

ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr C Daw
Responsible Officer: Lisa Lewis, Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Community Engagement

Reason for Report: Annual report on compliments, comments and complaints received as part of our 2 plus million contacts with customers in 2021/22.

Recommendation: to note the record of compliments, comments and complaints

Financial Implications: None

Budget and Policy Framework:

Approved by Finance: No

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: *Accurate recording and monitoring of complaints is good practice and ensures openness and accountability to all customers.*

Equality Impact Assessment: Compliments, comments and complaints are received by a variety of means which ensures that there is equality of opportunity for all customers. In addition, where there is a need Customer Services staff will always assist in the recording of these communications and complaints. There is also an interpretation service available.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: To ensure that the Council provides access to services for customers in whatever way they choose to transact with us. Ensuring extended access via digital means and improving the way that we hold information and deliver our services to customers, placing them at the centre of what we do.

Impact on Climate Change: None

1.0 Introduction/Background

1.1 The Council receives contact from customers in a variety of ways for all services. The table below shows the overall number of contacts for each method for the last 12 months covering September 2021 until August 2022

Contact Method	01 September 2020 – 31 August 2021	01 September 2021 – 31 August 2022
Number of visitors to the office for enquiries	1,259	4,066
Telephone Payments (including automated)	66,741	67,288
Calls to call centre	104,470	108,907
Calls to direct lines (not including calls to mobiles)*	280,063	In excess of 300,000
Emails Received	1,556,889	1,569,983
Digital Payments	105,904	103,244
Online- forms submitted	52,597	53,864
Planning applications and enquiries	2,464	2,303

*Difference in figures due to change in telephony system, comparable figures will be available on the next annual review (300,000 has been estimated on average of figures which are available).

- 1.2 This report provides a summary of the number of complaints, compliments and comments received for each service from 1 Sep 2021 to 31 Aug 2022 (see **Appendix 1**). An official complaint is recorded when a customer has been unable to resolve their issues with the service concerned or where the issue is more serious than a normal service request that can be resolved by officers as part of their day to day activities.
- 1.3 Compliments, comments and complaints are recorded on the CRM in accordance with our corporate complaints policy. The name, address and contact details of the complainant, the nature of the complaint and the outcome of the complaint investigation are all recorded.
- 1.4 Feedback recorded is not the totality of the expression of dissatisfaction with service delivery. For example, Customer Services record many service requests and services also record contacts/service requests in their own ICT systems. These include routine enquiries, requests for service and logging service failures which can be resolved quickly to the customers' satisfaction.
- 1.5 Members are provided with performance statistics for complaints via the six weekly PDG Performance Management reports and as part of the Audit cycle.
- 2.0 **Performance Statistics**
- 2.1 Feedback is recorded on the CRM, based on the information recorded we are able to extract the number of complaints raised at each level. Level 1 complaints are investigated by the Service Manager and Level 2 Complaints are investigated by Operational/Corporate Managers or member of Leadership Team.
- 2.2 Numbers of complaints upheld is recorded within the CRM.
- 2.3 As a measure of performance with complaint handling, the number acknowledged within 3 working days and resolved within timescales is recorded and reported on monthly as mentioned at 1.5.
- 3.0 **What does feedback tell us?**
- 3.1 As a result of complaints made, service managers are able to make changes to the working practices within service areas. These are also recorded in the CRM. Feedback where a change can be identified is an excellent way to improve services and respond to the needs of our customers.
- 3.2 Compliments received are often for members of staff who customers feel have done a good job. These are fed back to staff by line managers and where appropriate in staff communications.
- 3.3 What are the numbers telling us? We are actively encouraging feedback from customers and as we have seen an increase in customer activity and transactions, it is expected to have increased feedback.
- 3.4 The context of the environment in which we are all working is important. Staffing issues, which Members are aware of, have affected services across the organisation and meant there has been a continued need to the need to provide some services differently which can lead to gaps between the ability to provide services and the customer expectation.
- 3.5 Additionally, customer transactions increased as we came out of lockdowns and restrictions and we can see our customers moving away from the traditional telephony method of communication. Email has become an important tool and volumes of emails increase every year. But this can be a time consuming and inefficient way for customers to transact with us.

This will be something that we need to consider for the future as we review our customer based policies and consider the case for a new Customer Service approach.

- 3.6 We have seen a 10% increase in Complaints, compared to the year before. We have also seen decreases in Compliments (1.5%) and Comments (32%), indicating that our customer behaviours are returning to a 'near normal' and that their expectations and experience of services is returning to pre-Covid levels. Samples of compliments received can be found at **Appendix 5**.
- 3.7 There have been changes to the guidance in the management of Housing complaints and staff turnover which necessitates a requirement to review staff training. The authority will be reviewing complaints training for managers, and will be looking to monitor service performance with complaints and feedback to operations managers on a regular basis.
- 3.8 The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement will instigate a regular quarterly review with the Portfolio Holder for Continuous Improvement on organisation wide complaints (separate from the tracker) to more effectively monitor service delivery issues.
- 4.0 **Referrals to the Ombudsman complaints service**
- 4.1 9 complaints were made to the ombudsman by residents. Two of these were investigated and only one of these was upheld by the ombudsman. A summary of complaints to the Ombudsman 2020-21 (the latest available) is provided at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.2 The Local Government Ombudsman Annual review letter is provided at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.3 For comparison, a table of neighbouring authorities and their ombudsman cases has been provided at **Appendix 4**.

Contact for more Information: Lisa Lewis, Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Community Engagement. llewis@middevon.gov.uk

Circulation of the Report: Cabinet Member seen and approved [yes/no – name of Cabinet Member], Cabinet, Leadership Team seen and approved [yes/no]

Appendix 1

Compliments, Comments and Complaints

Fig.1

Feedback Received	01 September 2020 – 31 August 2021	01 September 2021 – 31 August 2022
Complaints received	354	391
Comments received	134	132
Compliments received	132	90
Number of complaints at level 2	40	50
Number of complaints at level 2 upheld	15	7
Number of complaints at level 1 upheld	82	106
Number where a change was made to the service procedures as a result of the complaint	6	22
Open at start of date range	170	213
Open at end of date range	233	290

Fig.2

Percentage change 2020/21 – 2021/22 – Processed and/or Completed

Complaints	10%	INCREASE
Compliments	1.5%	DECREASE
Comments	32%	DECREASE

Fig.3

Feedback by Service – Processed and/or Completed

Feedback Processed	01 September 2020 – 31 August 2021			01 September 2021 – 31 August 2022		
	Complaints	Compliments	Comments	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
Abandoned Vehicles	1				1	
Affordable Housing	3		1	1	1	1
Bulky Waste	1					
Building Control					2	1
Business Rates				1		
Car Parks	3			7		1
Community Alarms	2			1		

Feedback Processed	01 September 2020 – 31 August 2021		
Service	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
Community Housing Support			
Community Safety	1	1	
Council Tax Billing	6		3
Council Tax Recovery	8		1
Council Tax Reduction			1
Customer Services	18	7	10
Democracy and Members			
Dogs Stray or Fouling	3		
Electoral Register	1		
Environmental Issues	3		1
Environmental Services	6	2	
Finance	1		1
Fly Tipping	2	2	2
Garden Waste	7	1	6
Grants & Funding	1		
Grass Cutting	5	2	1
Health & Safety	5		
High Hedges	2		
Homelessness	6	6	
Housing Benefit	2	2	
Housing Repairs	74	51	74
Housing Tenancy	70	18	2
Human resources	2		1
Legal Services			
Leisure	4		
Licensing	1		
Planning	2		
Planning – Development Control	37	6	2

01 September 2021 – 31 August 2022		
Complaints	Compliments	Comments
1	1	
		1
14	2	2
6		
1		
13	6	2
7		
1		
6		1
1	4	
2	1	1
2	3	2
17	2	
7	3	2
98	22	79
103	13	13
1		
1		
4		
6		
27	1	1

Feedback Processed	01 September 2020 – 31 August 2021			01 September 2021 – 31 August 2022		
Service	Complaints	Compliments	Comments	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
Planning – Forward Planning	2			3	1	1
Play Areas		1				1
Pollution Incl. Noise	2			1		
Private Sector Housing	4			2		
Property Services	4		1	3		3
Recycling	26	13	10	23	14	10
Refuse Collection	36	14	14	28	12	9
Street Cleansing	3	6	3	1	3	
Street Naming				1		
Trade Waste				1		1
Total	354	132	134	391	90	132

Fig.4

*Compliments not all recorded in CRM – recording process for all feedback to be amended going forward under a system replacement.

Ombudsman Referrals 2021-2022

Reference	Authority	Category	Received
21017205	Mid Devon District Council	Planning & Development	22/02/2022
20014475	Mid Devon District Council	Planning & Development	19/07/2021
21003628	Mid Devon District Council	Housing	11/06/2021
21003802	Mid Devon District Council	Planning & Development	28/06/2021
21004554	Mid Devon District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	29/06/2021
21005017	Mid Devon District Council	Corporate & Other Services	07/07/2021
21005284	Mid Devon District Council	Planning & Development	13/07/2021
21005716	Mid Devon District Council	Benefits & Tax	20/07/2021
21017100	Mid Devon District Council	Corporate & Other Services	18/02/2022

Ombudsman Letter and Report

Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

20 July 2022

By email

Mr Walford
Chief Executive
Mid Devon District Council

Dear Mr Walford

Annual Review letter 2022

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2022. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to encourage effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer such valuable opportunities to learn and improve.

Complaint statistics

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 27 July 2022. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

I know your organisation, like ours, will have been through a period of adaptation as the restrictions imposed by the pandemic lifted. While some pre-pandemic practices returned, many new ways of working are here to stay. It is my continued view that complaint functions have been under-resourced in recent years, a trend only exacerbated by the challenges of the pandemic. Through the lens of this recent upheaval and adjustment, I urge you to consider how your organisation prioritises complaints, particularly in terms of capacity and visibility. Properly resourced complaint functions that are well-connected and valued by service areas, management teams and elected members are capable of providing valuable insight about an organisation's performance, detecting early warning signs of problems and offering opportunities to improve service delivery.

I want to support your organisation to harness the value of complaints and we continue to develop our programme of support. Significantly, we are working in partnership with the Housing Ombudsman Service to develop a joint complaint handling code. We are aiming to consolidate our approaches and therefore simplify guidance to enable organisations to provide an effective, quality response to each and every complaint. We will keep you informed as this work develops, and expect that, once launched, we will assess your compliance with the code during our investigations and report your performance via this letter.

An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. We adapted our courses during the Covid-19 pandemic to an online format and successfully delivered 122 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,600 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Yours sincerely,



Michael King
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld		
	<p>50% of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 51% in similar organisations.</p>	<p>1 upheld decision</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 2 investigations for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
<p>No recommendations were due for compliance in this period</p>		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation		
	<p>In 100% of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 20% in similar organisations.</p>	<p>1 satisfactory remedy decision</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 1 upheld decision for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022</p>

Local Authority Benchmarking

Authority	Number of complaints Investigated	Complaints Upheld
East Devon	4	1
Mid Devon	2	1
North Devon	2	2
South Hams	5	2
Teignbridge	5	2
Torrige	2	1
West Devon	1	1

Local Authority Average upheld = 51%

Mid Devon upheld = 50%

Sample compliments received 01 September 2021 – 31 August 2022. Names and addresses have been removed but all other content is as received.

Community Housing Support
<p>We cannot thank you enough for your prompt response to our mum Mrs XXXXXX and organising the lifeline alarm for her. It is reassuring for her and for us. She was concerned that she was losing her independence but we said that by having this, she was maintaining her independence.</p> <p>Thank you so much. You have been so helpful.</p>
Customer Services
<p>Mrs XXXXXXXXX called today and wanted to pass her thanks across to all of the Customer Service team. She said whenever she has had to call we are always so friendly and very helpful. She wanted to thank us and pass her comments across.</p> <p>I would like to say a big thank you to all you ladies in the call centre who have helped me through the years. You've always been so helpful, polite and gone the extra mile to help me. I'm sorry I wasn't able to bring any chocolates into the office for you but please pass on my appreciation to the rest of the ladies</p>
Housing Repairs
<p>Thank you all for your kindness and understanding this last year it is greatly appreciated. And for all the team do</p> <p>I would like to praise Jamie and Casper from the repairs team who boarded and plastered a new ceiling for me yesterday - they were very polite and have done an amazing job with the ceiling. It was a huge relief to come home from work to find that they had cleared and tidied up after themselves. Thank you very much</p>
Housing Tenancy
<p>Thank You so much for Your message I very appreciate this. I need any reference number to pay rent online or by phone? Sorry for too many questions but for Me this is all new. Thank You so much for Your help and support.</p> <p>Thank you for not getting upset with me, getting old seems that you say what you want to say but mean no harm as I think you are the number 1 Council.</p>
Planning – Forward Planning
<p>I just wanted to drop you a brief note to say thanks very much for coming to XXXXXX XXXXX to think about our application last week.</p> <p>I really appreciated your time and advice, and thank you for also looking at the back the of the property barn as well - that was very helpful even though off remit perhaps!</p> <p>I appreciated you being supportive of the project, and I am happy to provide any clarifications that are needed going forwards.</p>
Recycling
<p>Just wanted to say a huge Thankyou to our recycling chaps. My fob watch must have fallen off my uniform when I put the bins out and when I got home after shift today they'd found it and popped into the empty recycling box! Please pass on my thanks from a tired but very grateful nurse :)</p>

All the waste crews have been working very hard in recent circumstances and are always really helpful. It is very much appreciated

Council Tax Billing

Erin was very kind and helpful this morning when helping me with my council tax and has probably been the most helpful and empathetic person Ive spoken to within the council. I wanted that to be shared with her supervisors so they know she is doing a great job.

Mr XXXXX called about his council tax today and wanted to say how efficiently the council dealt with the matters relating to the death of his partner and how quickly his council tax single discount was applied.

Fly Tipping

Mrs XXXXX calling to say thank you for the prompt collection of the fly tip at XXXXX from XXXXX. She says she reported it yesterday morning but every scrap of it had gone in the afternoon.

Garden Waste

We wish to record our appreciation for the excellent services, Council operatives provide to we customer throughout the year.

An excellent team arrived to day and emptied the old bin for me into the new one.

Homelessness

Ms XXXX wanted to say how grateful she is for all the help she received from Paul and the team, and also Sally Bloomfield and the housing tenancy team and Christine from Welfare. She feels everyone worked together and helped with her situation and referred her to other services and organisations outside of the council.

Ms XXXXX and her son now have their house back and is starting to get furniture and get her life back on track. You've all helped her get through a difficult time.

Housing Benefits

I would like to thank the two members of the Housing Benefit Team who I have dealt with over the past few days. Both of the ladies were kind, patient and very understanding of my situation and offered good support and advice. The advice given to me enabled me to resolve the situation, I appreciated their help so much and I just wanted to say thank you to both of you.

Refuse Collection

Can I please thank you for the excellent way you dealt with the recent bad weather. I appreciated your decision to delay the Friday collection and inform us of that. I am also grateful for the effort to catch up with collection today. Well done!

I just wanted to feedback what a great job the refuse and recycling teams do in Hemyock, in particular the people who service our road.

Irrespective of the weather, they are very professional and courteous, returning receptacles to the correct place, being polite and helpful to the public around them, and leaving the area clean and tidy when they finish. Having lived in different places, I know this isn't always the case. I appreciate that this job can sometimes be cold, wet and smelly, so it's an absolute credit to them that they perform their role so well and professionally.

I know this view is share my many of my neighbours because positive comments are sometimes made on the community Facebook page. Please share our appreciation with them.