

Cabinet Committee on Performance Improvement

Meeting to be held on 30th July 2014

Electoral Division affected: None

Complaints dealt with under the County Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure and via the Local Government Ombudsman – Quarterly Report April – June 2014

(Appendices 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' refer)

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Executive Summary

A report detailing complaints dealt with formally under the County Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure, and approaches via the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) during the first quarter of 2014.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report and comment as appropriate.

Background and Advice

Corporate Complaints Procedure

The Local Government Ombudsman, urges local authorities to settle complaints locally, if possible, avoiding the need for a detailed investigation of any complaint by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman would not normally begin a detailed investigation unless the Council has had an opportunity to resolve the complaint locally.

This report gives details of complaints dealt with formally under the Corporate Complaints Procedure during the period 1st April 2014 to 30th June 2014.

A copy of the Corporate Procedure is attached for the Cabinet Committee's information at Appendix 'A'. Essentially, it deals with all complaints which fall outside other more specific procedures and tend to be, but are not always, administrative and diverse in nature making it difficult to spot trends.

Issues which cannot be dealt with under the procedure include:-

- Social care issues relating to adults or children
- Complaints about schools which should be referred direct to the school

- Reports of and complaints about street lighting; highways defects; footpath obstruction; public transport services; and quality of goods.
- Complaints from County Council staff about employment issues
- Complaints against County Councillors

Complaints Received

The tables below show the number of formal complaints received during the first quarter of 2014 and the figures for 2013 for comparative purposes. The Cabinet Committee should note that the vast majority of complaints received from the public are resolved informally and at the first point of call, and are not recorded as to do so would be administratively excessive.

April – June 2014

Directorate	Complaints Received
Children & Young People	6
Adult Services, Health & Wellbeing	0*
Environment	5
Others	0
Total	11

April – June 2013

Directorate	Complaints Received
Children & Young People	8
Adult Services, Health & Wellbeing	0*
Environment	8
Office Of the Chief Executive	0
Total	16

(* All complaints received by the Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing Directorate were considered under the statutory Social Care Complaints Procedure).

Further details of the nature of the complaints received are set out at Appendix 'B'.

It would be wrong to conclude from the above that complaints are on the increase or decrease – such a conclusion could only be reached on an annual basis. Previous experience is that the number of complaints which enter the formal process is remarkably static at approximately 50 per year.

Local Government Ombudsman

After being considered under one of the Council's formal complaints procedures, complainants have the option, if they remain dissatisfied, to refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) for independent investigation. Although the LGO would not normally investigate a matter before the Council has had the opportunity to investigate and respond to it itself, there are exceptions, mainly school

admission appeals, or, on rare occasions, where the LGO considers there may be exceptional reasons to commence an investigation immediately.

April – June 2014

Directorate	Referrals
Children & Young People	12
Adult Services, Health & Wellbeing	10
Environment	3
Others	0
Total	25

April – June 2013

Directorate	Referrals
Children & Young People	9
Adult Services, Health & Wellbeing	8
Environment	2
Others	1
Total	20

Details of the nature of the complaints received are set out at Appendix 'C'.

As with Corporate Complaints, it would be wrong to draw any conclusions regarding increases or decreases in the number of LGO cases from these figures. We are not informed of when the LGO received the complaints, although it is clear from their referencing standard that some have been with them for some time before being referred to the Council. In addition, some referrals will be recorded several times and across months and years, i.e. a referral may commence as premature, be referred to the Council for consideration under its own procedures, be referred back to the LGO which may make 'preliminary enquires' following which they may proceed to a formal investigation, therefore there is a danger of double, even triple counting when comparing statistics on a quarterly basis – it is not unusual for some complaints to span several months or years.

The LGO has now issued the annual summary of complaints made about the County Council, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 'D'. However, due to significant changes in the way the LGO deals with and categorises complaints, this year's summary does not include comparative data and its usefulness is limited (the LGO herself appreciates this). Clarification, particularly on complaints upheld, has been sought from the LGO and hopefully this will be available at the meeting. This is a 'one year only' problem and future year's reports should include this information.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

N/A

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A