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| REPORT TO: | OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE |
| DATE: | 10 JUNE 2021 |
| REPORT OF THE: | HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES MARGARET WALLACE |
| TITLE OF REPORT: | CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS Q4 2020/21 |
| WARDS AFFECTED: | ALL |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an end of year performance report on customer complaints and compliments received in 2020/21, which includes an update on the quarter 4 reporting period.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee:
- (i) Note that the number of complaints received in 2020/21 decreased with less stage 2 escalations than in previous years.
 - (ii) Note that the number of customer compliments received in 2020/21 increased, with significantly more received than in previous years.
 - (iii) Note the improvements made across the organisation to improve complaints handling and to ensure that the Council puts things right for customers.

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 To monitor the numbers and types of complaints received and recommend service improvements in line with data analysis to provide customer excellence.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS

- 4.1 Potential reputational damage from upheld decision notices following investigation by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman into customer complaints.

5.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Council Plan includes the strategic objective of ‘access for all – an innovative and enterprising Council’. This includes the commitment to transform customer services, using new ways of working to improve responsiveness and achieve better engagement and use of customer feedback. Complaints management improvements have been progressed to achieve this. This has included the roll out of updated procedures, Ombudsman training, refreshed customer communications and targeted improvements. Further work will be undertaken during 2021/22 to ensure that analysis draws out trends by protected characteristics.

REPORT

6.0 REPORT DETAILS

- 6.1 The customer complaints and compliments received form an important part of the feedback process for the Council to learn from any issues raised and improve how we deliver our services, and to provide a better standard of service that is more responsive to people’s needs. When analysing the customer complaints and compliments, they should be read in conjunction with each other to gain a full picture of the feedback received.

COMPLAINTS

- 6.2 The Council operates a two stage internal complaints process to respond to the issues raised by complainants. Stage 1 is an initial response by the applicable line manager or service unit manager. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they receive, then they can move to Stage 2, which is investigated and answered by the relevant Head of Service.
- 6.3 Following this Stage 2 response, there is the option for the complainant to go to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied. The Ombudsman is a free and impartial service, but will generally only consider complaints that have been through the internal two stage process at the Council first.
- 6.4 Since the quarter 3 update report to the committee in February 2021, the Council has handled a further 5 corporate complaints in the period from 1 January to 31 March 2021. The complaints related to:
- The approach of the council in supporting the reopening of businesses and venues out of the current coronavirus restrictions
 - The role of the council in the adoption of a BT phone box
 - Alleged lack of planning enforcement action from the council on noise from a building site
 - Repeated missed recycling collections
 - The renewal process for the garden waste license

From the five corporate complaints received during quarter 4, four were completed under Stage 1 of the complaints process, with one complainant remaining dissatisfied at Stage 1 and advancing on to Stage 2, which is ongoing. The average response time for complaints received in quarter 4 was 9.40 days at Stage 1. This is slightly higher than the average response times for the rest of the reporting year during Q1 (8.39 days), Q2 (6.88 days) and Q3 (6.45 days).

- 6.5 For the 2020/21 year-end performance, the Council received 37 complaints. This is significantly lower than the 2019/20 year (60) and trending lower than previous years.
- 6.6 The most complaints this year have been received in the customer facing areas of Streetscene (11), Revenues & Benefits (7) and Planning & Regulatory Services (6). From the complaints received this year, 34 (91.8%) have been dealt with under Stage 1 of the complaints process, with three complaints in this time period remaining dissatisfied at Stage 1 and advancing on to Stage 2. This is an improvement on the same time period last year, when 44 of the 60 complaints received (73.33%) were resolved at stage 1 of the complaints procedure and 16 were escalated to stage 2.
- 6.7 The average response time for Stage 1 complaints for the 2020/21 reporting year was 7.78 days. This is a fall from the average response time for 2019/20 of 8.70 days. Also it continues to be well within the 15 day turnaround time for complaint responses that require further investigation to provide a full response. The two completed Stage 2 complaints to date were responded to in an average time of 15 days.
- 6.8 Examples of the lessons learned from the complaints received up to the end of quarter 4 this year are included at Appendix 2 to show the actions taken to remedy complaints received and the lessons learned.
- 6.9 The improvements in complaints handling performance reflects a number of corporate initiatives. Training has taken place with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman on 'Effective Complaints Handling'. The training set out the principles for dealing with complaints received and gave examples of good practice in responding and liaising with complainants. This will help deliver a consistent approach to the handling and administration of customer feedback.
- 6.10 Specific staffing on customer insight and complaints has also been put in place. These officers are working to ensure that the quality of responses from the Council meet customer excellence standards in line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance on 'Effective Complaints Handling'. The officers also work with services to actively learn lessons from complaints, which includes improving service delivery, and ensuring that any incidents of poor service standards are not repeated.
- 6.11 The procedure guide for Comments, Compliments and Complaints has been refreshed, to make it more customer friendly and easier to follow. This can be found on the Ryedale DC website [here](#) and is included at Appendix 3.

COMPLIMENTS

- 6.12 The number of compliments received in 2020/21 was 104. This is a big improvement on the 46 received during 2019/20. The main topics of the compliments received by citizens during the year relate to support given by the council in the response to Covid-19, in particular the grant help for local businesses (44), the work of customer services staff to assist with enquiries received (20) and supporting those who have become homeless during the pandemic to find temporary accommodation (12). In quarter four, there were also compliments received about the work of the council in supporting the flooding response in early 2021.
- 6.13 Examples of some of the compliments from January to March 2021 include:

“All done amazing work very well done to all those who helped fight the river.”

“A great team effort. Well done to everyone involved in helping with the flooding. Thank you.”

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your team for your support during this horrid and difficult time, Ryedale Council really has come into its own. We feel very thankful to live in this area.”

“I just wanted to drop you a line to say thank you for your continued support to keep bolstering us during these difficult times. These contributions make a big difference and the speed and clarity by which you are communicating and delivering the support, is to be commended.”

“Thank you so much for providing the assisted waste services. Please pass on my thanks to all of the crew they do an amazing job.”

“I just wanted to email you to say a huge thank you for all your help and advice. I am delighted to say we received a grant from yourselves at Ryedale that literally makes the difference between survival or failure for our holiday cottage business.”

“I run a small B&B and Holiday Cottage business and as you can imagine, our business has been severely affected during the Covid pandemic. The government grants available for businesses like mine are described in complicated legislation and I have been very grateful for the business support pages on RDC's website. I have had to make a series of separate applications and some payments were made but others seem to get lost in the system, despite my being eligible. As guidance changed, I lost track completely of where I was in the process. The response I received was prompt, courteous and concise, clarifying the situation, what monies had been paid under which grant and which applications I still should make.

“I wish to thank you all for the sensitivity and patience in answering and responding to Ryecare alarm calls.”

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The following implications have been identified:

- a) Financial
Costs are contained within the agreed budgets for services.
- b) Legal
No complaints required to be escalated to Legal services for advice in 2020/21
- c) Other (Equalities, Staffing, Planning, Health & Safety, Environmental, Crime & Disorder)
None

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Background Papers:

None

Background Papers are available for inspection at:

None