitoring forms. Of those, two were 'fairly satisfied' and the other was 'fairly unsatisfied'.

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 Compliments

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 2019/20	Number of Compliments 2018/19
Finance and Corporate Services	12	8
Neighbourhoods	72 (+5 for Streetwise)	50 (+ 1 for Streetwise)
Communities	30	28
Transformation	13	18
Total	132	105

5 Risk and Uncertainties

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

There are no direct financial implications from the report.

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.

6.3 Equalities Implications

The Council and its officers strive to treat each complaint on its merits.

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

There are no direct Section 17 implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	The successful resolution of complaints supports all of the Council's priorities.
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	
The Environment	

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that this report is accepted as a true record of customer feedback in 2019/20.

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Background papers Available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices (if any):	Appendix 1 – Complaints by Service Area

Appendix 1

Service Area	Number of Complaints	Subject of complaint	Resolved at Stage 1 or 2	Justified?
Communities	14	9 x Planning application / decision 3 x Lack of communication from Planning dept. 1 x Planning Committee issue 1 x Issue with volume at Sunday Cinema event	3 x Stage 2; 6 x Stage 1 3 x Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1	2 x Yes; 7 x No 1 x Yes; 2 x No No No
Neighbourhoods	17	7 x Housing allocation issue / decision 3 x Housing staff issue 1 x Noise nuisance issue 1 x EH enforcement issue 1x EH staff issue 1 x Pest control issue 1 x Duty of care issue 1 x Complaint re emptying of septic tank 1 x Issue with EH legislation	2 x Stage 2; 5 x Stage 1 3 x Stage 1 Stage 2 Stage 2 Stage 2 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1	1 x Yes; 6 x No 3 x No No No No No No No Yes
Finance and Corporate Services	13	10 x Council tax issue 1 x data protection breach 1 x complaint about advice re benefits claim 1 x postal vote issue	1 x LGO; 1 x Stage 2; 8 x Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1	5 x Yes; 5 x No Yes No No
Transformation	1	Issue with barriers on cycle track	Stage 1	No