

Annual Complaints Report

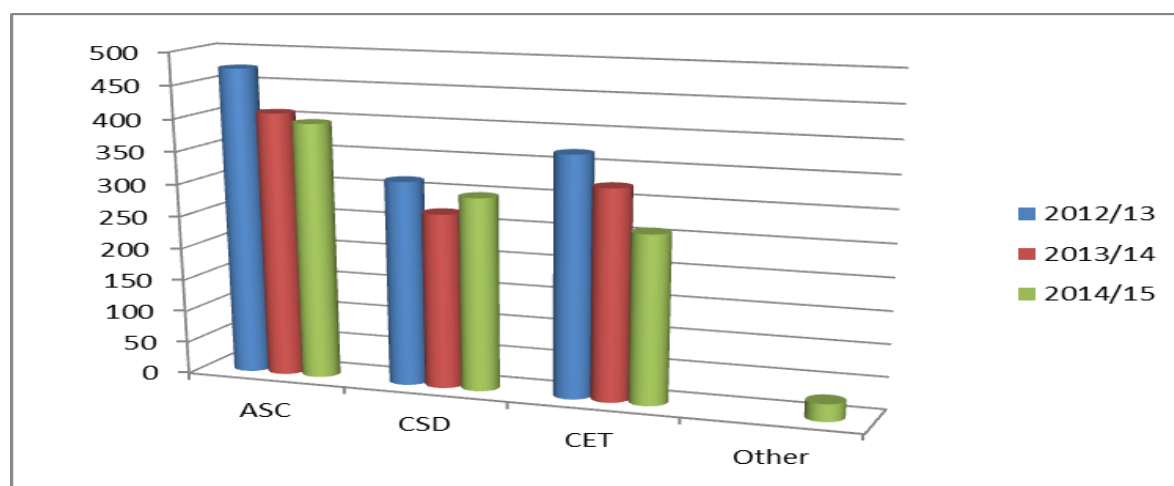
Appendix 2 Corporate Complaints and Compliments 2014/15

Summary of complaints by department

1. Summary

The chart below shows the number of complaints received this year by department compared with 2012/13 and 2013/14. As can be seen, there was an overall drop in complaint volumes over the last three years. This is also reflected in the total figures across all departments except for the Children Services department (CSD). Although CSD experienced an increase in complaints during the last financial year, complaint numbers were below 2012/13 levels.

Complaint numbers are not necessarily a reflection of service users' level of dissatisfaction as changes in complaint volumes can reflect a number of different variables. Comparisons of complaints and compliments between departments are not valid due to the nature of the different services provided by each department.



	ASC	CSD	CET	Other ¹
2012/13	474	316	370	
2013/14	409 ²	270	324	
2014/15	396	298	260	27

¹ These are complaints relating to the Business Services Department (BSD), Governance Services Department and the Chief Executive's Office. Comparative data is not available due to departmental re-structure. Going forward this will be collected to be available for next years report.

² The figure taken from last years report has been revised by ASC to 437. Now complaints concerning external providers are included.

2. Adult Social Care

- Number of complaints received – 396
- Number of complaints upheld – 148 (37%)
- Number of compliments – 1740

2.1 Summary

Overall there has been a further 10% decrease (41 fewer complaints) in the complaints recorded about Adult Social Care (ASC) services compared to last year. This represents a 16% fall in complaints received since 2012/13. The biggest area of complaints related to assessment, where 152 complaints (41% of the total) were received. Assessment functions include some 7,000 annual eligibility assessments for social care support, and approximately 10,000 annual financial assessments to identify how much someone will pay towards their support. Other assessment functions include Occupational Therapy assessments for adaptations and equipment, and assessments for the provision of a Blue Badge.

There was a 25% increase in the number of complaints about the financial assessment process. Of the 152 complaints related to assessments, 92 were about decisions or disputing the outcomes and 35 were about delay. The higher number of complaints in previous years was the result of a change in the assessment process, with a new set of eligibility criteria that turned down a lot of applicants who were previously eligible. There was a 50% decrease in complaints about the Occupational Therapy and Blue Badge services.

2.2 Action taken to improve the service

Mid way through the year the financial assessment team undertook a full review of their processes. Delays in the process were reduced significantly through a range of changes including providing clients with a preliminary statement at their assessment, allowing people 20 working days to provide additional information, and improving our information, both before and after assessments. As a result, a higher proportion of assessments are now completed at the initial visit, reducing delay and increasing satisfaction. This had a measureable impact. In the first six months of the year the team recorded 43 complaints about the financial assessment process and in the last six months this reduced to 26.

2.3 Compliments

People appear to have particularly valued the Joint Community Rehabilitation Team (318 compliments), Carers Services (302 compliments) and Older Peoples directly provided services (212 compliments).

The high increase in compliments for ASC is the result of a new opportunity to leave feedback and compliments.

2.4 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

The table below sets out the findings for complaints about Adult Social Care.

Findings	Investigations		Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid / incomplete	Referred back	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld					
ASC	15	22	0	7	1	13	58

Analysis of the data received from the LGO shows that, of the 58 complaints, 13 were referred back for local resolution. Thirty-seven were investigated, and of these 15 have been upheld.

The three main themes of complaints' decisions were as follows:

- 10 complaints (17%) disputed the outcome of a social care assessment or review in relation to the Learning Disability Service. Often the dispute included the value of the personal budget and the choice this gave. In the four complaints that were upheld we agreed to do another assessment or review.
- Seven complaints (12%) related to the outcome and timeliness of financial assessments. Five of these complaints were upheld because of delay in the process, and we paid a time and trouble payment of between £100 and £200. Of the five upheld, only two found fault with the decision making and in both cases another assessment was undertaken.
- Seven complaints (12%) disputed the outcome of the Blue Badge Assessment. None of these complaints were upheld.

3. Children Services

- Number of complaints received – 298
- Number of complaints upheld – 31 (10%)
- Number of compliments – 397

3.1 Summary

Overall there has been a 10% increase in complaints investigated in comparison to last year. Compared to the figures recorded for 2012/13 the numbers have, however, decreased by 6%. Adult Stage 1 complaints have increased by 8% over the past year. In addition to the 298 complaints received, a total of 209 MP representations were made, an increase of 27% on the previous year. A further 159 'other representations' were made (referrals to other services, and complaints which fall outside the complaints procedure due to legal/tribunal proceedings or historic complaints).

As a percentage of total contacts, MP/Councillor representations have risen from 20% to 30% over the past five years. Over the same period, and despite the increase in the past year, adult Stage 1 complaints have decreased from 46% to 41% of total contacts. This demonstrates how complainants are utilising their MPs more to raise awareness of their issues.

Parents account for 71% of all Stage 1 complaints and young people account for fewer than 5% of all Stage 1 complaints.

Of the 507 enquiries made as complaints or through MP representation, 17% related to the provision of service and a further 17% were about school placements. This is followed by 9% complaining about assessments and 9% about staff behaviour.

Overall the main issues for complaints were insufficiency of service (19%), decisions made (16%) and delay (13%).

3.2 Action taken to improve the service

The Complaints Team are reviewing the way in which they can be contacted. A simpler website which leads the complainant through a clear process to gather their feedback is being developed. This will monitor information as well as explain the complaints process.

Improvements will also be made to the online offer for young people and the team will work with the Children in Care Council as part of the service redesign.

In the spirit of You Said We Did, the Complaints Team will work more closely with colleagues to ensure that all letters include a standard paragraph that details what has happened as a result of the complaint. The reason for this is that, in some cases

a complaint is not upheld, but the feedback is still valuable and we are keen to show how the feedback has made a difference.

3.3 Compliments

For every 100 complaints we received 133 compliments.

3.4 Local Government Ombudsman

The table below sets out the findings for complaints about CSD:

Findings	Investigations		Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid / incomplete	Referred back	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld					
CSD	4	4	0	8	0	12	28

Of the 28 complaints received by the LGO, 12 were referred back for local resolution, eight were closed after initial enquiries, eight were investigated and of these four have been upheld.

It should be noted that detailed information is not made available by the LGO for cases referred back to the council, or about cases closed after initial enquiries.

The main themes of complaints to LGO were as follows:

- Admissions: five complainants disputed outcomes of independent appeal panels for either school admission or transport. One was closed after initial enquiries, three were not upheld, and one was upheld. For the upheld complaint, the LGO found maladministration (the appeal decision letter did not cover all points made), but no injustice (the decision was not affected by fault in the way it dealt with the appeal).
- SEN (Special Educational Need): three complainants disputed Council decisions relating to school placements and transport. One was closed after initial enquiries, and two were upheld. In one, the LGO found there to have been avoidable delay in assessing special educational needs (remedy £400), and in the other, the LGO found fault in the delay in making suitable travel arrangements (remedy £150).

- Social care complaints had no particular theme and in the vast majority of cases were either closed after initial enquiries, or not upheld. Only one complaint was upheld, relating to the way in which the Council dealt with a safeguarding referral about the complainant – the Council was not at fault in the way it dealt with the referral, but it failed to keep the complainant informed and delayed contacting the schools. The remedy was a letter of apology and informing schools of the outcome.

4. Communities, Economy & Transport

- Number of complaints closed – 260
- Number of complaints upheld – 85 (33%)
- Number of compliments – 569

4.1 Summary

The number of complaints received for the Communities, Economy & Transport department (CET) reduced this year by 20% in comparison to last year. Since 2012/13 the investigated number of complaints has decreased by 30%.

Around half (136 of the 260 complaints) were about highways and a further 28 complaints (11%) related specifically to the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road (BHLR). For highways, planned maintenance is the service area receiving the majority of complaints (40), including 23 complaints about roadworks and 15 about drainage. The remaining complaints were about Transport and Operational Services (17%), followed by 11% about library services and 6% about traffic & road safety concerns. There were 23 complaints about parking.

169 complaints were not upheld. This means that in 60-70% of the investigated complaints no fault has been found. Three service areas show marked differences from this overall departmental picture. In traffic & road safety and planning & environment nearly 90% of complaints were not upheld, while for the BHLR only 25% of complaints were unfounded.

Overall, 134 complaints relate to the way services have been delivered. The main reason customers are unhappy is due to poor communication and delays in the delivery of services. This is followed by complaints about our policies/decisions, which amount to 61.

4.2 Action taken to improve the service

Highways – A group has been set up looking at the reason for complaints and ways to improve communication internally and externally.

Libraries – The majority of complaints for libraries related to Seaford library. The library service was able to put in place the adjustments needed for the lift, further signage, and layout and furniture adjustments to improve the environment for the public. No further complaints have been made.

Parking Team – A review of standard responses has been undertaken. Staff have completed plain English training due to several complaints being partially upheld for poor communication.

4.3 Compliments

Of the 569 compliments received in CET in 2014/15, 190 were for waste disposal and recycling, 155 for highways and 150 for registration services.

4.4 Local Government Ombudsman

The table below sets out the findings for complaints about CET:

Findings	Investigations		Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid / incomplete	Referred back	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld					
CET	1	0	0	11	1	5	18

One of the 18 complaints received has been investigated and five have been referred back for local resolution.

The upheld complaint was about Trading Standards. Although the LGO did not find a wrongdoing in their action, some case documentation had been lost which was upheld as a fault. As a result staff had been reminded of the process and the importance of correct document handling.

5. Other Departments

- Number of complaints closed – 27
- Number of complaints upheld – 11 (41%)

5.1 Summary

This section concerns the Business Services Department (BSD), Governance Services Department and the Chief Executive's Office. Complaint numbers cannot reliably be compared with previous years due to a change in organisational structure. Complaints related mainly to the financial function and contract management (16) followed by complaints about properties and estate management (5).

5.2 Local Government Ombudsman

The table below sets out the findings for complaints about other Council departments:

Findings	Investigations		Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid / incomplete	Referred back	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld					
Other departments ³	0	1	0	1	2	0	4

One of the four complaints received has been investigated and as a result was not upheld.

The complaint related to the conduct of the coroners office which falls under our responsibility.

5.3 Compliments.

One compliment has been received for the Chief Executives Office.

³ This is titled "Corporate & Other" in the LGO's report. This will mainly entail complaints about BSD however, there is a degree of uncertainty as the Council is not notified about details and themes of the invalid complaints.