

## Agenda Item 4

Executive Member	Councillor Vivienne Michael
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To	Scrutiny Committee
Date	15 September 2015
<b>Ward (s) affected</b>	N/A
<b>Subject</b>	Review of Complaints 2014-2015
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
The Committee is asked to note the complaints monitoring for April 2014 to March 2015	

### 1. BACKGROUND TO ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

- 1.1 Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) has an established Complaints Policy. The annual Complaints Review is part of an ongoing process to assess MVDC's performance against its own standards and learn from residents' feedback. MVDC is committed to listening to its residents to develop and improve services in accordance with their needs. The review is considered by the Scrutiny Committee in the autumn to give an overview of the complaints received in the previous year with the aim of evaluating and, ultimately, improving performance.
- 1.2 MVDC remains committed to resolving the majority of complaints informally when taken up directly with the Service responsible. However, should a customer remain dissatisfied they may register a formal complaint with the Complaints Officer, who will carry out an independent investigation with the appropriate officer(s) (Stage 1). If a customer is not happy with the outcome of the investigation, the matter can then be referred to the appropriate Corporate Head, or in some cases the most appropriate senior officer (Stage 2).

### 2. COMPLAINTS

- 2.1 The Complaints Policy states that an acknowledgement will be sent out to the customer within 3 working days and a full response sent out to the customer within 10 working days. This was achieved 99% of the time in 2014/15. Where a full response was not sent within 10 working days, customers were informed why this was the case and when a full response could be expected.
- 2.2 The following tables set out the number of formal complaints received in 2014/15 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015) and give comparable figures for 2013/14 and 2012/13.
- 2.3 Overall, in 2014/14 there was a 27% decrease in Stage 1 complaints and a 14% decrease in Stage 2 complaints compared with 2013/14.
- 2.4 Appendices 1 and 2 show the percentage of complaints each service received at each stage of the complaints process.

2.5 The Ombudsman made decisions on 16 complaints (1 was carried forward from the previous year) but did not find against MVDC in any of these cases.

	Service Area	2014/15		2013/14	2012/13
		Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld	Complaints Received	Complaints Received
<b>STAGE 1</b>	Accounts	0	0	1	0
	Benefits	0	0	1	0
	Building Control	3	0	--	--
	Communications	0	0	0	0
	Community Services	2	0	1	2
	Customer Services Unit	0	0	0.5	5.5
	Democratic Services	0	0	2	1
	Development Control	25.5	7	17	11
	Dorking Halls	0	0	--	--
	Environment	9	6	10	24
	Environmental Health	2.5	0	7.5	3
	Finance	0	0	1	9.5
	Housing	4	1	9	7
	HR	0	0	0	0
	ICT	0	0	0	0
	Legal	0	0	0	0
	Parking	5	1	14	4
	Parks	0	0	2	2
	Partnerships	0	0	4	1
	Planning Policy	1	0	--	--
	Planning Support	0	0	--	--
	Policy & Performance	0	0	1	0
	Property	1	0	1	0
Revenues	2	1	4	0	
Strategic Leadership	0	0	--	--	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>70</b>	

	Service Area	2014/15		2013/14	2012/13
		Complaints Received	Complaints Upheld	Complaints Received	Complaints Received
<b>STAGE 2</b>	Accounts	0	0	0	0
	Benefits	0	0	1	0
	Building Control	0	0	--	--
	Communications	0	0	0	0
	Community Services	1	0	0	1
	Customer Services Unit	0	0	0	0
	Democratic Services	0	0	0	0
	Development Control	8	1*	6	3
	Dorking Halls	0	0	--	--
	Environment	2	1	1	1
	Environmental Health	0	0	2	0
	Finance	0	0	0	1
	Housing	0	0	2	4
	HR	0	0	0	0
	ICT	0	0	0	0
	Legal	0	0	0	0
	Parking	0	0	1	0
	Parks	0	0	0	0
	Partnerships	0	0	0	0
	Planning Policy	0	0	--	--
	Planning Support	0	0	--	--
	Policy & Performance	0	0	0	0
	Property	0	0	0	0
Revenues	1	0	1	0	
Strategic Leadership	0	0	--	--	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	

Where there is a not a whole number recorded the complaint involved more than one service.

-- Data was not previously categorised for these services (all planning was previously recorded under Development Control)

\* Development Control Stage 2 Complaint from August 2014 was partly upheld and partly not upheld.

- 2.6 The tables show that in 2014/15 a total of 55 complaints were registered at Stage 1. Many complaints were resolved at this stage, with only 12 (18%) escalating to Stage 2.
- 2.7 Sixteen Stage 1 complaints were upheld as fair and valid. In 39 cases, MVDC was found not to be at fault and therefore the complaints were not upheld. At Stage 2, two complaints were upheld, 10 were not upheld as fair and valid complaints.
- 2.8 Development Control received the highest number of complaints with 25.5 (46%) complaints at Stage 1 and 8 at Stage 2. Environment and Parking received 9 (16%) and 5 (9%) Stage 1 complaints respectively. The same three service areas also received the largest percentage of complaints in 2013/14.
- 2.9 Development Control complaints related to issues such as application processes, decisions, neighbour notifications and committee reasoning. These are similar subjects as previous years. It is noted that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) recognises that Development Control issues across England are the most contentious and therefore receive a large percentage of complaints in all authorities. The majority of MVDC complaints relate to issues arising from proposed residential developments.
- 2.10 The Development Control team received 1,941 applications during the year so the number of Stage 1 complaints represents only 1.3% of the total applications. Furthermore, none of the complaints were upheld by the LGO. However, in line with our organisational values, the Development Control team, led by the interim Corporate Head of Service aims to listen to and learn from feedback received from customers and welcomes the opportunity to improve service delivery wherever possible.
- 2.11 The second highest number of complaints was received by the Environment team: 9 Stage 1 and two Stage 2. To put this into context, in the calendar year 2014, the team organized and carried out nearly 2 million visits to Mole Valley properties in order to empty bins. The Environmental Services team works closely with our waste contractor, Biffa, to resolve collection issues early and avoid repeat problems.

### **3. COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS YEARS**

- 3.1 This year we have separated Development Control figures in to Building Control, Development Control, Planning Policy and Planning Support to more accurately reflect the different Planning services. In previous years these have been calculated using one heading of 'Development Control'. It is hoped that this new categorisation provides further clarity for Members.
- 3.2 In 2014/15 there was a total of 55 Stage 1 complaints compared with 75 in 2013/14 (a 27% decrease) and 70 in 2012/13.
- 3.3 A total of 12 Stage 2 complaints were received in 2014/15, two fewer than the previous year. Development Control had the highest number with 8 Stage 2 complaints; these related to Unilateral Undertakings, application decisions and Section 106 agreements.

#### **4. IMPROVEMENTS**

- 4.1 Mole Valley District Council values feedback received from customers to allow us to learn, make improvements and move forward. We are committed to improving the customer experience across all service areas and thereby our general reputation. We work together to reduce complaints and improve services. Complaints are reported to SMT monthly with outcomes and improvements proposed and undertaken as a result of the complaint where appropriate.
- 4.2 Any learning points are shared by managers with individual team members, in team meetings and then through the Business Managers' Group.
- 4.3 The service areas implement changes to processes and procedures resulting from customer feedback. Examples of change include improvements within Development Control to ensure accuracy in the wording of conditions, and within Environment, improving the working arrangements with Biffa, our waste collection contractor, regarding collection and replacement of bins on residential properties.
- 4.4 The Complaints Officer continues to build relationships with service area managers, team leaders and Corporate Heads of Service. These relationships allow free flowing conversations regarding service improvements.

#### **5. OMBUDSMAN**

- 5.1 The Ombudsman report for year 2014/15 shows that they received a total of 15 enquiries and complaints relating to MVDC services, which is the same as in 2013/14. However, the 15 includes 1 from Adult Social Care which is not within Mole Valley District Council's remit. This has been brought to the Ombudsman's attention.
- 5.2 For the period 01 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 the Ombudsman made decisions on 16 complaints (1 was carried forward from the previous year). The Ombudsman did not find against MVDC in any of these cases.

#### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

**Legal Implications:** None in producing this report

**Financial and Risk Implications:** There are no risk implications arising as a direct consequence of this report.

**Time Constraints:** None

**Equalities Implications:** There are no equalities implications arising as a direct consequence of this report.

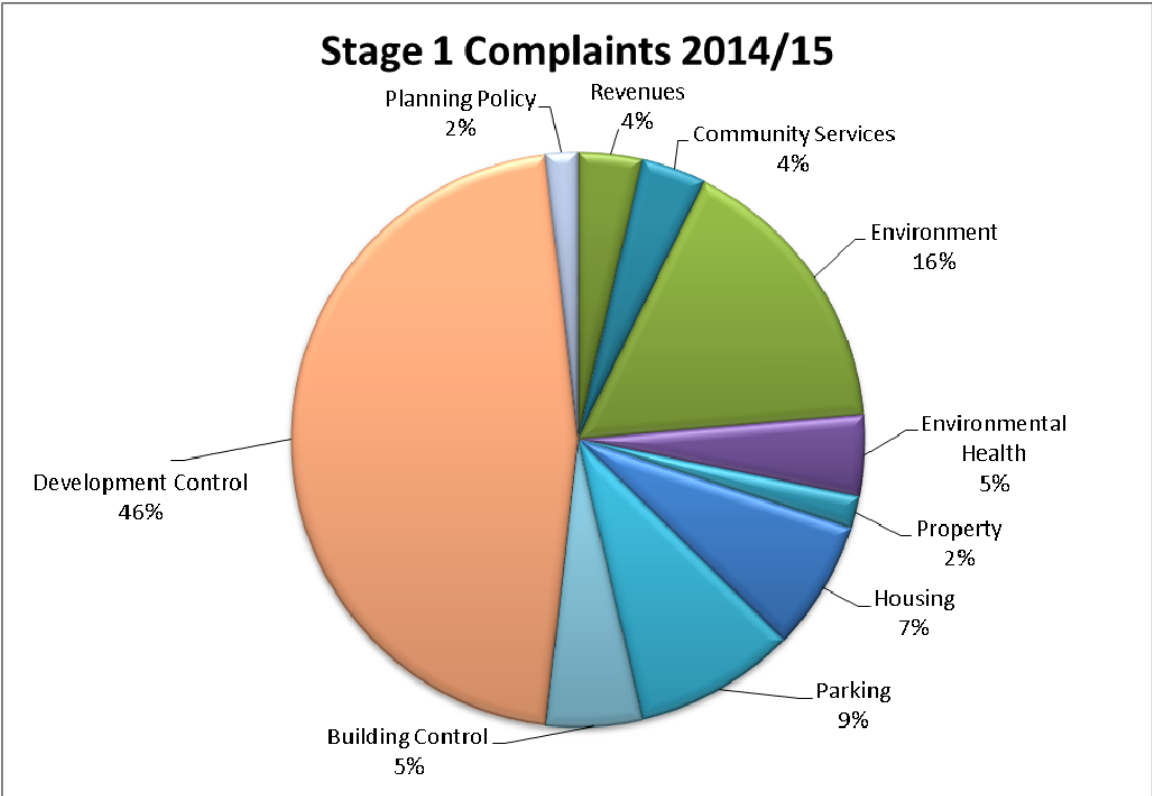
**Employment Issues:** None

**Sustainability Issues:** None

**Consultation:** None

**Background Papers:** These are exempt under paragraph 4 of Schedule 12(a) Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972

**Appendix 1:  
Stage 1 Complaints received by Service 2014/15 (55)**



**Appendix 2:  
Stage 2 Complaints received by Service 2014/15 (12)**

