

**AUDIT COMMITTEE  
20 NOVEMBER 2019**

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**ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AND MEMBER STANDARDS – UPDATE REPORT**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To update members on issues relevant to member standards and ethical governance.

**Summary**

2. The report gives members an update of information about issues relevant to member standards since matters were reported to the Committee in June 2019.
3. Also set out in the report are a number of datasets of ethical indicators to assist in monitoring the ethical health of the Council. By reviewing these indicators it is hoped to be able to identify any unusual or significant trends or changes in the volume of data recorded for the relevant period that might provide an alert to any deterioration in the ethical health of the authority.
4. Commentary is included for some data sets to give analysis and explanation for some of the more notable variations. There are no particular issues of concern that have been identified from reviewing the data.

**Recommendation**

5. Members are asked to note the information presented and to comment as appropriate.

**Reason**

6. By having information of this nature:
  - (a) Members will be assisted to perform their role.
  - (b) Members will be able to get a better picture of the ethical health of the authority.

**Paul Wildsmith  
Managing Director**

**Background Papers**

None – save as mentioned in the text  
Luke Swinhoe: Extension 5490

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S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific issues which relate to crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	There is no specific health and wellbeing impact.
Carbon Impact	There is no specific carbon impact.
Diversity	There is no specific diversity impact.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected equally.
Groups Affected	All groups are affected equally.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not affect the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	There is no specific relevance to the strategy beyond a reflection on the Council's ethical governance arrangements.
Efficiency	There is no specific efficiency impact.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Update on matters relevant to Ethical Governance and Member Standards

#### Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL)

##### The Principles of Public Life:25 years

7. In October this year it was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The CSPL is an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Cabinet Office. The CSPL advises the Prime Minister, national and local government about ethical standards in public life in England. It monitors, conducts broad inquiries and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders.
8. The CSPL does not have a role in investigating individual allegations but promotes the seven principles of public life. These are known as the 'Nolan Principles'. All public office holders and employees (ministers, civil servants, NHS staff, the police, councillors and council officers) must uphold the principles of accountability, honesty, integrity, objectivity, selflessness, openness and leadership.
9. To promote the anniversary and to draw attention to the Nolan Principles - the CSPL has made a number of short videos (an overview video and then videos on each of the seven principles). These can be viewed from the following website:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCL04xn0gFY8rx2an6GM112Q>

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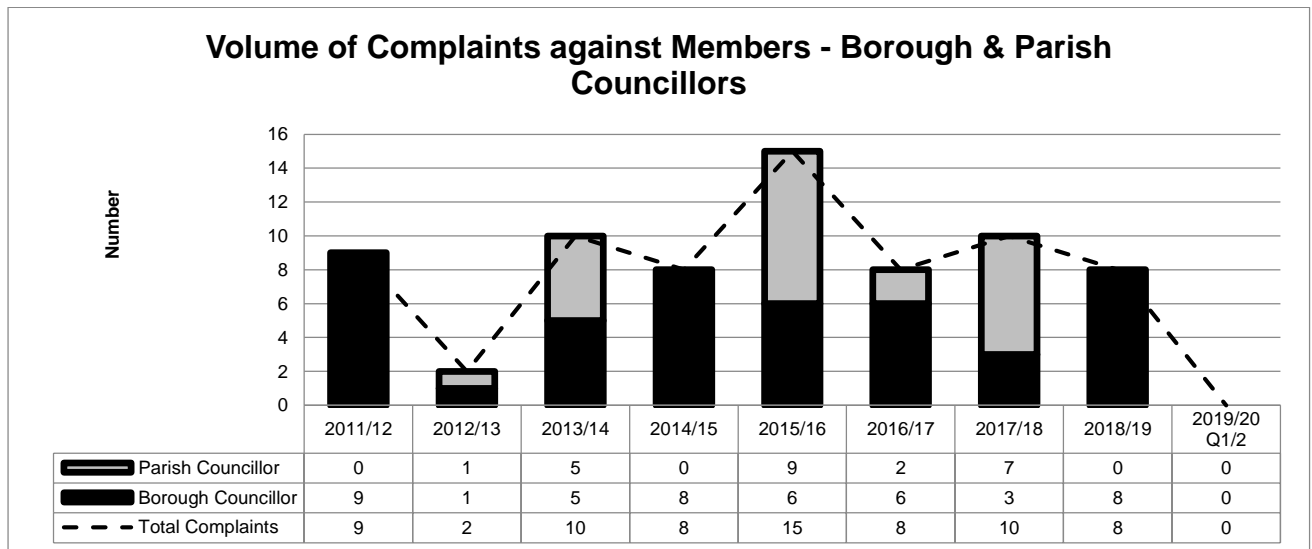
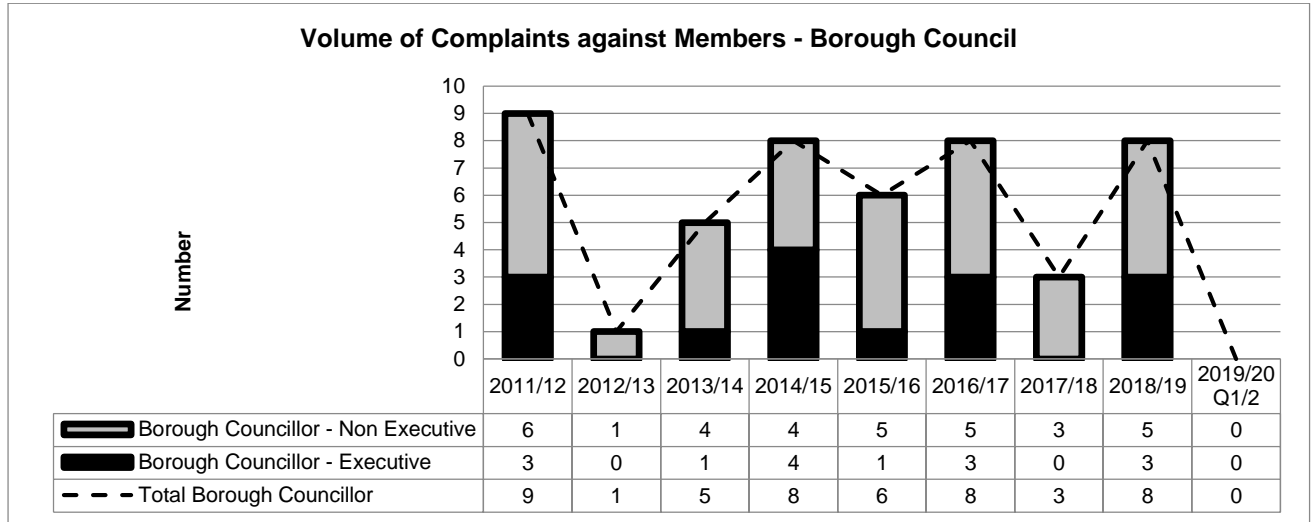
## **Members Code of Conduct**

10. Since the May local government elections, a number of training sessions about the Code of Conduct have been held for members of the Borough Council and also for members of Parish Councils and Parish Clerks.
11. As a result of the May elections the Councils website has been updated with details of the register of interest forms for both Borough Council and Parish Council Members.

## **Ethical Indicators**

12. Set out in **Appendix 1** are a range of data sets that it is hoped will assist in monitoring the ethical health of the Council. By reviewing the indicators, it will be possible to identify any unusual or significant changes in the volume of data recorded for the relevant period that might provide an alert to any deterioration in the ethical health of the authority.
  13. Member's observations about this information are invited.
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**Member Complaints**



Comments

The average number of complaints per year from 2010/11 to 2018/19 is 8.22 per year.

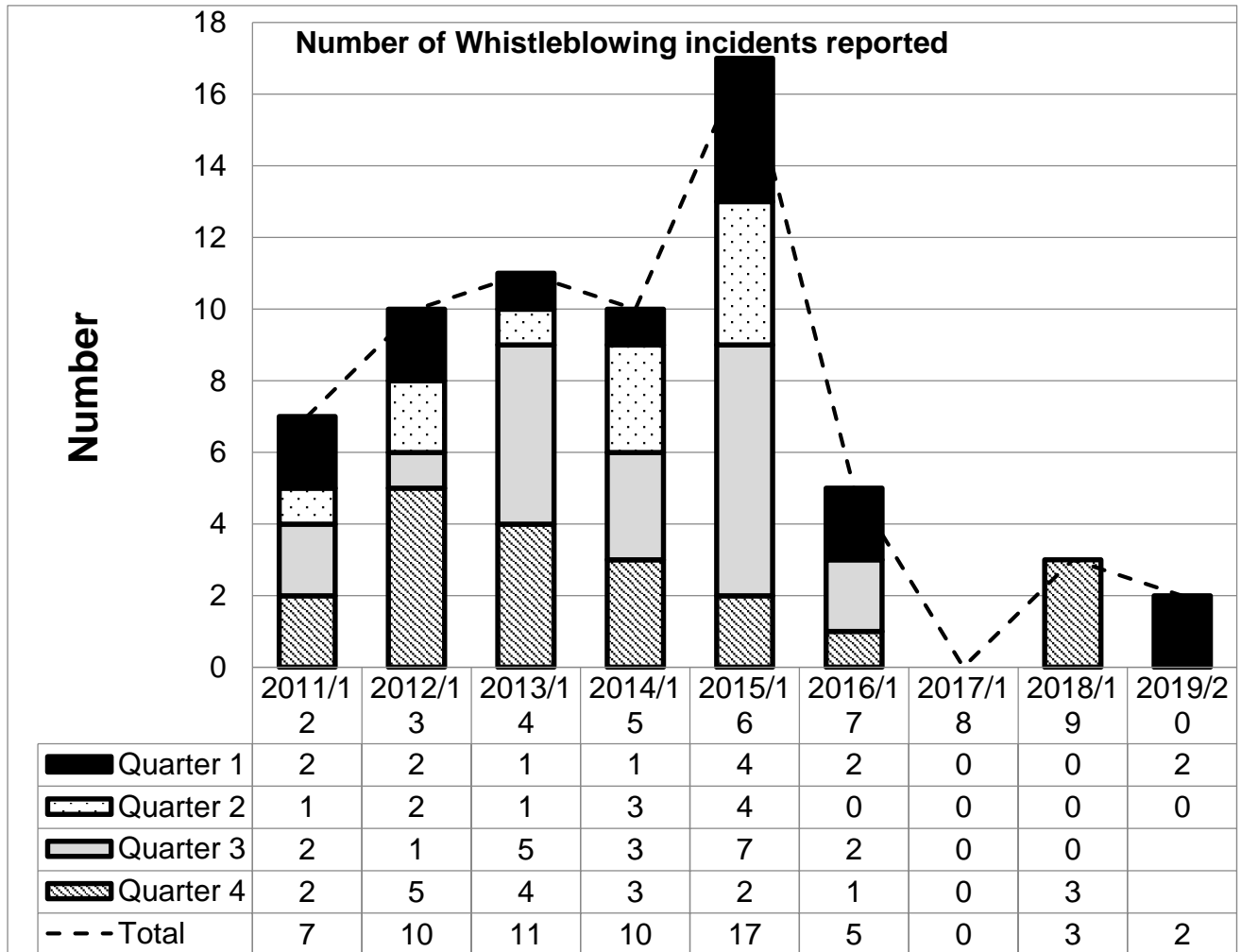
Interpreting the information needs a degree of caution due to low volumes. It is also a factor that in some years spikes in complaints occur due to particular circumstances which account for the rise.

The increase in complaints received for 2015/16, related to one Parish Council alone which accounted for all of the 9 complaints attributed to Parish Councils. This has very significantly impacted on the total complaints received for 2015/16. The number of complaints from 2016/17 on, has been more in line with the overall average.

Over the period 2010/11 to 2018/19 there have been 25 complaints made in respect of Parish Councillors and for the same period 49 complaints relating to Borough Councillors. The fact that there are more complaints in respect of Borough Council members is perhaps

unsurprising given the types of decisions they are involved in making and the more prominent role that they play compared to Parish Councillors.

**Whistleblowing**

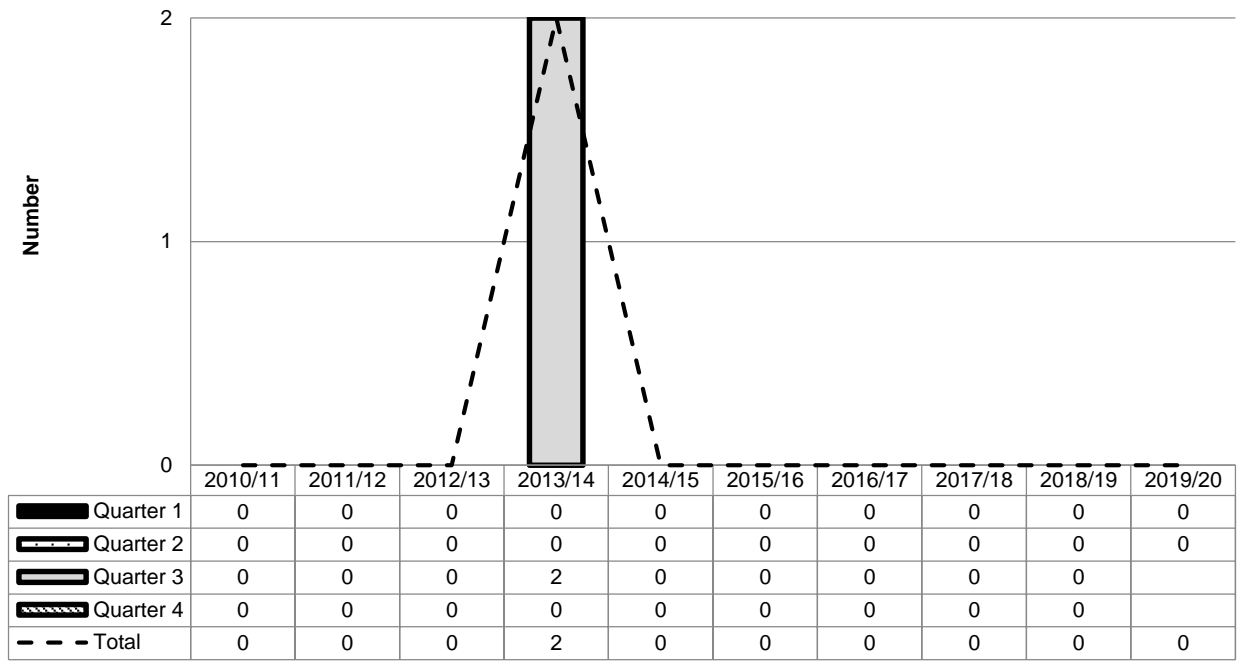


Comments

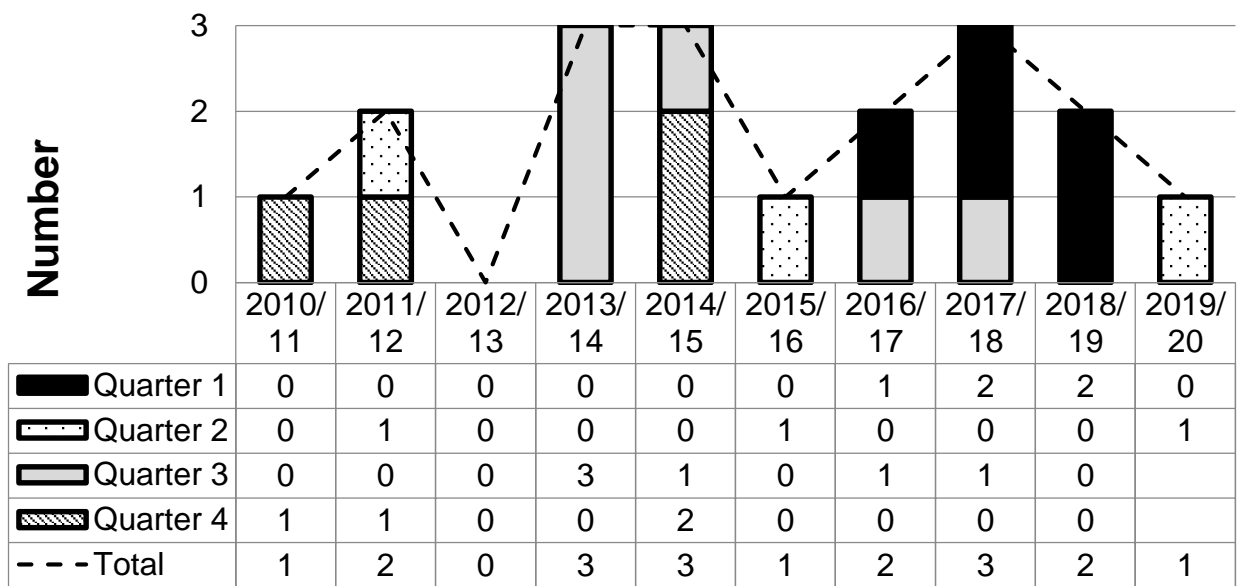
Publicity about the whistleblowing policy took place in the Autumn of 2018. Work was also undertaken to highlight the Council’s Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy. There has been a slight increase in reported incidents.

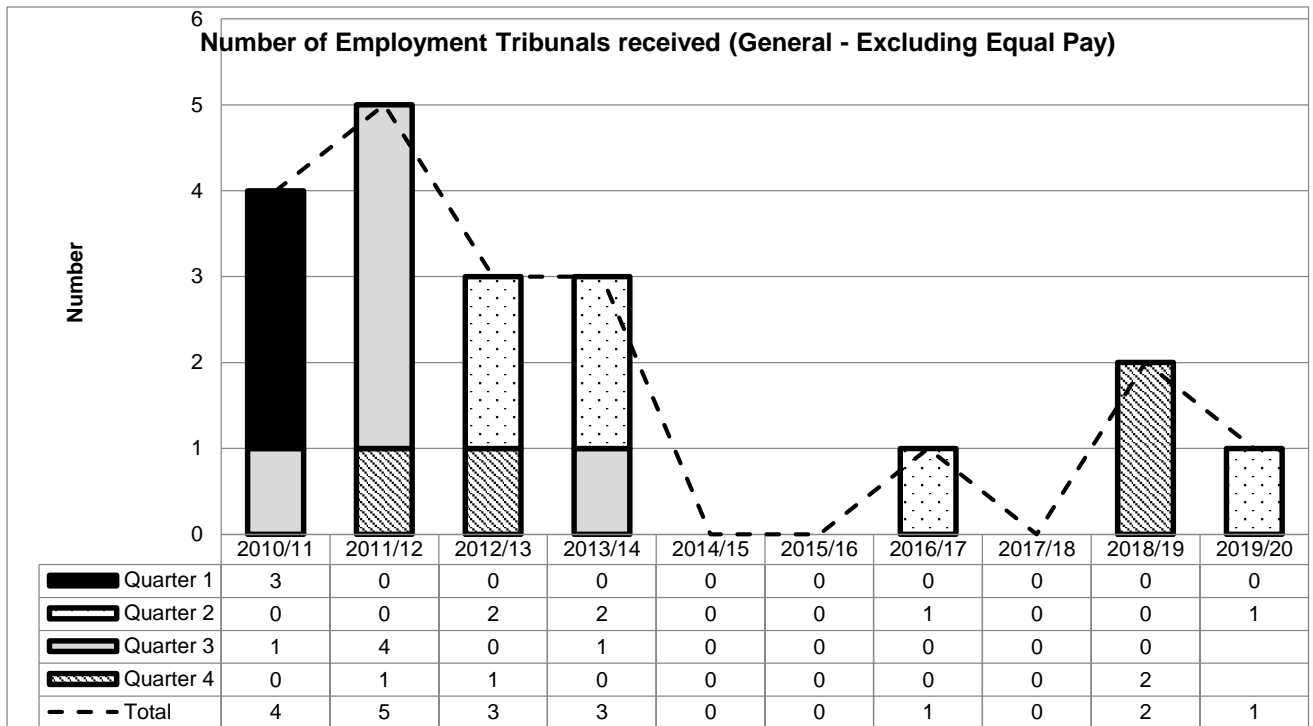
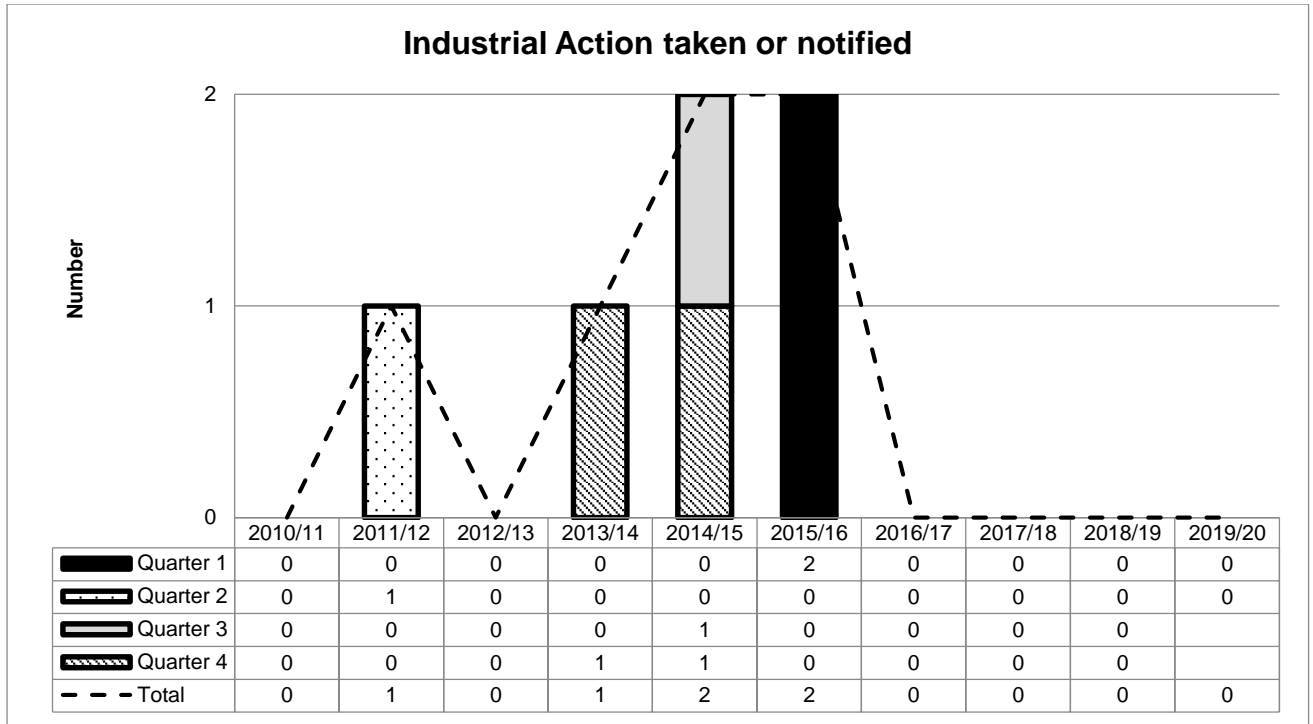


### Disciplinary action relating to breaches of the Member / Officer Protocol

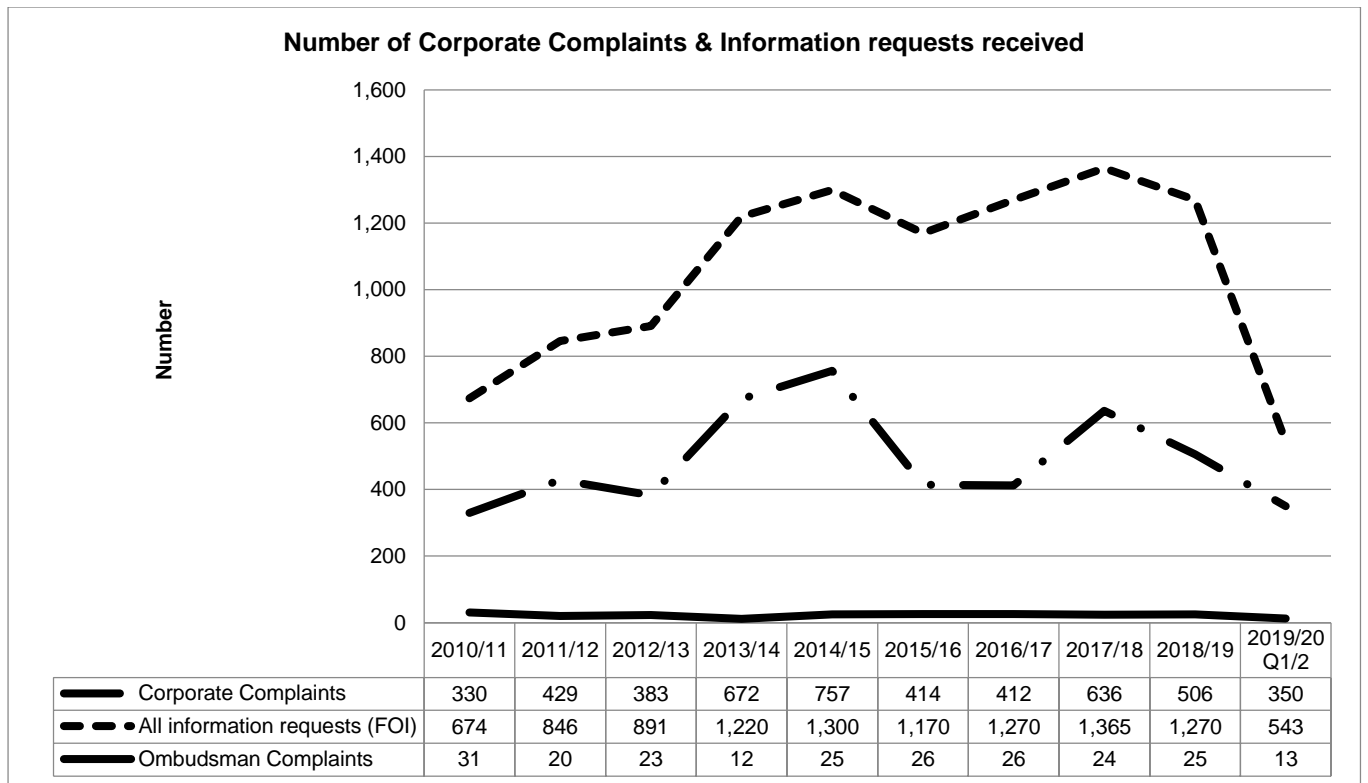


### Disciplinary action relating to Fraud









**Comments**

2014/15 - this increase in complaints can be attributed primarily to problems people experienced with their refuse and recycling collections, following the introduction of alternate weekly collections.

2015/16 – this decrease in complaints can be attributed primarily to the reduction in complaints about problems people initially experienced with their refuse and recycling collections following the introduction of alternate weekly collections.

2016/17 – the number of Corporate Complaints and Ombudsman Complaints received was similar to the number received in 2015/16, while there was an increase of 100 information requests.

2017/18 – One of the major factors in the increase in corporate complaints was the introduction of the Council’s policy to no longer provide a recall service for missed refuse collections. There was also a significant increase in corporate complaints about Customer Services following a restructure, the most common theme was dissatisfaction with telephone waiting times. Additional staffing resource was brought in, as a response to the complaints about telephone waiting times.

2018/19 – The Council received 624 corporate complaints, a slight decrease from 636 the previous year. While there were increases in some areas, those which saw a decrease in complaints included Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, Customer Services, Development Management and Parking Appeals.

2019/20 – The Council again saw a slight decrease in corporate complaints during quarters 1 and 2 of 2019/2020. The Council received 347 corporate complaints compared to 364 for the same period in 2018/19.

