

TITLE OF REPORT: Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure - Annual Report 2019/20

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

Purpose of the Report

1. The report asks the Cabinet to consider and endorse an analysis of the complaints and compliments recorded by the Council during the year 2019/20.

Background

2. This report focuses on complaints and compliments that the Council deals with under its Corporate Complaints and Compliments procedure. It provides a statistical analysis of the complaints and compliments received for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.
3. Appendix 2 to this report details:
 - The number of complaints recorded in the year 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020
 - The categories of complaints (note: a complaint may fall into more than one category).
4. Appendix 3 to this report details:
 - The number of complaints resolved in the year 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020
 - The number of complaints resolved within the target time of twenty working days
 - The number of complaints closed (ie dealt with as issues other than complaints)
 - The number of complaints open (ie unresolved at 31 March 2020)
 - The number of resolved complaints that were found to be justified or part justified.
5. Appendix 4 provides an analysis of the compliments received and complaints recorded and resolved across all Council services and the Gateshead Housing Company.
6. Appendix 5 provides information about the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman.

Proposal

7. It is proposed that the analysis provided for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 be agreed.

Recommendations

8. It is recommended that the Cabinet
 - (i) Agrees the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure Annual Report for 2019/20 as detailed.
 - (ii) Notes the report will be considered by the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

For the following reason:

To have an effective and timely complaints procedure.

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APPENDIX 1

Policy Context

1. The corporate complaints and compliments procedure supports Vision 2030 and the Council Plan in that it helps the Council to assess its service provision and improve where necessary.

Background

2. The Council aims to respond positively to complaints. The corporate complaints and compliments procedure is publicised across the Borough through a complaints and compliments form which is available at Council facilities and on its website. The Gateshead Housing Company operates its own procedure as the body responsible for the day to day management and maintenance of council housing in Gateshead.
3. The Council operates the corporate complaints and compliments procedure to make it easier for members of the public to submit compliments and raise issues of concern, ensure that complaints are responded to quickly and in a consistent manner and to enable the Council to learn from the issues raised and amend procedures and practices as necessary.
4. The report focuses on complaints that the Council deals with under its corporate complaints procedure. Excluded from the procedure are:
 - most Social Services and Children's Services matters - for which there are separate statutory procedures
 - matters for which there is a statutory system of appeal/redress eg planning
 - most complaints about schools
5. The current procedure enables people to express their views and register their complaint or compliment in person at a Council office, by telephone, letter, e-mail, complaints and compliments form or online. It can also be done through a Councillor, someone acting on their behalf, with the assistance of other organisations or via social media.
6. The procedure has the following three steps: -

Step 1 - problem solving – by Services trying to sort it out quickly and informally by providing information or taking appropriate action

Step 2 - investigation – the complaint is recorded and investigated by a Senior Manager within Services who will aim to respond within twenty working days

Step 3 - review – the Chief Executive (or Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company) to look again at a complaint and aim to respond within twenty working days.
7. The computerised recording of Step 2 complaints is designed to ensure a consistent method of response to complaints across the Council. A designated officer oversees and monitors the operation of the corporate complaints procedure and system on behalf of the Chief Executive who has ultimate responsibility. This

includes the collation and analysis of the statistics for the Council and the conduct of the Step 3 reviews. The officer is also the Council's link officer with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman.

8. A new corporate complaints system, utilising the case management features of the Digital Platform, was introduced on 10 March 2020. The Digital Platform hosts and delivers the Council's website, intranet, Go Gateshead and other websites plus key online services such as the report fly tipping facility.
9. Residents are encouraged to submit complaints via a form on the Council's website, while still retaining the ability to submit complaints in the other ways outlined for those that do not have internet access. One of the benefits of using the online form is to ensure the Council has all the information needed to proceed without having to request further information from the complainant.
10. The website has been updated to direct people to service requests wherever appropriate eg. to report fly tipping or a missed bin collection so that only genuine complaints are submitted to the designated officer through the corporate complaints system. The complainants after registering on the new system can view the progress of their complaint, submit further information and they will receive e mail notifications on information and updates and the Council's formal response to their complaint. All contact with the complainant will be recorded within the new system making it easier for staff managing the corporate complaints process to track and monitor the complaints process, manage all the system users and provide performance data and statistics on complaints received in the Service areas.
11. The system also records the number of compliments received which recognises the good work of the Council and its officers. The number of compliments received have always well exceeded the number of complaints received.
12. The new system is more flexible to reflect changes in Council structures, staff and other key information. To date, 140 case managers over 100 task officers have been trained and are now using the new corporate complaints system.

Consultation

13. There has been no external consultation undertaken in the preparation of this report.

Alternative Options

14. There are no alternative options.

Implications of Recommended Option

15. **Resources:**

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that there are no new financial implications arising from this report.

- b) **Human Resources Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance confirms that there are no human resources implications arising from the report.
 - c) **Property Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance confirms that there are no property implications arising from this report.
16. **Risk Management Implication** – Potential failure to act on complaints received is minimised through regular monitoring.
 17. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – The corporate complaints and compliments procedure contributes to the implementation of the Council’s Equal Opportunities Policy.
 18. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.
 19. **Health Implications** – There are no health implications arising from this report.
 20. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** – There are no climate emergency and sustainability implications arising from this report.
 21. **Human Rights Implications** – There may be human rights implications in a number of complaints made to the Council. Therefore, having a corporate complaints procedure will assist the Council in carrying out its duties under the Human Rights Act 1988.
 22. **Ward Implications** – None.
 23. **Background Information** – Corporate complaints and compliments policy and procedure.