

REPORT TITLE: COMPLAINTS AND THEIR RESOLUTION

5 MARCH 2020

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: CLLR TOD – CABINET MEMBER FOR SERVICE QUALITY AND TRANSFORMATION

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

Members of this Committee requested that an item covering the council's complaints and their resolution be included on the 2019/20 Work Programme and a report brought back to a future meeting.

This report provides details of the current arrangements at the Council for managing and responding to complaints and the work being undertaken to improve the service that is provided to our residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Audit and Governance Committee notes the findings within the report and the steps that are being undertaken to improve the councils management and response to complaints.

## IMPLICATIONS:

### 1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

- 1.1 Improving the processes for managing and responding to complaints contributes to the Council Plan priority to improve satisfaction for our services by effectively responding to and using complaints and feedback to drive service improvement.

### 2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the content of this report, however the Council recognises that there is a cost in officer time in investigating and following up complaints,

### 3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None

### 4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct workforce implications arising from the content of this report; however officers are required to take the time to follow up and respond to complaints. Improving the efficiency of the management of complaints will reduce the amount of time that officers are currently spending on following up on complaints.

### 5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None

### 6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 The Cabinet Member for Service Quality and Transformation, Executive Leadership Board (ELB) and the chairman of Audit and Governance Committee have been consulted on the contents of this report.

### 7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 None

### 8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

- 8.1 None required arising from the content of the report, although officers will have regard to the considerations as set out in the Equalities Act 2010 and whether an Equality Impact Assessment will be required to be undertaken as required on any specific recommendations or decisions made.

### 9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 None required

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<i>Property - none</i>		
<i>Community Support – significant numbers of complaints can indicate concerns from the community and a lack of community support for the Council.</i>	Regular monitoring and reporting of the types and numbers of complaints the Council receives	Low levels of complaints indicate high levels of community support.
<i>Timescales – delays in responding to complaints can lead to adverse publicity and reputational damage</i>	Regular monitoring of complaints and the time taken to respond ensures that the Council is responsive to the complaints that it receives	Learning from complaints can enable the Council to develop services ensuring that it remains customer focussed.
<i>Project capacity - none</i>		
<i>Financial / VfM cost of investigating and responding to complaints</i>	Proper recording and monitoring of complaints ensures the Council is alerted to trends before they escalate	Complaints provide the opportunity to develop or enhance services where appropriate
<i>Legal - none</i>		
<i>Innovation - none</i>		
<i>Reputation – significant numbers of complaints can lead to reputational damage and adverse publicity</i>	Regular monitoring and reporting of the types of complaints the Council receives.	Decrease in volume of complaints received and would provide a much better reputation for the council as would responding to and dealing with them more effectively.
<i>Other - none</i>		

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:**Background**

- 11.1 Audit and Governance Committee members requested a report that includes an analysis of the council's complaints and their resolution be included in the 2019/20 Committee Work Programme and brought to this Committee in March 2020.
- 11.2 An annual review of complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was last reported to Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2019 and covered the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 (Report SC010 refers).

- 11.3 Complaints are recognised as a valuable tool in helping officers to understand the concerns of residents in the delivery of services and have an important role in both supporting the improvement of those services and holding managers to account.
- 11.4 The numbers of complaints that the Council receives is included as one of the key performance indicators in the quarterly Finance and Performance report that is presented to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
- 11.5 This report provides members with an update on the work being undertaken to review the council's procedure for managing and responding to complaints and is scheduled to be in operation from 1 April 2020.
- 11.6 Following the introduction of the new complaints management system, it is proposed to bring back a report to this committee in the autumn with an update on the implementation of the new processes.

### **Current process**

- 11.7 Complaints made to Winchester City Council can often be resolved informally by the person that has been dealing with the customer or their line manager. This is referred to as a local resolution and not recorded on the complaints system.
- 11.8 If this informal stage does not offer the customer satisfaction they can then raise their complaint through the formal process by either completing the online complaints form, by telephone or emailing the dedicated complaints email address. Our standards state that the complaint will be acknowledged within five working days, investigated and responded to within ten working days. This is referred to as stage one. All complaints are logged on the council's Pentana system and assigned to an officer in the relevant service area for their investigation and resolution. Pentana generates automated emails to officers assigned to each case to remind them when a complaint is approaching the ten working day period prompting them to complete an investigation and close a complaint as appropriate.
- 11.9 If a customer considers that their complaint has not been resolved at stage one, they can contact the Chief Executive's office setting out the reasons as to why they are not satisfied and what they expect from a further review. Our standards state that they will receive a response within ten working days. This is known as stage two. If a customer has been through all stages of our complaints procedure and feel that their complaint has still not been resolved to their satisfaction, they can ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman to review the complaint.

### **Summary of complaints received**

- 11.10 During the calendar year 2019, Winchester City Council recorded a total of 674 complaints compared to 557 in the calendar year 2018.

11.11 The five teams that received that received the highest volume of complaints and their percentage weighting in the total overall are as follows:

- Environmental Services 323 complaints (47%)
- Housing 181 complaints (27%)
- Parking Services and CCTV 27 complaints (4%)
- Engineering and transport 18 complaints (3%)
- Development Management 23 complaints (3%)

### **Proposed improvements for the management of complaints**

- 11.12 When asked as part of the recent Resident's Survey, 80% of respondents agreed that the council responds to complaints promptly which shows that the process for managing and responding to complaints is working
- 11.13 However, an analysis of the complaints received during 2019 showed that 79% were responded to within 20 working days, but only 59% were responded to within 10 working days.
- 11.14 To improve the number of complaints responded to within 10 working days it is proposed to implement a more robust monitoring of complaints with regular reporting of the performance of responding to complaints within 10 working days.
- 11.15 The organisational culture at the Council is not always one of learning from complaints and making service improvements to stop further complaints being received. Each complaint is often managed as a one-off and trends not always identified where there have been a number of complaints relating to a similar subject matter. Furthermore the Council should be able to understand what has gone wrong for customers and use the information to redesign processes to reduce avoidable demand.
- 11.16 Currently the council is unable to report on the percentage of complaints that have been upheld due to this information not being captured onto the complaints system. However this is being retrospectively updated and the numbers of upheld or not upheld complaints now being recorded. Knowing the percentage or number of complaints that have been upheld is a useful indicator of where service improvements should be considered and implemented.
- 11.17 On the occasion when complaints are raised with Winchester City Council, our residents should have confidence in the professional approach to their concerns. Demonstration of a more robust complaints handling procedure will help the council to improve service standards, develop deeper customer relationships and enhance the public perception of the Council's service values.

11.18 The Council's Policy and Performance team have completed a review of the current complaints procedure and have identified areas where there are opportunities to improve the process to ensure efficiencies and effective customer care as well as enhancing transparency, accuracy and consistency across complaint handling. These improvements include:

- Accurately recording actual complaints and not requests for service. Following investigation, the team has identified that a number of complaints recorded were actually requests for service and should not have followed the formal complaints procedure. To reduce the likelihood of this happening in the future it is proposed to introduce a clear definition of a complaint for all staff to follow. This will be rolled out across the organisation as part of an online complaints training programme for all staff. For reference, an example of this could read: **'A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction whether that is verbal or written where the individual alleges that there has been distress or inconvenience or caused by one of the councils services'**.
- A Customer Charter to be adopted and introduced across the council that sets out the principles and behaviours that our customers can expect to uphold during each interaction with Winchester City Council.
- Updating of the complaints section of the Council website with clear guidance for customers on how to make a complaint and the process with direct links to the newly developed Customer Charter, online complaints form and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman website.
- Complaints Policy to be devised outlining Council's process and procedures for managing and responding to complaints for customers and staff.
- Staff training programme to be developed using Aspire training portal that reviews all aspects of complaints and the Council's process. This in turn will look to empower officers to make the right decision between service requests/formal complaints and improve knowledge on the Pentana system and the administration element of complaint logging. All officers to undertake this training.
- From the review of the existing process it is acknowledged that a high proportion of complaints received are about missed waste collections, non attendance of contractors for property repairs and could be classed as a request for service as above but still logged and monitored to drive service improvement.
- To understand the detail of complaints and use them as an opportunity to improve, an introduction of 'You Said, We Did' approach and published on the website could help customers see the impact of their opinions and feel that they are listened to

11.19 Progress is already underway to begin implementation of the proposed improvements by 1 April 2020.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

None

Other Background Documents:-

SC010 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual report 2018-19.

APPENDICES:

None