



Report Reference Number: A/21/9

To: Audit and Governance Committee
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Status: Non-Executive Decision
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Title: Corporate Complaints & Compliments Annual Report, April 2019 – March 2020 & April 2020 – March 2021 and Local Authority Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2021

Summary:

Selby District Council is committed to customer service. We believe that the needs of our customers are our top priority, and we are committed to putting our customers first by improving the quality of our services and our customers' experience of them. We are keen to understand where services can improve as changes are made to a deliver a greater digital service.

The Council adopted a Complaints Policy in 2017, which was amended in 2020 in respect of dealing with vexatious customers. In this policy we have made a commitment to publish our performance on dealing with complaints every quarter as part of the Corporate Performance Report and to publish an annual complaints report.

The annual report is an opportunity to inform on service area improvement, this report is for a two-year period in relation to Corporate Complaints and Compliments. The delay in reporting the 2020 information is a result of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the pandemic as all service areas focussed resource on immediate customer needs.

As previously advised, this report also includes information and a link to the Ombudsman Annual Report to provide a comprehensive picture of complaints handling at this Council.

Recommendations:

That the Audit and Governance Committee note and provide comments on the Corporate Complaints Annual Report and the Ombudsman Annual Report.

Reasons for recommendation

In our Complaints Policy we have made a commitment to publish an annual complaints report. This report includes how we have performed in responding to complaints and how we have used complaints to inform service improvement. Including Ombudsman information within the same report provides Members with a full picture of complaints handling and its effect on continually improving standards at Selby District Council.

1.0 Introduction and background -

- 1.1 Complaints arrive into the Council in varying ways; telephone, email, and letter. The central point for receipt, recording and administration is Leadership Support, who triage to assess the type of complaint received. The assessment is to establish if the complaint is a service area complaint, which can be initially dealt with by the Customer Service team, or if there is a requirement for the Leadership Support team to log as a corporate complaint and trigger the designated timelines.
- 1.2 Compliments are usually received direct from a service area, a line manager or a colleague plus via the web, where a customer can log their feedback. The Leadership Support team log details of the named member of staff or team and the service area, with brief details of the customer's comments.
- 1.3 Leadership Support monitor complaints for responses to Stage 1, Stage 2 and Ombudsman complaints and they issue reminders to colleagues for completion dates. Discussions are ongoing with Data and Systems for a complaint reminder to be a RAG (red, amber, green) system that's currently used for Freedom of information requests.
- 1.4 Information is gathered monthly and quarterly for Stage 1, Stage 2, and Ombudsman complaints, including details of the numbers received and if they have been responded to in the required timeframe. This information is then recorded in KPI reports and published on the web.

2.0 Complaints Performance Report:

Stage 1 Corporate Complaint's

- 2.1 The tables below illustrate a comparison of Stage 1 complaints for the last two financial years, and the data that forms part of the current KPI and the yearly return of the council's performance:-

2020-2021: -

| Service Area | Total | On time | Late | Not Justified | Partially Justified | Justified | No data provided |
|--------------|-------|---------|------|---------------|---------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Operational | 26 | 23 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 1 | 9 |
| Planning | 18 | 15 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 15 |
| Legal | 3 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Contracts | 4 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Business Dev | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Comm. & Partnership | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 52 | 46 | 6 | 15 | 9 | 1 | 27 |

2019-2020: -

| Service Area | Total | On time | Late | Not Justified | Partially Justified | Justified | No data provided |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Operational | 55 | 49 | 6 | 33 | 16 | 4 | 2 |
| Planning | 16 | 10 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Legal | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Contracts | 7 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Business Dev | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Comm. & Partnership | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 80 | 68 | 12 | 47 | 19 | 5 | 9 |

2.2 These figures illustrate a decrease in Stage 1 Complaints received and a decrease in late responses. Monitoring sheets which provide information about complaint justification improved in 2019 – 2020, however form returns have decreased in 2020 – 2021, this could be due to Officers covering several areas of work due to the pandemic.

Stage 2 Corporate Complaints

2.3 The figures below again illustrate a slight increase overall. Similar to Stage 1 complaints, there is a decrease in Monitoring sheet information, again this could be due to the demands on all services caused by the pandemic.

2020-2021: -

| Service Area | Total | On time | Late | Not Justified | Partially Justified | Justified | No data provided |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Operational | 9 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Planning | 13 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Legal | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Contracts | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Business Dev | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Comm. & Partnership | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 25 | 16 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 21 |

2019-2020: -

| Service Area | Total | On time | Late | Not Justified | Partially Justified | Justified | No data provided |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------------|---------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Operational | 14 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| Planning | 7 | 7 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Legal | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Contracts | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Business Dev | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Comm. & Partnership | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 22 | 15 | 7 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 11 |

2.4 Whilst the corporate complaints for Stage 1 have decreased and Stage 2's increased slightly, the focus for quarterly and yearly reports remains number based, rather than theme based. Presently, there is limited information about lessons learnt or actions taken to rectify an issue to prevent repeat complaints. As a result of this finding, it is proposed that further work will focus on the importance of collating information about the nature of complaints through completion of monitoring forms. Analysis of the monitoring information to see if any themes arise from which lessons can be learned and services further improved will be developed within Leadership Support.

LGA Ombudsman Complaints

2.5 The figures below illustrate a decrease in the amount of complaints escalated to the LGA Ombudsman. The LGO have reported a nil return for complaints they have upheld for SDC for the last financial year.

2021-2020: -

| Received | Investigated | Not investigated | Complaint upheld | Complaint not upheld |
|----------|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 7 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 3 |

2020-2019: -

| Received | Investigated | Not investigated | Complaint upheld | Complaint not upheld |
|----------|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 10 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 4 |

2.6 The Ombudsman Service published the Annual Statistics on its website for 20/21 at [Selby District Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#) None of the complaints made against SDC were upheld during this period. 100% of any improvements recommended by the Ombudsman were carried out. It was a difficult year in which the Ombudsman Service suspended consideration of complaints at the start of the covid pandemic for six months, and this should be taken into account if comparing with last years' statistics.

Compliments

2.7 The figures below illustrate the number of compliments received over the two-year period and the service areas concerned.

2021-2020: -

| Received | Contact Centre | Assets | Lifeline | Housing | CT& Bens | Contracts | Planning |
|----------|----------------|--------|----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 134 | 67 | 26 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 27 | 1 |

2020-2019: -

| Received | Contact Centre | Assets | Licensing | Council Tax | Housing | Contracts | Data & Systems | Planning |
|----------|----------------|--------|-----------|-------------|---------|-----------|----------------|----------|
| 106 | 50 | 22 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 11 | 3 | 2 |

2.8 It is encouraging from a performance perspective that the number of compliments has almost doubled. Moving forward, data regarding compliments received could be added to the KPI information monthly.

Other Complaints

2.9 Separate from the complaint's procedure, MP enquires come direct to Leadership Support to instigate a response. Support from a designated area (Leadership team) has provided a less fractured service. The designated officer has an overview of varying complaints received which assists with appropriate escalation of complaints and decreases duplication of complaints across MP enquiries, corporate complaints, and service area complaints.

Vexatious Complaints

2.10 It is very rare for the Council to reach the position where a complainant is designated as vexatious. However, in 2019 such a designation was made in respect of a persistent complainant. The matter was considered further by the Ombudsman. The Council's policy was subsequently amended on the advice of the Ombudsman, to include a specific warning to the complainant prior to such designation.

2.11 The policy has been amended to reflect the working procedure of issuing an initial letter warning and then a final warning letter that we are moving to the vexatious stage, with varying options of how to manage the customer during this period.

2.12 With dedicated complaint administration, Leadership support can review all communication received and highlight any issues to the Customer Service Manager, to discuss with the relevant area if referral to the vexatious procedure would be appropriate.

3.0 Implications

- 3.1 Consideration for a compliment indicator to be added to the KPI information to give a balanced view of complaints and compliments received quarterly to feed into the annual report.
- 3.2 A RAG (red, amber, green) email to be formulated, from the complaint spreadsheet, to assist with complaint administration, similar to one presently used for Freedom of information administration. This will move ownership from manual reminders and assist Officers managing their own dairies to ensure complaints are handled in a timely manner.

Legal Implications

- 3.3 Clear and lawful policies and procedures in place to consider complaints and learn from them reduces the risk of legal challenges and increases the efficiency of Council administration. Oversight by Members is important in terms of transparency and openness.

Financial Implications

- 3.4 With stronger complaint administration and key data on lessons learnt, this may assist with claims against the Council for compensation for delays with complaint handling.

4. Conclusion

During this report period, Leadership support have provided strong administrative support, assisting with responses at service level, to avoid matters escalating to corporate complaints.

With the administration of Corporate complaints, Ombudsman correspondence and MP enquiries now being dealt with by Leadership support, this has become less fractured with a more holistic approach, minimising confusion for customers and colleagues.

Corporate complaints are a tool to provide vital feedback for the Council to improve our performance. The current performance on Stage 1 & Stage 2 monitoring sheets requires improvement. As we move out of the pandemic we will focus on gathering information about the nature of complaints and analysing how services can be improved and lessons learned.

Whilst corporate complaints have decreased for Stage 1's and only a slight increase in Stage 2's, further work can be done to improve the customer journey. With emphasis on a KPI for lessons learnt and how we could improve our policies and procedures this would strengthen the council's relationship and with our customer base, illustrating the value we place on complaints received.

It can be inferred from the Ombudsman Annual Review Report [selby district council.pdf \(lgo.org.uk\)](#) that Selby District Council's improvements to complaints handling procedures have had an impact on the number and outcomes of

Ombudsman Complaints this year, resulting in improved reputation and increased efficiency of process.

Members are asked to note the information in this report.

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