

Complaints and Compliments Quarter 4 2022/2023 (Law and Governance, Clare Pinnock)

Synopsis of report:

To provide Members with a summary of the complaints and compliments received from 1 January – 31 March 2023 (Quarter 4 of the KPI reporting structure), and report any matters that have arisen since the last scheduled meeting of the Committee in January 2023.

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 30 entries in the complaints register and 16 compliments recorded in Quarter 4 of 2022/2023.
- 2.4 **Complaints Quarter 4 2022/2023 (and year end)**

The table below sets out the figures for 2022/2023:-

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Assets and Regeneration	0	0	0	2
Community Development	0	1	0	(3)
Community Services	1	0	0	0
Corporate Services	0	0	0	0
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	2	3	2	2
Development Management and Building Control	0	0	4	2
Economic Development and Planning Policy	0	0	0	0
Environmental Services	8	12	5	10
Financial Services	0	2	0	0
Housing	16	11	9	13
Human Resources	0	0	0	0
Law and Governance	0	0	1	1
Total	27	29	21	30

- 2.5 An analysis of the 30 complaints recorded shows that communication and delays in updating people with their service requests continues to be a theme. However, this could and can often be attributable to high workloads and other pressures on teams, such as vacancies.
- 2.6 Four complaints were upheld, compensation being paid in two Housing cases to acknowledge delays. A further 7 cases (across different business centres) were partly upheld and compensation paid in 3 of these cases to the complainant. 14 cases were not upheld, one of these has been re-opened and is with the Ombudsman. This leaves 5 cases in Refuse and Recycling that appear to be overdue and Officers have been asked to confirm the latest.
- 2.7 There were no complaints recorded for the former Community Development (Green Space) unit because they are now in Environmental Services. Hence that figure being slightly higher this Quarter. Three of the 10 were under the remit of Green Spaces, but two concerned the same incident which was highlighted on social media at the time. Officers acted quickly to mitigate the health and safety concerns raised and work is on-going to make further improvements subject to the agreement of third parties in whose ownership the land in question relates to. The remaining complaints regarding refuse and recycling were all concerning multiple missed collections and general

issues about being inconvenienced by the timing of collections. With busy, congested streets this is largely beyond their control and crews try to carry out this important statutory function facing a number of challenges.

- 2.8 Law and Governance dealt with a complaint with regard to the Crime and Disorder Committee which was not upheld.
- 2.9 Members will be aware that one complaint about Planning was considered by a special meeting of the Corporate Management Committee and was not upheld.
- 2.10 Housing complaints concerned individuals who disagreed with policies and assessments and issues with tenants' properties and repairs. The Housing Committee, at its last meeting in March noted that a tenant satisfaction survey would be underway in the Spring which is an important part of responding to feedback from our residents.
- 2.11 Sometimes cases come in as Service Requests but become complaints when the service request (or what has been treated as a service request) is essentially a complaint. However, it is accepted that some can be borderline and that if they are complaining for the first time it is usually appropriate to treat it as a service request. We also of course field a lot of complaints that are for other services such as County Highways, which should not be recorded as complaints about the borough council but forwarded to them for action.
- 2.12 There were two complaints that were picked up when the business centre in receipt of them copied us into their correspondence and these were added to the register.
- 2.13 If Members have any queries regarding particular service areas these can be referred to the relevant Corporate Head.
- 2.14 **Compliments Quarter 4 2022/2023 (and year end)**

The table below sets out the figures for 2022/2023:-

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Assets and Regeneration				
Community Development	5	5	(now part of Community Services)	(1)
Community Services	1	3		
Corporate Services	4			
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	4	10	4	6
Development Management and Building Control		1	1	2
Economic Development and Planning Policy				
Environmental Services	2	7	7	5
Financial Services				
Housing	8	3	5	3
Human Resources				
Law and Governance		1		
Total	24	30	17	16

- 2.15 Whilst Complaints increased in Quarter 4, which is not unusual, covering the winter months, there were fewer compliments (16). The details, where staff were named or identifiable from the information provided, are set out in Exempt Appendix 'A'.
- 2.16 Compliments were for staff across the Council showing empathy and being helpful to customers, many of whom were in difficult personal and/or financial circumstances. Others appreciated jobs well done in response to service requests.
- 2.17 The breakdown of complaints and compliments for 2022/2023 by Ward is set out below (- denotes complaints and + compliments)

Ward	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Addlestone North	4	3	1	3	1		6	2
Addlestone South	3	3	4	3	4	3	5	
Chertsey Riverside	2		2	4	1	1	4	1
Chertsey St Ann's	3	2	4	2	1		3	2

Egham Hythe	4	4	4		3	2	4	
Egham Town	4	1	1	1	3		3	
Englefield Green East						1		
Englefield Green West	1			1	1		1	2
Longcross, Lyne and Chertsey South			1	1	2	1		1
New Haw	2	1	4	3	1			1
Ottershaw		1	3			1	1	1
Thorpe		2	1	2		1		1
Virginia Water	2		2			1	1	
Woodham and RowTown		1						1
Out of Borough	1	6	1	7	3	2	2	2
Unrecorded	1		1	3	1	4		2
Totals	27	24	29	30	21	17	30	16

- 2.18 Recording complaints and compliments is a valuable tool for the Council to review performance and improve the delivery of services.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The Complaints policy and procedures are reviewed regularly to provide up to date guidance to staff completing the registers and to ensure reporting is accurate.
- 3.2 The Corporate Business Plan 2022 – 2026 is relevant to this process as handling complaints is at the centre of how we interact with the public. Our values include being customer focused, striving for excellence, improving services, promoting equality and diversity, and delivering excellent value for money. Our goals include having satisfied customers. It is important that our processes are aligned with these strands of the plan.

4. Resource implications

- 4.1 The Council does not have a complaints team. Work is co-ordinated within Business Centres by individuals with whom Officers in Law and Governance maintain a close working relationship to try and ensure complaints are dealt with in a timely manner, recorded accurately and that reporting compliments is also promoted.

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 two complaints that could be identified as relevant to race and one to disability. One was partly upheld but only in relation to the agreement that repairs were needed to the property. The other two were not upheld. There was one compliment relevant to disability and another to age.

(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.