

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

28 January 2021

ANNUAL CUSTOMER CARE REPORT

Report of the Case Management Team Leader for Service Delivery

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel considers information in the Annual Compliments and Complaints report.

Summary

This report analyses the number of compliments and complaints received in the period 1 December 2019 – 30 November 2020. It also provides data for the previous two years to enable the Panel to compare performance. This data also includes the number of complaints that were escalated to the formal Level Two stage of the Council's Complaints Procedure.

This report also considers the complaints raised to, and the decisions made by the Local Government Ombudsman for the same period.

Statutory Powers

Local Government Act 1972 Section 111, Localism Act 2011 Section 1.

Strategic Implications

1. This report relates to the efficient operation of Council services and the way the Council delivers against all the Corporate Plan 2015-2025 objectives, by: "Meeting the needs of our residents, businesses and other key stakeholders, Operating in a business like, commercially focussed way, Ensuring our services are well planned and efficient and Making the best use of technology" Monitoring significant changes in levels of complaints for a service is a control mechanism, prompting management to investigate service performance and take appropriate remedial action.
2. The way the Council serves and responds to customers, including when they make complaints, is a key determinant of reputation, trust in public bodies and customer empowerment. This is particularly important in relation to the most

vulnerable or disempowered residents and relates to the Council objective of 'Enabling Health and Wellbeing' and 'Tackling Deprivation'.

Introduction

3. The previous Compliments and Complaints report from 2018 recommended changes to the current Corporate Complaints procedure to support technical advances in methods of communication.
4. This has been addressed by moving the complaints process over to Salesforce in February 2019 and is now called Customer Care.
5. Previously customer complaints were raised through a range of different service channels such as online web self-service forms, telephone calls to the Customer Service Centre (CSC), email and written correspondence. The cases were logged and managed within the Lagan system. Since February 2019, all compliments, complaints and comments have been managed through Customer Care cases in Salesforce.
6. The Council's complaints procedure is not inclusive of every circumstance in which someone contacts the Council with a matter of concern. In most cases, the concerns received are resolved as a service request or within the service areas and they are not classed as a corporate complaint; for example there may already be an ongoing case that is being investigated by the area/team.
7. If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the service request or the service provided, the procedure moves to a more formal process as a Level One complaint. The escalation is usually initiated with the customer writing via post or email to the area within the Council or by a customer submitting a complaint through the Customer Care portal on the EBC website.
<https://www.eastleigh.gov.uk/council/customer-care>
8. All compliments, complaints, and comments are managed as Customer Care cases. The cases are logged via our website or by the Customer Service Centre (CSC) staff onto *Salesforce*. The Service Delivery Case Management Officer (CMO) Team manage the administration of the cases, with the CMO Team based at the Hedge End Depot managing specific cases relating to Direct Services. Any complaint will be investigated and responded to by the relevant Head of Service for the area the complaint relates to.
9. If the customer is not satisfied by the outcome of their complaint, they can request it is escalated to Level Two, which means it is investigated by an independent senior officer who has not been involved in the original case.
10. If the customer feels that the matter has still not been resolved to their satisfaction on completion of Level two of the Council's complaints procedure,

they may escalate the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

11. Under the Council’s complaints procedure, the customer is sent an acknowledgement within three working days from the Customer Care case management system, and a final response within 15 working days. However, where the investigation is likely to take longer, the relevant service area will notify the customer with a holding email or letter and an extension of a further 10 working days can be applied to the investigation time.

Customer Feedback

12. There were 147 compliments received by the Council during the period of 1 December 2019 – 30 November 2020. This compares to a total of 190 in the same period for 2018/2019 and 162 in the same period for 2017/2018. (See appendix 1).
These are from members of the public who have actively chosen to express their thanks in relation to the services the Council provides via the Customer Care portal. This does not include the many informal appreciative comments received by Management Team and staff each year.

Year	Number of Compliments	Increase/Decrease on previous year
2017/18	162	43.75% decrease
2018/19	190	14.74% increase
2019/20	147	22.64% decrease

13. 27 individual service areas were recognised within the compliments, with 24 acknowledging individual staff.
14. The number of compliments does vary year on year, with fewer received for the current year than the two preceding years. This reduction can be mainly attributed to the new system for managing compliments, also the Customer Service Centre no longer having the facility to record customer feedback via the solidus system, as well as the unprecedented circumstances this year which did see an unavoidable drop in some services.

Summary of Complaints received 1 December 2019 – 30 November 2020

15. The Council received 531 complaints in the above period with a total of 17 escalating to Level Two. (See appendix 2). This compares to a total of 661 complaints received in the same period 2018-2019. (See appendix 2). The volume of Level One complaints has fallen by 29.64% and we have seen a decrease in Level Two complaints by 37.04%. In summary **we have seen a total reduction in complaints by 19.67% or 130 complaints.** Not everything

received through Customer Care is a complaint; customers often seek updates on service requests already in the process and the council receives complaints relating to matters that are not its responsibility e.g., road surface issues that are the responsibility of Hampshire County Council. The customer is responded to and directed to the appropriate authority or body to investigate the complaint.

For comparison, the Council received 656 complaints from 1 December 2017 – 30 November 2018, 625 Level One complaints with a total of 30 escalating to Level 2. (See appendix 2).

Year	Number of Complaints	Increase/Decrease on previous year
2017/18	656	25.95% increase
2018/19	661	0.76% increase
2019/20	531	19.67% decrease

Please see below additional data for the year broken down by levels:

Undetermined – cases that have not been classified as a Level One complaint but are not a General Enquiry/Service Request.

General Enquiry – reclassified complaints to a service request.

<u>2017–2018.</u> <u>Total 656</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>2018–2019.</u> <u>Total 661</u> <u>Moved onto</u> <u>customer</u> <u>care Feb</u> <u>2019</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>2019–2020.</u> <u>Total 531</u>	<u>Total</u>
Undetermined	0 - not previously recorded on previous system	Undetermined	47	Undetermined	124
General Enquiry	0 - not previously recorded on previous system	General Enquiry	63	General Enquiry	25
Level One	626	Level One	512	Level One	360
Level Two	30	Level Two	27	Level Two	17
Blank	0 - not previously recorded on previous system	Blank	12	Blank	5

16. There were also 119 enquiries resolved for the period of 1 December 2019 – 30 November 2020 that came direct from the two Members of Parliament covering Eastleigh Borough. Enquiries directly from our MPs are answered directly by the Chief Executive and the administration process is managed by the Personal Assistant (PA) Team.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO)

17. From April 2016 the LG&SCO established a new mechanism for ensuring the recommendations made to councils are implemented, where agreed to. The LG&SCO follow up with the Council and seek evidence of complaints remedied, with recommendations implemented.
18. Annual data has been published on the LG&SCO website in an aim to be transparent and provide information that aids the scrutiny of local services. www.lgo.org.uk
19. For the year ending 31 March 2020 the LG&SCO received 24 complaints in relation to Council services. This compares to a total of 11 complaints received in the same period 2018-2019, and a total of 17 in the same period for 2017/2018.

LG&SCO Service Area breakdown 2017 – 2018	Complaints & Enquiries Received	LG&SCO Service Area breakdown 2018 -2019	Complaints & Enquiries Received	LG&SCO Service Area breakdown 2019 - 2020	Complaints & Enquiries Received
Corporate and Other Services	1	Corporate and Other Services	2	Corporate and Other Services	5
Development Management	5	Development Management	6	Development Management	8
Environmental Services	3	Environmental Services	1	Environmental Services	3
Housing	6	Revenues and Benefits	2	Housing	2
Revenues and Benefits	2			Revenues and Benefits	2
				Adult Care Services	1
				Highways & Transport	2
				Other	1
Total	17	Total	11	Total	24

The outcomes for this period are as follows.

LG&SCO Decisions Made 2017 - 2018	LG&SCO Total received - 14	LG&SCO Decisions Made 2018 - 2019	LG&SCO Total received - 6	LG&SCO Decisions Made 2019 - 2020	LG&SCO Total received- 16
Incomplete or invalid	1	Incomplete or invalid	2	Incomplete or invalid	2
Referred back for local resolution	6	Referred back for local resolution	2	Referred back for local resolution	4
Closed after initial enquiries	7	Closed after initial enquiries	2	Closed after initial enquiries	9
				Advice given	1
Not upheld	4	Not upheld	1	Not upheld	5
Upheld	1	Upheld	0	Upheld	3

The data provided shows the complaints and enquiries recorded along with the decisions made. The LG&SCO numbers include enquires made directly to them and signposted back to the Council. Some of these individuals may never make contact again or choose to go through our formal complaints procedure to resolve their matters.

Report findings and recommendations for complaints management.

20. Analysis of the current complaints process found that out of 531 complaints from 1 December 2019 – 30 November 2020, 197 (37.09%) went over the current service level agreement of 15 working days for a full written response. The average complaint response in these cases went over by 34.16 working days. (see appendix 3)
21. This level of service is unacceptable, and a full review has been carried out to improve both the process and the length of time it takes to respond to a complaint. As a result of the review the following recommendations were implemented:
 - **Daily management of Customer Care by one specific person or a team.** This has been implemented from 1 November 2020 by Case Management Team Leader for Service Delivery.

- **Additional oversight by the Service Delivery Case Management Team Leader.** This has delivered a reduction in the number of complaints that go over the Service Level Agreement (SLA) and achieving the target of 25% or less over SLA for November 2020. **Mandatory training on Customer Care for all staff** – this training was rolled out in the last quarter of 2020, with the remainder of staff completing it in the first quarter of 2021.
- **Corporate training on investigating and writing complaint responses and complaints handling for EBC staff** – Effective Responses to Complaints in the Public Sector Training course can be done virtually by Understanding ModernGov to better improve handling complaints. We are currently looking at this and other options, such as internal training to improve staff skills in this area.
- **Focus attention on the areas of the Council which have the highest numbers of complaints** – Working closely with the relevant Heads of Service to reduce the numbers of complaints e.g. Direct Services. Reports being sent weekly to service areas to understand complaints outstanding and any that are due to go over Service Level Agreements (SLA) in the next few days Currently being carried out by Service Delivery Case Management Team Leader.

22. These interventions have already seen an improvement in the complaint-handling time and there is no longer a backlog of outstanding Customer Care cases. Whilst performance has significantly improved, the goal is to maintain the improvement and review the KPI to improve performance still further. Please see below the KPI figures for the last 6 months:

KPI definition	Better =	July 20	Aug 20	Sept 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20
Customer complaints received (number)	↓	61	46	36	31	38	37
Corporate complaints outside SLA (% and actual number of complaints)	↓	25% (15/61)	38% (26/69)	40% (34/86)	44% (16/36)	21% (8/38)	0% (0/37)

Financial Implications

23. Improvements to the management of complaints and future reporting arrangements will largely arise because of the Salesforce system being rolled out across the Council. There are therefore no financial implications associated directly to this report.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

24. There are no significant Climate Change implications from this report, or the complaints process itself. Complaints sometimes involve further remedial action by services to resolve issues, which may have climate change implications e.g. extra trips by waste and recycling collection vehicles. Council services aim to reduce any duplication of service actions in order to keep climate impacts as low as possible.

Risk Assessment

25. There is a risk that if the recommendations from the review are not implemented or are delayed, then performance may slip again. However, the staff training and the dedicated officer for overseeing performance will prevent this. In addition, the number of complaints out of SLA is one of the Key Performance Indicators that form the monthly monitoring received by the Corporate Leadership Board so that any reduction of performance will be addressed immediately.

Equality and Diversity Implications

26. The Customer Care process is accessible to all residents; residents unable to submit a compliment or complaint online or via email can do so via letter or by phone (with a member of Customer Service Centre staff taking details). During the period of 01 December 2019 – 30 November 2020 371 complaints were received via the website, 79 by email, 9 by letter, 1 by face to face and 71 by phone or staff portal. Responses to complaints are given via accessible forms of communication for each complainant, e.g. complaints received by post are responded to in letter format.
27. The audit of the compliments and complaints received indicates that in relation to the Customer Care process, there are no equalities issues and the council does not ask for personal data when making a complaint.
28. The audit of the compliment and complaints received indicates that in relation to services there are no equality issue identified.
29. There were no upheld Ombudsman complaints concerning equalities issues.

Conclusion

30. This report provides data on the compliments and complaints process, now known as the Customer Care process. Whilst the level of complaints has

remained fairly constant over the last three years, with a reduction in the last 12 months, a change in reporting methods, some internal staffing changes, and the operational impact of COVID 19 had led to a decline in response times, particularly over the last 12 months. This report highlights the improvements that have been made to the process and the impact they are having on complaints handling performance.

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Appendices Attached: 3

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

* [List Background Papers: None.](#)