



Audit & Governance Committee
25 September 2014

Annual Complaints Performance Report

Purpose of the report:

The purpose of this report is to give the Audit & Governance Committee an overview of the council's performance in relation to complaint handling in 2013/14 and how feedback from customers has been used to improve services.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. The Audit & Governance Committee note the council's performance in 2013/14 and how feedback from customers has been used to improve services.

Introduction:

2. The council recognises that effective complaint handling is a critical component of delivering good customer service. As well as putting things right for the customer every complaint presents a potential opportunity to learn and improve.
3. Where fault is found Corrective Action Plans are put in place to improve the service and resolve the complaint for the customer. Specific examples are highlighted later in this report.
4. Even if a complaint is not upheld, there is always the opportunity to learn about why the customer has complained, and a need to understand their motives and feelings.

Complaint categories and performance in 2013/14:

- Every complaint is assigned one or more categories which describe the nature of the complaint. Complaints by Directorate and the assigned categories are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Complaints by service and categories in 2013/14

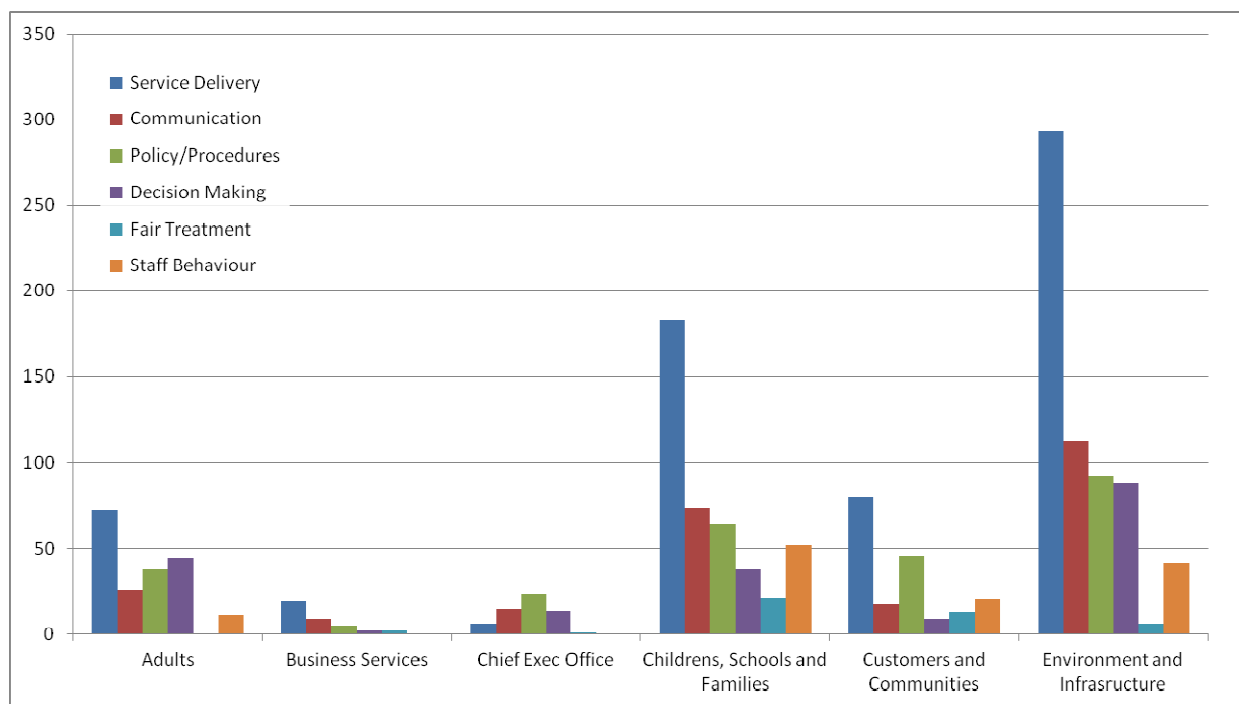


Table 1: Complaint categories in 2013/14

Directorate	Values					
	Service Delivery	Communication	Policy/Procedures	Decision Making	Fair Treatment	Staff Behaviour
Adults	72	25	38	44	0	11
Business Services	19	9	5	2	2	0
Chief Exec Office	6	14	23	13	1	0
Childrens, Schools and Families	183	73	64	38	21	52
Customers and Communities	80	17	45	9	12	20
Environment and Infrasructure	293	112	92	88	6	41
All	653	250	267	194	42	124

Table 2: Complaint handling performance in 2012/13 and 2013/14

Area	Response target	2012/13		2013/14	
		Complaints received	Performance against response target	Complaints received	Performance against response target
Business Services	90% within 10 working days	24	88%	28	86%
Chief Executives		2	100%	47	72%
Customer & Communities		199	95%	181	95%
Environment & Infrastructure		463	95%	625	91%
Adults social care	90% in 20 working days	213	94%	179	96%
Schools & Learning and Services for Young People	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	54	86% (within 10 working days) 94% (within 20 working days)	80	77% (within 10 working days) 92% (within 20 working days)
Children's social care	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	274	47% (within 10 working days) 71% (within 20 working days)	346	55% (within 10 working days) 77% (within 20 working days)
Total / weighted average		1,229	89%	1,486	88%

Complaint Trends

- The number of complaints has risen. This is accounted for as feedback is being actively encouraging and, as noted in the recent Government report 'More Complaints Please (April 2014)', there is a general rise in the number of complaints across all public and private sectors. The report describes that this does not always indicate that the quality of services is diminishing, but reflects in part rising expectations and new technologies making it easier for people to complain. People have a higher level of confidence, are more aware of their rights, and expect an increasingly effective service from all parts of the public and private sectors.
- There has been a rise in the number of complaints in the Chief Executive's Office who took responsibility for the management complaints about Ride London.

Performance

8. Despite the increase in volume of complaints, response performance for most Services remains above target. Of particular note is Environment and Infrastructure, which has seen a 35% increase in complaints received, while achieving 91% of responses within target. Children's Services response standards have also improved on last year's figures despite a 26% increase in volume. It should be noted that complexities of complaints in Children's Services significantly impact on timescales and the average time to respond at Stage 1 over the year fell to 13 days.
9. Where the council is at fault, compensation can be paid if deemed appropriate. All compensation awards are approved by the relevant Head of Service, and if greater than £1,000, in consultation with the portfolio holder. In 2013/14, the Council paid £43,039 compensation, compared to £13,394 in 2012/13. The difference is attributed to 3 payments made: £16,436 was for reimbursement of a residential placement, £8,500 was awarded in relation to a historic safeguarding failure and, £9,853 was awarded following the failure in the project management to relocate a traveller's site.

Complaint Escalation

10. We aim to resolve complaints satisfactorily at the earliest opportunity however customers who remain dissatisfied can escalate their complaint. Table 3 shows the number of complaints escalating through all stages and where fault was identified by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

Table 3: Complaint escalation in 2013/14

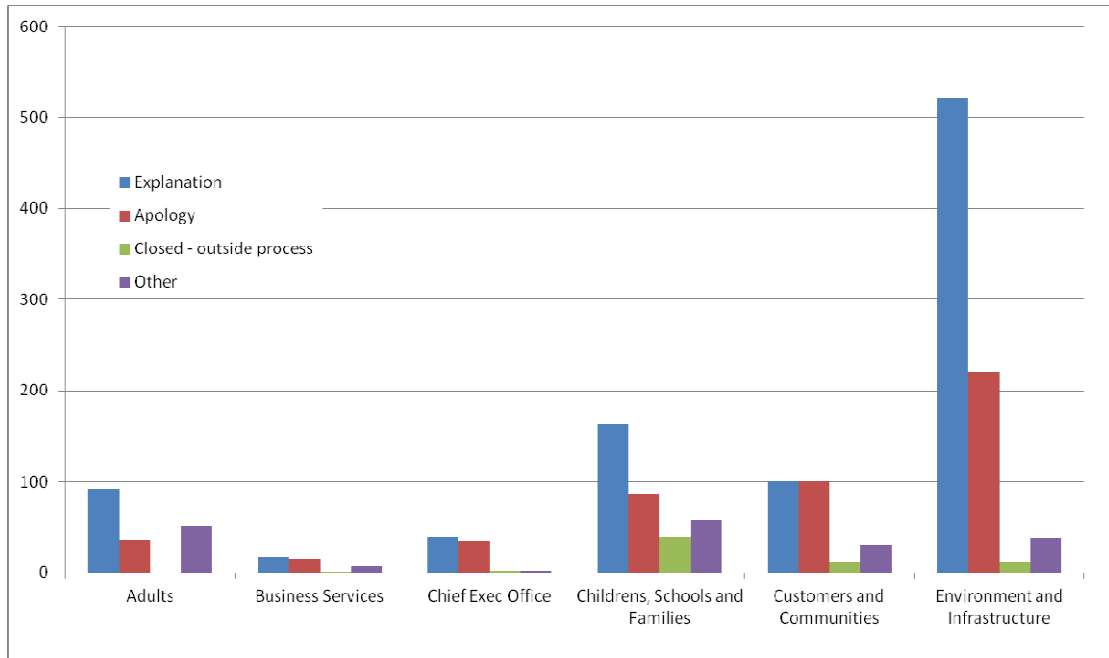
Area	Complaints received at stage 1	Complaints escalated to:			Complaints escalated to LGO in 2012/13 (fault found)
		Stage 2	Stage 3	LGO (fault found)	
Business Services	28	2	N/A	3 (0)	3(0)
Chief Executives	47	6		1(0)	0(n/a)
Customer & Communities	182	17		3(0)	0(n/a)
Environment & Infrastructure	624	141		18(1)	16(0)
Adults social care	179	N/A		12(2)	10(2)
Schools and Learning	80	7		10(0)	20(0)
Children's social care	346	15		1	21(2)
Total	1,486	188	1	68(5)	62(4)

11. The LGO rarely finds fault in the investigations carried out by our staff. This is due to the emphasis put on robust and in-depth investigations.

Complaint Outcomes

12. The outcomes from complaint investigations are monitored and analysed for trends or possible service improvements. Some complaints will result in more than one outcome or recommendation. Figure 2 shows the outcomes from complaints and how they were resolved. Figure 2 shows the outcomes from complaints and how they were resolved.

Figure 2: Complaint outcomes in 2013/14



Learning from complaints

13. Every complaint presents an opportunity to put things right for the complainant and also learn and improve. An individual complaint may result in corrective action being identified, or a number of complaints about the same service may identify a need to review a process or the information provided to customers.
14. Specific examples of learning identified through complaints are listed below:
- Children's Rights Services recommended a review of the guidance for major adaptations within the family home, and a review of the Occupational Therapy structure which has led to clearer information being provided for families and improved relationships.
 - Children's Rights Service made recommendations ensuring families are updated more regularly on the progress of assessments, and records are maintained accurately to ensure confidentiality. This has led to improved working practices and relationships with families.

- c) A review of practice regarding the transfer of Special Educational Needs (SEN) statements will lead to parents being more informed and better communication and working practices between schools.
- d) Following a joint investigation by the Care Quality Commission and Surrey County Council into a private provider's residential care home, staffing levels were increased and training revised. Surrey County Council also developed a new relationship with the care home and provided an allocated Practitioner as a professional liaison.
- e) A recommendation to provide the Adults Social Care Emergency Duty Team with access to information on the Carers Registration Scheme has improved their ability to support callers out of hours.
- f) Recommendations led to a joint review by Property, Schools Commissioning, Procurement and Planning & Development regarding the delivery and management of planning applications whereby the school and SCC are jointly named. The new process model provides clarity around roles and responsibilities and has led to more joined up working.
- g) A recommendation for the Parking Team in Highways to make it clearer that there is an option of mediated access through the Contact Centre has improved the system for capturing objections to parking schemes and provided greater accessibility.
- h) A review by Highways and Transport Development and Planning of the process for managing and monitoring small developments has led to more joined up working.

Conclusions:

15. What are we doing well?

- a) An improved awareness of the complaints processes has led to a significant increase in the number of complaints.
- b) Work with services has improved the quality of responses and led to a reduction in the number of complaints escalating (15% to 13%).
- c) Adults Customer Relations has built strong links with advocacy providers resulting in greater support for people wishing to complain.
- d) Adults Customer Relations has developed and now lead the Complaints Managers' group for social care and NHS staff in Surrey, resulting in improved external relationships and better working practices.

- e) The advocacy service in Children's Rights Service has seen an increase in contacts and has become the 'go to' advice and helpline for Surrey young people and staff. It has also collaborated closely with a national service enterprise in the development of the self advocacy 'app' MOMO (Mind of My Own).
- f) The Corporate Customer Relations team supported Highways through the Customer Service Excellence programme and continues to advise other council services working towards the quality standard.
- g) Improvements to complaint reporting is leading to a better analysis and understanding of service improvement opportunities.

16. What do we need to work on?

- a) We are currently redesigning our website to make it easier for customers to leave feedback and make a complaint.
- b) We are reviewing our systems to make complaint handling more efficient and to improve the analysis of trends to drive customer service improvements.
- c) Continue to work collaboratively across Adults Customer Relations, Corporate Customer Relations and Children's Rights Service to improve the collection, analysis and reporting of complaint information.
- d) Continue to work with services to promote the value of complaints internally, improve early resolution for customers and embed learning within the services.

Financial and value for money implications

17. There are no direct financial implications for the council in handling complaints; however there are times when compensation is awarded as an outcome of the complaint investigation.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

18. The complaints process enables customers to make their complaint through the website, by telephone or in person and does not have implications for people with protected characteristics.

Risk Management Implications

19. The complaints process does not have any direct risk management implications; however complaints do carry a risk to the council's reputation if not handled appropriately.

Next steps:

20. The Audit & Governance Committee to receive information on operation of the council's complaints procedures on an annual basis.

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Sources/background papers:

- SCC complaints database, ASC Annual Customer Relations Report, Children's Rights Service.
- Appendices
 - Appendix A – SCC complaints policy and procedures
 - Appendix B – ASC Annual Complaints Report 2013-14
 - Appendix C – Children's Annual Report 2013-14