

ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. Meeting:	Self Regulation Select Commission
2. Date:	18 September 2014
3. Title:	Complaints – Annual Report (April 2013 – March 2014)
4. Directorate:	All

5. Summary

This report presents information about complaints made between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 under the Corporate Complaint's Procedure, the Adult Social Services and Children's Social Services complaint regulations

The figures in the report include details of the number of complaints, compliments and Councillor Surgery enquiries received by the Council and each Directorate area has provided information and a breakdown summary.

In total over the last 12 months the number of complaints received by the Council is **672** (0.5% increase - **668** received 2012-13).

Overall **98%** of all complaints were responded to within the timescales promised, compared to **98%** (2012-13) and **94%** (2011-12).

6. Recommendations

That the commission note the contents of the report, its findings and recommendations.

7. Proposals and Details

The Annual Report (Appendix 1) sets out the Council's performance with regard to Complaints for the last financial year. In 2013-14 there has been continued improvement in the way that complaints are dealt with across the Council. Complaints are treated as excellent customer insight into the quality of services and all complaints are used to learn from and improve service delivery and inform policy changes. The management of complaints and the quality assurance processes in place has contributed to the reduction in complaints escalating through the complaint procedure, ensuring that we swiftly put things right when things go wrong and work with the customer to resolve their dissatisfaction.

Headline Results April 2013 to March 2014

- A very small increase in the number of formal complaints (at all levels), **672**. (**668** received 2012-13), a small increase for Neighbourhoods and Adult Services and Environment and Development Services and a decrease for Children and Young People's Services. Less informal complaints* received, **811**. (**1206** received 2012-13)
- More Councillor Surgeries were received, **714**. (**572** received in 2012-13).
- The same number of complaints were responded to within timescales, **98%**. (**98%** in 2012-13).
- Less complaints (at all stages) upheld, **193**, **28%**. (**256**, **38%** upheld 2012-13).
- The same number of Stage 1 complaints escalated to Stage 2, **7%**, **50**. (**7%**, **48** escalated in 2012-13)
- The Ombudsman investigated more complaints, **38** complaints but upheld less, **5**, **13%** (**30** investigated and **8** upheld **27%** in 2012-13)

The creation of a centralised complaint function in 2012 and improvements made following the Council's review of complaints has continued to show benefits, both in terms of performance and the experience of customers. This has been achieved despite a decrease in the number of staff across the Council responsible for dealing with complaints. The efficiencies in the service and the best ever performance and experience of customer can be considered as a significant and successful improvement to the complaint service.

We are pleased to report that, working with front line services and customers, we have maintained a high level of performance and at the same time maintained qualitative approach to complaint handling. All complaints are quality assured and considered for learning and improvement. We have also continued to improve the access to our complaint service and improved the experience of customers using the complaint procedures.

The report also identifies trends in complaints relating to changes and improvements to Council services. We are beginning to see complaints as a result of the Council's budget reductions and other national external factors. Complaints have also been received relating to reductions in service, such as the Council's grass cutting service and from customers who are affected when services have been removed. Complaints also increased for the Housing Income Service reflecting the difficult financial times customers are facing. We also saw increases in complaints about damp in Council properties which is

partially attributable to fuel poverty which has been exacerbated by welfare benefit reforms such as the spare bedroom subsidy.

Complaints by Directorate

Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

In **Adult Social Services**, **76** complaints were received; this is a reduction from **88** last year and underlines the progress made in responding to customers concerns before they become formal complaints. Satisfaction with adult social care services has also increased, Rotherham has the best satisfaction rates in Yorkshire & Humberside.

Trends in complaints were regarding delays to services and information provided, waiting times for COT assessments and delays processing some social care assessments led to a number of complaints. Customers also made complaints about an absence of information or advice, particularly around the financial assessment process. Learning actions have been taken to address all issues and procedures updated and staff informed.

The front line social work teams completing assessments for customers received the most complaints. Complaints were received if the complainant wanted to challenge the outcome of the assessment, usually relating to the level of care to be provided. Complaints were received in other service areas including, Learning Disabilities – complaints were received about the transportation review, Direct Payments – regarding audits completed and Rothercare – regarding the provision of assistive technology equipment.

In **Housing and Neighbourhood Services** **341** complaints were received. Just over half of all new Stage 1 complaints in the period (**165, 51.72%**) were linked to repair services delivered by the Contract and Service Development Teams, the repairs contractors and the Strategic Housing Investment Team. The most common issues being the delay in repairs, damp and roof leaks, which in part was due to the gales in the third and fourth quarter of the year. Actions, detailed in the report have been put in place to address these issues in 2014-15.

The trends suggest lessons learned and reported in 2012-13 have been applied. Complaints about the repairs contractors have reduced by **12%**. One reason for this is the dramatic reduction of complaints about missed appointments. The next highest numbers of complaints (70, 21.94%) were made about services provided by Housing and Communities, this represents a drop of almost one fifth on last year. This reduction has been driven by a significant reduction in complaints about the action of staff enforcing tenancy breaches, the figures support the view that officers have improved how they communicate when taking enforcement action.

Children and Young Peoples Services

In total **73** formal complaints were received. Complaints were received in relation to communication, customer care, information about action taken and delays in information being provided. The number and type of these complaints are consistent with those received in the previous 6 months.

In addition complaints were received relating to decisions made in response to allegations made in respect of children, the sharing of sensitive information with families and concerns raised by young people about other young people which they live with in residential care.

Environment and Development Services

The highest number of complaints received related to Streetpride Services and were specifically around services delivered by Network Management where customers complained about the content of standard letters, lack of maintenance of road surfaces and number of pot holes evident across the borough along with lack of feedback received from Streetpride Connect contacts. Complaints were also received relating to Waste Management and problems being experienced with Waste Collections crew re-siting bins in the wrong location and assisted collections being missed. In Leisure and Community Services there are some indications that customers are complaining about Council budget reductions. They received a number of complaints relating to removal of litter bins, lack of litter picking, reduced grass cutting service and removal of toilet facilities at Rosehill Park.

Former Resources Directorate

The total number of complaints received for Former Resources Directorate was **48**, representing a decrease over the last year from **69**. The decrease can be attributed to an improvement in the way that complaints are reported rather than a decline in the standard of service. Improvements in the way that the Council deals with complaints overall has led to a better engagement with services who are able to better identify when a complaint should be responded on a formal basis.

The Revenues and Benefits Service (Benefits Assessment) and Local Taxation received the highest number of complaints. These were mainly regarding advice and information provided by staff.

8. Risks and Uncertainties

Although positive management of complaints has been achieved, the number and type of complaints received is sometimes determined by circumstances beyond the control of the services. Regardless of any external factors the service is required to maintain a high level of performance and excellent customer care.

The current financial decisions the Authority is making is also affecting the number of complaints received (see full report for details), changes to services drive the level of complaints received.

This year the Complaint Team has assisted with an unprecedented number of Councillor e-casework enquiries. This positive trend is expected to continue as more Councillors are finding benefit in managing their casework electronically.

9. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The complaints report reflects the Policy and Performance Agenda requirements of both national Government and the Council. These include;

- Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 (Making Experiences Count).
- The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- Localism Act 2011.
- Corporate Complaint Procedure.
- Rotherham's local plans including corporate and service plans.

10. Background Papers and Consultation

- Appendix 1 Complaints Annual Report (April 2013 – March 2014)

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