



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 2nd SEPTEMBER 2020

**CORPORATE COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS
ANNUAL REPORT 2019 – 2020**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to present for the Commission's consideration the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report, covering the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. This is attached as appendix A to this report.

Policy framework and previous decisions

2. A new Corporate Complaints Procedure was adopted by the Authority in April 2010 which requires an Annual Report to be produced, analysing and reviewing complaints received during the preceding 12 months.

Background

3. The Customer Relations Team manages and co-ordinates complaints relating to 3 separate complaints systems:
 - (i) Adult Social Care statutory process;
 - (ii) Children's Social Care statutory process;
 - (iii) Corporate Complaints process – these are complaints relating to other services provided by the Council where there is no other form of redress.
4. Both statutory processes are subject to their own reporting processes and annual reports on both areas will follow in autumn 2020 to the respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The third category is the subject of this report. However, a specific report regarding those complaints that relate to environment and transport matters will be the subject of a separate report to the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
5. As detail is included in the Annual Report itself, the purpose of this report is to highlight the headline issues emerging from the analysis of complaints activity for 2019/2020.

Headline statistics

Complaints received and outcomes (2018-19 comparative data is in brackets)

6. During 2019-20 the following complaints were received:
 - 432 Corporate complaints (324) – a 33% increase
 - 44 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman enquiries (36) – a 22% increase
7. 183 Corporate complaints were upheld - which is 43% of the total received (44%). This represents a 1% decrease from last year following a small rise over the last few years.
8. 36 Ombudsman decisions were made during 2019/20 as follows.
 - 16 Maladministration with injustice
 - 13 Closed after initial enquiries
 - 4 No fault found after full investigation
 - 3 Outside of LGO remit
9. The number of Ombudsman decisions increased significantly from 2018-19 when 26 decisions were made.

Response times

10. The Council's internal target has been to respond to 60% of complaints within 10 working days. Whilst this target was met in 2019-20, performance was not as strong as it was in 2018-19 due to the addition of a "review step". This was added to both the Corporate Complaint and Adult Social Care procedures to ensure responses are robust prior to escalation to the Ombudsman.
11. Overall timeliness of responding to corporate complaints remains healthy as set out below (2018-19 figures in brackets):
 - 60% of all complaints received a response within 10 working days (71%)
 - 83% received a response within 20 working days (91%)
 - 99% received a response within the maximum 65 days recommended by LGO (99%)

Issues most frequently complained about

12. The top five issues complained about during 2019/20 were as follows:

Special Educational Needs Assessment	58
Travel and Transport Services	47
Highway and Footway Maintenance	38

Environmental Services	36
School Admissions	23

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints

13. There has been a significant increase both in the number of investigations and adverse findings this year. Financial payments made through the complaints process have also increased from £1.1k to £28.8k.
14. The biggest factor in this is SEN complaints featuring prolonged periods of missed education.
15. The Ombudsman continues to cite SEN as their primary concern across all local authorities and is upholding around 90% of complaints it receives in this area.

Compliments

16. There was a significant increase in numbers of compliments recorded during the year with 412 across all services (up from 241 in 2018-19). This reflects the better discipline within departments around forwarding these on to our Complaints team.

COVID 19 Impact on Complaint Volumes

17. Between 1 April 2020 to 18 July 2020, following the Covid 19 outbreak, there have been two emerging themes which are generating significant complaints, comments and enquiries. These are briefly set out below:

Waste Management	124
Lockdown	104

18. Waste Management complaints and enquires are split largely between 'policy' complaints, e.g. the Initial closure of the waste sites or restrictions on vans / trailers (53) and difficulties in using the online platform to make a booking (64).
19. There have been very few complaints regarding the onsite experience at Waste sites where a number of compliments have been recorded.
20. Most lockdown complaints and enquiries were received after the 'Local Lockdown' announcement. These are not recorded as complaints but have been responded to centrally to allow for consistency and tracking of overall volumes.
21. The other main change has been the reduced number of social care complaints during the first quarter. This likely reflects some of the service changes that have been made during this time. Most notably the freeze on financial assessments.

Recommendations

22. The Commission is asked to:

- (i) note the contents of the Corporate Complaints Annual Report, covering the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020;
- (ii) provide comment and feedback on the content and analysis within the report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Background Papers

Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2018 – 2019: Scrutiny Commission – 12 June 2019

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List of Appendices

Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2019 – 20

Equality and Human Rights Implications

None