

Joint Audit and Governance Committee



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To: Joint Audit and Governance Committee
DATE: 25 January 2022

Review of complaints received during 2020-21

Recommendation

That the committee reviews formal complaints received in 2020-21 and performance in responding to complaints against timescales set out in our Corporate Complaints Policy.

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a review of formal complaints we received during 2020-21 in line with the corporate complaints procedure.

Strategic objectives

2. This report sets out formal complaints received by the councils, it therefore underpins all of our Corporate Plan objectives; along with our ambitions to provide excellent customer service and transparency in decision-making. By recording complaints, we can understand when things have gone wrong resulting in us failing to meet customer expectations, failure to provide a service or where we have not followed correct procedure.

3. Appendix One includes the number of Covid-19 related complaints received by stage, and service.
4. Appendix Two includes charts demonstrating the number of formal complaints received and performance in providing the response within 15 working days.
5. Appendix Three includes the official annual complaints reports received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (Ombudsman).
6. Appendix Four includes a copy of the complaints policy document which is available on the councils' website complaints pages.

The Formal Corporate Complaints Procedure

7. Our corporate complaints policy and council-wide procedure for dealing with complaints ensures that:
 - members of the public know what to do if they have a complaint and understand how we will deal with it
 - staff are confident about what to do when they get a formal complaint
 - customers are treated fairly and equally
 - we can improve our services using customer feedback from complaints
8. In the year 2020-21, we recorded two complaints which resulted in service review and improvement. Both these complaints were resolved at stage two of our complaints process and were not referred to the Ombudsman. One complaint was about the wording used in a condition attached to a planning application, which was upheld and addressed by training delivered to planning officers.
9. As stipulated in the Ombudsman guidance on good practice: the purpose of a complaints system is to put right what has gone wrong, and to learn from it. Where a complainant has a justified grievance, there is a duty to put things right at the earliest opportunity. Depending on the seriousness and type of complaint, putting things right could involve a range of outcomes, from a simple written apology to a reimbursement of funds or a compensation payment.
10. To help customers understand the complaints policy and procedure that we follow when we are handling complaints, a copy of the policy document is now published on the complaints page of our websites. This enables staff to refer to relevant points of the policy when corresponding with customers.
11. Please refer to **Appendix Four** to read the policy which has been adapted for public use. The adaptations include the addition of 'useful definitions' for key words used throughout the policy document, and by staff when contacting customers. We have also added further detail on how submit a complaint or concern to us, encouraging customers to contact service team in the first instance to address the concerns raised through an informal resolution.

Stage one

12. Each service has nominated officers responsible for logging stage one formal complaints. The relevant service manager will investigate and respond to the complainant within 15 working days.

Stage two

13. If the complainant is not satisfied with the stage one response, then they can ask for their complaint to be reviewed as a stage two within six weeks of the date of the stage one response. The complainant must explain why they are not satisfied with the response they received at stage one, and what outcome they would like to achieve in pursuing a stage two complaint.
14. The stage two complaint will be allocated to the head of service for the relevant service area. However, if the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations or Head of Corporate Services, considers it more appropriate, a complaint may be re-allocated to an alternative head of service or deputy chief executive. The head of service or deputy chief executive will investigate the complaint and respond within 15 working days of receipt.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

15. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the stage two response, they have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate their complaint. The Ombudsman investigates complaints of alleged injustice concerning Local Authorities.

Complaints reporting

16. Last year's complaints report included figures for financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20 due to pending work on the council's new complaints database which has enabled us to simplify and improve our reporting process.
17. Our report this year includes the numbers of complaints received and our performance against target for issuing a response for 2020-21, set out in **Appendix Two**. This includes a narrative of the identified themes of complaints, as well as changes in our services that were required as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
18. We have also encapsulated in this report, an interim overview of complaints received in the six-month period between April-September 2021, allowing councillors and staff the opportunity to reflect on our most recent performance and monitor themes before the year end. Please refer to section entitled 'Interim Overview - Complaints received April-September 2021'.
19. Following the service realignment in September 2021, Development and Regeneration has been realigned to Development and Corporate Landlord. This year's report and annual figure comparison is unaffected by this.
20. The councils receive annual letters with reports from the Ombudsman, with a summary of their decisions. Extracts of these are available in Appendix Three and show a comparison of our performance against other district councils.

South Oxfordshire District Council

2020-21 we received 96 stage one complaints, a reduction of 24 on the previous year. The percentage number of complaints escalated to stage two increased by 7%. There was also a decrease in the number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman to the previous year. Please see point 18 which refers to their pause in casework.

Vale of White Horse District Council

Vale received a slight increase of stage one complaints in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20, but less than previous years. The noticeable difference is an increase in complaints received by Development and Regeneration from zero in 2019-20 to seven in 2020-21, due to the grant applications dealt with by the Economic Development team in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and concerns about our leisure centres. Stage two complaints

also increased slightly on the previous year with an increase of 2%. Vale saw a decrease in the number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman.

Covid-19 related complaints

21. Licensing received complaints including those following the cancellation of face-to-face license renewal meetings because staff were required to work remotely. An online application process was put in place to allow applications and renewals to continue.
22. In response to the pandemic, Government introduced a number of grants for businesses to provide both mandatory and discretionary to support those affected by the Covid-19 restrictions. Our Finance team (alongside Capita) dealt with assessing the mandatory grants, whilst the Economic Development team assessed the discretionary grants. Both teams received complaints from customers and businesses who were not eligible for the schemes.
23. We also received complaints dealt with by the Active Communities team, as a result of the closure of leisure centres including concern about staff entering the premise during lockdown for maintenance or the offer to freeze gym memberships.
24. Our Technical Services team who are responsible for the councils' car parks, received complaints with concerns about the use of carparks during the pandemic or requests for refund or reduction on parking permits.
25. Please refer to **Appendix One** for the figures.

Ombudsman investigations

26. The Ombudsman upholds complaints when they find fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before their investigation. A focus on how often things go wrong, rather than simple volumes of complaints, provides a clearer indicator of performance.
27. They recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice. Recommendations try to put people back in the position they were in before the fault. Monitoring is carried out to ensure recommendations are complied with.
28. The Ombudsman encourages the early resolution of complaints and credit authorities that have a positive and open approach to resolving complaints, and where satisfactory remedies have been provided.
29. At the end of March 2020, the Ombudsman took the unprecedented step of temporarily stopping their casework and did not accept any new complaints, in the wider public interest, to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. They restarted casework in late June 2020, after a three month pause. The councils continued to consider stage one and two complaints in this time.
30. Of the 10 complaints received by the Ombudsman for Vale in 2020-21, one was investigated formally which was upheld, they found fault, but no injustice caused to the complainant. The Ombudsman received 16 complaints for South, of which four were investigated and none upheld. This compares with two upheld complaints for Vale and one upheld for South in the previous year 2019-20.

A summary of the upheld complaint is available in **Appendix Three**.

Interim Overview - Complaints received April-September 2021

31. The figures will be provided in next year's annual report, but here we highlight the service areas with noticeable trends that will allow each service area to reflect and where required implement service improvements and help influence the second half of the year.
32. The service areas to note for this six-month period are as follows:

Housing and Environment

The increase in complaints recorded for Housing and Environment are mainly as a result of the disruption to the garden waste service following the suspension. These complaints were actually responded to by corporate services, as they are responsible for the customer contact.

Finance

The increase in finance complaints is in the main due to the backlog of correspondence for council tax and benefits. This was as a result of the pandemic and the recommencement of recovery action. General themes here included a lack of, or delay in response to customer contact and objections to recovery.

Financial Implications

33. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Legal Implications

34. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

Other implications

35. There are no other implications arising directly from this report.

Risks

36. It is important to have a robust and efficient complaints system in place to ensure that members of the public receive clear and fair responses to their queries and concerns; and to have oversight and review of the process. This provides transparency for customers and manages reputational risk.

Conclusion

37. This report sets out a review of formal complaints received during 2018-19 and 2019-20. The Committee is asked to review complaints received, and response times.

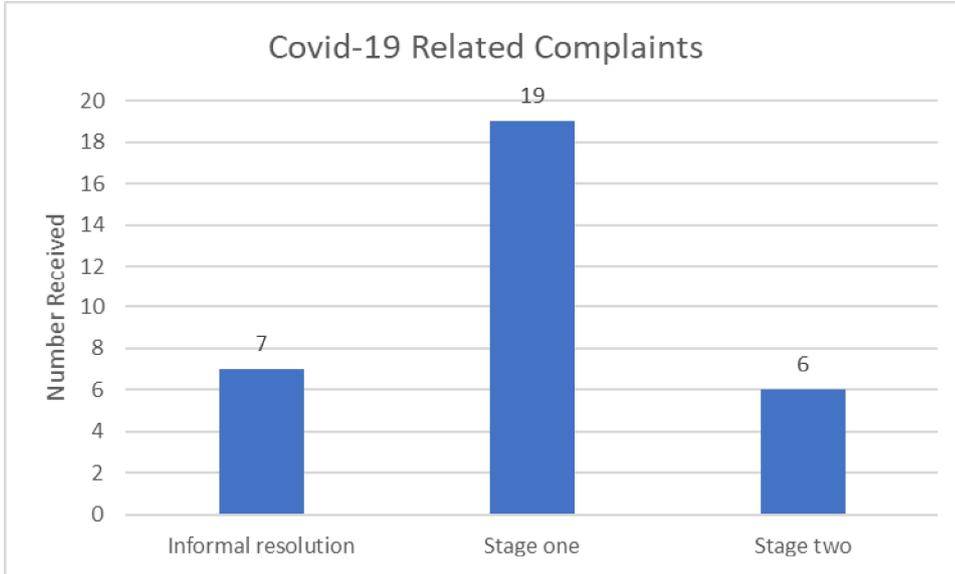
Background papers

- None

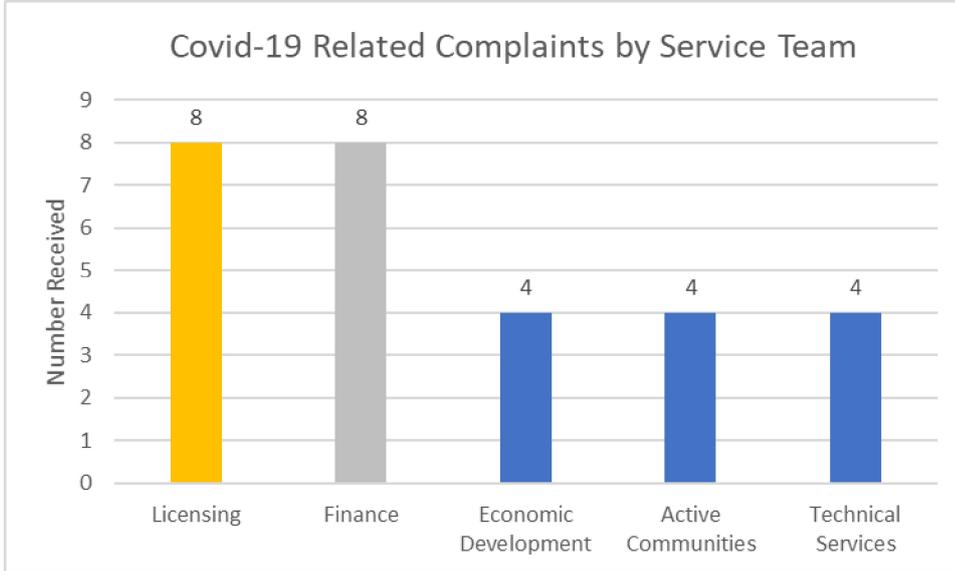
Appendix One

Covid-19 Related Complaints

- 1. The below chart demonstrates the number of complaints received by stage, that were Covid-19 related.



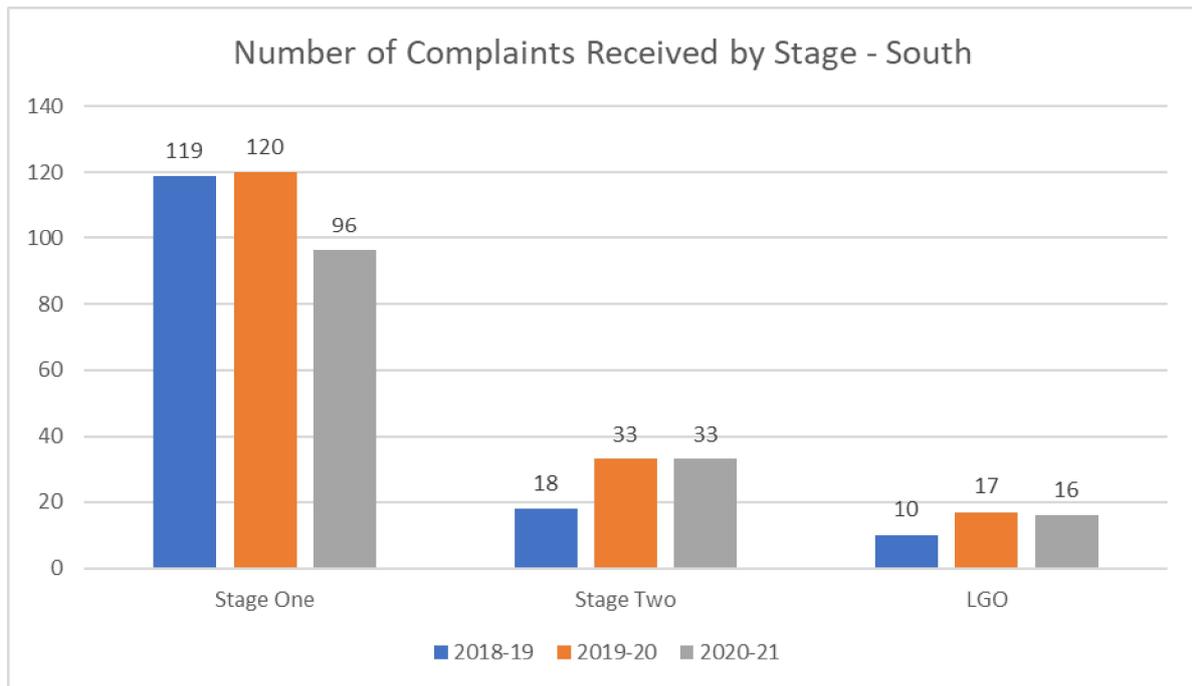
- 2. The below chart shows the number of Covid-19 related complaints received by service team.



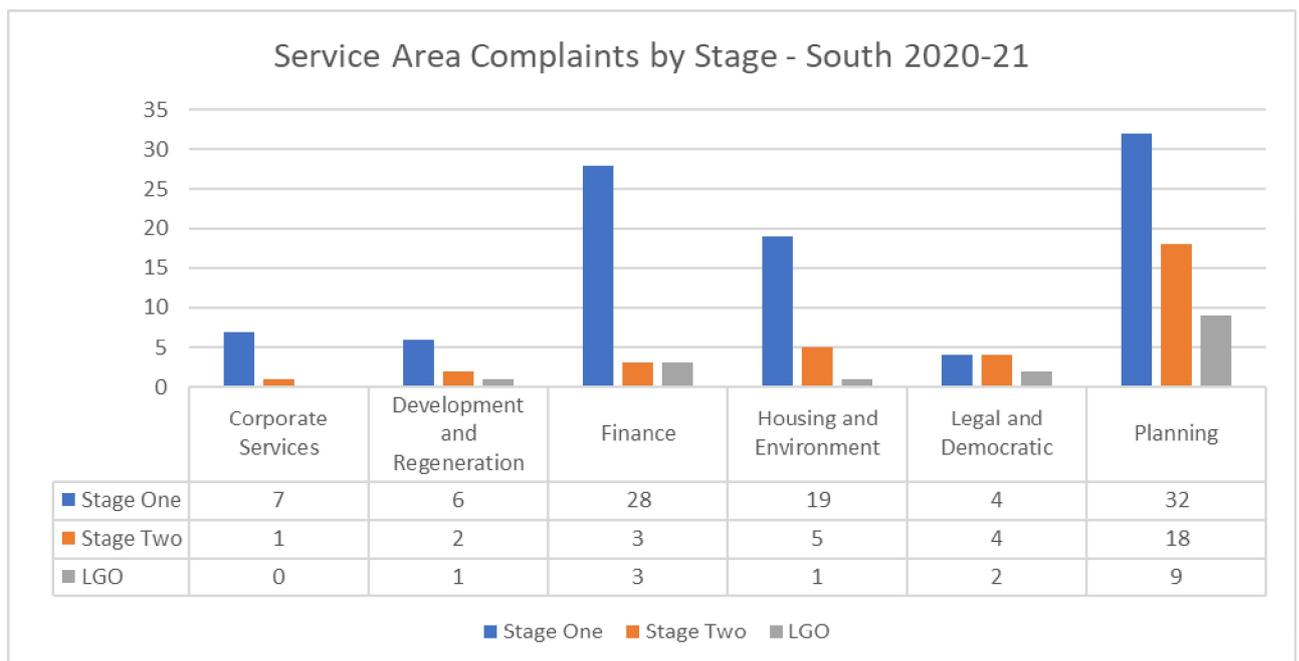
South Oxfordshire District Council

Number of formal complaints received and performance in providing the response within 15 working days

1. The following charts show the number of complaints received at each stage of the process over the past three completed years.

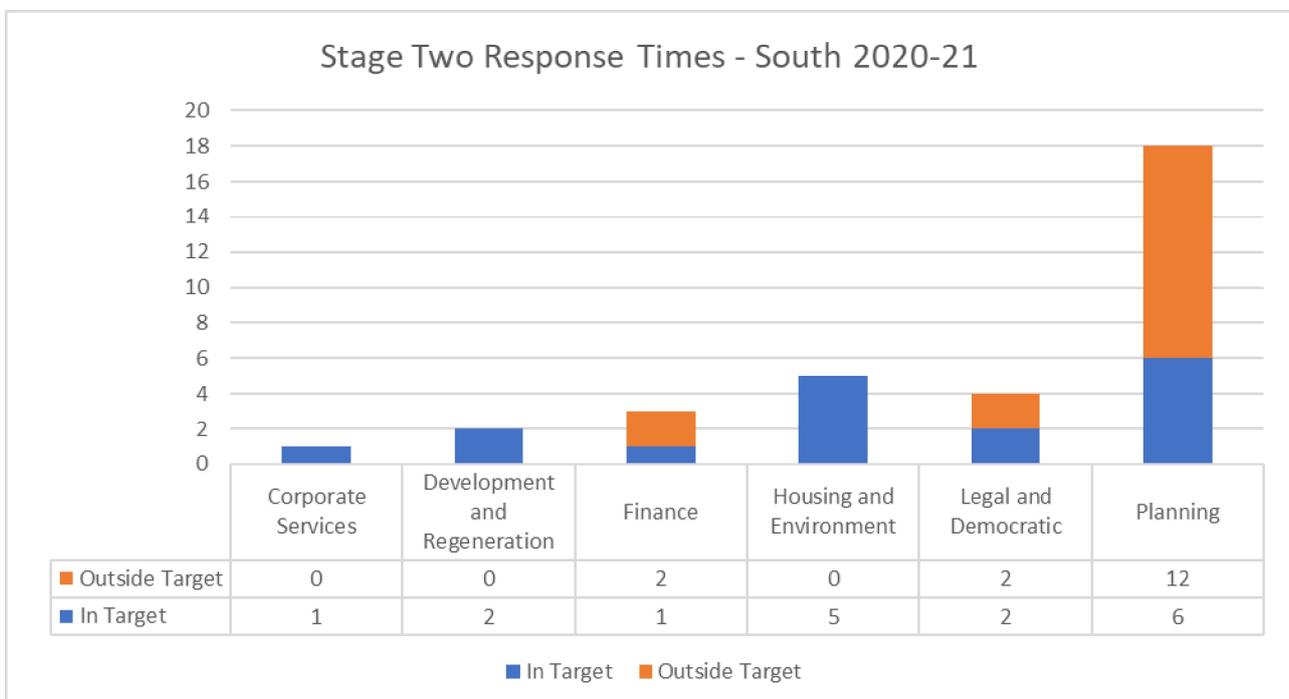
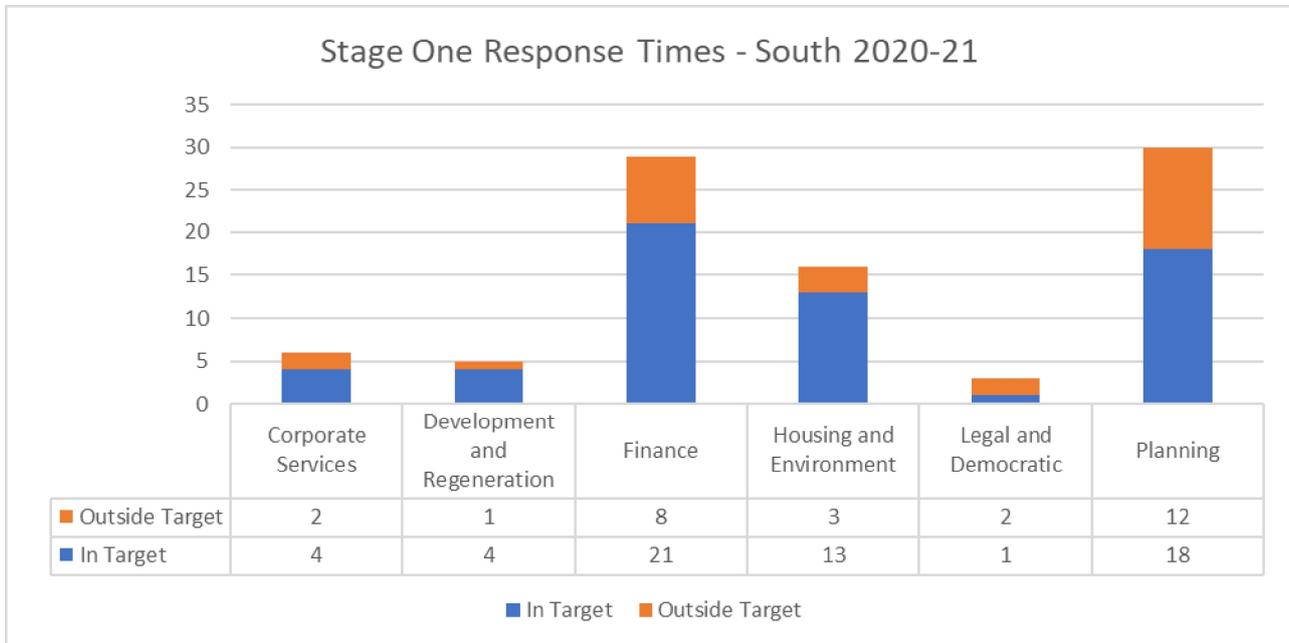


2. The following charts show the number of complaints received in 2020-21 for each service area at each stage of the complaints process.



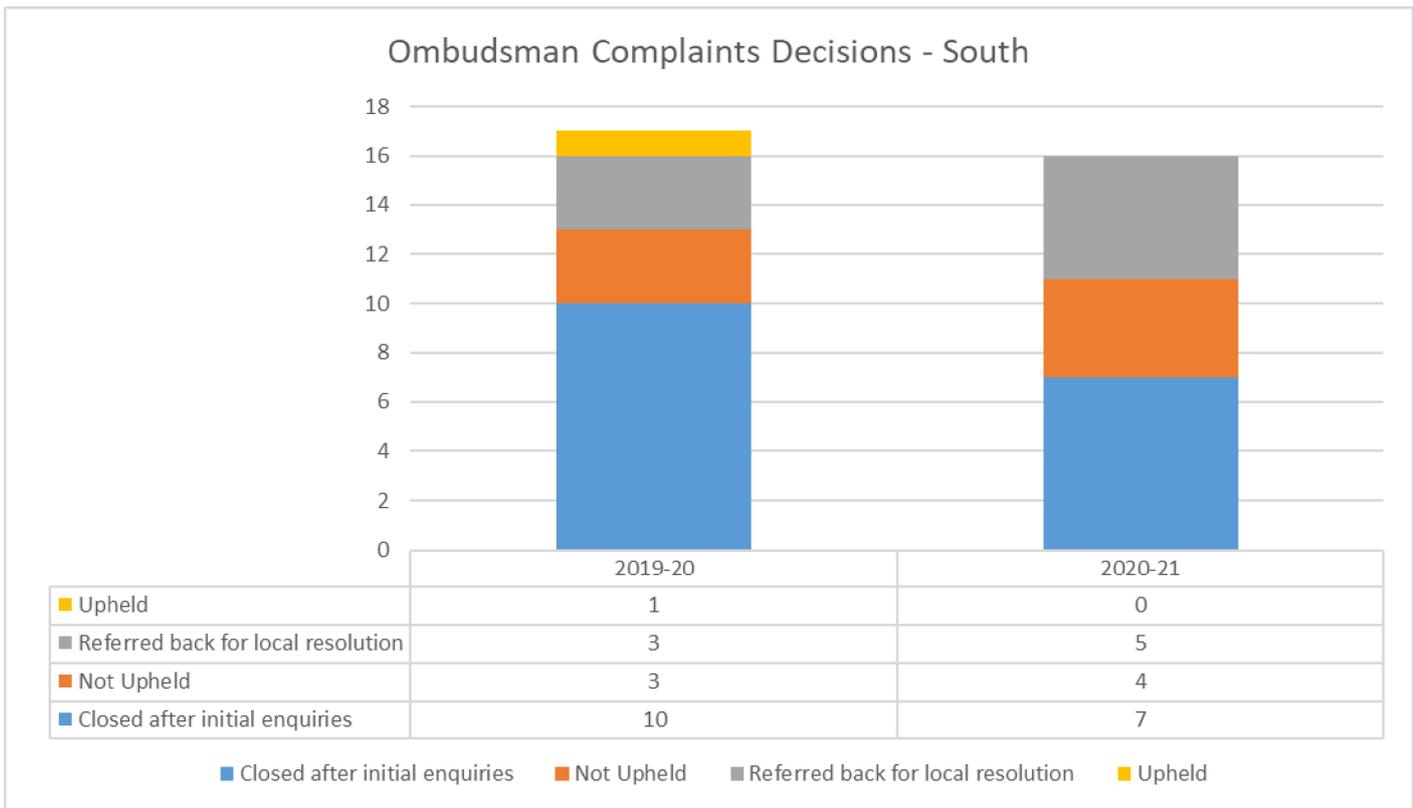
3. The following charts show service area performance in providing the response within 15 working days in 2020-21.

On the occasion circumstances do not allow us to meet our deadline, an extension of time will be agreed with the complainant, although they are recorded as outside target because they will have exceeded 15 working days.



Please note you will see a variance in the total number of complaints received, compared with the numbers of complaints responded to in the given year. This is because a complaint received late March will be reported as received in one year, and responded to in the following.

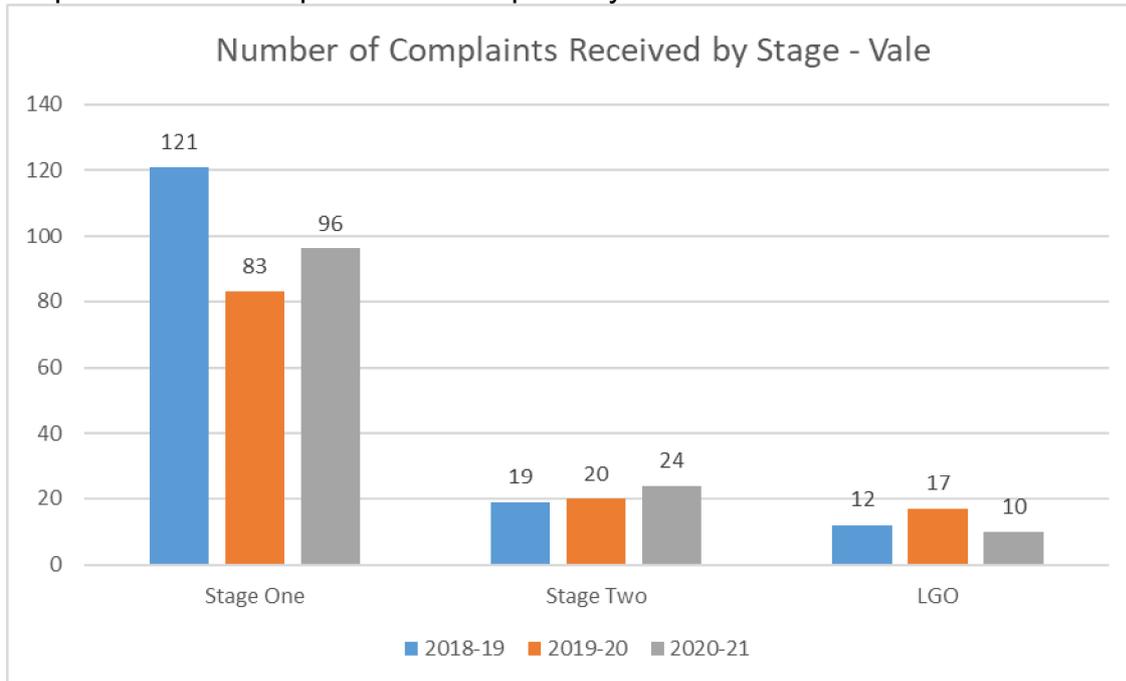
4. The following charts show the outcomes of Ombudsman complaints received in 2019-20 and 2020-21.



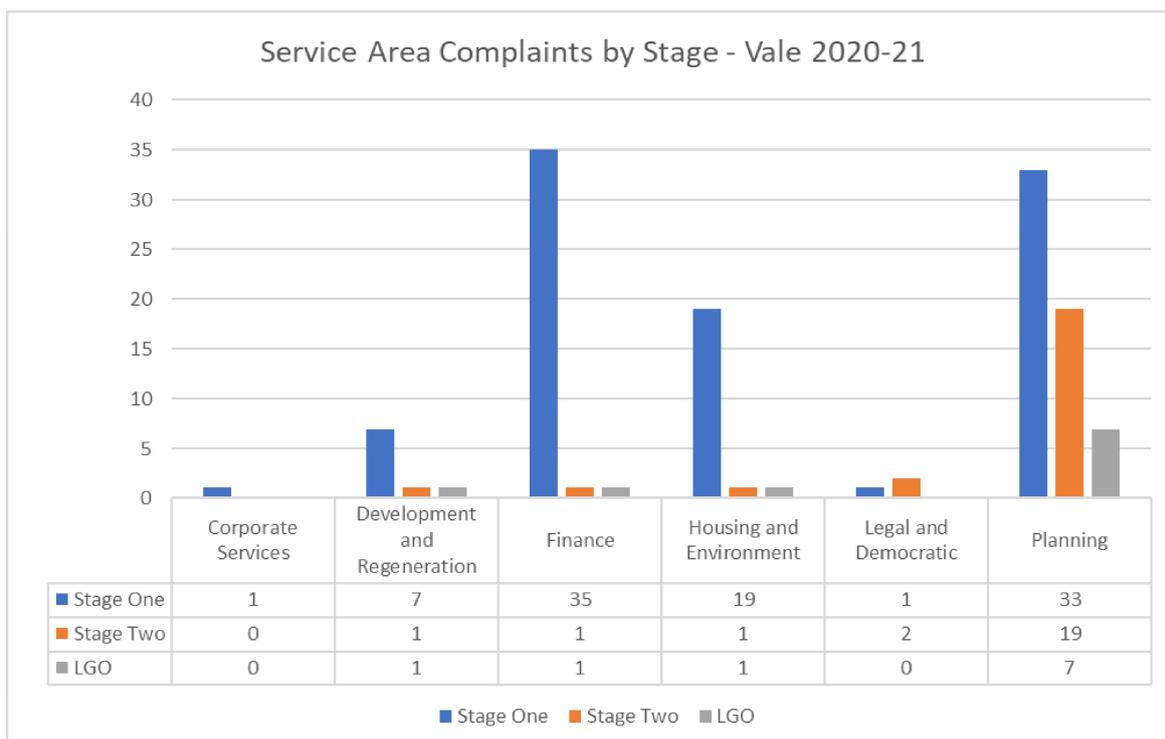
Vale of the White Horse District Council

Number of formal complaints received and performance in providing the response within 15 working days

5. The following charts show the number of complaints received at each stage of the process over the past three completed years.

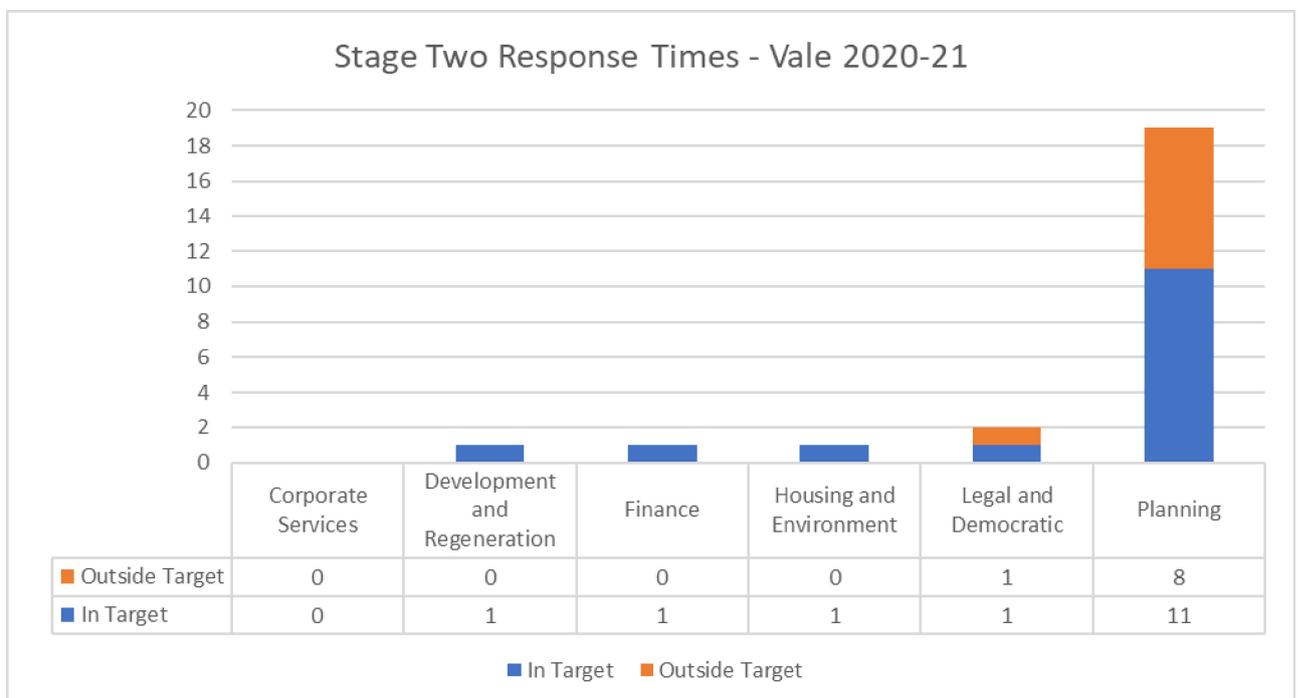
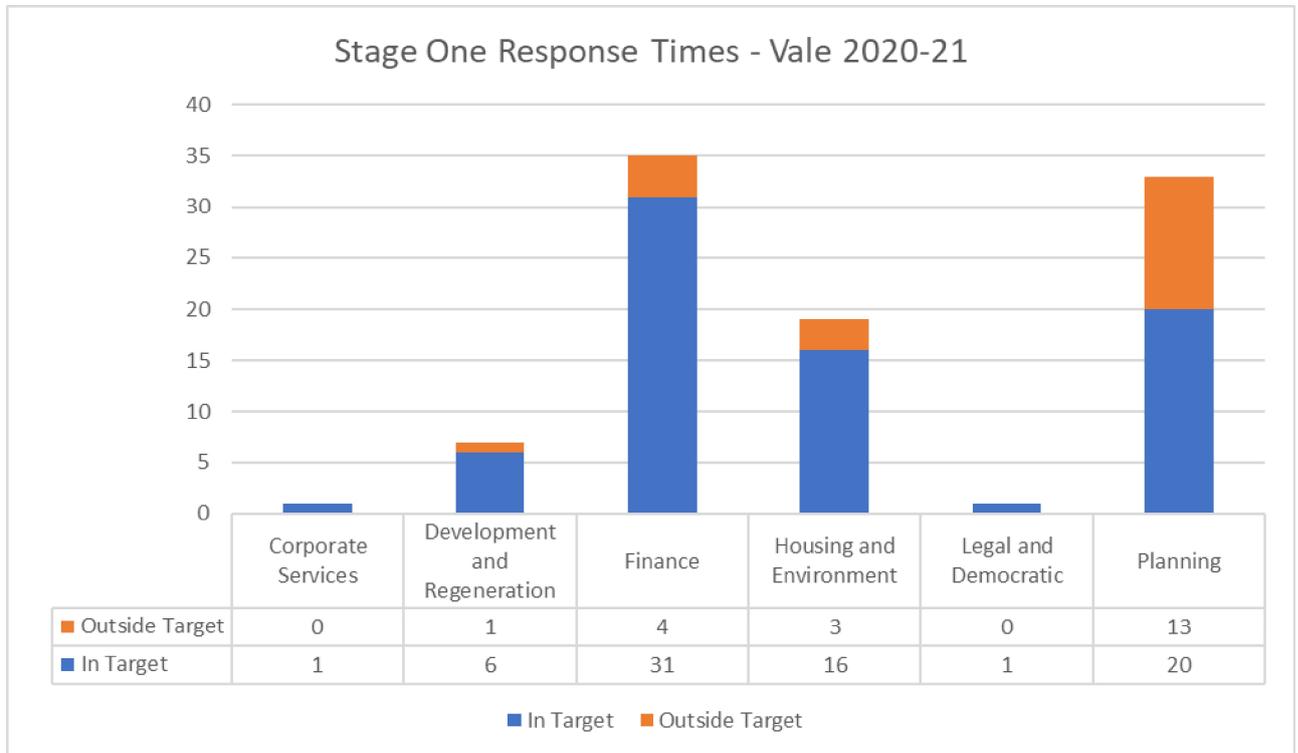


6. The following charts show the number of complaints received in 2020-21 for each service area at each stage of the complaints process.



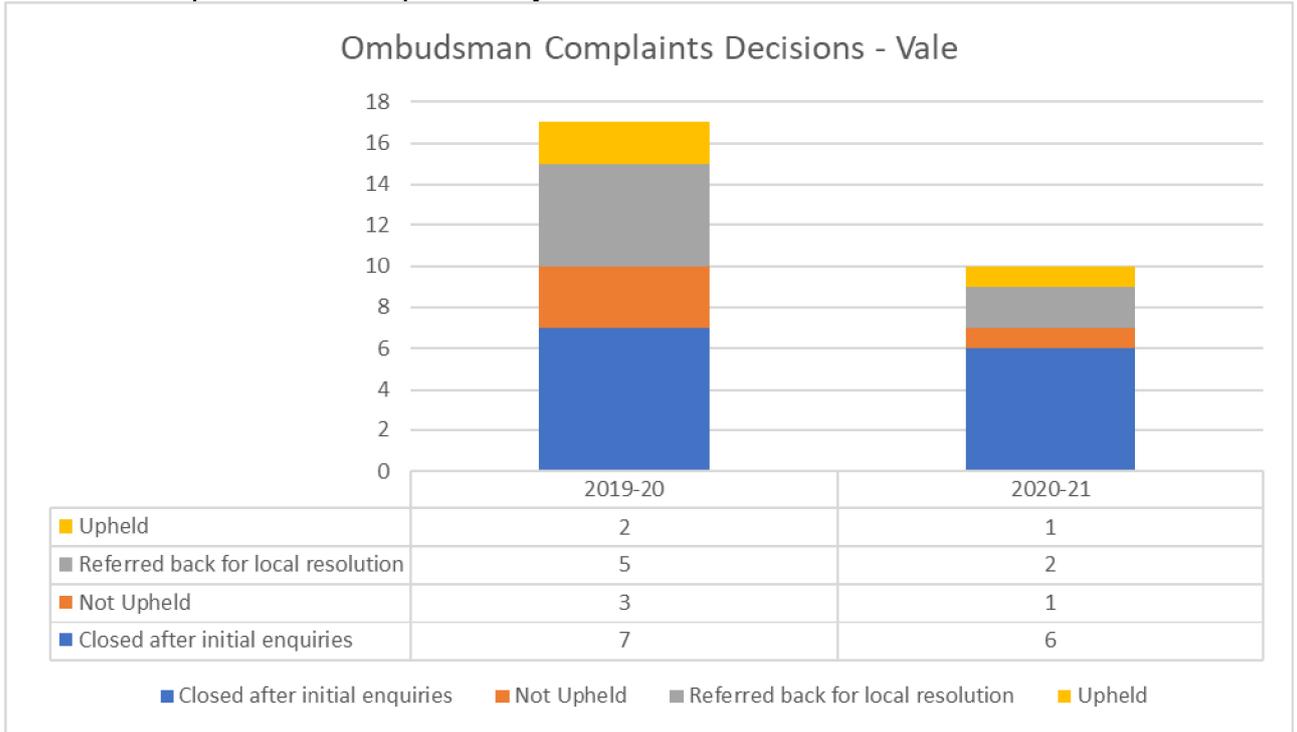
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Please note you will see a variance in the total number of complaints received, compared with the numbers of complaints responded to in the given year. This is because a complaint received late March will be reported as received in one year, and responded to in the following.

8. The following charts show the outcomes of Ombudsman complaints received in 2020-21 compared with the previous year.



Appendix Three

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Summary 2020-21

1. The following chart is an extract from the Ombudsman’s annual report, and show the performance of Ombudsman complaints for **South Oxfordshire District Council**, compared with other District Councils.

Upheld Complaints



Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

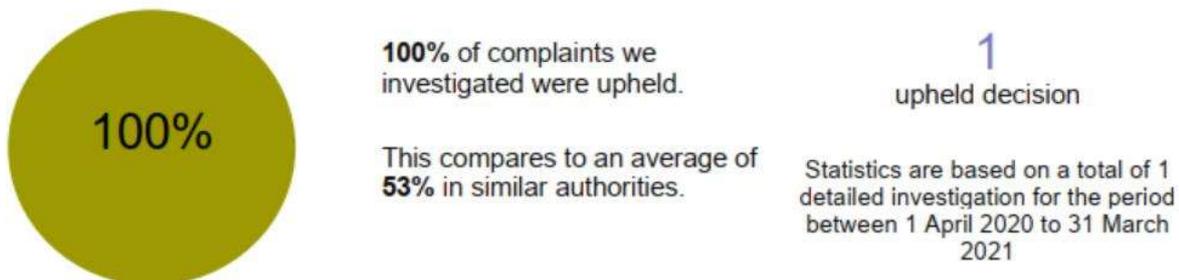
No recommendations were due for compliance in this period.

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority

The Ombudsman did not uphold any detailed investigations during this period.

2. The following charts are an extract from the Ombudsman’s annual report, and show the performance of Ombudsman complaints for **Vale of the White Horse District Council**, compared with other District Councils.

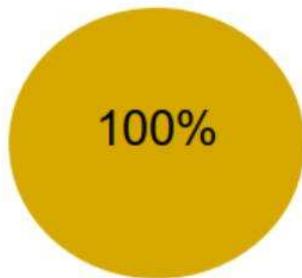
Upheld Complaints



Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority



In **100%** of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **16%** in similar authorities.

1
satisfactory remedy decision

Statistics are based on a total of 1 detailed investigation for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

3. Summary of the Vale Upheld complaints:

The Ombudsman's decision and report on this occasion was not made public.

Summary: Mr X complained the Council failed to properly consider a planning application. We found there was some fault. However, we concluded the outcome of the planning application was unlikely to have been different, had that fault not occurred.



Complaints Policy and Procedure

Last updated: January 2022

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Useful Definitions:

Working days – days the council is open to the public (not Saturdays, Sundays, Bank holidays and any other closures)

Relevant manager - the manager who oversees the team or service complained about

Ward councillor – the district councillor who is responsible for your area. You can find your councillor(s) on our websites:

www.southoxon.gov.uk/councillors

www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-the-council/who-we-are/the-councillors/

Complaints Policy and Procedure

POLICY STATEMENT

1. The council is committed to putting people at the centre of everything we do. We aim to provide a high standard of service and recognise we do not always get it right first time. Customer feedback is important to us, and we want you to tell us when you think we have got something wrong, so we can endeavour to put it right and learn from it.

THE NEED FOR A CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

2. Having a council-wide procedure for dealing with complaints ensures that:
 - customers know what to do if they have a complaint and understand how we will deal with it
 - staff know what to do when they receive a complaint
 - customers are treated fairly and equally
 - we can improve our services by analysing complaints
3. The complaints policy is intended for the use of customers, residents, businesses and visitors, or their chosen representatives.
4. As stipulated in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) guidance on good practice: the purpose of a complaints system is to put right what has gone wrong, and to learn from it. Where a complainant has a justified grievance, there is a duty to put things right at the earliest opportunity.

DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT

5. Our definition of a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service that requires a response. A complaint can relate to the standard of, or service received, the way a decision has been made, actions or lack of actions by the council, its staff or its partners and contractors.

FORMAL CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

6. Minor service dissatisfaction or failures, for example a missed bin collection, are dealt with directly by the relevant service team. Some responses may come directly from our suppliers or partners.
7. The service team will aim to achieve an informal resolution to address the concerns you have raised. If you are not sure which team to contact, please email enquiries@southoxon.gov.uk or enquiries@whitehorsedc.gov.uk.

8. Before accepting a formal complaint, the customer service team will look at whether you have already sought an informal resolution with the service team. Where appropriate, we will allow the service team the opportunity to address your concerns.
9. If you do not feel the matter was satisfactorily resolved by way of informal resolution, then you can ask for it to be reviewed as a formal complaint.
10. We will acknowledge your complaint and let you know if we can progress it under the formal corporate complaints procedure. Please refer to Appendix One to understand when our formal complaints procedure cannot be used.
11. There are two stages to our formal complaints procedure, with a third independent stage:
 - **Stage One:** responded to by the relevant service manager
 - **Stage Two:** this is to review the stage one investigation and outcome, which will be carried out by the relevant head of service. It is not an opportunity to raise new issues or further points of representation.
 - **Local Government Ombudsman:** if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of our formal complaints procedure, you can refer your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)
12. We require you to provide all the information and evidence you have at the point of submitting a complaint. In the unavoidable circumstance that new information or evidence becomes available to you during investigation of your complaint, we would need to consider a revised deadline.
13. When we acknowledge a complaint, we may seek clarity on the information you have provided before the stage one or stage two investigation can begin.
14. If it is not possible for a response to be provided within the deadline set out in our acknowledgement, we will write to you before the deadline to let you know a revised date.
15. On the occasion an individual officer has had previous involvement in a matter, or a complaint is about that member of staff, it may be allocated to an alternative service manager or head of service, at the discretion of the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations or Head of Corporate Services.
16. Complaints which involve multiple service areas, will be handled with a co-ordinated approach and a response provided by the service area we consider most relevant.

STAGE ONE – SERVICE MANAGER

17. We will contact you within one working day to acknowledge your complaint, we will provide the:
 - complaint reference number,

- name and title of the service manager who will be responding,
- date you can expect to receive your response, which is within 15 working days from our acknowledgement

18. In a small number of circumstances, we will escalate your complaint straight to stage two. This includes a complaint about the procedure followed during a Code of Conduct complaint, but not for review of the Monitoring Officer's decision.

19. If new information or evidence is provided by you after you have received the stage one complaint response, we will consider whether this demands a new stage one complaint.

STAGE TWO – HEAD OF SERVICE

20. Following the outcome of the stage one complaint, you have a right to ask for your complaint to be reviewed under stage two.

21. At stage two, the role of the head of service is to review the response you were provided at stage one, and whether we have satisfactorily addressed the points you raised in your stage one complaint.

22. You must write to us within six weeks of the date of the stage one response to request your complaint is escalated to stage two, including the following:

- what you feel has not been answered in your stage one response,
- and what outcome you would like to achieve in pursuing a stage two complaint

23. We will contact you within one working day to acknowledge your complaint, we will provide the:

- name and title of the head of service who will be responding,
- date you can expect to receive your response, which is within 15 working days from our acknowledgement

24. If new information or evidence is provided by you after you have received the stage two complaint response, we will consider whether this demands a new stage one complaint.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (LGSCO)

25. The LGSCO investigates complaints of alleged injustice concerning Local Authorities. Their service is free of charge.

26. If you remain dissatisfied following the outcome of our formal complaints procedure, you can contact the LGSCO at www.lgo.org.uk or telephone 0300 061 0614. The address of the LGSCO is as follows: 10th Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP.

27. Before the LGSCO will accept your complaint, you must first complete stage one and two of our complaints procedure, as set out in this policy.
28. The law does not allow the LGSCO to accept complaints made by an “authority constituted for the purposes of the public service”. This includes parish and town councils.

HOW TO MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT

29. Formal complaints can be submitted in a number of ways:

- our online complaints form available on our website at: www.southoxon.gov.uk/complaints or www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/complaint,
- by email to complaints@southandvale.gov.uk,
- or by letter to 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Abingdon, OX14 4SB

30. If you are unable to use our online complaints form, when writing to us please include the following:

- Name, Address and Email address (if you have one)
- Details of complaint: A summary of what has or has not happened
- What do you feel has been the effect of the action or lack of action?
- What do you think the council could do to put it right? And any outcomes you are looking to achieve
- Have you been in contact with anyone in the council about this matter? If so, please advise with who and when
- Evidence for example emails, letters or photographs

31. With signed confirmation from you, a complaint can be submitted on your behalf by your chosen representative.

32. Our customer service team are available on 01235 422600. If you are unable to put your complaint in writing, they will complete the online complaints form on your behalf, with you on the phone. Please note all telephone calls are recorded and saved for 6 months before they are deleted.

33. If you have difficulty in putting forward your complaint because of speech, language or other problems, you will be offered assistance.

34. If you visit our office in order to make a complaint, you will be asked to complete the online complaint form and if help is required with this, a customer service officer can assist you. You may be accompanied at any time by a friend or advocate.

35. If a complaint is sent to an individual officer or councillor, you may then be asked to complete our online complaint form. Alternatively, the officer may forward your

correspondence to the customer service team for it to be dealt with in line with the complaints policy and procedure.

36. When a complaint is submitted by a group (more than one person), we will ask for a signed confirmation from all parties saying they are happy to be considered as a group. We will then agree with you how we will correspond with the group.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

37. Generally, we do not investigate anonymous complaints. Anonymous complaints will only be dealt with if they involve individual or public safety, corruption, waste or other impropriety and where there is sufficient information to allow an investigation to proceed.

VEXATIOUS AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

38. In a minority of cases, complainants pursue matters in a way that can impede the investigation of their complaint or have significant resource issues for us.
39. We have a separate policy for dealing with vexatious and unreasonable behaviour, which can be found at: www.southoxon.gov.uk/complaints and www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/complaint

MONITORING, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

40. An annual complaints report is submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee.

CONFIDENTIALITY

41. The identity of a complainant will only be revealed to those who need to consider it; their identity will not be made known to anyone else, nor will it be made public.
42. Files that contain confidential information may be subject to data subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 2018. Consideration of what can be released will be decided by the Data Protection Officer, who will take into account the complainant's own rights and expectation of confidentiality.
43. Where there is an explicit request by you to do so and your consent has been given, your complaint and associated documentation/correspondence will be sent to your ward councillors.

APPENDIX ONE - WHEN OUR FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE CANNOT BE USED

1. For matters that have already exhausted our complaints procedure and/ or have been investigated by the Ombudsman.
2. Complaints about parish or town councils should be sent directly to the relevant town or parish council using the contact information on their website.

3. **Benefits:**

If you disagree with the way we have calculated your benefit entitlement, you can ask us to send their appeal to the Tribunal Service for review by an independent tribunal. To do this you should contact us within one calendar month of our decision by email to:

sodc.benefits@secure.capita.co.uk or
vowh.benefits@secure.capita.co.uk

or by writing to:

South Oxfordshire District Council	or	Vale of White Horse District Council
PO Box 870		PO Box 880
Erith		Erith
DA8 1UN		DA8 1UN
Tel: 0345 302 2313		Tel: 0345 302 2315

4. **Licensing:**

To appeal against a decision regarding licensing (premises, personal or taxi licences) you must lodge that appeal with the appropriate court within 21 days of the date of our decision. The written decision notice will give details of the relevant rights of appeal. For taxi penalty points, the route of appeal is detailed within the letter issuing points.

5. **Planning Application and Enforcement Decisions:**

When a planning application is refused, an applicant has a legal right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

The formal complaints procedure can only be used to investigate the procedures followed in determining an application, and not the decision itself. We will not investigate complaints from objectors who are simply unhappy that we have granted planning permission for a particular development, as we only have powers to revoke such a decision in exceptional circumstances.

Similarly, our corporate complaints procedure cannot be used if you are not happy with a planning enforcement triage or formal investigation decision. We can only accept a complaint if you think we have not followed due process, as set out in the council's Planning Enforcement Statement.

6. **Excess charge notices (parking fines):**

If you want to dispute an excess charge notice (parking fine), you must do so in writing, preferably within the reduced payment period of the excess charge notice, either by email to carparks.southandvale.uk@sabagroup.com

or by writing to:

Car parks team
Saba Park Services Ltd.
For and on behalf of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District
Councils
Milton Park
Milton
Oxfordshire
OX14 4SB

7. **Complaints about Elected Members:**

If the complaint is about the conduct of a district councillor, a member of one of the town or parish councils or a co-opted committee member, the complaint should be considered under the Code of Conduct complaints procedure by the Monitoring Officer. Please visit the Councillors' code of conduct page on our website for further information:

www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/local-democracy-and-elections/council-meetings-and-decision-making/councillors/councillors-code-of-conduct/

www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/local-democracy-and-elections/councillors-committees-and-meetings/councillors/councillors-code-of-conduct/

Managing vexatious and unreasonable complainant behaviour policy

Last Updated: January 2022

INTRODUCTION

1. We want to be able to deal with complainants in ways that are open, fair and proportionate. A clear policy on dealing with what is considered to be unreasonable behaviour helps staff to understand what is expected of them, what options for taking action are available, and who can authorise such action.
2. Some customers may have justifiable complaints but may pursue them in unreasonable ways. Others may pursue complaints which appear to have no substance, or which have already been exhaustively investigated and determined; their contacts with the council may be amicable, but nevertheless will place heavy demands on staff time.
3. Situations can sometimes escalate, and complainants' behaviour may become abusive, threatening, offensive or otherwise unacceptable.

AIM

4. The aim of this policy is to:
 - Protect the wellbeing of our staff and the integrity of our processes
 - Outline the actions to be taken when people display vexatious and unreasonable complainant behaviour

DEFINING UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

5. Our definition of unreasonable complainant behaviour is: Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are those who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with the council, hinder the councils' consideration of their, or other people's complaints, and who continue to occupy an unreasonable amount of staff time when it has been made clear that it is not possible to achieve the outcome they want.
6. Below are examples of actions and behaviours that may be considered unreasonable:
 - Abusive, offensive, aggressive, threatening behaviour and/or language from complainants.

- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations and insisting that these are 'new' complaints.
- Refusing to accept the decision and repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.
- Persistence in presenting the details of the complaint in a confusing manner or refusing to provide evidence supporting their claims including diary sheets, despite offers of help.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff. This will include lengthy and/or frequent phone calls, emails or letters to council staff.
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with more than one service area or authority.
- Demanding meetings with staff when it is clear this will not achieve what the complainant is seeking to achieve or resolve the complaint any further.
- Submitting falsified documentation.
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints process, for example refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the corporate complaints policy and procedure, or that the matter is not the district councils' responsibility despite being directed to an external organisation including Oxfordshire County Council or the Police.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, including demanding to deal with someone else.
- Denying or changing statements that you made at the outset.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE COUNCILS TO MANAGE UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANTS

7. If such behaviours are displayed towards a member of staff, we will warn the complainant that we may:
 - Terminate the phone call if the behaviour does not change.
 - Terminate the meeting if the behaviour does not change.
 - Decline to provide a further response to an email or letter.
 - Where behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, the council will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police.
8. If the inappropriate behaviour recurs, the relevant head of service will consider invoking this policy. In making this decision, they will review whether:

- The complaint is being or has been investigated properly and thoroughly, in line with relevant policy and procedures including the councils' formal corporate complaints procedure available at: www.southoxon.gov.uk/complaints and www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/complaint
 - The decision reached is the logical, fair and reasonable.
 - Communications with the complainant have been adequate.
9. Should the head of service decide to invoke this policy, they will write to the complainant advising:
- Why a decision has been taken to invoke the policy.
 - What specific restriction(s) have been applied. Please see below.
 - How long the restrictions will be in place.
 - What they can do to have the decision reviewed by the Deputy Chief Executive.
 - That they have the right to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about the fact that they have been treated as an unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainant.
10. Restrictions may include:
- Advising the complainant that all future complaints on the same matter, not raising anything new, will be read and placed on file but not acknowledged.
 - Restrictions on the length or number of telephone calls and personal contact received from the complainant.
 - Restricting the way contact is made for example only by telephone, letter, or email.
 - Restricting the complainant to contacting one designated officer.
 - Requiring face to face contact to take place in front of a witness.
 - Recording of telephone calls, providing the complainant has been made aware that calls may or will be recorded.
11. A record of any decision made, and related correspondence, will be stored on the complaints database under the relevant complaint reference.
12. The decision made to invoke this policy will be reviewed by the Deputy Chief Executive after the agreed period, after which restrictions can be lifted and relationships restored unless there is good reason to extend the limit.