

Chichester District Council

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE 29 September 2015

Complaints/ Freedom of Information and Data Protection Analysis - 2014/15

1. Contacts

Report Author

Fiona Delahunty – Customer Service Centre Manager

Telephone: 01243 534734

E-mail: fdelahunty@chichester.gov.uk

2. Recommendation

The Corporate Governance and Audit Committee is requested to consider the information provided in this report and to make any appropriate recommendations as to future monitoring arrangements to identify business improvement.

3. Background

3.1 The Corporate Governance and Audit Committee receive an annual analysis of all formal complaints and compliments, freedom of information requests and data subject access requests received by the authority, together with a summary of the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Report.

3.2 This report is in response to the work plan of Overview and Scrutiny Committee which sought some detail as to the process for identifying trends and potential to address issues and/or amend practices to improve service delivery.

3.3 The Council's complaints procedure:

The complaints procedure has three stages:

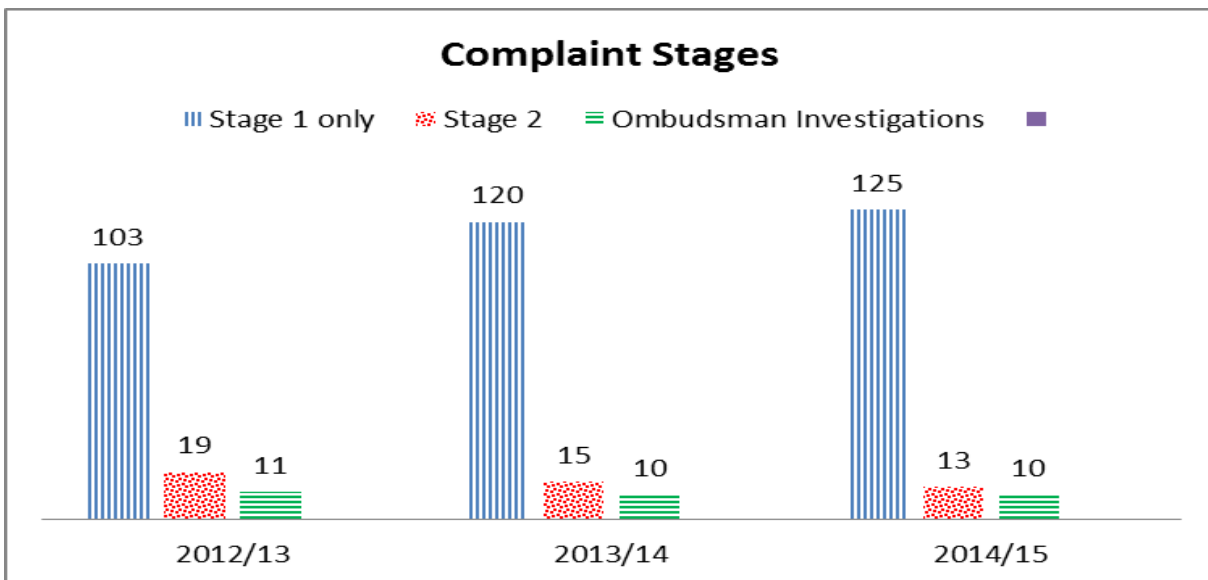
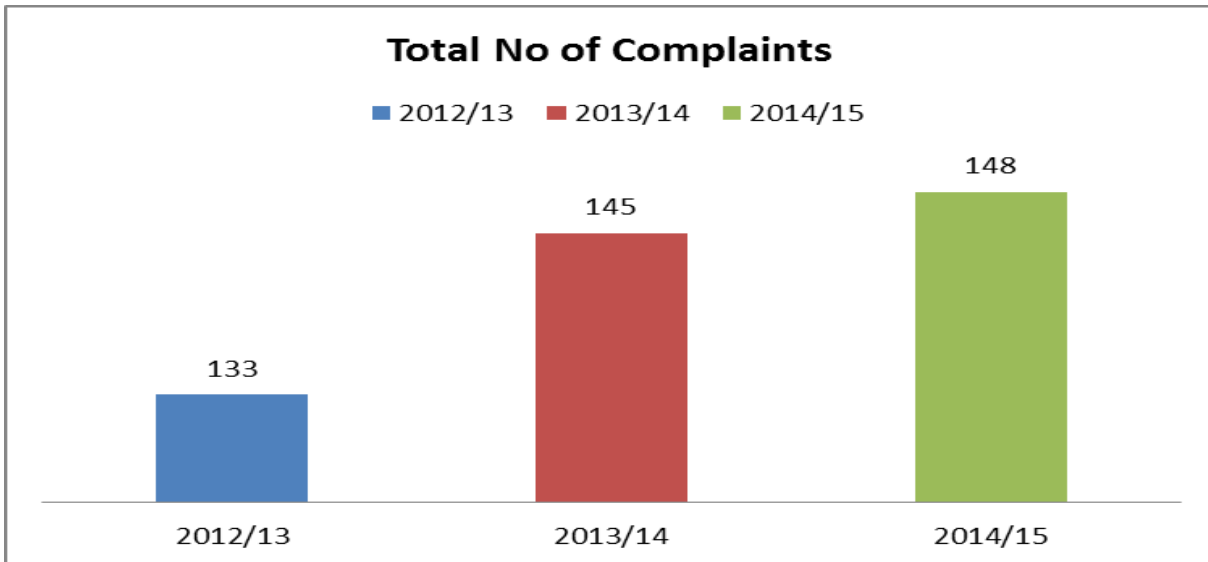
Stage 1 – Initial complaint investigated by the Manager responsible for the service team.

Stage 2 – If the customer is dissatisfied with the response to stage 1, the investigation is reviewed by the Head of Service for that team.

Stage 3 – If the customer is dissatisfied with response to stage 2, they are offered the opportunity to seek an independent investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman.

3.4 From April 2014 – March 2015 the Council received 148 complaints. 91% of those were responded to within the 10 day target date. This is an improvement of 4% on the previous year.

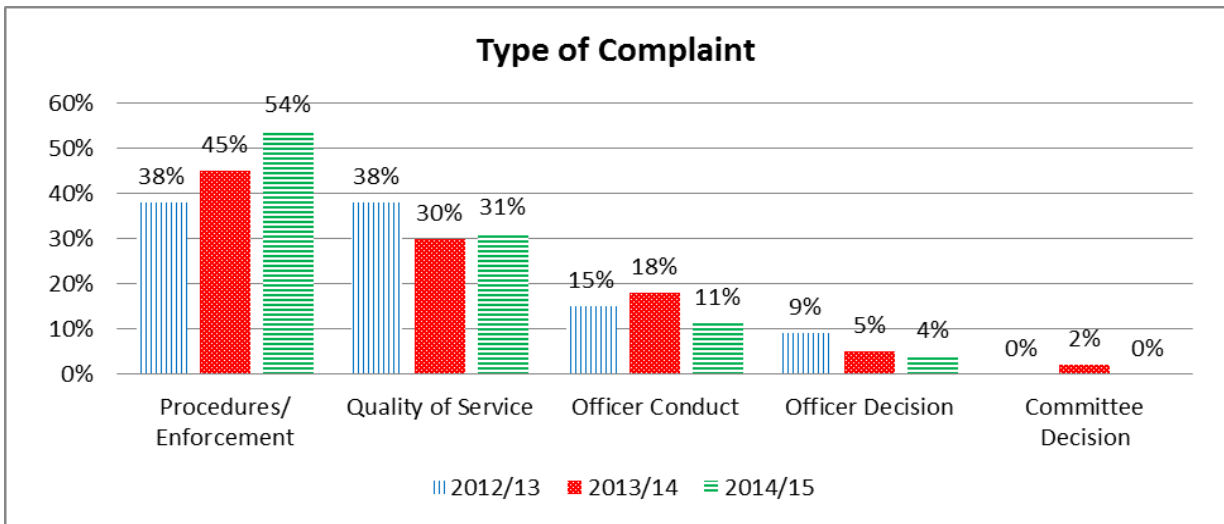
3.5 During the preceding three years, the following complaints have been received:



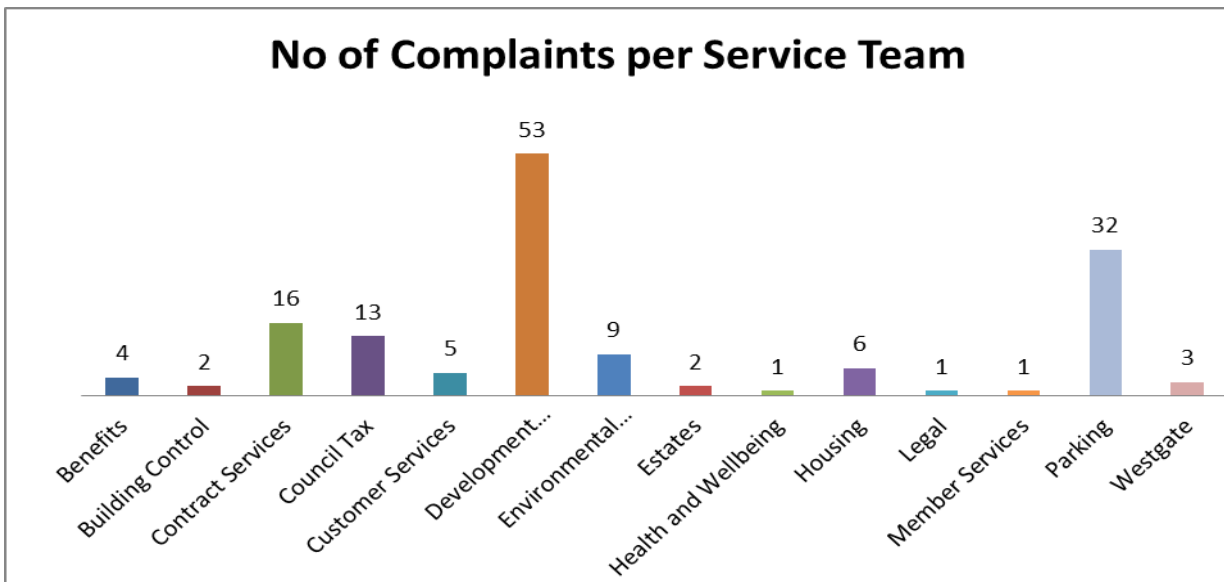
The Ombudsman upheld one complaint regarding the delayed response by the bailiff, regarding a statement of costs and a response to a conditional offer of payment.

The decision was there is fault by the Council because its bailiff visited the customer to collect council tax arrears when she had written to ask for details and offered to make payment. The Council agreed to pay £100.00 as recommended as a remedy by the Ombudsman. As a result of this complaint the Bailiffs have improved their procedures

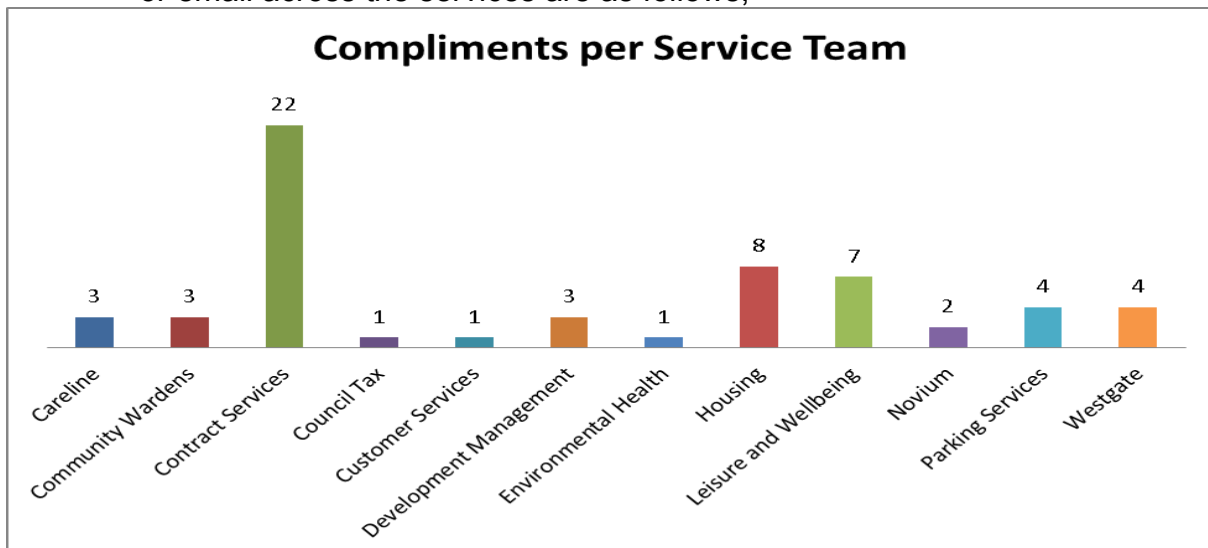
- 3.6 All complaints are recorded, categorised and monitored by Customer Services. During the preceding 3 years, the percentage of complaints have related to the following categories:



The percentage of Procedures/Enforcement and Quality of Service complaints have increased. However Officer Conduct and Decision complaints have reduced. The number of complaints received by service for 2014/15 is as follows;



3.7 Compliments are also recorded. The number of compliments received by letter or email across the services are as follows;



4.0 Learning Points

Each complaint can be an opportunity to make changes or service improvements., examples of some of the learning points and improvements made as a result of complaints during 2014/15 include:

- 4.1 The Customer Service Centre send an escalation request to the Service Team Manager and the Customer Services Manager if a customer has made a repeat request for a call back. This is to ensure a call back that working day.
- 4.2 Improved procedures introduced by the Bailiffs employed by the Council.

5.0 Outcomes to be achieved

- 5.1 The primary purpose of investigating complaints is to resolve customer dissatisfaction where possible. However, by recording and monitoring the nature of complaints, it is possible to identify trends or address issues to avoid future complaints and to improve service delivery and/or to contribute to a review of policy.
- 5.2 Each Head of Services has access to monthly reports containing the detail of all complaints received and their service areas performance in dealing with each complaint.
- 5.3 Not all customers wish to formalise their complaint but it is important for us as an organisation to understand areas where there is dissatisfaction and to try to rectify it. To this end, other channels of feedback and performance monitoring are made available with mechanisms in place to address issues:-

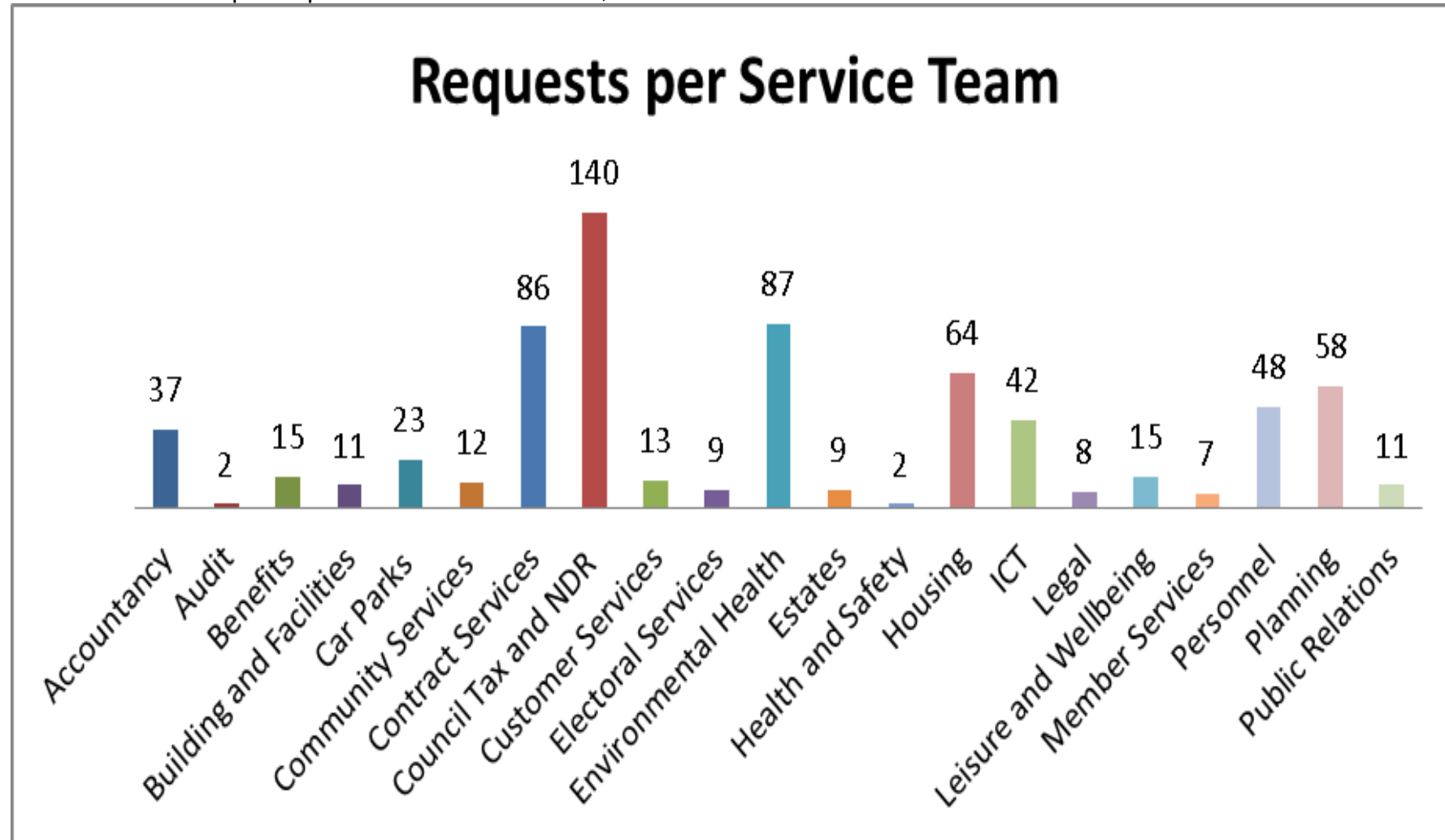
The website has a generic email account called CDC Complaints. Often customers will use this to report an issue. These are forwarded to the appropriate service area to contact the customer and deal with the request.

- 5.3.1 The website has the option to provide feedback on usability and usefulness on each page. This information is fed back to the service areas responsible for the appropriate page.
- 5.3.2 The Customer Service Centre undertakes monthly performance monitoring with customers contacting the Council by telephone and those visiting the Reception Service. This information is used to identify areas where service improvements may be made.
- 5.3.3 All telephone calls to the Customer Service Centre are recorded and monitored. These recordings are used to mentor and train staff with a view to improving quality of service.
- 5.3.4 The Council have a Facebook and Twitter account which is a quick and easy way for customers to make contact and provide feedback.

6.0 Freedom of Information Requests

- 6.1 The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act gives people the right to ask the Council for recorded information they have on any subject. If the request relates to environmental information, this will be handled under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs). We are required to reply within strict deadlines, giving the information requested, or explaining why we cannot provide that information.
- 6.2 The Customer Services team administer the FOI process.
- 6.3 From April 2014 – March 2015 793 requests for information were received, 94 of these were redirected to other agencies.
- 6.4 94% of the Requests were answered within the 20 working day deadline.
- 6.5 The number of requests received can take up a great deal of officer time in collating the responses. Many requests continue to be received from the press or from commercial organisations.. The legislation does not provide for the Council to recover costs for the officer time involved unless the estimated staff costs involved locating or compiling the information exceeds £450. Under these circumstances, we can refuse the request on grounds of cost, or charge the applicant £25 per hour for the estimated work.

The Number of Enquiries per service are as follows;



From the recorded information we have identified our most popular requests are as follows;
Public Health Funerals
Credit Balances on Non Domestic Rates
Information on Contracts held by the Authority
Car Parking Income.

7.0 Data Protection Requests

The Data Protection Act 1998 provides individuals with the right to access their personal information. The Council are required to provide any personal information held manually or electronically within 40 calendar days of the request being made. The Act also provides exemptions for statutory agencies to access personal information held by the authority, particularly in relation to crime or fraud. In the year 2014-15 the Council received 13 requests for information from external agencies and 8 requests from individuals requesting their personal data held by the authority.

8.0 Improvements to Procedures and Publications

- 8.1 Make publicly available our frequently asked requests on the transparency page on our website
- 8.2 Non Domestic Rate information will shortly be published on our website
- 8.3 Requests from Media will be copied to the Public Relations Team
- 8.4 Publish annual report of requests on our website

9.0 Proposal

- 9.1 To continue with existing monitoring and recording of formal complaints, freedom of information and subject data access requests.
- 9.2 To continue to provide feedback and performance to service areas to provide opportunity to improve service delivery.
- 9.3 To continue to provide performance monitoring within the Customer Service Centre to gain customer insight and improve service delivery.

10.0 Alternatives that have been considered

- 10.1 None

11.0 Resource and legal implications

There is a legal obligation to comply with the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts. Compliance does require a significant amount of staff time. However the Customer Services Manager and Head of Business Improvement Services have gained a Practitioner qualification for Freedom of Information to help assist and advise staff in dealing with requests.

12.0 Consultation

- 12.1 None

13.0 Community impact and corporate risks

13.1 None.

14.0 Other Implications

	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder:		X
Climate Change		X
Human Rights and Equality Impact	x	
Safeguarding		X
Other (please specify) eg biodiversity		x

15.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Complaints analysis 2014/15

16.0 Background Papers

16.1 Complaints Procedure

16.2 Procedure for dealing with requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 & Environmental Information Regulations 2004