

**South Lakeland District Council**  
**Standards Committee**

**Monday, 11 October 2021**

**Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review,  
Complaints received from April 2020 to March  
2021**

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<b>Portfolio:</b>	Customer and Locality Services Portfolio Holder
<b>Report from:</b>	Simon Rowley, Director Customer and Commercial Services
<b>Report Author:</b>	Vicky McDonald – Operational Lead People, Welfare and Income Maximisation
<b>Wards:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	Not applicable

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**1.0 Expected Outcome and Measures of Success**

1.1 That the Standards Committee receive the annual report of the Local Government Ombudsman for 2020/21, and the summary of complaints and compliments received from April 2020 to March 2021. The learning from complaints is applied to the improvement of Council services.

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 It is recommended that these reports are received and recent decisions of the Local Government Ombudsman noted by the Committee.**

**3.0 Background and Proposals**

3.1 The Council strives to improve customer service and to support this, complaints and compliments data has been monitored for a number of years. All complaints, comments and compliments are recorded and managed by the Customer and Commercial Services Case Management Team.

3.2 In May 2020, in line with customer connect, the council implemented an online system for logging, monitoring and responding to customer comments, compliments and complaints. This approach supports the council to ensure that complaints are responded to within the appropriate timeframe and all relevant documents are stored in a central location.

3.3 Following the implementation of the online complaints reporting system the council introduced a streamlined complaints policy reducing the levels of complaint stages from three to two.

3.3 Over the period of 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 the council received a total of 399 enquiries through the customer complaints channels. These channels include emails to the complaints address, letters addressed to complaints or through the online complaints reporting system.

- 3.4 The 399 enquires received through the complaints process are broken down by the following:
- 235 Stage 1 complaints investigated
  - 24 Stage 2 complaints investigated
  - 1 complaint was referred to the Local Government Ombudsman
  - 25 were not classed as a complaint (i.e. request for service)
  - 74 enquires were resolved through an informal solution
  - 40 enquires received, SLDC was not the governing authority (i.e. Cumbria County Council or South Lakes Housing)
- 3.5 The total number of formal complaints logged between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 was 259. This shows an overall increase of 99 (62%) in comparison to 160 received during 2019/2020. Year on year comparisons from 2017 to 2021 are shown in Appendix 1, identifying a significant percentage increase in complaints in 2020/2021 compared to percentage increases in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020.
- 3.6 The total number of stage 1 complaints logged between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 was 235. This shows an increase of 95 (68%) stage 1 complaints made in comparison to the 140 made in 2019/2020.
- 3.7 The total number of stage 2 complaints logged between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 was 24, an increase of 10 (71%) compared to 14 in 2019/2020.
- 3.8 The reasons for complaints are wide and varied and there is no underlying trend. However, it should be noted that the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic did impact on service delivery in some areas due to self-isolation, increased absence and shielding of vital resources, which impacted on the number of complaints received. In addition, it could be considered that prolonged periods of lockdown and isolation was a contributing factor to the increased amount of complaints received.
- 3.9 A breakdown of the total number of complaints received relating to service areas (Appendix 1) shows that 94 (49%) of the total number of complaints received were related to 2 predominant service areas, refuse and recycling (36%) which is indicative of the large number of public interactions that take place, and planning (13%).
- 3.10 The council recognises the value of complaints made and uses the insight gained to drive service improvements and promote a culture that is open to challenge, with a willingness to change, considering the wider implications, as opposed to focusing on resolution of individual issues. Officers involved in complaint resolution apply lesson's learned to identify opportunities for continuous improvement. An example of the application of this approach would be the redesign of the recycling, garden and general waste bins webpage as a result of the levels of complaints received. The website has been redeveloped to include daily updates of known issues with collections, disruption to service warnings, and resolutions and instructions to residents on issues that they may be experiencing. This has improved the customer journey through enhanced communication, the provision of accurate, real time data that is readily available and easily accessible, removing the need for residents to make further enquiries via other communication channels.
- 3.11( The complaints policy aims to respond to all formal complaints within 10 working days. A total of 82% (211) complaints were responded to within 10 working days. Of the 18% (48) falling outside of this time, the majority were more complex complaints requiring detailed investigations and on some occasions, required a site visit. It should also be noted that Officers made every effort to respond within the 10 day

deadline whilst also responding to the Covid pandemic emergency which resulted in a significant amount of additional demands across the authority.

- 3.12 Over the period of 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 the council received a total of 90 compliments through the customer compliments channels. A breakdown of the compliments received by service area is contained within Appendix 2. 71% (64) of compliments received relate to Street scene.
- 3.13 In accordance with the new streamlined approach to working through customer connect, all compliments and complaints are logged and responded by the Complaints Administration Team. This provides a more effective way to monitor the appropriate stages and storage of documents to support Local Government Ombudsman investigations.
- 3.14 Attached to this report members will find a copy of the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review 2020/2021 letter (Appendix 3).
- 3.15 During this reporting period the Local Government Ombudsman made a decision on 9 cases (Appendix 4), 4 of which were in relation to planning and development, 1 in relation to benefits, 1 in relation to highways and transport, 1 in relation to environmental services and public protection and regulation, and 2 to corporate and other services. In comparison, there were 13 decisions in 2019/2020, 7 decisions in 2018/19, 7 decisions in 2017/18 and 10 decisions in 2016/17.
- 3.16 In 2020/2021 no decisions were upheld against the council as the Ombudsman did not find any evidence that the council acted with maladministration. As a comparison, an average of 53% of decisions for similar councils are upheld.  
  
This annual review findings are also available on the Local Government Ombudsman website.
- 3.17 The council continues to work hard to resolve any complaints that arise before any referral to the Ombudsman.
- 3.18 Members are asked to receive the report.

#### 4.0 Appendices Attached to this Report

Appendix No.	Name of Appendix
1	Complaints data
2	Compliments received during 2020/21 by service area
3	Annual Review letter of the LGO 2020/2021
4	SLDC LGO complaints and decisions 2020/2021

#### 5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 Not applicable

#### 6.0 Alternative Options

- 6.1 There are no alternative options, this report is only for the Committee to note.

#### 7.0 Implications

#### Financial, Resources and Procurement

- 7.1 Not applicable

## Human Resources

7.2 Not applicable

## Legal

7.3 No issues to raise

## Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment

7.4 Have you completed a Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment? No not applicable

## Equality and Diversity

7.5 Have you completed an Equality Impact Analysis? No

7.8 If you have not completed an Impact Analysis, please explain your reasons: Not applicable

Risk Management	Consequence	Controls required
Reputational as a result of adverse complaints	Reputation of the Council is diminished	Regular review of complaints policy and handling of complaints

## Contact Officers

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## Background Documents Available

Name of Background document	Where it is available
Customer feedback policy	<a href="https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/media/7122/customer-feedback-policy-accessible.pdf">https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/media/7122/customer-feedback-policy-accessible.pdf</a>

## Tracking Information

Signed off by	Date sent	Date Signed off
Section 151 Officer	10/09/2021	15/09/2021
Monitoring Officer	21/09/2021	21/09/2021
CMT	21/09/2021	23/09/2021

Circulated to	Date sent
Lead Specialist	N/A
Human Resources Lead Specialist	N/A
Communications Team	N/A
Leader	N/A
Committee Chairman	N/A
Portfolio Holder	24/09/2021
Ward Councillor(s)	N/A
Committee	N/A
Executive (Cabinet)	N/A
Council	N/A