

TITLE OF REPORT: Annual Report - Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure 2018/19

REPORT OF: Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

Summary

The report provides an analysis of complaints and compliments recorded by the Council and the Gateshead Housing Company in the year ended 31 March 2019.

Background

1. The Cabinet has referred the report to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the performance management process, in order to ensure that the process is operating satisfactorily.
2. The Council sees comments, complaints and compliments as an important part of performance management. To make it easier for people to express their views we have a corporate complaints and compliments procedure and it is publicised in the Council News, leaflets in council facilities and on both the internet and intranet. The Gateshead Housing Company has its own complaints and compliments procedure.

Procedure

3. The procedure has three steps, the first of which 'problem solving', relies on the quick resolution of complaints by employees and their managers and does not require the complaint to be recorded. At the second step the complaint is recorded, there is a formal investigation into the complaint and a written response is sent to the complainant usually within twenty working days. The final step enables those complainants who remain dissatisfied to request the Chief Executive (or Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company) to carry out an independent review of the matter.
4. The report focuses upon recorded complaints and compliments with information about the distribution of complaints and compliments across the Council and the categories of complaints.

5. This does not include complaints about statutory Social Services and Children's Services matters which are investigated under their own separate legal requirements.

Complaints Received

6. Over the year 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019:
 - 191 complaints were recorded
 - 593 compliments were recorded
 - 31 complaints were the subject of an independent review by the Chief Executive of the Council and the Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company undertook 17 reviews.

Issues Arising

7. A number of points can be noted arising from the statistics for 2018/19:
 - 191 complaints were recorded in 2018/19 compared with 258 in 2017/18 a decrease of 67.
 - 593 compliments were recorded for the year 2018/19 compared to 466 in 2017/18 – an increase of 127.
 - The number of complainants requesting a review of their complaint by the Chief Executive increased by 4 to 31 in 2018/19. The Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company carried out 17 reviews in 2018/19 compared to 14 in 2017/18.
 - There were 129 complaints regarding quality of service. This is the largest of the six categories although a complaint can fall into more than one category.
 - The proportion of complaints found to be fully justified decreased from 36.6% in 2017/18 to 24.2% in 2018/19.
 - In addition, the proportion of complaints found to be partially justified decreased from 24.7% in 2017/18 to 17.6% in 2018/19.
 - Most importantly, the Council's managers used the information gained through the monitoring of complaints to improve the provision of services.
 - The computerised recording system made it easier to track and respond to complaints. However, this system now requires an upgrade that reflects the new structure of the Council and provides improved statistical interrogation and analysis. A new corporate complaints system is currently being developed using the case management features of the Council's Digital Platform to handle corporate complaints.
 - There has been a decrease in the number of complaints recorded by the Council during 2018/19. Additionally, there has been a decrease in performance of the percentage of complaints resolved within target timescales for the both the Council and the Gateshead Housing Company from 75.2% in 2017/18 to 64.9% in 2018/19.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

8. During the course of 2018/19, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigated 28 complaints. Of these 16 were closed after initial

enquiries, 6 were not upheld and 6 were upheld partially or fully. Councillors will note that a summary of those cases upheld has been presented to the Cabinet. Each case has provided learning opportunities in terms of reviewing policy, maintenance of records, the operation of systems and the provision of guidance and training to staff. The Council maintains a good working relationship with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and all cases have now been settled to their satisfaction and the complainants.

Supporting Local Scrutiny

9. Councillors may be aware that throughout the year the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has produced a number of focus reports. These highlight particular subjects or systemic issues coming from casework. They draw on lessons learned from complaints and have included recommendations on good practice. These reports may be used to inform reviews and case studies undertaken by the Council's overview and scrutiny committees. The Ombudsman also has an Advisory Forum comprising members of the public who have used their service, representatives from Local Authorities and those who act as advocates for the public. The Ombudsman has also, in consultation with the Local Government Association (LGA), produced a workbook for Councillors that can be accessed via the LGA's website.

The Housing Ombudsman

10. From 1 April 2013 the Localism Act 2011 extended the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman to cover all social landlords, including Councils. The Housing Ombudsman is able to consider complaints in so far as they relate to the provision or management of housing. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman continues to investigate complaints about allocations and the lettings policy.

During 2018/19, the Council has been contacted by the Housing Ombudsman in respect of 7 cases as presented to the Cabinet.

Recommendation

11. The Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to endorse the information in the Annual Report and satisfy themselves that the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure is operating satisfactorily.