



Committee report

COMMITTEE	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	10 NOVEMBER 2020
TITLE	CORPORATE COMPLAINTS REVIEW REPORT
REPORT OF	DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

BACKGROUND

1. We receive complaints for a variety of reasons, and it is evident that escalation is often a result of poor responses or handling of the complaint at an early stage. It has been found to be beneficial for nominated complaints officers to speak with potential complainants at the first point of contact, often negating progress to formal complaint stage or facilitating conversion to general enquiry. This approach is adopted by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman there is an expectation that local authorities will do the same to ensure that a complaint is fully understood before attempting to resolve or investigate.
2. It remains important our complaints process seeks to learn lessons from the complaints we receive with a view to improving outcomes for future complainants and other stakeholders. Key to establishing quality learning outcomes is understanding what has led to the complaint and why we have been unable to settle this at an informal stage. Similarly, we must promote an enabling role in the settlement of complaints.
3. Learning from complaints is recognised as good practice and the LGSCO are still keen for local authorities to demonstrate they are actively using complaints to learn more about performance, perceptions and that learning, and outcomes are disseminated to make positive changes to working practices.
4. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Council's complaints process in early 2020 to enable data to be available from the first six months of a new customer relationship management system (CRM). At that time the Committee were keen to see the council was learning from the complaints process and using this to make improvements in service delivery.

DATA AND REPORTING

5. The Corporate Plan includes a performance indicator of a rolling twelve-month average number of stage 1 complaints made about council services per month. The baseline figure for 2017 is 57; the 2022 target is 50. This measure is reported through the quarterly performance reports to Cabinet. The figure for September 2020 was 51. Figures on the number of Stage 1 complaints received by the council are reported to Cabinet as part of its quarterly performance reports.
6. The Adult Social Care Complaints and Investigation Officer already comprehensively reports on a quarterly basis to the ASC leadership group and provides service specific complaint themes and action taken. Complaints logging and processing for Children's Services is

slightly different in that under our strategic partnership, the statutory complaints process is operated by Hampshire County Council. We therefore only have access to data that relates to Education or corporate complaints that have been received for Childrens Social Care. The Director of Childrens Services however does have rigorous processes in place to manage and review learning from complaints within the directorate.

7. An annual letter is issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGCSO) relating to complaints that have been taken up with them. The most recent letter reports on the period ending 31 March 2020. The LGCSO undertook detailed investigations of 15 cases, of which 5 were upheld and confirmed. A web based interactive map of council performance for all councils in England can be found at:

<https://lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/isle-of-wight-council/statistics>

PERFORMANCE STATISTICS

8. Data relating to the statutory process for children’s services, and on complaints relating to the delivery of the Highways PFI contract by Island Roads is not included in this table. The customer support team who administer the corporate complaints system are liaising with these areas to align reporting.

9. **Complaints Data: for the period 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020**

Date	Complaints logged	Learning outcomes recorded
October 2019 to September 2020	472	145

10. 472 new complaints were logged during this period. Of these 145 complaints have learning outcomes allocated to them. This represents a similar percentage of complaints with learning outcomes in Q3 19/20.

Directorate	Service Area*	Complaints with LO’s	Total
ASC & Community Well-being	Adult Services	43	50
	Homelessness	4	
	Island Homefinder	3	
Corporate Services	Call Centre	1	29
	Council Tax	21	
	Enforcement Service	3	
	Housing Benefit	3	
	Local Council Tax Support Scheme	1	
Neighbourhoods	Parking Operations	2	11
	Leisure Services	2	
	Cowes Floating Bridge	2	
	Highways PFI	1	

	Island Roads	2	
	Environmental Health	1	
	Household Waste & Recycling	1	
Regeneration	Commercial Land & Property	1	6
	Planning Development	1	
	Planning Enforcement	3	
	Trees, Woodlands and Hedges	1	

*CRM service logged against

11. Learning Outcomes

12. It is helpful to categorise each complaint to identify patterns and wider causes of specific issues rather than the immediate cause of a complaint. There were 96 complaints during the period that had an identifiable theme and where changes/improvements were made:

- **Wording of letter (3)** Action taken to improve the wording of letters and terms and conditions and ensuring that clear and accurate conversations are had
- **Staff training (46)** Action taken to deliver targeted training to address areas leading to complaint
- **Process improvement (44)** Action taken to improve response times, no longer issuing unnecessary forms when not required, additional checks for accuracy
- **Workload management (4)** Action taken against the learning outcomes include automating processes and cross skilling of additional staff to assist during peak periods

13. The remainder have entered the words “complaint not upheld therefore no learning outcome”, “customer doesn’t understand the process” or “the individual did not agree with our decision” or equivalent however we would encourage those reviewing complaints to ask additional questions and consider the reason why the individual felt the need to complain before classifying as “no learning outcome”.

14. It is important to highlight good practice and where learning outcomes have led to improvements in service delivery below is an example:

- **Complaint** “no payments had been received and therefore the case had progressed through recovery stages incurring costs” initial documentation issued by enforcement agents was not in large print steps are now being taken to ensure this occurs in the future”
- **Learning** “council tax team must ensure that the Enforcement Agents (EA’s) team are notified of council taxpayers requiring large print documentation in future when cases are passed to them”
- **Action** “a process is being established to notify EA’s of any cases passed to them requiring large print documentation. Recovery extracts must be produced separately for Large Print reminders and summons etc”

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY

15. Improving the Corporate Complaint Process

16. The Corporate Complaints Policy has been revised providing guidelines for staff and outlining the responsibilities of nominated complaint officers, their deputies and those responsible for responding to complaints and identifying learning outcomes. The CRM reporting system now includes a learning outcome field with a minimum number of characters to encourage the entry of greater detail and work is continuing to establish a reporting dashboard for Nominated Complaints Officers (NCO) to provide on a monthly basis to service managers. In the interim complaint data can be requested from the customer support team customer.support@iow.gov.uk.
17. There is still progress to be made in the recording of learning outcomes from complaints which means we cannot be confident that we are consistently making service improvements as a result of complaints. The corporate complaints team continue to encourage all NCO's to remind service managers on a monthly basis where learning outcomes are required to be recorded, noting what could have been done better, whether there is a need to change policies or procedures and when this will happen. It is considered that all complaints will have a learning outcome of some kind, even when the complaint is not upheld. In these situations, it important for managers to be reflective of the situation and consider how we could have done things differently to avoid the complaint being raised at all. In light of the need for further improvements, this has recently been escalated to the corporate management team for consideration by way of a recent report.
18. To make our complaint process effective we will need to proactively review complaints and the root cause of issues and identify learning outcomes that can inform future processes and planning. Reviews should occur regularly to improve internal processes and prevent similar issues occurring in future.
19. Complaint handling training that had been organised and due to be delivered by the LGSCO was paused due to covid-19 restrictions. The LGSCO are now making the training available online, and we will seek to make this available to NCO's, Service Managers and others who deal with complaints at various stages of the process.
20. The LGSCO on October 8th released updated complaints guidance which includes advice on how to draw out the learning from the issues raised, and this will be shared with all complaint handlers.
21. Where substantive learning outcomes from a complaint were not recorded, it should be noted that this does not necessarily mean learning did not arise. It could be that these were not recognised as needing formal capture. Directors have confirmed that staff are encouraged to identify learning outcomes, and training is being provided to support this.

SUMMARY

22. The Council regularly reviews its complaints policy and has clear objectives relating to improving service delivery by identifying learning outcomes. The Corporate Management Team acknowledge that learning outcomes from our customers should be at the heart of service delivery, their views and comments are important to us and are therefore actively making improvements that will allow us to improve and develop our services to better serve our residents.