



# Cambridge City Council

## Annual Customer Complaints and Feedback Report **2018-19**

Cambridge City Council's Annual Complaints Report	<b>3</b>
Our Complaints Procedure	<b>3</b>
Complaints & Compliments to the City Council in 2018-19	<b>4</b>
How complaints were received	<b>9</b>
GovMetric - Customer Feedback System	<b>11</b>
Service Complaint Trends and Feedback	<b>14</b>
Independent Complaints Investigator	<b>27</b>
Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)	<b>34</b>
Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct	<b>34</b>
Appendix 1 – 3 year service analysis	<b>36</b>

# CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL'S ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

Each 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.

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 can be wide ranging, but can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided, or lack of action by the Council, or its staff. This can include failure to achieve specific standards of service.

It should be highlighted that issues brought to the Council for the first time are dealt with as a request for service and so are not processed as a formal complaint. However service requests can then translate into a stage 1 complaint if the customer is further dissatisfied with how their request has been dealt with. This may occur from delays in response or dissatisfaction with staff behaviour or policies.

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.

Cambridge City Council currently has a three stage complaints process:

**Stage One:** A complaint that has been made for the first time. The case is allocated to a service manager to investigate and respond to the complainant.

**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 LGO requires that the person affected must have gone through our complaints process before going to the Ombudsman.

DRAFT

## Complaints & Compliments to the City Council in 2018-19

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. In 2018-19, total recorded complaints rose 463 from 698 to 1161. In the same time period we received 148 compliments. The increase in the number of complaints was caused by a variety of factors, and a detailed commentary from the Head of Service, setting out what is being done to address complaints and / or improve complaint handling is included in the service-by-service sections on pages 12-22.

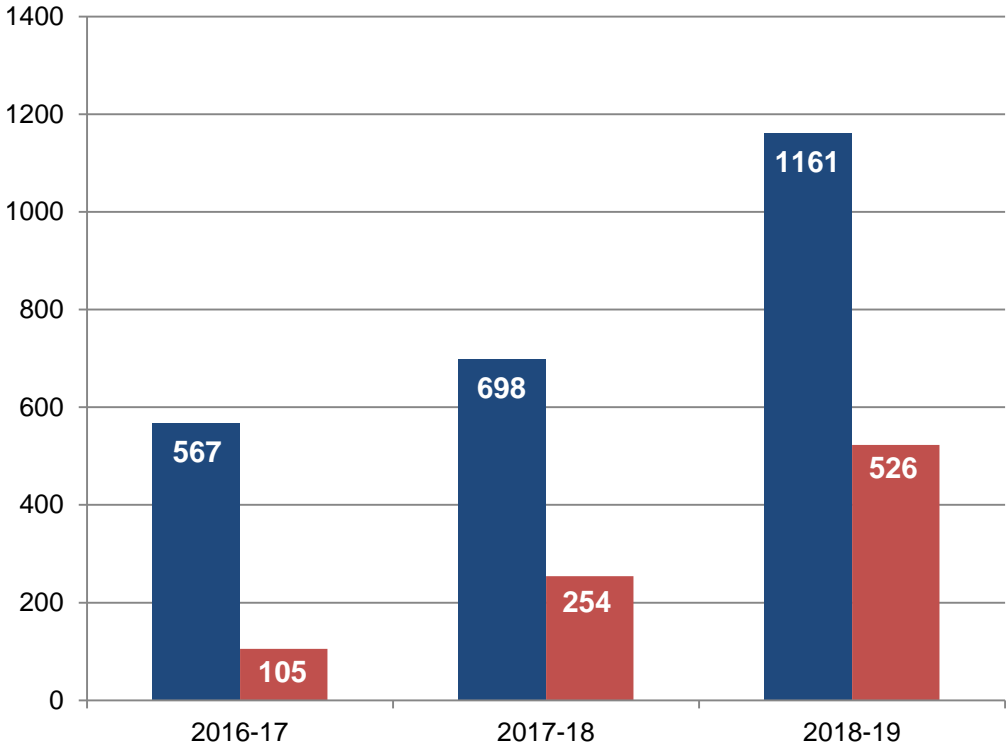
In seeking feedback, we have also received over 14700 comments via GovMetric, a customer satisfaction rating system. In April 2018 and January 2019, Cambridge City Council appeared in the top 10 for positive feedback across 70-plus councils who use GovMetric. To put these figures in context, during 2018/19 over 250,000 telephone and electronic contacts were received and over 55,000 face to face visits were recorded at the Customer Service Centre.

The City Council's performance overall can be more fully understood by reading this report alongside the Annual Report on the Corporate Plan 2018-19, and the financial out-turn reports that were presented to the Strategy & Resources scrutiny committee on 1 July 2019.

### Complaints

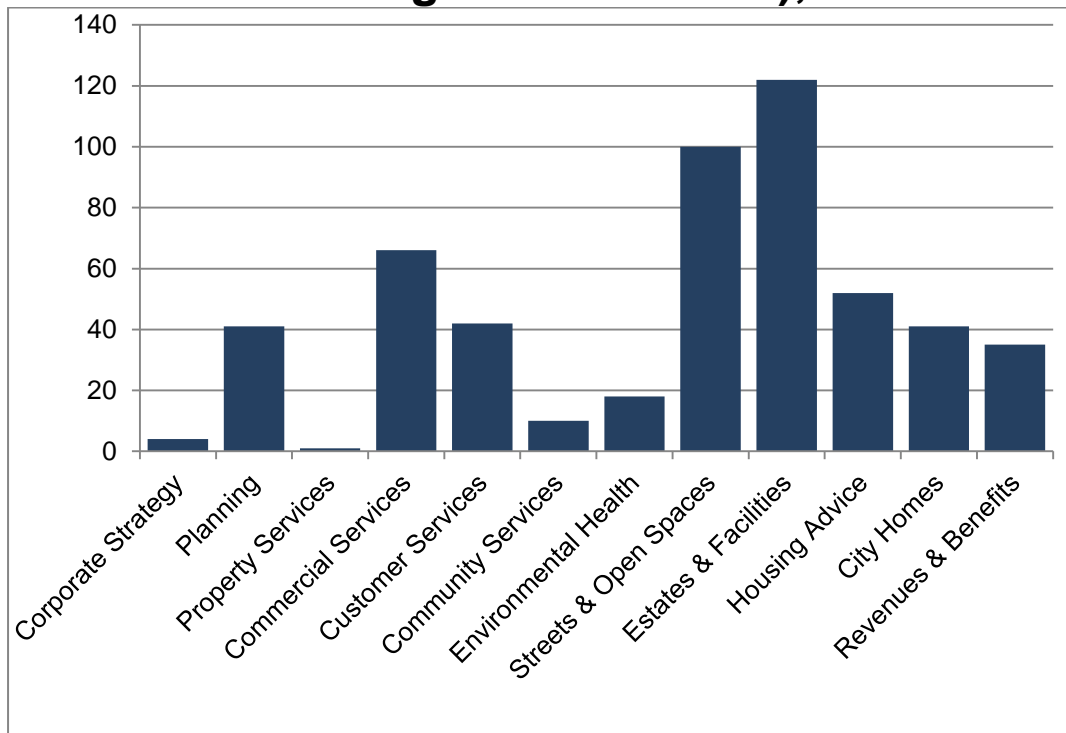
We received 1161 complaints in 2018-19. This was an increase of 463 (34%) on the number received in the previous year as can be seen in the table below. The waste service receives significantly more complaints than other services, and so the number of complaints are shown in table 1, in order to make table 2 easier to read. Please see the Head of Service commentaries on pages 12-22 for a fuller explanation of how services are responding to these complaints.

### Total number of annual complaints, and complaints for Waste Service



DRAFT

## Number of complaints by council service (not including Waste Service), 2018/19



In 2018-19, Waste Services continued to have the highest amount of recorded complaints, with 526 (45% of total council complaints). This is an increase of 272 from the 254 (35%) in 2017-18. The increased number of recorded waste complaints during 2018/19 arose primarily from a change in the way that customer comments relating to waste are recorded combined with a change to the policy regarding missed bins (rather than any actual deterioration in service). Complaints are now recorded consistently within the corporate complaints tracker, whereas they previously may have been resolved informally by phone calls to service managers. We saw a spike in the number of complaints received both when this change was introduced, and similarly when the changes to the winter garden waste collection policy was approved and implemented.

It is worth noting that the waste service in the city has far more interactions with customers than any other service, making around 14,600 collections each working day, or about 3.8 million in the year. While we would prefer to deliver a service that did not lead to any complaints, the 523 complaints for the year need to be seen in this context. A fuller commentary on complaints against the Waste service is provided by the Head of Service on pages 12-13.

The number of stage 2 complaints across the Council also increased, from 38 in 2017/18 to 91 in 2018/19. Of the 91 stage two complaints, 31 were for Waste. Of these, 18 related to missed bins, and were escalated because customers did not feel their case was resolved successfully at stage 1.

Other services with a number of Stage 2 complaints were Planning and Housing, as well as Multi-Service complaints. Complaints in these areas tend to be more complex than others due to the nature of the services or depth of investigation required, so this may explain why these service areas have higher numbers of stage 2 complaints than others.

### **Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)**

1 Stage 3 (ICI) Complaint was carried forward from 2016-17. 24 new complaints were submitted to the ICI in 2018-19. Of these complaints, 24 were investigated. Five were upheld, seven were partially upheld and eight were not upheld.

See page 23 for more detail.

### **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

13 complaints were reported to the Local Government Ombudsman in 2018-19. Of these, three complaints were upheld.

### **Changes and improvements to recording, reporting and monitoring**

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. 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 in the Customer Service Business & Development team reviews data on a monthly and quarterly basis to establish themes and trends. This data and analysis is shared with Directors and Heads of Service to help them understand what the service needs to do to improve or change service arrangements or practices to prevent a reoccurrence of a complaint.

In addition to these monthly reports, the Senior Management Team monitors performance management across the Council with the aid of the corporate balanced score card, quarterly complaints reports, and senior management meetings. Each quarter services provide performance data against around 40 corporate indicators. This provides a snapshot of how the Council is performing in key service areas including complaints.

Particular attention is focused on reducing identifying and addressing any recurrent causes of customer complaints, and on reducing the number of complaints being escalated to the independent complaints investigator because they haven't been dealt with satisfactorily at the earlier stages.

The Business & Development team has also undertaken continuous improvement work with the Complaints Tracker system. This includes a new auto-triage feature which ensures owners are allocated automatically by a customer choosing their own service. This eliminated the amount of manual work going into processing



complaints, and has freed up the Complaints Admin staff to complete more recording of information.

The team has also been working on refreshing staff knowledge of the complaints process and system by attending service team meetings or scheduling separate training sessions. The team is currently working with Policy and Performance Officers in services to widen the selection of resolution themes available to make reporting more useful to Heads of Service, and to add more value to their monthly and quarterly reports.

Following discussion at Civic Affairs Committee in 2018, we extended our target response period to ten working days to align with the target in our shared service partner authorities. Moving forward, with the implementation of other ICT based projects, there is a piece of work ongoing to investigate whether Complaints Tracker can be integrated with the new online customer portal. This is expected to be complete in 2019-20

## How complaints were received

Year	Face to Face %	Letter %	Email and Web %	Telephone %	Other (Comment Cards) %
2018-19	2	2	80	14	2
2017-18	2	3	86	6	3
2016-17	3	7	82	6	2

The majority of complaints were received in writing, predominantly via customers submitting their complaints themselves. 62% of complaints were logged by members of the public using the web form to report directly into Tracker.

## Compliments

2018-19	148
2017-18	147
2016-17	146

In 2018-19 compliments have stayed at a similar level to previous years. The Council received 148 compliments across all services via Complaints Tracker. As with

previous years, Customer Services and Streets & Open Spaces received the highest amount of compliments, with the majority relating to helpful staff members

We also received 7734 positive comments through GovMetric, our customer satisfaction rating system. Authorities who adopt GovMetric are benchmarked against each other to compare monthly performance. In April 2018 and January 2019 Cambridge City Council appeared in the top 10 for telephone and face to face contact, from the 70-plus councils using GovMetric.

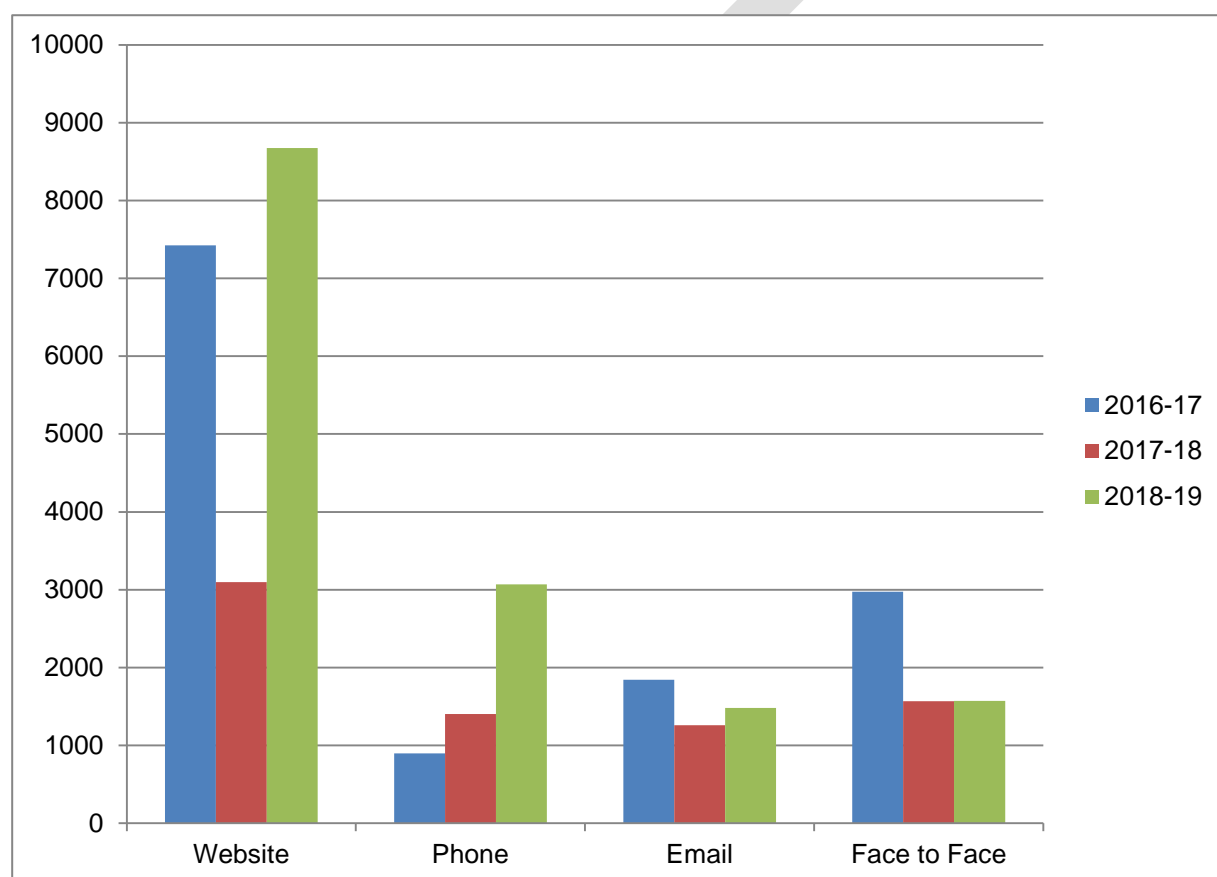
DRAFT

## GovMetric - Customer Feedback System

GovMetric is a customer feedback tool which allows us to monitor feedback and measure improvement. Customers are able to select service areas/departments, give ratings of good, average or poor and give more specific detail about their experiences if they wish.

The tool allows us to record how the feedback was received: 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, by channel, 2016-2019



Channel	Year	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Phone	2018-19	3067	88%	9%	3%
	2017-18	1405	82%	12%	6%
	2016-17	898	76%	16%	8%
Face to Face	2018-19	1572	81%	8%	11%
	2017-18	1567	76%	10%	14%
	2016-17	2974	73%	10%	16%
Email	2018-19	1482	49%	21%	30%
	2017-18	1259	57%	16%	27%
	2016-17	1843	58%	15%	27%

## Feedback received via the Customer Service Centre

With regard to phone contacts, in 2018-19 the volume of feedback received from Govmetric increased significantly in the contact centre due to a refocus within Customer Services. 88% of customers rated the service they had received from the advisor as good, demonstrating that customers appreciate the service they are receiving.

Automatic reports go to individual advisors showing the number of positive feedback results they have achieved, and these are well received by the team. We continue to publicise the performance of the whole team on communications boards within the centre and we have set an objective for each advisor to encourage three customers per day to give feedback. This approach has proved effective with the results shown above and we have also been in the top ten of all 70+ local authorities which are benchmarked by Govmetric in during 2018/19.

The feedback we receive from face to face enquiries also shows that customers value our service, with 81% of customers rating the service as good.

Feedback on email communications has remained consistent with 2018-19 performance with a slight increase in numbers of customers giving feedback.

A high proportion of the e-mail contacts rated as “poor” were in relation to the Homelink service. They were concerned primarily with delays in responses, or with the actual decision conveyed in the e-mail regarding housing allocations, rather than with the quality, or accuracy of the contact *per se*.

## Feedback received via the web site

Channel	Date	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Web	2018-19	8674	35%	14%	51%
	2017-18	3099	38%	15%	47%
	2016-17	7425	47%	18%	35%

There has been a significant increase in feedback via the web from last year. We cannot confirm exactly why this is, but following the previous changes made to the placement of the smileys (to a more prominent position on the page), we can assume that customers are now finding these again and so are using them more.

Many of the comments received via the website relate not to the website itself, but to customers' experience of other aspects of Council services.

The web team check Govmetric comments, and where possible make content amends to the website to help customers find information more easily, as well as

fixing broken links (although this is mainly done now from SiteImprove which sends us regular reports).

From recent feedback, the webteam have contacted services about improving information on pages, for example with regards to more information on taxi licensing and accessible vehicles, and better information on HIA grants and information for private tenants.

As with previous years, a number of negative comments relate to not being able to speak to advisors immediately and/or not finding phone numbers. We direct customers to our self-service (online) contact channels in the first instance, but do now (in response to feedback) provide the main Customer Service Centre number in the “contact us” information on the website. As customers become more familiar with our online channels (and as these become more user-friendly, for instance through the roll-out of the ‘MyCambridge’ portal), we would hope these kind of complaints will reduce over time.

Additionally, many customers tend to use the Govmetric on the web to relay a grievance about their overall customer experience, or about a specific service (e.g. to report noise issues or missed bins), rather than using it to comment on the website itself.

## Service Complaint Trends and Feedback

Each council department is asked to review 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 10-17 detail comments from Services on actions they have taken to prevent complaints by improving or changing their service as a result of the feedback received in 2018/19. The total in the first column is the sum of Stage 1, 2 and ICI complaints.

### Waste Services

Waste	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
2018-19	526	31	1	69%	14	9
2017-18	254	11	-	51%	7	3
2016-17	105	2	-	71%		8

#### Resolution Theme

Waste services – Missed Bin – 59%

Waste services- Bin Positioning – 12%

Waste services – Crew driver attitude – 7%

#### *Service comments from Trevor Nicoll, Head of Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service:*

The Shared Waste Service undertakes in the region 675,000 collections per month, collecting 3 bins per household per fortnight, or approximately 316,300 bin collections per month within the City. The service has increased the number of successful collections to over 99.8%.

In 2018-19, the service recorded 6,234 bins that were not collected on schedule for various reasons – two thirds of these are outside the control of the service such as blocked roads, vehicle breakdowns, or issues where the bin has not been put out for collection. However, these are normally collected within 24 hours.

Of these, 2,754 were reported to the Council and dealt with appropriately as “service requests”.

This number of missed bins was down from 28,963 recorded in 2017-18. However, the number of recorded complaints rose from 254 in 2017-18 to 526 in 2018-19.

The increased number of recorded complaints for the service during 2018/19 arose primarily from a change in the way that complaints relating to waste are now more

consistently recorded in the corporate complaints tracking system (and customer comments in the Waste service's own "Yotta" management system), combined with a change to the policy regarding missed bins and winter garden waste collection; they do not, in my view, represent a deterioration in service performance.

Essentially, customer complaints and comments are now consistently captured in the corporate complaints tracker, rather than the previous situation of complaints and comments sometimes being addressed through e-mails and phone contacts with managers in the waste service, and therefore not formally recorded. This more consistent and coherent approach allows managers to see missed bin and other management data in one place, so that any emerging trends, or problems with repeatedly missed bins, become more apparent and can be more easily addressed.

In the three months prior April to June, an average of 19 customer complaints per month and a total of 57 were recorded as complaints. At the start of July a new management system called Yotta was implemented for the recording and categorizing of problems raised by customers by all routes. At the same time, new policies were implemented regarding the service returning to collect missed bins. In the three months of July to September immediately after, an average of 51 customer complaints per month and a total of 153 were recorded as complaints.

The more than doubling of recorded waste complaints in the nine months from July to the end of the reporting year (compared to the first three months) was largely due to that change in the way complaints are recorded, alongside several seasonal service issues and the impacts of specific changes to policies. In particular, customers are now required to report missed bins in a 24 hour window, rather than up to three days later, in order for missed bins to be collected. Complaints about this change of policy are included in the total number of complaints, as are complaints about the change to green waste collection (moving to a monthly collection rather than fortnightly during the winter months).

Complaints are currently running at around two per working day, out of 14,600 bins collected each day. Given that some complaints are generated by circumstances beyond our control, I would anticipate this level of complaints may continue. The service remains committed to responding to complaints on time and to a satisfactory standard, and to reducing the number of complaints as far as possible.

## Estates & Facilities

Estates & Facilities	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
2018-19	124	8	2	58%	28	6
2017-18	89	4	1	43%	11	4
2016-17	86	4	-	62%		2

### Resolution Theme

Estates & Facilities – Delayed Repairs – 41%

General- Individual complaint – no evident trend – 20%

Estates & Facilities- Quality of repairs – 13%

### *Service comments from **Lynn Thomas, Head of Estates & Facilities***

Over the 2018/19 financial year, as a service, we completed 15,300 responsive repair jobs and carried out planned work to the value of just over £7.4 million. While there has been an increase in the number of complaints relating to the service this year, this number still represents a relatively low proportion (less than 0.8%) of our responsive repair jobs for tenants. We have improved the proportion of complaints responded to within the target timescale this year, but are determined to do much better in 2019/20 and beyond.

We are making every effort to improve the quality and efficiency of our responses to resolve complaints effectively. Part of this process is to implement a project plan in three phases. During the first phase we held training provided by the Local Government Ombudsman, with the objective to improve the investigation techniques and quality of responses by the complaint handlers, particularly as more complaints have escalated to stage 2 and on to the independent complaint investigator.

Phase 2 has been a combination of training on the complaints tracker system and detailed analysis of why the target dates were missed on cases that were not responded to on time.

We are now starting the third phase where we are analysing the 122 complaints received and looking at what the root cause and themes were. Where the service delivery may have failed we are reviewing our processes and procedures to see where improvements may be made.

The highest proportion of the root cause of the complaints received by Estates and Facilities were delays and/or service failure (combined 43%) and poor communication 16%.



I am conducting a service review which will look at the current appointment system, the waiting time experienced by tenants and the efficient deployment of work to operatives to improve their productivity and reduce fuel consumption.

The Council is currently updating and improving the housing management system and mobile working IT systems. As part of this project we are reviewing the processes and procedures behind this - one of the aims will be to improve communication with tenants and other departments within the Council.

## Environmental Services

Environmental Services	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
<b>2018-19</b>						
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Environmental Health</i>	18	2	2	39%	4	1
<i>Streets &amp; Open Spaces</i>	100	2	4	59%	11	29
<b>2017-18</b>						
<i>Environmental Health</i>	16	4	3	36%	2	-
<i>Streets &amp; Open Spaces</i>	62	5	-	56%	8	54
<b>2016-17</b>						
<i>Environmental Health</i>	22	2	-	59%	-	2
<i>Streets &amp; Open Spaces</i>	77	7	2	73%	-	36

### Resolution Theme

General- Individual complaint- no evident trend – 42%

General- Decision – 9%

General- Staff Conduct/advice given – 9%

*Service comments from **Joel Carre, Head of Environmental Services***

**Streets and Open Spaces** employs 130 frontline staff and is responsible for managing the city's streets, parks and open spaces, including public tree stock (c240,000), play areas (c80) and public toilets (20); and providing daily street cleansing, grounds maintenance and enforcement services.

Of the 100 service complaints received in 2018/19, there was no evident trend to be found. However, in terms of volume, the three highest areas of service complaint related to street cleansing (42); environmental enforcement (16) and public toilets (10). The remaining 32 complaints covered a cross-section of other service areas.

Street cleansing is a 365 day a year, city wide operation, where, on a daily basis, the team empties c1,000 public litter bins, cleans the city's streets and pavements and picks up litter on the city's 300 hectares of parks and green space. Given the scale of this operation; and with a population of c130,000 residents and a historic city core that attracts 8 million visitors a year, the number of street cleansing related complaints (42, equating to fewer than one per week) is not considered high.

In addition to the universal service demand, Streets and Open Spaces went through an operational restructure, which saw it move from a city wide to a four area-based management structure; and investing in new digital technology in 2019/20 to enable customers to report public realm issues and view delivery performance online in real time. These changes should enable us to deliver a better and more efficient service going forward

In 2018/19, the street enforcement team undertook 2,000 enforcement investigations and issued 662 fixed penalty notices, including 392 for littering and 71 for small scale fly tipping. Given the scale of the operation, the number of complaints (16, or less than 1%) is not considered high.

The third highest area of complaint (10) related to the city's public toilets. A large number of the city's 20 public toilet facilities are in older buildings, which require major capital investment and suffer from regular acts of vandalism. A number of complaints related to the condition of the toilets in Silver Street, which are the subject of a £500,000 capital investment to be undertaken in 2019/20. Other complaints related to Cherry Hinton Hall and Lion Yard toilets, which between them, required £20,000 (of the public toilet maintenance budget (£30,000)) to be spent on repairs arising from vandalism.

## Environmental Health

Environmental Health complaint figures have remained broadly the same since last year, with a total of 18 in 2018/19; and 16 in 2017/18. This is a low figure, given the high volume of enforcement and licensing cases (c4,000) managed in 2018/19, and reflects the consistently high level of customer service provided by the team. There was no evident trend to the complaints received.

## Housing Services

Housing Services 2018-19	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
<b>2018-19</b>						
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Housing Advice</i>	<b>53</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>City Homes</i>	<b>41</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>

<i>Supported Housing</i>	6	-	-	100%	-	15
--------------------------	---	---	---	------	---	----

2017-18						
<i>Housing Advice</i>	24	1	2	73%	6	2
<i>City Homes</i>	67	2	3	64%	6	8
<i>Supported Housing</i>	2	-	-	100%	-	9

2016-17						
<i>Housing Advice</i>	40	3	1	92%	-	5
<i>City Homes</i>	79	1	1	88%	-	18

### Resolution Theme

General- Individual Complaint – no evident trend 22%

Housing Advice – Home link housing application processing – 17%

Housing Advice – Homelessness/ Banding Decision – 17%

### *Service comments from **David Greening, Head of Housing:***

Housing Services continue to be concerned about the continued presence of a strong theme around Home-Link processing. The backlog of applications accrued, as outlined in last year's report, was sufficiently reduced by January 2019 to bring response times in line with our 28 day target. However, following a change of IT system in February/March 2019 response times are once again outside of target; this will be a key focus in the first half of 2019-20.

Decisions and policy complaints still continue to feature heavily as a root cause of complaints in 2018-19. The Housing Service has been reviewing a large number of its policies with 16 revised policies and procedures approved at Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2019.

A further set will be revised and put before committee for approval in 2019-20. One of the key drivers for the review was to ensure that our policies offer greater clarity to customers and that a rationale is present, enabling policies to be applied consistently.

For the Housing Advice Service and City Homes, two front line services attracting the highest level of complaints across Housing Services, there are inbuilt review mechanisms in place to enable these services to identify themes and areas for continuous improvement.

The Housing Advice Service runs a quarterly desk-top review which identifies themes and particular cases where the response to the customer fell short. Conclusions and recommendations are made which may include specific staff training, changes to policy, promotion of service standards and so on. For City

Homes a new monthly complaints resolution meeting has been established with housing officers to ensure the service is learning the lessons from complaints and feeding these into a continuous improvement process.

## Customer Services

Customer Services	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
2018-19	43	1	1	91%	38	58
2017-18	36	-	-	88%	11	30
2016-17	32	1	-	84%		31

### Resolution Theme

General – Individual complaint- no evident trend – 33%

General – Staff Conduct/advice given – 29%

Customer service- automated telephone system (inform 360) – 12%

*Service Comments from **Clarissa Norman, Customer Services Operations Manager***

In 2018-2019 Customer services handled in excess of 300,000 contacts via telephone, email and face to face and received 42 complaints. Complaints therefore equates to 0.014% of contacts received. We also received 58 compliments through tracker and 7,734 positive comments through Govmetric which equates to 2.6% of contacts – far more than the number of complaints received.

The key root cause themes of the complaints received for Customer Services are, service failure 26%, poor communication 24% and staff conduct 21 %.

Reviewing the complaints received highlighted that customers sometimes call to chase up a previous request. At this point in the contacts where complaints were received, customer services were either unable to establish the status of the request from service areas, or where they were, customers were unhappy with the update. Where the advisor is unable to resolve the issue, this has led to multi-service complaints being logged about the customer service received and the service failure which prompted the initial contact.

When this was recognised, a number of actions were taken, briefings took place in team meetings to highlight the number of complaints being received and the reasons for them, a re-education of the customer service role and the role complaints take in service improvement was given and individually advisors were coached on when to offer complaints as a mechanism for customers to have their query resolved. Since these actions were taken the number of complaints with this as the root cause have decreased.

Liaison with service areas to improve communications is something which happens routinely, however as a result of the complaints we have received, specific actions have been put in place to enable customer services to update customers effectively.

In terms of staff conduct, the % of complaints where this was the root cause has decreased from 38% in 2017-2018 to 21% in 2019. The decrease seen in the last year is positive and reflects the interventions taken and the targeted coaching which is done with the team. Performance management action plans have been put in place where a trend was established and all targets have been met as a result of these.

## Commercial Services

Commercial Services	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
<b>2018-19</b>						
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Parking Services</i>	62	1	-	98%	4	3
<i>Bereavement Services</i>	3	-	-	100%	-	1
<i>Strategic Procurement</i>	1	-	-	100%	-	-

<b>2017-18</b>						
<i>Parking Services</i>	36	1	-	69%	-	5
<i>Bereavement Services</i>	2	1	-	100%	-	2
<i>Strategic Procurement</i>	-	-	-	-	-	1

<b>2016-17</b>						
<i>Parking Services</i>	12	-	-	92%	-	3
<i>Bereavement Services</i>	1	-	-	100%	-	-

### Resolution Theme

Parking Services – Car Parking Charges – 34%

Other – 20%

Parking Services – Car Park Machines – 11%

General – Staff Conduct/advice given – 7%

Parking Services- Homeless related – 7%

General- Individual complaint – no evident trend – 5%

### *Service comments from **James Elms, Head of Commercial Services:***

The feedback that Commercial Services has gained from its customers has allowed the teams to relook at their operations.

The past year has seen the circa 2,000,000 customers at the car parks become accustomed to new contactless payment system, a new pay-by-phone provider and a tariff that has been designed to reduce congestion during the busy morning rush hour.

Parking services have reviewed the design and wording on the payment signs making the tariffs easier to understand at a glance, the sign boards for ShopMobility parking have been repositioned to help direct non-ShopMobility users away from the entrance dedicated for users of that service.

The Bereavement Service has completed in the region of 2,000+ services with mourners having to deal with some very difficult traffic conditions on the A14 to visit the crematorium. The payment process at Bereavement Services has been redesigned, reducing the time customers are waiting, putting in place a process that is robust, managed and timely.

The garage at Waterbeach has continued to grow its private customer base gaining 95.7% on the Good Garage Scheme. The garage has redesigned its waiting area providing more room and better seating for customers.

---

## Revenues & Benefits

Revenues & Benefits	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
2018-19	35	1	1	97%	13	15
2017-18	41	1	2	85%	-	8
2016-17	35	1	-	94%	-	26

### Resolution Themes

Council Tax- Decision Notice Content/Administration – 49%

General – Individual complaint – no evident trend – 17%

Other- 9%

General – Delayed/no response – 9%

Customer Service- Automated Telephone System (Inform 360) – 6%

Benefits – Decision Notice Content/ Administration- 6%

### *Service comments from **Alison Cole, Head of Revenues & Benefits:***

During the year we issued approximately 150,000 documents in relation to Council Tax and Business Rates administration, which includes bills, reminders, final notices and summonses for court action (approximately £74.6m of council tax collected from 57,800 council tax properties and £111.8m of business rates from 4,500 businesses).

For Housing Benefit administration we sent approximately 50,000 letters and documents and approximately 10,000 documents for overpayment recovery. We paid almost £42m during 2018/19 in housing benefit and council tax support to over 8,100 households.

Given the sheer volume of documents issued, with a high number of these in pursuance of non-payment of either Council Tax, Business rates or Housing Benefit repayments due to the Council, the number of complaints remains consistently low and is a testimony to the sensitive way the team handles this area of work.

We continue to consider smarter and faster ways of working with the intention of providing the most streamlined service possible, thereby reducing avoidable contacts by the customer.

---

## Community Services

Community Services	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
2018-19	10	1	-	50%	8	10
2017-18	11	1	1	70%	2	27
2016-17	23	7	-	87%	-	15

### Resolution Theme

General – Individual complaint – no evident trend – 70%

General – Delayed/ No response – 10%

General – Comment – 10%

General – Service Request/ Not a complaint – 10%

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

---

## Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service

Planning	Total Complaints	No. of Stage 2 Complaints	No. of ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	No. of Multi-Service Complaints	No. of compliments
2018-19	41	7	6	49%	1	-
2017-18	15	1	5	46%	1	-
2016-17	36	3	1	81%	-	1

### Resolution Themes

General- Individual complaint- No evident trend- 45%

General – Delayed/no response – 18%

General – Staff Conduct/advice given – 13%

Equality & Diversity – 5%



### *Service comments from Sharon Brown, Assistant Director of Delivery*

There was a significant increase in the number of planning service complaints in 2018-19 (41) compared to the previous year to 2017/2018 which had a very low number of complaints overall (15). The total number of complaints received is, however, more comparable to the number received the previous year in 2016/17 (36).

The number of Stage 2 complaints has also risen (7) compared to the two previous years (1 and 3 respectively) as well as the number of ICI complaints (6) compared to the two previous years (5 and 1 respectively).

The complaints relate to a range of issues, including the processes that the Council followed in reaching its planning decision, to dissatisfaction with planning outcomes and the responsiveness of the enforcement process as well as levels of communication and responsiveness between the service and citizens of the City. The shared planning service project is seeking to improve the resilience of the City Planning capability but remains an ongoing process which this year has resulted in a greater degree of staff turnover than in previous years as the service re-structures and re-organises itself for the future.

In response to these issues, the Planning Service is implementing new policies and processes, is investing in its recruitment offer and online information services and is investing further in planning enforcement. The service is also reviewing its training to include dedicated training on effective complaint management and avoiding actions that lead to complaints through improved analysis of areas for improvement.

It should be noted that the City Council receives over a thousand planning applications annually and the number of complaints therefore needs to be seen within this overall context.

---

## **Multi-Service Complaints**

<b>Multi Service Complaints</b>	<b>Total Complaints</b>	<b>No. of Stage 2 Complaints</b>	<b>No. of ICI Complaints</b>	<b>Complaints in Target</b>
<b>2018-19</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>67%</b>
2017-18	32	5	2	41%

Multi-Service complaints tend to be more complex and involve more officer time to investigate, which could explain the low number of complaints responded to within target. We will renew our efforts to ensure that such complaints are handled more promptly in future years.

The most common areas involved in multi-service complaints are Estates & Facilities (28), and Customer Services (38). This is to be expected as Estates & Facilities can often involve officers from the Housing service if the complaints concern decisions made by that service. Customer Services, as the first point of contact, can also be expected to be involved in multi-service complaints.

When a multi-service complaint is allocated, all Heads of Service involved are contacted to establish a lead officer who will then co-ordinate an investigation and response, including input from all relevant services involved.

Of the multi-service complaints that went to stage three, one case involving Human Resources and Streets & Open Spaces was not investigated as the nature of the complaint was outside of the ICI remit. The complainant was advised of this, and provided with alternate routes to further escalate their complaint should they so wish. One case involving Streets & Open Spaces, Safer Communities and Environmental Health was partially upheld, see page 26 for details.

## **Non-Cambridge City Council**

In addition to the complaints received for City Council services, 174 complaints were raised by customers for authorities or services not provided by the City Council.

In an effort to reduce this number and signpost the customer to the correct authority first time, we are working closely with the Complaints Tracker development team to provide guidance text on the complaints submission page.

This text will address the most common Non-CCC issues and where to register these complaints. The most common Non-CCC complaints are about Highways, Bus services and Parking tickets.

## **Other Complaints**

In 2018-19, several services were not reported on in detail due to a low number of cases. These were:

- ICT – one Stage 1 complaint
- Building Control – two Stage 1 complaints and one stage two complaint
- Housing Development Agency – one Stage 1 complaints
- Corporate Strategy – one Stage 1 complaint
- Democratic Services – one Stage 1 complaint
- Corporate Marketing – one Stage 1 complaint
- Commercial Property – one stage 1 complaint

## Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

24 new complaints were submitted to the ICI in 2018-19. Of these complaints, 4 are pending resolution as they are still being investigated at year end. 24 were investigated, 5 were upheld and 7 were partially upheld. 8 were not upheld. One complainant escalated three different complaints to the ICI, none of which were upheld.

Upheld and partially upheld Stage 3 complaints in 2018-19	
Service	Decision
Planning	Upheld
Planning	Upheld
Planning	Upheld
Property Services	Partially upheld
Multi-Service Complaint	Partially upheld
Housing Advice	Partially upheld
Waste	Upheld
Housing Advice	Partially upheld
Estates & Facilities	Partially upheld
Revenues & Benefits	Upheld
Customer Services	Partially upheld
City Homes	Partially upheld

### ICI Complaints received between 2016 – 2018-19

Period	Partially upheld	Upheld
2018-19	7	5
2017-18	1* + 7	1
2016-17	1* + 2	1* + 3

\*Complaints carried over from the previous year

## ICI Complaint Service Feedback

Pages 24-25 detail comments from Services on actions they have taken to prevent, improve or change as a result of the ICI feedback received in 2018-19

### Upheld ICI Complaints

#### Revenues & Benefits

Decision – **Upheld**

##### **Complaint Overview**

A customer called the Customer Service Centre on more than one occasion to question their Council Tax refund. They were given different information on each call and the refund was not processed by the target date given.

##### **ICI Suggested Way Forward**

- For the City Council to send a written apology in plain English recognizing the offence that had been caused to the customer. The written apology should include reassurance that the complainants future dealings with the Revenues & Benefits department will not be affected by the complaint, and all future dealings will be courteous and professional.

##### **ICI Learning points and Recommendations**

- The City Council formally write to the customer in terms which recognise and apologise for faults which have led to various poor communications in the case, and caused the customer evident anxiety.
- City Council makes payment of £100 to cover the additional time and trouble the customer had at stages 1 and 2 as their concerns were not addressed correctly until the ICI stage.

##### **Actions taken in response to feedback**

- Issues around communication and explaining information to customers clearly was addressed within team meetings to ensure accuracy and consistency.
- A cheque was raised for the £100 compensation recommendation, and a letter of apology was sent to the complainant.

#### Planning

Decision – **All three complaints were upheld**

##### **Complaint Overview**

This summary covers three complaints submitted about the same issue by two separate complainants.

Customers were not initially informed of a neighbours planning application, and were not kept informed of any developments within the case. The complainants also believed that the applicant made an amendment to the application without neighbour consultation.

### **ICI Suggested Way Forward**

The Planning Department reviews its processes for publicising planning applications and managing the consultation process to ensure that, on a case to case basis, there is consideration of the most effective processes to ensure that those who need to know, or have an interest in knowing, are engaged with.

### **ICI Learning points and Recommendations**

- The issue around emergency access to the complainants' street needs to be resolved through the ongoing wider complaint investigation associated with the development in question.
- There should be further consideration of the processes for providing notification of, and opportunities to consult on amendments to planning applications.

### **Actions taken in response to feedback**

The issue around emergency access to the complainants' street was clarified through a subsequent planning application which was approved at Planning Committee in September 2019. It was resolved through consultation with the Fire Service which clarified what the emergency access provisions would be in the event of a fire. The Planning Service also commissioned its own survey of the area to determine the width of the road at the present time. The revised application approved at Planning Committee, if implemented, would result an increased road width in the narrowest part from 3m to 3.7 metres.

We were not able to accommodate all of the ICI recommendations in terms of suggested changes to consultation processes on planning applications. This was in respect of researching the owners of properties and consulting them on each individual planning application, rather than addressing letters to occupiers as is current practice. The suggested change would not be practical and is not consistent with national practice. The Council's approach is compliant with legal requirements in terms of publicity for planning applications. However, the Planning Service is undertaking a wider review of its processes as part of the new ICT and process alignment work for the Shared Service. This will include a general review of consultation processes and letters.

## **Waste**

### **Decision – Upheld**

#### **Complaint Overview**

A customer had seen a decline in service from the waste team as there was an ongoing problem with collection of blue recycling bins despite being on an assisted collection service. The customer had a letter to say that the data for the collect and return service was being updated, but their bin continued to be missed.

### **ICI Suggested Way Forward**

- For the City Council to send a written apology in plain English recognising the failure of the service on this occasion. This letter should also recognise the time and trouble that the customer endured in trying to resolve the matter.

### **ICI Learning points and Recommendations**

- City Council makes payment of £100 to cover the additional time and trouble the customer had at stages 1 and 2 as their concerns were not addressed correctly until the ICI stage.
- That the City Council recognises the faults in this case and considers reviewing the management processes that are in place to ensure that they are sufficiently robust to ensure that services provided by the domestic waste team are capable of effectively remedying service collection failures.

### **Actions taken in response to feedback**

Following this complaint, an apology along with payment of £100 was issued to the customer. The service also took on board the ICI recommendation and carried out a review of the process for assisted bin collections.

## Partially Upheld ICI Complaints

### Housing Advice 25/10/18

#### ***Complaint: Home-Link banding decision***

Escalated to ICI as complainant believed that the Council was ignoring part of the Home-Link application form, and that they did have a valid local connection to the City.

- ICI recognised that there had been a breakdown in communication between the Housing Advice team and the applicant, which the Council had already apologised for.
- In regards to the upheld elements of this complaint, the ICI made recommendations that the Council consider incorporating a function to alert applicants when they no longer meet a banding criteria, consider moving question six of the Home-Link application to page one. Also to review the complainants application and move the customer to Band B. Furthermore the ICI recommended a review of the current Letting's policy and to carry out an EQIA of the Home-Link application process.
- Following the report, the complainants application was reviewed and they were re-banded into Band B. The other recommendations would be subject to agreement from the rest of the sub-region, so the City Council do not have full control to implement these recommendations. However, a review of the sub-regional lettings policy is scheduled for later in 2019.

### Customer Services 11/12/18

#### ***Complaint: Staff Conduct***

Complainant believed that their original request for service was not processed and led to the situation with their overflow pipe getting worse. The complainant also believed that the numerous advisors they spoke to were rude and unhelpful.

- ICI recognised that there had been a delay in escalating the issue, and that the calls with advisors could have been handled better by one advisor. An apology was sent by the Head of Customer Services, and 1-2-1 coaching was carried out with the staff member.

### City Homes 06/01/19

#### ***Complaint: Neighbour Dispute issues***

Complainant was unsatisfied the Council's ability to find a practical solution to an ongoing dispute with their neighbour, and the Council should accept responsibility for the neighbour feeding wildlife.

- ICI recognised that the Council had attempted to rectify the dispute, but the measures put in place were not effective in doing so. ICI recommended a way forward, and a monitoring period to enable a City Homes manager to review the issues raised.
- Following the ICI recommendations decoys were installed at both the complainants and their neighbours property in an attempt to deter the wildlife. The housing officer for the area visited weekly for a period of four weeks to

monitor the situation. Following an emergency referral to the Tenancy Enforcement Panel, the case was referred to the ASB team to take the lead on a further investigation

### **Property Services 18/05/18**

#### ***Complaint: Discrimination against type of business***

Complainant did not feel that the Council acted fairly in determining their application for their business venture into one of the Council commercial units.

- ICI partially upheld the complaint and felt that personal opinions did enter into the decision rationale. Recommendations were made to pay £250 compensation and issue a letter of apology, including reassurance that any further correspondence would adhere to the Equalities Act 2010.
- Following the upheld elements of this complaint, all recommendations from the ICI were carried out by the service.

### **Multi-Service (Housing, Safer Communities) 12/07/18**

#### ***Complaint: Failure to manage customer expectations***

Complainant was unhappy that they had been offered a Council property which neighboured a property with a history of anti-social behaviour. The complainant was not informed of this prior to moving in, or being offered the property.

- ICI report recommendations state that City Council consider reviewing its risk assessment processes of tenancy lettings, and write to the complainant to acknowledge that a mistake was made. The ICI also made a recommendation of compensation in respect of the partially upheld complaint.
- A letter of apology was sent to the complainant regarding the impact of their neighbours behaviour. City Homes reviewed their procedures and included a risk assessment as part of any referrals to the Tenancy Enforcement Panel. Compensation was agreed with the tenant and offered, but it was later refused, and the complainant escalated their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, and the Local Government Ombudsman. Their complaint was upheld by both.

### **Estates & Facilities 17/09/18**

#### ***Complaint: Council not carrying out adaptations to property***

Complainant escalated to ICI as they had requested disabled adaption work was carried out to their property, and the Council had not permitted this work. Complainant did not feel that the Council explained why we were unwilling to support and fund these adaptations, and that all available Occupational Health and medical assessments were not considered.

- ICI found that the rationale behind the decision had not been articulated to the customer. The decision did not specifically address why the proposed adaptations were rejected. The ICI found that the officer who made the decision had not been kept up to date with new medical information, so was not at



fault. ICI recommended that Head of Estates and Facilities review the decision.

- Following the ICI recommendations, all Managers were retrained by the LGO in complaints handling, and further support was given to the Adaption Officer in handling responses to complaints. The complainant was offered the chance to meet with Senior Managers, and a review of the policy was carried out.

### **Housing Advice 01/10/18**

#### ***Complaint: Housing application processing***

This complaint was escalated to Stage 3 as they believed they had not been treated fairly by the Home-Link bidding process. The complainant felt that as they had friends in similar situations who had been housed, that they should also be housed by the City Council. The complainant was also not happy with the wording of the decision letter. The complainant made further reference to comments made by a Customer Service Advisor and a Housing Advisor.

- ICI recommended a letter of apology for the comments made within the decision letter and ensure that Housing Advice Officers and Customer Service Advisors are aware of the impact of their comments.
- A Senior Manager from the Housing Advice team wrote to the complainant to apologise for the comments made by the Customer Service Advisor, and the style and tone of part of the email from the Housing Advisor. This was also followed up with both officers to make sure they were aware of the impact of their comments.

## Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

If customers are not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled they can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's office. The LGSCO investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and other bodies. In 2018-19 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman received 13 enquiries and complaints relating to Cambridge City Council. As a result of the LGO's detailed investigations, three were upheld.

Department	No of Complaints Received	Decision
Housing	4	1 Incomplete/Invalid 1 Referred back for local resolution 2 Advice given
Revenues & Benefits	2	1 Closed after initial enquiries 1 Referred back for local resolution
Highways & Transport	1	1 Referred back for local resolution
Corporate & Other Services	1	1 Referred back for local resolution
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	2	<b>1 Upheld</b> 1 Closed after initial enquiries
Planning & Development	3	<b>2 Upheld</b> 1 Closed after initial enquiries
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3 Upheld</b>

### Yearly comparison 2015 – 18

Year	Total Enquiries Received	Change
2018-19	13	-32%
2017-18	19	+11%
2016-17	17	+6%

### 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 2018-19, the Council received two complaints about the conduct of Councillors.

Both complaints involved the conduct of a Councillor at a Committee meeting but in neither case was it the opinion of the Monitoring Officer or Independent Person that there had been a breach of the Member Code of Conduct. Both complaints were therefore dismissed.

There were 4 complaints in 2016/17 and 2 complaints in 2017/18. 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](mailto:tom.lewis@3csharedservices.org)

## Appendix 1 - 3 Year Service Comparison

