

REPORT TO:	FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 8
DATE OF MEETING:	15 FEBRUARY 2024	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (CORPORATE RESOURCES)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	TRACY BINGHAM (595811) tracy.bingham@southderbyshire.gov.uk	DOC: s:\cent_serv\complaints\committee reports\working papers for December 2023\Complaints and FOI report for 15 February 2024
SUBJECT:	COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS 01 APRIL 2023 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2023	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: FM11

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the comments, compliments, complaints, and FOI requests, as detailed in the report, are considered, and noted.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 The report provides a summary of official comments, compliments, complaints, and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by the Council for the period 01 April 2023 to 30 September 2023. Details of individual complaints and requests etc, can be found at:
<https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/about-us/open-data-and-transparency>.
- 2.2 Figures for the corresponding period in 2022/23 are given for comparison purposes.

3.0 Executive Summary

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

- 3.1 The comments, compliments and complaints procedure are designed to encourage people to give informal feedback on Council services.
- 3.2 It is intended that this report format will be reviewed and improved for future Committees to include recent data sets that reflect current performance, allowing for improved trend analysis. More focus will also be given to 'lessons learnt', responsiveness, and repeat service failures.
- 3.3 The introduction of e-Case case management software will provide an end to end digital journey for the receipt, management and response of requests moving

forward. e-Case will also provide an increased level of meaningful reporting for managers to enable them proactively resolve and put measures in place to avoid repeat complaints and bottlenecks in demand for service.

- 3.4 2 comments, 41 compliments and 95 complaints have been received between 01 April 2023 to 30 September 2023.
- 3.5 The number of complaints received in the first half of this financial year has increased compared to the corresponding period of 2022/23 and the number of compliments received has decreased.
- 3.6 Members are informed via e-mail (enclosing a copy of the original complaint) when a complaint is received relating to their ward. This is for information purposes only. A copy of the response letter sent to the complainant has been provided to Ward members from 01 June 2019.

Freedom of Information

- 3.7 The Council is committed to making itself open. A large amount of information is already available to the public, through for example, the Council's website and at community centres and village halls, etc.

Publication Scheme

- 3.8 Under the Freedom of Information Act, South Derbyshire District Council has a duty to adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme describing:
 - The classes of information it publishes
 - How and where such information is published (e.g., website, paper copy, etc.)
 - Whether or not a charge is made for such information

The purpose of a Publication Scheme is to let everyone know what information will be automatically or routinely published by the Council and to ensure that a significant amount of information is available to the public, without the need for a specific request to be made.

In line with guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office, the scheme is updated regularly, and the current version is available from the Website at:

<https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/assets/attach/10445/Publication-Scheme-September-2021.pdf>

- 3.9 A total of 184 Freedom of Information requests have been received from 01 April 2023 to 30 September 2023. This is an increase of 19 over the corresponding period for 2022/23.

4.0 Detail

Comments

- 4.1 2 comments were received over the past six months. Any comments received are carefully considered and if appropriate, are investigated under the Complaints Procedure.

Department	1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022	1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023
Housing	0	1
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	0	1
Total	0	2

Compliments

- 4.2 The table below compares the number of compliments received for the first half of 2023/2024 against the first half of 2022/2023. Compliments generally relate to the quality of the service provided and/or actions of individuals.

Department	1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022	1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023
Customer Services	12*	5
Housing Services	19*	21
Cultural and Community Services	7*	6
Operational Services	23*	8
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	2	0
Environmental Services	2	0
Legal and Democratic Services	0	0
Corporate Resources	2	0
Business Change and ICT	3	1
Total	70	41

* This indicates where one compliment has referred to two separate services

Complaints

- 4.3 The table below compares the number of official complaints received:

	1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022	1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023
Resolved at Stage 1	38	76
Stage 1 still ongoing	1	0
Resolved at Stage 2	8	15
Stage 2 still ongoing	1	0
Withdrawn	2	4
Total received	50	95

4.4 The complaints received can be broken down as follows:

Department	1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022	1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023
Customer Services	12*	10*
Finance Services	0	1*
Housing Services	19*	23*
Cultural and Community Services	7*	4*
Operational Services	23*	38*
Planning and Strategic Housing	2	15*
Property Services	0	1
Environmental Services	2	2*
Legal and Democratic Services	0	1*
Business Change and ICT	3	0
Corporate Resources	2	0
Total	70	95

* This indicates where one complaint has referred to more than one service

4.5 For comparison, the table below shows the total number of complaints over the last four complete years:

Department	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Organisational Development and Performance	1	1	1*	1
Finance Services	1	1	2*	0
Corporate Property Services	2	2*	0	1
Customer Services	18	5	20*	23*
Housing Services	26	36	44*	49*
Cultural and Community Services	10	6*	12*	9
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	14	14	23	16
Environmental Services **	12	6	6*	3**
Operational Services **	22	29	33*	25*
Legal and Democratic Services	5	5	2*	1
Economic Development and Growth	0	0	1	0
Business Change and ICT	0	0	1	3*
Chief Executive	0	0	2	0
Total	111	105	147	131

* This indicates where one complaint has referred to two separate divisions.

4.6 Managers dealing with the complaint are asked to complete a questionnaire following each complaint. This provides details of actions taken and improvements made because of a complaint.

4.7 From 01 April 2022 complainants have been asked to complete a complaint satisfaction questionnaire. This is to ascertain the satisfaction rate with the way in which the complaint was handled. 76 were issued from 01 April 2023 to 30 September 2023 and 6 returned. Of these questionnaires returned, complainants

were satisfied overall with the handling of the complaint's procedure, however, not necessarily satisfied with the outcome and the way the complaints were dealt with to fruition.

- 4.8 If a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 2 of the Council's procedure, it can be taken to the Local Government Ombudsman for independent consideration. These complaints are the subject of a separate annual report.

Freedom of Information Requests

- 4.9 Although the Freedom of Information Act 2000 creates a general right of access to information, it also sets out information that the Council does not have to make available for specific reasons. This is information, which, if published, might prejudice the health, safety or security of the Council, its staff, systems, services, or property.
- 4.10 As much information is made available as possible without charging for it. The Council, however, reserves the right to levy a reasonable charge where the information request is extensive and would require more than two days' staff time to satisfy the request.
- 4.11 The Council deals with hundreds of routine requests for information every day. These are referred to as "business as usual requests". However, information that is not readily available and that has to be prepared or extracted is handled differently. The Council is entitled to make a charge for this kind of information.
- 4.12 Requests for information under Freedom of Information must be processed within 20 working days. However, requests for details under the Freedom of Information Act can be turned down if they fall within certain exemption criteria.
- 4.13 The table below compares the Freedom of Information requests received for the first half 2022/2023 against the first half of 2023/2024.

Note: the figures also include any requests that have been made under EIR (Environmental Information Regulations).

	1 April 2022 – 30 Sept 2022	1 April 2023 – 30 Sept 2023
Total Number of Requests Received	165	184
Less passed to other organisations	24	22
Less those withdrawn or duplicate requests	2	2
Less exemptions/partial exemptions	4	8
Total Requests Answered	135	152
Number replied to within 20 statutory days	119	135
Number replied to after 20 statutory days	16	17
Percentage replied to within 20 statutory days	88%	89%
Percentage replied to after 20 days	12%	11%

- 4.14 The above table shows that the response times increased overall to 89% in the first half of 2023/24.

4.15 The requests for information received can be broken down as follows:

Department	1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022	1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023
Corporate Resources	0	1
Finance Services	17*	14*
Organisational Development and Performance	9*	11
Business Change and ICT	9*	14*
Corporate Property Services	4*	6*
Customer Services	24*	21*
Environmental Services	25*	29*
Housing Services	12*	13*
Cultural and Community Services	6*	11*
Operational Services	8*	3
Planning and Strategic Housing	10*	19*
Legal and Democratic Services	15*	20*
Economic Development and Growth	1*	0
All Departments	1	0
Passed to 3 rd Parties	24*	22*

* Same request has involved several Services.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 None directly stemming from this report.

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 Under the Complaints procedure the Council will write to the complainant within five working days, telling them who is dealing with their complaint and when they can expect to receive a reply. In most cases a full reply will be sent within 10 working days.

6.2 Under the Freedom of Information Act the Council must respond to any requests received within 20 working days. For many requests the information required affects several areas of the Council. Consequently, a coordinated approach must be taken in the Council's response, with each service area being responsible for providing the information requested relating to their area.

7.0 Community Impact

None

8.0 Background Papers

None