

# **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

25 January 2022

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**Title: Review of complaints closed in 2020/21**

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**Portfolio Holder: Paul Follows**

**Head of Service: Robin Taylor**

**Key decision: No**

**Access: Public**

### **1. Purpose and summary**

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the complaints received by Waverley that were closed during 2020/21, the Council's performance in responding to those complaints and, where applicable, the lessons learned. Complaints about Waverley's services received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman in 2020/21, are addressed in a separate report on this agenda.

### **2. Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the information in this report and passes any comments and recommendations to the Executive.

### **3. Reason for the recommendation**

To allow the Committee to consider the complaints dealt with in 2020/21 and draw to the attention of the Executive any issues that require further attention.

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 Since 1 April 2018 the Council's complaints' process comprises two stages, level 1 and 2. If the complainant remains unsatisfied at the end of stage 2 they have the option of taking the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.2 The tables below show the number of complaints closed during 2020/21 at each level and the percentage for each service.

<b>Service</b>	<b>Level 1</b>	<b>%</b>
Commercial Services	6	2.9
Environmental and Regulatory Services	58	27.9

Finance and Property	5	2.4
Housing Delivery and Communities	9	4.3
Housing Operations	80	38.5
Planning and Economic Development	50	24.0
Policy and Governance	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>100%</b>

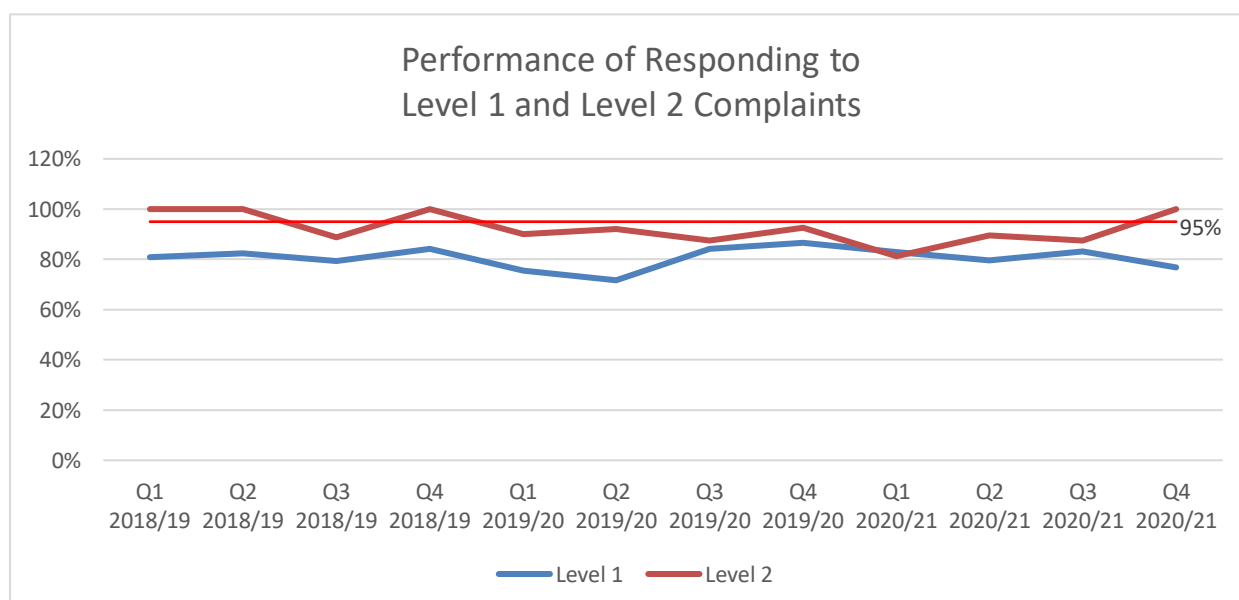
Service	Level 2	%
Commercial Services	1	1.3
Environmental and Regulatory Services	10	13.2
Finance and Property	7	9.2
Housing Delivery and Communities	5	6.6
Housing Operations	26	34.2
Planning and Economic Development	26	34.2
Policy and Governance	1	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100%</b>

4.3 64% of all complaints closed in 2020/21 were resolved at Level 1 compared with 75% the previous year.

4.4 Housing Operations received the highest number of complaints, a total of 106. As in previous years, the majority of these complaints concerned property maintenance and responsive repairs. This is a slight decrease when compared with the total of 111 for 2019/20.

## 5. Waverley's performance in responding to complaints

5.1 The corporate target currently states that 95% of all complaints should be responded to within 10 working days of receipt at Level 1 and within 15 working days of receipt at Level 2. This target has been in place for many years and continues to set a challenging level of performance. The following table shows the performance over the past three years.



5.2 In 2020/21 84% of all closed complaints were responded to within the target timescales which is the same percentage for 2019/20. Performance at each level was as follows:

Level 1 - 82%

Level 2 - 89%

5.3 Officers discussed recently whether there was a case for changing the target, but it was concluded that it should be possible to improve performance by closer monitoring of complaints by the individual Service Complaints Administrators and the increased use of automatic reminders which are now possible following the implementation of a new database

## **6. Outcome of complaints closed in 2020/21**

6.1 The following table gives information on the outcome of the complaints closed in 2020/21.

<b>Service</b>	<b>Not upheld</b>	<b>Partly upheld</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Total</b>
Commercial Services	4	2	1	7
Environmental and Regulatory Services	52	2	14	68
Finance and Property	9	0	3	12
Housing Delivery and Communities	13	1	0	14
Housing Operations	46	20	40	106
Planning and Economic Development	68	3	5	76
Policy and Governance	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>284</b>

The assessment of whether a complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld is often a subjective matter, and this judgement is made by the officer investigating the complaint. Overall, 68% complaints were not upheld, 10% were partly upheld and 22% were upheld. The majority of housing operations complaints that were partly upheld or upheld concerned the service provided by contractors in respect of responsive repairs and property services.

## **7. Remediating complaints**

7.1 When seeking to remedy a complaint that has been upheld or partly upheld, the Council follows the advice of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman that the remedy offered should, as far as possible, put the complainant back in the position he or she would have been in but for the fault that has been identified. An apology will always be offered but in appropriate circumstances the complainant may be reimbursed for any expenditure they have incurred as a result of poor service by the Council or its contractors.

## **8. Lessons learned from complaints**

8.1 Learning lessons from complaints is an important part of improving Waverley's services and these are recorded on the complaints database. Lessons learned are looked at and actioned on a case-by-case basis. Changes that need to be made

to policies, procedures or other administrative processes are identified by the officer investigating the complaint and then discussed with the relevant Head of Service who then ensures that all necessary action is taken to avoid a recurrence of the problems identified by the complainant.

- 8.2 Annexe 1 gives some examples of lessons learned in 2020/21. Many lessons learned concerned procedural/administrative issues and the need to improve communications with the customer.

## **9. New complaints database**

- 9.1 A new 'low code' database for handling workflow on complaints came into use with effect from 1 April 2021. The database provides more accurate and detailed data than the previous Sharepoint database and sends automatic reminders of approaching deadlines to officers which should help to improve performance in responding to complaints. The new database is linked to the citizens hub which is expected to become operational within the next few months.

## **10. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan**

- 10.1 Investigating complaints provides the Council 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' need. Lessons learned from complaints help the Council to meet its priorities of promoting high quality public services accessible for all and the health and wellbeing of our communities.

## **11. Implications of decision**

### **11.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)**

None

### **11.2 Risk management**

Complaints can highlight areas where there are reputational and operational risks.

### **11.3 Legal**

There are no legal implications associated with this report. The Council's complaints handling process complies fully with best practice and the most recent guidance from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The process also meets the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

### **11.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion**

There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. Equality impact assessments are carried out when necessary, across the council to ensure service delivery meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. However, complaints investigations can help to ensure that the Council delivers its services to all customers in a fair and equal way, and that any shortfall is rectified immediately.

### **11.5 Climate emergency declaration**

There are no implications in this report that relate to carbon neutrality.

### **11.6 Consultation and engagement**

Not applicable.

### **12. Other options considered**

None

### **13. Governance journey**

The report and observations from the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be submitted to the next meeting of the Executive

### **Annexes:**

Annexe 1 – Lessons learned from complaints closed in 2020/21

### **Background Papers**

There are / are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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Agreed and signed off by:  
Legal Services: November 2021  
Head of Finance: N/A  
Strategic Director: November 2021  
Portfolio Holder: November 2021