

To: Cabinet

Date: 17 April 2024

Report/Comments of: Scrutiny Committee

Title: Scrutiny feedback to Cabinet – Complaints Update

SUMMARY OF REPORT CONSIDERED	
Report Title:	Complaints Update
Purpose/Description of Report:	To give an overview of the complaints and feedback received by the Council and outline the policy which guides the Council in responding to those.
Key Decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Cllr M Brown, Scrutiny Committee Chairman
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Cllr M Glancy, Portfolio Holder for Governance, Environment and Regulatory Services (Deputy Leader)

1. Introduction and Overview

The Scrutiny Committee met on 21 March 2024 to consider an update on complaints. The report gave an overview of the complaints and feedback received by the Council along with the policy which guides how the Council responds to complaints.

The report also sets out future improvements to systems and processes that will further enhance how the Council responds to complaints and feedback from residents, tracks the implementation of associated actions and strengthens capacity for insight and analysis.

Activity, performance, and trends between 1st April 2023 up to the end of December 2023 were also covered within the report. It was also noted that the Housing Ombudsman complaints handling code was to become statutory from 1st April, and that some minor policy amendments were being made to reflect some required changes. A self-assessment to confirm compliance with the complaints handling code had been carried out in December 2023 and an updated self-assessment would be completed by June 2024.

2. Summary of Feedback/Recommendations for Cabinet Consideration

- Officers were thanked for their hard work on processing complaints as they come in and investigating them to resolve issues identified. The importance of customers / tenants knowing how to complain and being empowered to complain was noted.
- It was commented that the report presented to the committee did not cover the beginning of the process (i.e. the interface and how easy it was for people to make a complaint). Members wanted assurance that there were a range of ways in which customers and tenants can complain to the Council, e.g. phone call, letter, reception or email. It was explained to the Committee that the policy sets out the ways that people can complain and that complaints received through any of the methods available are logged through a central complaint log.
- A query was raised about how the Council supports people who don't have the means or ability to complain via technology. It was explained that people may receive support to make a complaint via a trusted person and be supported by council officers to complain, or be supported during the complaints process for example by the community support hub. Some recent changes to the Parkside reception area were also outlined, which had been implemented in response to customer and member feedback, meaning that there is now a customer liaison officer located in one of the customer meeting rooms in order to assist when people come in and ask for advice.
- Members were requested to bring to Officer's attention anyone they know who is struggling to access Council services or is dissatisfied with council services, so that this can be looked into and investigated.
- The committee felt that the Council could better publicise its policy and also the ways in which residents can be supported to have their service requests resolved including to contact ward councillors who can provide advice and connect residents to the relevant council teams. A comment was made that a residents may not always know that they can contact their ward Councillor to assist them with issues.
- It was explained that figures provided in the report were the number of complaints received and not the total number of interactions with complainants or overall contact to the council. Moving slightly away from the subject of complaints, a suggestion was made that the Council could automatically allocate a reference number for each interaction with the

council. It was confirmed that currently, every complaint or online request receives a reference number.

- Members shared anonymous case examples of complaints over recent years, with some recalling positive experiences including a tenant who had a fault in their property fixed on Christmas Eve. Some less positive experiences were also shared and it was confirmed that learning from complaints is important and that internal consideration of complaints resolution, trends and analysis takes place. The committee suggested that the council report more on the ways in which complaints are resolved.
- A Member cautioned that just because people contact the Council, it doesn't mean that it is a complaint. It was noted that in February, 82% of enquiries (via the switchboard) were dealt with at the first point of contact.
- A query was raised about how the Council handles unreasonably persistent complainants. It was explained that the process and criteria are outlined in the policy and that steps to restrict contact with the council to specified arrangements are only used where necessary. It was confirmed that there is certain criteria within the policy that the Council has to satisfy in order to label a complainant as unreasonably persistent.
- In summing up the Chairman noted that:
 - 1) The Council should consider how it could raise awareness of the complaints policy and ways on which people can complain and be supported to complain.
 - 2) There are things that will be requested that are not complaints – for instance of a missed bin collection.
 - 3) The Council should at all times, focus on giving the best service in the first instance.

Written by: Scrutiny Committee Chairman in consultation with Members of the Scrutiny Committee