



Corporate Complaints (Non-Statutory) 2018/19

Audit & Risk Committee

Date of committee meeting: 18 September 2019

Lead director: Alison Greenhill

Useful information

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1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to update the Audit and Risk Committee on corporate non-statutory complaints in 2018/19; and for members to note the improvements, comment upon our actions from the lessons learned and planned future changes.

2. Service delivery

2.1 Since April 2016 we have been operating a single stage non-statutory complaints regime, streamlining the process and providing a flexible approach to handling a complaint dependent upon its nature and complexity. The “triage” process determines the route of the complaint and who will need to be involved.

2.2 It should be noted that Statutory complaints relating to Adults and Children are not administered by this team and are investigated through a separate statutory procedure.

2.3 Complaints can be submitted in writing, over the phone, by email and through MyAccount. If the customer presents as vulnerable, for whatever reason, Customer Support Officers will support them to make their complaint.

Summary of the annual complaints for 2018/19

2.4 In 2018/19 the total number of complaints received was 1,408, compared to 1,485 in 2017/18, a reduction of 5.2%.

Of the complaints received, 864 (38%) were “triaged” to the appropriate service to respond as a *request for action* such as provide orange bags or a *service request* usually relating to service delivery.

This meant a total of 544 were investigated compared to 920 the previous year (excluding *requests for action and service*); a reduction of 40%.

Justified complaints

2.5 The team determined that of the 544 complaints independently investigated, 18% were justified, a further 22% were partially justified and 60% were deemed as “not justified” and therefore did not find the authority at fault.

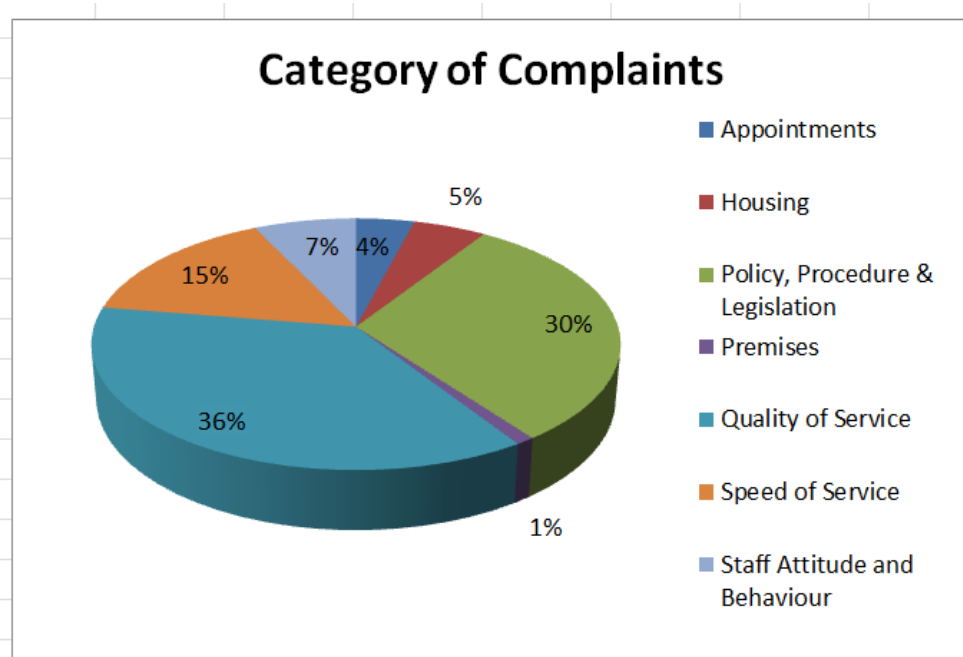
The percentage of complaints found to be justified was lower than the previous year (26%) noting the number of complaints received had nearly halved there may be a correlation.

The service remains confident complaints that are found to be justified through this independent process remain reflective of the service customers receive.

Why customers complain:

2.6 Complaints are categorised into the main reasons for the complaint, within a limited list. We categorise each complaint, which can be multi-faceted, over all the applicable areas that it relates to; therefore, the numbers relating to the reason categorisation will *a/ways* exceed the total number of complaints received. These are as follows:

- Appointment
- Policy, procedure and legislation
- Premises – any complaints relating to leisure centres or premises of LCC
- Quality of Service
- Speed of Service
- Staff attitude and behaviour
- Housing
- Closed Uncategorised – pending agreement with customer
- Open Uncategorised – where the complaint is still open



The top three categories of complaint remain, as previously in 2017/18:

1. Quality of service 196 (36%)
2. Policy, procedure and legislation 162 (30%)
3. Speed of service 79 (15%)

Which services receive these complaints?

2.7 The top 10 service areas for which we receive complaints account for 90% of the total 544 complaints investigated. They are listed below. The top 6 areas for complaints relate to Housing Services and Revenues & Customer Support. This is

unsurprising as they interact with the greatest numbers of customers in demanding areas of Council business. It is positive to note Housing repairs complaints have continued to reduce, this year by a further 39% from the previous year as they have positively engaged with the new triage arrangements. This trend is repeated for Local Taxation complaints, reducing by 22% from 101 to 79 in 2018/19 through improving speed of processing.

Top 10 service areas for complaints	Total	%
Housing repairs	187	34%
Local Taxation	79	15%
Housing Other	67	12%
Housing Options	41	8%
Housing Benefits	34	6%
Customer Services	20	4%
Street Scene Enforcement	19	3%
Sports & Leisure Centres	19	3%
Planning Management	16	3%
Parks & Green Spaces	6	1%

2.8 Specific reasons cannot be identified for the reduction in the overall number of complaints received over the past year. However, contributory factors are believed to be: -

- Services are improving their service offer (Housing and Revenues);
- Triaging - for reasons why a customer seeks redress has been improved, for example when a customer complains about a decision we now signpost them to the appropriate website; and
- Our on line (MyAccount) complaint submission journey is difficult to navigate

2.9 The MyAccount on line complaint submission customer journey is in the process of being reviewed. We expect changes to be in place by the end of Autumn 2019.

2.10 The reporting regime provides statistical information, at different levels, about the complaints received. These are shared with Heads of Service on a regular basis. In addition, the Service Improvement Manager meets regularly with services which receive the highest volumes of complaints (Housing Services and R&CS) to work on how to reduce the issues customer face on a repeated basis.

3. Lessons Learned

3.1 Working with other services to understand their business over the last financial year, we have learnt what triggers complaints and where changes can be made to make a difference in our divisions. These include:

- Being proactive to tackle personal injustice: typically, the customer wants to be listened to, offered an apology and an opportunity to appeal or request a

review of their case. These represent opportunities to mitigate a complaint, usually over the phone.

- Recommendations for service improvements arising from complaint investigations: a review of policies, change to practices, training staff, and raising awareness of issues within the authority and the public.
- Corporate Complaints Policy. We have introduced a Corporate Complaints Policy. This is ensuring we meet the good practice outlined by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), and comply with our obligations on fairness, transparency and accessibility under (amongst others) the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equalities Act 2010 and the Data Protection Act 2018. The policy ensures we are complying with the standards the LGO expects of local authorities. The policy is benefiting both officers and members of the public as it outlines and clarifies the complaints process; ensuring we are fair, open and consistent in our decision making. It is published on the Council website. This has enabled us to manage customer expectations effectively in relation to their complaint.
- Vexatious procedure: This has been introduced to identify vexatious complainants and set out how these are managed. The procedures are published on the council's internal intranet site only. This helps the authority understand why an individual is making various levels of complaints/contact to the authority on different matters.

4. Future Actions:

4.1 There are 3 actions which continue to make a difference to delivery without compromising the benefits of complaints. These are:

- a. Continue to raise awareness of the complaints prevention activity across all services/divisions. As part of the triage process some comments/complaints can be resolved via a quick phone call or email. The complaints officers have trialled this with a few service areas; the process is working well and efficiently in terms of complaints resolution with anecdotal feedback from the customers at the time of the triage indicating a good level of customer satisfaction. This activity has resulted in a reduction in complaints within the services. Therefore, we have now embedded this customer liaison into the triage procedure.
- b. Review our approach to remedies. The remedy suggested to the complaint needs to be proportionate, appropriate, and reasonable. Similar remedies are appropriate for similar cases, but we must consider each case on its own merits considering the particular circumstances. Our key principle is that the remedy should, as far as possible, put the complainant back in the position they would have been in if the error had not occurred.
- c. Service Improvement meetings are on-going with the services that receive the largest proportion of complaints. This is an on-going activity to reduce reputative avoidable complaints and deliver meaningful customer focussed

service improvements. The Service Improvement Manager will begin to work with the services who receive lower volumes but repetitive complaints to share the learning and mirror the reductions seen in Housing Services and Revenues & Customer Support. These include but not limited to:

- Review of policy and procedures,
- monitor the agreed activity is remedying the service failure (if applicable); and/or
- ensure the agreed activity/actions continue to deliver the anticipated improvement/change.

- d. The Service Improvement Manager will review the categorisation of complaints to improve analysis as part of the improvement to the customer journey and reporting on the management information.

5. Risk and issues:

5.1 As Corporate Complaints continues its aim to reduce the number of complaints made, it faces challenges from events over which it has no influence. These events in the recent past have included the impacts of increasingly severe weather and service changes as budgets across the Council continue to reduce; what are seen as traditional services such as the mowing of grass verges are now less frequent and some residents become dissatisfied and complain.

5.2 Vexatious complainants can be a drain on resources both for the Service Improvement Manager who acts a single point of contact and the service areas (multiple service areas are usually involved) attempting to resolve the complaints. This is an issue which will remain, however the introduction of written procedures has clarified the administrative arrangements which are put in place to minimise the impact and manage a resolution.

6. Financial, legal and other implications

6.1 Financial implications

There are no significant financial implications arising directly from this report.
Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

6.2 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
Kamal Adatia, City Barrister & Head of Standards, Ext 37 1401

6.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There are no climate change implications arising from this report.
Duncan Bell, Corporate Environmental Consultant. Ext. 37 2249

6.4 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 also requires that reasonable adjustments be made so that disabled people can access services as far as reasonable on the same terms as non-disabled people. This duty is on-going and anticipatory and, therefore, reasonable and proportionate steps to overcome barriers which may impede people with different kinds of disabilities. In making reasonable adjustments, a service provider should not wait until a disabled person wants to use their services, they must think in advance about what people with a range of impairments might reasonably need.

There are no direct equalities implications arising from the report as the report is to provide an update, rather than for decision. Having an effective complaint procedure helps to deal with complaints quickly, fairly and consistently. It provides an opportunity to gather valuable customer insight, it also has the potential to help make improvements that lead to increased customer satisfaction for service users from across all protected characteristics.

Surinder Singh, Equalities Officer Tel 37 4148

6.5 Other Implications

N/A

7. Appendices: None