

## Agenda Item 8

<b>Executive Member</b>	Councillor Corinna Osborne-Patterson – Executive Member for Communities, Services & Housing
<b>Strategic Management Team Lead Officer</b>	Paul Anderson – Interim Corporate Head of Service
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<b>To</b>	Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> October 2017
<b>Ward (s) affected</b>	N/A
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Review of Complaints 2016/2017</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	
The Committee is asked to note the complaints monitoring for April 2016 to March 2017.	

### 1. Background To Annual Complaints Report

- 1.1 Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) has an established Complaints Policy. The annual Complaints Review is part of an ongoing process to assess MVDC's performance against its own standards and learn from residents' feedback. Customer Care is a high priority for MVDC and the approach taken to dealing with complaints reflects our Corporate Values. This includes listening to residents in order to develop and improve services in accordance with their needs.
- 1.2 The annual Complaints review is reported to Scrutiny Committee in the autumn of each year to give an overview of the complaints received in the previous financial year with the aim of evaluating and, ultimately, improving service performance.
- 1.3 MVDC remains committed to resolving the majority of complaints informally when the issue is dealt with directly by the service area responsible. The Council's Values underpin the approach taken to dealing with complaints. If an informal complaint remains unresolved or the customer is dissatisfied, they can register a formal complaint with the Complaints Officer, who will carry out an independent investigation with the appropriate officer(s) under Stage 1 of the Complaints Policy. If a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 investigation, the matter can then be referred to a Corporate Head of Service, or in some cases another senior officer if appropriate, under Stage 2. Following Stage 2, if the customer remains dissatisfied at the Council's responses, they may approach the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to request an investigation.

### 2. Complaints

- 2.1 The Complaints Policy states that an acknowledgement will be sent out to the customer within 3 working days and a full response within 10 working days. In the period April 2016 to March 2017, 97% of formal complaints were acknowledged within 3 working days and 91% were responded to within 10 working days. Where a full response was not sent within 10 working days, customers were informed why this was the case and when a full response could be expected.

- 2.2 The following tables set out the number of formal complaints received in 2016/17 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017) and give comparable figures for 2015/16 and 2014/15.
- 2.3 Overall, in 2016/17 we received 26 Stage 1 complaints compared to 36 in 2015/16 which is a 28% decrease. For Stage 2 complaints we received 8 whereas in the previous year we received 18 (a 56% decrease).
- 2.4 For 2016/17, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made decisions on 2 complaints. The LGO found against MVDC in 1 of these cases. Nationally the LGO upheld 54% of their detailed investigations – up from 51% the previous year.

	Service Area	2016/17		2015/16		2014/15	
		Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld	Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld	Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld
<b>STAGE 1</b>	Accounts	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Benefits	1	0	1	0	0	0
	Building Control	0	0	1	0	3	0
	Council Tax	3	1	3	0	2	1
	Communications	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Community Services	0	0	2	0	2	0
	Customer Services Unit	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Development Management	12	0	16	6	26	7
	Dorking Halls	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Environmental Services	3	1	0	0	9	6
	Environmental Health	1	0	2	0	2	0
	Finance	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Housing	2	0	4	1	4	1
	HR	0	0	0	0	0	0
	ICT	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Legal	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Parking	2	1	5	0	5	1
	Parks	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Partnerships	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Planning Policy	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Planning Support	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Policy & Performance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Property	0	0	2	0	1	0	
Strategic Leadership	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Totals</b>		<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>16</b>

	Service Area	2016/17		2015/16		2014/15	
		Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld	Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld	Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld
<b>STAGE 2</b>	Accounts	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Benefits	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Building Control	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Council Tax	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Communications	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Community Services	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Customer Services Unit	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Development Management	5	0	12	1	8	1
	Dorking Halls	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Environmental Services	0	0	0	0	2	1
	Environmental Health	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Finance	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Housing	1	0	3	2	0	0
	HR	0	0	0	0	0	0
	ICT	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Legal	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Parking	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Parks	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Partnerships	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Planning Policy	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Planning Support	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Policy & Performance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Property	0	0	1	0	0	0	
Strategic Leadership	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	

- 2.5 The tables show that in 2016/17 a total of 26 complaints were registered at Stage 1. 69% of these complaints were resolved at this stage, with 8 (31%) escalating to Stage 2.
- 2.6 In all, 4 Stage 1 complaints were upheld. In 22 cases, MVDC was found not to be at fault and therefore the complaints were not upheld. At Stage 2, 1 complaint was upheld, 7 were not upheld.
- 2.7 Appendices 1 and 2 show the percentage of complaints each service received at each stage of the complaints process.
- 2.8 Development Management received the highest number of complaints which is consistent with previous years. No complaints were upheld at Stage 1 or 2. These complaints related to issues such as the decisions process, neighbour appeals and misinterpretation of information given by planning officers. It is noted that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) recognises that Development Management issues across England are the most contentious and therefore receives a large percentage of complaints about all authorities. The majority of MVDC complaints relate to issues arising from proposed residential developments.
- 2.9 The Development Management team received 2132 applications during the year so the number of Stage 1 complaints represents only 0.5% of total applications. Furthermore, none of the complaints were upheld by the LGO. In line with our organisational values, the Development Management team, led by the Corporate Head of Service, listens to and learns from feedback received from customers and welcomes the opportunity to improve service delivery wherever possible. Improvements have included ensuring that consideration be given to contacting interested parties for comments where amendments are proposed to a development.

- 2.10 The second highest number of complaints was received by Environmental Services and Council Tax, who each received 3 Stage 1 complaints. To put this into context, through their contracts with Biffa and Veolia, the Environmental Services team manages the waste and recycling collections from over 36,000 domestic properties every week, as well the street cleansing of all of Mole Valley's public highways and footpaths. The Council Tax team have in excess of 38,000 residential properties on file.

### **3. Comparison with Previous Years**

- 3.1 This year there was a total of 26 Stage 1 complaints compared with 36 in 2015/16 (a 28% decrease) and 55 in 2014/15.
- 3.2 A total of 8 Stage 2 complaints were received in 2016/17, 10 less than the previous year.
- 3.3 In 2016/17, MVDC upheld 15% of the Stage 1 complaints received compared to 19% in 2015/16. In 2016/17 12% of Stage 2 complaints were upheld compared with 17% in 2015/16.

### **4. Improvements**

- 4.1 Mole Valley District Council values feedback from customers to allow us to learn, make improvements and move forward. We are committed to improving the customer experience across all service areas and thereby our general reputation. We work together to reduce complaints and improve services and the Strategic Management Team are regularly updated as to the detail of each formal complaint received and any learning outcomes/improvements that have been highlighted as a result of those complaints.
- 4.2 Any learning points are shared by managers with individual team members, in team meetings and also through the Business Managers' Team.
- 4.3 The service areas implement changes to processes and procedures resulting from customer feedback. Examples of change include improvements within Parking to ensure clearer wording on the reverse of Penalty Charge Notices, and within Environmental Services, improving the working arrangements with Biffa - our waste collection contractor, regarding collection and replacement of bins on residential properties.
- 4.4 The Customer Care Officer, who is new to the role, will continue to build relationships with service area managers, team leaders and Corporate Heads of Service. These relationships allow free flowing conversations regarding service improvements that will ultimately improve the customer experience.
- 4.5 The Customer Care Officer is also a member of the team delivering the Customer Care programme to raise standards of customer care across the organisation. As part of this, 4 frontline teams have been externally assessed for Customer Service Excellence during 2016/17 and all have been accredited. This highlights the high levels of customer service offered by MVDC.

### **5. Ombudsman**

- 5.1 The Ombudsman report for year 2016/17 shows that they received a total of 4 enquiries and complaints relating to MVDC services, which is 9 less than in 2015/16.

Of these, 1 Complaint was closed after initial enquiry, 1 was referred back to the authority for local resolution and the Ombudsman made a decision on the

remaining 2. The Ombudsman found against MVDC in 1 case which related to Housing. It was determined that MVDC did not communicate effectively with the resident and a compensation amount of £160.00 was paid in recognition of time and trouble. As a result of these findings changes were made to procedures and staff were briefed accordingly.

**Corporate Implications**

**Property Implications**

None

**Legal Implications**

None

**Finance Implications**

None

**Equalities Implications**

None

**Monitoring Officer Commentary**

Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the relevant legislation has been taken into account in this report.

**S151 Officer Commentary**

The S151 is satisfied there are no financial implications of this report.

**Risk Implications**

There are no risk implications arising as a direct consequence of this report

**Employment Issues**

None

**Reputational Implications**

None

**Sustainability Issues**

None

**Consultation Issues**

None

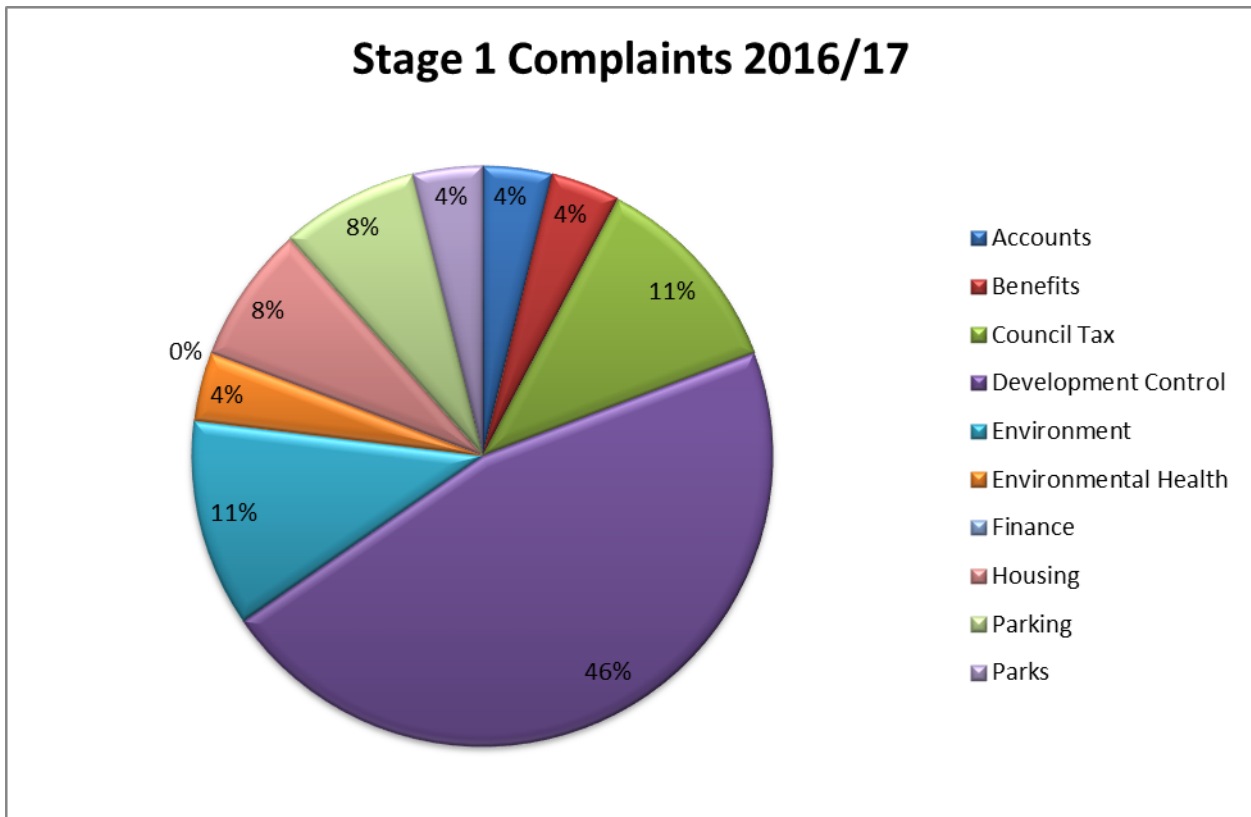
**Communication Implications**

None

**Background Papers**

None

Stage 1 Complaints received by Service 2016/17 (26)



Stage 2 Complaints received by Service 2016/17 (8)

