

3 October 2024		ITEM: 8
Audit Committee		
Annual Complaints & Enquiries Report – 2023/2024		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Tracie Heiser, Head of Customer Services, Corporate Services		
Accountable Assistant Director: Marta Poczowska - Chief Digital and Customer Services Officer		
Accountable Director: Dan Fenwick, Executive Director Corporate Services/MO (Monitoring Officer)		
This report is public		
Version: Final		

Executive Summary

- The number of complaints received to for the reporting period is 1940. For the same period last year, the figure was 1717, therefore the reporting period represents an increase of 223 complaints received (13%)
- Details of the top 10 complaint areas, learning from complaints and Ombudsman decisions are detailed within Appendix 1
- Adult Social Care and Children’s Social Care have separate statutory complaints procedures and reports for these areas are shown within Appendices 2 and 3
- During the reporting period, 43% of complaints were upheld. This is an improvement compared to the same period last year, which identified 47% of complaints as upheld.
- For the reporting period, 87% of complaints were responded to within timeframe. This represents improved performance from last year, where 83% were responded to within timeframe.
- A total of 259 MP enquiries were received, of which 88% were responded to within timeframe. This represents improved performance compared to last year’s figures of 86% within timeframe from 320 received.
- A total of 4048 member enquiries were received, with 94% responded to within timeframe. Last year the council received 4142 enquiries with 94% responded to

within timeframe. The average time taken to respond to members enquiries across all Directorates was 5 days.

- The council received 2089 external compliments within the reporting period compared to 1261 during last year.

1. Recommendations

1.1 To agree the report goes onto Audit Committee for consideration.

1.2 That Audit Committee consider and note the report.

2. Introduction and Background

This report sets out the council's complaints statistics for 2023/24. The top 10 complaint areas along with learning from complaints are detailed within Appendix 1.

Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Social Care (CSC) have separate statutory complaints procedures and reports for these areas are shown within Appendices 2 and 3

2.1 Complaints Figures

For the reporting period a total of 1632 Stage 1 complaints were responded to. Of these 738 were upheld, with the average time taken to respond to complaints across all areas being 10 days.

For the reporting period a total of 202 Stage 2 complaints were responded to. Of these, 54 were upheld, with the average time taken to respond to complaints across all areas being 18 days.

There were 0 (Nil) complaints recorded as rejected or refused for investigation during the reporting period.

Benchmarking covering complaints data has been undertaken and is summarised within Appendix 1 for corporate complaints and within Appendices 2 and 3 for Adult Social Care and Children Social Care complaints.

2.2 Ombudsman Enquiries and/or compensation payments

There were 62 Ombudsman decisions within the reporting period with 21 findings of fault. Appendix 1 details a summary of enquiries where the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and/or the Housing Ombudsman have reached a final decision on cases within the reporting period.

In addition to Ombudsman decisions:

- £573 was paid out or offered by the council (or its contractors) as a form of complaint resolution across 11 Stage 1 complaints.
- £3385 was paid out or offered by the council (or its contractors) as a form of complaint resolution across 13 Stage 2 complaints.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman have put in place complaints handling codes that the council must adhere to. The council complies with these codes and the self-assessment against these codes will be published on the council's website.

2.3 MP and Members Enquiries

During the reporting period enquiries were received as follows:

- 4048 member enquiries were received, with 94% responded to within timeframe. The average time taken to respond to members enquiries across all Directorates was 5 days.
- A total of 259 MP enquiries were received, of which 88% were responded to within the timeframe.

Feedback from Member Enquiries - Since January 2024, the complaints team have been undertaking sample checks/surveys on closed member enquiries responded to by service areas. The surveys are short and aim to identify any concerns from Members regarding the transparency of responses from service areas. As of 31 March 2024, 82% of responses received from Members have been positive. For any negative responses received, the Complaints Team will review and will link in with the relevant service area to address the concerns raised by the Member.

2.4 Learning lessons from complaints

The most important aspect of any complaints management framework is the ability to demonstrate that the council can show evidence that it is learning from complaints received. Appendix 1 shows the top 10 complaint areas and a summary of high-level learning from upheld complaints which has been identified for each area.

2.5 Complaint channels

There are various means for complainants to register expressions of dissatisfaction and the table below details how complaints were received:

Digital channel (email, social media, website)	90%
Telephone	10%

2.6 Compliments

The council received 2089 external compliments within the reporting period compared to 1261 from last year. A breakdown is shown below, and the high volume shown for the Contact Centre are in the main due to compliments received via the contact centre call handling satisfaction surveys.

Area	Volume
Contact Centre	1662
Adult Social Care	196
Housing	73
Children's Services	72
Waste Management	21
Clean & Green	16
Development Control	10
Human Resources	9
Transport Development	5
Licensing	5
Passenger Transport Unit	4
Environmental Protection	4
Community Protection	4
Recreation & Leisure	2
Highways Maintenance	2
Building Control	1
Environmental Enforcement	1
Network Management	1
Democratic Services	1
Total	2089

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Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 There are no options associated with this paper.

4 Reasons for recommendations

4.1 This report is for noting purposes. There are no recommendations requiring approval.

5 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 This report was sent to Senior Leadership Team.

6 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance, and community impact

6.1 Complaints impact on the council's priority of delivering excellence and achieving value for money.

6.2 The complaints process seeks to create a culture of corporate learning from best practice from listening to our customers and by acting on complaints. All complaints received must have learning applied if the complaint outcome is upheld.

6.3 The complaints process aims to improve customers' and users' experience of accessing council services. This will support our customer services strategy.

7 Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Dawn Calvert**
Chief Financial Officer

The financial implications are set out in the body of the report. Corporate Learning from complaints will reduce further exposure to financial consequences by improving core processes and services.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Governance Lawyer & Deputy Monitoring Officer

Given that this is an update report for noting there are no legal implications directly arising from it. The following points should be noted by way of background information:

- Both the Courts and the Local Government Ombudsman expect complainants to show that they have exhausted local complaints / appeal procedures before commencing external action.
- The implementation of our learning from complaints and listening to our residents should lead to a reduction of complaints received and a reduction in those going to the Ombudsman or the Courts.
- Social Care for Adult and Children are required to follow a separate procedure stipulated by the Department of Health (DOH) and Department for Education & Skills (DFES).
- Regular reports on the council's performance in responding to complaints, assists the council to ensure that it complies with its best value duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**

Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities

There are no direct equality and diversity implications arising from this report. Individual complaints that include an equality related expression of dissatisfaction are considered by the service alongside all complaints.

7.4 Risks

None.

7.5 Other implications (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

None.

8 Background papers used in preparing the report

Information has been obtained from the council's complaints system.

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Top 10 complaint themes
- Appendix 2 – Adult Social Care complaint dashboard
- Appendix 3 – Children Social Care complaint dashboard

Report Author:

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