

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Complaints and Compliments Quarter 2 2023/24</b>
<b>Report author</b>	Clare Pinnock, Democratic Services Officer
<b>Department</b>	Law and Governance
<b>Exempt</b>	No

**Purpose of report:**  
**For Information**

**Synopsis of report:**  
**To provide Members with a summary of the complaints and compliments received from 1 July – 30 September 2023 (Quarter 2 of the KPI reporting structure) and report any matters that have arisen since the last meeting of the Committee in October 2023.**

**Recommendation(s):**  
**None. This report is for information.**

**1. Context and background 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. There is an overdue complaints register which helps us keep track of unresolved complaints.

**2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended**

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. However, as set out elsewhere in this agenda this definition is changing when the Ombudsman’s new joint complaint handling code is published following the current period of consultation.

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 corporate 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 54 entries in the corporate complaints register and 29 compliments recorded in Quarter 2 of 2023/24. Two complaints were withdrawn and a further one not counted as no further information was received after 4 weeks from the initial contact.

#### 2.4 **Complaints Quarter 2 2023/24**

The table below sets out the figures for quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24:-

<b>Business Centre</b>	<b>Quarter 1</b>	<b>Quarter 2</b>
Assets and Regeneration	1	5
Community Services		
Corporate Services		
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	2	1
Environmental Services	27	24
Financial Services		1
Housing	6	16
Human Resources		
Law and Governance	1	1
Planning, Economy and Built Environment	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>54</b>

2.5 Members will notice a spike in complaints about Housing. These were mostly about communications between staff and members of the public, the way in which a case has been handled or dissatisfaction with the response given which in the majority of cases was correct and following our policies and procedures. Some cases had other elements to them which exacerbated the situation such as neighbourhood disputes, disagreements about when and what repairs should be made to a property and whose responsibility it was to make repairs. Six of the Housing complaints were upheld and training has been put in place and system improvements made to prevent data errors.

- 2.6 There were slightly fewer complaints regarding Refuse, Recycling and Green scene, which includes Grounds Maintenance. There was an initial increase in complaints about Grounds Maintenance but this seems to have fallen as new regimes are beginning to settle. A number of matters were referred to the County Council as being Highways related.
- 2.7 We used to record complaints as 'upheld', 'partly upheld' and 'not upheld'. In anticipation of the Ombudsman's new Joint Complaint Handling Code we now (from October) formally count complaints where any element of it has been upheld as 'upheld' with the opportunity to provide a breakdown of which elements were upheld and which were not. Housing already do this and the spreadsheet and guidance is being updated.
- 2.8 If Members have any queries regarding particular service areas these can be referred to the relevant Corporate Head.

**2.9 Compliments Quarter 2 2023/24**

The table below sets out the figures for quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24:-

<b>Business Centre</b>	<b>Quarter 1</b>	<b>Quarter 2</b>
Assets and Regeneration		
Community Services	4	2
Corporate Services	1	
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	3	5
Environmental Services	5	15
Financial Services		1
Housing	4	5
Human Resources		
Law and Governance		
Planning, Economy and Built Environment	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>

- 2.10 The details, where staff were named or identifiable from the information provided, are set out in Exempt Appendix 'A'. At the meeting of the Committee in July we announced that with their permission staff would get a mention on social media. However, the majority of staff have not wished for their name to be publicised, so it was easier to retain the exempt appendix. Staff and teams continue to receive their certificates on a weekly basis on behalf of this Committee.
- 2.11 Environmental Services covers the Depot, Grounds Maintenance and Green Spaces; the breakdown was 7 for Grounds Maintenance, 5 for Refuse and Recycling and 3 for Green Spaces. Their compliments were mainly for specific pieces of work

completed. For example, a tidy up of Abbeyfield, Homewood Park and Walton Leigh open spaces. Specific crews were also thanked for their assistance to residents.

- 2.12 The breakdown of complaints and compliments for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/2024 by Ward is set out below (- denotes complaints and + compliments)

Ward	Quarter 1		Quarter 2	
	-	+	-	+
Addlestone North	4	3	6	2
Addlestone South	2	2	4	2
Chertsey Riverside	2	1	1	
Chertsey St Ann's	5	1	8	4
Egham Hythe	3	1	8	2
Egham Town	2	3	6	3
Englefield Green East	1			1
Englefield Green West	2	1	2	
Longcross, Lyne and Chertsey South	1		2	1
New Haw	1	1	4	1
Ottershaw		1	3	
Thorpe	2		2	1
Virginia Water			1	
Woodham and RowTown	5		1	1
Out of Borough	2	3	4	4
Unrecorded	6	1	2	7
Totals	38	18	54	29

- 2.13 Egham Hythe and Chertsey St Ann's had more complaints this quarter. There were a mixture of issues but predominantly Grounds Maintenance and Housing related.
- 2.14 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.

- 3.3 The Complaints process is the subject of an internal service review. This will take into account the Ombudsman's consultation on the new joint complaint handling code and work by Digital Services to make service improvements concerning reporting and software.

#### **4 Resource implications/Value for Money (where applicable)**

- 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. Legal implications**

- 5.1 None identified.

#### **6. Equality implications**

- 6.1 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.

- 6.2 In the last reporting period there was one complaint that could be identified as relevant to religion or belief, which was not upheld.

#### **7. Background papers**

Complaints and compliments data held on Law and Governance files (part exempt)

#### **8. Appendices**

Exempt Appendix 'A'