



Cambridge City Council

Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2016-17

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Report, which gives an overview of the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them, though we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained.

Cambridge City Council welcomes customer feedback, to help us to identify and address problems for customers, and to improve our services. This report shows how we have increased customer feedback about services and how we are responding to complaints.

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 to 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 2016-17

Directorates and Services

Chief Executive	Corporate Strategy
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Director Stephen Kelly (SCDC/CCC)	Planning and Economic Development
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Fiona Bryant Strategic Director	Human Resources
	Property Services
	Commercial Services
	3C shared legal Service
	Finance

Suzanne Hemingway Strategic Director	Customer Services
	Community Services
	Environmental Services
	Estates and Facilities
	Housing Services
	Revenues and Benefits
	Waste Services

[Independent Complaints Investigator](#)

[The Local Government Ombudsman](#)

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

Executive Summary

Cambridge City Council welcomes feedback from customers, so that we can address immediate issues, and can learn from complaints, in order to improve our services. With a growing population, and increasing pressure on services, we have seen a small rise in the absolute number of complaints received from 559 in 2015/16 up to 567 complaints in this year. In the same time period we received 129 compliments.

In seeking feedback, we have received 13,140 comments via GovMetric, a customer satisfaction rating system. Last year over 300,000 telephone and electronic contacts were received and over 55,000 face to face visits were recorded at the Customer Service Centre.

This report looks at what complaints were about and how we can learn from them to improve services. Overall 34% of complaints were for 2 services, Refuse and Estates and Facilities. The Estates Service looks after Council owned buildings, but most of its work – and complaints – relate to the maintenance of Council housing. These services received large volumes of complaints, but did not see significant increases in complaint numbers.

Complaints were up on the previous year for Housing Advice and Housing Management, and down for Planning Services, parking and Bereavement Services. Planning Services in particular saw a significant drop from 60 complaints in 2015/16 to 32 in 2016/17. This report includes feedback from the LGO where long-standing Planning complaints were determined, and our services had fallen short of expected standards for those residents.

As a Council, we know we need to continue to listen carefully to customers to ensure our services are accessible, and meeting needs. We will be seeking more customer feedback in 2017/18.

Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

From 1 April 2016 until 31 March 2017, 8 complaints were submitted to the Independent Complaints Investigator. From the period April 2015 until March 2016, 2 investigations were carried over. Of these 10 reports, 3 complaints were partially up-held, and 4 complaints were up-held.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

16 LGO complaints were investigated, with 3 upheld, one of which reported in April 2017 but has been included here as it was reported to committee early in the year.

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. 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 data on a quarterly basis to establish themes and trends. This is discussed with Directors and Heads of Service to understand what the service needs to do to improve, change or prevent a reoccurrence. 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:

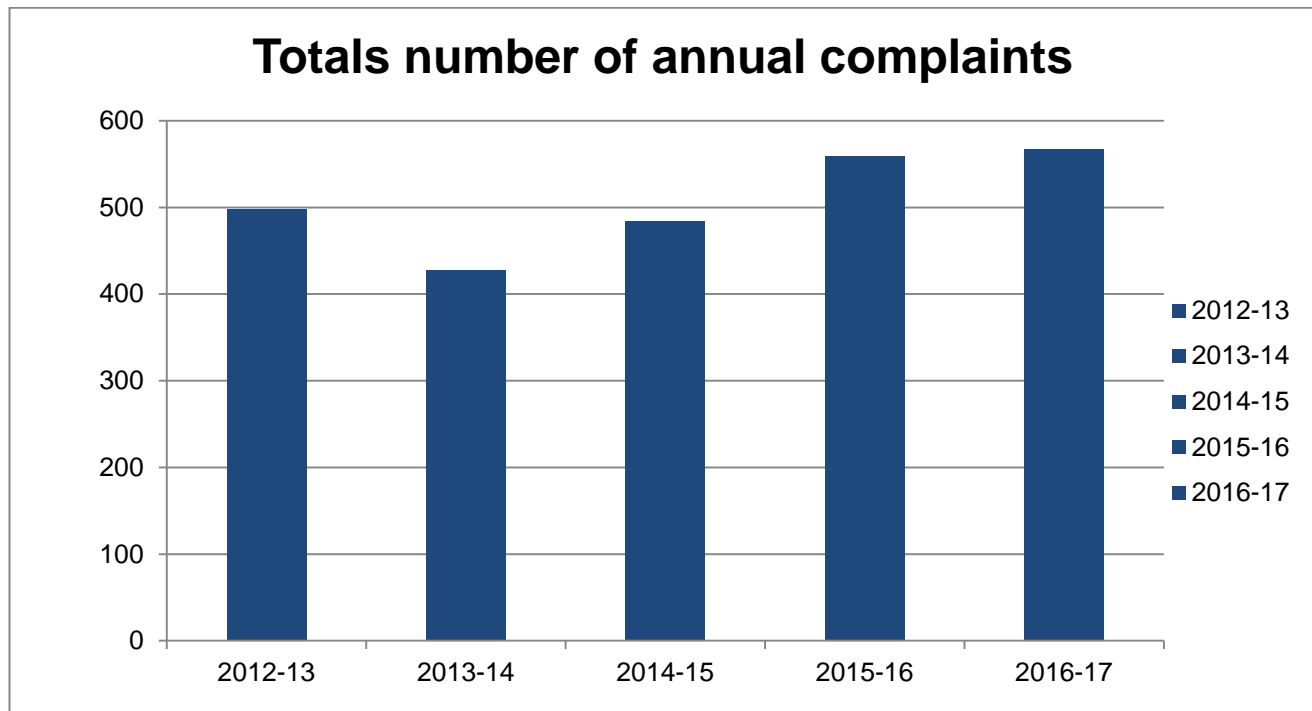
- **Stage One:** A complaint that has been made for the first time.
- **Stage Two:** Internal review of a complaint where the complainant is unsatisfied with the response to their complaint or the way in which the complaint has been handled, and they wish for their complaint to be considered further.
- **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 2016-17

We received 567 complaints in 2016-17. This was an increase of 1.4% on the number received in the previous year as can be seen in table below.

Figure 1 - Cambridge City Council complaint totals 2011 – 2016-17



Year	Total number of complaints received
2016-17	567
2015-16	559
2014-15	484
2013-14	428
2012-13	498

General summary

This report presents service complaints data from 2014-15 to 2016-17.

Last year over 300,000 telephone and electronic contacts were received and over 55,000 face to face visits 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. Complaints provide an opportunity to address issues for the customer and improve services for others where possible.

In 2016-17 the Council received 129 compliments. We also received 7420 positive comments through GovMetric, our customer satisfaction rating system out of 13,140 comments overall.

We have identified key trends as a rise in stage 2 complaints which are not responded to within the 7 day target; complaints related to poor communication, where we are not clear with customers about what they can expect; a small but concerning number about staff attitude and behaviour.

In 2016-17 34% of complaints were for 2 services, Waste Services and Estates and Facilities.

Waste Services received 105 Complaints, an increase of 1 from the previous year. With such high volumes of transactions, we expect to see more complaints in this area than in smaller services. Some complaints related to changes introduced in February 2017 when the service started cross border collections with a complete rerouting of rounds and days of collections. While overall performance remained above 94% at all times, there was an increase in missed bins, and some customers experienced repeat service failures. The team prioritised customers known to have had repeat issues, to ensure new crews knew routes well and could improve service delivery. A review of bin day changes was reported to our Environment Committee in July 2017, and service issues relating to the changes have been addressed.

Estates and Facilities received 86 complaints, an improvement from 98 the previous year. However, there continue to be some issues in ensuring clear communication with customers, and failing to promptly follow up complaints which have inevitably escalated to stage 2. Tenant/leaseholder expectations about planned programmes notably doors, fencing and structural work have been escalated due to poor communication. The service recognises the need to improve communication about planned works, and to be clearer with customers about what to expect from us. A comprehensive skills training programme for staff this Autumn will include communication and customer care issues alongside practical building maintenance skills.

Historic analysis of services over 3 years is in Appendix 1. A key headline is that Parking Services complaints have reduced significantly whereas Housing Services complaints have increased. Housing Advice complaints increased when we changed the way we deal with applications to our housing register (in order to reduce the volume of work for staff), and we have re-introduced the previous system in response to feedback.

We have seen an increase in stage 2 complaints, where services have not responded with the 7 day target time. In 2017, we are introducing new complaints-tracker systems to help managers keep on top of complaints (whilst also delivering busy responsive services) and hope this will reduce missed deadlines.

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. Further work was undertaken in 2016/17 to enhance the way in which we manage the recording and handling of our complaints, this resulted in a project to implement a new complaints tracking system which provides a more user friendly platform for the efficient administration of complaints and enhances reporting. The new system is being implemented by October 2017 with complaint awareness training for all staff training by November 2017

The Council also offers staff a customer service corporate learning a development programme as part of the performance review process. Customer Service training was introduced specifically to develop good customer relationships and improve customer service skills.

The senior leadership team monitors performance management across the council with the aid of the corporate balance score card, quarterly complaints reports and senior management meetings. Each quarter services provide performance data against approximately 40 corporate indicators, these indicators provide a snapshot of how the council is performing in key service areas including complaints.

How complaints were received

Year	Face to Face %	Letter %	Email %	Telephone %	Other (Comment Cards) %
2016-17	3	7	82	6	2
2015-16	3	9	76	10	2
2014-15	2	8	61	11	18

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 2014 – 2016/17

Year	Chief Executive	Director (FB)	Director (SH)
2016-17	0	3	126

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

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 letters to the Customer Service Centre, as customers are choosing to use GovMetric to communicate both compliments and comments.

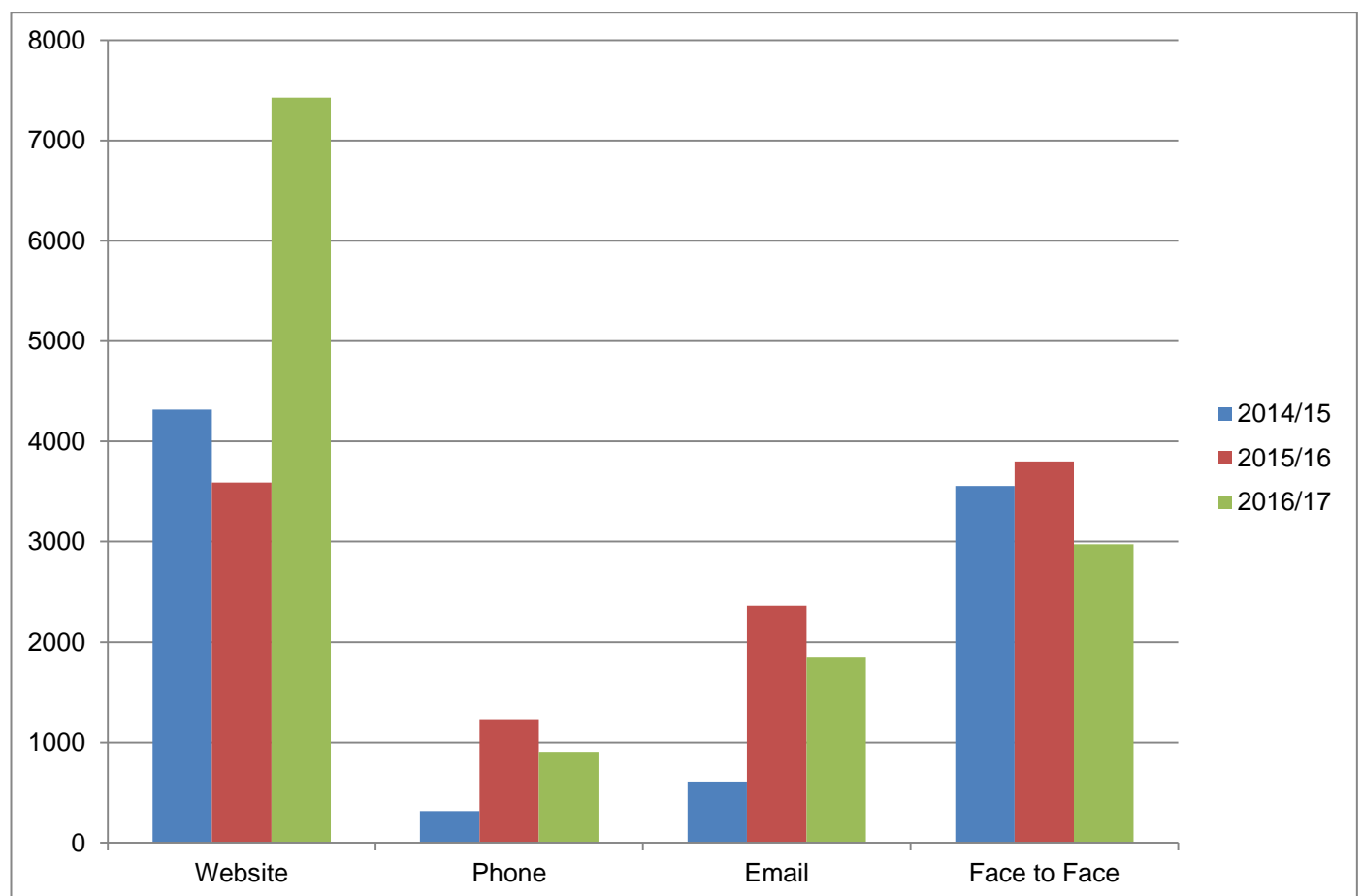


GovMetric - Customer Feedback System

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 2014-17



GovMetric feedback via channels 2014 - 2017

Channel	Date	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Web	2016-17	7425	47%	18%	35%
	2015-16	3589	47%	13%	40%
	2014-15	4316	48%	14%	37%
Phone	2016-17	898	76%	16%	8%
	2015-16	1230	87%	6%	7%
	02.12.2014-31.03.2015	317	85%	7%	8%
Email	2016-17	1843	58%	15%	27%
	2015-16	2361	70%	10%	20%
	02.12.2014-31.03.2015	610	74%	9%	17%
Face to Face	2016-17	2974	73%	10%	16%
	2015-16	3801	71%	12%	17%
	2014-15	3555	67%	13%	21%

Feedback from the Customer Service Centre

In 2016 – 2017 the volume of feedback received from GovMetric reduced due to a number of reasons. In our face to face area the kiosk has been out of commission since February as a result of intentional damage by a customer. We took the opportunity to refresh the questions and the look and feel of the kiosk; a new one is being installed in August 2017.

Feedback volumes from the contact centre were reduced due to the extreme call volumes experienced in the last quarter of 16-17 due to bin round changes. Under pressure to answer calls, the team had less time available to ask for feedback so relied on automated call recording to direct customers to leave feedback.

We now have automatic reports to individual advisors showing the number of positive feedback results they have achieved, and managers have reports on the performance of the whole team and the results are highlighted on communications boards within the centre. This approach had been encouraging the team to forward more customers through to the feedback system.

Reports are automatically sent through to managers on a daily basis where customers leave comments for action or a negative report is given in respect of an advisor. These are reviewed and appropriate action and or follow up is taken.

Feedback from the Web Team

When feedback is received via the GovMetric system and requires an action or a response, the relevant service is notified for their input or action. This may result in them managing the comment as an official complaint in accordance with our corporate complaints procedure. The web team have used the web based feedback to monitor and review the general functionality of the website, correcting content and links, as well as using any relevant comments as evidence to support proposed website changes in the 2017 – 2020 Web Strategy and wider Digital Strategy.

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 11-23 detail comments from Services on actions they have taken to prevent, improve or change as a result of the feedback received in 2016-17

Chief Executive

Corporate Strategy 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	4	1	75%	0

This service has not been reported on in detail due to a low number of complaints.

Planning and Economic Development

Planning and Economic Development 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	32	3	81%	1

Service area headlines

The number of complaints reduced significantly since 2015/16 (60 complaints including 11 at stage 2). Two LGO complaints have been complex and time consuming to deal with but as of Q2 2017 it is expected that these are now close to resolution. During the last 12 months the service has had periods of staff shortage particularly Enforcement Officers which has affected the ability to follow up on planning enforcement complaints. As of Q2 2017 we are now fully staffed. The Planning Service is about to enter a period of rapid change as we move to a Greater Cambridge Planning Service shared with South Cambridgeshire.

Themes identified

- Lack of communication by case officer
- Delay in reply on correspondence/FOI response
- Unhappy with Committee decision/officer decision
- Access to submission is in digital formats
- Construction activities
- Ability to submit all applications online
- The public's interpretation of the presence of officers with divergent views at Informal Hearings (planning appeal)
- Lack of communication by case officer
- Delay in investigating enforcement case
- Poor level of service from Building Control
- High turnover of staff in Application Support team leading to processes being missed (acknowledgement letter)
- Planning Enforcement Complaint sent in via Corporate Complaints system

Any changes and improvements made

Complaints discussed with individual officers and attention to detail highlighted. Developer contributions work now managed by Developer Contributions Monitoring Unit, mitigation measures identified in advance of Committee meetings, additional training in Application Support team, re-allocation of caseload in more proactive way and vacancies filled (Planning Enforcement Officers).

Changes and improvements made/Consultation to committee decision outcomes

Report to Planning Committee/Council – LGO Investigation Beaulands Close, March 2017. The LGO did not find that any of the failures identified amounted to 'significant injustice but did recommend that we review approach/guidance on representations that include photographs/video. This resulted in the standard acknowledgement letter being updated to provide advice on submitting information in a digital format and staff training.

Senior Officer review of attendees at Informal Hearings where the views of officer are divergent and a more sensitive consideration of the impression that the public takes of attendance of officers at Informal Hearings.

New FOI response system introduced

Strategic Director – Fiona Bryant

Human Resources, Financial, Procurement and Fleet services and Legal Services did not receive any complaints in 2016/17

Property Services 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	2	0	100%	0

Commercial Services

(Parking Services and Bereavement)

Bereavement Services 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	1	0	100%	0

These services have not been reported on in detail, due to the low volume of feedback.

Parking Services 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	12	0	92%	3

Themes Identified

- Poor communication
- Lacking or inaccurate information
- Staff Conduct
- Decision(s) / Policy relating to parking charges
- Procedures / Planned maintenance Works

Any changes and improvements made

- The ability to pay by cash has been removed at Pay & Display car parks, due to repeated thefts. This led to a number of complaints. We are reviewing options for the future.
- New car park equipment will be installed imminently, which enables Blue Badge holders to use self-service, meaning that they will be able to use the Blue Badge discount scheme 24/7.
- We have ceased to give warnings regarding cars overhanging the walk-way in Grand Arcade car park as a result of customer and internal consultation; we no longer fine such customers. This has resulted in fewer complaints in this regard and increased customer satisfaction.
- We have started to record all customer interactions over intercom for investigative and training purposes.
- Zebra crossing area improvements have been identified & implemented as a result of customer feedback.

Strategic Director – Suzanne Hemingway

Customer Services 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	32	1	84%	31

Service area context

Customer services saw an increase in complaints this year due to service changes including a significant increase in customer contacts relating to bin day changes – In the first 5 weeks that the changes took place customer services received over 6000 contacts, double our normal contact levels for this service. Legislative changes and staff turnover continues to be high and therefore training and development has been key to continue to deliver excellent customer service.

Themes Identified

- Poor Communication
- Lacking or inaccurate information
- Staff Conduct
- Delays in responding/answering

Any changes and improvements made

- To reduce telephone wait times customer service implemented an automated switchboard which has reduced the number of calls requiring advisor intervention. This has reduced the time to answer for switchboard calls.
- Staff briefings took place on specific legislative changes e.g. Housing Benefit Registration to ensure staff had the most up to date information.
- Staff conduct complaints – were reviewed on an individual basis, there was no trend that it was any one advisor so feedback/coaching and additional training was carried out as a result of the individual complaints.
- Training on communicating effectively with distressed people is being provided as a result of staff feedback – complaints were not the trigger for this training but equipping staff with more tools to help them in their role will have a positive impact on reducing complaints.

Community Services 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	23	7	87%	15

Service area context

The service area continues to provide the following services:

- 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

Themes Identified

- Poor communication
- Poor consultation
- Decision(s) / Policy - Both relate to a series of complaints about a decision by the Council to grant planning permission for storage containers at Sheep’s Green learner pool.

Any Changes and improvements made

Emphasis on more proactive and systematic communication with ward councillors and local groups on proposals for change or improvement in our area

Changes and improvements made/Consultation or committee decision outcomes

As a result of the complaints about Sheep’s Green learner pool, the Council relocated the storage containers following a successful planning application

ICI or LGO Learning

Community Services has dealt with number of complaints relating to the management of antisocial behaviour cases in relation to council housing tenants. Close liaison with the housing service is important in ensuring the issues and outcomes are understood and owned across both services. A review of how antisocial behaviour in general is managed by the council is currently being undertaken.

Environmental Services – Streets and Open Spaces 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	75	7	73%	36

Service area context

Streets and Open Spaces service continues to deliver front line services and a review was undertaken in 2016/17 to improve customer service, including investment in and use of ICT, digital technology and open data.

Themes Identified

Communication delays:

- All six Stage 2 complaint responses missed the initial 7 working day full response deadline.
- Failed to keep a customer informed of progress dealing with complaints.

Staff Conduct:

All seven Stage 1 complaints related to alleged enforcement officer mis-conduct, none of which were upheld. Only one of these was escalated to Stage 2, where the complaint was again not upheld. The nature of face-to-face enforcement action increases risk/ incidence of such a challenge.

Decision(s)/ Policy:

Three Stage 1 (and one Stage 2) complaints related to implementation of the Council’s moorings policy and action taken against unauthorised boats.

Procedures / Planned Works:

- Two Stage 1 complaints related to alleged missed routine street cleansing service (removing fallen leaves).
- Failed to do necessary property checks to confirm whether Council or private ownership and to liaise with property owner, prior to undertaking required grounds maintenance works

Any changes and improvements made

Communication:

Officers were reminded of the need to keep customer (and Business Support) informed of progress dealing with complaints and any necessary extension of response deadlines.

Staff Conduct:

Environmental enforcement officers have been issued with body worn CCTV cameras, which will help provide corroborating evidence in response to complaints over officer conduct and will help to protect both officers and public.

Procedures/Planned Works:

- Develop operating procedure for grounds maintenance works on City Homes estate areas involving property checks
- Pursue developing online maps/ guidance, showing routine street cleansing/ grounds maintenance rounds, so public can see when/ where their street/ verge/ open space will be serviced.

ICI or LGO Learning

Responding to ICI recommendations, corporate enforcement policy is being reviewed to address zero tolerance approach to littering, fly tipping, etc

Environmental Services – Environmental Health 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	22	2	59%	2

Service area context

Environmental Health (EH) service transferred to new Environmental Services unit, following senior management restructure.

Themes Identified

Communication – Delays:

- The 2 Stage 1 complaints missed target response date.
- Each of the 3 x Stage 2 complaint responses missed the initial 7 working day full response deadline set by CSC.

Decision(s)/ Policy:

- 3 of the 5 Stage 1 complaints related to objections to a planning/ licensing application.

Any changes and improvements made

- Staff made aware of the importance to respond to complaints on time.
- Assessment made of investigating officers work pressures to ensure time is set aside for complaint investigation and response.

Estates and Facilities 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	86	4	62%	2

Service area context

Estates & Facilities has undergone a second review and restructure, in 2016/17 (following a restructure in 2105/16) as part of the overall Housing Transformation programme driven by the four year, 1% rent reduction.

Themes Identified

- Tenant/leaseholder expectations about planned programmes notably doors fencing and structural works.
- Communications with customers. Complaints not answered in target are high – averaging approximately 40%. There are further issues recorded or escalated to stage 2, where complaints reflect frustration with poor communication.

Any changes and improvements made

Staff briefings have been used repeatedly in 2016/17 to emphasise the importance of:

- Dealing promptly with customer enquiries to avoid them becoming complaints
- Being clear with customers about realistic service expectations
- Delivering consistently and reliably to those standards
- Greater integration of leaseholder and planned works officers (co-locating at mill Road 2 days/week) to improve consistency of information provided to leaseholder.
- Use of staff briefings to reinforce the need to deal promptly, consistently and pro-actively with all service complaints
- Ongoing review of Repairs Standards, involving full stakeholder consultations, to increase clarity of landlord responsibilities and provide clearer guidance to staff and tenants about dealing with requests that are not Council responsibility, including tenant damage

Changes and improvements made/Consultation or committee decision outcomes

- Provisions for future changes included in the Housing transformation programme approved by Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2017.

ICI or LGO Learning

- ICI feedback in 2016/17 identified communication failures rather than actual service delivery issues as the principle cause for concern – see above comments. ICI case used as reference when briefing staff about the importance of good communications with customers.

Housing Services – City Homes 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	78	1	88%	18

Themes Identified

Staff attitude, and Complainants unhappy about decisions made:

Staff are more confident about the services we can and cannot provide across Housing Services as a result of the restructure. They also have the confidence that they will be supported by Managers. Saying 'no' will obviously increase complaints as it will take time for customers to accept/understand the reasons why.

Service failure:

- Largest proportions of these complaints were about the communal cleaning within flatted blocks and Sheltered Housing undertaken by Churchill.

- Grounds maintenance: We do have complaints of a seasonal nature in this area but there has been no significant trend to cause concern.

Any changes and improvements made

- Review Policies – this work has started and is on-going. Staff are being asked for their views/suggestions as part of the Policies review.
- Refresher training for staff on the different ways of saying ‘no’.
- Continue meetings in relation to communal cleaning in flatted areas.
- Estate Champions will continue to work closely with our Contracts Manager in connection in with the Churchill contract.

Housing Services – Housing Advice 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	60	5	88%	5

Service area context

- Changes to the way in which housing application verification takes place (at housing offer stage rather than at application stage) has given rise to an increased number of complaints about this area in 2016-17
- New Home-Link IT system has proved to be less efficient than its predecessor

Themes Identified

- Decision(s) / Policy
- Procedures
- Delays.

Any changes and improvements made

- We are returning to the old front end verification process in 2017-18 as this proved more popular with customers and partners alike.
- Refresher training on medical assessment procedures for CSC staff was organised following complaints that a customer had been misinformed about the process.

ICI or LGO Learning

Managers have undergone LGO complaint handling training.

Revenues & Benefits 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	35	1	94%	26

Service area context

The number of complaints continues to be very low compared to the many thousands of transactions that Revenues and Benefits has with Cambridge’s 138,750 residents. The overall number of complaints in relation to service has increased from 33 in 2015/16, to 35 in 2016/17. There was an improvement in terms of complaints handling, with an increase in complaints responded to in target from 85% to 94% respectively.

Themes Identified

- Communications
- Misunderstanding of complex issues

- Escalation routes not always being followed at first point of contact and customers are instead signposted to the complaints process
- Several complaints were followed by compliments for the way in which we handled the complaint
- Complaints from customers unhappy about receiving reminders and summonses for non-payment of council tax.

Any changes and improvements made

- To continue to review of the content of correspondence, with a view to making these easier to understand and improving their overall tone.
- To continue to review processes within both Revenues and Benefits, with an aim to reduce the time it takes to action incoming work.
- Additional checks are completed within the Benefits team to reduce calculation errors.
- In order to manage customer expectations, we are continuing to develop online functionality to enable customers to self-serve and update their accounts and claims.
- Positive meeting with Cambridge CAB to review processes and evidence required to amend claims.
- Reviewing council tax bills to see if content can be made clearer to reflect payment methods.

Waste Services 2016-17	No. of Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of compliments
	105	2	71%	8

Service area context

In the last month of the year the service fully started cross border collections with a complete rerouting of rounds and days of collections. While overall performance remained above 94% there was increase in missed bins and service complaints. Some complainants experienced repeat service failures.

Themes Identified

- Service Failure (Missed bins)
- Bins not returned to the correct position
- Staff Conduct engagement and behaviour (Attitude / driving)

Any changes and improvements made

- New first line management team put in place with more focus being placed on Team Managers being required to do more crew and site visits to check service delivery, conduct and H&S.
- Regular phone conferences were held prior to and after new rounds went live. These included customer services and communications teams in both authorities to ensure all parties were aware of any issues as they arose from the round changes in February 2017.
- Sickness levels have been high; we have a new approach to support and deal with absence. This is expected to help staff attend work and so reduce the need for temporary staff which is often linked to bins being missed due to lack of local knowledge.
- A review of bin day changes was reported to Environment Committee in July 2017.

Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

ICI Complaints Submitted in 2016-17	
Number of ICI complaints carried forward from 2015-16	5
Number of ICI complaints submitted in 2016-17	8
ICI Complaints Investigated in 2016-17	
Number of ICI complaints investigated	8
Number of complaints with complete reports	7
Number of complaints outstanding	1
ICI Complaint Decisions in 2016-17	
Not upheld	2* + 1
Not upheld with recommendations	1* + 1
Partially upheld	1* + 2
Upheld	1* + 3

Upheld and partially upheld Stage 3 complaints in 2016-17		
Service	Date	Decision
Planning	13 April 2016	Partially upheld*
City Homes	20 June 2016	Upheld*
Estates and Facilities	11 October 2016	Upheld
Estates and Facilities	11 October 2016	Upheld
Estates and Facilities	24 February 2017	Partially upheld
Streets and Open Spaces	27 July 2016	Upheld
Streets and Open Spaces	11 October 2016	Partially upheld

ICI Complaints received between 2013 – 2016-17

Period	Received	Partially upheld	Upheld	Services where complaint upheld
2016-17	5* + 8	1* + 2	1* + 3	Estates and Facilities, Streets and Open Spaces, Planning and City homes
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 and Estates and Facilities.

*Complaints carried over from the previous financial year

ICI Complaint Service Feedback

Pages 24-30 detail comments from Services on actions they have taken to prevent, improve or change as a result of the ICI feedback received in 2016-17

PLANNING SERVICES

Decision - Partially Upheld

Complaint Overview

In approving a planning application Cambridge City Council failed to act fairly and has failed to demonstrate best practice in terms of demonstrating a reasonable duty of care to neighbouring owners as could be expected. The complainant felt that the City Council had been negligent in handling this planning application.

ICI Suggested Way Forward

ICI suggested that the case officers report could have been more explicit in assisting objectors in understanding the relevance of drawings and illustrations to the core planning pack being considered. In recognition of this point the ICI made a recommendation for compensation of £100.

ICI Learning points and Recommendations

- ICI did not uphold the complainant's view that the City Council had been negligent in the overall handling this application to the extent that you have been disadvantaged.
- The City Council should be mindful that where a planning application involves significant documentation being placed on the planning portal for public access, that it may be useful for case officers committee reports to signpost more explicitly which documents are considered core to the applications assessment and the Planning Committee decision making process.
- That the Director of Environment notes this independent reviews finding and the learning point identified for further consideration and communication within planning services staff to support the on-going development of best practice.

Actions taken in response to feedback

ICI report discussed at team meeting.

LGO reports discussed at team meeting

Planners attended Planning Committee when LGO case discussed

CITY HOMES

Decision – Upheld

Complaint Overview

How the City Council had managed and handled the complainant's personal property that had been taken from a property following the complainant's eviction in October 2014.

ICI Suggested Way Forward

- That a meeting is convened where the new evidence images can be shared and a further meeting after the City Council has had an opportunity to reconsider its findings at stage 2 of the complaints process relating to the extent of property lost, damage, liability and the offer of compensation made.

ICI Learning points and Recommendations

- That if the City Council determine to improve on the level of compensation offered then this amount agreed should be the basis upon which to start consideration to replace the complainants goods.
- Whilst the complainant would wish any replaced items to be replaced with new rather than second hand goods this may inhibit the range of items that may be replaced against any agreed compensation amount; this is an area for pragmatic discussion.
- As the complainant is in arrears it is reasonable for the Council to apply its normal process of deducting any monies owed from the amount of compensation which may be agreed in this case.

Actions taken in response to feedback

The service followed suggested recommendations from the ICI. The advocate is in ongoing discussions with the Customer and the Council to resolve.

ESTATES AND FACILITIES

Decision - Upheld

Complaint Overview

The lack of speed and amount of contact when reporting damp in the complainant's rented property.

ICI Suggested Way Forward

- That the City Council provides a written apology which recognises that they had been significantly inconvenienced by these service failures.
- That the City Council makes a compensation payment of £150 for the personal time and trouble the complainant incurred over a 10 months period.
- That the City Council makes arrangements to compensate the complainant for the damage as a consequence of damp repairs which were not dealt with in a timely manner.

ICI Learning points and Recommendations

- That the City Council agree to review the systems and processes which have been found to be inadequate within the Estates and Facilities Department to meet the current customer service expectations for requests for repairs and taking ownership for complaints investigations.
- That any lessons learned from reviewing the systems and processes are properly documented and tracked against a managerially owned departmental action plan to avoid a repetition of the failures identified and ensure the public's confidence in the Council is maintained.

Actions taken in response to feedback

The complaint was fully justified as reported by the ICI and acknowledged as such with the customer. The actions proposed by the ICI have all been implemented and the customer is now satisfied.

ESTATES AND FACILITIES

Decision - Upheld

Complaint Overview

That the City Council has not acted correctly in the handling of a complaint about its sale of the complainant's neighbour's Council owned property without first resolving an outstanding boundary dispute. Also for not addressing the damage to the complainant's hedge, an act of trespass and its mismanagement of the boundary measurement.

ICI Feedback

- The Council should acknowledge and apologise for the poor service it has provided.
- The complainant has suffered undue distress and inconvenience in pursuing this matter which could have been resolved with relative ease if handled correctly at the outset or if opportunities for intervention were taken. On this basis the Council should consider compensating the complainant.

ICI Learning points and Recommendations

- It is recommended that the City Council ensures that its staff is reminded of the organisation's expectation for its service standards to be met and of their individual responsibility to manage communication with those contacting the organisation.
- It is recommended that managers dealing with or delegating complaint issues should ensure that any actions which they allocate to members of staff are monitored to ensure that they are actually delivered within set timeframes and with an outcome of clearly defined quality.

- When staff are involved in issues that involve Council employees they should ensure that all of their actions are transparent and provide no impression of potential partiality or favoured treatment and recognise the potential for this to result in a breakdown in trust and public confidence.
- Where there are legal implications to decision-making there needs to be absolute clarity and certainty in the language involved when communicating both internally and externally.
- Sales of Council owned houses should proceed only when there is complete certainty that there are no unresolved issues that may have a potential legal impact.

Actions taken in response to feedback

The outcome and ICI findings have been discussed in detail with both the officer and line manager and advice given about the standards of communication expected. Additionally, the example has been used, in general terms, to brief all staff about the importance of good communications with customers even where issues are potentially contentious.

As advised by the ICI, those staff involved with Right to Buy enquiries have been reminded of the requirement to communicate all legal interpretations clearly and unambiguously and our Right to Buy procedures have been reviewed to make sure that sales do not progress in future until outstanding queries have been fully resolved.

STREETS AND OPEN SPACES

Decision - Upheld

Complaint Overview

Complainant wishing for a 'door barrier' to be installed due to speeding cyclists. In their view though the Council officials demonstrated a broadly supportive attitude, they have failed, or been persistently slow, to respond to correspondence. Additionally, no decision was communicated to the complainant.

ICI Suggested Way Forward

- The cycle barrier will be installed and paid for by the City Council.
- The City Council will improve its communication in line with the report recommendations.

ICI Learning points and Recommendations

- Staff are reminded of the organisation's expectation for its service standards to be met and of their individual responsibility to manage communication with those contacting the organisation.
- The website contains only accurate information.
- Managers dealing with complaint issues should ensure that any actions which they delegate to members of staff are monitored to ensure that they are actually delivered within set timeframes and with an outcome of clearly defined quality.

Actions taken in response to feedback

- Corporate Enforcement Policy review has been completed and proposed revised Policy being presented to Committee for approval autumn 2017
- The need to consider, on an individual case basis, the suitability of continuing the process of pursuing the payment of fines during investigations of associated complaints at Stages One, Two and Three of the Complaints process is reviewed on a case by case basis in line with the amount of time available (i.e. Cases are restricted to six months from start to finish to enable legal proceedings to take place). Where possible cases are suspended until a complaint has been resolved.

STREETS AND OPEN SPACES

Decision – Partially Upheld

Complaint Overview

The complainant viewed that the City Council had treated them in an unfair and unprofessional way in relation to the issuing of a fixed penalty notice. The complainant disputed paying the issued fine and requested that it was cancelled.

ICI Suggested Way Forward

- The ICI recommended that the issue of the Fixed Penalty Notice was confirmed and the payment made.
- A suspension should have been granted when the commencement of a Stage Three investigation process was known.

ICI Learning points and Recommendations

- It is recommended that the City Council reviews its Corporate Enforcement Policy (section 6.3 - Informal Action)
- When a complaint is ongoing involving a member of Council staff it may be considered as insensitive and unhelpful for the staff member or members directly involved to continue with the responsibility of communicating directly with the complainant unless the issue has been carefully considered and a decision made that it is unnecessary or unavoidable to manage this in another way.
- There needs to be careful consideration by the City Council, on an individual case basis, of the suitability of continuing the process of pursuing the payment of fines during investigations of associated complaints at Stages One, Two and Three of the Complaints process.

Actions taken in response to feedback

To be completed

ESTATES AND FACILITIES

Decision – Partially Upheld

Complaint Overview

That the complainant had been subjected to poor customer care and a lack of communication which had not satisfactorily explained why their land was subjected to trespass/unauthorised access on 5 occasions which resulted in some damage. In addition, there remained an unresolved boundary dispute associated with inaccurate record keeping.

ICI Suggested Way Forward

- In respect of paint damage to a fence, the Council had offered to arrange for the paint to be removed as soon as possible and the ICI recommended the City Council further engage with the complainant to affect this remedy as soon as possible.
- The City Council provides a written apology, which recognises the upset caused by their staff and instructed contractor's 'inadvertent' straying onto the complainant's land which resulted in occasions of 'wholly unintentional trespass'.
- That the City Council further engages with the complainant to revisit its accepted position that previous follow through to replace fence posts was not fulfilled and completes this action as soon as possible.

ICI Learning points and Recommendations

- The City Council review the effectiveness of its policies and procedures which advise staff and contractors of their obligation 'on site', where there is the potential for inadvertent or unintentional trespass.

Actions taken in response to feedback

Attempts are being made to work with the complainant to reinstate the boundary fence in its correct location in accordance with land registry and confirmed RTB records. Nothing further has been received from the complainant

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 2016-17 the Local Government Ombudsman received 17 enquiries and complaints, 4 were treated as complaints where decisions were applicable. As a result of the LGO's detailed investigations, 2 were upheld and 2 were not upheld. In addition to this we received another enquiry (ref 16 004 091) which was received and investigated during April 17, this was upheld and included in the Service comments below.

Department	No of Complaints Closed	Decision
Benefits & Tax	3	2 Referred back for local resolution; 1 Not upheld
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	3	1 Not Upheld 2 Closed after initial enquiries
Housing	2	1 Incomplete/Invalid 1 Advice Given
Planning & Development	6	1 Referred back for local resolution 1 Closed after initial enquiry 3 Upheld (1 of which reported in April 2017) 1 Not Upheld
Corporate & Other Services	2	1 Closed after initial enquiry 1 Referred back for local resolution
Total	16	

Comments from Planning Services relating to upheld Complaint (ref 16 002 481):

This upheld complaint concerned a resident who had objected to a planning application submitted by his neighbour for an extension. The resident complained that officers had made a number of errors in approving the application under 'delegated powers' and there were serious flaws in the way in which the Planning Committee decided not to revoke planning permission. The LGO considered that the Council was significantly at fault in the way in which they had determined the application under 'delegated powers' but were not at fault in way in which it subsequently considered revocation of the planning permission. The LGO considered that the injustice to the residents was limited to their justifiable sense of outrage at being treated unfairly, uncertainty and time and trouble. The LGO recommended a compensation payment totalling £1250 which has been paid. This complaint has been reported to Planning Committee and Council.

Comments from Planning Services relating to upheld Complaint (ref 16 006 971):

This upheld a complaint made by a resident concerning the way in which the Council had dealt with a retrospective planning application. The resident had submitted material in the form of a video and photographs that the Council's security software had not allowed the case officer or Committee to review. The Council did not communicate this to the complainant or respond to an offer to provide the material in an alternative format. For that reason, the LGO found fault with the Council that did not cause injustice and recommended that the Council clarify its position on the submission of material on different media, that it review its procedures for responding to such circumstances and communicate this to staff and that it apologise to the complainant. Other grounds of complaint, concerning the Council's assessment of the impacts of the retrospective application on the complainant property were not upheld. The Council has accepted and acted upon the recommendations of the LGO and revised its consultation letter to make the position on media submissions clearer. It has also apologised to the complainant.

Comments from Planning Services relating to upheld Complaint (ref 16 004 091)*:

This upheld complaint also concerned a resident who had submitted objections to a planning application by his neighbor for an extension. The application was reported to Planning Committee who accepted the officer recommendation of approval. The LGO summarised the complaint as relating to failings in the way in which application was determined, specifically that the submitted drawings were inaccurate and the Committee report contained errors. The LGO requested that an additional screen be provided to protect the neighbor which has been agreed by the applicant. The LGO also recommended a compensation payment of £500 which has been paid. Planning officers have been reminded of the need to check that plans are accurate. This complaint has been reported to Planning Committee and Council.

*This complaint was investigated during the 2016-17 period and the decision was made after the end of the year reporting in April 2017, taking it outside the LGO's reporting period. The investigation took place during the 2016-17 period which is why it is included in the report.

Yearly comparison 2014 – 2016-1

Year	Total Enquiries Received	Change %
2016-17	17	+6.25
2015-16	16	0
2014-15	16	0

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 2016-17, the Council received four complaints about the conduct of Councillors. Three of the complaints were rejected and one was resolved informally by means of an apology.

The first complaint related to a Councillors sharing of information supplied by a constituent with other councillors. The Councillor apologised for his mistake which was conveyed to the complainant who acknowledged and accepted the apology. No further action was deemed necessary by the Monitoring Officer.

The second complaint related to the participation of an executive Councillor at a meeting of the Strategy and Resource Committee and a failure to disclose a personal and prejudicial interest. Neither the Monitoring Officer nor the Independent Person felt there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct given that a decision to carry out a consultation (in relation to mooring) did not constitute a decision which would have brought the relevant section of the Code of Conduct (11.2(b)) into operation.

The third complaint also involved the same Committee and Councillor, namely Strategy and Resource Committee. In this instance the complainant incorrectly stated that the Councillor did not declare a personal interest as an appointed (by the Council) Conservator of the River Cam Conservancy. The minutes to the meeting clearly showed that the Councillor had declared a personal interest. The Monitoring Officer having consulted the Independent Person therefore dismissed the complaint.

The fourth complaint concerned the way in which a member conducted themselves while acting as a teller at the general election. While the role of a teller was outside the scope of the Monitoring Officer's remit being outside the role of a Councillor some interaction on social media did fall within the scope of the Code of Conduct. The complainant alleged that in responding to various comments the Councillor had breached the Code of Conduct. In responding to these it was the view of both the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person that the Councillor did not breach the Code of Conduct. They expressed an opinion as part of an exchange on social media defending their actions with their view of events.

There were 3 complaints in 2011/12, 2 complaints in 2012/13, 3 complaints in 2013/14, 4 complaints in 2014/15 and 3 complaints in 2015/16. 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.

Appendix 1

3 Year Service Analysis

2014/15 - 2016/17

Chief Executive

Corporate Strategy

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	1	0	0	0
2015-16	3	0	0	0
2016-17	4	1	0	0

Planning and Economic Development

Planning

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	44	1	1*	2
2015-16	60	11	3	0
2016-17	32	3	1	3**

*Shared Service ICI complaint

**1 LGO carried forward from 17/18

Fiona Bryant

Human Resources – No Complaints Received

Legal Services – No complaints Received

Finance – 1 complaint received in 2014/15

Property Services

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	2	0	1*	0
2015-16	2	0	0	0
2016-17	2	0	0	0

*Shared Service ICI complaint

Commercial Services

Parking Services

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	45	1	0	0
2015-16	26	2	0	0
2016-17	12	0	0	0

Bereavement Services

Column1	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	13	0	0	0

2015-16	11	0	0	0
2016-17	1	0	0	0

Suzanne Hemingway

Customer Services

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	16	0	0	0
2015-16	39	0	0	0
2016-17	32	1	0	0

Community Services

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	29	0	0	0
2015-16	9	0	0	0
2016-17	23	7	0	0

Environmental Services

Environmental Health

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	9	1	0	0
2015-16	9	2	0	1
2016-17	22	2	0	0

Streets and Open Spaces

Column1	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	62	5	1	0
2015-16	53	0	1	0
2016-17	75	7	2	0

Estates and Facilities

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	87	4	3	0
2015-16	98	11	0	0
2016-17	86	4	3	0

Housing Services

Housing Advice

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	36	1	0	2
2015-16	39	3	1	1
2016-17	60	5	0	0

City Homes

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	40	1	1*	0
2015-16	67	3	0	0

2016-17	78	1	1	0
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*Shared Service ICI complaint

Revenues and Benefits

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	29	1	0	0
2015-16	33	1	0	0
2016-17	35	1	0	0

Waste Services

	Stage 1	Stage 2	ICI	LGO
2014-15	60	1	0	0
2015-16	104	9	0	0
2016-17	105	2	0	0