

Report title	Complaints and Compliments Quarter 3 2023/24
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Department	Law and Governance
Exempt	No

Purpose of report:
For information

Synopsis of report:
To provide Members with a summary of the complaints and compliments received from 1 October – 31 December 2023 (Quarter 3 of the KPI reporting structure) and report any matters that have arisen since the last report on these matters to the meeting of the Committee in November 2023.

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

1. Context and background of report

1.1 The Council maintains corporate registers (spreadsheets) 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.

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.’

As reported at the last meeting, when the new joint handling code is issued, subject to any changes following consultation, the new definition of a complaint will be:

‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.’

2.2 The new definition of a service request will be:

‘a request from an individual to the organisation requiring action to be taken to put something right.’

- 2.3 Officers are informally operating under these new definitions from January 2024 ahead of the introduction of the new joint complaint handling code. The Ombudsman received 157 responses to the consultation and is preparing its response. Owing to the volume of feedback the response has been delayed and it is more likely to be the end of February or beginning of March before we have a finalised code to work towards in liaison with the Ombudsman. Therefore, we have not yet updated the definitions in the formal complaints policy and are also awaiting the outcome of the internal service review.
- 2.4 Corporate Heads are responsible for ensuring that service requests and complaints are dealt with consistently and compliments recorded in a timely way so that entries on the corporate registers are accurate and comply with the General Data Protection Act. Our responses to complaints should be set out in a particular way, signposting customers to the next stages if they remain unsatisfied with our response.
- 2.5 As at 10 January 2024 there were 37 entries in the corporate complaints register and 16 compliments recorded in Quarter 3 of 2023/24.

2.6 Complaints Quarter 3 2023/24

The table below sets out the figures for quarters 1, 2 and 3 of 2023/24:-

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
Assets and Regeneration	1	5	2
Community Services			2
Corporate Services			
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	2	1	1
Environmental Services	27	24	12
Financial Services		1	
Housing	6	16	14
Human Resources			
Law and Governance	1	1	1
Planning, Economy and Built Environment	1	6	5
Total	38	54	37

- 2.7 Four of the Housing complaints had neighbourhood disputes at the core of the complaints, the others related to maintenance issues, interactions with staff including contractors and an internal system error for which measures have been put in place to avoid a re-occurrence. There is one complex complaint in progress, requiring input from a number of Officers.
- 2.8 Complaints received by us but relating to County Council functions, typically issues to do with potholes on public roads and other highways related matters have been sent on for them to address.
- 2.9 Quarter 3 saw a reduction in complaints overall, as more matters are being dealt with as service requests. Environmental Services continues to have the most complaints and these mainly relate to multiple missed bins i.e. missed on more than one occasion, and the standard of some specific works carried out in grounds maintenance and green waste.
- 2.10 Three of the Planning related complaints arose from planning applications where residents disagreed with the decisions made by Officers as they felt that by granting permission some detriment had been caused, although all the correct procedures had been followed. Another concerned enforcement and the last, communications which was shared with a number of other departments and was an IT related matter, again for which measures are being put in place to prevent a re-occurrence of the problem.
- 2.11 In some instances, residents have contacted the Chief Executive first instead of addressing their concerns to the service area. These go back to being stage 1 complaints so they can go through the approved internal process and residents were advised accordingly.
- 2.12 In Quarter 3, 15 complaints were upheld and 13 were not upheld. As expected the number of complaints upheld has increased now that we do not use the term 'partly upheld' if any element of the complaint is upheld, usually owing to delays or a breakdown in communication for which we have apologised.
- 2.13 In terms of identifiable lessons to be learned, the register refers to areas where our communication with customers could be improved or systems put in place to assist people understand our policies and procedures and appropriate training provided to prevent a re-occurrence of a particular issue.
- 2.14 If Members have any queries regarding particular service areas these can be referred to the relevant Corporate Head.
- 2.15 **Compliments Quarter 3 2023/24**

The table below sets out the figures for quarters 1, 2 and 3 of 2023/24:-

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
Assets and Regeneration			
Community Services	4	2	3
Corporate Services	1		
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	3	5	3
Environmental Services	5	15	4
Financial Services		1	1
Housing	4	5	3
Human Resources			
Law and Governance			1
Planning, Economy and Built Environment	1	1	1
Total	18	29	16

2.16 The details are set out in Exempt Appendix 'A'.

2.17 The breakdown of complaints and compliments for Quarters 1, 2 and 3 of 2023/2024 by Ward is set out below (- denotes complaints and + compliments)

Ward	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3	
	-	+	-	+	-	+
Addlestone North	4	3	6	2	4	
Addlestone South	2	2	4	2	3	1
Chertsey Riverside	2	1	1		5	
Chertsey St Ann's	5	1	8	4	1	
Egham Hythe	3	1	8	2	4	3
Egham Town	2	3	6	3	4	2
Englefield Green East	1			1		
Englefield Green West	2	1	2			1
Longcross, Lyne and Chertsey South	1		2	1	2	1
New Haw	1	1	4	1	3	1
Ottershaw		1	3		3	1
Thorpe	2		2	1	1	
Virginia Water			1			

Woodham and RowTown	5		1	1		
Out of Borough	2	3	4	4	2	2
Unrecorded	6	1	2	7	5	4
Totals	38	18	54	29	37	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.

3.3 At the last meeting we reported that the Complaints Policy and Procedures are subject to an internal Service Review. Progress has been made including:

- A review of complaint form data from the Council's website and reviewed the joint handling code (at consultation stage, may be subject to change)
- Identifying a number of key stakeholders
- Production of a high level process map of what happens when we receive complaints through to resolution or escalation to the Ombudsman to help build the software solution (subject to the outcomes of the service review)
- Preparatory work for guidance documents
- regular meetings on the project going forward

4. Resource implications/Value for Money

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.

4.2 Since the last meeting, senior management have been asked to consider who will be responsible for triaging complaints and the mechanism for managing the process. This will be integral to the successful implementation of new ways of working under the new joint handling code, to include the creation of consistent response templates for staff to use who deal with complaints.

4.3 In addition, each Business Centre will need to identify who will be logging, processing and resolving complaints and service requests. This will all help inform the reporting structure and data shared with this Committee.

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 were two complaints that could be identified as relevant to age and disability, which was not upheld, and 3 compliments relevant to age, one to disability and one to age and disability.

7. Risk Implications

- 7.1 The main risk is that of reputational damage if complaints are not dealt with in a timely and meaningful way.
- 7.2 If complaints are escalated to the Ombudsman, there is potential for financial risk, if a complaint is upheld and compensation recommended as part of the remedy to bring the customer back to the place they were before lodging a complaint.

8. Timetable

- 8.1 The service review and the actual release of the new joint handling code will determine the implementation of new ways of working and associated software packages.

9. Background papers

Complaints and compliments data held on Law and Governance files (part exempt) and correspondence between Officers in Law and Governance and Digital Services.

10. Appendices

Exempt Appendix 'A' - Compliments