

Place Scrutiny Committee

10 March 2020

Quarterly Complaints Update - Place

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Flower, Leader of the Council

Executive Director: Jonathan Mair, Corporate Director, Legal & Democratic

Report Author: Tony Bygrave
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Report Status: Public

Recommendation: That the Committee note the performance of complaints made again functions within the Place Directorate.

Reason for Recommendation: To have an awareness of the numbers and types of complaints and the organisational learning.

1. Executive Summary

This quarterly report provides an update on the numbers, types and outcomes of complaints made against services that sit within the Place Directorate. As raised at the last quarterly update, there have been issues trying to amalgamate complaints figures for cases handled by each of the predecessor Councils. There is now a central corporate complaints team situated within the Assurance Service, and good progress is being made on a single point of entry, although put back to the beginning of the financial year to ensure robust reporting mechanisms and complete annual data. The Quarter 3 statistics included within this report continue to bring together all of the complaints relating to 'Place' into a single declaration. The report highlights some really positive trends

Key messages for this quarter are:

- There have been 86 complaints, down from 103 during Q2. 52 of which were managed as formal complaints;
- There were 2 complaints escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman with one finding of maladministration (Planning) at a cost of £1800 to the local authority.
- 13% of the complaints received were found to be fully or partially justified;
- The 20 day timescale has been missed on 9% of cases which is a great improvement on Q2
- We are starting to see some high volumes of positive organisational learnings from Place complaints with 34 cases providing genuine value

The vision of the new central team continues to be to work with services to ensure greater organisational learning, but this is a heartening step.

2. Financial Implications

None

3. Climate implications

None

4. Other Implications

None

5. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk LOW

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

None. The Corporate Complaints policy has been subject to an EQIA

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Summary of Q2 Complaints

8. Background Papers

None

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

APPENDIX A - below

APPENDIX A

dorsetcomplaints



2019/20

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Number of FORMAL complaints	44	54	52		In Q3 we received and responded to 52 formal complaints process. This is consistent with Q2.
Number of INFORMAL complaints	46	49	34		In Q3 we received and responded to 34 informal complaints, This is a marked reduction on Q2.
Upheld approaches to the LGSCO Ombudsman compared to total received	0/0	0/8	1/2		There have been 2 approaches to the LGSCO this quarter. One was upheld.
Timescales (overdue)	4%	18%	9%		In Q3 9% of complaint responses were over the 20 working day deadline. This shows an improvement on the spike of 18% in Q2.
% fully justified complaints	3%	6%	12%		Of the 86 complaints received in Q3, 12% were fully justified showing a steady increase on Q1 and Q2.
% part justified complaints	2%	6%	14%		Of the 86 complaints received in Q3, 14% were partly justified showing a steady increase on Q1 and Q2.
Compliments	34	28	39		In Q3 we received 39 compliments. Some examples will appear in the full report.
Learnings	2	14	34		Of the 86 complaints received in Q3 34 brought learning points. This is a very positive improvement on Q1 and Q2.

Place = total Q3 complaints = 86

2019/20

Summary of Q3 Complaints

Quarter 3 Total 86 Complaints

Complaints handling staff have received **86** communications for Quarter 3. **34** were dealt with informally, and **52** formally through Dorset Council's Whole Authority complaints process. There were 2 decisions from the LGSCO in Q3, with 1 case of maladministration.

2019/20

Total Communications to Complaints	86
Total Formal Complaints	52
Total Informal Representations	34
LGSCO	2/0

Main Theme -Service Provision

Some complaints have more than 1 theme depending on complexity. However, the majority of cases fall under 'Service Provision' with a perceived lack of, delay to, or dissatisfaction with, service levels.

Complaint Themes Breakdown %

Communication	3%
Policy – Disagreement with Decision	12%
Service Provision – Attitude of Staff	2%
Service Provision - Delay in providing services	5%
Service Provision - Failure to provide service	7%
Service Provision - Inadequate Service	3%
Service Provision - Quality of Service	22%
Service Provision - Professional Practice of Staff	5%
Service Provision - unspecified	41%

Timescales

Place complaints & concerns should be investigated and responded to within 20 working days. 91% of the timescales were met in Quarter 3. A significant improvement on Q2

Timescales	2019/20
Responses within 20 days	91%
Responses Overdue	9%

Complaints by Team

Former DCP and DCC software will not be fully aligned until the new financial year. Although the numbers are accurate across Dorset, it is currently something of a challenge to report on teams as accurately as we would like.

Team	No. of Complaints	Nature of Complaint Example	% Full/Part Justified	Typical Case Summary Example
PLACE - Customer Services & Libraries	2	Communication - Breakdown in communication	50%	Unhappy with call handling by DD
PLACE - Highways (General)	17	Service Provision - Quality of Service	20%	Roadworks & traffic lights causing unacceptable delays (contractor)
PLACE - Highways Parking	7	Service Provision - Quality of Service	0%	Complaint about bailiffs trying to collect goods for outstanding parking fines
PLACE - Environment & Wellbeing	14	Service Provision - Quality of Service	40%	Unhappy tree pruning has not been carried out as arranged
PLACE - Planning	34	Procedure - Disagreement with Decision	15%	Unhappy that comments re a planning application were disregarded
PLACE - Community & Public Protection	2	Service Provision - Quality of Service	0%	Taxi licensing- unhappy that driver did not stick to pick up date/time and fare quoted
PLACE - Waste	12	Service Provision - Quality of Service	58%	Repeated problems with bin collections & attitude of staff
TOTAL	86			

Learning from Complaints

The Complaints team are very pleased to report 34 learning points and actions arising from complaints. This continues the encouraging trend of improvements.

We will be providing more context of the team, case and actions as part of the Q4 report in due course

Reminder to all officers undertaking site visits of the Royal Town Planning Institute Guidance concerning Personal safety at work
https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/6365/GPN_3_New_-2-1-.pdf

The Service Manager has raised this at a meeting of the Officers to reiterate that comments should not go beyond the areas they have been asked to comment on.

e-mail to all DM officers reminding them to double check addresses prior to S/V and whilst on site/out of office

Notify the Complaints Team prior to deadline date if the issue raised is not our responsibility to investigate and respond to the complaint.

The Complaints Team can then communicate this to the complainant to advise them how to raise their concerns directly with the relevant authority/third party.

Website to be updated so that it reflects the decision of Corfe Mullen Council to be known as a town council.

The contractor has spoken with the specific operator and reminded him of the importance of using machinery safely and responsibly within the public highway, and to be courteous to the public at all times.

Crew instructed to return if unable to access, or if able, to walk bins out to the vehicle.

To return later that day, or return the next day to reattempt collections

Plan in the New Year to make round changes to make small collection vehicles available

Crews are issued works instructions and are expected to comply with these. Possibility of producing a map with every missed bin, although this could be costly to the authority.

The Head of Highways recognises that, currently, there is an inconsistent parking strategy across the whole of Dorset. A Parking Strategy Manager is being appointed to ensure that we have a consistent approach to parking in Dorset in the future.

Officer to fast track the tree removal by using one of our contractors from our top up resource list. This will be slightly more costly but should ensure that the work is carried out sooner.

We are now working with Pet Identity to see if we can improve our services to return dog to owner.

We have this 'black dog' ID with many other companies which use Pet Log (primary database) as a means to supply data to Dog Wardens. We are looking to consolidate this for Dorset Council moving forward rather than the former district PIN. – another convergence win.

In conclusion the following actions have been initiated:

We have updated the website with the new fees and charges. At the time of your complaint they were showing the previous fees and charges of East Dorset District Council. Staff in the East of the district have been advised of the fee structure and how to interpret it. Anyone else who may have been affected by this is being identified and suitable reimbursement will be made. Pet Identity is liaising with us to ensure that procedures are in place for returning dogs to their owners promptly. There is work programmed to review all our microchip database connections in the coming months. The websites, procedures and protocols associated with the Dog Warden Service are under review in light of service convergence. The online complaints system is being reviewed and updated.

Ascertained under which part of the council these vehicles work and the respective managers have been asked to issue instructions to the vehicle operatives as to where they can and can't park.

Dorset Travel have been discussing this case with other more complex ones. We are now looking at taking such cases, where a large number of pick up and drop offs are cancelled, in house. It has become apparent that a small handful of cases, such as this one, are not suited to commercial companies and would be better suited to DC staff and vehicles due to our ability to be more flexible to client demands. However, in this case the operator insisted he wanted to carry on with this route. This would also negate the delays in covering extra day etc.
Also to be more pro-active in communicating with parents.

Identify cases which may be problematic, due to young person's needs, and then decide whether it should be taken in house. Ensure we keep parents up to date as much as possible in the future

All staff have been advised to put bins back correctly, they are advised weekly that they must carry out their job properly.

Staff have been advised and if we have reports of bins not being put back correctly they are told to make sure they do their job efficiently, if they keep failing they are disciplined.

Documented discussions have taken place with the two officers, and further training has been provided. In addition, I have ensured that the rest of the team have been reminded of our processes for escalating calls. (COMPLETED)

Change in collection rounds so crews are now able to collect on scheduled day

The driver has been instructed to ensure he drives appropriately for the road and conditions in future.

Policy does not meet all exact individual needs but does provide scope for services still to be used. Complaints about the policy remain infrequent and policy continues to restrict and limit trade waste abuse at Household Recycling centres.

Feed in complaint statistics to anticipated policy review (18-24) months.

As far as possible, given resources, check stated ownership

backlog has caused delay due to staff shortages/loss of experience and knowledge due to changes in structure within Housing

Conditions and amended plans need to be checked carefully

Customer frustration regarding the automated telephone system to be taken into consideration

Dates and references on plans should be chronological and with revision numbers/letters. Officers could check these and raise queries and clarify with applicants, but this may be time consuming and unnecessary.

Mr could have left voicemail if he was frustrated by the phone system, but it was resolved once payment allocated and transferred by finance

Officer has been spoken to about tone and content of email and advised to consider how her comments can be interpreted.

Officer to review letters prior to being sent, with line manager, where non-standard letters are used.
Recorded delivery post got lost - not for the first time. Manager will raise this with Staff
Reinforce how to conduct a site visit with officer.
Significant backlog of apps along with service review and current resources in my team has resulted in this app not being determined in a timely manner
Staff reminded to redact signatures appropriately.
training scanning team on redactions
We were scheduled to call Dr G back within an hour of the email being recd

Compliments

We have collected 39 compliments across the directorate in Q3.

What people are saying:

I just wanted to let you know that I was very impressed with the driver who was collecting on Friday. I think he may have been collecting food waste but I'm not sure. I didn't get the reg no but the chap with him was a young man with red hair. I was riding my horse and leading another. He saw me coming and stopped and reversed into the drive at and waited for me to go past. The lights on those trucks can be a bit spooky and I was really impressed with his consideration towards the horses. There are a lot of cars on the roads now and some drivers are not very tolerant towards horse riders! I just wanted to say thank you so much.
I would like to offer my most sincere and grateful thanks to you both for determining our applications this week. We are truly astounded and delighted.
May I take this opportunity to also thank you for the efficient and calm way you have dealt with all aspects of the Inspector's Inquiry. I am sure you are also due some well-earned leave.
What could have been a tricky housing situation you handled with care, kindness and respect.
Could I just congratulate you and your excellent team working on the Wareham stretch of these road improvements?
Unfortunately, I overslept so of course forgot to move the bins kerbside, but the lovely team not only still emptied them but put them back near the house
Just wanted to thank you and all the other guys for coming out so quickly yesterday to unblock the culvert. We really appreciate your efforts, especially as you are now covering another area. Sorry you couldn't stay for tea!

Compliments are being promoted and we hope locality teams will make use of the new address in an effort towards producing a more balanced report:

Compliments@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Local Government Social Care Ombudsman -(LGSCO)

There were 2 approaches from the LGSCO this quarter in relation to Place issues. One was upheld (in Planning) with a cost to the council of £1800 because of maladministration

Summary: Mr X complained the Council gave incorrect pre-application advice. This led to him submitting a planning application that had no chance of being approved. We have found fault with the Council for issuing poor advice. This resulted in Mr X proceeding with an application and paying architect fees. The Council has agreed to pay Mr X the value of the architect fees to remedy his injustice.

The Corporate Director for Economic Growth & Infrastructure sincerely apologised for this situation occurring, on behalf of the team and the service, and conveyed how sorry he was. He also accepted the recommendation to accept responsibility for the expenses incurred after they received pre application advice and pay the sum of £1800 to redress the architect fees paid based on the Council's advice.

Ombudsman Link:

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKLGO/bulletins/2204c0b>

A look forward....

Once again, the Complaints Team are continuing their efforts to raise the profile of learning from complaints, by attending meetings, booking time with managers and engaging in person. It is clear that these efforts are paying off as the learnings have improved so greatly. It is a very positive quarter

Tony Bygrave

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Complaints Page – Find out more

<https://dorsetcc.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/find-out-about/information-management/complaints#cat-termName>

Complaints Team Home Page

<https://dorsetcc.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/howwework/teams/Pages/Compliments-and-Complaints.aspx>