



Corporate Complaints (Non- Statutory) 2017/18

Audit & Risk Committee

Date of committee meeting: 12th September 2018

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 2017/18; 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 successfully determines the route of the complaint and who will need to be involved. During February 2018, Corporate Complaints transferred to Revenues and Customer Support Service (R&CS), as part of the Business Service Centre Review.

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, at Granby Street Customer Service Centre they will be supported to make a complaint.

Structure/Roles and Responsibilities – Corporate Complaints

2.4 The Corporate Complaints Team report to the Service Improvement Manager within R&CS. There are two complaints officers, an admin assistant and an apprentice. They manage a complaints case load, utilising the Firmstep DASH workflow and ensure that responses are co-ordinated with the relevant service/division.

Summary of the annual complaints for 2017/18

2.5 In 2017/18 the total number of complaints received was 1,485, compared to 1,939 in 2016/17, a reduction of 23%. Of the complaints received, 565 (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 920 were investigated compared to 1,555 the previous year (excluding *requests for action and service*); a reduction of 635.

2.6 Less than approximately 5 customers are unsatisfied with the *request for action/service* categorisation since we introduced this new procedure. This is because we speak to customer and liaise with the service on behalf of the customer; to ascertain if the action they wish to happen can be completed. If this is the case, we categorise this as a *service request / request for action* and the customer issue is resolved.

Justified complaints

2.7 The team determined that of the 920 complaints independently investigated, 26% were justified, a further 26% were partially justified and 48% were deemed as “not justified” and therefore did not find the authority at fault.

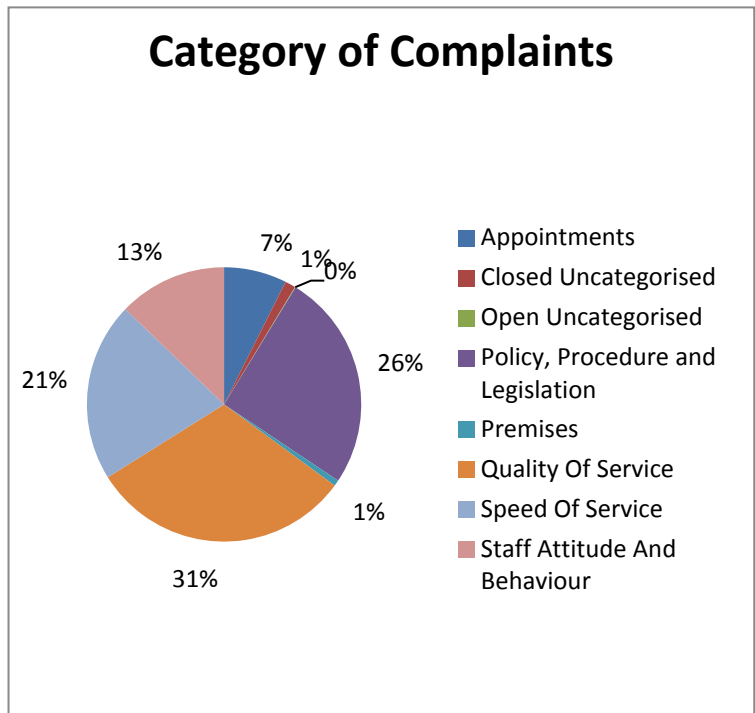
The percentage of complaints found to be justified was slightly lower than the previous year (30%) however the number of complaints received had nearly halved.

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

Why customers complain:

2.8 Complaints are categorised into the main reasons for the complaint, within a limited list. We categorise each complaint over all the applicable areas that it relates to, therefore the numbers relating to the reason categorisation will *always* 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
- Closed Uncategorised – pending agreement with customer
- Open Uncategorised – where the complaint is still open



The top three categorises of complaint remain, as previously in 2016/17:

1. Quality of service 398 (31%),
2. Policy, procedure and legislation 329 (26%).
3. Speed of service 271 (21%)

The top 15 service areas for which we receive complaints are listed below. Housing Services appear 4 times in the top 6 and Revenues & Customer Services twice. 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 reduced by 33% from the previous year as they have positively engaged with the new triage arrangements. This trend is repeated for Local Taxation complaints, reducing by 47% from 191 to 101 in 2017/18 through improving speed of processing.

Top 15 service areas for complaints	Total	%
Housing repairs	304	33%
Housing Benefits	101	11%
Local Taxation	101	11%
Housing other	89	10%
Housing options	62	7%
Customer services	53	6%
Street scene enforcement	37	4%
Planning management	28	3%
Sports and leisure centres	20	2%
<i>Parks and green spaces</i>	18	2%
Traffic management	15	2%
Income management	14	2%
Waste management	12	1%
Learning services	12	1%
Licencing and pollution control	6	1%
Remainder	48	5%

2.9 There has been a reduction in the overall number of complaints received over the past year, although we can't isolate a particular reason this is probably as a result of:-

- Services are improving their service offer (Housing and Revenues);
- The on-line triage 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
- The complaint on-line submission journey may deter customers from making a complaint.

In response to the issue in relation to the customer journey, the Digital Transformation Lead has agreed to undertake a review of the MyAccount customer

journey.

2.10 The team has developed a reporting regime to provide statistical information, at different levels, about the complaints received. In particular, the Service Improvement Manager now has regular meetings 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 regular basis. The arrangements are summarised in the table below.

Reporting Regime		
	Frequency	Purpose
Chief Operating Officer	Annual	Scrutiny
Corporate Management Team	Annual	Scrutiny
Divisional Directors and Relevant Heads of Service	Quarterly	Scrutiny and to action upon as required
Assistant Mayor for Neighbourhood Services Cllr Kirk Master	Quarterly	Scrutiny
Audit & Risk Committee	Annual	Governance

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 to the public.

4. Future Changes:

4.1 There are 5 actions which will make a difference to delivery without compromising the benefits of complaints. These are:

1. Complaints prevention activity to be introduced to 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 intend to embed this customer liaison into the triage procedure.

2. Service Improvement meetings have been undertaken with the services that receive the largest proportion of complaints. This is an on-going development to improve complaint handling and deliver meaningful customer focussed service improvements.
3. Corporate Complaints Policy. We are considering introducing a Corporate Complaints Policy. This will ensure 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 would ensure we are complying with the standards the LGO expects of local authorities. The policy is expected to benefit both officers and members of the public as it will outline and clarify the complaints process; ensuring we are fair, open and consistent in our decision making. This will also enable us to manage customer expectations effectively in relation to their complaint. The Complaints Policy will be submitted to this committee for review before publishing on the Council website.
4. We are considering introducing procedures to identify vexatious complainants and set out how these are managed. The procedures will be published on the council's internal intranet site only.
5. The Service Improvement Manager will review the categorisation of complaints to improve analysis.

5. Risk and issues:

5.1 Corporate Complaints handling is continuing to deliver the original aims of reducing complaints and delivering service improvements. The operational risks remain around complaint volumes should they begin to rise through an unforeseen circumstances or as a result of staffing resources. It is a small, effective team and the loss of one officer would inevitably have a negative impact on the delivery of the service.

5.2 Vexatious complainants are 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 despite the introduction of written procedures; however clarity over the administrative arrangements will be widely available which ensure all services are aware of the procedure for dealing with these complainants.

5.3 A formal Corporate Complaints Policy would reduce any procedural risk.

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 legal implications arising directly from this report –
Kamal Adatia, City Barrister & Head of Standards, ext. 37 1401.

6.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There are no significant climate change implications associated with arising from this report.

Aiden Davis, Sustainability Officer, ext. 37 2284

6.4 Equalities Implications

There are no equality implications, this being an update report.

However, when work on a Corporate Complaints Policy commences it would be useful to complete an equality impact assessment in order to demonstrate that the consideration of equalities impacts has been taken into account.

Surinder Singh Equalities Officer Tel 37 414

6.5 Other Implications

N/A

7. Summary of appendices:

None.