

**Report to:** *Cabinet*

**Date of meeting:** *27 November 2023*

**Report author:** *Michelle Carty Customer Services operations Manager*

**Report sponsor:** *Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services*

**Portfolio holder:** *Cllr Mark Watkin*

**Report title:** *Annual Complaints Report*

## **1.0 Executive Summary**

1.1 As part of the Council's commitment to continuous improvement, the Annual Complaints Report was created to ensure that we continue to deliver consistent levels of customer care and high quality services across all areas including our partners. The report is also one of the deliverables in the Customer Experience Strategy, approved by Cabinet in November 2022.

1.2 The development of the complaints reporting functionality within the corporate Business Intelligence platform (QLIK), means that complaints information is now regularly provided to Customer Liaison Officers (CLOs) and managers. Detailed reporting in real time is available and includes volumes of complaints by service, upheld / not upheld, resolved at stage one / stage two and response times. Service improvements identified and the changes made as a result of complaints are also tracked, in line with our emerging Continuous Improvement Framework. Our complaints policy is to respond to Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints within 10 working days and customers will be contacted if it will take longer. To help towards these KPIs being achieved, the Customer Service team proactively contact CLOs or handling officers regularly to ensure action is taken to respond to the complaint or to advise the customer of a delay. This is in addition to the automated emails sent via Firmstep to CLOs when target deadline dates for responses are approaching. Complaints performance is also reported quarterly as part of the councils KPIs. Staff across the council also have access to the Staff Guide to Complaints help them when responding to complaints.

1.3 The Customer Experience Strategy supports the development of an environment where staff appreciate the importance of a positive approach to all customer interactions and how they impact the overall customer experience. Whilst our ambition is for all customers to have a great customer experience, as outlined in our Customer Care Standards, we recognise that mistakes happen and when we receive a complaint it is an opportunity to reset our customers' opinion of the organisation and to make changes to

improve. The information provided in this annual report is intended to support services from across the organisation to address complaints correctly, ensure they are resolved at their earliest opportunity and to provide further insight to assist with the continual improvement of services. It shows that the organisation views complaints as a valuable source of customer feedback and makes best use of the opportunity to develop the services we deliver. It also enables services to identify if there are any trends in the types of complaint being made or the services that complaints are being made about. As a result, changes can be made to services and how they are provided.

1.4 Engagement has been undertaken with the Customer Experience Project Board and the CLOs to develop this report. The final approval of the Annual Complaints Report will ensure that our people are continuously looking to improve and develop their services to ensure that they meet our customers' expectations when they use our services.

1.5 The Annual Complaints Report is therefore included at Appendix A and will be used to report annually to Cabinet. Whilst the Annual Complaints Report is intended to provide an overview of our complaints data, the detail sitting behind this information will be made available to all services via the council's business intelligence platform which will enable a proactive approach to complaints management and avoid multiple complaints about the same issue.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 Cabinet are asked to:

- Approve the Annual Complaints Report and proposed next steps

## **3.0 Report pathway**

3.1 Next review body: *Cabinet*:

3.1.1 Indicative date: 27 November 2023

3.2 Final review body: *Cabinet*

3.2.1 Indicative date: 27 November 2023

## **4.0 Contact Officer:**

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Operations Manager  
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Reviewed and signed off by: *Liam Hornsby Associate Director of  
Customer and Corporate Services*

## **5.0 Detailed proposal**

5.1 One of the council priorities is to provide an excellent customer experience. To help us do this we need to identify and address any problems for our customers, and to continuously improve our services. We want to learn from our mistakes and encourage people who have cause to complain to make comments and suggestions to help us make these improvements. We want to be transparent about the complaints we've received, how we've responded to them and what we've done to try to put things right. Additionally, we want to prevent further complaints in the future.

5.2 Therefore, the Annual Complaints Report has been created to support the council's commitment to continuous improvement, and the aims of the Customer Experience Strategy and its delivery across the organisation.

6.0 To create the Annual Complaints Report we:

- Researched the latest industry standards:
  - Reviewed other councils' complaints reports.
- Reviewed our most recent complaints audit.
- Reviewed customer feedback by:
  - Looking at their comments and suggestions
- Analysed our complaints data :
  - Reviewed the various complaints stages: Stage 1, Stage 2, and Ombudsman.
  - Compared to the previous year.
  - Scrutinised by service.
  - Monitored response times.

6.1 Since creating the annual report improvements have been recognised and changes made as a result of learning from complaints. Below are some examples:

- Reporting will be updated so that handling officers will need to record a reason why the complaint has been responded to after the deadline, therefore impacting our KPIs.

- A new process has been designed for logging LGO complaints. Therefore, more reporting information will be available on these types of complaints.
- The website complaints process will be updated so customers are logging genuine complaints. Currently many are reclassified as general service requests or comments.
- Complaints are discussed regularly at service improvement meetings between the CSC and other services, and also at the CLO meetings. This includes discussions on performance, outstanding complaints, and details on any trends. We also discuss if services need any further support with handling complaints.
- Regular reminders sent to the CLOs now include departmental managers, to help us achieve our KPIs.
- The CSC will offer regular training to any new CLOs on handling complaints.

6.2 The key headlines from the complaints performance in 2022/2023 are as follows:

- The number of complaints received overall decreased by 20% from 356 to 284 (72 complaints) compared with the previous year.
- 85% of all complaints were responded to in time.
- We received 12 Stage 2 complaints. This is a decrease of 20% (3 complaints) compared to the previous year.
- We received 9 LGO complaints. This is a decrease of 6 complaints compared to the previous year of which only 3 were investigated.
- The total number of cases where compensation was awarded decreased by 40% from 5 to 3 compared to the previous year. However, the amount of compensation decreased significantly by 99% (£1,493).
- Service Failures and Dissatisfaction with a policy or a decision are the top two reasons for customers making a complaint.

- Waste & Recycling, Council Tax and Parking Services are the top three concerns for customers.

These figures represent an improvement in the number and type of complaints that we receive and are indicative of the organisation's enhanced focus on complaints monitoring and resolution over the last year..

### 6.3 Benchmarking:

The table below shows complaints data from other Hertfordshire councils:

<b>Council</b>	<b>Stage 1 complaints</b>	<b>Stage 2 complaints</b>	<b>Responded to in time*</b>
Welhat	1770	162	
Dacorum	669	68	
Watford	284	12	85%
Hertsmere	276	41	
East Herts	187	32	
North Herts	158	27	77%
St Albans	146	39	
Broxbourne	96	33	78%

\*

From the councils we benchmarked against the key information is:

- The total number of Stage 1 complaints we received places us third overall.
- The total number of Stage 1 complaints we received (284) is 84% lower than the first placed council (1770).
- Our Stage 2 complaints are the lowest.

6.4 The report and the information which sits beneath it will be used and presented to services as part of the service improvement sessions and will form part of the continuous improvement framework. This will help drive improvement throughout the organisation as we will be able to provide information on where we have gone wrong in the past and how we can make it better. An example of this is where our Stage 1 response times are outside of the 10 working days. We are currently collecting more information on this and are looking at our escalation procedures to senior management. This will ensure that complaints are responded to as soon as possible whilst ensuring that the concerns of the customer are fully understood and responded to appropriately. It should be noted that a longer timescale in relation to responses can sometimes mean that the response is of better quality. Recognising that a number of services are not delivered directly by the council, any complaints in relations to partners will be shared via the existing partnership boards so that any issues can be investigated via the existing contract management processes in place..

## 7.0 Implications

### 7.1 Financial

7.1.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

### 7.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

7.2.1 There are no legal issues as a result of this report.

## 8.0 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
The Annual Complaints Report is not approved by Cabinet	The Annual Complaints Report is not delivered as part of the Customer Services Strategy.  It does not reflect the		Treat	4 x 1 = 4

	council's commitment to continuous improvement.			
We are not continuously improving in line with the councils' commitment	Our services are not maintained	The annual production of a complaints report.	Treat	3 x 2= 6
The Annual Complaints Report is not shared with and staff.	Staff are not fully knowledgeable when dealing with complaints. Staff do not have the feedback to help deliver a great customer experience. Inconsistency across the organisation when handling complaints. Increased complaints and negative feedback. Possible repeated complaints.	Ensure there are wider comms – i.e., intranet and team meetings. Feedback in our regular CLO and service meetings. Feedback to Service Managers	Treat	3 x 2= 6

## 9.0 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

### 9.1.1 Equalities

9.1.1.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for this report.

### 9.1.1.2 Data Protection Impact Assessment

9.1.1.3 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

**10.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved.**

10.1

November 2023	Publish on the Council's intranet and website	Customer Services Operations Manager
November 2023	Send the report to all SDL's	Customer Services Operations Manager
December 2023	Share with the CLOs	Customer Services Operations Manager
From December 2023	Deliver in Service and Team Meetings across the council	Customer Services Operations Manager

**11.0 Appendices**

11.1

- Annual complains Report (Appendix 1)

**12.0 Background papers**

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.