

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Corporate Director for Corporate Services
to
Cabinet

On
20th September 2016

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Agenda
Item No.

Annual Report – Comments, Compliments and Complaints – 2015/16
All Scrutiny Committees
Executive Councillors: Councillor Lamb, Councillor Salter, Councillor Courtney
A Part 1 Public Agenda Item.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report is to:

- Fulfil the Council's statutory duty to produce an annual report on compliments and complaints received about its Children and Adult social care functions.
- Provide performance information about comments, compliments and complaints received across the Council for 2015-16
- Contribute towards the Council's values to be open, honest and transparent.

2. Recommendation

2.1. To note the Council's performance in respect of compliments, comments and complaints for 2015-16 and to refer each separate report to the respective Scrutiny Committee.

3. Background

3.1. Legislation requires that statutory processes are in place to deal with complaints relating to children and adults social care, to advertise that process and produce annual reports.

3.2. As the statutory process requires the Children and Adults' Social Care reports to be shared with the Care Quality Commission and the Department of Health this necessitates three separate reports for the Council, including a separate report on the Council's corporate comments, complaints and compliments process.

3.3. Details of performance are contained in the respective reports under

Appendix A – Compliments, Concerns and Complaints – Adult Social Care Services.

Appendix B – Compliments and Complaints – Children’s Social Care Services.

Appendix C - Corporate Comments, Complaints and Compliments.

- 3.4. The table below sets out a comparison of the total number of complaints received for the previous three years by Department. As can be seen, the figures reflect a steady upward trend in the number of complaints being received by the Council (8.5% up on 2014/15).

Department	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/16
Corporate Services	74	44	43	66
Department for People (including statutory)	218	227	246	304
Department for Place	233	375	376	351
Public Health	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	525	646	665	722

This trend reflects the nationwide picture as outlined in the Local Government Ombudsman’s (LGO) ‘Annual Review of Local Government Complaints’ (2015/16) which highlights a 6% rise in complaints and enquiries received by them. Reasons cited for this upward trend include the impact of declining resources on council services and growing willingness of the public to make complaints.

- 3.5. Comments and compliments are also received, with numbers shown below.

Department	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/16
Corporate Services	1653	1694	1326	1673
Department for People (including statutory)	477	521	474	416
Place	219	288	222	337
Grand Total	2349	2503	2022	2426

4. Lessons Learnt and Service Improvements

- 4.1 Whilst responding to feedback in a timely manner it is important for Council services to reflect on lessons learnt and improving outcomes. This is recognised by the Local Government Ombudsman’s principles of good complaints handling of being customer focused, putting things right and seeking continuous improvement.

Examples of service improvements undertaken throughout the year as a result of customer feedback include:

- A revised policy on dealing with abandoned vehicles, to make the process easier for those reporting incidents was agreed;
- Information on the rights of appeal for benefit claimants was revised on standard letters and the website;
- School transport appeals - reasoning is set out more in more detail both in appeal reports and letters to appellants;
- Procedures were improved to ensure that care providers have a clearly defined retention and disposal policy - a copy of which is sent to the contracts team for review;
- The hospital discharge pack provided by the Hospital Social Work Team was improved;
- In response to a complaint about lack of transparency, the South Essex Homes Decant and Management Move Procedure was updated and made a publicly available on the SEH website.

Further examples are contained in App A (Appendix 8), Appendix B (paragraph 12) and Appendix C (para 4.7).

5. Future developments

- 5.1 In May 2015 the government announced its intention to introduce a Public Services Ombudsman Bill to set up a Public Services Ombudsman in England which will absorb the functions of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, the Local Government Ombudsman and potentially the Housing Ombudsman. This is intended to provide better value for money, reflect increasing cross sector working and provide a more joined up service with simpler access for the public.
- 5.2 To date no draft bill has been published, and such a bill was not included in the May 2016 Queens Speech, however, the LGO, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman are now investigating health and social care services cases through a single team based in the LGO's office.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

Customer feedback and complaints management is directly relevant to the Council's corporate priorities to deliver strong, relevant and targeted services that meet the needs of our community. This remains important in the coming years as budget constraints continue to impact on service delivery.

6.2 Financial Implications

The commissioning of independent people to deal with children's stage two statutory complaints incurs additional cost. The decrease in stage 2 complaints this year has reduced the costs of investigations. The use of mediation and

early intervention within all the processes is used in an effort to restrict the number of complaints escalating, limiting the amount of officer time spent on complaints as well as improving the outcome for the complainant.

A limited number of compensation payments to customers to acknowledge the time and trouble that they have expended have been made this year.

6.3 Legal Implications

To ensure compliance with the statutory complaints processes.

6.4 People and Property Implications

People and property implications are considered through the Council's normal business management processes.

6.5 Consultation

The Advocacy Services and Representations Procedure (Children) (Amendment) Regulations 2004 confer a duty on local authorities to provide information about advocacy services and offer help to obtain an advocate to a child or young person wishing to make a complaint. The Authority has a contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service. All children and young people wishing to make a complaint in 2013-14 were offered the services of an advocate.

6.6 Equalities and Diversity Implications

All three processes are receiving feedback from customers from Southend communities including minority groups. Similarly, alternative approaches to facilitate complaint resolution are offered including advocacy and meetings.

Corporate equalities considerations continue to be part of the process.

6.7 Risk Assessment

Processes are reviewed periodically and reduce any risk which could adversely affect the Council's reputation in the community and reduce public trust/satisfaction. Whilst an anticipated increase in complaints did materialise after 2013, notably in respect of services delivered corporately, the number recorded is still significantly less than the 1100 reported for 2009 at the beginning of the revised process.

6.8 Value for Money

Early resolution of complaints, together with learning lessons from the process, contribute to service improvements and getting things right first time.

6.9 Community Safety and Environmental Impact Implications

The process is implemented to ensure both community safety and effects on the environment are fully considered.

7. Background Papers

None

8. Appendices

Appendix A - Compliments Concerns & Complaints received throughout 2015-16 for Adult Social Care Services

Appendix B - Compliments and complaints – Children’s Social Care.

Appendix C - Corporate comments, complaints and compliments – 2015-16.

