

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

VALUE FOR MONEY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE O&S COMMITTEE – 25 JANUARY 2021

Title:

REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS CLOSED IN 2019/20

Portfolio Holder: Cllr John Ward, Leader of the Council

Head of Service: Robin Taylor, Head of Policy and Governance

Key decision: No

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the complaints received by Waverley that were closed during 2019/20, the Council's performance in responding to those complaints and, where applicable, the lessons learned. The report also includes the Council's response to the self-assessment audit required by the Housing Ombudsman Service's recently published Complaints Handling Code.
- 1.2 Complaints about Waverley's services received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman in 2019/20, are addressed in a separate report on this agenda.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Value for Money and Customer Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the information in this report and passes any comments to the Executive.

3. Reason for the recommendation

To ensure the Council's complaint process and outcomes are scrutinised effectively.

4. Analysis of complaints received and closed in 2019/20

- 4.1 In February 2018 the Council's complaints procedure was changed from three to two stages, and following a short transition period the new procedure came into effect on 1 April 2018.
- 4.2 The table below shows the number of complaints closed in 2019/20 for each service and at each level.

Service	Level 1	Level 2	Total
Commercial Services	22	1	23
Environmental and Regulatory Services	57	14	71
Finance and Property	27	7	34
Housing Delivery and Communities	9	5	14
Housing Operations	85	26	111
Planning and Economic Development	52	31	83
Policy and Governance	6	2	8
Total	258	86	344

- 4.3 75% of all complaints closed in 2019/20 were resolved at Level 1 which is the same percentage in the previous year.
- 4.4 Housing Operations received the highest number of complaints, a total of 111. The majority of these complaints concerned matters relating to property services and responsive repairs. This is a decrease when compared with the total of 151 for 2018/19.

Waverley's performance in responding to complaints

- 4.5 The corporate target currently states that 95% of all complaints should be responded to within 10 working days at Level 1 and within 15 working days at Level 2.
- 4.6 In 2019/20 84% of all complaints closed were responded to within the target timescales compared with 85% in 2018/19. Performance at each level was as follows:
- Level 1 - 82%
- Level 2 - 90%
- 4.7 The target of 95% has been in place for many years and continues to set a challenging level of performance.

Outcome of complaints closed in 2019/20

- 4.8 The following table gives information on the outcome of the complaints closed in 2019/20.

Service	Not upheld	Partly upheld	Upheld	Total
Commercial Services	14	9	0	23
Environmental and Regulatory Services	51	4	16	71
Finance and Property	16	15	3	34
Housing Delivery and Communities	8	4	2	14
Housing Operations	54	37	20	111
Planning and Economic Development	75	3	5	83
Policy and Governance	4	2	2	8

Total	222	74	48	344
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- 4.9 The assessment of whether a complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld is often a subjective matter, and this judgement is made by the officer investigating the complaint. Overall, 65% complaints were not upheld, 22% were partly upheld and 13% were upheld. The majority of housing operations complaints that were partly upheld or upheld concerned the service provided by contractors in respect of responsive repairs and property services.

Remedying complaints

- 4.10 When seeking to remedy a complaint that has been upheld or partly upheld, the Council follows the advice of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman that the remedy offered should as far as possible put the complainant back in the position he or she would have been in but for the fault that has been identified. An apology will always be offered but it also may be considered necessary to reimburse a complainant for any expenditure they have incurred as a result of poor service by the Council or its contractors.

Lessons learned from complaints

- 4.11 Learning lessons from complaints is an important part of improving Waverley's services and these are recorded on the complaints database. Lessons learned are looked at, and actioned on a case by case basis. Changes that need to be made to policies, procedures or other administrative processes are identified by the officer investigating the complaint and then discussed with the relevant Head of Service who then ensures that all necessary action is taken to avoid a recurrence of the problems identified by the complainant. Annexe 1 gives some examples of lessons learned in 2019/20. Many lessons learned concerned procedural/administrative issues and the need to improve communications with the customer.

New complaints database

- 4.12 A new 'low code' database for handling work-flow on complaints is currently being developed. This will be linked to the citizens hub used by the newly established Customer Services Centre, and should be operational from 1 April this year.

Waverley's response to the Housing Ombudsman Service's self-assessment audit

- 4.13 In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman Service published a Complaint Handling Code with the aim of promoting 'a progressive use of complaints among social housing providers, providing a high-level framework to support effective complaint handling and prevention alongside learning and development. A copy of the Code is attached as Annexe 2.
- 4.14 The Housing Ombudsman expected landlords to carry out regular self-assessment against the Code by 31 December 2020 with a view to taking appropriate action to ensure their complaint handling is in line with the Code. Waverley completed its self-assessment within this timeframe and a copy of the completed self-assessment is attached as Annexe 3

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

One of the Council's priorities is to promote 'high quality public services accessible for all' and complaints can result in action to improve processes and systems which, in turn, can improve service delivery and achieve better value for money.

6. Implications of decision

6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)

Sometimes the appropriate remedy for a complaint will be to offer the complainant compensation and this may be financial. All compensation payments must be authorised by the relevant Head of Service.

6.2 Risk management

Complaints can highlight areas where there are reputational and operational risks.

6.3 Legal

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion

Waverley's complaints handling policy helps to ensure that there is no discrimination in the way in which it delivers services so that all complaints are dealt with in a fair and equal way.

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

There are no specific implications regarding Carbon Neutrality relating to the handling of complaints.

7. Consultation and engagement

Overview and Scrutiny are asked to scrutinise this report and any comments and recommendations are forwarded to the Executive.

8. Other options considered

8.1 Not applicable.

9. Governance journey

9.1 The observations of the Committee will be passed to the Executive.

Annexes:

Annexe 1 – Examples of lessons learned

Annexe 2 – Complaint Handling Code
Annexe 3 – Housing Ombudsman Self Assessment Form

Background Papers

There are / are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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Agreed and signed off by:

Legal Services: N/A

Head of Finance: N/A

Strategic Director:

Portfolio Holder: 13 January 2021