

For general release

REPORT TO:	Scrutiny & Overview Committee 10th July 2018
SUBJECT:	Annual Complaints Report 2017/18
LEAD OFFICER:	Marion Leigh - Support Services Manager Clare Davies - Complaints Manager
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Simon Hall – Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Marion Leigh - Support Services Manager Clare Davies - Complaints Manager

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	The Annual Complaints report is submitted to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to provide oversight of the Complaints process at Croydon Council.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	The Committee is asked to note the Annual Complaints report for 2017/18.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides a summary position of complaints, 2017/18 (01 April 2017 – 31 March 2018).

2. COMPLAINTS – HIGHLIGHTS/LOWLIGHTS DURING 2017/2018

- 2.1 The volume of corporate **Stage one complaints** has decreased. 2017/18 received 1490 stage one complaints which represents a decrease of 8% when compared to 2016/17 (1622 complaints received). (See 3).

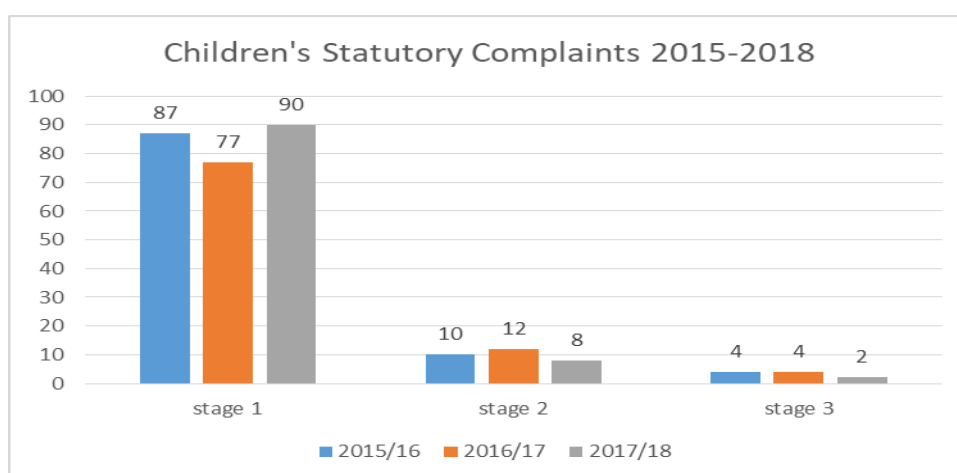
Total 2016-2018	2015-2016			2016-2017			2017-2018		
	Total	Upheld	In Sla	Total	Upheld	In Sla	Total	Upheld	In Sla
Corporate Complaint - Stage one	1143	452	791	1622	1282	1361	1490	1118	1309
Corporate Complaint - Stage two	100	100	32	138	56	39	127	49	50
Corporate Complaint - Ombudsman	66	23	46	76	26	47	73	22	50

- 2.2 **Stage one complaint** response times have improved. During 2017/18, 88% (1309 of 1490) were answered on time. Although this is below the corporate

target (90%) this represents an improvement of 4% when compared to 2016/17 when 84% (1361 of 1622) were answered on time.

- 2.3 The volume of corporate **Stage two complaints** has decreased by 8% (11 complaints). 2017/18 received 127 stage two complaints compared to 2016/17 received 138 stage two complaints.
- 2.4 **Stage two complaint** response times were below the corporate target. During 2017/18 39% (50 of 127 complaints) were answered on time. This is an 11% increase when compared to 2016/2017 when 28% (39 of 138) were answered on time.
- 2.5 The volume of corporate **Ombudsman complaints** has decreased by 3 complaints since 2016/2017.
- 2.6 A brief summary of the volumes of **Statutory Complaints** received during 2017/18 (*See appendix A Statutory Scrutiny for details*):

STATUTORY - Complaint Stage	2015/16	2016/17	2017/2018
Adult - Stage one	106	82	55
Child - Stage one	87	77	90
Child - Stage two	10	12	8
Child - Stage three	4	4	2



3. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS - STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

3.1 The corporate target is to respond to 90% of complaints within 20 working days. These are responded to directly by each service.

3.2 The services with the highest volume of stage one complaints for 2017/18 were:

- Refuse & Recycling (237 complaints)
- Revenues (202 complaints)
- Benefits (126 complaints)
- Members & Resident Services-Repairs (132 complaints)
- Planning Applications (87 complaints)

The table below shows the stage one volumes received by the above teams:

Service team	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Refuse and street cleaning/ Recycling	315	215	237
Revenues	141	246	202
Members & resident services -Repairs	173	221	132
Benefits	73	179	126
Planning Applications	21	17	87

3.3 The **Refuse & Recycling, street cleansing and new garden waste** team received 237 stage one complaints during 2017/18. This represents a 14% decrease when compared to 2016/17 (271 complaints received).

3.4 The highest volume of complaints have been seen in April – June 2017 (69 complaints received) which reflected the launch of the Garden Waste Service. The main cause of complaints were due to delays in bin deliveries and subsequent delays in collections, due to technical issues with the system.

Contact across all channels remained high through this period whilst issues were resolved.

- 3.5 The next peak in complaints was seen in March 2018 (35 complaints received). This increase in complaints was due to a number of addresses of flats dropping off of the Veolia IT system when they upgraded their system as part of the move to the new South London Waste Partnership contract. Collections were being persistently missed and it was difficult for residents and staff to report online as addresses were not actually on the system. This was compounded by connectivity issues with our online services, as we moved more services to be integrated. This was resolved, and residents are able to report more issues, straight to the contractor.
- 3.6 We have also seen high contact and complaints due to the changes to garden waste service. There were no early incentives for signing up, and the new garden waste is now over a rolling year, which meant less residents had signed up early. To increase take up for the service, the Council sent out 14,000 emails to customers with info to increase uptake of the service, but the systems weren't always working to support this i.e. Echo was down on occasions throughout this period.
- 3.7 April 2018 saw the launch of the 2017/18 South London Waste Partnership which meant a change in street cleansing operations. The focus of the contract is for Veolia to maintain streets to a certain standard rather than sweep to a certain frequency, and we are seeing good progress on this. Collection services are due to go live in September 2018. The main changes for residents will be new containment solutions, as well as collection day changes to some 75% of households. To ensure they minimise dissatisfaction we will:
1. Work with the SLWP communications team to ensure correct and timely messaging is going out to customers.
 2. Ensure that our IT systems are fully integrated with Veolia's so that more proactive messaging can be utilised.
 3. Creating a more robust monitoring system for waste collection, akin to the work they have already done on street cleansing monitoring.

Members & Resident Services-Repairs

- 3.8 There has been a substantial reduction of 34% in complaints received during 2017/18 (132 complaints) compared to 221 complaints received in 2016/17. 51,304 jobs were completed and complaints as a percentage of jobs completed is 0.26%. 7 complaints escalated to stage 2 and 5 of these were upheld compared to 2 in 2016/17 and 1 upheld. The increase has been investigated and the service continues to include specific service improvements with its joint improvement plan with Axis. There was a slight reduction of 6% in compliments received during 2017/18 (33) compared to 35 received during 2016/17.

- 3.9 Of the 132 complaints logged, 111 of these are related to Axis service failures. Axis is responsible for a 34% reduction during 2017/18 compared to 2016/17 (168 complaints). There has been an improvement in heating related complaints which have reduced from 40 in 2016/17 to only 13 in 2017/18 and this represents a 67% reduction and this is despite the two spells of exceptionally cold weather.

Development Management – planning applications and appeals

- 3.10 Complaints have increased significantly within Development Management (625% in the last year). However the majority of the complaints have not been upheld (87%). They are mostly related to those seeking to overturn planning permission which would have been granted in accordance with planning policies and seeking to deliver more housing and intensifying development within the borough.
- 3.11 The team is being robust around decision making processes and how they justify development, where there is no maladministration found. They are also communicating and explaining the current policy position and the reasons why such schemes will be approached positively. In addition, they are now advising applicants as part of the complaints process, that this process is most unlikely to challenge the planning merits of a scheme or to modify the decision reached.
- 3.12 The team is also providing more details of policies and planning procedures on the web site and there has been a reduction in complaints about sole reliance on site notices to advertise planning applications. This has reduced complaints that neighbours did not see the notice or it had been removed before they had noticed the notification, so this is an improvement.

Revenues

- 3.13 Revenues stage 1 complaints have decreased by 18% this year, compared to last year (16/17) where 246 complaints were received against 202 received for 17/18.
- 3.14 33% of complaints received were in relation to recovery action, whereas for the previous year this was 42%. Although there has been a decrease in this area, the Council has agreed that those who can pay will pay, those who cannot pay will be supported to do so, and those who won't pay we will take a tough stance against.
- 3.15 70% of complaints have been upheld this year. The main reason for upheld complaints was due to recovery action, errors and this was compounded by delays in responses (i.e. errors or incorrect information being given) (59%). Delays tend to be seen during Q1 and Q3 and the run up to year end as the service prepare to issue 155k annual council tax bills.
- 3.16 The service continues to work on reducing their turnaround times in order to manage customer expectations; work has been done to implement our new target operating model which will help to manage demand better and improve

processing times. We are also looking at a better way to manage e-mail contact, as we have seen more customers choose to contact us this way.

3.17 In line with the councils new operating model, some key initiatives for the service next year will be:

- Closer working between Revenues and Gateway to support those needing help
- Financial Resilience strategy to ensure affordability is identified when making payment arrangements
- Greater focus on “one Croydon” approach so residents with multiple debts are not tackled in isolation.

Housing Benefits annual complaints

3.18 Benefits have seen a decrease in complaints over 17/18 where 126 complaints were received, compared to 179 in 2016/17 which is a 30% decrease.

3.19 Benefits have implemented a number of changes to help reduce complaint numbers. It has been identified that a number of complaints were due to customers receiving large, complex overpayment letters, which at times, weren't clear. A 100% check of all outbound contact sent by officers was carried out to ensure the information sent was accurate and clear for residents to understand.

3.20 Complaint trends and quality checks are being monitored and work is being done to ensure that current processes are up to date, feeding back any possible learning/skills gaps within the services to again drive complaints down further. Customer feedback is now actively monitored on e-mails, and improvements made where necessary.

3.21 Of those complaints that were upheld just over 57% were categorised as being due to assessment error, due to complexity of new claims. There is a focus on proactive and clear communication with regard to complex cases and where benefit adjustments mean that payments and entitlements frequently change.

3.22 Upheld stage one complaints:

54% of the stage one complaints received during 2017/18 were upheld.

79% of the stage one complaints received during 2016/17 were upheld.

3.23 Top 20 teams for Stage one complaints during 2017/18:

Service Team (by volume)	Total	Upheld	In SLA
Refuse & Recycling/ Street Cleaning	237	96%	98%
Revenues	202	83%	84%
Members & Resident Services (repairs)	132	83%	100%
Benefits	126	73%	90%
Planning Applications	87	13%	90%
Housing Mobility	42	100%	98%
Highways Network Maintenance	42	52%	95%
Contact Centre-Environmental	41	89%	93%
Homelessness Prevention	31	87%	90%
Housing Allocations	21	100%	95%
Corporate Debt Recovery	21	90%	86%
Child Protection & Proceedings	18	72%	50%
New Garden Waste Service	16	100%	100%
Tenancy East	15	73%	100%

NSO North East	15	93%	100%
Housing Allocations-Reactive	14	43%	86%
Tenancy South Central	14	86%	100%
Children in Need	12	75%	75%
Tenancy North	12	58%	83%

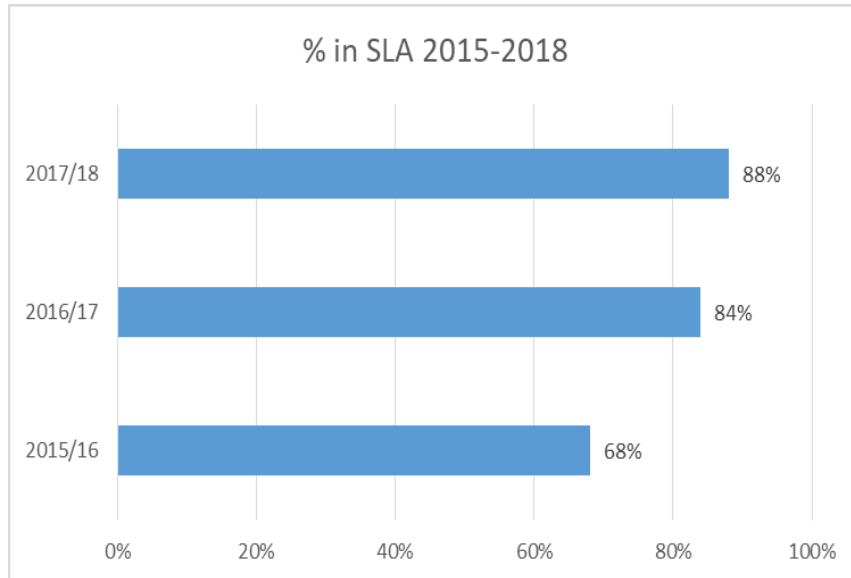
Stage one complaint response times:

3.24 Stage one complaint response times have improved by 4% in comparison to 2016/17.

3.25 Below is a year to date comparison with previous periods:

Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
% responded in 20 days`	68%	84%	88%
	(1149 of 1332)	1361 of 1622)	(1309 of 1490)

(* 20 working days is the corporate SLA)



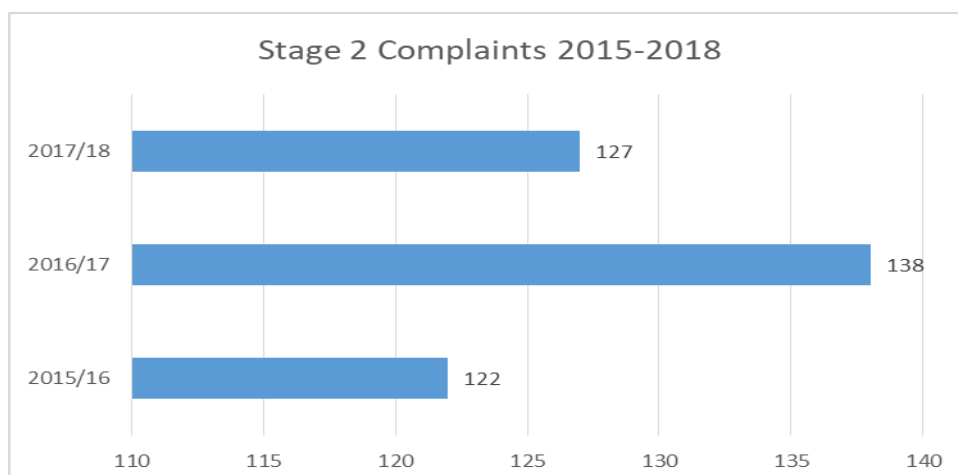
4. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS - STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

4.1 The corporate target is to respond to 90% within target of 20 days.

4.2 The volume of corporate **Stage two complaints** has decreased. 2016/17 received 138 stage two complaints compared to 127 in 2017/18. Work will continue by CRT to reduce the number of complaints progressing from S1 to S2, by ensuring quality is of a high standard.

4.3 Below is a comparison with previous periods:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of stage two complaints received	122	138	127



4.4 The table below shows where the increases in stage two complaints have been seen when compared with 2016/17:

Team Name	Total 2016/17	Upheld	Total 2017/18	Upheld
Revenues	18	28%	27	56%
Members & Resident Services (repairs)	2	50%	7	71%
Planning Applications & Appeals	2	50%	7	29%
SEN - 0 to 16 years (Special Educational Needs)	5	40%	7	71%
Refuse and recycling	4	50%	6	33%
Highways Network Maintenance (Roads, Drainage and Structures)	5	40%	6	50%
Housing Allocations	2	50%	4	25%
Service charges	1	0%	2	50%

Upheld Stage two complaints:

4.5 39% (49 of 127) of the stage two complaints received during 2017/18 were upheld. This is compared to 41% in 2016/17 where 56 out of 138 in 2016/17. This represents a decrease of 2% being upheld.

Stage two complaint response times:

4.6 Stage two complaint response times below the target. During 2017/18, 39% (49 of 127 complaints) were answered on time. The corporate target is 90%. Although this is a concern, for comparison during 2016/17, 28% (39 of 138 complaints) were answered on time so there has been an 11% improvement in responding within SLA.

4.7 The complaints team has been re-structured and completed recruitment in June 2017. With a new structure in place, they have laid some key foundations over 17/18 with a focus on working with services to look at trends, and improvements arising from complaints. There has also been a focus on complaint handling and responses which will continue over 2018/19. Some of the key initiatives for 2018/19 to improve complaint handling and responses:

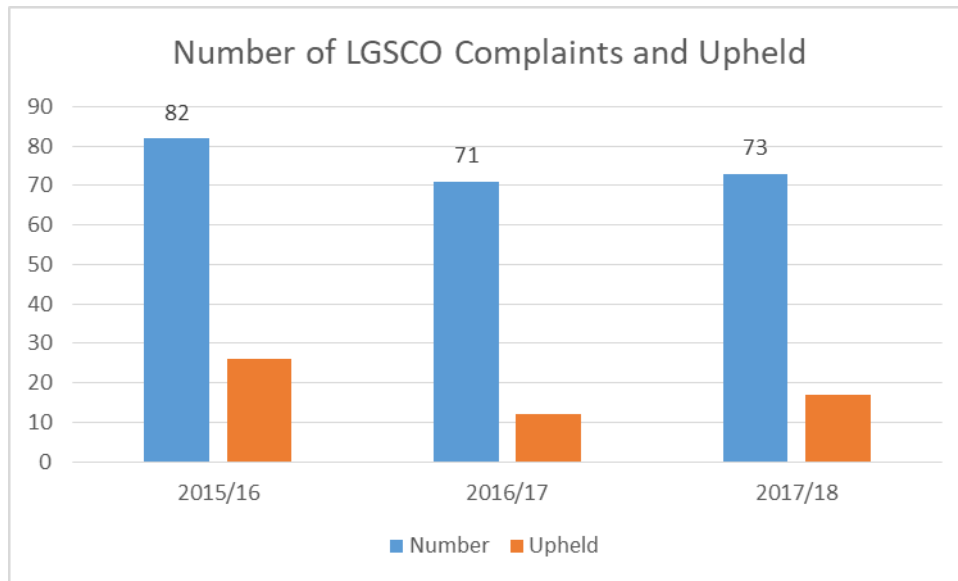
- Sample quality check on all stage 1 responses to check for quality and to ensure we are responding to all issues, preventing the customer needing to contact us again
- Monthly meetings with high volume complaint areas, reviewing Stage 1 responses, themes around complaints and actions to reduce complaints (focus on learning)
- Complaints training for all DCO's (departmental complaints officers) to offer support, letter writing tips and knowledge and insight into their roles and responsibilities
- Engagement with residents to gain insight around service improvements
- Working with Learning and Development to include complaints training & prevention as part of employee induction
- Publishing quarterly complaints reports on the Intranet, along with case studies arising from Local Government Ombudsman complaints and trends.

5. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS - OMBUDSMAN (LSGCO) COMPLAINTS

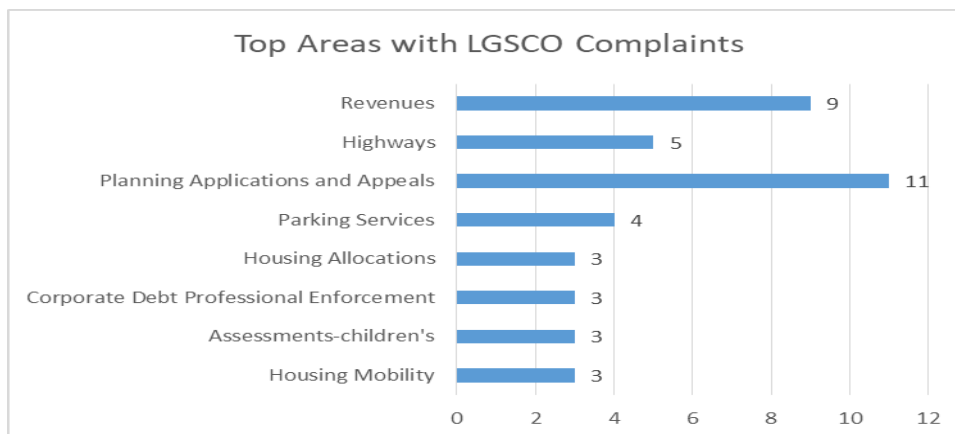
5.1 The corporate target is to reduce year on year 10% of upheld complaints.

5.2 The volume of corporate **Ombudsman complaints (Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman)** has increased slightly. 2016/17 received 71 Ombudsman complaints compared to 2017/18 (73 complaints). Below is a year to date comparison with previous periods:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of Ombudsman complaints received	82	71	73



5.3 Highest areas for Ombudsman complaints during 2017/18 (minimum of 2 cases received during the period):



Upheld Ombudsman complaints:

5.4 At the time of writing, 23% (17 of 73) of the Ombudsman complaints received during 2017/18 were upheld. This is compared to 17% (13 out of 76) in 2016/17. This validates having a two stage internal complaints process model where the second part is independent and ensures is robust corporate governance and resolution of complaint issues. There are some LGSCO complaints that are currently still under investigation and have no outcome.

(See appendix B LGO Scrutiny)

Top Teams for LGSCO complaints:

Team Name	Total 2016/17	Upheld	Total 2017/18	Upheld
Planning Applications & Appeals	9	0%	11	1
Revenues	6	50%	9	4
Highways	0	N/A	5	1
Parking (operations)	8	0%	4	0
Housing Mobility	4	50%	3	0
Assessments-children's	0	N/A	3	0
Corporate Debt	3	0%	3	1
Housing Allocations	0	N/A	3	1
Benefits	4	25%	1	1

- 5.5 Although the Revenues department continues to receive a large number of LGSCO escalations, the council strengthens its position in terms of debt collection, ensuring customers who can pay, do pay, and the same is true for the Corporate Debt team. Work has also been done to implement a new target operating model, which will help to manage demand better and improve processing times.
- 5.6 Planning continue to receive a large proportion of LGSCO complaints, due to the increasing development within the borough, which residents are continually challenging. Some of the Planning cases that escalate to the LGSCO are unable to be investigated, as there may be a separate appeals process. Only a small number are upheld however, with the theme showing that residents are unhappy about approved applications, with no fault being identified by the LGSCO of the Council's processes or procedures.
- 5.7 Parking (operations) had a 50% decrease from 8 complaints to 4 escalating to the LGO, which is an improvement compared to last year.

5.8 Benefits LGSCO complaints have reduced from 4 to 1, which is an improvement and complaint trends and quality checks are being monitored to ensure that current processes are up to date, feeding back any possible learning/skills gaps within the services to again drive complaints down further.

6. LGSCO UPHELD CASE STUDIES:

6.1 The below shows a selection of LGSCO upheld complaints across the Council, and the recommendations they have made for us to remedy the complaint. For all LGSCO complaints, please see Appendix B LGO Scrutiny.

Team Name	Complaint Summary	Recommendation
Resources	Mrs X has complained about how the Council has dealt with her council tax account. There is some fault as the Council did not respond to Mrs X's request for a corrected bill before enforcement agents visited. The Council has agreed to waive the fee Mrs X incurred because of this visit.	The Council has agreed to apologise to Mrs X for how it handled her complaint. It has also agreed to refund the extra charges she incurred as a result of the enforcement agent's visit to her home (£235). This action should be taken within one month of this decision.
Housing-Homelessness Prevention	The Council delayed reaching decisions on Miss X's homelessness applications. There was also a failure to consider the concerns raised about the interim accommodation the Council provided. The Council agreed make a payment to Miss X to remedy the injustice caused and to review her interim accommodation.	Within four weeks of my final decision the Council agreed to pay Miss X £450 to recognise the delay in deciding homelessness applications and the uncertainty that Miss X may have been offered an alternative, more appropriate property during this time. The Council also agreed to review Miss X's interim accommodation within four weeks of my decision.
Benefits	The Council made mistakes handling Miss X's council tax account. It has apologised for these mistakes. This is sufficient to remedy injustice caused to her. The Council reviewed Miss X's benefit entitlement, paid a refund and adjusted what she owed. There was no fault in how the Council sought to recover council tax from Miss X.	LGO have found evidence of fault by the Council causing Miss X injustice. The Council's subsequent actions have already remedied this injustice.
Planning Applications &	Mr and Mrs X complain about the Council's failure to protect them from	I have ended my investigation as the Council accepted my findings

Appeals	their neighbour's development. There was some fault in the way the Council dealt with the planning application, but we should not continue our investigation as the planning enforcement process is ongoing.	and recommendations. Mr and Mrs X may come back to the Ombudsman at the end of the Council's enforcement process or there is unreasonable delay.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Statutory Scrutiny

Appendix B: LGO Scrutiny

CONTACT OFFICER: Clare Davies - Complaints Manager

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None