

## **TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

<b>CABINET –</b>	<b>23/09/2021</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Customer Feedback and Statutory Complaints Reports for 2020-21</b>
<b>REPORT OF</b>	<b>Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services</b>
<b>LEAD CABINET MEMBER –</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Community Safety and Customer Services</b>

### **PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT**

#### **1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to set out the amendments to the Complaints policies for Corporate, Children’s Statutory and Adult Statutory Complaints and to update Cabinet on the Council’s response to complaints between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.
- 1.2. The Council’s current complaint policies have been in place for some time and have been refreshed and updated to reflect latest best practice. The amended policies in full can be found online at [Appendix A, Appendix B and Appendix C](#), however a summary of the changes can be found at Appendix H.
- 1.3. To demonstrate effective complaint handling the Council produces an annual report on complaint handling for Children’s Statutory Complaints, Adult Statutory Complaints and Corporate Feedback and Complaints. These reports can be found at Appendices D, E and F.
- 1.4. In total there were just 491 complaints received across the Council in 2020/21 from a total of 473 complainants. This is against a backdrop of the many millions of service transactions that take place every week including 10.2 million refuse collections and 229,000 calls to our call centre each year including new services provided to support our residents during the most challenging of years due to the Covid Pandemic. The total number of complaints therefore remains an incredibly small proportion of our transactions at less than 0.005%.
- 1.5. The service area who received the majority of the complimentary feedback was by a large margin, Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services, followed by Children’s Safeguarding/Family Support and Communities, Customer and Commercial Services.
- 1.6. Conversely, Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services were also the service that received the highest number of complaints, which is an indication of the ubiquitous nature of this service in the day to day lives of every resident and visitor to the

Borough.

- 1.7. In summary there has been an overall reduction in the number of complaints received by 16%. It is also positive to note that there do not appear to be any common reasons, or patterns to the complaints we have received, which suggests that the issues reported are isolated incidents.
- 1.8. In addition, it is pleasing to see a 35% increase in customers that have complimented Council services, with 392 received compared to 290 in 2019/20.
- 1.9. During this reporting period there were 424 corporate stage one complaints, an 11% reduction from 2019/20, taking an average of 12 days to respond and well within the 15 working day deadline.
- 1.10. 38 Adult Statutory complaints were received, a 34% decrease on the 58 received in 2019/20. The lowest number received in 5 years.
- 1.11. 29 Children's Statutory complaints were received, a 42% decrease on the 50 received in 2019/20, the lowest number received in 6 years.
- 1.12. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman review letter 2021 has also be included at Appendix G which provides details of the outcomes of complaints which have had been investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 1.13. Headline amendments to council complaints policies include the ability to report anonymous complaints and complaints about council policy, some changes to timescales for response and the introduction of user friendly and easy to read versions of the policies.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the changes to the new Complaints Policies available online at [Appendix A, B and C](#). These policies will be introduced with immediate effect.
- 2.2 That Cabinet grants delegated authority to the Director for Communities, Customer & Commercial Services in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Community Safety and Customer Services to make amendments to these policies going forward in line with changes to the appropriate legislation.
- 2.3 That Cabinet reviews the Customer Feedback and Statutory Complaints Reports for 2020-21 in respect of Adult Statutory, Children's Statutory Complaints and Corporate Customer Feedback and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Review Letter 2021.
- 2.4 That Cabinet notes the significant reduction in complaints received in 2020/21, the increase in positive feedback and the improvement in complaint handling performance.

### 3 SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	A community- focussed, innovative Council providing efficient, effective and quality services.  Key outcome:  Our customer experience is the best possible and facilities are accessible to all.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	
<b>TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE</b>	Once approved the complaint policies will be introduced with immediate effect.	
<b>FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	Yes	The cost of dealing with complaints is mainly in the form of officer time and is met from existing Council budgets. The mystery customer exercise is funded from reserves.  <b>01.07.2021 MB</b>
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	No	On 08.10.2020 the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman issued updated guidance on effective complaint handling for local authorities  Children’s social care statutory complaints are conducted under Section 26 Children Act 1989, the <a href="#">Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006</a> , known as the CARP Regulations and guidance <i>Getting the Best from Complaints</i>  Complaints about Adult Social Care Services are governed by The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and guidance <i>Listening, responding, improving: a guide to better customer care</i> .  <b>01.07.2021 KF</b>
<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	No	

<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	No	Borough-wide impact
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## **PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **4 INFORMATION**

#### **4.1 Amendments to Complaints Policies and Procedures**

##### **4.1.1 Corporate Complaints Policy ([Appendix A](#))**

The Corporate Complaint Policy has been refreshed. Key changes to the policy include updated acknowledgment timescales, a timescale for Stage 2 escalation requests, enabling customers to make complaints about Policy and also allowing anonymous complaints to be submitted as recommended in the recent Customer Service & Digital Peer review.

##### **4.1.2 Adult Statutory Complaints Policy ([Appendix B](#))**

The Adult Statutory Complaint procedure is outlined in legislation. The key amendments to the Adult Statutory Policy includes more detail around what may or not be excluded from the procedure, Inter-agency Joint working, who may act on behalf of a service user and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's role. Timescales have been amended and the 25 working day target has been removed.

The policy now states that anonymous complaints will be handled via our Corporate complaints procedure.

##### **4.1.3 Children's Statutory Complaints Policy ([Appendix C](#))**

The Children's Statutory Complaints procedure is outlined in legislation. Amendments have been made in relation to timeframes around Stage 2 complaints, so that the process that follows receipt of the Investigation Officers Report is clearer and local timeframes are applied. The policy states that anonymous complaints will now be accepted via our corporate complaints procedure.

4.1.4 As part of the review of both the Adult and Children's Statutory Complaint Policies, a shortened version of both policies will be created to ensure that this process is accessible for all. For example, easy read versions and child friendly versions of the policies will be created keeping in mind the specific needs of our customers. Consultation with specific groups such as the Making it Real Board (Adult Social Care service users) and Voice (young children in care) will take place to ensure the accessibility of these shortened policies. An easy read version of the corporate complaint policy will also be created.

4.1.5 A summary of the changes to the policies can be found at Appendix H.

## 4.2 Corporate Feedback Report (Appendix D)

4.2.1 In 2020/21 there were 424 corporate stage one complaints received, an 11% reduction on the number of complaints received in 2019/20. This is also the lowest number of complaints received in the previous 7 years. 42% (180) were partly or fully upheld, this is where services have acknowledged that we could have done better. 6% (24) of the complaints were either withdrawn or out of jurisdiction.

82% of corporate complaints were responded to within the 15 working day time scale, an improvement on the 81% achieved in 2019/20. There has been a sustained improvement since 2017/18.

4.2.2 Of the 424 complaints received, 29 were escalated to Stage two of the procedure with 40% partly or fully upheld. The average number of days to complete a full investigation was 29 working days. The impact of COVID-19 did affect these timescales, however this is still well within the extended timescale of 65 working days as outlined in the complaints policy.

4.2.3 All of the 180 complaints partly or fully upheld have been reviewed to ensure wider learning to avoid such issues occurring in the future. There are no major trends or common themes that have led to complaints being reported. This is against a backdrop of providing over 750 different types of service and millions of transactions. As a result this is a very low percentage of complaints levied against the council.

4.2.4 Some positive improvements resulting in learning from complaints include;

- The Financial Case Management client charging process has been updated, which will improve timescales
- Procedures reviewed so there is better preparation and communication between social workers prior to meetings
- All officers who complete financial agreements now undertake a one year online course and also have to complete an induction programme, including training to the required competency
- Contactors have been reminded of the standards expected in relation to sightlines at junctions to ensure that, when signs are installed, they do not obstruct them
- New proof of residency procedures for Revenues Enforcement agents have been implemented

4.2.5 Our Customer Insight Programme was put on hold in April 2020 due to the pandemic. However we relaunched the programme in July 2020 with a new digital agenda. Our Mystery Customers completed website and digital access reviews. 76 Mystery Customer assignments were completed in the year and key results include that;

- 91% of customers were satisfied with their experiences as a whole and the quality of the information on the website
- 92 % of customers were satisfied with the ease of navigating the website

### **4.3 Adult Statutory Complaint Report (Appendix E)**

4.3.1 We received 38 Adult Statutory complaints in 2020/21, a 34% decrease on the 58 received in 2019/20.

4.3.2 Of the 38 complaints completed, 69% (26) were upheld

4.3.3 We aim to respond to all Adult Statutory complaints within 25 working days, because of the nature and complexity of some issues it may take longer, and complainants will be informed if this is the case. The time scales may be extended to a maximum of 65 working days. In 2020/21 the average number of days to respond to an Adult Statutory complaint across all portfolios was 53 working days this is an increase on the 51 working days achieved in 2019/20. There has been a significant improvement in timescales since October 2020, which has seen the average number of days reduce to 32 during the last two quarters of the year.

4.3.4 Of the remedies recorded against Adult Statutory Complaints in 2020/21:

- 37% were to provide an explanation and apology
- 16% were to provide an explanation and no remedy was required
- 16% were to improve service provision

4.3.5 Positive improvements that have resulted from learning from complaints include;

- There is now a specialist commissioning framework for providers to autistic people, Mental Health services and Learning Disability services
- Hospital discharges are now supported at weekends
- A Specialist Housing Strategy for accessible housing for people with disabilities has been developed
- The development of accessible information for Mental Health services

### **4.4 Children's Statutory Complaint Report (Appendix F)**

4.4.1 We received 29 Children's statutory complaints in 2020/21. All were dealt with at Stage One, with only four progressing to an independent Stage Two investigation. No Stage 3 panels were completed in 2020/21.

4.4.2 Of the 29 complaints completed in the year, 52% (15) of the complaints were upheld.

4.4.3 The average time scales for all Children's Statutory Stage One Complaints is 23 working days, which exceeds the timescales outlined in the regulations. However there is a clear improvement since November 2020, where complaints were responded to in an average of 17 days.

4.4.4 Positive improvements that have resulted from learning from complaints include;

- Individual remedies have been completed regarding support plans and working agreements, assessments and contact.
- Officers have been reminded regarding the expectation that minutes are provided from meetings.
- We are now using Parent and Baby placements more consistently with high levels of wrap around support to parents during the Mental Health assessment process.
- High levels of training and development has been given to social workers around the impact of domestic violence so that the appropriate support can be offered to survivors.

#### **4.5 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review 2021 (Appendix G)**

- 4.5.1 During 2020/21 a total of 22 complaints were escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, in addition to this 12 detailed investigations remained open on 31 March 2020.
- 4.5.2 During the year the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman made the decision that 2 complaints were premature and decided not to further investigate 15 complaints. 6 complaints were referred for a detail investigation and a decision has yet to be made on these cases. There were 9 detailed investigations completed in 2020/21, and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has confirm that there was fault in 8 of these cases.
- 4.5.3 In all cases where fault was found the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was satisfied that we had successfully implemented their recommendations. In two cases the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council has provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached them.
- 4.5.4 In each upheld case the Council has taken learning forward to improve practices in relation to the faults identified, apologies have also been given to customers in these cases.

### **5 IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

N/A

### **6 PREVIOUS MINUTES**

None

### **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Appendix A- Corporate Complaints Procedure](#)

[Appendix B- Adult's Statutory Complaint Procedure](#)

[Appendix C- Children's Statutory Complaint Procedure](#)

Appendix D- Corporate Feedback Report 2020-21

Appendix E- Adult's Statutory Complaint Report 2020-21

Appendix F- Children's Statutory Complaint Report 2020-21

Appendix G- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter  
2021

Appendix H – Summary of amendments to complaints policies and procedures

**Report prepared by Rebecca Zacharek, Customer Relationship and Quality Assurance  
Team Leader, Telephone: 01952 383890**