

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

**Report of the Executive
Director - Communities**

Barnsley Council Annual Customer Feedback Report, Complaints, Compliments and Comments – April 2016 to March 2017

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet with an analysis and overview of the complaints handled under the council's complaints procedures in line with our statutory obligations under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the Management of Customer Feedback Procedure during the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. It is also to advise on the compliments received by the council and the improvements to service delivery that have arisen as a result of complaints made within this period.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members' receive and discuss the information contained in this report as required under the complaints legislation.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The data contained in this report was correct at the time of creation. However, there is a risk to some variation in future reported data due to updates.
- 3.2 The submission of feedback (compliments, complaints, and comments) is an important means by which people can let the Council know about their experiences. The aim is to ensure that each item of feedback is recorded, acknowledged and appropriately responded to.
- 3.3 It is vital to continuous service improvement to know when things have gone right and people are happy with the services they receive. However, on those occasions when things go wrong complaints are equally valuable because they provide a chance to identify errors and to ensure the same mistake is not repeated in the future.
- 3.4 The complaints process aims to investigate a person's concerns thoroughly and fairly in partnership with the complainant, to reach a swift resolution and to ensure, where appropriate, that a proper apology is given and that a form of redress is provided.
- 3.5 Compliments received are acknowledged with the customer and shared with the service area concerned.

3.6 Comments received are acknowledged with the customer and shared with the service area concerned. In some cases a response is provided to the customer within 10 working days.

4. Proposal and justification

4.1 A total number of 458 customer compliments have been received by the council, the highest number of these were received in the Customer Services Business Unit. This is a decrease in number from the total reported last year (541), however work is ongoing to ensure that customers and all staff know how they can share their positive experiences with us.

4.2 Where our customers would like to share their thoughts and suggestions the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team logs these as comments. 2016-17 saw 310 comments from our customers being recorded, this is an increase on the total number received last year (171).

4.3 504 customer complaints were logged in 2016-17. This is an increase on last year's total of 384. It is important to note that not all customer concerns need to be processed as a complaint. Where a customer has contacted the service direct and their concerns are sorted out by the service there is often no need to escalate these through the council's complaints procedures. It is important that we make sure the customer is always informed of their right to make a complaint if their concern is not resolved or they remain unhappy.

4.4 It is positive to report that the majority of our complaints are being made online and directly to the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team.

4.5 The majority of the complaints received are being resolved quickly through early resolution, 397 of the total number of complaints received were resolved this way, and 107 required a formal investigation. However, there is still some improvement to be made to resolving complaints within timescale and work is on-going to address this.

4.6 Investigations into our customers complaints resulted in us upholding 266 cases, we partially upheld 154 and 64 of them were not upheld. Unfortunately, 3 of our customer withdrew their complaints during 2016-17. We are working with services to strengthen how we learn from customer complaints and this year will see the introduction of a new process on how we capture and embed learning from the complaints we receive.

4.7 No complaints received progressed onto the review stage. However, that's not to say that all customers were happy after their investigation. Those customers who did remain unhappy were supported by the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team without the need to progress their complaint onto the next stage of the process.

4.8 Our records indicate that we have received 36 contacts from the Local Government Ombudsman in 2016-17. 12 of these required the Ombudsman to undertake a formal investigation. Fault was found in 2 of these cases, one resulting in injustice for the customer. The Council agreed with the Investigator's recommendation to address this and paid £100 to the customer

with a letter of apology.

We expect to receive the Local Government Ombudsman annual review letter over the summer period. This review provides a summary of the statistics on the complaints made to them for the council.

4.9 Work is continuing to embed the role of the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team and during 2016-17 the following work was undertaken:

- Implementation of a new management system for customer feedback and information request during quarter 4. The benefits of this new system are hoped to be realised during 2017-18.
- We promoted, encouraged and supported our customers to contact us online, whilst also offering a telephone service too. We have worked to ensure the information we provide to customers both online and via telephone is clear to ensure that their concern is handled appropriately and proportionately. The benefits of this are that most of our customers accessed our service directly online. However, we are still working to reduce the number of contacts that reach the team which are not complaints.
- We encouraged our customers, who have made a complaint, to share their experiences of using the complaints process with us. We do this during our contact with the customers, generally over the telephone, but also within our letters. We use the information from this to improve our service delivery. One of the changes we have made to our practice, as a result of this dialogue is to better explain who we are on our webpage this ensures are customers know who their complaints are received by within the council.
- We have explored how we capture customer complaints and what we could do to strengthen this arrangement. Therefore a new approach to learning from complaints is to be trialled this year. The complaints investigation process will focus upon identifying the issues which led to the complaint and will in turn make recommendations on what needs to be done to prevent a reoccurrence. This information will be presented at Directorate Management Meetings on a quarterly basis for attention and action in the creation of a directorate learning plan. It is hoped that this new approach will enable us to see the wider issues in our service delivery being raised by customers through the complaints process, and identify what action needs to be undertaken in order to address this.

4.10 During 2017-18 we plan to undertake the following:

- Explore how we ensure our most vulnerable customers know how to make a complaint if they are unhappy with our services. This includes customers who are receiving services paid for by the council but delivered by a third party.
- Explore how we can capture and report on compliments and complaints made directly to other organisations that provide services on our behalf.
- Embed and develop the new learning from the complaints process.

5. Consideration of alternative approaches

Not applicable.

6. Implications for local people / service users

The attached report demonstrates which areas of service provision that service users are currently providing feedback on, in the form of complaints and compliments.

7. Financial implications

As part of the complaints process a number of formal resolution methods may have financial charges associated with them such as external investigations and appointment of mediators. However, effective resolution of complaints can lead to service improvements and complainant satisfaction.

Any financial charges incurred will be contained within existing budgetary provision.

8. Employee implications

8.1 All staff should be aware of the complaints procedures covering their area of work so that they can advise service users of the options available to them.

8.2 Staff resources are needed in order to carry out investigations follow a complaint. On rare occasions other procedures such as management investigations may be required following a complaint investigation.

9. Communications implications

The report will be published online.

10. Consultations

a) Circulated to the Communities Directorate Management meeting on 5th May 2017.

b) Discussed at Senior Management Team on 16th May 2017.

c) Circulated to the Barnsley Leadership Team on 17th May 2017.

11. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework

The Customer Feedback and Improvement Team had four performance measurements during 2016-17 on the management of customer complaints, compliments and comments. The progress on these will be outlined in the council corporate performance report.

12. Promoting equality, diversity, and social inclusion

The capturing of equality information will be reviewed for this service. Focusing on how customer information can be effectively captured and used to ensure accessibility of the council's complaints procedure. The equality impact assessment for this area of service will be reviewed during 2017-18 to inform this review.

13. Tackling the Impact of Poverty

Not applicable.

14. Tackling health inequalities

Not applicable.

15. Reduction of crime and disorder

Not applicable.

16. Risk management issues

Services fail to recognise or escalate complaints and compliments that need to be considered through the Council's management of complaints process which is managed by the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team.

Escalation of complaints to the Ombudsman without the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team having had sight of the complaint and it by passing the complaints management process.

These risks are mitigated by the use of regular visits to DMT and team meetings to raise awareness of the feedback processes.

17. Health, safety, and emergency resilience issues

Not applicable.

18. Compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights

Not applicable.

19. Conservation of biodiversity

Not applicable.

20. Glossary

Not applicable.

21. List of appendices

a) Barnsley Council Annual Customer Feedback Report – Complaints, Compliments, Comments and learning, 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017

22. Background papers


- a) Management of Customer Feedback Procedure - background papers can be obtained by contacting Claire Dobby, Complaints Manager, Feedback and Improvement Team, Gateway Plaza, Level 8.

- b) Complaints and Representations Procedure for Children and Young Peoples Services

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Date: 11th May 2017

Financial Implications / 
Consultation <i>(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer</i>