

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 24 JANUARY 2017**

#### **EXECUTIVE – 7 MARCH 2017**

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**Title:**

**COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN WAVERLEY IN 2015/16**

**[Portfolio Holder: Councillor Julia Potts]  
[Wards Affected: All]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

This report provides information on complaints handling in Waverley in 2015/16, including the number of complaints received, Waverley's performance in responding to complaints, and lessons learned. As confirmed in the report, there was a slight decrease in the number of complaints received in 2015-16 when compared with the previous year, and an improvement in the percentage of complaints responded to within the target timescales.

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**How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

Investigating complaints from members of the public provides Waverley with an opportunity to keep under review and improve the quality of its services to the community, and is a key part of understanding residents' needs. It can also help to identify areas in which the Council could provide better value for money in its services, and can result in action that will improve the lives of residents.

**Financial implications:**

There are no unbudgeted costs associated with the new dedicated complaints handling database which is being built in-house.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no legal implications associated with the proposals. The Council's complaints handling process is fully consistent with best practice and the most recent guidance from the Local Government Ombudsman.

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**Waverley's policy for dealing with complaints**

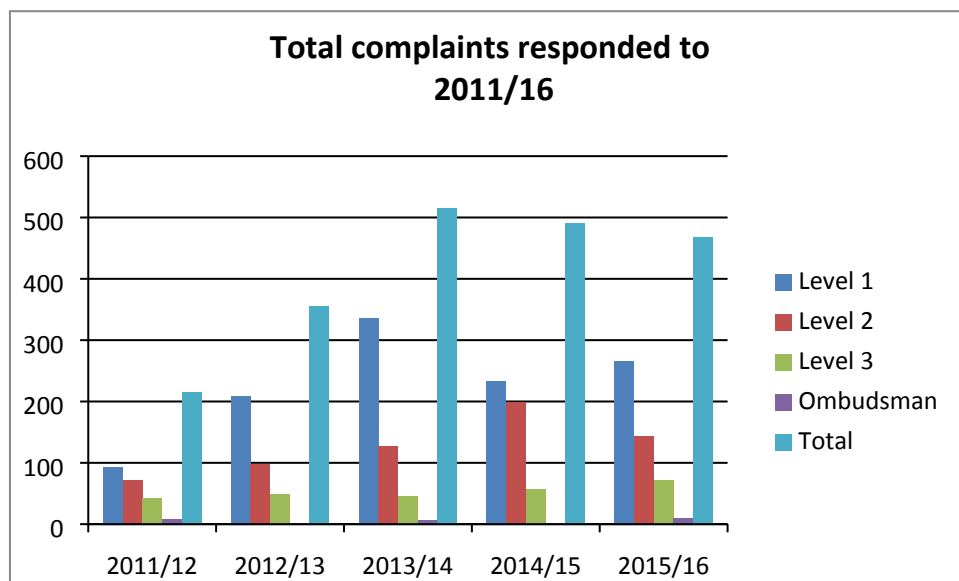
1. Waverley's policy for dealing with complaints from members of the public has been in place for a number of years, and closely reflects guidance published by the Local Government Ombudsman. This guidance recommends that an effective complaints procedure should have the following features – accessibility, communication, timeliness, fairness, credibility and accountability.
2. A copy of the policy is attached as Annexe 1. The policy now includes the procedure to be followed when dealing with complaints made by a third party (see page 3.)

## New complaints database

- As Members may recall from previous reports on complaints handling, increasing difficulties have been experienced with the database that is currently used for handling complaints from customers. The system was originally designed to log FOI enquiries but was adapted to enable complaints to also be logged. Despite a number of modifications, officers have concluded that the database needs to be replaced by a more bespoke system. A new, dedicated complaints database will therefore be introduced at the beginning of January 2017.
- The new system will enable more detailed analysis of complaints handling across all services, including the outcome of complaints. It will also issue automatic reminders regarding response deadlines to officers who are dealing with complaints, which it is hoped will, in turn, improve performance in response timescales.

## Complaints responded to by Waverley in 2015/16

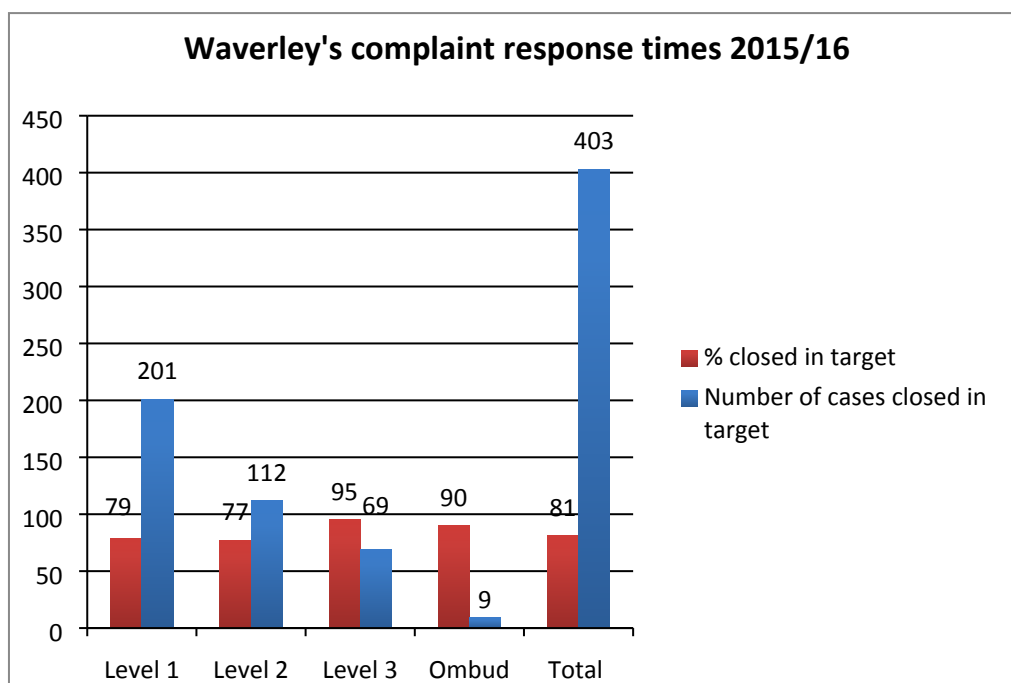
- The following table shows the total number of complaints responded to in 2015/16 at each level, and in the four previous years.



- While there was a slight increase in Level 1 complaints in 2015/16, fewer complaints progressed to Level 2 which is to be welcomed. There was also a small increase in Level 3 complaints but a small decrease in the total number of complaints received.
- An analysis of complaints responded to within each service area is attached as Annexe 2. Within the Housing Service, the majority of complaints concerned responsive repairs, whereas in Planning the majority of complaints concerned development control matters.
- Housing responded to a total of 251 complaints (*compared with 268 in 2014/15*), followed by Planning which received 81 complaints (*89 in 2014/15*) and Environmental Services which responded to 73 complaints (*71 in 2014/15*).

## Waverley's performance in responding to complaints

- In 2015/16, 81% of all complaints were responded to within the target timescales, compared with 76% in 2014/15. The benchmark for responding to complaints is 95% of all complaints to be responded to within the target timescales (i.e. 10 working days for Level 1 complaints and 15 working days for Level 2 and Level 3 complaints). There is still therefore scope for improving performance.
- The table below shows performance in responding to complaints at each level of the complaints procedure.



## Lessons learned

- Learning lessons from complaints is an important part of improving Waverley's services and all lessons learned together with any action taken as a result of a complaint, should be recorded on the complaints handling database. [Annexe 3](#) gives a few examples of these. It is hoped that the new database will enable more detailed analysis of this aspect of complaint handling.

## Conclusion

- In 2015/16 there was a further small improvement in the Council's performance regarding the time taken to respond to complaints, and efforts are being made to ensure that performance continues to improve, in particular by continuing to raise staff awareness of the complaints procedure.

## Comments from the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee

- The Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Complaints Handling report for 2015/16 and noted that the performance on the time taken to respond to complaints had continued to improve, although still fell short of the target. The Committee queried whether the target was realistic, but recognised the benefit of having a challenging target to work towards.

14. There was some speculation that Waverley tenants might be reluctant to complain to their landlord, the Council, particularly in relation to housing matters; but the Tenants' Panel representative assured the Committee that the Panel had promoted the complaints procedure through their own newsletter and encouraged tenants to use it if they had cause to complain. The Chairman shared a personal concern that there might be a risk of the complaints procedure being perceived by staff as a form of safety-net for poor service, as customers had a means through which they could complain. He was disappointed that the approach was to require a complaint to be made before an issue could be resolved, rather than trying to resolve a grievance before it became a complaint and the communication became more confrontational.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive notes the performance on complaints handling in 2015/16, welcomes the comments of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee and endorses the lessons learnt.

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### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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