

Public Report  
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

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**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 24 February 2021

**Report Title**

Annual Compliments and Complaints Report 2019-20

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

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

**Report Author(s)**

Stuart Purcell, Corporate Complaint Manager, Assistant Chief Executive Directorate, 01709 822661 or [stuart.purcell@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:stuart.purcell@rotherham.gov.uk)

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**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 2019/20 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 2019/20.
2. Provide comments on areas that require further improvement regarding complaints handling and reporting.

**Background Papers**

- Annual Compliments and Complaints Report, 2019/20

**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 2019-20**

### **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 with legislation. The purpose of the annual complaint report is to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received in the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020, 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.
- 1.3 The report is being presented at a later date this year due to a part suspension of the formal complaints service during 2020. Stage two, Stage three complaints, and the normal reporting schedule were placed on hold. This allowed the Complaints Team to assist with the emergency response (contacting Shielding residents) during the first few months of the global pandemic. It is expected that the Annual Complaint Report for 2020/2021 will be reported as usual between September – October 2021.

### **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 The performance headlines outlined within the report include:
  - In 2019/20, the overall number of complaints received by the Council increased by 7%, going from 1,275 in 2018/19 to 1,372. The increase was due to more complaints received in two particular service areas. Housing Services increased by 26%, from 439 to 551, and Finance and Customer services increased by 41%, from 129 to 182.
  - Children and Young People's Services' complaints, decreased, from 200 to 147, 27% and Adult Social Services, from 87 to 72, 17%. Regeneration and Environment Services also decreased but by only, 413 to 411.
  - The two highest areas for complaints overall were Housing (551) and Regeneration and Environment Services (411). The third highest area was Finance and Customer services (182). This is consistent with previous years' figures, due to the number of residents that these departments deal with, although this is the first time that there has been more complaints in Finance and Customer services than in Children and Young People's Services. In the main this can be attributed to how complaints are responded to more proactively in Children's and Young People's Services and an increase in complaints about delay and about Disabled Persons Parking Permits in the Customer Services' department in Finance and Customer services.

- Overall, 89% of complaints were responded to within timescales, compared with 87% in 2018/19. This means that this is better than the five year all council average of 83%. The response rate significantly increased in Children and Young People's Services (83% in 2019/20 from 70% 2018/19). The response rate remained the same in Regeneration and Environmental services (88% in 2019/20 and 88% in 2018/19). Response rates in other areas decreased slightly.
- Unfortunately, the number of compliments received decreased again – 794 were received in 2019/20, in comparison to the 844 received in 2018/19.
- The most frequent category of complaints received by the Council was again 'quality of service', accounting for 46% of all complaints (632 of 1,372.)
- In comparison with the previous year, fewer complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the complaint's procedure, at 31 (in contrast with 44 in 2018/19.) Additionally, of the 1,332 complaints that were taken through the Council's formal complaints procedures, more were upheld in 2019/20 at 365 or 27% in contrast with 305 or 25% in 2018/19.

2.2 The Annual Review letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) was received on 22 July 2020, setting out their records of referred complaint investigations. In total 72 complaints and enquiries had been directed to the LGSCO, of which seven were subject to full investigation. Out of the seven, four were upheld and three were not upheld (57% upheld rate). This compares to 60 enquiries, 14 investigations with six upheld and eight not upheld in 2018/19 (43% upheld rate). This review letter is attached as an appendix to the report (please see appendix one.)

2.3 In addition, the Council received two decisions by the Housing Ombudsman, one was upheld, and one was part upheld.

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

2.5 Due to the late submission of the report, for the reason explained at paragraph 1.3, the following is included to show the current statistical position (Q1-Q3 2020/21) and is an indication of direction of travel in year. 683 have been complaints received with 88% responded to in time. Only Adult Services are slightly below the 83% council average performance, but it has improved at 80%. Housing received the most at 262 following by Regeneration and Environment at 251. Numbers of complaints have reduced significantly across all directorates. (1013 received Q1-Q3 2019/20). Currently 26% of complaints

have been upheld and 17 complaints have been responded to at stage 2 of the complaint procedures and 5 at stage 3. In addition, 508 compliments have been received. (604 received Q1-Q3 2019/20).

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

3.1 Building on the key developments in 2019/20, the Council will again apply particular focus to the following issues:

- Revised approach to learning from complaints. Creating a learning from complaints programme, so that all learning reported is considered and the impact of service improvement is understood and recorded.
- Continue to improve performance to timescale. Making sure that we do not break our promise to customers and responses are timely and effective.
- Make the complaint procedures more outcome focussed. Resolving the complaint and finding solutions should be at the centre of all investigations.
- Improve efforts to increase 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.

### **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 2020/21. Progress against these actions will be reported on as part of the annual report for 2020/21.

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 this report, the provision of the compliments and complaints service is factored into the Council's budget. 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 As the Council faces pressure on services due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic, as well as a continued ambition to transform service delivery, it is vital that customer expectations around what is sustainable for the Council to deliver are properly managed.

12.2 To mitigate this, the Council is continuing to engage with the public as appropriate through regular communication around the pandemic response as well as where services are being proposed to be amended.

**13. Accountable Officer(s)**

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

Jackie Mould, Head of Policy Improvement and Performance

Stuart Purcell, Corporate Complaint Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of: -

|                                                                   | <b>Named Officer</b> | <b>Date</b>                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Chief Executive                                                   | N/A                  | Click here to enter a date. |
| Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer) | Judith Badger        | 09/02/21                    |
| Head of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)                       | Bal Nahal            | 09/02/21                    |
| 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. |

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