



Cambridge City Council

Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2015-16

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Cambridge City Council's Annual Complaints Report

Every year we publish our Annual Complaints Report, which gives an overview of the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them, though we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained.

Why we produce this report

- To learn from our mistakes so that we can improve our services
- To encourage people who have cause to complain to make comments and suggestions to help us make these improvements.
- To show how we've responded to complaints and what we've done to try and put things right.
- To publicise and explain our complaints process.

Our Complaints Procedure

What is a complaint?

A complaint is defined as: '***an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Council, or its staff, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.***'

To set these complaints in context, it should be explained that where an issue is brought to the Council's attention for the first time (for example, a missed bin) that is dealt with as a request for action, and is not processed as a formal complaint. However, the Council's response, or lack of response, to that first time notification might lead to a complaint if the customer were still dissatisfied.

Customers complain to the Council if they:

- Are unhappy about something we have or haven't done.
- Are not satisfied with the way a member of staff has treated them.
- Are not happy with the way a councillor has treated them.
- Want to complain for any other reason.

Directorates and Services 2015-16

Directorates and Services

Chief Executive	Corporate Strategy
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Environment	Environmental Health
	Refuse
	Specialist Services
	Streets and Open Spaces
	Parking Services
	Planning
	Garage

Customer and Community	Estates and facilities
	City Homes
	Strategic Housing
	Revenues and Benefits
	Community Services

Business Transformation	Customer Services
	Property Services
	Finance
	Legal Services
	Human Resources

[Independent Complaints Investigator](#)

[The Local Government Ombudsman](#)

[Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct](#)

Executive Summary

General Summary

In 2015/16 Cambridge City Council received 559 complaints, compared with 484 in the previous year. The Council also received 147 compliments and 10,981 comments via GovMetric, a customer satisfaction rating system. To put the number of complaints in broader context, last year over 255,000 telephone and email contacts were received and over 42,000 face to face visits were recorded at the Customer Service Centre. Overall 36% of complaints were for 2 services, Refuse and Estates and Facilities. Both of these services underwent significant operational changes which contributed to an increase in feedback.

Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

From 1 April 2015 until 31 March 2016, twenty-six complaints were submitted to the Independent Complaints Investigator. From the period April 2014 until March 2015, three investigations were carried over. Of these twenty-nine complaints, during 2015 to 2016, fifteen submissions were not investigated, nine submissions were investigated and reported, and five investigations were on-going and awaiting report at the end of the year. Of these nine reports, four complaints were not up-held, three complaints were partially up-held, and two complaints were up-held.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

Sixteen LGO complaints were investigated, with two upheld.

Reporting and Recording

The City Council has worked hard to understand the reasons for the complaints, and has taken action to prevent the poor service that triggered those complaints from being repeated. We continue to work hard to deliver high quality services to all residents and customers, and welcome all feedback on our services and suggestions for improvement. This report allows us to reflect on our successes and areas of development. Following feedback and a review of our complaints process we have changed the way we record and monitor complaints, compliments and comments.

The Lead Complaints Officer reviews all data and feedback on a quarterly basis to establish themes and trends within services. This is discussed with Directors and Heads of service to gain an understanding of what the service is doing to improve, change or prevent a reoccurrence. This helps to create a rolling annual report, ensuring accuracy and that changes and improvements made are captured and reviewed on a regular basis. Particular attention is focused on reducing complaints being escalated to the independent complaints investigator by making sure that complaints that involve more than one service at stage one are dealt with more efficiently.

Cambridge City Council has a three stage complaints process:

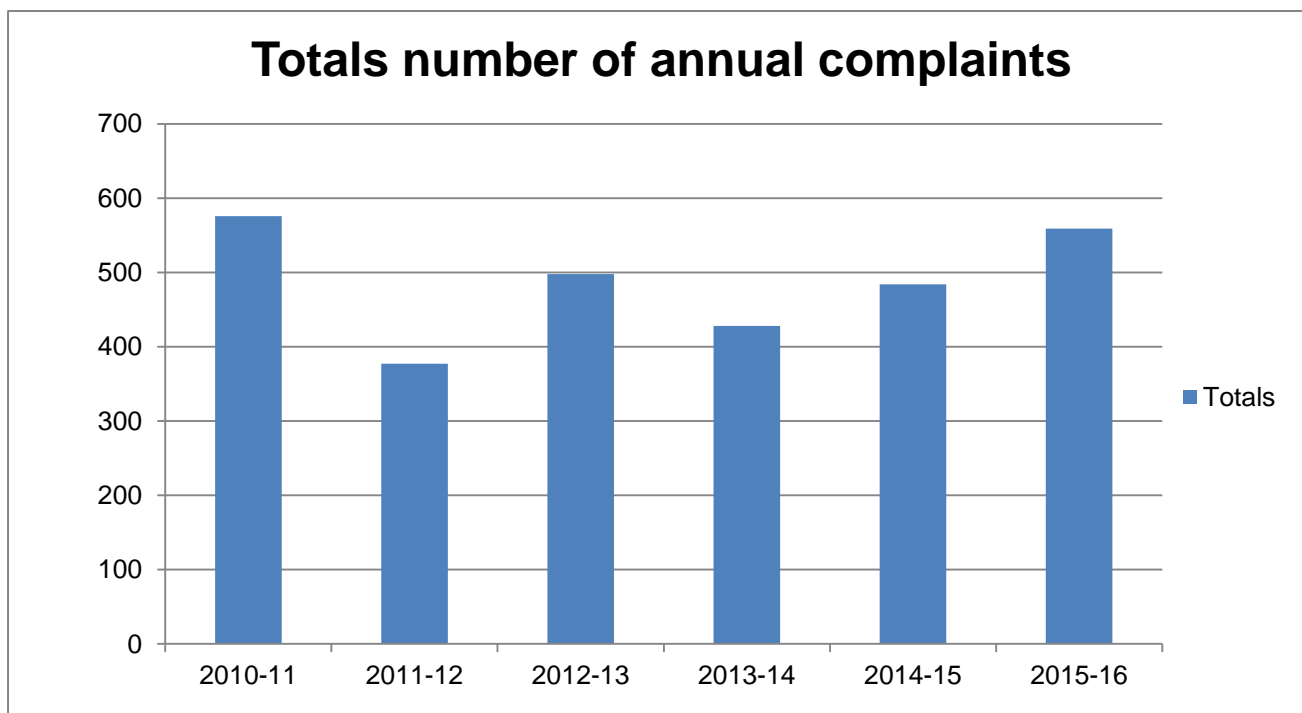
- **Stage One:** A complaint that has been made for the first time.
- **Stage Two:** Internal review of a complaint where the complainant is unsatisfied with the response to their complaint or the way in which the complaint has been handled, and they wish for their complaint to be considered further.
- **Stage Three:** Review by an Independent Complaints Investigator, where the complainant remains unsatisfied with the internal process and wish to take their complaint further.

The **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)** is the final stage - the person affected must have gone through our complaints process before going to the LGO for an independent review.

Complaints to the City Council in 2015-16

We received 559 complaints in 2015-16. This was an increase of 15.49% on the number received in the previous year as can be seen in table below.

Cambridge City Council complaint totals 2010 – 2015-16



Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Business and Transformation	Customer & Community	Totals	Change %
2015-16	3	264	40	252	559	+15.49%
2014-15*	1	240	20	223	484	+11.5

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals	Change %
2013-14	0	210	93	125	428	-14
2012-13	2	72	83	341	498	+32
2011-12	0	65	40	272	377	-34.5
2010-11	8	81	56	431	576	-30

*In early 2014 we saw a change in services and directorates. The tables above have been separated to show this clearly.

Headline Analysis

In 2015-16 36% of complaints were for 2 services, Refuse and Estates and Facilities.

Of the 264 Environment related complaints, 104 were for refuse. There are approximately 49,000 households visited each week, which puts the volume of complaints into context with the volume of service delivery undertaken throughout each week of the year. In addition to this, the Refuse Service underwent a significant change during Quarter 3 – transitioning into a shared services delivery with South Cambridgeshire District Council. This involved the relocation of the team and its operations to a new depot in Waterbeach and alterations to the routes the crews take in view of the new geographical location of the teams.

The Customer & Community Directorate received 252 complaints, of which 98 were for Estates and Facilities. The department has undergone a restructure in 2015-16, affecting most staff. In particular, staff who have previously been closely involved in pre-surveying repairs, ordering works (both planned and responsive) and with complaint management. During the implementation of the new staffing arrangements, which involved both appointments and redundancies, the volume of complaints increased, specifically those relating to delays in communication relating to repairs, and scheduled repairs taking place at agreed times. This trend has been acknowledged by the Head of Service, and measures have been taken to address potential complaint risks, including an emphasis on the importance of handling and responding to complaints in a timely and efficient manner.

To put the number of complaints in broader context, last year over 255,000 telephone and email contacts were received and over 42,000 face to face and cashiers visits were recorded at the Customer Service Centre. The number of complaints is relatively low in relation to the volume of customer contacts received by Council services; however, the Council recognises that it is important to respond to all complaints in a timely and appropriate manner, and to take any steps necessary to prevent repeat occurrences in future or the need for escalated resolution.

In 2015-16 the Council received 147 compliments, in addition, 7104 positive comments through GovMetric, our customer satisfaction rating system. This channel of communication continues to be popular with our customers with 10981 comments overall.

Since 2008 the volume of complaints has fluctuated. A review of our reporting and recording procedure in 2014-15 enabled us to improve upon recording data more accurately. In addition Directors and Heads of Service have continued to endorse the importance of engaging staff in the importance of encouraging feedback, which helps us to identify areas of development. Further work has been undertaken in 2015-16 to enhance the way in which we manage the recording and handling of our complaints, this has resulted in a project to implement a new complaints tracking system. The new system will provide a more user friendly and comprehensive platform for the efficient administration of logging, responding and closing complaints and enhance the ways in which we can report on trends and timeframes. The new system is scheduled to launch in autumn 2016.

How complaints were received

Year	Face to Face %	Letter %	Email %	Telephone %	Other (Comment Cards) %
2015-16	3	9	76	10	2
2014-15	2	8	61	11	18
2013-14	2	13	78	7	2
2012-13	1	19	70	8	2
2011-12	2	26	48	6	18
2010-11	1	24	56	4	15

The majority of complaints were received in writing, predominantly via email (the email figure is a combination of standard emails and the use of our electronic online form).

Compliments

Cambridge City Council Compliment totals 2010 - 2015-16

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Business and Transformation	Customer & Community	Totals
2015-16	0	30	38	79	147
2014-15*	0	64	79	120	263

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals
2013-14	0	19	15	148	182
2012-13	0	8	23	571	602
2011-12	0	7	3	531	541
2010-11	6	35	12	408	461

*In early 2014 we saw a change in services and directorates. The tables above have been separated to show this clearly.

Following the change in the way in which we receive feedback, with the introduction of GovMetric as a feedback system in 2014; We are continuing to see a significant decrease in compliments received via e-mail and letter to the Customer Service Centre, as customers are choosing to use GovMetric to communicate both compliments and comments.



GovMetric - Customer Feedback System

GovMetric was introduced by customer services to monitor feedback and measure improvement. The tool allows us to record how the feedback was received, ratings of good, average or poor can be selected by customers. They are also able to select service areas/departments and give more specific detail about their experiences.

We currently use GovMetric to monitor feedback from the website, face to face visits in Mandela House reception and via service e-mails and incoming calls to Mandela House.

Total feedback via GovMetric 2014 - 2016

Channel	Date	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Web	2015-16	3589	47%	13%	40%
	2014-15	4316	48%	14%	37%
Phone	2015-16	1230	87%	6%	7%
	02.12.2014-31.03.2015	317	85%	7%	8%
Email	2015-16	2361	70%	10%	20%
	02.12.2014-31.03.2015	610	74%	9%	17%
Face to Face	2015-16	3801	71%	12%	17%
	2014-15	3555	67%	13%	21%

When feedback is received via the GovMetric system and requires an action or a response, the relevant service is notified for their input. The web team have used the web based feedback to monitor and review the general functionality of our website, and the comments and suggestions have contributed to the redesign of our new look website www.cambridge.gov.uk which launched in autumn 2015. In instances where a poor comment constitutes a complaint it is recorded as an official complaint and managed in accordance with our corporate complaints procedure.

Service Complaint Trends and Feedback

Each council department reviews the complaints and compliments it receives on a quarterly basis. This enables services to identify if there are any trends in the types of complaint being made or the services that complaints are being made about. As a result, changes are made to services and how they are provided.

Pages 10 – 20 detail comments from Services on actions they have taken to prevent, improve or change as a result of the feedback received in 2015-16.

Directorate – Chief Executive

Corporate Strategy 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	3	0	100%	0
This service has not been reported on in detail, due to the low volume of feedback.				

Directorate – Environment

Environmental Health 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	9	2	62.2%	5
Service area context				
Environmental Health moved from the Environment Directorate to Customer and Community Services on 19 th August 2015.				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual complaints with no themes 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to the low volume of complaints, which were dealt with on an individual basis, there have been no changes or improvements identified. 				
Consultation / committee decision outcomes				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two complaints were investigated and unfounded and later became part of a legal case, which deemed the complainant's contact as malicious communication. This matter was dealt with via the police and future contact between the complainant and the authority will be managed via a solicitor. 				

Refuse 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	104	9	75.2%	7
Service area context				
<p>As a shared service initiative with South Cambridgeshire District Council, the Refuse service moved from Mill Road Depot to operate from Waterbeach Depot during Quarter 3. The refuse department has now embedded itself in its new operating centre at Waterbeach and is looking at how it can best deliver and improve its service to the residents of the city. Out of the 104 complaints the majority are relating to missed bins. The service collects approximately 78,000 bins per week and has successfully collected 99.98% of them over the last year. We will ensure the service focus is on making the crews aware of new builds being occupied and that feedback to crews is given where needed.</p>				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Failure (Missed bins) • Delivery of service (bin positioning after collections, vehicle obstruction) • Staff engagement and behaviour (Attitude / driving) • Procedures (Bank holiday schedule changes) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team leaders have continued attaching photos and maps for the crews where collections have been missed and where bins have not been returned to the collection point on repeat occasions. • Discussions have taken place with drivers on best practice and conduct when driving their vehicles, emphasising the need to minimise obstruction to other road users. • Driver training has been conducted to increase drivers' cyclist awareness and any staff who have been involved in a driver conduct complaint have been individually spoken to and reminded of the council's code of conduct. • Staff shortages were leading to an increase in missed bins, to build greater resilience the option of upskilling loaders to be trained to drive was reviewed • During the transition into a shared service arrangement, it has provided an opportunity to emphasise the importance of customer service and how this translates with the waste service setting. In addition the new head of service has spent time with the waste streams from both authorities to experience the issues the crews face and how they operate to enable the service to look for improvements in its service delivery. • The team have worked closely with the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to ensure that trends of complaints are monitored and customer's expectations are managed wherever possible. Liaison meetings and regular management feedback has supported in timely updates and investigation. This has resulted in significant improvements in the volume of missed collection complaints. • A workforce meeting has been established, enabling staff and management to meet on a regular basis to discuss performance, training and Health and Safety to enable improvements for both staff and residents. <p>The communication to residents about holiday collections has been reviewed and was sufficient considering the level of change made. The timing and method of communications about holiday collections is carefully considered each year, taking into account previous year's experiences.</p>				

Streets & Open Spaces 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	53	0	79.2%	12
Service area context				
Streets & Open Spaces service was restructured in April, 2015, following a management review conducted in 2014/15. The council started a new corporate building cleaning contract, including public toilets, in June 2015. This contract involved the TUPE transfer of former City Council building cleaning staff to the new provider, Churchill.				
Themes Identified				
Service Failure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silver Street public toilet. cleanliness • Missed tree report responses 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to maintain Silver Street public toilet cleanliness levels have been undertaken throughout the year. In parallel, there has been significant scoping investigation into an improved facility at the site. This resulted in March 2016, with an options report being presented to the Environment Scrutiny Committee. Executive Councillor agreed the results of the scoping exercise on the various and supported further development work (including detailed design and public consultation) on potential variations around Option 2 (street level facility on existing site). • In response to need to strengthen arboricultural service management, created new Senior Arboriculture Officer post to lead / manage tree team. Appointed May, 2015, the new Senior Arboriculture Officer has introduced new tree team specific customer service standards (in accordance with corporate standards) and will ensure performance is monitored/ managed against it. Impact of these changes yet to take full effect. In October, 2015, Executive Councillor adopted new citywide Tree Strategy and associated policy framework. • Reviewed health and safety policy / risk assessment and identified need to refresh policy guidance on safe use of vehicles on Council parks and open spaces (to be implemented as part of wider corporate policy 2016/17). • Reviewed programming of plant watering outside complainant's property so that this is done at more reasonable time of day. • Agreed to review fruit drop from trees on Alex Wood Road, next year, with a view to implementing a phased removal of trees before onset of fruiting. Street cleansing service directed to clear the current level of fruit drop. • Head of Service has introduced new monthly customer complaint reporting system, which will use to monitor management issues across the service and agree any required changes/ improvements with service managers. 				

Specialist Services 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	11	0	83.6%	1
Service area headlines				
The service experienced high staffing turnover during quarter 3, to remedy this, recruitment involved a combination of new and temporary staff members to be appointed.				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Delivery Failures (one-off staff errors) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following recruitment of new staff, mentoring and training was implemented. This supported with safeguarding against errors. In addition, any staff complaints were investigated and followed up with the individual involved. • The service has improved cross-referencing when actioning ashes follow up • Improved grass cutting procedures and supervision have been established. • New improved shoring is provided for open graves 				

Parking Services 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	26	2	92.8%	3
Service area context				
Following a committee report submission for city car parks improvements – the recommendations for replacement car parking equipment and provision for card payment processing services to be implemented were endorsed in January 2016.				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy (decisions) • Staff Conduct 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the interests of good customer service a grace period has been introduced from 7.30am in the morning to allow for customers arriving before the 8am start time of their permit and ten minutes at night which brings season tickets in line with casual parkers. • In June 2016 a new building cleaning contract launched, this new contractor has a quick reaction team in the event of contaminated waste reports – providing swift resolution of customer complaints. In addition, the department work closely with the Police and Anti-Social Behaviour Team to reduce the origin of certain types of contaminated waste. • Any short falls in the level of customer service provided by operatives is addressed in the staff members performance reviews and training is provided where applicable. In addition, voice recording has been implemented and all intercom transactions are saved for review and on occasion training purposes. 				

Planning 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	60	11	83.1%	0
Service area headlines				
Increasingly high workload of planning application and enforcement work were observed from Quarter 3 and Quarter4, against a context of 5 officers leaving the authority. Recruitment to fill these vacancies was undertaken during Quarters 3 and 4.				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication (delays, inaccuracy, lack of consultation) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of complaints related to errors in committee reports, these were identified by officers and fully corrected at, or reported to committee. Apologies and explanations were given to the customers who raised concerns about this. The service manager has raised this issue with the team at a team meeting. • Where a complaint relates specifically to an officer the matter is discussed with the staff member and where applicable the staff member is monitored by their line manager. • The importance of communication is highlighted regularly to staff at team meetings, during one-to-one meetings and via individual performance reviews. With additional support provided to inexperienced officers. • Following an Independent Complaints Commissioner investigation, a learning point was suggested - to review the order of items on Planning Committee Agendas. The process was reviewed to ensure that the order of late items is considered more carefully. 				
Consultation or committee decision outcomes				
In relation to the ICI complaint review regarding 219 Milton Road this resulted in a report being taken to Planning Committee in April 2016 and a decision not to revoke planning permission. The case has now moved onto the LGO.				
ICI Learning				
Learning from the ICI review has focused on the need to be thorough particularly during site visits and when making decisions. This has been a very serious case for the CDM team and all members have been briefed on it.				

Garage 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	1	0	100%	2
This service has not been reported on in detail, due to the low volume of feedback.				

Directorate – Customer and Community

Estates & Facilities 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	98	11	56.9%	16
Service area context				
<p>The number of complaints increased in Quarter 4 and notably an area of concern being the significant rise in complaints progressing to a stage 2 referral. This has been viewed in the context of a challenging period for staff, undergoing a re-structure of the Estates & Facilities and changes to administration processes (and personnel) resulting from the Support Services Review.</p>				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures / Planned Works • Delays • Service Failure (delivery / quality of repairs and communication) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for customer focussed service and high standards in all communication are reinforced at all monthly team briefings. • Discussions have taken place with planned work contractors to improve the responses made to any defective work that is reported. The Head of Service has endorsed the importance to Senior Managers of handling and responding to complaints within the agreed timeframe, and ensure the relevant complaints administrator is sent a copy of the response. Officers that have a demonstrably poor response rate are then monitored. Further training has been provided to help overcome customer misunderstanding of damp/condensation/mould growth issues and the causes particularly during colder winter months. Customers are visited and given advice on property use (heating/ventilation). Free humidity meters are issued. All craft operatives have received training in identification, causes and advice in the management of condensation and mould growth. Tenant reps and non-technical CSC and Housing staff were included in the training. • Following completion of the restructuring, new arrangements have been developed to ensure that customer enquiries can be investigated and resolved at an early stage without resort to the complaints procedure. These arrangements include for staff availability for site inspections where appropriate to resolve or explain enquiries as early as possible. Complaint recording in Q1 (2016/17) will provide an indication of progress. • The Planned Works Programme 2016-17 was distributed internally (CSC and City Homes) in January 2016 to enable wider communication to customers. In addition, there has been reinforced publicity of the agreed 2015 fencing policy, to ensure tenants are aware of the extent and construction available. 				

City Homes 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	67	3	62.9%	21
Service area context				
<p>In June 2015 a new building cleaning contract launched, this resulted in an initial increase of complaints relating to the standard of their service. Some complaints received were a result of individual complainants who remained dissatisfied with the outcome of complaints investigations, and spanned more than one quarter whilst a resolution was sought. In the final quarter the team started to make preparations for structural changes to the housing team, including the closure of the South Area Office.</p>				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Failure (cleanliness/maintenance) • Staff (conduct/managing expectations) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for responding to customer enquiries in a timely manner has been reinforced to the staff members and monitoring is in place by the Area Housing Manager to maintain standards. • Weekly meetings have been established to monitor the building cleaning contractor; this has resulted in significant improvements in service. 				

Community Services 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	9	0	100%	34
Service area context				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's and young people's services (ChYpPs) • Community facilities • Grants and support for the voluntary sector • Neighbourhood Community Development & Safer Communities • Sport, recreation and swimming services • Culture, arts, equality & diversity 				
Structural context				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge Corn Exchange, Cambridge Folk Festival Guildhall events and City Events run by Cambridge Live under contract with the Council • Leisure facilities managed by GLL under contract with the Council 				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual complaints - no themes 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been noted by the Department that the volume is low, this was raised with managers to encourage reporting and logging where applicable. 				

Strategic Housing 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	39	3	92.3%	2
Service area context				
<p>The volume of complaints reflects the additional pressures on the service, particularly the Housing Advice Service, as housing applications increase. There has been a 37% increase in the housing register during 2014-15. The numbers of people applying as homeless has increased from 262 in 2014/15 to 419 in the current year, an increase of 60%. In addition, during quarter 3 there were a number of staffing changes and in quarter 4 the service was leading up to the implementation of two new IT systems.</p>				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Failure (application processing) • Policy / Decisions (homeless application acceptance) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with the Safer Communities team, quarterly snapshot surveys are completed with residents, where dissatisfaction is reported, the matter is followed up, to identify either an immediate resolution or to offer further information/explanation that might help. This also supports tracking trends. • The team has been collating a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' to be published on the corporate website. This will include information about why we require the level of proofs that we currently request, and why the processing of these proofs is not immediate. • To ensure the medical assessment process is efficient and fair to all, officers have been reminded that applications should only be re-submitted where there is new medical information. • It has been acknowledged that there is a need to communicate better with other Home-Link partner authorities, particularly where there are differing approaches, policies and processes. • Following feedback, the Senior Officer Review Panel will aim to convey the reasons for their decisions to the applicant, as well as the decision itself. • The team have been piloting an approach to verification which means that applicants will not normally be required to provide documentation until they are likely to receive an offer. Although this improves the customer experience when first applying to us, it's anticipated that some customers will experience difficulties in providing proofs when they are required to progress an offer. 				

Revenues & Benefits 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
		33	1	85%
Service area context				
<p>The number of complaints is extremely low given high volumes of documents issued by Revenues and Benefits each year, including reminders and enforcement documents chasing payments. During 2015/16 we sent 30,000 council tax recovery documents (reminders and summonses for non-payment), in addition to 76,000 council tax bills. 2500 new housing benefit claims and 39,000 housing benefit changes in circumstance were processed. In addition to this Council Tax Reduction claims were managed as well as housing benefit overpayments.</p>				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication (delays / notifications issued / published information) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a review of email acknowledgement messages and additional resource allocated to reduce complaints regarding delayed responses to appeals. • The team conducted a review of council tax reminder notices being sent; this resulted in the introduction of a process to ensure cancellations of Direct Debits were initiated by customers and not a banking issue. • A project was initiated to carry out a further review of the content of council notices, with a view to making them easier to understand and assess their overall tone. • Work has been completed to review processes within both Revenues and Benefits, with an aim to reduce the time it takes to action incoming work. • Additional checks have been completed within Benefits to reduce calculation errors and a new post of Compliance Officer has been created to monitor and reduce errors and resolve any issues highlighted as soon as possible. • In order to manage customer expectations of the speed of processing, the section is continuing to develop online functionality to enable customers to self-serve and update their accounts and claims. This has been very successful with approximately 30% of revenues work and 65% of benefits work coming via this e-channel. On-going efforts are being made to promote this facility to customers. Including its promotion via the Customer Service Centres telephone lines and face-to-face points. 				

Directorate – Business Transformation

Customer Services 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	39	0	83.4%	38
Service area context				
<p>In the period of 01.04.15 - 31.03.16 customer services received over 255000 calls and emails combined, and over 42000 face to face visits. In October 2015 Cambridge City Council's waste service went live as a shared service with South Cambridgeshire District Council and we experienced an escalation in complaints from customers regarding their contact with customer service regarding missed collections and delays in bins being delivered.</p>				
Themes Identified				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication Issues (telephone system) • Staff conduct • Delays in response (queuing) 				
Any changes and improvements made				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings were held with the director and operational manager for the waste service to establish what improvements within the waste service would be made to prevent the need for customers to complain and to ensure our team were well briefed on updates. • Staff members have received regular coaching and training to support their development, in particular conflict resolution and targeted one-to-one guidance in relation to any specific dissatisfactory customer contacts. • Efforts have been made to improve awareness of bulk mailings and activities across the council that cause increases in demand on customer services – a corporate calendar has been populated to coordinate and capture key dates. • The department has implemented a more proactive approach to updating telephone queue messages. • A new appointment system has been implemented for face-to-face planning enquiries to support with managing resource across both contact methods. • A number of new staff have been recruited and trained, and additional temporary resource sought to cover staff shortages where possible. • Customer Services introduced an automated call answering service for customers contacting us about Council Tax and Housing Benefit (inform360) in January 2016. This initiative was designed to answer the simple and straightforward queries relating to these service areas and to encourage the use of our on-line systems to free up capacity to deal with the complex queries customer have. The implementation is being continually monitored and reviewed to make improvements which improve the customers experience when using this facility. Changes include menu alterations and enabling customers to easily identify how to be transferred to an advisor. 				

Property Services 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	2	0	100%	0
This service has not been reported on in detail, due to the low volume of feedback.				

Finance 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	0	0	N/A	0
This service received no complaints or compliments.				

Legal Services 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	0	0	N/A	0
This service received no complaints or compliments.				

Human Resources 2015-16	No. of Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Number of compliments
	0	0	N/A	0
This service received no complaints or compliments.				

Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

From the period April 2014 until March 2015, three investigations were carried over. From 1 April 2015 until 31 March 2016, twenty-six complaints were submitted to the Independent Complaints Investigator.

Of these twenty-nine complaints which have been submitted, during 2015 to 2016, fifteen submissions were not investigated, nine submissions were investigated and reported, and five investigations were on-going and awaiting report at the end of the year. Of these nine reports, four complaints were not up-held, three complaints were partially up-held, and two complaints were up-held.

Up-held, and partially up-held Stage 3 complaints, 2015-16.

Directorate	Service	Date	Decision
Environment	Planning	20 February 2015	Partially up-held.
Customer and Community	Strategic Housing	17 July 2015	Partially up-held.
Environment	Planning	24 July 2015	Partially up-held
Environment	Streets & Open Spaces	4 January 2016	Up-held
Environment	Planning	8 February 2016	Up-held.

ICI Complaints received between 2012 – 2015-16

Period	Received	Partially upheld	Upheld	Services where complaint upheld.
2015-16	3* + 26	3	2	Planning; Streets and Open Spaces and Strategic Housing.
2014-15	2* + 19	1	4	Streets and Open Spaces; Estates and Facilities; Property Services; and City Homes.
2013-14	28	5	2	Planning Services; Revenues and Benefits; Estates and Facilities; City Homes; Environment Services; Planning; Housing Needs; Anti-Social Behaviour; Environmental Services; Accountancy and Support Services; Estates and Facilities.
2012-13	3* + 21	2	3	Planning Estates and Facilities Streets and Open Spaces

*Complaints carried over from the previous financial year.

Environment - Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment	Planning Services	Partially up-held
Complaint Overview		
Complaint with several components about timings, dates, responses, and protocols regarding a Planning Enforcement Notice to Demolish a new-build which did not possess planning permission.		
ICI Feedback		
<p>The Independent Complaints Investigator recommended a letter of apology for not responding to correspondence, along with re-assurance that in the future the complainant will receive treatment on the basis of merit, case by case.</p> <p>The Independent Complaints Investigator did not uphold that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the council impacted on time dependent decisions that led to an enforcement notice, nor that the notice was unfair, or that the council acted unreasonably in its issue. any inaccuracy in dates was influential in the decision to proceed with the notice. 		
Actions taken in response to feedback		
The complaint related to development on site owned by the complainant, who has since been invited to submit correspondence to a single point of contact in the Council (City Development Manager) to ensure that the questions that they raise are dealt with effectively. They have also been advised by the Director of Environment not to contact the Council about issues that have already been resolved or which have no clear meaning. The complainant has been encouraged to contact the LGO if they are dissatisfied with the arrangement.		

Customer and Community Services - Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

Directorate	Service	Decision
Customer and Community	Strategic Housing	Partially up-held
Complaint Overview		
Complainant alleged that she had been forced to sign a rental agreement for a garage for the storage of her belongings, as she had become homeless. The Independent Complaints Investigator found no evidence of duress, and that the Council had acted reasonably. The ICI found that the Council had not provided the complainant with sufficient notice of time.		
ICI Feedback		
<p>The ICI recommended compensation to the cost of the lost food items due to the lack of notice for the complainant to make decisions on its storage/consumption.</p> <p>The Independent Complaints Investigator did not up hold that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> there was duress on the part of the council of the complainant to lease a garage. 		
Actions taken in response to feedback		
This complaint was escalated to the LGO, further details available on page 25.		

Environment - Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment	Planning	Partially up-held
Complaint Overview		
Complaint that Council's "Considerate Contractor Scheme" is ineffective, since it does not possess either formal obligations, or an independent complaints process, unlike the national 'Considerate Constructors' Scheme'. Also, the similarity between the two names is misleading.		
ICI Feedback		
<p>The Independent Complaints Investigator upheld that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the omission from the council's publicity of the voluntary nature of the agreement misleads the public to believe that the agreement gives the Council authority with any contractor who may not comply with its terms. the scheme does not have an effective or documented complaints process to standardise the expected response to public complaints. the complaint that the Council's 'Considerate Contractor Scheme' does not have an effective independent complaints process to address where complainants are dissatisfied with a contractor's internal investigation processes or approach. there is a need for a documented process for dealing with the sanction of contractor members who do not comply with the Code of Good Practice. <p>The Independent Complaints Investigator did not up hold that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the similarity between the two names was misleading to the public. 		
Actions taken in response to feedback		
<p>As a result of this complaint the Director of Environment requested an internal review of the Considerate Contractor Scheme. As part of this review, discussions took place with the CCS website was amended to emphasise the voluntary nature of the scheme and to refine and highlight the associated complaints procedure.</p> <p>Further details can be found within the full Considerate Contractor Scheme review report.</p>		

Environment - Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment	Public and Open Spaces	Up-held
Complaint Overview		
Complaint that the Members' Cycling and Pedestrian Steering Group did not consult appropriately with stake-holders prior to its decision to widen the foot path in Palmers' Walk. Whilst the Council has responded to the concerns which have been raised by considering suggestions which might improve the proposed scheme, the core issue for the complainant is that the original consultation process was flawed, and biased towards the decision which the Group appeared to seek. The details of the alleged bias are: that only one option was forwarded, that a significant number of stake holders were not identified, and were not consulted, and that the analysis of the limited information which was submitted lacked transparency.		
ICI feedback		

The Independent Complaints Investigator up-held this complaint on the basis that:

- the council had failed in its duty to conduct a fair and open consultation, and that the council had failed to consult on alternatives.
- the decision to widen Palmers Walk was unsound, and that there has been maladministration by the council.

Actions taken in response to feedback

Cambridge City Council obtained legal advice and a revocation report was taken to Planning Committee on 6 April 2016. Contact was made with the applicant and they were advised not to start works. Works have not commenced. Contact was made with complainant and is on-going. In addition, the complaint outcomes were discussed at a team meeting. Relevant Planning Portal information was checked and officers were reminded of this at a team meeting.

Report taken to next available Planning Committee and Councillors briefed throughout. This case progressed to the LGO and officers are awaiting the outcome of the review.

Environment - Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment	Planning Services	Up-held

Complaint Overview

Complaint that:
 The Planning Officer did not take into account all the relevant factors in applying delegated powers, so that the decision to approve is unsound; The review process conducted by the Head of Planning Services made some incorrect assumptions in supporting the original decision to approve, so that the decision to approve continues to be unsound; and Both the oversight, and the review processes regarding delegated powers are inadequate.

ICI Feedback

The Independent Complaints Investigator up-held this complaint on the basis that:

- the Planning Officer did not take into account all of the relevant factors in applying delegated powers.
- the Stage Two internal review process of the complaint made judgements which were flawed and therefore the decision to support approval was unsound.
- the Head of Planning Services did not support their judgement with supporting evidence in relation to the oversight by a Principal Planning Officer of the delegated powers and the Planning Officer’s report containing factual errors.

Actions taken in response to feedback

Cambridge City Council obtained legal advice and a revocation report was taken to Planning Committee on 6 April 2016. Contact was made with the applicant and they were advised not to start works. Works have not commenced. Contact was made with complainant and is on-going. In addition, the complaint outcomes were discussed at a team meeting. Relevant Planning Portal information was checked and officers were reminded of this at a team meeting.

Report taken to next available Planning Committee and Councillors briefed throughout. This case progressed to the LGO and officers are awaiting the outcome of the review.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

If customers are not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman's office. The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and other bodies.

In 2015-16 the Local Government Ombudsman received 16 enquiries and complaints, 3 were treated as complaints where decisions were applicable. As a result of the LGO's detailed investigations, 2 were upheld, 1 was not upheld.

Department	No of Complaints	Decision
Benefits & Tax	2	1 Referred back for local resolution; 1 Incomplete / Invalid
Environmental Services	3	1 Upheld 1 Referred back for local resolution; 1 Closed after initial enquiries
Housing	7	1 Upheld 1 Not upheld; 4 Referred back for local resolution; 1 Advice Given
Planning	4	2 Referred back for local resolution 2 Closed after initial enquiry
Total	16	

Comments Environmental Services relating to upheld Complaint:

There has been one upheld complaint made to the LGO in regards to a Moorings Licence. The council was considered at fault through its delay in considering the complainants representations about obtaining a second sole residential license to use its riverside moorings. The LGO found maladministration, no injustice. Officers amended the Mooring Licence to reflect the LGO's advice.

Comments from Housing relating to upheld Complaint:

One upheld complaint relating to the Council moving a resident at short notice from temporary accommodation, resulting in the need for the rental of a council garage to store their belongings. They complained that the Council fee was too high for the garage, that the council miscalculated the garage rent and the arrears payable for it. This case prompted an internal review of temporary third party lease arrangements, a review of issuing keys for garages by City Homes, effective complaint handling training was organised for Council staff to attend, organised by the LGO and the customer received an apology and was compensated to the sum of £410. This complaint has been reported to Housing Scrutiny with a detailed report on actions taken by the service.

Yearly comparison 2011 – 2015-16

Year	Total Enquiries Received	Change %
2015-16	16	0
2014-15	16	0
2013-15	16	+56
2012-13	7	-65
2011-12	20	+5

Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct

Councillors must adhere to the Council's Code of Conduct whenever they are conducting Council business, representing the Council or conducting the business of the office to which they were elected. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure high standards of ethics and conduct are maintained and that councillors treat everybody in an equal capacity and with respect, ensuring at all times that the integrity of the Council is not compromised in any way.

Complaints about councillors are considered initially by the Council's Monitoring Officer (who is also the Head of Legal Practice). When the Monitoring Officer receives a complaint about breach of the Code of Conduct, they consult one of two "Independent Persons" appointed by the Council. The role of the "Independent Persons" is to introduce external scrutiny of the complaints process. The Monitoring Officer can respond to a complaint, can commission a formal investigation or can refer it for consideration by the Council's Standards Sub-Committee. The Council's Standards Sub-Committee is made up of three councillors. During 2015-16, the Council received three complaints about the conduct of councillors. Two of the complaints were rejected and one was upheld.

The first complaint related to a letter to the Cambridge News sent by a (now former) councillor. The letter related to punt touts and was expressed in strong terms. The complainant considered that the comments amounted to personal insults about his son, who worked as a punt tout. Insulting an individual can amount to a failure to treat them with respect and is potentially a breach of the Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer rejected the complaint because (a) the letter commented generally on punt touts and did not identify an individual; (b) It is important, on matters of local political controversy, that politicians are not, without very good reason, hindered in saying what they think; (c) The letter was written in very strong terms but did not go beyond the sort of language one might expect of a politician in expressing strongly held views; and (d) the councillor's right to express his views was protected by his right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The second complaint related to comments made to or about an individual via Twitter. The Monitoring Officer upheld the complaint in respect of two comments made but not in respect of others. The councillor apologised for the comments made and the Monitoring Officer considered this to be an appropriate resolution of the complaint.

The third complaint concerned the way in which the Chair of a committee conducted a meeting. The Monitoring Officer's remit in this context was to consider whether there was a breach of the Code of Conduct, not to reach a view on whether the meeting was well chaired. The complainant alleged that they and members of the public had not been treated with respect and that the Chair had acted in a bullying and intimidating manner. The Monitoring Officer did not accept that this was the case and did not uphold the complaint. The Chair conceded that, with hindsight, they could have handled the meeting better but the Monitoring Officer decided that any failings did not amount to a breach of the Code of Conduct.

There were 3 complaints in 2011/12, 2 complaints in 2012/13, 3 complaints in 2013/14 and 4 complaints in 2014/15. To find out more about the Council's Code of Conduct visit our website or contact the Council's Monitoring Officer Tom Lewis tom.lewis@3csharedservices.org. (The Councillor Code of Conduct decisions summarised in this report were made by the council's previous Monitoring Officer, Simon Pugh).