

Report for: Scrutiny

Date of Meeting:	25 November 2024
Subject:	Annual Report Compliments, Comments & Complaints
Cabinet Member:	Cllr J Wright, Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement
Responsible Officer:	Lisa Lewis, Corporate Manager for Business Transformation & Customer Engagement
Exempt:	N/A
Wards Affected:	All
Enclosures:	Appendices 1 to 5

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

Annual report on compliments, comments and complaints received as part of our 2 plus million contacts with customers in 23/24.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. To note the record of compliments, comments and complaints**
- 2. To note the reallocation of this annual report to the Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement PDG and Cabinet.**

Section 2 – Report

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 This report covers two time periods. Firstly the financial year 23/24 and then secondly activity around the new Code of Complaints which has been implemented 24/25 to date.
- 1.2 The Council receives contact from customers in a variety of ways for all services. The table below shows the overall number of contacts into Customer Services for each method for 23/24. Included are the previous year's numbers for comparison. This is to provide context for customer

contacts through the contact centre and does not include the many thousand points of service delivery across services to our customers.

Contact Method	01 April 2022 – 31 March 2023	01 April 2023 – 31 March 2024
Number of visitors to the office for enquiries	6,021	5,693
Telephone Payments (including automated) *	70,756	101,962
Calls to call centre	91,867	81,413
Digital Payments	110,745	134,374
Online- forms submitted	64,816	82,532

- 1.3 This report provides a summary of the number of complaints, compliments and comments received for each service for 23/24 (see **Appendix 1**).
- 1.4 An official complaint is recorded when a customer expresses dissatisfaction with a service they have received. In some instances customers use the complaints system prior to requesting a service. These requests are triaged accordingly where we are aware and re-logged as service requests.
- 1.5 Compliments, comments and complaints are recorded on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system 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.
- 1.6 Members are provided with performance statistics for complaints via the quarterly PDG Performance Management reports and as part of the Audit cycle.
- 1.7 Housing complaints are now reported separately via the Homes PDG. Any questions regarding housing should be put to the relevant service or committee. Figures are included here only as a corporate oversight across all services.

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 a designated officer and Level 2 Complaints are investigated by more senior officers, usually Operational or Corporate Managers. This is dependent upon the seriousness or nature of the complaint.
- 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 1.6. NB. The acknowledgement target has been revised to 5 days within the new Code of Complaints and policy which came into effect summer 2024.

3.0 What does the 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/member communications.
- 3.3 What are the numbers telling us? We actively encourage feedback from customers and saw a 5% overall increase in customers telling us how we are doing for the period.
- 3.4 The contextual environment in which we are working is important. Staffing issues such as retention and staff savings targets, which Members are aware of, have affected services across the organisation and means there is a continuing need to review and revise how we provide some services which can lead to gaps between our ability to deliver and customer expectations.
- 3.5 However, despite the challenges that MDDC faced with vacancy management activities during 23/24 our service levels have seen a limited impact with a small increase of 6% complaints logged.

Some services have shown a marked improvement however.

Service	Percentage Decrease from 22/23
Council Tax Recovery	64%
Customer Services	47%
Democracy & Members	94%
Homelessness	52%

No services during the 23/24 period showed a significant or material increase in complaints which would indicate areas for concern.

4.0 Referrals to the Ombudsman Complaints Service 23/24

- 4.1 Nine complaints were made to the ombudsman by residents. Half were closed after the initial enquiry not requiring further investigation. And all but one other referred back for local resolution or signposted back to us to address under our complaints process.

- 4.2 Only one of the Ombudsman cases was upheld. This matches the Ombudsman outturn for 22/23 and is a testament to staff robustly applying processes and procedures in the delivery of services. A summary of complaints to the Ombudsman 23/24 (the latest available) is provided at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.3 The Local Government Ombudsman Annual review letter is provided at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.4 For comparison, a table of neighbouring authorities and their ombudsman cases has been provided at **Appendix 4**.
- 5.0 **The Future for Customer Feedback at MDCC.**
- 4.5 The authority is currently migrating the customer feedback process to the new CRM self-serve portal which went live in August 2024. As part of that migration and the requirement to ensure more oversight of performance around complaints, additional monitoring is being implemented.
- 4.6 As part of the migration process we have revisited training with responding officers and reviewing performance reporting to improve escalation of complaint responses and adequately monitor actions and learning as outcomes of customer feedback.
- 4.7 The new Code of Complaints Policy was progressed successfully through committee during the summer of 2024 and the new system went live on 1 Aug 2024 with additional monitoring in place.
- 4.8 As part of the new code, a Senior Responsible Officer and a Member Responsible for complaints were identified. Those being the Head of Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement and the Cabinet member for Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement respectively.
- 4.9 At the time of writing the report we do not have a full quarter's data on the new system, but we are able to provide a snapshot of performance against the new code at Appendix 5.
- 4.10 The figures show that we appear to be under-performing against the internal acknowledgement target at 37% (target 85%). The Digital Services team have established that some of this is due to officers providing a final response before the acknowledgement target date and that field therefore not being completed. The actual figures are nearer to 44%. Further training will be provided to officers and the monitoring reports reconfigured to reflect the anomaly. Some apparent service degradation was expected as we embedded a new process and recording system. This is not currently a cause for major concern.

- 4.11 Digital Services has a small number of technical issues which it continues to work on during this bedding in period of the system. Additional training is being offered to staff and the Complaints Policy is now mandatory training for staff to ensure that any officer can/will log a complaint on behalf of a customer should their assistance be needed to do so.
- 4.12 Resolution target for final responses has a corporate target of 85% completion within time. It is pleasing to see that this is currently at 100%. The data relates to only the first two months of the new code/system and is at a period within the year which is traditionally quieter for complaints so we expect to see performance fluctuate throughout the rest of the year according to season.

5.0 Future Governance and Oversight

- 5.1 Within the new code there is an expectation that there will be increased oversight of complaints. The new role of Member Responsible sitting with the Cabinet member for Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement will now receive quarterly reports on complaints performance from the Head of Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement.
- 5.2 Additionally, qualitative analysis of performance reporting and improvement activities needs to be defined and recorded. This work is about to commence.
- 5.3 It is suggested, as per the report recommendation, that with the creation of the PDG for Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement that this annual report sits with PDG/Cabinet from 24/25 onwards.

Financial Implications: None

Legal Implications: None

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

Impact on Climate Change: None

Equalities 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. Reports of discrimination logged with complaints is monitored and reported to the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion group.

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.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151
Date: 12 November 2024

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leiburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 12 November 2024

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director
Date: 12 November 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 29 October 2024

Cabinet member notified: yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Lisa Lewis, Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement
Email: llewis@middevon.gov.uk
Telephone: 01884 234981

Background papers:

Appendix 1 – Summary and Totals of Feedback

Appendix 2 – Summary of Complaints to Ombudsman

Appendix 3 – Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2022-23

Appendix 4 – Ombudsman Local Authority Benchmarking

Appendix 5 – Sample of Compliments