

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 24 February 2021

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Cusworth, R. Elliott, Jarvis, Jepson, Keenan, Mallinder, Napper, Taylor, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillor Tweed.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

313. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

314. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

315. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items that required the exclusion of the public or press.

316. ANNUAL COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Chief Executive that presented the annual summary of compliments and complaints received by the Council.

The Cabinet Member - Finance and Corporate Services, the Assistant Chief Executive and the Corporate Complaints Manager attended the meeting to present the report.

The Strategic Director – Children and Young People’s Services, the Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services, the Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment, the Assistant Director - Children’s Social Care, the Assistant Director - Community Safety and Street Scene and the Head of Housing Operations were also in attendance at the meeting.

In introducing the report the Cabinet Member - Finance and Corporate Services noted that the purpose of the annual complaint report was to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council had received in the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 and to highlight key themes and also longer-term trends. The Cabinet Member advised that the report was being presented at a later date this year due to a partial suspension of the formal complaints service during a period in 2020 as a result of the impact of the pandemic. The Cabinet Member noted that the Annual Compliments and Complaint Report for 2020/2021 would be reported as

usual during September/October.

The key issues detailed in the report were:

- In 2019/20, the overall number of complaints received by the Council had increased by 7%, going from 1,275 in 2018/19 to 1,372. The increase had been due to more complaints being received in two particular service areas. Housing Services increased by 26%, from 439 to 551, and Finance and Customer services had increased by 41%, from 129 to 182.
- In Children and Young People's Services' complaints decreased by 27%, from 200 to 147, and in Adult Social Services by 17%, from 87 to 72. The number of complaints received about Regeneration and Environment Services had also decreased but by only 2 from 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). It was noted that this was consistent with previous years' figures, due to the number of residents that these departments deal with.
- Overall, 89% of complaints were responded to within timescales, compared with 87% in 2018/19. This meant that this was better than the five year all Council average of 83%.
- The number of compliments received had decreased again – 794 had been received in 2019/20, in comparison to the 844 received in 2018/19.
- The most frequent category of complaints received by the Council was regarding 'quality of service', accounting for 46% of all complaints (632 of 1,372.)
- In comparison with the previous year, fewer complaints had been 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 had been 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.
- A number of service improvements had been made over the year, based on the feedback from customers and improvement opportunities highlighted from complaints received. The key themes of service improvements had included reviews of policies and processes; information and advice provided; the dealing of delays and improving communication. Examples of the improvements made were included within the report.

The full Annual Compliments and Complaints Report 2019/20 was

attached as an appendix to the officer's report. The Annual Review letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, received on 22 July 2020, that set out their records of referred complaint investigations was also attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

The Assistant Chief Executive made a presentation to the meeting that covered the key headlines, trends and planned activity around complaints for 2020/21.

Members noted that while the report was very informative and comprehensive the information had not been presented in a way that enabled the headlines in the report to give the clearest possible picture of the overall situation. Members however welcomed the high number of complaints that had been successfully resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process.

Members noted the increase in casework that they had seen during the pandemic and asked whether the number and pattern of complaints received had changed during this period. The Assistant Chief Executive advised that the overall number of complaints received during the year had been similar to the number received in previous years. The Head of Housing Operations advised that there had been an increase in complaints related to issues resulting from people spending more time at home during the pandemic such as noise complaints and increased problems around increased amounts of domestic waste. The Assistant Director - Community Safety and Street Scene advised that in his service area that while there had been a reduction in the number of complaints received there had been an increase in the number of requests for some services such as litter removal that were related to residents spending more time in their local areas.

The Corporate Complaints Manager noted that the number of complaints received during the first quarter of the year had fallen dramatically in response to behavioural changes linked to the start of the pandemic and the introduction of restrictions before returning to normal levels later in the year.

Members asked for further information on the benchmarking activity that took place to assess how complaints were managed at Rotherham compared to other similar local authorities. The Corporate Complaints Manager referred to the benchmarking data that had been included in the Annual Complaints report and advised that Rotherham compared very favourably against other similar local authorities regarding the number of complaints received as well as to how complaints were resolved.

Members asked for further information on the training and support that was provided to teams across the Council to improve the customer experience as many complaints received had been regarding actions of staff. The Corporate Complaints Manager advised that training and support was provided to managers to help them to understand and manage the complaints process and how they could use complaints

received as an opportunity to improve how their teams provided a service. The Assistant Chief Executive noted that the Council aimed to be a learning organisation where complaints received enabled activities to be put into place to improve services and enable staff development. The Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services noted that the development of the Council's Customer Access Strategy would further inform the wider development of processes that defined how the Council interacted with customers.

Members welcomed how complaints received were then used as an opportunity to improve service delivery. The Assistant Director noted that while it was important to learn from complaints received it was also vital that complaints were fully recognised and acknowledged as times when the Council had got things wrong.

Members noted the number of complaints that had been received regarding the issuing of Blue Disabled Parking Badges as a result of Government changes to the scheme. The Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services advised that a significant number of the complaints in this service area had either been withdrawn or not upheld as the problems that had occurred had been related to issues totally out of the Council's control. The Strategic Director advised that all possible actions had been taken to reduce the impact of the changes on the experience that residents received when applying for a badge.

Members noted the difficulties that the Government changes to the regulations regarding the issuing of Blue Disabled Parking Badges had caused but noted their thanks to the customer service staff who had supported residents to complete their applications during this difficult period.

Members asked how compliments and complaints that arose from member case work were recorded. The Corporate Complaints Manager advised that these compliments and comments were recorded along with all others received and encouraged members to submit compliments when staff had gone over and above what was expected or had provided an exceptional service. The Chair encouraged all members to submit compliments received about Council services to enable excellent service to be recognised.

Members asked with regard to the recommendation detailed in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2020 that a solution to the complaint should be in place at the time that the complaint is submitted to them for review could be managed. The Corporate Complaints Manager noted that only seven cases had reached this stage during 2019/20, with each of them having been through three stages before had been submitted to the Ombudsman. The Corporate Complaints Manager advised that as such it would be very difficult to reach an acceptable solution at the point of a complaint being submitted to the Ombudsman if the previous formal processes had already failed to

do so.

Members noted the number of complaints that they received from residents regarding housing repairs that had been carried out by the Council's contractor and asked what oversight and quality checking was carried out by the Council of housing repairs. The Head of Housing Operations advised that the contractor would deal directly with complaints received regarding repairs but assured members that the Council monitored these closely as part of their regular meetings with the contractor in order to ensure a high level of service. The Head of Housing Operations advised that officers carried out regular quality checks on housing repairs with the aim to inspect 10% of all repairs completed.

Members sought assurance that the Complaints service was easily accessible to residents. The Corporate Complaints Manager advised that the Complaints team could be accessed via a direct phone number, a service that was not common in other local authorities. The Corporate Complaints Manager assured members that customer services staff and staff across the Council were aware of the Corporate Complaints procedure and how and when this should be accessed in order to ensure that all complaints were recorded and investigated fully.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member - Finance and Corporate Services, the Assistant Chief Executive and the Corporate Complaints Manager and the other officers who had attended the meeting to for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

That the report be noted.

317. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme be approved

318. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

The Chairs of the Improving Lives, Improving Places and Health Select Commissions provided an update on the work of the Select Commissions.

The Chair of the Health Select Commission noted her thanks to Janet Spurling, who had retired in 2020, and to Katherine Harclerode for their work in supporting the Health Select Commission.

The Chair of the Improving Lives Select Commission noted her thanks to Caroline Webb, who had moved to another position in the Council, and to Martin Elliott for their work in supporting the Improving Lives Select Commission.

The Chair provided a progress report on the work of the sub-groups of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and on the work of the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Rob Elliott confirmed that he had now taken the vacant Rotherham Democratic Party seat on that committee.

319. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

Members considered the Cabinet Forward Plan for the period 1 February to 30 April 2021.

Resolved: - That the Forward Plan be noted.

320. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

321. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

322. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held on Wednesday 17 March 2021 at 11am as a Microsoft Teams meeting.