

Complaints and Compliments Quarter 3 2021/2022 (Law and Governance, Clare Pinnock)

Synopsis of report:

To provide Members with a summary of the complaints and compliments received from 1 October – 31 December 2021 (Quarter 3 of the KPI reporting structure), and report any matters that have arisen since the meeting of the Committee in November 2021.

Recommendation(s):

None. This report is for information.

1. Context of Report

- 1.1 The Council maintains a spreadsheet of formal complaints which have been recorded (and a separate register for those in which the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) has been involved), what they relate to and how they have been resolved. We maintain a similar spreadsheet for compliments and there is an overdue complaints register which helps us keep track of unresolved complaints.

2. Report

- 2.1 The Council's Complaints Procedure regards complaints as '*an expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service (whether the service is provided directly by us or by one of our partners/contractors) which requires a response.*' This is in line with the definition of a complaint that the Ombudsman recommends.
- 2.2 Corporate Heads are responsible for ensuring that complaints are dealt with and compliments recorded in a timely way and that entries on the central registers are accurate and comply with the General Data Protection Act. Service Requests, and people seeking information and explanations of Council policy are not generally regarded as complaints. Nevertheless, they should still be dealt with in a timely manner, be as helpful as possible to avoid a complaint being lodged subsequently and to maintain a high standard of customer service to our residents, businesses and visitors to the borough.
- 2.3 There were 20 entries in the complaints register and 23 compliments recorded in Quarter 3 of 2021/2022.
- 2.4 **Complaints Quarter 3 2021/2022**

The table below sets out the figures for Quarters 1, 2 and 3 of 2021/2022:

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
Commercial Services	0	0	0
Community Development	6	4	0
Community Services	2	0	0
Corporate Services	0	1	0
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	3	0	1
Development Management and Building Control	3	1	3
Economic Development and Planning Policy	0	0	0
Environmental Services	8	4	4
Financial Services	4	0	0
Housing	8	8	12
Human Resources	0	0	0
Law and Governance	1	0	0
Total	35	19	20

- 2.5 Of the 20 complaints recorded, 1 was upheld and a further 4 partly so, regarding issues under the remit of Customer Services and Housing respectively. 6 were not upheld, and a further 3 are in progress. There was one complaint that has been notified to us but having sent the resident details of the formal complaints procedure they did not follow it up with any details of their complaint after 4 weeks.
- 2.6 There were 4 complaints for which a response was overdue in Quarter 3, and the relevant Officers have been asked for an update.

Lessons Learned

- 2.7 Members have requested some analysis of complaints and compliments and how service improvements can be made using the data available and for this section on lessons learned to be reinstated into this report. The following has been identified from information provided in the registers:
- To check details carefully before sending communications to customers

- To deal with service requests in a timely way to avoid delays
- The value of the personal touch in Customer Service and face to face communications in front line services
- To send a reminder to business centres to record complaints centrally with Law and Governance via their departmental contact

2.8 Compliments Quarter 3 2021/2022

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
Commercial Services	0	0	0
Community Development	8	14	13
Community Services	1	0	2
Corporate Services	1	0	0
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	4	9	6
Development Management and Building Control	0	0	0
Economic Development and Planning Policy	0	0	0
Environmental Services	5	5	2
Financial Services	0	0	0
Housing	0	2	0
Human Resources	0	0	0
Law and Governance	0	0	0
Total	19	30	23

2.9 There were 23 compliments received for Quarter 3 2021/2022. The details, where staff were named or identifiable from the information provided, are set out in Exempt Appendix 'A'.

2.10 Some of the compliments were shared between teams; where for example Customer Services took the initial call but it was then actioned by another department such as Housing Maintenance or the Depot. Individuals in Community Development and Community Services were thanked for their care and attention to vulnerable residents and for strong partnership working with other parties such as the Police and voluntary organisations.

2.11 The breakdown of complaints and compliments in Quarters 1, 2 and 3 for 2021/2022 by Ward is set out below (- denotes complaints and + compliments)

Ward	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3	
	-	+	-	+	-	+

Addlestone North	11	1			1	2
Addlestone South	1	1	3	2	1	1
Chertsey Riverside	2		3		1	4
Chertsey St Ann's	1	1	1	2	2	1
Egham Hythe	2	1	1	2	4	
Egham Town	3	2	2	2	2	
Englefield Green East	3	1		2	1	1
Englefield Green West	2	2	1	2	2	
Longcross, Lyne and Chertsey South		1	3			
New Haw	2		1	1		
Ottershaw	1	1	1	3	2	1
Thorpe	1	1		1		
Virginia Water	4			1	2	1
Woodham and RowTown						2
Out of Borough	2	7	1	9	2	6
Unrecorded	0	0	2	3		4
Totals	35	19	19	30	20	23

- 2.12 Recording complaints and compliments is a valuable tool for the Council to review performance and improve the delivery of services.
- 2.13 Members are asked to note that since the meeting in November, following the retirement and/or taking voluntary redundancy of several senior managers during Quarter 3 and subsequent restructures, the registers have now been updated for Quarter 4 going forward.
- 3. Policy framework implications**
- 3.1 The Complaints policy and procedures are reviewed regularly.
- 3.2 Officers are giving consideration to whether we should regard a complaint as 'out of time' in the same way as we do if a complaint is made about a Councillor if the person does not follow it up after 4 weeks with any further details that would suggest that an investigation might be appropriate, and to amend the complaints policy accordingly.
- 3.3 The rationale behind this approach is that a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with the service delivered by the Council. It is recorded by the Council to enable it to measure its performance in an objective fashion and use such information to improve the way it operates. Complaints have a positive impact for an organisation because they allow lessons to be learnt.
- 3.4 By recording complaints on the system which are not being investigated because no actual details have been provided distorts the statistical data that the Council holds. It also causes confusion because it may give the impression that the Council is performing more poorly than it actually is.

3.5 Officers would view four weeks as being a reasonable period of time for someone to provide follow up information in respect of a complaint. If there were a reasonable reason why information was not provided within four weeks e.g. serious illness, then the complaint could be reopened.

4. **Resource implications**

4.1 The registers are co-ordinated by an Officer in Law and Governance; on behalf of the Monitoring Officer, but time is also spent by other Officers, particularly in Housing and Customer Services whose input is much appreciated.

5. **Equality implications**

5.1 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010. Section 149 of the Act provides that we must have due regard to the need to;

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- b) to advance equality of opportunity
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share protected characteristics.

We should at all times act in a way that is non-discriminatory through our policies and procedures and interactions with people.

5.2 In the last reporting period there were four compliments which can be considered relevant to the protected characteristics of age and/or disability and gender, and two complaints that could be identified as relevant to race and disability. However, these were not upheld with regard to the elements regarding their protected characteristics but we did accept responsibilities for the delays in dealing with their issues.

(For information)

Background papers

The Complaints and Compliments Registers held on the Council's feedback drive and relevant (part exempt) emails on the Council's outlook system.