

Public Report
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 02 October 2019

Report Title

Annual Compliments and Complaints Report 2018-19

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

Stuart Purcell, Corporate Complaint Manager, Assistant Chief Executive Directorate, 01709 822661 or stuart.purcell@rotherham.gov.uk

Jackie Mould, Head of Performance, Intelligence and Improvement, Assistant Chief Executive Directorate, 01709 823618, jackie.mould@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to:

- a) Outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received in 2018/19 in line with statutory requirements.
- b) Identify key trends within complaints and compliments over a five year period.

Recommendations

Members of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board are asked to:

1. Note the Annual Compliments and Complaints Report for 2018/19.
2. Provide comments on areas that require further improvement regarding complaints handling and reporting.

Background Papers

- Annual Compliments and Complaints Report, 2018/19

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Annual Compliments and Complaints Report 2018-19

1. Background

- 1.1 All councils need to provide complaint procedures to respond to customer concerns in an open and transparent way within defined timescales and in accordance to legislation. The purpose of the annual complaint report is to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received in the period 1st April 2018-31st March 2019, highlighting key themes and longer term trends.
- 1.2 The report also explains how the Council has performed against the required standards and includes case studies demonstrating how services have learnt from complaints received.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The performance headlines outlined within the report include:

- The overall number of complaints received by the Council decreased to 1,275 in 2018/19 from 1,304 in 2017/18, a 2% decrease. Children and Young People's Services recorded the biggest decrease at 22% followed by Adult Care Services at 14%. Regeneration and Environment Services also decreased but by only 3%. Against this trend was Finance & Customer Services with an increase of 48% and Housing Services who recorded a small increase at 3%.
- The two highest areas for complaints were Housing (439) and Regeneration and Environment Services (413). The third highest area was Children's and Young People's Services (200). This is consistent with previous years' figures, as these three areas typically receive the highest volume of complaints.
- Overall, 87% of complaints were responded to within timescales, compared with 79% in 2017/18. This means that the Council Plan target of 85% has been exceeded for the first time. The response rate increased in Children and Young People's Services (70% 2018/19 from 59% 2017/18). The response rate also increased in Regeneration and Environmental services (88% 2018/19 from 71% 2017/18) and Finance and Customer Service's (96% 2018/19 from 91% 2017/18). Response rates in other areas decreased slightly.
- The number of compliments received also decreased; 844 received in 2018/19, in comparison to 1,064 in 2017/18.
- The most frequent category of complaints received by the Council was again 'quality of service', accounting for 55% of all complaints (711 of 1,275.)

- In comparison with the previous year, fewer complaints escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure, at 44 (in contrast with 52 in 2017/18.) Additionally, of the 1,237 complaints that were taken through the Council's formal complaints procedures, more were upheld in 2018/19 at 305 or 25% in contrast with 260 or 24% in 2017/18.

2.2 The Annual Review letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) was received on 24th July 2019, setting out their records of referred complaint investigations. In total 60 complaints and enquiries were directed to the LGSCO, of which 14 were subject to full investigation. Out of the 14, 6 were upheld and 8 were not upheld (43% upheld rate). This compares to 58 enquiries, 5 investigations with 1 upheld and 4 not upheld in 2017-18 (80% upheld rate). This review letter is attached as an appendix to the report (please see appendix one.)

2.3 A number of service improvements have been made over the year, based on the feedback from customers. Key themes of service improvements have included the reviews of processes; information and advice provided; dealing with delay; improving communication. Examples of the improvements made are included within the report.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Building on the key developments in 2018/19, the Council will apply particular focus to the following issues:

- Increasing the number of compliments recorded. The Complaints Team will promote the procedure for recording compliments and support Directorates to ensure that more of the compliments received are properly recorded and reported.
- Addressing current and upcoming issues, using complaints as direct customer feedback to make immediate service improvements. For example, for 2019/20 this includes mitigating the impact of changes to the garden waste collection service for customers.
- Reviewing the way that the Council considers learning from complaints to ensure that each complaint enquiry is fully considered and used to positively develop services.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The findings of this report have been reported to each Directorate Leadership Team to enable key areas for improvement to be identified.

4.2 There has been no further consultation on this report beyond the requirements of internal processes, alongside consultation with the Cabinet member.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 A simple timetable to show the stages and deadlines for implementing the proposed improvements outlined in section 3 are to be implemented in 2019/20. Progress against these actions will be reported on as part of the annual report for 2019/20.
- 5.2 The Complaints Team will be accountable for leading on these improvements and for engaging with Directorates on how the approach to handling complaints can be improved. Each Directorate will be responsible for ensuring that the improvements identified are disseminated and implemented within each area of the organisation.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from complaints. If a complaint about an error in a charge for a Council service is upheld, then an appropriate refund will be made. In accordance with the Council's Finance and Procurement Procedure Rules.
- 6.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

- 7.1 The Council's approach to handling complaints is informed by the following key pieces of legislation:
 - i. Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 (Making Experiences Count).
 - ii. The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
 - iii. Localism Act 2011 (for Housing Services complaints)

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. However, Human Resources will provide support on further developing the training offer on handling complaints for officers outside of the Complaints Team.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The statutory complaints procedure for Children's and Adult Social Care provides an opportunity for children and young people and vulnerable adults to have their voices heard and to improve service delivery.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Investigations through the complaint procedure consider all relevant policy and legislation, including those relating to equalities and human rights.
- 10.2 Improvements have been made to the way that complaints are recorded to ensure that information relating to equality and diversity are captured where the complainant is comfortable to disclose this information.

11. Implications for Partners

- 11.1 As outlined in the annual report, improving the way that complaints are dealt with requires a whole-Council approach, with services committing to responding to complaints in a timely fashion and using the intelligence provided by the Complaints Team to make service improvements. It is the responsibility of every service to make responding to complaints and learning from customer feedback a priority.

12. Risks and Mitigation

- 12.1 The Council continues to face budget pressures and the need to deliver significant financial savings as part of its two-year budget strategy for the period 2019/20 to 2020/21. There is a risk that the impact of delivering these savings will lead to a rise in complaint volumes.
- 12.2 It will therefore, be vital that the Council continues to manage customer expectations around what is sustainable for the Council to deliver. To mitigate this, the Council will engage with the public as appropriate, for example, in seeking the views of the public in respect of budget saving proposals.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive
Jackie Mould, Head of Policy Improvement and Performance
Stuart Purcell, Corporate Complaint Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive		Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	20/09/19
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Bal Nahal	20/09/19
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	Click here to enter a date.
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	Click here to enter a date.

Report Author: Stuart Purcell, Corporate Complaint Manager, Assistant Chief Executive Directorate, 01709 822661 or stuart.purcell@rotherham.gov.uk

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