

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Corporate Director for Corporate Services

to

**Cabinet**

on

**20 September 2016**

Report prepared by: Tim MacGregor, Team Manager, Policy  
& Information Management

<b>Agenda Item No.</b>
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## **Corporate Comments, Complaints and Compliments - 2015-16**

**Place, People, Policy & Resources; Scrutiny Committee – Executive Councillor:  
Councillor Lamb**

### **A part 1 Public Agenda Item**

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#### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To report on the performance relating to corporate comments, complaints and compliments process and to provide comparisons with previously reported results. Complaints and compliments in respect of adult and children's social care functions are subject to their own statutory processes and are not monitored by the corporate procedure. Their results are reported separately.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 To note the performance of the corporate complaints process between April 2015 and March 2016.**

Refer the report directly to all Scrutiny Committees.

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1. The three stage complaints procedure outlined in **Appendix 1** has been in place since 2009 and is well established throughout the organisation
- 3.2 The Council's corporate comments, complaints and compliments process deals with all general feedback about the Council. As well as the children and adult social care statutory complaints there are certain other functions which are outside of the corporate procedure which have their own processes. Examples include appeals against parking tickets and concerns about schools.
- 3.3 The benefits in operating a feedback process include:
- To learn lessons from the types of feedback made

- To help improve service delivery
- To improve the consistency and timeliness of responses
- To reflect sector wide and Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) best practice.

3.4 This report, therefore, provides an update on how the process is working and an analysis of customer feedback data.

#### 4. PERFORMANCE TO DATE

##### 4.1 Performance

Details of performance data for 2015/16 is set out in [Appendices 2 to 5](#).

402 Stage 1 complaints were received during 2015/16, reflecting a decrease of 5.7% compared to the 425 complaints reported for 2014-2015 and 420 complaints in 2013-14.

The monitoring system that is in place highlights trends and issues that are subject to complaints. Areas that have been of note, at all stages, for 2015/16 include:

- Quality of service – 32%
- Providing a service – 32%
- Staff conduct/employee behaviour – 14%

##### 4.2 Complaints by Directorate with Response Times

Department	Stage 1 & 2 Total Complaints Apr 2013-Mar 2014	Responded to in 10 working days	Stage 1 & 2 Total Complaints Apr 2014-Mar 2015	Responded to in 10 working days	Stage 1 & 2 Total Complaints Apr 2015-Mar 2016	Responded to in 10 working days
Corporate Services	40	80%	38	92%	62	81%
Department for People	48	79%	44	80%	41	68%
Department for Place	372	80%	379	92%	344	83%
Public Health					1	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>80%</b>

The number of stage 3 complaints received was 15, compared to 24 in 2014/15. Response times for Stage 3 complaints continue to be a challenge, taking an average of 44.5 days compared to 57 days in 2014/15. Complaints that escalate to Stage 3 are by their nature more complex and sometimes involve situations where it is not possible for the Council to meet complainants' wishes. However,

the response times are longer than desired and work will continue to reduce response times. It should also be noted that the process of early advice and assistance at Stage 2 by the corporate complaints member of staff resulted in less complaints progressing to the final stage of the process than would otherwise be the case.

### 4.3 Nature of Complaints

**Appendix 2** sets out the nature of all complaints under the following headings:

- Communication
- Decision making
- Discrimination
- Policy or procedure
- Providing a service
- Service not provided by council
- Staff conduct/staff behaviour
- Quality of service

The main areas of concern for 2015-16 were: providing a service (151); quality of service (154) and staff conduct/behaviour (67).

### 4.4 How the Complaints Were Received

The four year trend chart in **Appendix 3** shows that 65% of complainants contacted the Council by e-mail or the website, an increase from 61% for 2014/15 (and 50% in 2012/13) reflecting the work undertaken to encourage customers to use the website as their channel of choice. Complaints submitted by letter, phone and face to face are also on a downward trend.

### 4.5 Progression of complaints and satisfaction

- 89% of stage 1 complainants were satisfied with their response which is in line with 2014/15 reported figure of 90%.
- Of the 45 complaints that were addressed at stage 2 (there were 36 in 2014/15) 23 related to either quality of service or providing a service.
- The use of mediation between stages 2 and 3 will continue to be used, where appropriate, in an effort to further reduce the number of complaints reaching stage 3. Whilst the aim continues to be to resolve complaints at the earliest point it is worth noting that of the 15 stage 3 complaints investigated 2 were upheld.
- 4 complainants that completed the corporate process (in 2015-16) escalated their concerns to the Local Government Ombudsman. Of these 2 were closed after initial enquiries; 1 was not upheld as the claimed injustice was speculative and 1 was determined 'no fault' with the Council's action.

### 4.6 Complaint Resolution

The emphasis on learning from customer feedback continues to inform reviews to provide improved targeted services. This is evidenced by how complaints have been resolved:-

- Specific action has been taken in 44% of cases - by doing something that had not been done, carrying out work or putting something right.
- 30% of customers that complained received an apology when the Council had not got things right and no further action was needed, other than to apologise, or explain why the Council had taken a particular course of action.
- 24% of complaints required no action. This was where our actions were reviewed but deemed to be correct and no apology was required.
- 5 cases required a process review.

The chart in **Appendix 4** reflects the breakdown of complaints by resolution.

### 4.7 Learning Points

The continuous review of customer feedback, and resulting changes to service provision, will continue. A pro-active approach on learning points will also continue so that:-

- Previously identified trends will be monitored to ensure that the resulting service changes are reducing the number of related complaints.
- Continuous review of responses to ensure that identified service improvements that have been promised are implemented.

Examples of service improvements as a result of complaints and 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.
- In response to a complaint about lack of transparency, the South Essex Homes Decant and Management Move Procedure was updated and made a public document.
- School transport appeals - reasoning is set out more in more detail both in appeal reports and letters to appellants;
- Reminders were issued to staff to replace food caddies appropriately, helped by a new category created on the Lagan customer service system to record where food cadies have not been replaced properly;
- Refuse vehicles are being fitted with 'on-board' systems to enable the direct reporting of service failures/requests, to refuse vehicles, enabling a swifter response.

### 4.8 Comments and Compliments

Govmetric, the customer satisfaction measurement tool used by the Council, specifically captures the provision of service by the Customer Service Centre and Council website and these figures are reflected in the Corporate Services analysis. It is anticipated that as the drive towards encouraging customer use of web based channels continues and results in less personal interaction between the Council and residents, so will the opportunities to receive compliments.

## Appendix C

Of the 1,673 comments and compliments recorded for Corporate Services in 814 were compliments, which compares to 505 recorded last year.

Comments received are responded to by the service and those making comments advised if their suggestion is to be taken up or not. Compliments are acknowledged and shared with the appropriate Head of Service to inform the service or member of staff. This may then inform the staff's performance review discussion.

The table below shows the 3 year comparison on total number of comments and compliments received by each Directorate.

Department	Total 2013/14	Total 2014/15	Total 2015/16
Corporate Services	1694	1326	1673
Department for People (excluding statutory complaints)	7	7	2
Department for Place	288	222	337
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1555</b>	<b>2012</b>

### 5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)

56 complaints and enquiries about the Council were made to, and decided upon by the Ombudsman. This compared to 53 for 2014/15. Of the 56 complaints, 25 were categorised as 'referred back to the Council for local resolution'\*, 12 were closed after initial enquiries, four were not referred on to the Council, and for one, advice was provided by the LGO to the complainant.

Of the remaining 14, seven were not upheld and seven were upheld. Of the 7 upheld, three were in adult services, one was in Benefits & Tax, one was in 'Corporate & other services' one in 'environmental services & public protection & regulation' and one was in planning.

[\*Prior to 2013/14 this category was known as 'premature complaints' and did not form part of the Ombudsman's statistics].

The LGO's annual review letter, including the breakdown of the results is attached at **Appendix 5**.

Alongside the statistical information the Ombudsman also publishes a yearly report on local government complaint handling. The report includes a summary of complaint statistics for every local authority in England which provides an opportunity for the Council to compare its performance against other Council's.

## Appendix C

The table below shows comparisons with a small number of other similar authorities.

Local authority	Complaints/ enquiries made 14/15	Complaints upheld 14/15	Complaints/ enquiries made 15/16	Complaints upheld 15/16
Southend on Sea	58	5	54	7
Blackpool	50	9	47	7
Medway	137	19	97	19
Plymouth	90	10	102	19
Thurrock	82	5	82	9
Isle of Wight	70	6	60	14
Central Bedfordshire	58	6	65	10

## 6 MONITORING AND REPORTING

Regular reporting continues to inform Departmental Management Teams to coincide with their monthly report on performance.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The process continues to deliver improved performance and a more robust system of monitoring and real service improvements.

## 8 Corporate Implications

### 8.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

Customer feedback and complaints management is directly relevant to the Council's corporate priorities.

### 9 Financial Implications

Service improvements and mediation continue to result in meaningful outcomes for customers and so ensure getting things right first time.

### 10 Legal Implications

This process is overseen by the Local Government Ombudsman

### 11 People Implications - See 14

12 Property Implications - None

13 Consultation - None

14 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The complaints process is open to all and has multiple methods of access for customers. Equality and diversity implications are a routine part of the process in recording customers details and are considered as part of any response. Mediation ensures people that may be vulnerable are able to access this service and receive the appropriate support.

15 Risk Assessment

16 Value for Money

The continued drive to resolving complaints as early as possible in the process reduce officer time spent dealing with concerns as well as providing the opportunity to improve service delivery.

17 Community Safety Implications - None

18 Environmental Impact - None

19 Background Papers – None

20 **Appendices**

Appendix 1 The Council's Comments, Complaints & Compliments Procedure

Appendix 2 Nature of Complaints

Appendix 3 How Stage 1 Complaints Were Received

Appendix 4 Complaint Resolution

Appendix 5 Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2016

## **Appendix 1 – Southend-on-Sea Borough Council 3 Stage Process**

### **Complaints**

#### **Stage 1**

An initial complaint responded to by the respective service Group Manager.

#### **Stage 2**

A complaint that has been responded to but where the complainant is still unhappy and a response is required from the appropriate Director or Head of Service.

#### **Stage 3**

If the complainant is still unhappy after the Stage 2 process, they have a right of appeal to the Council's Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. In the first instance mediation is offered, if unsuccessful an investigation is undertaken and a report presented to the Chief Executive for consideration.

### **Comments and Compliments**

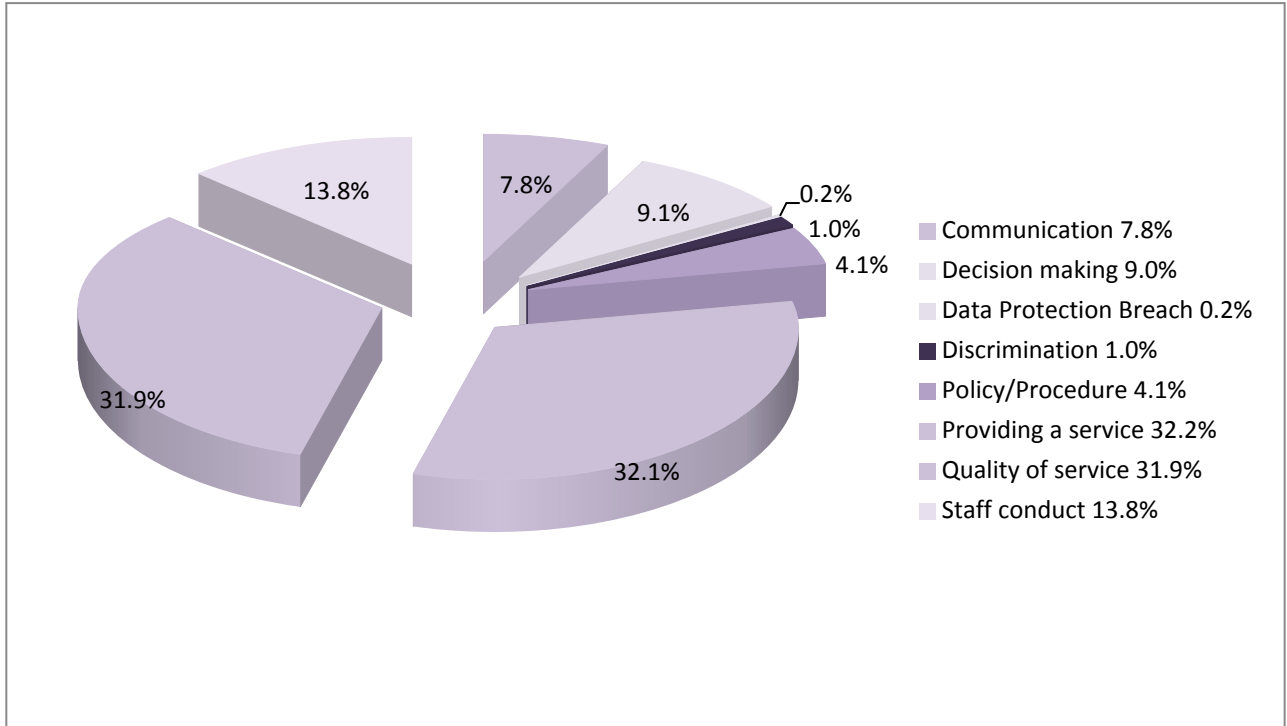
Any comment or compliment should be responded to within 10 working days. If a suggestion is not to be progressed then an explanation should be provided. Compliments must be gratefully acknowledged. Comments & Compliments should be logged into Covalent, the Council's system for recording feedback, by the Departmental Complaints Officer and reported as part of routine reporting to DMT.

Any compliments relating to staff should be shared with the appropriate Head of Service to share with his or her team member



**Appendix 2 – Nature of Complaints – April 2015 to 2016**

**Total: 486**



**Appendix 3 – 3 year Comparison of How Stage 1 complaints were received**

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Email	33%	29%	23%	34%
Internet	17%	18%	39%	31%
Telephone	26%	37%	30.5%	25%
Other	0%	1%	0.5%	0.5%
Letter / post	18%	10%	6%	9%
In person	6%	5%	1%	0.5%

**Appendix 4 Complaint Resolution April 2015 to 2016**

**Total 489**

