

# Annual Complaints Report 2016

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## **BASILDON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Report to:** Employment and General Purposes Committee  
7<sup>th</sup> July 2016

### **ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT**

**Report by:** Head of Customer Services, Georgina Blakemore

**Enquiries to:** Tom Walker, Manager of Customer Services

**Enclosures:** Enclosure No. 1 – Complaints Statistics

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

As requested by the Committee, this is an annual report detailing the level of complaints received by the Council covering the last financial year. The report sets out analysis of the complaint types and Council service areas they relate to.

The Council received 924 formal complaints in 2015/16, this is a marginal increase of 2 on the previous financial year. The number of formal complaints is in the context of the Council receiving 635,447 individual customer transactions over the year across face to face, telephone, and written correspondence from customers. As a proportion of all customer contact, this means that 0.14% of all service enquiries received by the Council lead to a service complaint in the last financial year.

The number of Stage One complaints increased by 5 from the previous financial year to 867. Escalations from Stage One to either Stage Two or three, reduced from 60 last year to 57 despite the small increase seen in the total number of Stage One complaints. The number of Stage Two complaints received remained the same as last year at 45. The number of Stage Three complaints reduced from 15 to 12. Of these Stage Three complaints, 2 were upheld and 2 partially upheld.

Basildon Council complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman reduced from 46 last year to 7 in 2015/16. Only one complaint against the Council was upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman.

There were 548 formal Service compliments received in 2015/16, a reduction from 800 in 2014/15 although there were 37,265 less instances of customer contact this year and so as a proportion of all contact, compliments remain at a similar level to the previous year. A new Performance Indicator (PI) was introduced in Q2 to capture more effectively the number of compliments received.

91% of complaints were responded to within the agreed service standard, an improvement in performance from last year's 80.4%.

Moving forward, from April 2016, all complaints, comments and compliments are recorded on a new Dynamics CRM system which will provide yet further analysis available on complaint trends per service area and further identify themes and root cause of complaints, information which can be used to further shape and improve services in the future.

**WARD(S):**

All wards.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Committee is asked to note the report.**

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**BACKGROUND**

**Complaints Policy and Procedure**

This report shows the number of Stage One, Stage Two and Stage Three complaints and Ombudsman cases received during the period April 2015 - March 2016.

In June 2014, a new Complaints Policy (with accompanying way of working which included centralised management of Complaints within the CSC) was approved by Cabinet. A designated Complaints line was set up, followed by the launch of a Complaints, Comments and Compliments web page in line with the corporate approach to increase access channels for customers. Feedback is also encouraged via Social Media and continued use of satisfaction surveys. Customer Advisors maintain a record of all complaints passed to the various service areas to be dealt with following initial contact with the complainant, liaising with technical specialists across services for updates and to assist resolution within the targeted timescales.

The Council has a three stage complaints management process as set out in the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy. This approach enables the authority to do everything it can to resolve complaints in line with agreed policies and procedures, prior to any referral to the Local Government Ombudsman.

A new Complaint and Compliment handling procedure went live in April 2016 for all complaints received as part of the 'CRM standardisation' Project whereby CRM Dynamics is used to record all complaints to the organisation, enabling greater categorisation of complaints and segmentation per service area. This will aid more detailed analysis. The CRM will also be used to monitor adherence to responses within the agreed service standard and automate reminders to back office service areas, increasing the opportunity for full responses to be issued within the allocated time, delivering greater efficiency within the process.

In December 2016 there is a review of the new Complaints, Comments and Compliments policy scheduled for Member scrutiny.

## COMPLAINTS IN CONTEXT

Face to Face there were 94,057 visits were recorded in reception - a reduction of 26% on the previous year. There were 418,076 calls into the Customer Service Centre (a 3% reduction despite one additional service line - CSC Rents - launched in March and accounting for over 1400 extra calls that month) and 23% less items of correspondence handled in 2015/16. Demand has reduced across contact access channels of face to face, telephony and written correspondence while web contact has increased by 21,000 unique users on the last year to over 1,150,000 unique users over the year. This is evidence of the Council's approach effective to increase web transactional capability to boost accessibility to services and free up available customer contact resource for those in our communities who need further support.

	2014/2015	2015/2016	
<b>Reception Visits</b>	127,646	94,057	↓
<b>Customer Calls</b>	433,157	418,076	↓
<b>Items of Correspondence</b>	449,452	342,923	↓

Despite a reduction in demand complaints volumes have remained the same as in previous years, this is partly due to the Council encouraging customer feedback and making feedback easier to provide through an improved web form, and complaints management process. Two thirds of Council service areas experienced either a reduction or no change in complaints from the last financial year. There was an increase in complaints about Refuse (particularly missed collections), which rose from 11% of all complaints last year, to 17% this year. However, as a proportion of all collections carried out each week, complaint volumes are low in this highly visible, high transaction service area.

The Council received a total of 924 complaints in 2015/16, with complaints comprising 0.14% of all customer contact. This is a small increase from 0.13% last year although the number of complaints escalating within the process, fell by 3. There were 867 Stage One, 45 Stage Two and 12 Stage Three.

An amendment made to the standard Complaint Acknowledgement letter last year, which no longer indicates or encourages immediate escalation to Stage Two simply if the matter is not resolved within the initial 10 working days, contributes to the low number of escalations. Instead, escalations occur when customers explicitly express the desire to do so which improves the reliability of escalation data.

The number of Stage Three complaints reduced by 20% from 15 to 12. Last year, 33% of complainants escalated from Stage Two to Stage Three but in 2015/16, this fell to 27%. Unchanged from last year, the most common

Complaints	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	
<b>Stage One</b>	525	862	867	↑
<b>Stage Two</b>	12	45	45	
<b>Stage Three</b>	1	15	12	↓

service area reaching Stage Three level are Housing and Planning.

The majority of complaints which reach Stage Three result in a face to face meeting to discuss the case with an independent manager.

### TOP 5 COMPLAINT AREAS 2015/2016



The top 5 areas for complaints remain the same as in 2014/2015.

Repairs account for 20% of all complaints (an improvement from 25% last year). The Repairs contract has now been awarded to Morgan Sindall. The most common area of complaint is poor communication between parties resulting in missed appointments, and the quality of repair work undertaken on behalf of the Council by contractors.

To place these complaints in context, the Council currently manages 10,930 properties. Basildon Borough has a greater proportion of social housing administered by the local authority than other parts of England. It also has a smaller private rented sector than the national average, thus there is heightened demand for social housing and accompanying related services such as Housing and Repairs. It is not surprising that both Housing and Repairs feature in the top 5 most complained about areas with 91 and 172 complaints made respectively. However, both service areas saw a reduction in complaint volumes from the previous year, with 12% less Housing and 19% less Repairs. Despite reductions in the aforementioned areas, the overall number of complaints have increased due to high volumes of refuse complaints. Refuse is the second most common area of complaint which has increased from 11% of the complaints share in 2014/2015 to 17% this year. The majority of complaints are about missed collections although an increase has been seen in the number of complaints about the loaders and drivers themselves. This is a highly visible service and a number of improvements have already been delivered. The new CRM for 2016 will enable more detail to be captured about specific trends, for all service areas, and includes a complaint category relating to staff performance / attitude. Also to address feedback from customers, an escalation procedure directly issued to management has been implemented to rectify complaints expediently through more senior management having better visibility of issues and allowing them to address issues promptly.

Housing complaints continue to feature as a top issue, the majority of which relate to the 7 year borough residency rule and the criteria governing Housing assessments. A key area of dissatisfaction is the criteria applied to upscaling properties where tenants wish to move from a 2 to 3 bedroom property for example. The Council's Allocation Policy is subject to formal review later this year which much of the feedback being incorporated into this review.

Complaints about revenues are commonly the result of dissatisfaction with the management of failed Direct Debits (resulting in Council Tax arrears). This includes complaints about Court summons which some customers regard as unreasonable. The Council's approach to recovery is consistent with national best practice and ensures fair

collection of Council Tax funds to everyone within the borough. A range of support mechanisms are in place for those who are unable to pay and the service continues to take on board user feedback whilst ensuring fair and consistent payment of Council Tax across the borough.

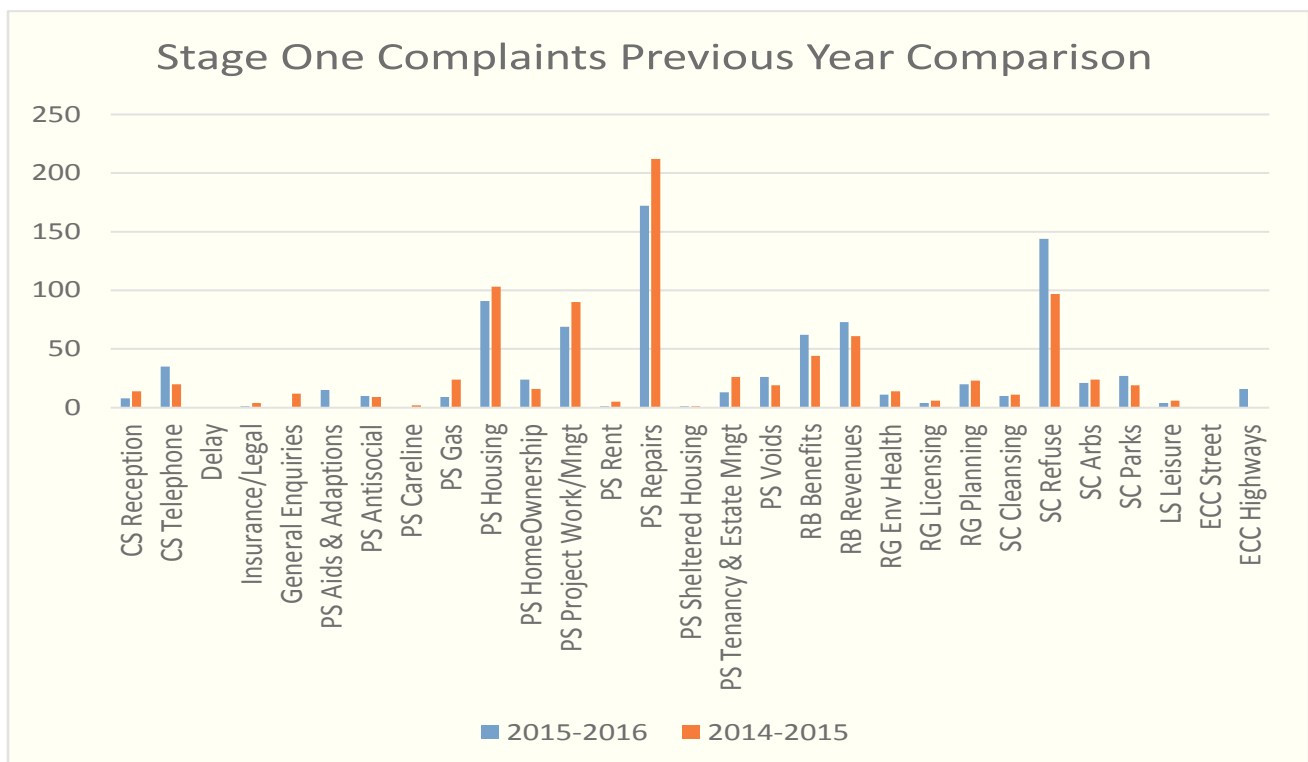
To put complaints in a wider national context, the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (April 2016) showed customer satisfaction has increased significantly for the first time since 2012, although the Public Sector remains one of the lowest performing sectors. Their report “Citizens and Customers: Further Building the Case for Customer Service in the Public Sector” evidences that customers have rising expectations and demands to be met, despite Public Sector organisations facing considerable financial pressures, having to manage what they would like to deliver against what they can afford to deliver. Furthermore, customer priorities have changed when compared with 5 years ago, with more importance attributed to staff attitude and behaviour than previously.

## **STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS**

### **Previous Year Comparison**

The number of Stage One complaints increased by 0.5% in 2015/2016, compared with an increase of 39% in 2014/2015 on the previous financial year. This was predominantly due to Council efforts to improve the ease at which complaints could be made by customers, and improvements in data capture. This is part of the drive for the Council to welcome feedback to help improve and shape services as set out in the Council’s Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

Repairs, Refuse and Housing are the most common areas of complaint, all being highly visible services and high transaction services. With Dynamics CRM now being used for recording all complaints, it will be possible to report in more detail the precise reasons for complaints and carry out further analysis to aid understanding of the issues and feed these back into services with a view to improvement



## **Analysis of Stage One Complaints**

Contributing to Repairs complaints is the complexity of communication which involves tenant, Council, contractors and sub-contractors. This is something that the award of the Repairs contract to Morgan Sindall – who will oversee all types of repair – should improve upon. The quality of repairs is also complained about. A total of 33,304 repairs were completed in the last financial year, thus complaints represent 0.5% of the total number of repairs completed.

There was a rise in Housing Application complaints after the 2014 Allocations Policy increased the number of exclusions for applicants, and introduced the 7 year borough residency rule. This continues to feature as the main reason for Housing related complaints, followed by other aspects of the Housing criteria rather than the Council failing to perform its duties correctly.

Refuse (collection) complaints increased 33% from 97 in 2014/2015 to 144 in 2015/2016. In context, there are around 77,000 residences to collect from each week and approximately 423,500,00 individual property refuse collections per year. Complaints about this high transaction service constitute 0.0004% of all individual collections carried out. This figure also captures initial reports about missed collections and does not reflect the Council failing the collection service levels, although there has been an increase in people-related complaints which will be monitored via the new CRM.

Council Tax arrears remain responsible for a number of the 75 Revenues complaints received. The key cause for complaint is the removal of customer Direct Debits if they have failed on two consecutive occasions to collect payment which can ultimately progress to a Court Summons. There has been a 14% increase in Revenues complaints, although the vast majority are resolved at Stage One with only 2 Stage Two escalations, and no Stage Three.

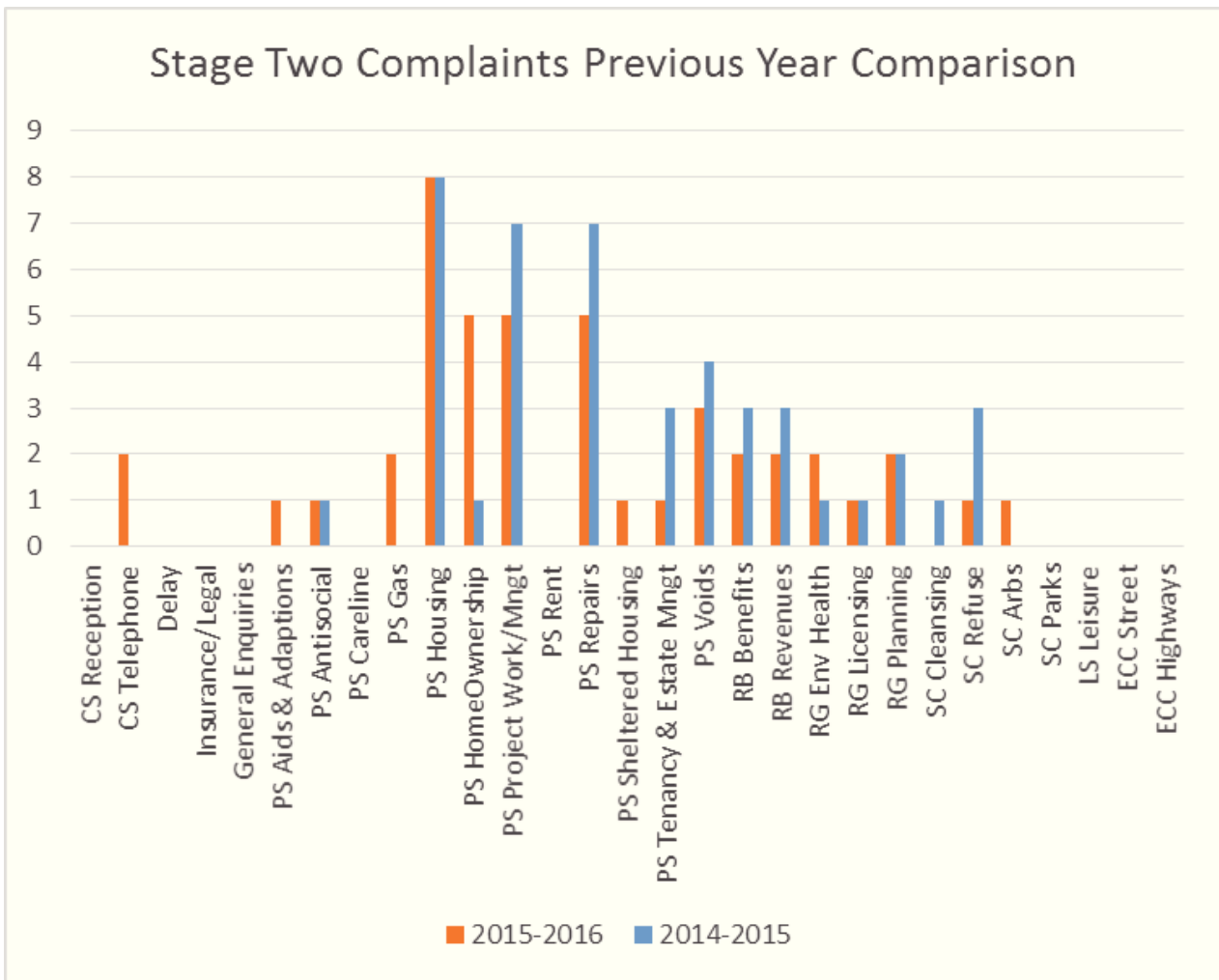
## **STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS**

### **Previous year comparison**

The number of Stage Two complaints remained the same in 2015/2016, although the number then escalating to Stage Three, reduced by 3. Housing and Repairs were the most frequent area of complaint accounting for 18% and 11% of Stage Two complaints respectively. The actual number of Housing complaints remained at 8, whilst Repairs dropped from 7 to 5 this year. The underlying reasons for complaint remain the same as for Stage One.

New service areas being complained about include Sheltered Housing, Customer Services, Gas, Aids / Adaptations and Arboriculture although the volume of complaints received about these areas at Stage Two are very low – typically 1 or 2 each. This is insufficient to properly identify any trends.





### Top reasons for complaint at Stage Two

Following from the trend seen in Stage One complaints, Housing and Repairs feature as two of the most common reasons for escalation along with Project Work. Given a higher number of complaints are made about these areas at Stage One, there is a greater potential for these areas to receive escalations at Stage Two given the high transaction numbers.

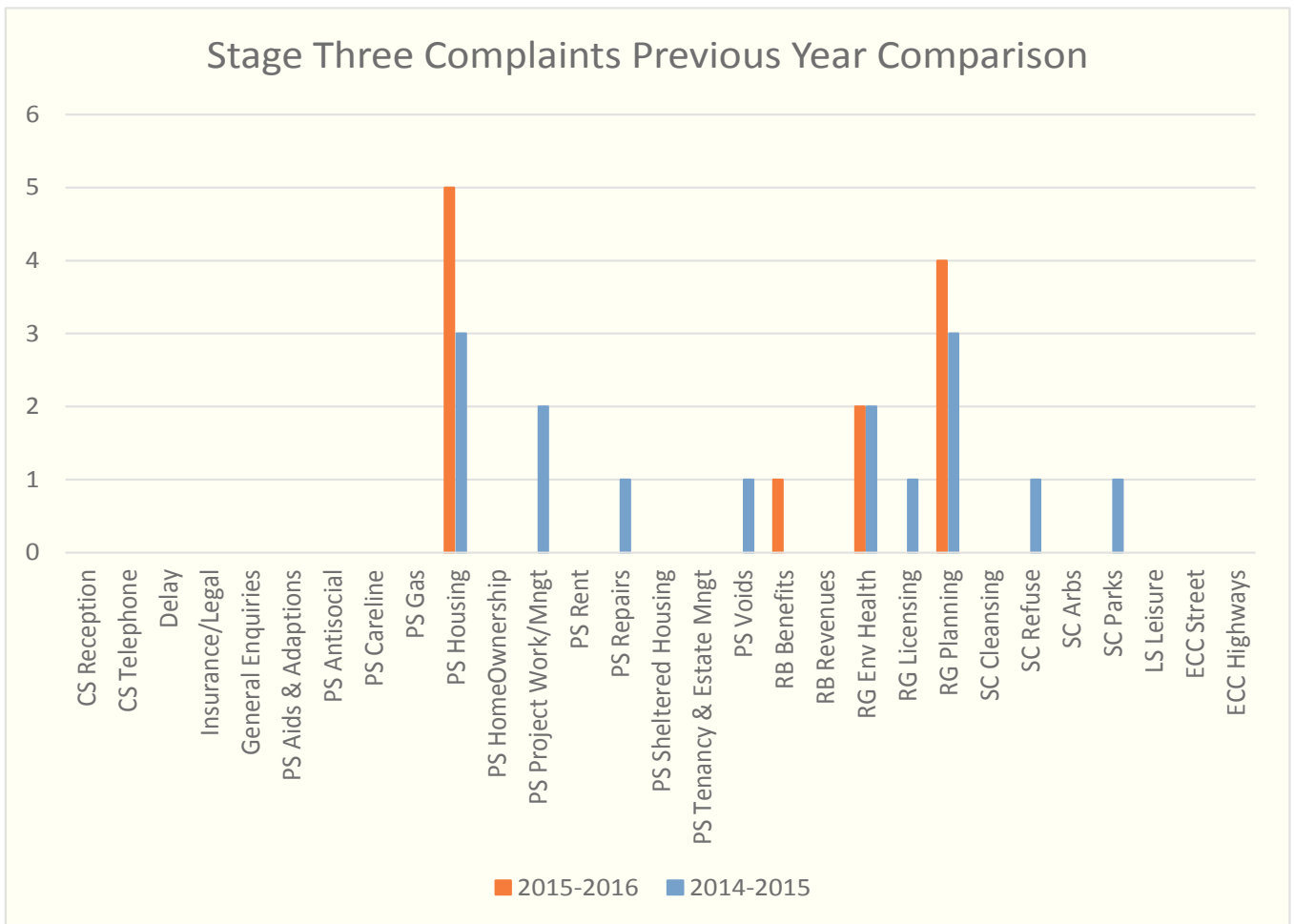
Home Ownership did not feature predominantly in the previous year although in 2015/2016 resulted in 5 escalations to Stage Two, but none to Stage Three.

### **STAGE THREE COMPLAINTS**

All Stage Three complaints are overseen by the Customer Service Manager except those which are about Property Services matters which follow a different process. Property Services complaints are managed by a Tenant Panel.

There was a total of 12 complaints escalating to Stage Three, a reduction of 3 (or 20%) from the previous year.





Housing, followed by Planning, were the top two service areas about which customers complained at Stage Three. This represents no change from the previous year. Planning complaints are often related to building consent where a nearby property is overlooked or inconvenienced in other ways. This year, 3 of the 4 complaints about Planning were due to consent and none were upheld.

There were two upheld complaints in total, and two partially upheld. Of those overseen by the Customer Service Manager, one was upheld due to the time taken to process a Benefits claim and one partially upheld due to errors processing an application for a Council house.

### **COMPLAINT RESPONSE TIMES**

The target for responding to complaints is for responses to be issued in 10 working days. In 2015/16, 91% of complaints were responded to in the agreed service standard, up from 80.4% last year.

The new Complaint and Compliment handling procedure launched in April 2016 as part of the 'CRM standardisation' Project will assist service areas in responding to complaints within target given the increased reporting capability on complaints now that, from Q1, they have been logged on Dynamics CRM. As this CRM will also issue reminders to back office service areas automatically, rather than through officer referral, there is an even greater opportunity to further improve the speed and efficiency of the Complaints process in respect of response times.

## **OMBUDSMAN CASES**

During the period 2015/2016, just 7 customers contacted the Local Government Ombudsman - much less than 2014/2015 where 46 complainants sought escalation of their issues in this way. This clearly indicates the Council's Complaints policy is efficient and ensuring customer concerns and complaints are being responded to effectively in-house.

One complaint was upheld relating to the Council's management of a statutory noise nuisance, a small amount of compensation was issued and areas of service improvement identified by the relevant service area have been implemented.

The breakdown of referrals to the Ombudsman are;

Regulatory Services 2  
Housing Applications 2  
Housing Benefit 1  
Enforcement (Street Scene) 1  
Council Tax / Legal 1

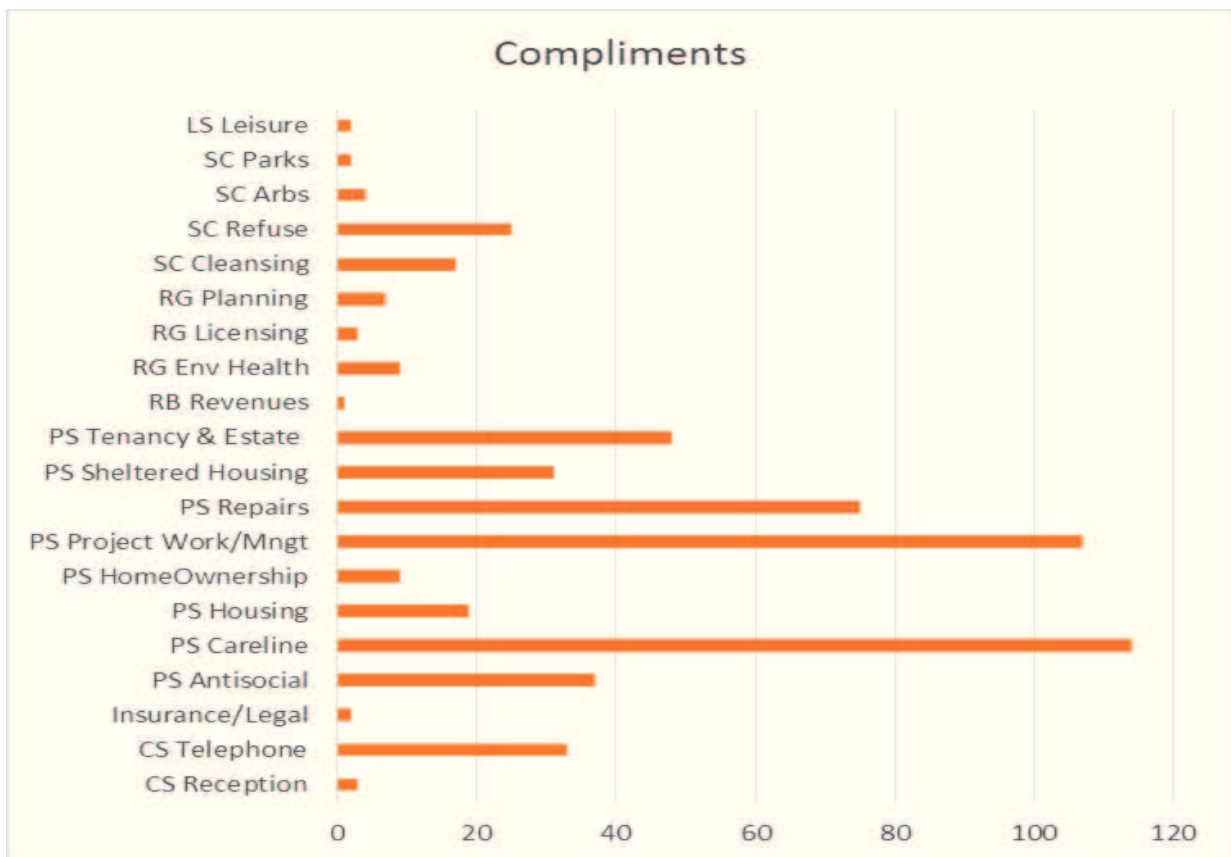
None of the remaining complainants this year were referred back to the Council to progress the matter further.

## **COMPLIMENTS IN CONTEXT**

In 2015/16, there were 548 compliments received which is less than in the previous year when 800 compliments were received. However, demand across the Council is down, with 37,265 less customer contacts this year. As a proportion of all customer contact received in 2015/16, the volume of compliments is similar when compared with the previous year. Taking the reduced demand into account, there was only a reduction of 0.03% compliments.

In Q2, a new PI to monitor the volume of compliments received from customers was introduced to reflect the importance of this form of feedback, and encourage all compliments to be captured. There is evidence that not all verbal compliments are being captured by colleagues for reporting purposes due to the transitory nature of this form of feedback, although satisfaction surveys continue to demonstrate high customer satisfaction amongst participants, acknowledging that customers are overall happy with the service being provided. Satisfaction levels remain at 97%, unchanged from last year.

Customers were particularly complimentary about Careline (21% of compliments) Project Works (20%) and Repairs (14%). Customer Services received 2% of the share in 2014/15, which increased to 7% in 2015/16.



## LEGISLATION/POLICY

Basildon Borough Council's Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy  
 Local Government Act 1974  
 Regulatory Reform (Collaboration between Ombudsmen) Order 2007

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Financial Implications

The Council acknowledges the Complaints, if managed ineffectively, can put pressure on resources. The finance team acknowledge efforts to rectify formal complaints as early as possible are reducing the number of referrals and resulting in efficiency savings.

### Risk Management Implications

Relevant risks and opportunities in connection to this matter have been considered and are referred to in the body of the report, as appropriate.

### Inclusion, Diversity and Community Cohesion Implications

The current corporate Complaints policy allows for an increased monitoring capability on the protected characteristics, and an after Complaint satisfaction survey is being considered which captures further details on complainants profile to allow for further analysis against protected characteristics, to ensure different groups are not having to formally complain more than others.

As part of the CRM standardisation Project, all complaints, comments and compliments are now recorded on Dynamics CRM facilitating greater monitoring, analysis and transparency of data relating to customer and service performance.

Other Relevant Considerations

None.

Background Papers

None.

## Enclosure 1 – Complaint Statistics

### STAGE 1 Complaints

AREA	QTR 1	QTR 2	QTR 3	QTR 4	Total
CS Reception	1	3	1	3	8
CS Telephone	8	7	13	7	35
Delay	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance/Legal	0	0	0	1	1
General Enquiries	0	0	0	0	0
PS Aids & Adaptions	0	4	3	8	15
PS Antisocial	5	3	2	0	10
PS Careline	0	0	0	0	0
PS Gas	9	0	0	0	9
PS Housing	28	21	26	16	91
PS Home Ownership	7	5	10	2	24
PS Project Work/Mngt	17	9	30	13	69
PS Rent	0	1	0	0	1
PS Repairs	27	38	50	57	172
PS Sheltered Housing	1	0	0	0	1
PS Tenancy & Estate Mngt	0	8	4	1	13
PS Voids	4	5	6	11	26
RB Benefits	9	25	24	4	62
RB Revenues	16	17	18	22	73
RG Env Health	6	3	1	1	11
RG Licensing	3	0	1	0	4
RG Planning	7	2	8	3	20
SC Cleansing	8	0	1	1	10
SC Refuse	36	47	33	28	144
SC Arbs	11	5	4	1	21
SC Parks	14	6	2	5	27
LS Leisure	1	2	1	0	4
ECC Street	0	0	0	0	0
ECC Highways	16	0	0	0	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>867</b>

### STAGE 2 Complaints

AREA	QTR 1	QTR 2	QTR 3	QTR 4	Total
CS Reception	0	0	0	0	0
CS Telephone	0	1	0	1	2
Delay	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance/Legal	0	0	0	0	0
General Enquiries	0	0	0	0	0
PS Aids & Adaptions	0	1	0	0	1
PS Antisocial	0	0	1	0	1

PS Careline	0	0	0	0	0
PS Gas	2	0	0	0	2
PS Housing	5	1	1	1	8
PS Home Ownership	0	1	3	1	5
PS Project Work/Mngt	3	0	2	0	5
PS Rent	0	0	0	0	0
PS Repairs	1	1	0	3	5
PS Sheltered Housing	0	1	0	0	1
PS Tenancy & Estate Mngt	1	0	0	0	1
PS Voids	0	2	0	1	3
RB Benefits	1	1	0	0	2
RB Revenues	0	1	1	0	2
RG Env Health	0	2	0	0	2
RG Licensing	1	0	0	0	1
RG Planning	0	0	2	0	2
SC Cleansing	0	0	0	0	0
SC Refuse	1	0	0	0	1
SC Arbs	1	0	0	0	1
SC Parks	0	0	0	0	0
LS Leisure	0	0	0	0	0
ECC Street	0	0	0	0	0
ECC Highways	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>45</b>

### STAGE 3 Complaints

AREA	QTR 1	QTR 2	QTR 3	QTR 4	Total
CS Reception	0	0	0	0	0
CS Telephone	0	0	0	0	0
Delay	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance/Legal	0	0	0	0	0
General Enquiries	0	0	0	0	0
PS Aids & Adaptions	0	0	0	0	0
PS Antisocial	0	0	0	0	0
PS Careline	0	0	0	0	0
PS Gas	0	0	0	0	0
PS Housing	1	1	1	2	5
PS Home Ownership	0	0	0	0	0
PS Project Work/Mngt	0	0	0	0	0
PS Rent	0	0	0	0	0
PS Repairs	0	0	0	0	0
PS Sheltered Housing	0	0	0	0	0
PS Tenancy & Estate Mngt	0	0	0	0	0
PS Voids	0	0	0	0	0
RB Benefits	0	1	0	0	1

RB Revenues	0	0	0	0	0
RG Env Health	1	0	1	0	2
RG Licensing	0	0	0	0	0
RG Planning	1	1	2	0	4
SC Cleansing	0	0	0	0	0
SC Refuse	0	0	0	0	0
SC Arbs	0	0	0	0	0
SC Parks	0	0	0	0	0
LS Leisure	0	0	0	0	0
ECC Street	0	0	0	0	0
ECC Highways	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>

### OMBUDSMAN Complaints

Area	Total
Regulatory Services	2
Housing Applications	2
Housing Benefit	1
Enforcement (Street Scene)	1
Council Tax	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>