

Annual Customer Feedback Report 2017/18

Blackpool Council



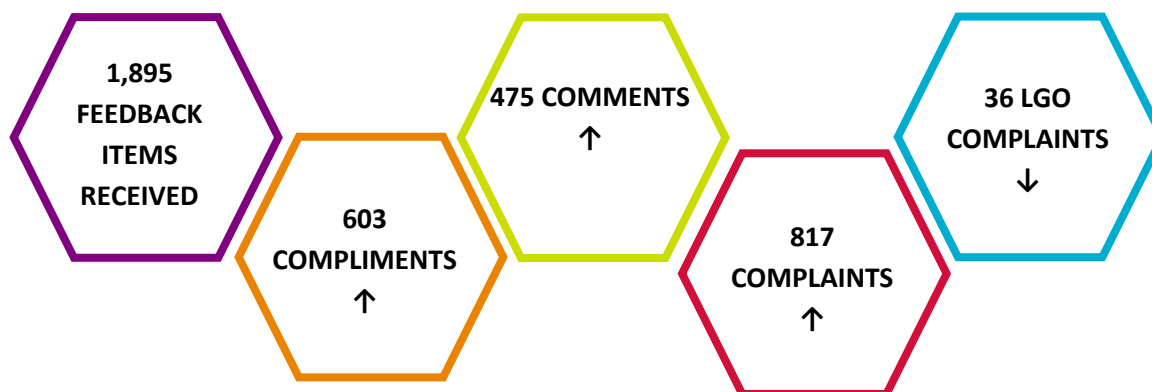
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1. KEY HEADLINES



30% increase in compliments received compared with 2016/17

41% increase in comments received compared with 2016/17

5.5% increase in complaints compared with 2016/17

Directorate with the highest proportion of complaints was Community & Environmental Services

Majority of complaints related to Quality of Service and Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer

73% of complaints were responded to within timescale

33% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld

Lessons learned captured for 26% of complaints

Number of complaints received by LGO has decreased compared with 2016/17

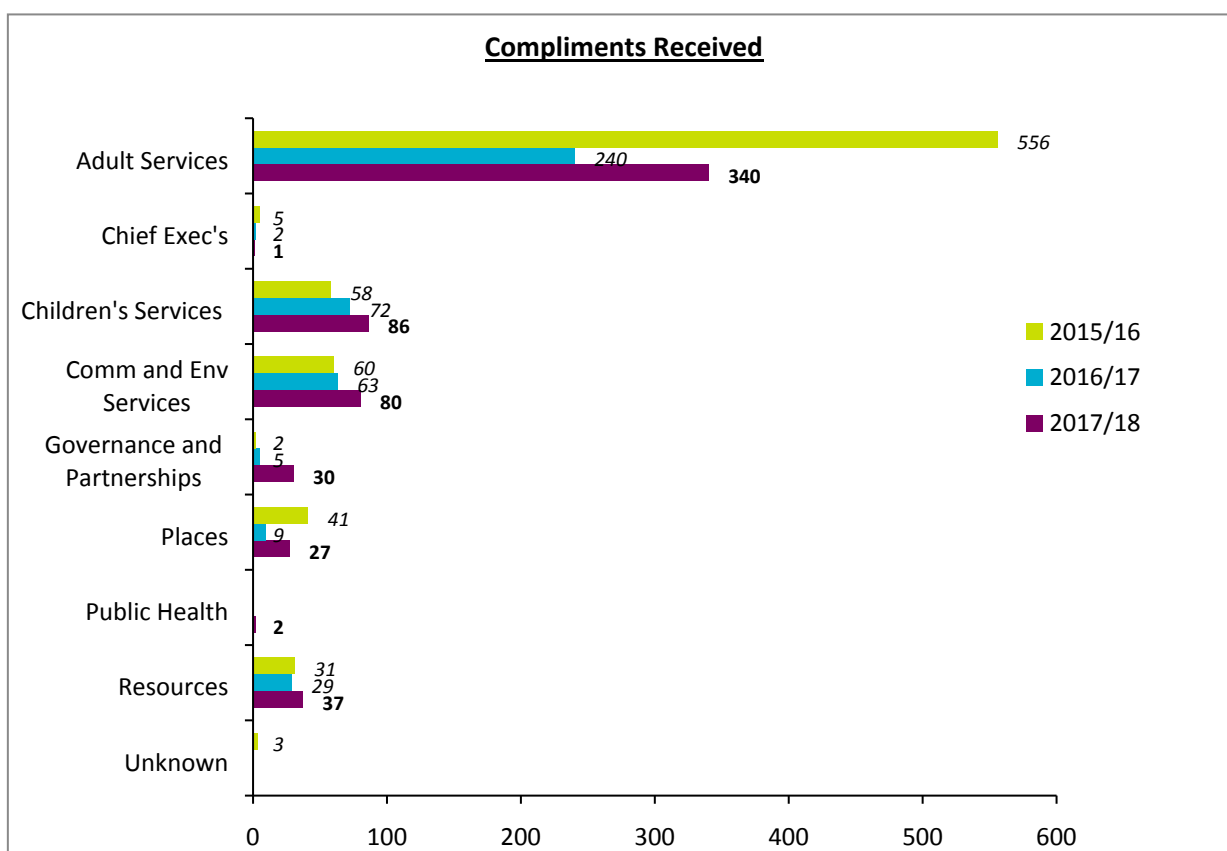
7 LGO complaints progressed to formal investigation stage

6 complaints formally investigated by the LGO were upheld

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2. COMPLIMENTS

Compliments are extremely important and help to highlight the areas we are improving in or maintaining levels of high quality service. Therefore, all compliments are passed on to the relevant staff member(s) and service manager to ensure that good practice is commended and to help boost staff morale. In total, 603 compliments were received in 2017/18. The graph below shows a breakdown of the compliments received by directorate:



The number of compliments received has increased considerably compared with 2016/17. Over half of the compliments received during the year were for Adult Services (56%). Across the rest of the Council, Children's Services and Community & Environmental Services received the most compliments.

Feedback for Adult and Children's Services is dealt with by the Customer Relations Team which has ensured that positive feedback from service users is captured and reported on a regular basis. Combine this with the nature of the services provided and this leads to a much higher number of compliments than for other departments.

The lower level of compliments for other departments is not necessarily representative of poor quality service in these areas. Certain teams remain very good at recording compliments received; however, there are services that rarely pass on compliment data for reporting purposes. The reported figures may therefore not

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be a true reflection of compliments received by Council services and can only show the number of compliments that have been officially recorded. Below are some examples of compliments received during this period:

*I write to thank you for your recent support with the discharge of X. Not only did you agree to take this case outside of your usual team activity, I am convinced that your particular style of calm, knowledgeable and supportive professionalism has contributed hugely towards the smooth transition of care we have achieved for this lady and her family **(Adult Social Care)***

*I would like to compliment the caring attitudes of the members of staff that attended my property regarding issues with my neighbours. They were very informative as to our rights and we found their presence to be both calming and reassuring **(Public Protection)***

*Please thank M on the Council Tax telephones for the charming and efficient way she handled my query. It was much appreciated. On a side note I was impressed with how quickly my call was answered and this young ladies professional style. I am assuming the training for this job is very good **(Customer First)***

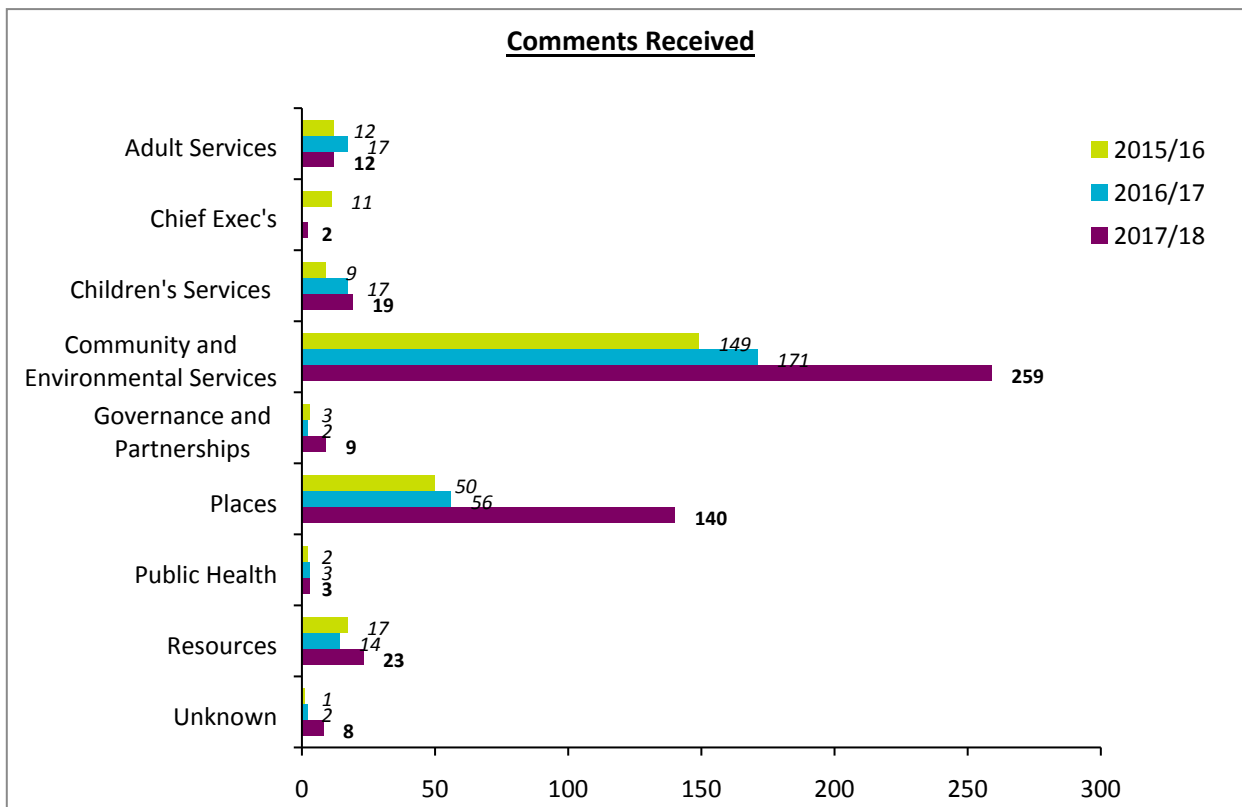
*I recently had cause to contact Crematorium and Cemetery Service. I wish to put on record my appreciation of the excellent customer service I was given by the staff who answered my query. The empathy and sympathetic way my query was dealt with by your staff was first class. Also as my query was in connection with Commonwealth war graves, and they showed exceptional knowledge of the history of Carleton **(Cemeteries and Crematorium)***

*I have today attended a delightful Coffee Morning at Anchorsholme Library. I want to thank you (and compliment A and her volunteers) for initiating this. It was like Camerados....only more geared to the "older" residents of this area. Thank you...this is a much needed and valuable service. Long may it continue! **(Libraries)***

3. COMMENTS

Comments are equally as important as complaints as they can help to shape and improve the quality of the services we provide. In total, 475 comments were received in 2017/18. The graph below shows the breakdown of the comments received by directorate:

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There has been a significant increase in the number of comments received during 2017/18. The department that received the most comments during the period was Community & Environmental Services. This was due to a large number of comments received relating to the town centre roadworks and bridge repair works.

Comments are usually received via the online feedback form directly from service users. Services do not always pass comments on to be logged therefore the figures may not be a true reflection of all comments received by Council services and can only highlight the number of comments that have been formally recorded.

The main themes across all comments received were Miscellaneous (26%), Council Action (19%), Request for Service (14%) and Quality of Service (12%). Below are some examples of comments received during the year:

*I love Blackpool and I see the council is not afraid of spending some money, but can I suggest that the front of the prom has one universal colour? This does not stop traders selling their wares but tidies up the frontage immensely. Think Llandudno and places like that. A colour or a base of colours linked kindly look so much better. I think also when shops close down only a limited amount of time should be allowed for landlords to sit on their properties, otherwise compulsory orders for the council to buy for sea front flats as on the Spanish coasts **(Growth and Prosperity)***

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*I would like to discuss with a member of staff the waiting times in getting through to Customer First. I would like to ask that when people contact the Council it tells them what number they are in the queue as I had to wait 9 minutes to get through **(Customer First)***

*I would like to suggest that at Christmas time Stanley Park could be utilised for a Christmas Market event to match others i.e. Berlin. This could consist of the wooden hut type stalls seen in other Christmas markets (or marquees) a winter wonderland type thing to include a Santa's grotto, ice rink, Christmas lighting using the trees - for example the main entrance trees could be decorated creating a pathway to it all - there is already Christmas carols planned - which could also form part of this event - I hope that this could be considered and would hopefully benefit the town and residents **(Parks and Open Spaces)***

4. COMPLAINTS

4.1 Types of Complaint

The Council has a three stage process for dealing with corporate complaints:

- Stage 1** Investigation by the service
- Stage 2** Review by the relevant Director / Assistant Director
- Stage 3** Review by the Complaints Panel on behalf of the Chief Executive

The table below shows the number of complaints logged for each stage during the period.

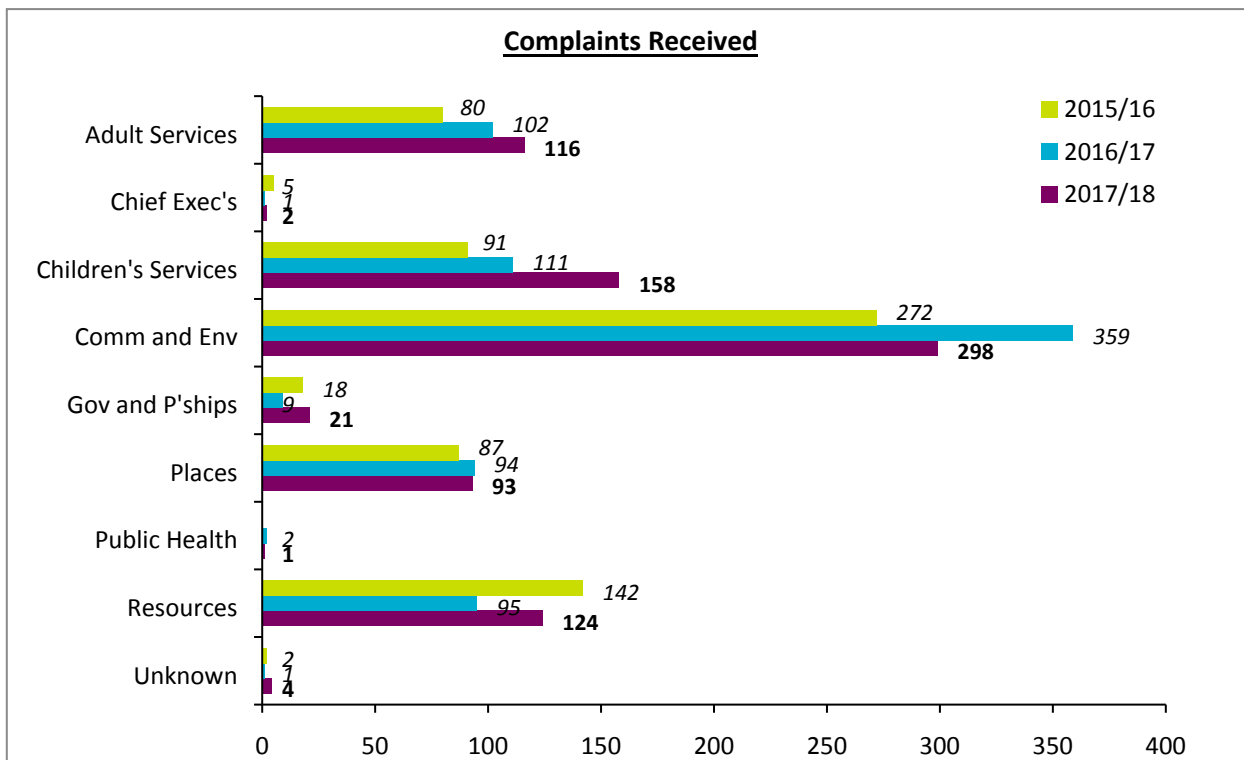
Stage	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	
Stage 1	143	111	122	147	523	96%
Stage 2	4	5	3	4	16	3%
Stage 3	2	1	1	0	4	1%
	149	117	126	151	543	

The low number of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints received suggests that the majority of Stage 1 complaints are dealt with effectively, therefore preventing complaints from escalating. In 2017/18, 274 complaints were received relating to Adult or Children's Social Care. Complaints of this nature are dealt with under separate statutory procedures and are not included in the figures above.

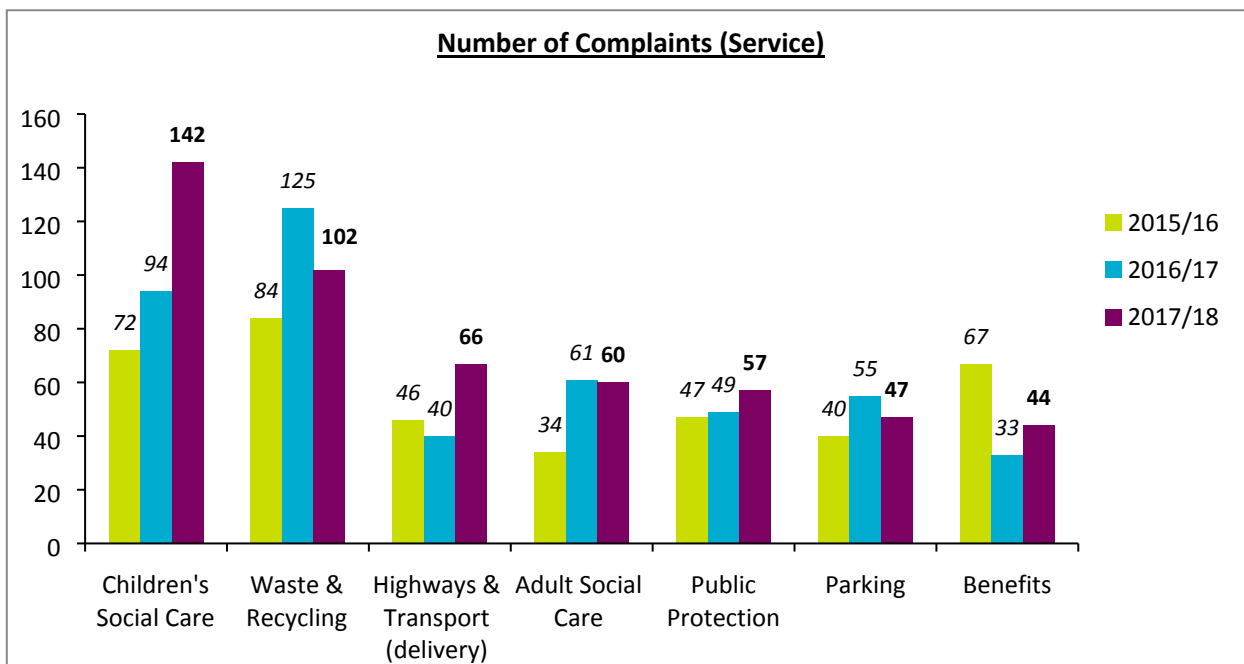
4.2 Directorates and Service Areas

The graph below shows the breakdown of the complaints received by directorate during 2017/18:

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Over half of all complaints received (63.5%) during this period relate to seven service areas.



There has been an increase in complaints in a number of service areas during 2017/18, most notably:

- **Children's Social Care** – there is no clear reason for the increase in complaints in this area.

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- **Highways and Transport (delivery)** - the increase in complaints can be attributed to the increased number of roadworks that have been undertaken across Blackpool, particularly in the town centre.
- **Customer First** – there has been a general increase in complaints relating wait times at the counter and telephones, the quality of service received and Council Tax queries. Complaints are regularly reviewed to ascertain if lessons can be learned and whether changes can be implemented to assist customers in the future.
- **Benefits** - the increase in complaints can be attributed to delays in processing due to several members of staff being off sick, which led to backlogs from April – August 2017. Performance in this area gradually improved in the run up to Christmas due to the implementation of process changes within the services.

There was also a significant reduction in complaints relating to Parks and Open Spaces in 2017/18. A further breakdown of the number of complaints received by service area can be found in **Appendix A**.

4.3 Complaint Themes

The table below highlights the main complaint themes. As in 2016/17, the majority of all complaints received (79%) relate to the following four themes:

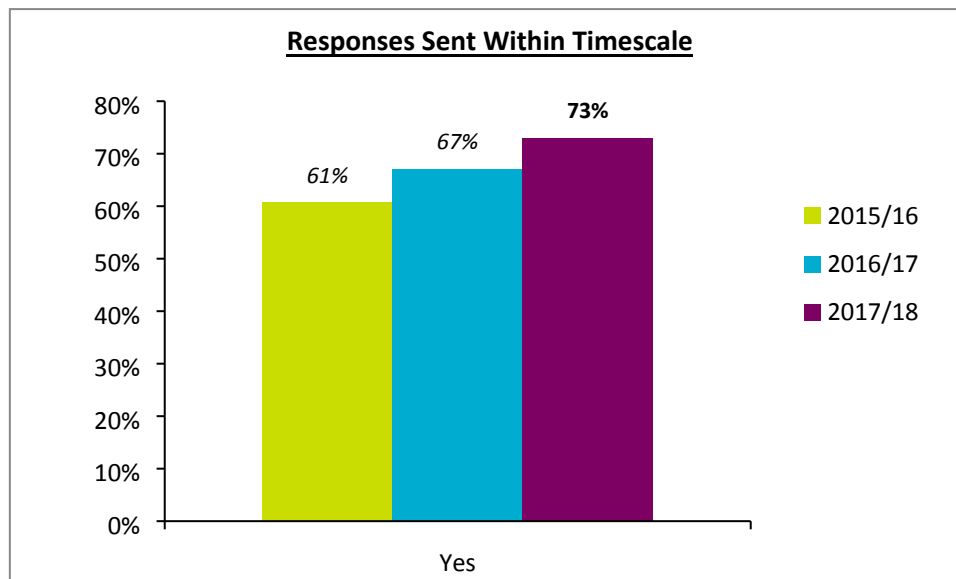
Theme	Total	
Quality of Service	254	↑
Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer	209	↑
Council Action	107	↑
Lack of Action	73	↓
	643	

By far, the most common complaint theme was Quality of Service. Over half of complaints within this theme relate to the following areas – Waste and Recycling (18.6%), Children’s Social Care (11%), Adult Commissioning (10.2%), Adult Social Care (8.6%), Benefits (6.7%) and Customer First (6.7%). Encouragingly there has been a 45% reduction in complaints about lack of action with 60 fewer complaints being received in 2017/18 than the previous year.

4.4 Response Timescales

We aim to respond to the majority of complaints within 5 working days. Where complaints are relatively easy to resolve this would mean that a full response is issued to the complainant within 5 working days. For more complex complaints which take longer to investigate it is more appropriate to allocate a longer response timescale. Therefore in these instances we aim to contact the complainant within 5 working days to acknowledge their complaint and explain when they can expect a full response. Complaints relating to Adult Social Care and Children’s Social Care are covered by separate statutory legislation and therefore the timescale for responding to these complaints is extended to 15-20 working days.

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The chart above shows that in 73% of cases a response was sent to the complainant within timescale which is a continued improvement on the previous 2 years. General reasons for timescales not being met include:

- Key members of staff being unavailable to respond to complaints due to sickness or annual leave;
- Senior officers availability to respond within relevant timescales;
- Increasing workloads on restricted resources means that it is not always possible to prioritise complaint responding / investigation within some service areas;
- Complex investigation work required, which may include multi-agency communication, can prolong the time it takes to respond to complaints;
- Multiple complaints from the complainant regarding the same or different matters can cause delays in the investigation process; and
- Difficulties in being able to contact complainants using the contact details provided can sometimes mean we are unable to inform them of the outcome of their complaint.

The Customer Relations team regularly chases up outstanding complaints with services to ensure that the majority of complaints are responded to in a timely manner. The team also produces a monthly report for Action Officers and Monitoring Officers which highlights complaints that are out of timescale and require immediate attention. However, further work needs to be undertaken to try and improve compliance with response timescales.

4.5 Outcomes

The table below details the outcomes of the complaints received during this period. It should be noted that the figures in the table do not include complaints which are in progress or have been withdrawn.

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Outcome	2017/18		DoT
Upheld	88	12%	↓
Partially Upheld	152	21%	↑
Not Upheld	213	29%	↑
Explanation Provided	284	39%	↓
	737		

In the majority of cases the outcome was to provide an explanation to the complainant of the reasons why the Council has taken a particular action. For example, changes to benefits due to government legislation. The proportion of complaints which were upheld or partially upheld has reduced compared to the previous year which is encouraging. However, this could also be due to incorrect recording of outcomes and is something that will be covered in future staff training.

Some of the general reasons for complaints being upheld over the year are detailed below:

- A lack of action and / or long delays in delivering a service following a request from a customer;
- Errors in service delivery, such as failing to follow correct policies and procedures;
- Failure to communicate with customers, for example, not informing them of a change of policy or action that has been taken in response to a previous request;
- A combination of minor issues, which have overall resulted in a poor experience for the customer; and
- Staff attitude / behaviour towards customers, ranging from poor customer service to the use of rude or abusive language.

4.6 Lessons Learned

Officers are encouraged to identify lessons learned from complaints in order to improve the services we deliver as well as share best practice. It should be noted that not all complaints produce lessons learned, however each case should be reviewed to ensure that any learning points are recorded and actioned where applicable.

Of the complaints received during 2017/18, lessons learned have been logged for 201 complaints (26%). This represents an improvement compared with 2016/17.

Examples of learning obtained from complaints during this period include:

- The importance of keeping customers informed of the stages of their application so that they don't make unnecessary complaints regarding a lack of action.
- Staff in Children's Services have been reminded of the importance of listening to children's views and ensuring that they are heard and recorded.
- Social media policy and code of conduct policy for staff refreshed to ensure staff are aware of the implications of posting inappropriate and / or derogatory comments on social media.

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- NoWcard application form updated to clarify what supporting evidence needs to be supplied.
- Procedural change introduced to provide a further check on vehicle detail accuracy when issuing parking tickets.
- A review of hospital discharge documentation has been undertaken to give better understanding to patients and their carers of the care plan on discharge from hospital and who will be responsible for completing the tasks and activities.
- The importance of responding to complaints in a timely manner to prevent them from escalating to Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the Council's complaints process needs to be reinforced with services.

We will continue to encourage the review of complaints to ensure that we learn from the feedback provided by our customers. However, the ability of services to take the time to review complaints and implement changes to improve services will be continually inhibited by the increasing demand on services and the pressure on existing resources.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)

5.1 Complaints Received by the LGO

The table below shows the number of complaints received by the LGO in 2017/18 broken down by service area. Overall the number of complaints received by the LGO has continued to decrease.

Complaints & Enquiries Received	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	DoT*
Adult Care Services	9	14	11	↓
Benefits & Tax	6	4	2	↓
Corporate & Other Services	6	6	1	↓
Education & Children's Services	10	9	9	↔
Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation	6	4	4	↔
Highways & Transport	2	2	3	↑
Housing	3	3	3	↔
Planning & Development	5	3	3	↔
	47	45	36	

* Direction of travel compared to 2016/17.

When compared to other unitary authorities in England, the Council received a below average number of LGO complaints in 2017/18 (the average was 67).

5.2 Decisions Made by the LGO

The table below shows a breakdown of the decisions made by the LGO during 2017/18. **Appendix B** contains a definition of the types of decision made.

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Decision Type		No. of Complaints		
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Complaints investigated by LGO	Complaint upheld	7	8	6
	Complaint not upheld	9	7	1
Complaints not investigated by LGO	Advice given	0	1	1
	Closed after initial enquiries	12	13	10
	Incomplete / invalid	4	2	4
	Referred back for local resolution	18	16	15
		50	47	37

As in previous years, the majority of complaints received by the Ombudsman were referred back to the Council for local resolution. Of the 37 complaints reviewed by the LGO, only 7 (19%) progressed on to the formal investigation stage. However, the majority of the complaints reaching this stage were upheld.

The LGO has the powers to recommend remedies where a fault or maladministration by the Council has caused injustice to a complainant. Remedies were recommended and implemented for 5 of the upheld complaints in 2017/18:

Service Area	Remedy
Adult Care Services	Apology
Adult Care Services	Financial redress
Education and Children's Services	Training and guidance
Adult Care Services	New appeal/review or reconsidered decision
Adult Care Services	Training and guidance
Adult Care Services	Other remedy

Senior management reviews these cases to explore the reasons why the complaints have been upheld and identify any actions that can be taken to reduce the number of upheld complaints in the future. As the majority of remedies were recommended by the LGO, senior management will explore whether the Council missed opportunities to resolve complaints through the use of remedies at an earlier stage in the complaints process.

6. NEXT STEPS

The Customer Relations Team will provide ongoing guidance and support to all services. The focus will be on improving the handling of complaints and the quality of responses; encouraging learning from complaints and compliments; and ensuring that a robust mechanism is in place for sharing lessons learnt, best practice and potential development.

In addition, the Customer Relations Team will offer continuous support to staff acting as investigating officers to improve the timeliness and quality of responses, whilst aiming to reduce the need for secondary or follow up enquiries. The team is currently working on a training programme for Action and Monitoring Officers which will be rolled out in early 2019.

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The team will review existing arrangements for complaints handling within directorates following a number of recent restructures and will explore ways in which insight gained from customer feedback can be used to improve services.

The Customer Feedback Policy is in the process of being updated, to provide clarity to both the public and Council officers on the difference between a complaint which can be investigated through the corporate complaints process and matters which have a separate procedure to follow, such as an appeal or decision challenge.

Services are encouraged to continue to work with the Customer Relations Team, in order:

- To ensure that we acknowledge the importance and value of complaints and all customer feedback.
 - To ensure that complaints are handled in line with the Council's Customer Care Standards and any other relevant legal and policy requirements.
 - To provide and detail a clear route by which customers can raise concerns about the service they have received from the Council.
 - To ensure complaints are dealt with fairly, promptly and sensitively.
 - To learn from our mistakes and use feedback from customers to continuously improve services.
 - To use insight gained from compliments to share best practice.
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APPENDIX A – BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SERVICE AREA

KEY: ■ Same / Reduction ■ Increase <10 ■ Increase >10

Department	Service	Total	
Adult Services	Adult Social Care	60	
	Business Support & Resources	8	
	Care & Support	10	
	Commissioning	38	
Chief Executive's Office	Exec Support	2	
	HR, Policy & Comms	0	
Children's Services	Children's Social Care	142	
	Early Help for Children & Families	4	
	SEN, Education & Psychology	0	
	School Standards & Effectiveness	8	
	Business Support & Resources	2	
	Lifelong Learning	2	
Community & Environmental Services	Coastal Services	0	
	Facilities Management	0	
	Highways & Transport (delivery)	66	
	Integrated Transport	9	
	Leisure	12	
	Parks & Open Spaces	17	
	Public Protection	57	
	Street Cleansing	35	
	Waste & Recycling	102	
Governance & Partnership Services	Cemeteries & Crematorium	9	
	Coroner Services	1	
	Customer Relations	1	
	Governance Services	5	
	Information Governance	1	
	Legal	0	
	Licensing	0	
	Registrars	4	
Places	Community Safety	8	
	Culture	0	
	Economic Development	3	
	Growth & Prosperity	2	
	Highways & Transport (policy)	0	
	Housing Options	13	
	Learning, Adult & Community	1	

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Department	Service	Total	
Places (continued)	Libraries	9	Yellow
	Parking	47	Green
	Planning	5	Yellow
	Tourism	5	Green
Public Health	Public Health	0	Green
	Public Health Commissioned Service	1	Yellow
Resources	Benefits	44	Red
	Business Rates	4	Yellow
	Council Tax	38	Yellow
	Customer First	32	Red
	Debtors & Creditors	1	Yellow
	Finance	0	Green
	ICT	0	Green
	Property & Asset Management	5	Green
	Risk & Insurance	0	Green
Unknown	Unknown	4	Yellow

** Any restructures or service changes which took place during 2017/18 will be reflected in the 2018/19 annual customer feedback report.*

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APPENDIX B – DEFINITION OF DECISIONS MADE BY THE LGO

Decision Made	Explanation
Upheld	Where the LGO has decided that the council is at fault in how it acted and that this fault may or may not have caused an injustice to the complainant, or where the council has accepted that it needs to remedy the complaint.
Not upheld	Where the LGO has investigated a complaint and decided that the council was not at fault.
Advice given	Where the LGO advises a complainant that their complaint does not fall within their jurisdiction or where the complaint has already been investigated by the LGO and therefore cannot be investigated again.
Closed after initial enquiries	Where the LGO has made an early decision that they could not or should not investigate a complaint, or where there is little or no injustice to a complainant that would necessitate an LGO investigation of the matter, or where an investigation could not achieve anything, either because the evidence shows at an early stage that the council was not at fault or the outcome a complainant wants is not one the LGO could achieve.
Incomplete / invalid	These are complaints where the complainant has not provided the LGO with enough information to be able to decide what should happen with their complaint, or where the complainant no longer wishes to pursue their complaint.
Referred back for local resolution	These are complaints which have been referred back to the council by the LGO because the council has not had an opportunity to resolve the issues through its own complaints procedure.
