 Brent	<p align="center">Scrutiny Committee 8th October 2015</p> <p align="center">Report from the Operational Director – Strategic Commissioning</p>
For decision	
<p align="center">Complaints Annual Report 2014 - 2015</p>	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of corporate complaints received by the Council during the period April 2014 to March 2015. Complaints concerning the Adult Social Care and Children and Young People Departments come under separate statutory complaint procedures. Legislation requires those services to produce annual reports. These are included as appendices A and B to this report and provide a detailed analysis in respect of each department. Headline figures for those departments have been included in the body of this report, for the purposes of comparison.

2.0 Recommendations

Members of the Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:-

- 2.1 consider and comment on the council's performance in managing and resolving complaints.
- 2.2 note the actions being taken to improve response times to complaints and reduce the number of complaints which escalate to the final review stage.

3.0 Headlines

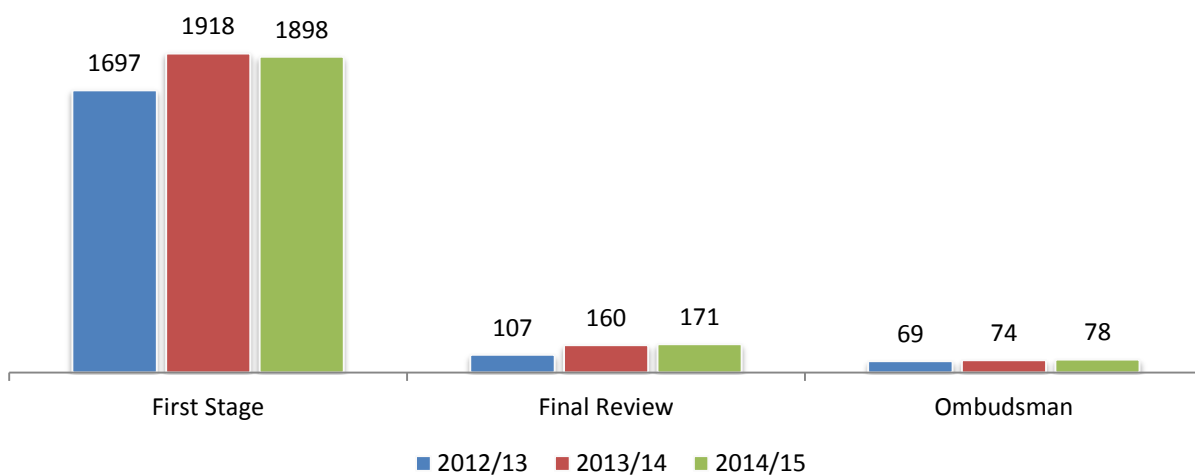
- A total of 1898 first stage complaints were received between April 2014 and March 2015, representing a reduction of 20 on the previous year.
- A total of 1717 complaints were successfully resolved at the first stage, representing 91% of the total investigated. This is in line with the previous years' result, however it is 3% higher than that achieved in 2012/13.
- 38% of the final stage investigations resulted in the complaint being fully or partly upheld, indicating some degree of fault with the earlier investigation
- 278 first stage complaints were resolved within 5 working days or less, which saved the Council the staff costs associated with a full investigation.
- With the exclusion of Brent Housing Partnership, 77% of first stage corporate complaints were responded to on time, up from 74% the previous year. This is still considerably below the Council's performance target of 100% within the deadline.
- 74% of complaints were made on-line, up from 70% the previous year. 35% of customers recorded their complaint directly onto the Council's complaints database.
- Compensation awards increased by £56k to £78k with slightly more awarded at the final stage in comparison with first stage complaints
- iCasework became the sole IT system for recording/managing complaints received by the Council and Brent Housing Partnership with effect from November 2014,
- Service improvements identified through complaint investigations helped make the Council a stronger organisation

4.0 Detailed Considerations

4.1 A total of 1898 first stage complaints were received between April 2014 and March 2015, representing a reduction of 20 on the previous year. A total of 1717 complaints were successfully resolved at the first stage, representing 91% of the total investigated. This is in line with the previous years' result, however it is 3% higher than that achieved in 2012/13.

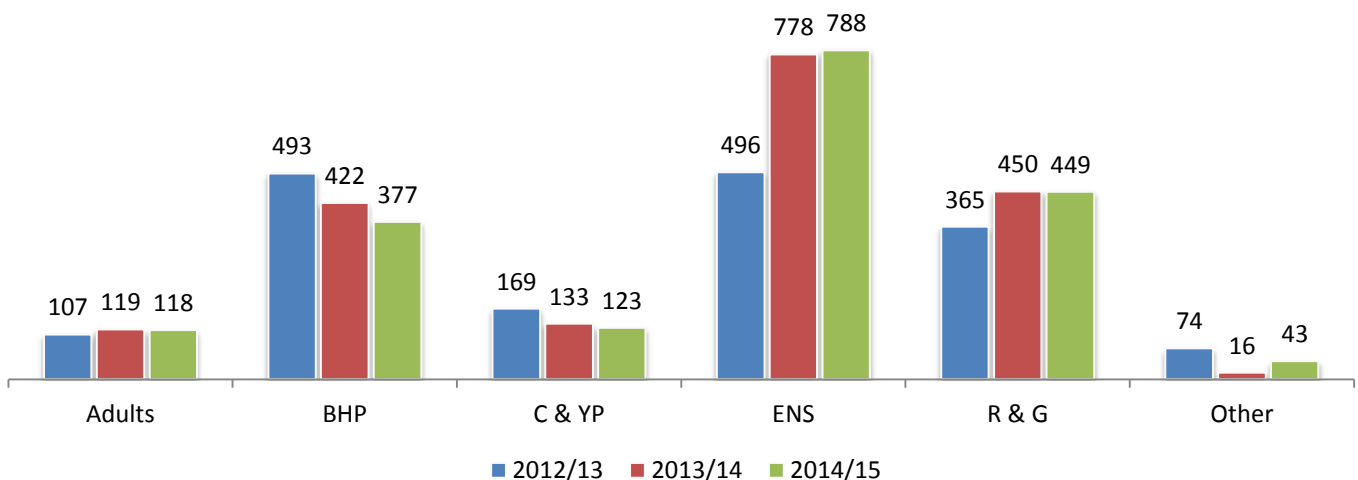
4.2 Although response rates improved marginally, there were still a significant number of complaints not responded to within the deadline. This report comments on the steps that are being taken to improve response times and what needs to be done to address the rise in escalated complaints experienced over the past two years.

4.3 Graph 1: Complaints received in comparison with previous years



4.4 BHP and Regeneration and Growth experienced significant rates of complaints escalating from stage 1 to 2 at 14% and 15% respectively. This contrasts with Environment and Neighbourhoods, which had an escalation, rate of less than 5%. The rate of escalation and what can be done to reverse this trend is discussed further on in this report.

4.5 Graph 2: First stage complaints received by departments



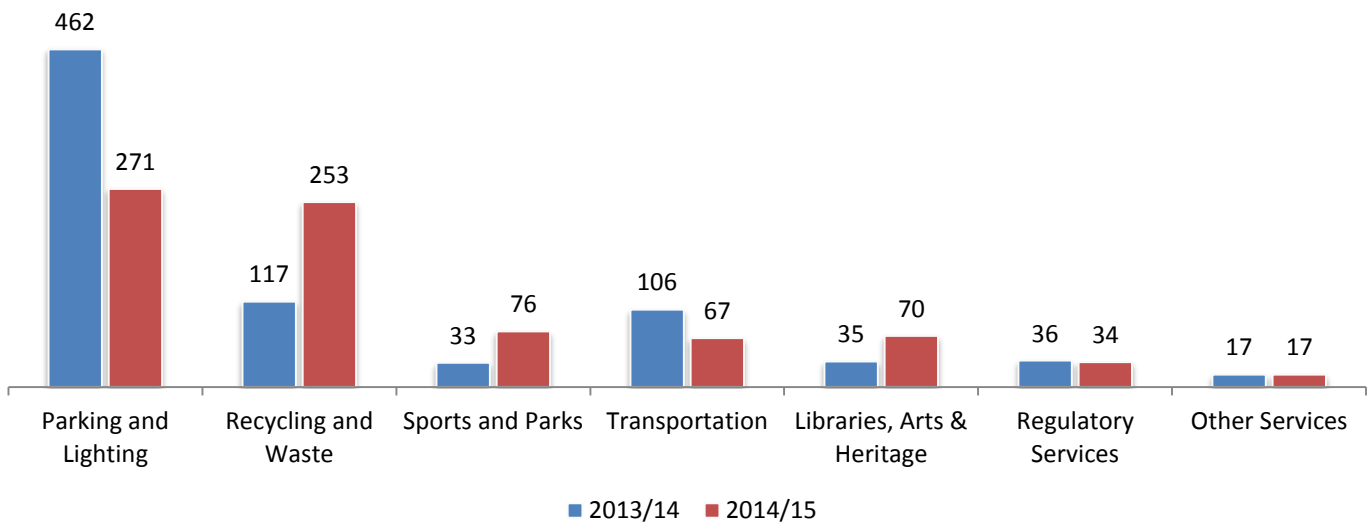
4.6 A further breakdown of complaints affecting the two departments that receive most complaints is provided below. Environment and Neighbourhoods accounted for a high proportion of the total

complaints received by the Council, which continued the trend from the previous year. This is largely a reflection of the customer facing services for which that department is responsible. The column headed “Other”, in the main relates to complaints relating to Legal and the Finance Service Centre.

4.7 Breakdown of Environment & Neighbourhood Services complaints

Parking and Lighting and Recycling and Waste accounted for two-thirds of the complaints the Department received. A further analysis of complaints relating to those services is set out in the pie charts below. Parking and lighting complaints reduced by 195 in comparison with 2013/14 and reflects the ‘bedding down’ of the ‘virtual permit’ initiative which gave rise to a large number of complaints when introduced in 2013. In addition improved recording practices, meant that customers raising concerns about Penalty Charge Notices, were correctly directed to the appeal process, when previously they had been recorded as ‘complaints’. Recycling and Waste complaints increased by 136 in comparison with 2013-14. Analysis has revealed that the increase is largely due to customer dissatisfaction with the Council’s decision to introduce charging for the collection of garden waste, which has proved controversial with some residents.

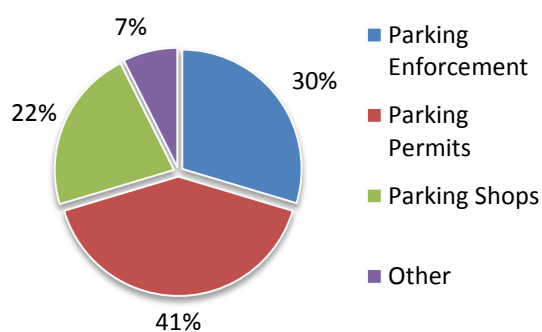
Graph 3 : Environment & Neighbourhood Services complaints



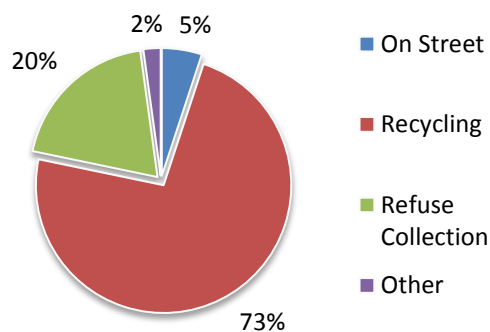
4.8 Spotlight on Parking and lighting and Recycling and Waste

The move away from a manual to an on-line service for ordering permits is reflected in the complaint figures, as are those relating to the closure of the parking shops. Many residents preferred the traditional method for ordering permits via the parking shops. Complaint numbers reduced as residents became more used to the on-line system. Turning to Recycling and Waste, a high proportion of the complaints recorded under the Recycling category, relate to customer dissatisfaction with the Council’s decision to introduce charging for garden waste.

Graph 4 (a) Parking and lighting



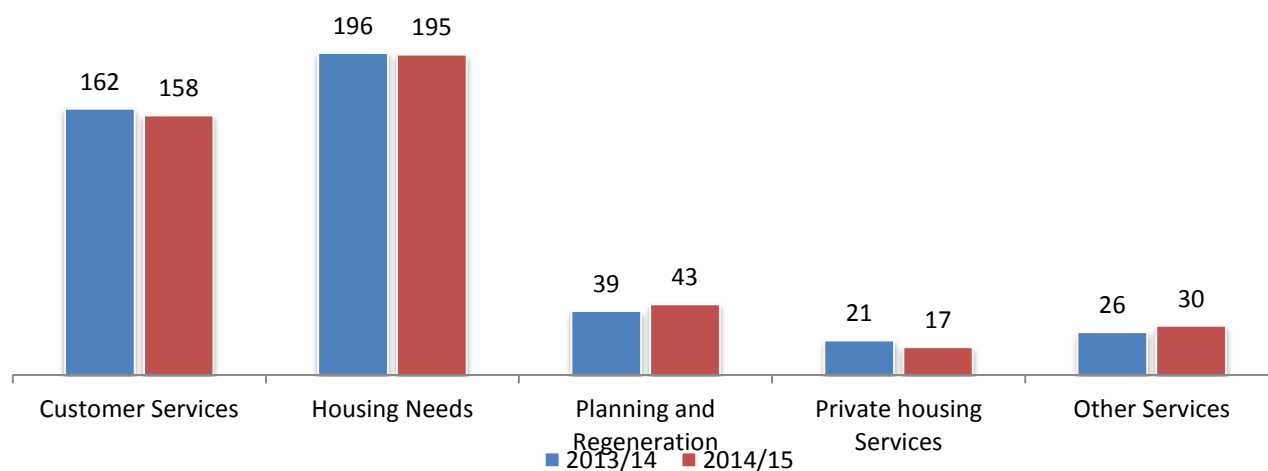
Graph 4 (b) Recycling & Waste



4.9 Breakdown for Regeneration & Growth

With a total of 195 complaints, Housing Needs continued to attract the Department's largest number. This is not surprising given the increasingly challenging nature of their work and the inclination of customers to use the complaints process in the hope of having a housing decision reviewed. Customer Services encompasses the contact centre and a range of other customer facing services, therefore, the number should be seen in the context of the high volume of customer contacts the service experiences on a daily basis. A further breakdown of the figures for Customer Services and Housing Needs is set out in the charts below.

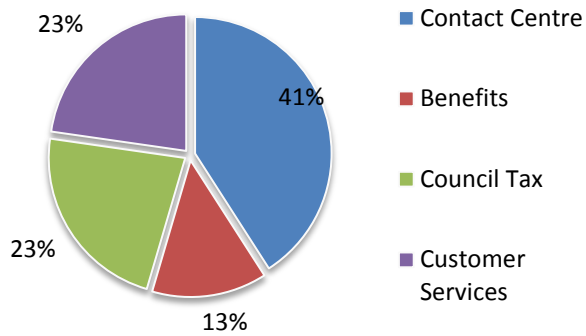
Graph 5: Regeneration and Growth complaints



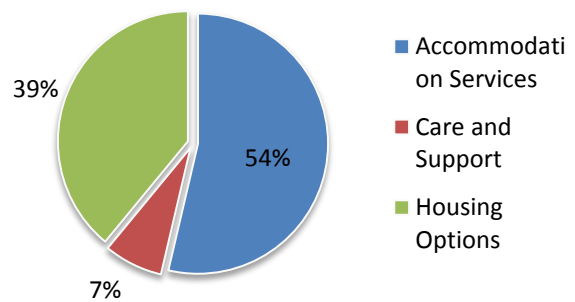
4.10 Spotlight on Customer Services and Housing

A total of 65 complaints related to the Contact Centre and concerned dissatisfaction with the time taken to get through the service, or concerns about how they were dealt with by the officer. This is a low number of complaints, bearing in mind the service handles 30,000 customer enquiries each month. Housing Benefits received 36 complaints, which again is a small number bearing in mind the large number of customers and claims they deal with. Accommodation Services accounted for 54% of the complaints received by Housing Needs, and reflects the pressures the service experienced in sourcing suitable temporary accommodation. The Housing Options figure reflect the pressures associated with the severe shortage of suitable and affordable accommodation within the Borough coupled with the need to place many families out of Borough.

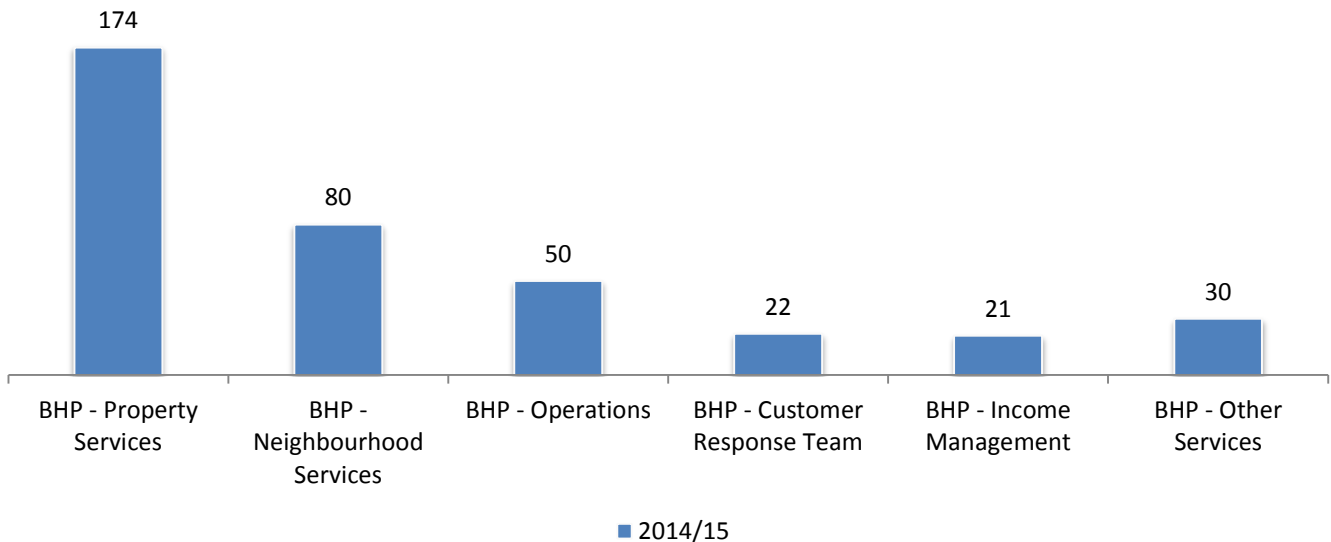
Graph 6 (a) Customer Services



Graph 6 (b) Housing Needs

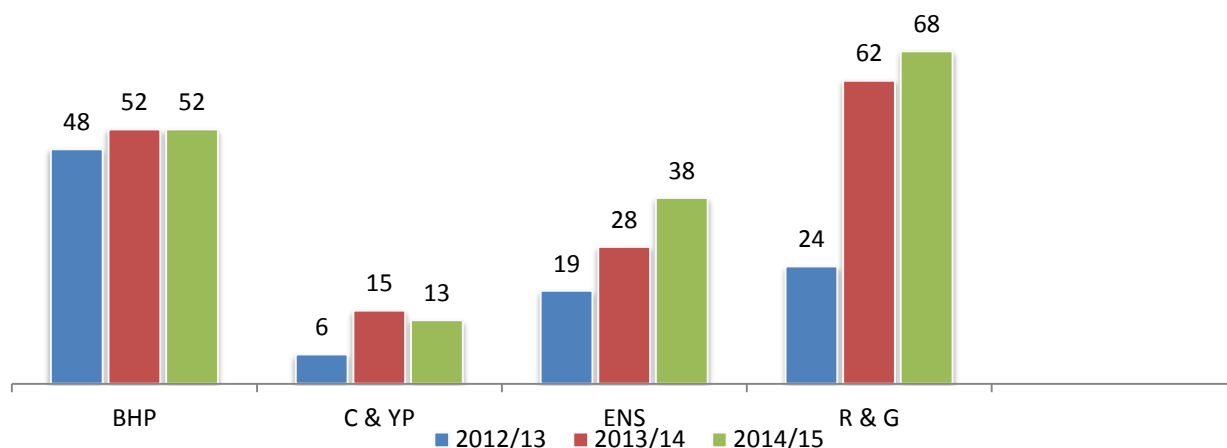


4.11 Graph 7: Breakdown of BHP complaints



4.12 The 174 Property Services complaints were overwhelming repairs related, as has been the case in previous years. Typically, complaint concern dissatisfaction with the time taken to carry out a repair, or with the quality of the work provided. It should be noted that repairs-related complaints fell by 129 in comparison with the previous year. During the year, BHP introduced a new approach to responding to reports from tenants about outstanding repairs. The new procedure, involves BHP seeking to arrange 'straightforward' repairs to be carried out within 48 hours of the tenant making the report. Previously, these issues would have been recorded as complaints. Neighbourhood services, incorporates tenancy management. Many of their complaints were from tenants dissatisfied with the actions or lack of actions BHP had taken in connection with reports of neighbour nuisance or anti social behaviour.

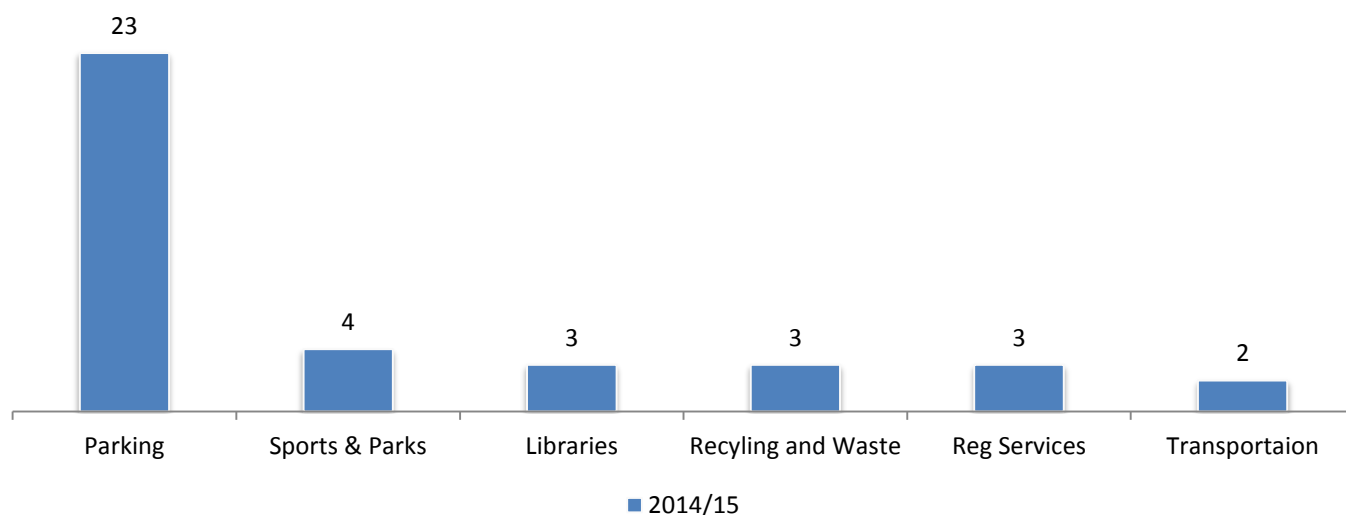
4.13 Graph 8: Final Review complaints received



4.14 A total of 171 final review investigation requests were received, representing an escalation rate of 9%, which was consistent with the previous year, although it should be noted that this is 3% higher compared to 2012/13. Regeneration and Growth accounted for 68 of the final review complaint investigations, with Housing Needs (31) and Planning (20) receiving the most. The majority of Environment and Neighbourhoods final review complaints related to Parking and Lighting (23).

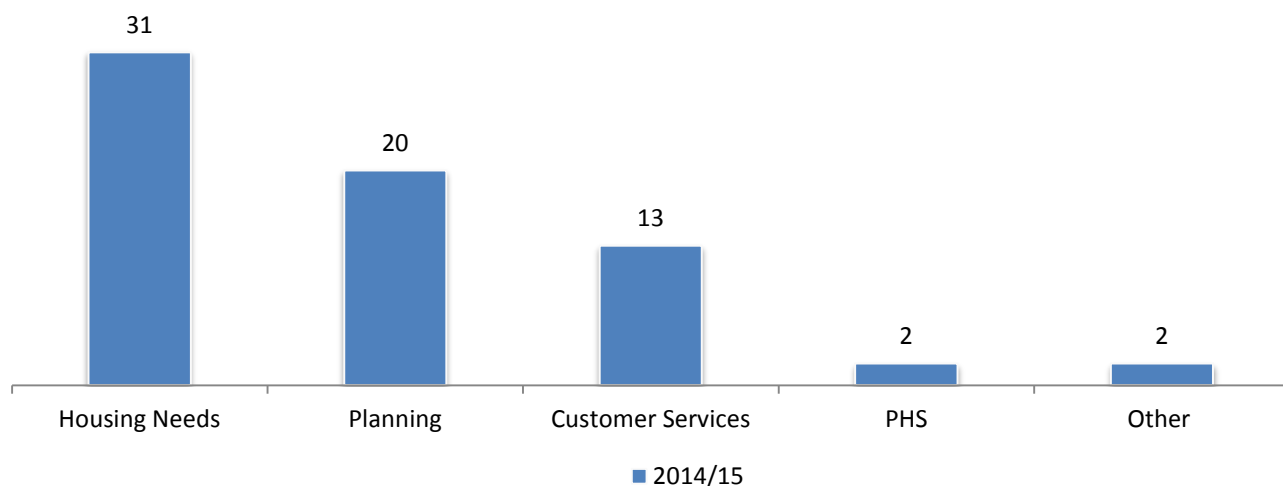
4.15 A detailed breakdown of complaints received for the two departments is below. The Council received 52 final stage escalation requests relating to BHP, representing an escalation rate of 14%, which is higher than the average for the Council. Two-thirds of these complaints (35 in total), were upheld when investigated at the final stage. These factors indicate that the first stage investigations failed to adhere to the requirements set out in the complaint investigation standard. This is commented on further in section 3.7 and 3.8 of this report.

4.16 Graph 9 : Breakdown of escalated complaints for Environment and Neighbourhoods



4.17 There was an overall increase of 10 escalated complaints compared with 2013-14. 'Parking' complaints, which encompasses issues relating to parking enforcement, and residents/visitor permits increased by 7. This made Parking and Lighting's escalation rate 8%. This is still below the Council average. Of the 23 parking and lighting complaints considered at the final review stage only 8 resulted in the complaint being fully or partly upheld.

4.18 Graph 10: Breakdown of escalated complaints for Regeneration and Growth



4.19 Housing Needs, had the largest number of escalated complaints, with 31 escalating to the final stage of the complaints process, representing an escalation rate of 15%. Officers frequently have to make difficult decisions that impact on a person's housing situation. Not surprisingly some customers are reacting to what they perceive to be a 'negative' decision by raising complaints and generally using the complaints process as a means to have decisions reviewed. It is worth noting that when considered through the final stage investigation process, two-thirds of escalated Housing Needs complaints were either not upheld or had insufficient basis to justify a further investigation. Similarly, only 2 out of 20 escalated Planning complaints were subsequently upheld.

4.20 Why complaints escalated

4.21 Analysis of escalated complaints indicates that the reasons why customers considered it necessary to escalate their complaints fell into three main categories:

- Persistent complainants, who disagreed with the stage 1 decision, irrespective of the quality of the decision
- The complainant considered that the initial complaint response had not addressed all the issues they had raised in their complaint
- The complainant considered that the remedy put forward at the initial stage to resolve the complaint was inadequate. A remedy is often represented by financial compensation, although not exclusively so.

4.22 In 61 cases (35% of escalated complaints), the Complaints Service determined that there were insufficient reasons for carrying out a further investigation. In the main, these were the cases referred to above, where the customer had disagreed with the stage 1 decision but had not given sufficient justification for a further full scale investigation to be undertaken. The remaining cases were subject to further investigation because the Complaints Service considered that the earlier investigation had either not addressed the complaint as thoroughly as it should have or had not remedied the complaint appropriately, for example, an insufficient amount of compensation had been awarded.

4.23 As part of its complaints policy, the Council has a Complaint Investigation Standard, which all complaint investigations are required to adhere to. The aim of the standard is to ensure that investigations are carried out to a consistent, high standard, resulting in the customer being less likely to want to escalate their complaint to the second stage. Under the standard, the investigator is required to complete an investigation plan setting out the issues that need to be addressed. The plan should be signed off by the relevant Operational Director or if necessary delegated to the Head of Service before the investigation commences. Based on an analysis of records taken from iCasework, in half of the escalated complaints, the investigation plan had not

been completed to a reasonable standard and agreed by a senior officer, or had not been completed at all. This helps explain why the customer considered that the initial investigation had not addressed all the issues raised and provided a through response. This report recommends that CMT reminds their DMT's of the requirement to adhere to the Complaint Investigation Standard in respect of those investigations that they oversee. Extensive training on the standard has been delivered to officers across the Council and further guidance is available on the complaints webpage and from the Complaints Service Team.

4.24 Table 1: What was the outcome of investigations?

	First Stage						Final Stage					
	Upheld / Part Upheld	%	Not Upheld	%	Early Resolution	%	Upheld / part Upheld	%	Not Upheld	%	Further investigation not necessary	%
Adults	64	56	37	33	14	13						
BHP	191	63	102	34	10	3	35	63	5	9	16	28
C & YP	64	49	46	35	21	16	1	8	11	92	0	0
ENS	272	36	289	38	194	26	8	25	9	28	15	47
R & G	134	33	235	57	43	10	26	35	20	27	28	38
Other	10	30	17	52	6	18	0	0	2	50	2	50
Total	544	38	624	43	278	19	70	39	47	26	61	35

4.25 38% of first stage investigations (544 in total), were upheld or partly upheld, down from 47% the previous year. This remains a relatively high percentage and is a healthy indication of departments' willingness to recognise faults within their respective services and seek to remedy them at an early stage. It is important to note that 278 first stage complaints were resolved in five days or less – the table above refers to them as “Early Resolution” cases. The early resolution approach was introduced two years ago in recognition of the fact that many complaints have the potential to be resolved quickly, thereby avoiding the costs in management time etc. associated with a full investigation.

4.26 Out of 178 final stage complaints considered by the Complaints Service Team, 70 resulted in the complaint being fully or partly upheld. This represents 39% of all final stage cases considered, and compares with 30% in 2013/14 and 19% in 2012/13. In effect, these complaints represent those where the further investigation found some degree of fault with the stage 1 decision and by implication, the stage 1 investigation.

4.27 35 out of the 56 final stage investigations involving BHP were fully or partly upheld. This is an especially high figure when compared with the Council average of 30%, and highlights the need for the service to adhere to the complaint investigation standard referred to earlier. The Complaints Team has delivered complaints training to BHP and will be working with BHP further to develop an action plan designed to improve the quality assurance aspect of BHP's investigations.

4.28 When an escalation request is received, the Complaints Team undertakes an assessment of the complaint to determine whether a further full investigation is warranted. Where we are fully satisfied that the Stage 1 investigation had been conducted thoroughly and there is no new evidence or information presented, we explain this to the customer, and inform them of their right to go to the Ombudsman. Following assessment, 35% of escalation requests fell into this category. This approach, which was introduced two years ago, helps ensure that investigation resources are focused on those complaints where there is a possibility that the initial investigation and decision was incorrect or incomplete in some way.

4.29 Complaints where the Local Government Ombudsman 'upheld' a complaint against the Council

Two years ago, the Ombudsman revised their process for recording the outcome from investigations.

- In brief, where the Ombudsman considers that there was some fault in the Council's actions that led to the complaint arising in the first place, they will record a decision of "Upheld". Crucially, this is irrespective of whether they are satisfied that the Council has taken the appropriate action to remedy the complaint through its own complaints procedure. In other words, the Council's complaints procedure may already have identified and fully resolved a problem, but if the complaint goes to the Ombudsman for a further decision, they will record it as 'upheld', despite their intervention having added no further value.
- In their annual letter, the Ombudsman reported 23 'upheld' complaints involving Brent, 5 of which had not been through the Council's complaints procedure, and therefore the Council had had no opportunity to resolve them, before they reached the Ombudsman.
- 5 complaints concerned Adult Social Care and a further 5 related to the Children and Young People's Department. Details of those cases are included in the two annual reports, attached as appendices to this report. Of the remaining 13 complaints: 6 related to Housing Needs, 2 Council Tax recovery, 1 Housing Benefits, 2 parking enforcement, 1 concerned cemeteries and 1 Planning case.

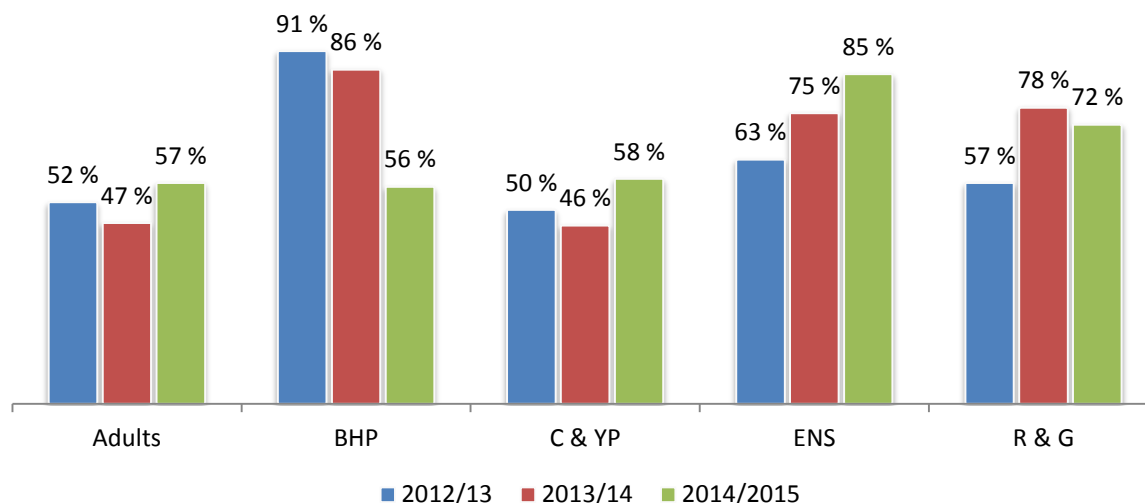
4.30 Of the 13 cases there were 3 cases where the Ombudsman considered more needed to be done to remedy the complaints. A summary of those cases is outlined below.

4.31 Council Tax recovery – The Ombudsman asked the Council to write off Council Tax arrears of £170 on the basis that the customer had been sent several conflicting account balances. The final stage investigation had upheld the complaint but did not consider that it was necessary to wipe out the debt

4.32 Council Tax recovery – a bailiff's failure to carry out an up to date check of a vehicle's ownership before levying distress, resulted in the Council being criticised. The vehicle had been in the ownership of the debtor when the debt was first referred to the bailiff, however by the time the bailiff attempted to seize and remove the car, ownership had been transferred. The Ombudsman considered that a check should have been made with the DVLA immediately prior to seeking to remove the vehicle.

4.33 A Homeless family's - excessive stay in Bed and Breakfast accommodation – This resulted in an increase in the compensation award. - Government guidance stipulates that families should not be placed in bed and breakfast for more than 6 weeks. Because of the severe shortage of suitable alternative accommodation, London Council's Councils find meeting this expectation a challenge. In this particular case, the family had spent approximately 4 months in bed and breakfast accommodation. In recognition of this, £350 was awarded at the final review stage. The Ombudsman considered that £250 per month was an appropriate amount.

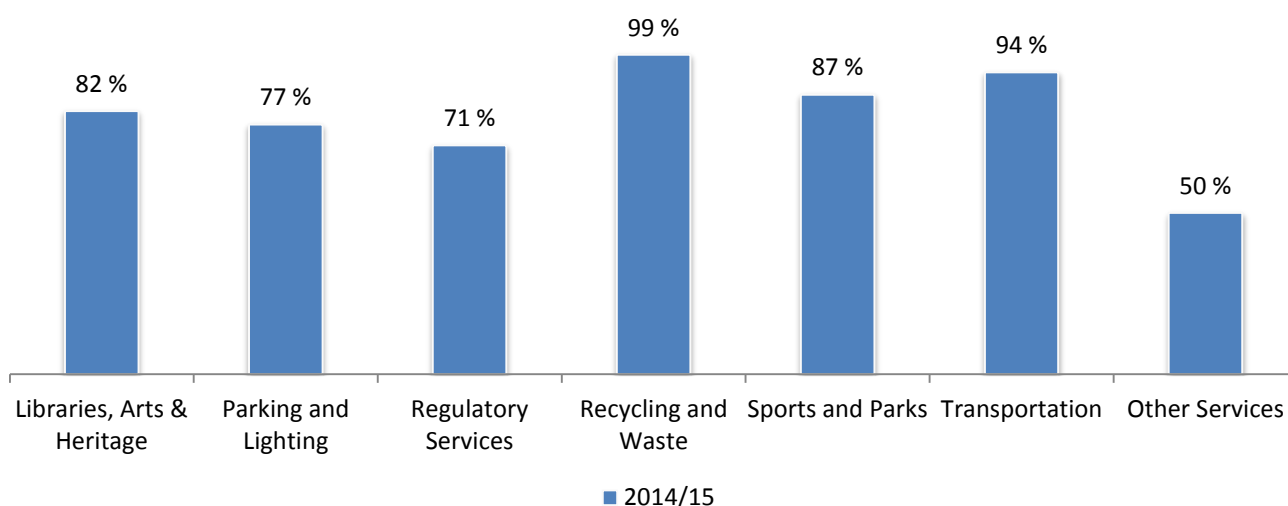
4.34 Graph 11: First stage complaint response times - percentage sent within the deadline



4.35 The Council has a deadline of replying to first stage corporate complaints and Adult Social Care complaints within 20 working days. The equivalent figure for Children and Young People is 10 working days, although legislation does allow the deadline to be extended to 20 working in complex cases. During 2014/15 the Complaints Service implemented a number of initiatives to help departments to improve their performance in meeting the deadline. The complaints database sends an 'advance' reminder to the relevant investigator, 3 working days before the response is due. Weekly lists showing all open complaints are circulated to Service Heads and Operational Directors. The Complaints Manager liaised directly with investigators and managers in order to chase outstanding responses and attended weekly meetings with several heads of service, including the Head of the Housing Needs Service and the Operational Director (social care) for Children and Young People, at which performance was reviewed. What the above graph makes clear however, is that overall response rates during the years were significantly below the Council's target of responding to all complaints within the deadline.

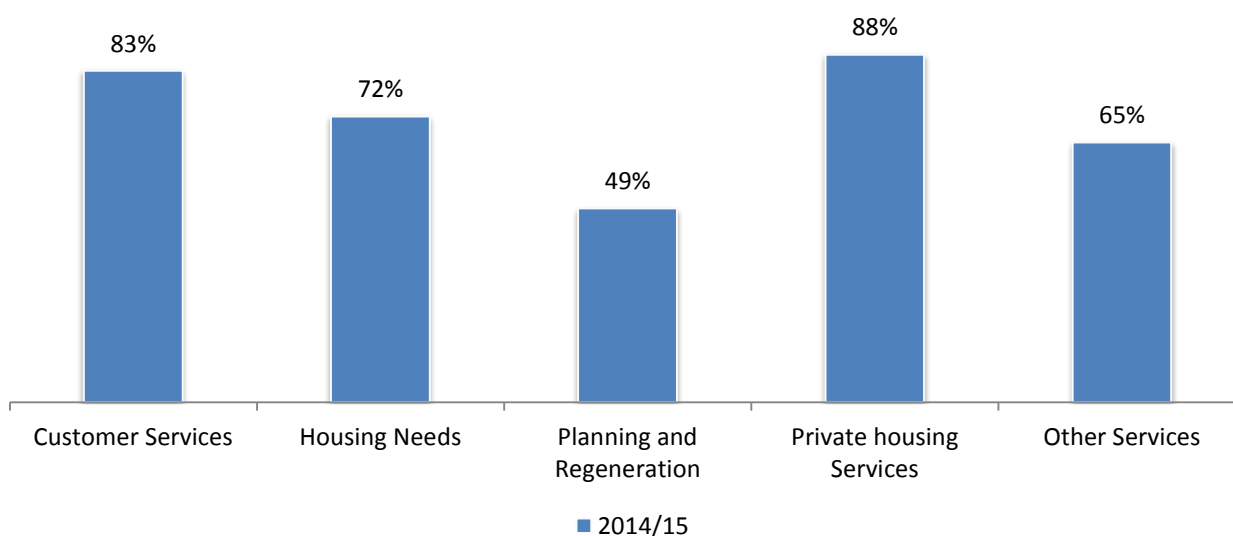
4.36 The position since January 2015 has improved considerably. By the end of quarter 1 2015/16, Children and Young People's performance had risen to 96% on time, Adult Social Care – 85% and Regeneration and Growth and the Chief Operating Officer's Department both answered 94% on time. It is essential that these improvements in performance are maintained. CMT members are therefore asked to ensure that focus is maintained by including complaints performance as a standing item on their respective DMT agendas.

4.37 Graph 12: Environment and Neighbourhoods – first stage complaint responses in time, by service area



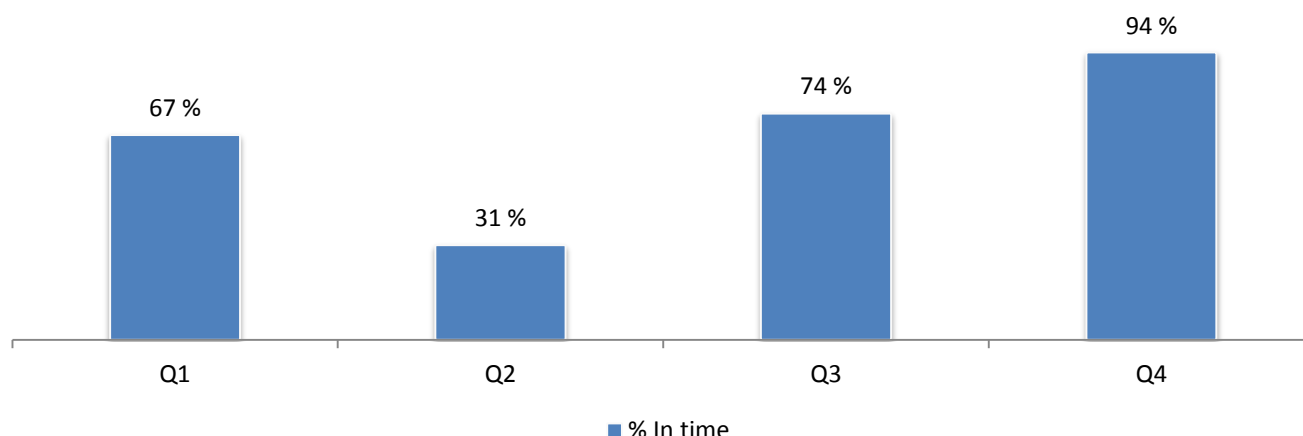
4.38 Parking and Lighting and Recycling and Waste accounted for two-thirds of the Department's Complaints. Parking and Lighting's performance was adversely affected by significant staff changes during the year, which impacted on the ability of the service to respond promptly to complaints and appeals. Effective arrangements were put in place however which resulted in performance improving with 87% of complaints being responded to on time in Q4 and 92% in Q1 of 2015/16. Recycling and Waste had a consistently good performance throughout the year, as can be seen by the graph.

4.39 Graph 13: Regeneration and Growth - responses in time, by service area



4.40 Housing Needs received 195 out of the Departments 499 complaints. This is a reflection of the challenging nature of the area of work the service deals with. In addition to large numbers of complaints they also receive a high number of Member enquiries. The Head of Service worked closely with the Complaints Service Team to improve performance. Weekly meetings have been established between the Head of service and the Complaints Manager at which performance reports are generated and all outstanding complaints are reviewed. Further targeted complaints investigation training was also provided to key officers from the service. By the end of Q1 2015/16, 98% of complaints were being responded to on time. The Planning Service's performance was disappointing given that they only received 43 complaints. However their performance had improved to 86% by the end of Q1 2015/16.

4.41 Graph 14: Final Review complaint response times by quarter



4.42 The Complaints Service Team experienced a backlog of complaint investigations during the year, which is reflected in the above figures. More stringent performance management measures were put in place which resulted in the backlog being cleared in the latter part of the year and performance improving significantly in Q's 3 and 4. The improvement has been maintained in 2015/16.

4.43 Table 2: Compensation paid in connection with complaints

Area	First Stage		Complaint Numbers	Final Stage		Complaint Numbers
	2013/14	2014/15		2013/14	2014/15	
Adults	£6,065.10	£4,950.00	2	£2,600.00	£750.00	5
BHP	£620.00	£8,092.52	44	£2,403.12	£22,524.22	30
C & YG	£2,374.44	£8,200.00	3	£1,450.00	£1,000.00	4
ENS	£719.06	£14,863.03	10	£1,122.11	£1,510.00	4
R & G	£2,968.91	£4,214.99	14	£6,193.88	£13,184.15	19
Other	£0.00	£130.00	2	£625.00	£306.50	5
Total	£12,747.51	£38,726.54	61	£14,394.11	£39,274.87	67

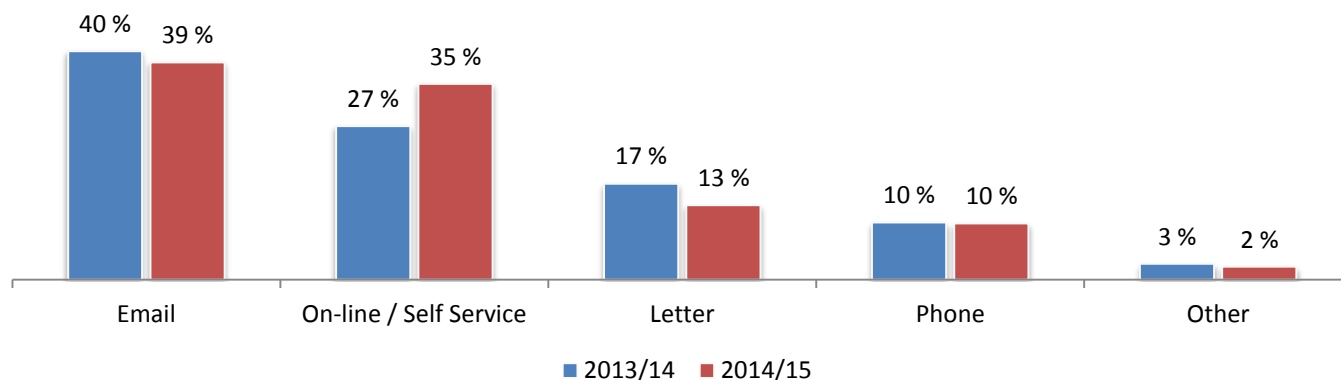
4.44 The Council's policy on compensation is closely modelled on guidance provided by the Ombudsman. Compensation is awarded in cases where upon investigation it is found that the Council's incorrect actions or failure to act or delay in acting has resulted in the person being seriously affected. For example the person may have incurred costs and/or suffered financial hardship because of our mistake or they may have experienced significant distress and inconvenience. Compensation awarded in appropriate complaints makes good business sense for the Council because it reduces the likelihood of a complaint escalating and therefore avoids the cost and reputational damage associated with escalated complaints and the intervention of the Ombudsman. The total amount of compensation awarded in 2014/15 increased by £56k compared to 2013/14. As the table above shows, more compensation was awarded at the final investigation stage than at the first stage. This is especially evident in the cases of BHP and R&G and may indicate that managers are reluctant to award compensation, or that investigators are unaware that they can recommend a compensation award as part of the overall remedy to a complaint.

4.45 A failure to adequately remedy a complaint is one of the underlying reasons for complaints escalating. Therefore, CMT is asked to remind members of the importance of adhering to the remedies policy where it is found that the customer has experienced an injustice because of the Council's actions or lack of action.

4.46 How complaints were received

Encouraging customers to make their complaints on-line has led to a significant increase in those being received by email and by the iCasework enabled 'self service' facility, which can be accessed via the Council's website. The positive trend in customers making use of the self service facility is especially welcome as it represents the most cost effective method for receiving complaints.

Graph 15: Method of receipt



4.47 Service Improvements resulting from complaint investigations

4.48 Issues raised through complaints or highlighted through investigations are driving the Council's Service improvement agenda and are an important form of Business Intelligence. Some examples of improvements resulting from complaints received during the year are set out below. Those relating to the Adult Social Care and Children and Young People's departments are reported in the appendices to this report.

4.49 Ensuring we comply with the law when dealing with homelessness applications from customers with dependent children – serious failings in how a homeless application from a family with young children was handled, resulted in the family sleeping in their car for a number of days. The family approached Housing Needs, on the basis that they would shortly be made homeless. They were offered temporary accommodation, which the husband/wife declined on the basis that it needed some minor repairs. Housing Needs determined that by refusing the accommodation, the family were intentionally homeless and issued a decision to that effect.

The first error was that Housing Needs failed to inform the family of their right to request a review of the decision. Officers did not take sufficiently accurate notes of what occurred, and incorrectly assumed the husband was the homeless applicant, when in fact it was the wifen. This compromised the quality of decision-making in this case. Furthermore, because young children were involved, Housing Needs should have informed Children's social care of the decision, which they failed to do. Had they done so, social care may have been able to arrange alternative accommodation for a short period. The significant lessons arising from this case, were reviewed by the Head of Service, and led to further staff training, procedures being revised, and more effective liaison arrangements between Housing and Children's social care being put in place. The overall service Housing Needs are able to offer families with young children has improved and no further complaints of this nature have been received.

4.50 Improving the management of adaptation works for tenants with disabilities - a number of vulnerable BHP tenants had cause to complain about the poor management of the works designed to make their properties more suited to their needs. Two final stage investigations revealed that the management and monitoring arrangements had been inadequate, resulting in excessive delays and schemes overrunning .This contributed to the costs exceeding the amount

budgeted. As a result of the final stage investigations, a far more robust management and monitoring framework was put in place. The long term impact of this improved approach is currently being determined.

- 4.51 Reducing the time that properties remain unavailable for letting because of outstanding repairs - an investigation, into a BHP complaint revealed that due to inadequate systems in place for monitoring the progress of repairs, a vacant property had been left in a state that prevented it from being made available to families seeking accommodation, for over a year. The property had experienced a fire. The elderly tenant had been hospitalised. Although a programme of works to make the property habitable had been identified, these were delayed and subsequently lost track of while BHP and Adult Social Care discussed the long term future of the tenant. It was only after complaints were received from neighbours, about the state of the property, that action was taken to progress the repairs. The investigation led to an improved process for monitoring the progress of repairs, with monthly monitoring meetings now taking place between BHP and contractors.
- 4.52 Improved training for customer-facing staff - Dissatisfaction with the perceived attitude or conduct of staff who deal directly with customers, was a theme in a number of complaints. By way of illustration, one complaint concerned two members of the library staff who were reported by a customer for being overheard swearing. The Head of Libraries took prompt action to address the issue with the staff concerned and further guidance was issued to staff which stressed the importance of demonstrating professional conduct at all times. With many customer facing Council services delivered by partners, the importance of those partners adhering to the Council's customer service standards is a key issue. In one Waste and Recycling related complaint, the customer complained that they had been spoken to in a rude manner by an operative, in response to a request for an additional recycling bin. The complaint led to Veolia's contract manager reminding all staff about the standards of behaviour expected by the Council.
- 4.53 Improving operational procedures - Complaint investigations can often highlight procedures that are outdated or altogether lacking. By way of illustration, a final stage investigation, into a Housing Needs related complaint revealed that inadequate procedures were in place for notifying customers in bed and breakfast that their bookings were being terminated. In this case, a family with young children was given less than 45 minutes notice to leave the accommodation. An improved procedure is now in place and has been circulated to the relevant staff.
- 4.54 Improving communications – poor or inadequate communication is often the cause of complaints. By way of illustration, a failure to inform a temporarily decanted tenant that they had to make their own parking arrangements while at the temporary address, resulted in them receiving several parking tickets. The complaint led to a review of the information provided to decanted tenants, which resulted in an improved information pack being developed. No further complaints of this type were received.
- 4.55 Joined up working between services – There is a clear link between Transportation, which determines parking restrictions within the Borough and Parking and Lighting, which has to enforce those restrictions. A number of complaints concerning a perceived lack of enforcement action in connection with newly introduced parking schemes, resulted in more effective liaison arrangements being put in place between the two services. This enabled Parking and Lighting to be more proactive in ensuring that the need to enforce new schemes is reflected within service delivery plans. This in turn led to a fall in complaints about this subject.
- 4.56 Priorities for 2015– 2016
- 4.57 Improving complaint response times - Response times in a number of departments need to be improved significantly. The Complaints Team will continue to work collaboratively with relevant Operational Directors and Heads of Service to improve performance. CMT is also requested to ensure that improving response rates continues to be given priority status within their respective DMT's.

- 4.58 Implementing the complaints clearing house system - The complaints clearing house represents one of the strategies designed to improve response rates. The concept involves the triaging complaints when first received and weeding out issues that can be dealt with more effectively outside of the complaints process. The approach was piloted successfully during the year in Adult Social Care and Children and Young People Departments as well as in BHP and will be expanded to encompass the rest of the Council during 2015/16.
- 4.59 Reducing the level of escalated complaints - As outlined earlier in this report, there is scope for reducing the number of escalated complaints, together with the proportion subsequently upheld at the final stage, if DMT's ensure that their staff adhere to the complaint investigation standard when conducting first stage investigations. CMT are asked to emphasise to their respective management teams, the importance of all investigations complying with the standard.
- 4.60 Improving the learning capacity of the organisation - A 'Complaint Investigators Mentoring Scheme', will be rolled out in the first half of 2015/16. The concept involves members of the Complaints Team, mentoring carefully selected officers involved in current investigations. It will represent an opportunity for the officers to seek advice and guidance on any aspect of good the investigation practice. The objective will be to ensure that 'a right first time' culture is embedded within service areas, which in turn makes it more likely that the correct outcome will consistently be achieved at the initial stage. This will lead to a further reduction in complaint escalations. The impact of the initiative will be reported in subsequent quarterly reports.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 Escalated complaints are costly in terms of the amount of management time that often needs to be devoted to an investigation. The actions recommended in this report are designed to reduce the level of escalated complaints and will contribute towards efficiency savings.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Children Act 1989 and supporting regulations provides the statutory framework for managing child social care complaints. The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) regulations 2009 is the relevant legislation so far as Adult social care complaints is concerned.

7.0 Diversity Implications

- 7.1 The Council's complaints procedure covers all areas of the Council's service delivery and is available to everyone who lives in, works in or visits the Borough and all service users. With the exception of the Children and Young People department, the Council has been poor at collecting diversity information from complainants. It was hoped that an on line complaints survey introduced in 2013/14 would boost the level of diversity information captured. The survey invited customers to provide feedback on their experiences of making complaints, and at the same time asked for core diversity information. Unfortunately the response to the survey has been very low and therefore the data is incomplete. The complaints service will be working with the Diversity Manager to explore new approaches for capturing this information and more work will be done to emphasise to staff the importance of recording the information at the first point of contact.

8.0 Staffing Implications

None

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