



Audit & Governance Committee
28 September 2015

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 2014/15 and how feedback from customers has been used to improve services.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Audit & Governance Committee note the council's performance in relation to complaint handling in 2014/15 and how feedback from customers has been used to improve services.

Introduction:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 2014/15:

4. 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 2014/15

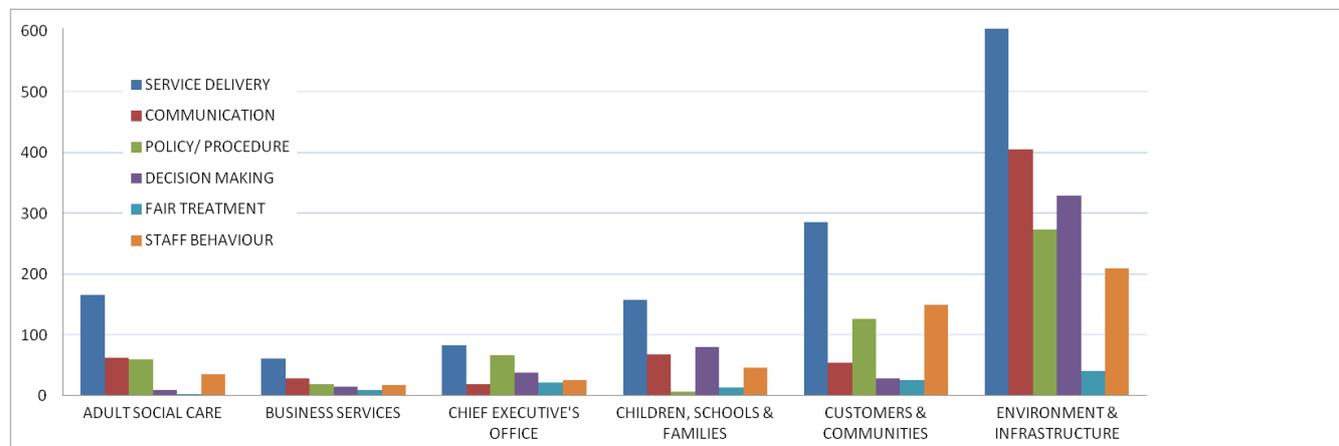


Table 1: Complaint categories in 2014/15

Directorate	Service Delivery	Communication	Policy/Procedure	Decision Making	Fair Treatment	Staff Behaviour
Adult Social Care	166	63	60	9	2	35
Business Services	61	29	19	15	9	17
Chief Executive Office	83	19	67	38	21	26
Children's, Schools and Families	158	68	7	80	13	46
Customers and Communities	286	55	127	29	26	150
Environment and Infrastructure	605	406	274	330	41	210
All	1359	640	554	501	112	484

Table 2: Complaint handling performance in 2013/14 and 2014/15

Area	Response target	2013/14		2014/15	
		Complaints received	Performance against response target	Complaints received	Performance against response target
Business Services	90% within 10 working days	28	86%	30	97%
Chief Executives		47	72%	138	87%
Customer & Communities		181	95%	72	92%
Environment & Infrastructure		625	91%	726	94%
Adult Social Care	90% in 20 working days	179	96%	194	92%
Schools & Learning and Services for Young People	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	80	77% (within 10 working days) 92% (within 20 working days)	51	61% (within 10 working days) 86% (within 20 working days)
Children's Social Care	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	346	55% (within 10 working days) 77% (within 20 working days)	321	53% (within 10 working days) 78% (within 20 working days)
Total / weighted average		1,486	88%	1,532	89%

Complaint trends

5. Overall the number of complaints has risen this year. The rise in the number of complaints in the Chief Executive's Office and decline in the number for Customers & Communities is a result of the move of Cultural Services (including Adult Community Learning, Library Service, Registration Service, Surrey Arts, Surrey Coroner and Surrey Heritage) into Chief Executive's Office in August 2014.
6. There has been a fall in complaints for Children's Services. This slight decrease may be indicative of improved resolution at an informal stage of the process and/or improved recognition by operational teams of alternate routes for responding to concerns. The Rights and Participation Service consider this further in their annual report and will continue to monitor recording levels to determine if there are any specific causes or trends that can clarify the lower recording levels.

Although there is a decrease in the number of complaints for Schools & Learning and Services to Young People from last year, the number of complaints recorded over the past 4 years has generally remained the same. Schools and Learning have other routes that parents are expected to take for resolution of certain types of dispute; such as Special Educational Needs (SEN) tribunals and School Transport appeals panels.

Performance

7. 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 an increase in complaints received (625 – 726), while achieving 93% of responses within target. Business Services has also improved their performance from 86% to 97% of complaints being responded to within the target. The complexities of complaints in Children’s Services continue to impact on their ability to respond within the statutory timescales, although the average time to respond at Stage 1 was 14 days.
8. 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 2014/15, the Council paid £33,032 compensation, compared to £43,039 in 2013/14. The 3 largest payments were for the following: £11,046.72 and £8,454 for payment equivalent to a foster carer’s allowance; and £6,500 for failures in case management and care coordination.

Complaint escalation

9. We aim to resolve complaints satisfactorily at the earliest opportunity however customers who remain dissatisfied can escalate their complaint. Table 3 (overleaf) 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 2014/15

Area	Complaints received at stage 1	Complaints escalated to:			Complaints escalated to LGO in 2012/13 (<i>fault found</i>)
		Stage 2	Stage 3	LGO (<i>fault found</i>)	
Business Services	30	4	N/A	3 (0)	3 (0)
Chief Executives	138	6		2 (0)	1 (0)
Customer & Communities	72	7		0 (N/A)	3 (0)
Environment & Infrastructure	726	116		16 (1)	18 (1)
Adults Social Care	194	N/A		28 (12)	12 (2)
Schools and Learning	51	11		16 (4)	10 (0)
Children's Social Care	321	38		0	21 (2)
Total	1,532	182	0	86 (19)	68 (5)

10. There has been a significant decline in proportion of complaints escalating for Environment & Infrastructure (23% in 2013/14 compared to 16% in 2014/15), reflecting the work Surrey Highways have been undertaking through the Customer Service Excellence programme and in quality checking their stage 1 complaint responses.
11. Adult Social Care (ASC) has seen an increase in the number of complaints being considered by the LGO compared to the previous 2 years, and subsequently the number being upheld. ASC Customer Relations team is currently monitoring the activity with the Ombudsman office to see if this is a continuing trend and what the learning is for the Department from the Ombudsman upholding these complaints.

Learning from complaints

12. 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 that is specific to that complaint, or a number of complaints about the same service may identify a need to review a process or the information provided to customers.
13. Specific examples of learning identified through complaints are listed below:
 - a) A review of guidance regarding continuing fostering placements, where the fostering team has concerns about potential risk to either the looked after child or other children present in the home, will lead to improved safeguarding and monitoring.

- b) A recommendation for assessments to clearly distinguish between social care professional opinion and comments received from third parties will lead to improved communication with, and understanding by, families involved with Children's Services.
- c) A recommendation to review procedures will enable the council to bring forward an annual Special Education Needs review when a parent raises concerns about the provision ensuring any changing needs of the child are met an earlier stage.
- d) A complaint about multi-disciplinary care for a resident, including home care delivered by a care agency on behalf of Surrey and district nursing provided through the NHS has led to a review of the communication strategies between the various agencies. This will seek to improve handover procedures and record management.
- e) A complaint about funding care for a resident's elderly mother led to a review of the assessment process and access to public funding.
- f) Recommendations regarding output, timeliness and quality of communications to the public have contributed to the work now ongoing in Surrey Highways to improve communications to customers around highways maintenance and improvement works. Learning from specific complaints is being directed to the new project team. This will assist in identifying the improvements necessary to reduce the number of enquires and complaints being made due to the provision of incorrect or substandard information.
- g) A recommendation to the Blue Badge Team for de-registering all badges returned to the team will prevent reminders being inadvertently sent out to customers who are deceased.
- h) A complaint about overhanging vegetation around streetlights resulted in an improved process between Skanska and Surrey Highways which addresses how reports of overhanging vegetation are managed and resolved.

Conclusions:

14. What are we doing well?

- a) Ongoing work with services across the council has improved the quality of responses and increased the resolution of complaints at the earliest stage.
- b) Improved the identification and recording of learning and corrective actions arising from complaints at all stages of the process, and subsequent monitoring to ensure actions are implemented within agreed timescales.

- c) Despite the increase in volume of complaints, response performance for most Services remains above target. Adult Social Care exceeded their target for 90% of complaint responses within timescale, with 92% this year. Environment and Infrastructure achieved a 93% response rate despite 16% increase in complaints.
- d) Adults Customer Relations team have developed a robust training strategy to support staff through the complaints process which has led to an increased confidence and knowledge in responding to complaints.
- e) A recent independent assessment (Customer Service Excellence) identified the council's approach to dealing with customer complaints to be an area of compliance plus. Of particular note was:
 - Establishment of a dedicated team to provide assistance and guidance to services when dealing with complaints as well as dealing with all complaints that reach stage 2
 - The service and council's culture of dealing with complaints as an opportunity of improvement
 - Logging of comments and compliments on the system
- f) Proactive work with Surrey Highways building on learning from experience of complaints to improve communications with customers around road maintenance schemes.
- g) The implementation of the new Customer Promise has led to a greater awareness and commitment to delivering excellent customer service. This in turn has led to a higher demand for support in complaint handling.

15. What do we need to work on?

- a) We are continuing to develop our training packages to support the Customer Promise, and on complaint handling for delivery to services and contractors.
- b) Continue to work with services to promote the value of complaints internally, improve early resolution for customers and embed learning within the services. We are focussing this year on revitalising the Complaints Lead network to build on working relationships with the services and drive customer service improvement.
- c) Continue to review our systems and procedures to make it easier to leave feedback and make a complaint.
- d) Adults Customer Relations team will monitor the complaints escalating to the Local Government Ombudsman and the outcomes of their investigations.

- e) Adults Customer Relations team is working with Association of Directors of Adults Social Care (ADASS) and the Department of Health on possible reform under the Care Act 2014. This may include a new system for appeals regarding care decisions or revisions to the complaints procedure itself.
- f) Children's Rights Service will be working closely with staff to increase the number of children and young people enabled to speak up for themselves whether in the context of formal complaints or information resolution of problems.
- g) 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.

Financial and value for money implications

- 18. Payment of compensation, as outlined in paragraph 10 of this report, is a financial implication of complaint handling. Responding to complaints quickly and getting issues resolved early ensures complaints do not escalate unnecessarily through the process.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 19. Ensuring we maintain good complaint handling processes enables our service to remain accessible to all.

Risk Management Implications

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, Adult Social Care Customer Relations team, Children's Rights Service.