

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	24 October 2023
Subject:	Have Your Say (4Cs) Annual Report
Report of:	Head of Service: Audit and Governance / Communications and Customer Experience Manager
Head of Service/Director:	Director: Corporate Resources / Associate Director: Transformation
Lead Member:	Lead Member Customer Focus / Lead Member Corporate Governance
Number of Appendices:	One

Executive Summary:

This report provides a summary of Compliments, Comments, Concerns and Complaints (4Cs) received during 2022/23. These four Cs make up our 'Have Your Say' approach, which incorporates our formal complaints process. An annual report with further analysis is attached at Appendix 1 and includes the annual letter received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) on complaints it has determined. The 4Cs framework was introduced in May 2021 using our digital platform, Liberty Create. The new framework widened the options available for our customers to feedback to us, meaning we get a better understanding of any performance trends or areas of concern. Building it on our digital platform also means customers can get in touch with us about any issue they wish to at a time that suits them.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER the annual report on the Council's comments, concerns, complaints and compliments to provide assurance that complaints are managed effectively.

Financial Implications:

None directly from this report but, under the Formal Complaints Policy, on some occasions remedies include ex-gratia payments to the complainant.

Legal Implications:

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has power to investigate complaints of maladministration against the Council (subject to certain exceptions) and may make recommendations as to how such complaints may be resolved. Where considered appropriate the Ombudsman has the power to issue a formal report on any particular case for consideration by the Council. Although not legally bound to accept any recommendations from the Ombudsman, it is important that the Council takes careful note of them and learns from any recommendations that it makes.

Environmental and Sustainability Implications:

None directly.

Resource Implications (including impact on equalities):

There is a manpower resource to investigate any complaints that are received.

Safeguarding Implications:

None.

Impact on the Customer:

None directly from this report but the impact of poor customer service leading to formal complaints being raised can lead to unnecessary delays, stressful situations for the customer, and reputational damage to the Council.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The 'Have Your Say' approach was approved at Executive Committee in March 2021. The approach incorporates the Formal Complaints Policy in the four 'Cs': Compliments, Comments, Concerns and Complaints.
- 1.2 The framework is built on our digital platform, Liberty Create, to help ensure feedback from customers is responded to appropriately and consistently and that the process is simple as possible for the customer.
- 1.3 The complaints element of the 4Cs framework is monitored by a designated officer within the Corporate Services team, and a quarterly analysis is presented at Leadership Team and annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The reporting and monitoring system has helped ensure that complaints are handled in a consistent way and their progress can be closely monitored so that responses are made in a timely manner. Complaints may be reported onwards to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) by the complainant once the complaint has been dealt with through the Council's complaints framework.

2.0 HAVE YOUR SAY APPROACH - THE FOUR Cs

- 2.1 Whilst there is not a statutory requirement for us to report the details contained within Appendix 1, we recognise the importance of ensuring our customers feel they will be:
- Listened to.
 - Treated honestly, fairly, and politely.
 - Given help and advice as quickly as we can.
 - Individual needs and right to privacy will be respected.
 - Kept informed about what is happening.

This annual report provides an overview of how we are performing in respect of customers' feedback to us and helps to inform our Customer Care Standards and our customer first Council Plan (2020- 2024) priority.

3.0 COMPLIMENTS

3.1 A compliment is defined as 'a polite expression of praise or admiration for a service received'. It could be about a person, a team, a service, a single event, or a chain of circumstances that made the experience a positive one.

3.2 Overall, the number of compliments received in 2022/23 (73) remain on par with 2021/22 figure (75). When compared to 2020/21 (43) there was an increase of 52% in the number of compliments received.

4.0 COMMENTS

4.1 We consider a comment to be 'a verbal or written remark expressing an opinion or reaction about a standard of service, policy or decision made by Tewkesbury Borough Council.'

4.2 Comments received in 2022/23 have increased by 42% with a total of 483 comments received compared to 2021/22 figure of 340 comments. Examples of comments received varied from queries relating to change of circumstances for council tax accounts, benefit queries, planning application queries, and waste and recycling queries. Under section two of the report, you will find a breakdown of comments received by service area.

5.0 CONCERNS

5.1 We let our residents know that we consider a concern to be 'something that is bothering the customer, but they don't feel they need to go through our more formal complaints procedure route to reach a resolution'. An example of a common concern is if a bin has been missed on more than one occasion.

5.2 Prior to the 4Cs framework being introduced, our customers had little choice online to raise issues with us other than submitting a formal complaint. Introducing the concerns element to our 4Cs means that customer can raise issues with us that are frustrating them but that do not need to go down the formal complaints route where a statutory response time is 20 working days. Instead, the expectation is that concerns are responded to within five working days.

5.3 Details of the number of concerns received by service area and examples of concerns can be found under section three of Appendix 1.

6.0 COMPLAINTS

6.1 Unlike compliments, comments and concerns, there is a statutory process in place for formal complaints. Our Formal Complaints Policy sets out what customers can expect from the two-stage process, including how we receive, manage, and respond to complaints. Section four of the attached annual report provides the following breakdown in relation to complaints received during 2022/23:

- the number of complaints received for both stage one and stage two
- four-year trend of complaints
- service areas the complaints related too and how many were justified,
- the nature of the complaint issues
- how many were answered within the 20-working day timescale across a four-year period
- how we are performing compared to other local authorities

6.2 If complainants remain dissatisfied after the second stage of our formal complaints procedure, they can escalate their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). On an annual basis every Council receives an Annual Review Letter from the LGSCO, which sets out the number of complaints it has received in the year and the decisions made. These decisions are published on its website at <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/tewkesbury-borough-council/statistics> but can also be found attached to the annual report.

7.0 LESSONS LEARNT

7.1 We consider a lesson learnt to be when ‘knowledge or understanding is gained by an experience’. This could be as a direct result from a positive or negative experience. When it’s positive, we will look to see if it can be applied elsewhere, and when it’s negative, we want to ensure that the issue is not repeated. Key learning points identified following formal complaints can be found within section 6 of the annual report.

8.0 LOOKING AHEAD

8.1 As a Council, we agree that it is important we place importance on the information we gain from complaints, and we continually look to ensure our complaints process is robust.

8.2 The LGSCO is conducting a consultation on a proposed complaints code jointly with the Housing Ombudsman. The code could potentially bring several changes which will require our current formal complaints procedure and policy to change. Following the outcome of this, the Audit and Governance team will carry out a review of the complaints policy and process to ensure it is relevant and compliant with the code.

8.3 In addition, further training sessions will take place in the upcoming year, especially for the appropriate officers who undertake complaint investigations.

8.4 Aligned to the Business Transformation team’s iterative approach to service rollout, a review will be carried on the way in which customers and officers are recording comments and concerns to identify any improvements.

9.0 CONSULTATION

9.1 None.

10.0 ASSOCIATED RISKS

10.1 If complaints are not handled in accordance with the approved framework and the Council does not learn from the complaints received there is a potential reputational risk to the Council.

11.0 MONITORING

11.1 The Council will continue to report on a quarterly basis to the Leadership Team where necessary providing a summary report for each quarter. Formal complaints response times are monitored through a key performance indicator in the Council Plan performance tracker, which is reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis.

12.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES/COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- 12.1** Corporate Formal Complaints Policy
Customer Care Strategy
Council Plan 2020-2024

Background Papers: None

Contact Officer: Director: Corporate Resources
01684 272002 Graeme.simpson@teWKesbury.gov.uk

Appendices: Appendix 1 - 'Have your Say' 4Cs annual report 2022/2023.