

Chichester District Council

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Thursday 24th October 2019

Complaints, Freedom of Information Requests and Data Protection Analysis – 2018/19

1. Contacts

Report Author:

Fiona Delahunty, Customer Services Manager

Tel: 01243 534734 E-mail: fdelahunty@chichester.gov.uk

2. Recommendation

The Committee consider the information provided in this report and to make any appropriate recommendations as to future monitoring arrangements to identify improvement where appropriate.

3. Background

3.1 The Corporate Governance and Audit Committee receive an annual analysis of all formal complaints, compliments, freedom of information requests and data subject access requests together with a summary of the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Report.

3.2 The Council's complaints scheme has three stages

Stage 1 - Initial complaint investigated by the Manager/Senior Officer responsible for the service team. Response time for reply 10 working days

Stage 2 - If the customer is dissatisfied with the response 1, they can ask for the complaint to be reviewed the Divisional Manager or in some cases the Director of the service. Response time for reply 15 working days

Stage 3 - If the customer remains dissatisfied with the Council's response they have the right to seek an independent investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman.

3.3 From April 2018 – March 2019 the council received 159 complaints, 114 were investigated at Stage 1, 29 at Stage 2 and 16 were received from the Ombudsman. 94% of complaints were answered within the response date offered by the service team. Analysis of complaints over the last three years is attached as Appendix 1.

3.4 This year has seen a small decrease in complaints of 1%. Stage 1 complaints have decreased by 7%; Stage 2 complaints have decreased by 3%; Ombudsman complaints have increased by 44%. It is worth noting a number of these complaints were about one subject.

- 3.5 The annual report letter from the Ombudsman shows the number of complaints received for Chichester as 21. 20 complaints have been decided, this figure includes complaints which were submitted in year ending March 18. Of the decided complaints 1 was invalid, 1 customer was given advice, 9 were closed after initial enquiries, 3 were referred back to the Council to resolve, and 6 were investigated. Of the 6 complaints that were investigated 3 were not upheld and 3 were upheld. The Ombudsman publish their decisions, to view these details use this link to their website <https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions>

Compliments are also recorded. Service teams received 169 written and emailed compliments during 2018-19

4. Learning Points

Following upheld complaints from the Ombudsman and service complaints we have made the following improvements;

- 4.1 All Planning Officers have attended a 2 hour workshop style training session for on report writing, including the consideration of third party representations received during the course of an application and human rights.
- 4.2 All Planning Officers have attended customer care training.
- 4.3 The housing allocations policy was updated to ensure those serving or those who have served in the Armed Forces are dealt with correctly.
- 4.4 Last year the Revenues Services underwent a restructure and went through a period of service instability which attributed to a backlog of work which resulted in complaints about delays in processing claims and refunds. The service is now working within the corporate 10 working days turnaround time which understandably has reduced the need for customers to complain. Revenues are currently in the process of reviewing how it organises its work to ensure that resources are used flexibly and where customer contact needs it.

5. Outcomes to be achieved

- 5.1 The primary purpose of investigating complaints is to resolve customer dissatisfaction where possible. However, by recording and monitoring the nature of complaints it is possible to identify trends or address issues to avoid further complaints and to improve service delivery and/or to contribute to a review of the policy.
- 5.2 Each Divisional Manager has access to monthly reports containing a summary of all complaints received for their service areas performance and is expected to work with their direct reports and staffing group to improve customer satisfaction and in reducing complaints.
- 5.3 The website has the option to provide feedback on usability and usefulness on each page. This information is fed back to the services areas responsible for the appropriate page. Divisional Managers are responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the Council's website for their service area and the outcome being that website activity increases.

- 5.4 The Customer Service centre undertakes monthly performance monitoring with customers contacting the Council. This information is used to identify areas where services improvements may be made.
- 5.5 All telephone calls to the Customer Service and Revenues Client Support teams are recorded and monitored. These recordings are used to mentor and train staff with a view to improving quality of service. They can also be used to investigate complaints.
- 5.6 The Council have a Facebook and Twitter account which is a quick and easy way for customer to make contact and provided feedback on services.

6. Freedom of Information Requests

- 6.1 The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act gives people the right to ask the Council for recorded information they have on any subject. If the request relates to environmental information, this will be handled under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs). We are required to reply within strict deadlines, giving the information requested, or explaining why we cannot provide that information.
- 6.2 The FOI process is administered by Customer Services.
- 6.3 From April 2017 - March 2018 we received 751 requests, 128 of these were redirected to other agencies
- 6.4 The taxation team received the most requests, 131, however as we have published information about this service on our website 44% of these were answered at first point of contact. A system generated email is sent to the customer with a link to the information published on our website.
- 6.5 93% of requests received were answered within the 20 working day deadline which is an improvement of 3% from 2017/18.
- 6.6 The number of requests received can take up a great deal of officer time in collating the responses. Many requests continue to be received from the press or from commercial organisations. The legislation does not provide for the Council to recover costs for the officer time involved unless the estimated staff costs involved locating or compiling the information exceeds £450. Under these circumstances, we can refuse the request on grounds of cost, or charge the applicant £25 per hour for the estimated work.
- 6.7 We have reviewed and made improvements to the FOI/EIR the process. FOI administrators now have access to online reports, giving a description of the request and key dates. We have also improved the reminder notification to Officers they are now sent an auto generated email at 15 working days notifying them they have 5 working days to respond to enquiry.

7. Data Protection Requests

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) provides individuals the right to access their personal information the Council have to respond to these requests within 20 working days. In 2018-19 the Council received 21 requests from customers, an increase in 86% from the previous year and 19 requests from other

agencies such as the Police and HMRC.

8. Improvements to Procedures and Publication

Utilise reports from Customer Services to publish more information on Website, improve our procedures and online services.

9. Proposal

To continue monitoring and recording formal complaints, freedom of information requests and subject data access requests.

9.1 To continue to provide feedback on performance to services areas to provide the opportunity to improve service delivery.

9.2 To continue to provide performance monitoring with the Customer Service Centre to gain customer insight and improve service delivery.

10. Alternatives that have been considered

None these are legal requirements

11. Resource and legal implications

There is a legal obligation to comply with the Freedom Information and Data Protection Acts. Compliance does require a significant amount of staff time. The Legal team are able to assist and advise staff when dealing with requests.

12. Consultation

None

13. Community impact and corporate risk

None

14. Other implications

	Yes	No
Crime & Disorder:		√
Climate Change and Biodiversity:		√
Human Rights and Equality Impact:	√	
Safeguarding and Early Help:		√
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR):	√	
Other (Please specify): eg health and wellbeing		√

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15. Appendices

15.1 Appendix 1 Analysis of complaints and Freedom of Information Requests

15.2 Appendix 2 General description of complaints received