

Quarter 4 Report on Complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) Enquiries (1 January to 31 March 2016)

Total Number of Complaints Received in Quarter 4 was 6.
Of these 0 were made regarding an Authority Member.

Total Number of Complaints Received April 2015 – March 2016: 14

Complaint Ref, Date Made and Stage	Service and Reason for Complaint	Date Response Sent	Outcome	Any Change in Processes/Practices as a Result of Complaint Investigation
C411 14/01/16 Stage Two	Planning Complaint regarding lack of action by the Planning and Enforcement Team with regard to a particular site.	27/01/16 Within 15 working day deadline	Complaint not justified. Responded to issues raised in complaint. Issues had been raised and responded to a number of times previously.	Complainant had sent a number of repetitive and defamatory emails so was informed that any further correspondence would be considered under the procedure for responding to unreasonably persistent complainants and a response would only be sent if a new issue was raised.
C412 18/01/16 Stage One	Planning Complaint regarding handling of a planning application. Issues originally raised in a previous complaint ref C.369 during 2013/14, which was eventually withdrawn. Complainant alludes to new information regarding the complaint but no details provided.	Response due by 08/02/16. Extension of time agreed to 19/02/16. Request for clarity of issues sent 15/02/16. Stage One Response sent 08/03/16.	No details of any new issues received from Complainant, so response based on a review of previous complaint issues. Explained reasons why some information is not displayed on website as is confidential.	None required.

C413 24/02/16 Stage One	Land Management Complaint regarding actions by an Authority officer regarding sale of Authority land.	09/03/16 Within 15 working day deadline.	Confirmed that the Authority did not own the Complainant's client's property nor did it claim to. Apologised for sending a letter which erroneously referred to the name of the Complainant's client's property instead of the name of the Authority's land. Refuted allegations of harassment by Authority officer.	None required.
C414 24/02/16 Stage One	Planning Complaint alleging unfair treatment of planning applicants	02/03/16 Within 15 working day deadline.	Complaint not justified. Explained reasons why an application on site previously owned by Complainant's parents had been approved when applications made by Complainant's parents had been refused.	None required.
C415 03/03/16 Stage One	Planning Complaint alleging that an Authority officer had visited Complainant's property without need and that this constitutes harassment.	23/03/16 Within 15 working day deadline.	This complaint was unjustified. The enforcement officer was undertaking a site visit and sent one letter entirely within the remit of his role in Enforcement.	None required.
C416 29/03/16 Stage One	Commercial Development & Outreach Complaint regarding consultation process for a Traffic Regulation Order.	15/04/16 Within 15 working day deadline	Complaint not justified. Explained consultation procedure and that those responses were included in the Committee report. Refuted allegations that the consultation letter was misleading, that responses were invalid and that the Committee decision was unsound. There was no conflicting approach by officers.	None required.

Updates on Complaints Reported in Previous Quarters

Complaint Ref, Date Made and Stage	Service and Reason for Complaint	Date Response Sent	Outcome	Any Change in Processes/Practices as a Result of Complaint Investigation
<p>C397 25/08/16 Ombudsman</p> <p>(Stage One reported in Quarter 4 of 2014-15 and Stage Two reported in Quarter 1 of 2015-16)</p>	<p>Land Management</p> <p>Complaint summarised as: "The Authority has refused to pay compensation in relation to a fine the Complainant received from the RPA/NE for failing to manage bracken on his farmland; and an Authority officer acted unfairly and unprofessionally during the end of tenancy discussions".</p>	<p>Initial Response sent 27/08/16. Within 31 day deadline.</p> <p>Response to draft decision sent 10/12/15. Within 21 day deadline.</p>	<p>Ombudsman's Decision: The Complainant complains about the Authority's actions when his farm tenancy ended. This complaint is a late complaint and as the Complainant's solicitor had already reached an agreement with the Authority there is no reason to exercise discretion to investigate the complaint.</p>	<p>None required.</p>

Complaints Review

Last year Members requested a review and update on trends in complaints over the past 3 years so we have continued the annual review this year.

Numbers of Complaints Received Over Last 3 Years												
Year	No of Total Complaints					No of Stage 1 Complaints		No of Stage 2 Complaints		No of Ombudsman Complaints		
Period	Received	Withdrawn	Against Planning Service	Against Other Services	Against Members	Planning Service	Other Services	Planning Service	Other Services	Planning Service	Other Services	Members
1 April to 31 March												
2013/14	34	1	18	11	5	17	11	6	1	1	0	2
2014/15	18	0	11	6	1	11	6	5	1	1	0	0
2015/16	14	0	8	5	1	6	5	1	1	2	1	0

The following trends in complaints have been identified:

2013/14 – Planning Service: handling of planning applications, pre-application advice, lack of consultation, actions of officers.
Other Services: Complaints against Members, actions of Management Team.

2014/15 – Planning Service: handling of planning applications, pre-application advice and length of time taken to take enforcement action.
Other Services: Actions of officers.

2015/16 – Planning Service: handling of planning applications, lack of enforcement action and actions of officers.
Other Services: Actions of officers

With regard to the number of complaints received, the reduction over the previous 3 years has continued this year and is shown in the table above. Of those complaints which were pursued to the Local Government Ombudsman, there has been 1 upheld case (C.355) which was fully reported to the meeting on 6 November 2015 (Minute 65/15) and issues arising from it were the subject of a Micro Scrutiny Review. The results of the Micro Scrutiny Review were reported to the meeting on 4 March 2016 (Minute 16/16). As with last year's report within the Planning Service it is considered that part of the reason for the reduction in complaints is the greater focus on dealing with issues as soon as they arise, rather than allowing them to escalate into a formal complaint.

Quarter 4 Report on Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environment Information Regulation Enquiries (EIR).

Quarter	No. of FOI Enquiries dealt with	No. of EIR Enquiries dealt with	No. of Enquiries dealt with in time (20 days)	No. of late Enquiry responses	No. of Enquiries still being processed	No. of referrals to the Information Commissioner
Q1(April June 2015)	17	9	22	4	4	0
Q2 (July- Sept 2015)	8	8	14	2	3	0
Q3 (Oct – Dec 2015)	8	4	12	0	0	0
Q4 (Jan – Mar 2016)	10	8	18	0	10	0
2015/16	43	29	66	6	17	0
2014/15	69	26	90	7	14	0
2013/14	88	84	156	11	9	0