

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday, 14 July 2022

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 and notes information in the Annual Compliments and Complaints report.

Summary

This report analyses the number of compliments and complaints received in the period 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022. 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 and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. The LGO will publish their summary of complaints received for 2021/22 in July 2022. Figures from the LGO for 2021/22 were not available at the time of writing this report.

Statutory Powers

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

Strategic Implications

- 1.0 This report relates to the efficient operation of Council services and the way the Council delivers against the Corporate Plan 2015-2025 objectives, by:
 - a. Meeting the needs of our residents, businesses, and other key stakeholders.
 - b. Operating in a business-like, commercially focussed way.
 - c. Ensuring our services are well planned and efficient; and
 - d. Making the best use of technology.
- 1.1 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.

- 1.2 The way the Council serves and responds to customers, including when they make complaints, is a key determinant of reputation, and trust in public bodies. This is particularly important for the most vulnerable or disempowered residents and relates to the Council objective of 'Enabling Health and Wellbeing' and 'Tackling Deprivation.'

Introduction

- 2.0 The Council's complaints procedure does not cover 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 are not classed as a corporate complaint.
- 2.1 Escalation of a Level One or Two complaint is initiated by the customer writing to the service 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>
- 2.2 An acknowledgement is sent within three working days from the Customer Care case management system to the customer, 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 is applied to the investigation time.
- 2.3 All compliments, complaints, and comments are managed as Customer Care cases. Any complaint will be investigated and responded to by the relevant Manager, Specialist and Service Lead for the area to which the complaint relates.
- 2.4 If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can request it is escalated to Level Two, to be investigated by an independent senior officer.
- 2.5 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 (LGO).
- 2.6 The current Complaints Policy is in the process of being reviewed and was presented to Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel in March. The feedback received has been incorporated into a new policy which will be presented to Cabinet for approval in July 2022. This includes recommendations to changes to the current process.

Customer Feedback

- 3.0 There were 114 compliments received by the Council during the period of 1 April 2021– 31 March 2022. This compares to 146 in the same period for 2020/2021 and 152 in 2019/2020. (See appendix 1).
- 3.1 These compliments 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 informal appreciative comments received by Corporate Leadership Board and staff each year.

- 3.2 Out of 114 compliments, 24 individual service areas were recognised with 28 individual staff having been acknowledged.
- 3.3 The number of compliments does vary year on year, with fewer received for the current year than the two preceding years. This is an area the Council has little influence over because it is at the discretion of the individual if they wish to log a compliment with the Council via the Customer Care portal.

Year	Number of Compliments	Increase/Decrease on previous year
2019/20	152	9% increase
2020/21	146	4% decrease
2021/22	114	22% decrease

Summary of Complaints received 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022

- 4.0 This report does not include data relating to complaints received about matters that are the responsibility of another authority or organisation.
- 4.1 The Council received 364 complaints in the above period compared to 357 in the same period 2020 – 2021, (see appendix 2).
- 4.2 Whilst the overall number of complaints received at Level One has decreased, (by 2%) in comparison to the previous year, the number being escalated to Level 2 has increased, (by 51%)., Work will be undertaken to investigate the reasons for this and to reduce the number of complaints that are escalated.
- 4.3 For comparison, during 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 the Council received 502 complaints; 477 were logged as Level 1; 5%, (no. 22) were escalated to Level Two and three were escalated to the LGO. (See appendix 2 and table below for breakdown of complaints data. LGO data is logged outside of Salesforce).
- 4.4 In summary we have seen an overall increase in the total number of complaints received in 2021/22 of seven or 2%.

Year	Number of Complaints	Increase/Decrease on previous year
2020/19	502	8% decrease
2020/21	357	30% decrease
2021/22	364	2% increase

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

<u>Year</u>	<u>Level 1</u>	<u>Level 2</u>	<u>Ombudsman</u>
<u>2019–2020. Total 502</u>	477	22	3
<u>2020–2021. Total 357</u>	335	18	4
<u>2021–2022. Total 364</u>	329	35	Figures from the LGO for 2021/22 were not available at the time of writing this report.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO)

- 5.0 From April 2016 the LGO established a new mechanism for ensuring the recommendations made to councils are implemented, where these were agreed to. The LGO follows up with the Council and seeks evidence of complaints remedied, and of agreed recommendations implemented.
- 5.1 Annual data has been published on the LGO website in an aim to be transparent and provide information that aids the scrutiny of local services. <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/eastleigh-borough-council/statistics>
- 5.2 For the year ending 31 March 2021, there were 4 complaints that were referred to the LGO. These were investigated by the LGO and all 4 complaints were upheld. In 100% of cases the LGO were satisfied the Council had successfully implemented the LGO's recommendations. Figures from the LGO for 2021/22 were not available at the time of writing this report and are due to be published in July 2022.

Report findings and recommendations for complaints management.

- 6.0 Since the last report in January 2021 –The Case Management Team Leader for Service Delivery and Case Management Officers have overseen the management of complaints and associated performance. This monitoring has continued to deliver 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.
- 6.1 **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 and Tone of Voice training to improve staff skills in this area.
- 6.2 **Focus attention on the areas of the Council which have the highest numbers of complaints** – The Case Management Team Leader has been working closely with relevant Service Leads to reduce the numbers of complaints e.g., Neighbourhood Services. Reports and dashboards are now available and being used in Neighbourhoods Services to assist staff with monitoring and managing their own complaints and understand the reasons for complaints, monitor complaint response times and prevent complaints from going over (SLA).
- 6.3 These interventions have contributed to a continued improvement in the complaint handling times. 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 from April 2021 to March 2022.

Full Performance Indicator Monitoring Report - March 2022															
Row	Executive / Service Area	KPI definition	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	KPI thresholds
25a	Customer Care: Support Case Management	Customer complaints (number)	66	77	104	46	42	43	34	29	31	39	26	18	No target
25b	Customer Care: Support Case Management	Corporate complaints outside SLA (% and actual number of complaints)	GREEN 11% (7/66)	GREEN 16% (12/77)	GREEN 8% (8/104)	RED 30% (14/46)	GREEN 14% (6/42)	GREEN 21% (9/43)	GREEN 12% (4/34)	GREEN 7% (2/29)	GREEN 10% (3/31)	GREEN 0% (0/39)	GREEN 4% (1/26)	GREEN 11% (2/18)	Green = 25% or less Red = more than 25%

Financial Implications

- 7.0 Improvements to the management of complaints and future reporting arrangements will 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

- 8.0 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 to keep climate impacts as low as possible.

Risk Assessment

- 9.0 There is a risk that if the recommendations from the review are not implemented or are delayed, then performance may slip. 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

- 10.0 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 April 2021 – 31 March 2022 364 complaints were logged, 261 were received via the website, 18 by email, 6 by letter, 1 by face to face and 78 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.
- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 The audit of the compliment and complaints received indicates that in relation to services there are no equality issues identified.
- 10.3 There were no upheld Ombudsman complaints concerning equalities issues.

Conclusion

- 11.0 This report provides data and information on the compliments and complaints received and information relating to complaints escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Work continues with improving the management of complaints and with training on complaints responses. This report also highlights the increase in the number of complaints being escalated from Level 1 to level 2 and the outcome of complaints escalated to the LGO. Work will be undertaken to investigate the reasons for this and identify where improvements can be made.

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Appendices Attached: 2

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 or state None.