

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

07 June 2016

Subject: Complaints

Cabinet member: Councillor Stuart Wheeler – Cabinet Member for Hubs, Heritage and Arts, Governance and Support Services.

Key Decision: No

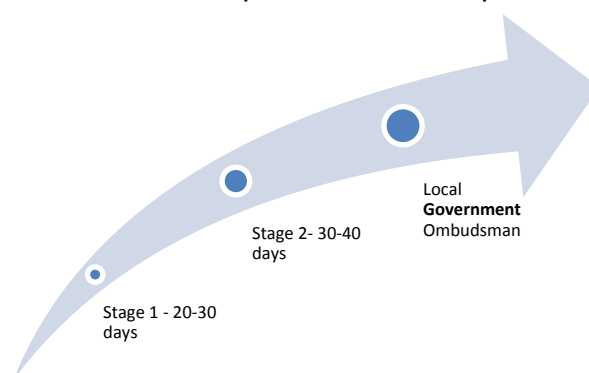
Purpose of the Report

1. The Committee has requested an overview of complaints within its remit, received by Wiltshire Council over the last reporting period between 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.

Background

Corporate Complaint Procedure

2. The corporate complaint procedure is a 2 stage procedure. Stage 1 will be dealt with by the service team involved with the complaint. This gives staff the opportunity to respond to and address any misunderstandings or breakdown in communications that may have occurred. It is encouraged wherever possible that teams spend time on their response as it can bring an end to a complaint which saves time and resource on both sides.
3. Should the complainant wish to pursue this, then the stage 2 request for investigation comes to the central complaints team for investigation. The Local Government Ombudsman remains the final course of redress if the complainant wishes to pursue their complaint.



Process for Corporate Procedure

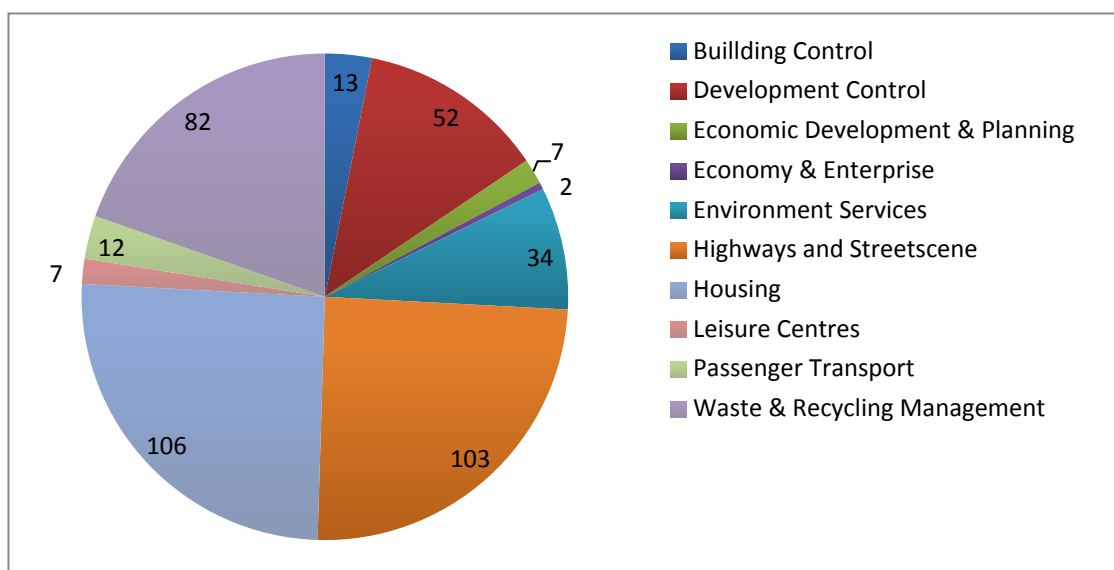
4. The purpose of the complaints procedure is to ensure that:

- The views and experiences of people who use services are heard to ensure the organisation remains focused on the customer.
- It is a simple and effective way of raising a complaint.
- The complaint is dealt with fairly and consistently.
- It encourages an open and transparent environment that people trust and engage with.
- The complainant receives a comprehensive response within the timescales stated.
- That services review and reflect on the complaints they receive and, where appropriate avoid a repeat of the issue.

Numbers of Complaints

5 This chart below highlights complaint numbers. This is a summary of the total number of complaints received by each service for the period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. The peaks in numbers around Highways, Housing and Waste are not an unusual occurrence and reflect either the challenging nature of the service being delivered where complaints are to be expected because of the decisions being taken. It should also be that that a reduction in budgets or a loss of staff resource does not lower the customer's expectations of having a service that delivers the same as before and complaints have therefore remained consistent.

Total number of Complaints by Service – 1st April 2015-31st March 2016



Data Spreadsheet

6. The attached spreadsheet shows the complaint numbers broken down by individual service team and by month. It further shows at what stage a complaint was dealt with. Please note that one person may go through several stages of the complaints procedure as they have a right to do. So numbers in each team may reflect the fact that a complaint was made at Stage 1, it progressed to Stage 2 and then it was received as an Ombudsman investigation, rather than it being a individual person for each number.
7. There is no one team that stands out in terms of having a high number of complaints. The team that dealt with the most were Housing repairs but 44 over the period of a year is not a high amount and of those only 2 were referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.
8. The next set of numbers which are very similar are between 22 and 27 complaints. Again whilst these teams peak with regard to complaints received, there is no particularly unusual reasoning for why they should be slightly higher other than the nature of the service along with the Housing repairs teams are historically subject to higher numbers of issues arising that may cause a formal complaint to be made.

Nature of complaints

9. The way complaints are recorded in terms of what they are about can fall under a number of different headings. These headings whilst giving some understanding of what the complaint might be concerning, do not, for the purposes of this report provide any further detail but do provide an overview.

Those headings are:

Decision making process to deliver service
Inappropriate action
Delay in service provision
Decision making process to deliver service
Failure to provide service
Discriminatory behaviour
Breach of confidentiality
Lack of communication
Poor communication
Incorrect advice/information given
Refusal to deliver/or pay for a service

10. With 429 complaints recorded, it is impossible to provide specific details and each complaint will differ from another under the same heading. That said, the report author has endeavoured to provide in the following table an example of complaints received under each of the headings above to give the committee the type of issues raised.

Reason for Complaint	Details	Outcome
Decision making process to deliver service	Unhappy with decision to grant planning permission for neighbour's porch	That the decision to grant planning permission was made in a reasonable manner, having properly given consideration to the potential impact upon the amenity.
Inappropriate action	Notice issued about misbehaviour on a school bus	That the letter was issued in accordance with the council's policy and with the rules that both parents and children are made aware of and sign up to when they apply for home-school transport.
Delay in service provision	Made a report of fly tipping but had not been removed	Service team advised and items were removed.
Decision making process to deliver service	How Homes4Wiltshire decided on her banding	The decisions made about the eligibility to join the scheme was taken in conjunction with the requirements of the Homes4Wiltshire Allocations Policy.
Failure to provide service	That Highways failed to complete resurfacing on the A3094	There was a breakdown in communication which the Council apologised for and the road was scheduled at a later date for resurfacing
Discriminatory behaviour	The actions of a parking officer and potential harassment	It was found that all 3 of the PCN notices issued to the individual were done so correctly and there was no evidence of harassment from the Parking Enforcement Officer
Breach of confidentiality	That the Housing team passed on his new address to the police without his permission.	Further investigation established this had not been the case. This was a matter dealt with through ASBRAC

Lack of communication	That there is a lack of response from the Council concerning the damage a refuse lorry did to the customers property	The matter had been raised with the contractor initially but there had been a delay. The Waste team became involved and arrangements were made to talk to the individual and resolve the issue.
Poor communication	Poor communication during repairs done to his house and poor attitude of staff member.	As discussions took place between the tenant and the officers, it was difficult to provide a decision. There was evidence to suggest that the customer had been left misunderstanding the situation and this was reflected and apologised for in the Council's response. The works were undertaken and completed.
Incorrect advice/information given	That although the advertised timetable stated free swimming being available on 2 January, the customer on attending the leisure centre was told this was not the case and had to pay.	The dates were found to be correct as advertised on both the Council's website and the leisure centre. However the Council apologised for any confusion and offered a free swim on the next visit.
Refusal to deliver/or pay for a service	Issues concerning a Disabilities Facilities Grant regarding the individual's husband.	There were some difficulties with communications and some errors in calculations which were been addressed and reimbursed where appropriate.

Report Summary

11. The Complaints Team has not found particular peaks or trends in the areas that the Committee considers. A large proportion of issues and concerns being raised never find their way to the formal complaints process because customers would rather go direct to the service teams and seek a direct and often quicker answer.

12. Complaints continue to be the reality of working in the public sector. At a time when public funding is reduced, difficult decisions have to be taken which continue to be unpopular with the public.
13. Customer expectations have not and will not reduce and rightly so. The Council therefore has to manage those expectations and work within the resources available.
14. How we deal with providing those answers is the difference between a professional, transparent and realistic approach and one where all those concerned become embroiled in a timely, costly and negative process.
15. Wiltshire Council recognises the importance of having an effective and accessible complaints management system, to ensure that complaints and concerns are dealt with as quickly as possible. It is vital that all levels of the council from staff to councillors and Corporate Directors engage with and adopt a consistent approach to handling and resolving complaints.
16. The aim of the central complaints team is to make the process of raising a complaint and the action of investigating it, a positive one. That means that officers within the team need to engage with both the customer making the complaint and the service teams responsible for delivering that service. The key to successful complaints management is having an honest and open conversation with those concerned.
17. Having a transparent and robust approach to dealing with complaints can only contribute to the Council's focus on delivering more for less and keeping the individual at the centre of its priorities.

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