

Report for: Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 28/11/16

Title: Complaints Information and Analysis for the Period 2015/16

Report authorised by : Mark Rudd, Assistant Director, Shared Services

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Ward(s) affected: N/A

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** N/A

1. Describe the Issue under Consideration

- 1.1 An annual review of the Feedback process and performance is conducted each year and shared with the Statutory Officer Group (**appendix 1**). In addition to this, interest has been raised in the Feedback process within Haringey by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 It was agreed to have an agenda item at the November Committee to review processes and performance and discuss the contribution Scrutiny can make to ensure compliance, and to identify improvements to the current ways of working.
- 1.3 This report gives an overview of the Feedback process, highlights some key points from the annual ombudsman report and recommends some next step.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to note the report.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 We operate a two stage internal complaints process. A Member Enquiry (ME) is considered as the equivalent of a stage 1 complaint made directly by a customer. Both of these have a target response time of 95% within 10 working days.
- 3.2 If the customer is unhappy with the response at Stage 1 (either to a complaint or a Members Enquiry) we will undertake an Independent Review, otherwise known as a Stage 2 complaint, the response target for this is 80% in 25 working days.
- 3.3 Stage 1 complaints and Member Enquiries are logged by Customer Services and responded to by relevant Service Areas. Stage 2 Independent Reviews for Haringey and for Homes for Haringey are undertaken by the Feedback and Information Governance Team, based in the Shared Service Centre.

Volumes and Performance

3.4 In 2015/16 we closed 1,818 Stage 1 complaints and responded to 83% on time. We closed 2665 MEs and responded to 88% on time. We conducted 446 Independent Reviews, responding to 85% on time.

3.5 The top reasons for both Complaints and MEs were:

- Service was of a poor standard
- Service was delayed or inadequate
- The decision made was incorrect
- Employee behaviour
- Inadequate communication

Complaints

3.6 The following table shows the top 5 Service Areas for volume of complaints received and a comparison with data from 2014/15. Veolia continues to be the highest complained about area.

Service Area	Volume of Complaints 2014/15	Volume of Complaints 2015/16
Veolia	278	↑ 330
Customer Services	236	↓ 233
SSC - Revenues	259	↓ 213
SSC - Benefits	227	↓ 209
Parking Infrastructure	96	↑ 144

3.7 54% of Corporate Stage 1 complaints were upheld or partly upheld. This shows that in over half of all cases, the investigating officer agreed with the complainant that the Council had done something wrong.

Member Enquiries

3.8 The following table shows the top 5 Service Areas for volume of MEs received and a comparison with data from 2014/15.

3.9 The Service Area which received the highest volume of MEs was “Sustainable Transport” which includes Highways issues such as street lighting, road safety, traffic calming schemes, highways defects and maintenance including potholes and resurfacing projects.

Service Area	Volume of Member Enquiries 2014/15	Volume of Member Enquiries 2015/16
Sustainable Transport	539	↓324
Housing Support & Options	339	↓ 317
Veolia	207	↑223
Parking Infrastructure	250	↓185
Neighbourhood Action Team (including Anti-Social Behaviour	384	↓ 178

Team)		
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3.10 We received 2,665 MEs in 2015/16, a decrease from 2014/15 when we received 3,501.

Independent Reviews

3.11 The following table shows the top 5 Service Areas for volume of Independent Reviews received and a comparison with data from 2014/15.

Service Area	Volume of Independent Reviews 2014/15	Volume of Independent Reviews 2015/16
Neighbourhood Action Team (includes Veolia)	60	↑67
Revenues	31	↑36
Traffic Management	38	↓32
Housing Support & Options	14	↑28
Benefits	32	↓24

3.12 36% of Independent Reviews in 15/16 were upheld or partly upheld.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Annual Report

3.13 The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) received a total of 214 referral items relating to Haringey and determined 99 of them should be treated as cases that needed investigating, a decrease of 11% from 2014/15. Of these complaints 55 were closed after further investigation and 32% were upheld against our internal target of 30%.

3.14 The figures published by the LGO vary slightly from our records, the discrepancy is explained below:

Decision	LGO figures	Our figures	Comment on discrepancy
Closed after initial enquiries	55	52	3 cases appear on the LGO figures which we were advised would be rescinded – they all relate to 1 complaint.
Not upheld	14	15	We have 1 case which is correctly logged on our system but is missing from the LGO data
Upheld	32	32	
Total	101	99	

3.15 The following table breaks down the outcome of all 99 cases we have recorded, 27% of cases were upheld with the category of maladministration and injustice.

Ombudsman Decision	Number Received	% of Total
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Closed after initial enquiry - out of jurisdiction / no further action	52	53%
Upheld - Maladministration & Injustice	27	27%
Not upheld - No Maladministration	11	11%
Upheld - Maladministration, No Injustice	5	5%
Not upheld – no further action	4	4%

- 3.16 Of the 27 cases where maladministration and injustice were found (the most serious category), 10 related to Community Housing (Housing Demand) and 7 for Environmental Services and Community Safety.
- 3.17 The recommendations coming from the LGO as a result of their investigations include suggesting compensation amounts, requesting us to action a service (i.e. review a decision made or undertake further assessment of a case) and apologising to the customer.
- 3.18 Haringey will pay compensation where appropriate during the internal complaints process, however noting the budget constraints this is not a default position. Although there are suggested amounts from the LGO, it will depend on the severity of the issue and the inconvenience or distress caused. Prior to paying compensation we check that there are no arrears on Council Tax or Rent Accounts, if there is then the compensation is paid into these accounts rather than to the customer directly. In 2015/16 total of £11k was awarded in compensation with the majority (£7k) relating to housing issues.
- 3.19 The LGO issue an Annual Letter to each Local Authority and an aggregated review of Local Government Complaints. The Review publishes statistics for all local authorities including information on cases that are logged but not subject to full investigation, for example where the customer was referred back to the authority or asked for additional information before their case could be looked at.
- 3.20 Haringey had a total of 214 items considered by the LGO of which 32 (15%) were found to be upheld following investigation.

Authority	Total Considered	Total Upheld	Upheld %
Enfield	159	25	16%
Haringey	214	32	15%
Waltham Forest	150	18	12%
Hackney	118	12	10%
Islington	99	10	10%
Camden	139	12	9%
Barnet	213	18	8%

The Role of Councillors

- 3.21 As part of its report, the LGO makes recommendations for consideration by Councillors in relation to the way the Authority manages feedback.

3.22 These are shown below with an update on the current way of working.

Item to Consider	Response
How do you actively welcome feedback from Customers on the way complaints are managed?	We welcome feedback on our services and actively promote the complaints / ME process. As part of the response template we include a section on how customers can feedback if they are still unhappy with the way their issue has been dealt with.
How do you report outcomes and lessons learned from complaints internally and externally?	There are internal reports shared between Services however we could review this further and develop something that could be shared to a wider audience.
How do you ensure commissioned partners implement an effective complaints handling service?	This is part of all contracts / partnership agreements and should be an agenda item at Client Management meetings. Noting the high volume of items relating to Veolia there are plans to do some targeted work with this area in particular.
How do we signpost our complaints procedure?	This is clear on our website and staff are briefed on how to assist customers if they receive queries directly.

Next Steps

- 3.23 The Feedback and Information Governance Team has recently moved into the Shared Service Centre (SSC). As part of this we will be looking at reviewing existing processes and policies and developing an action plan for the Council to improve performance and share learning.
- 3.24 It is recognised that the overall volume of complaints received at all stages is high and work needs to be undertaken to understand the demand better and pre-empt requests where possible to focus on preventing complaints and subsequent escalations. We need to look at action taken at the first point of contact to ensure that is as good as it can be and therefore reduce the volume going to Independent Review and the Ombudsman.
- 3.25 We acknowledge that Veolia receive the highest number of complaints. We are planning to improve the way we work with this area to develop shared learning and improve responses.
- 3.26 We will review the way we capture data relating to Feedback to make performance and lessons learnt reports more meaningful for service areas. As part of this we will look to have an Annual Report timetabled each year which will include data on lessons learnt and trend analysis.
- 3.27 We will continue to maximise the relationship between the Ombudsman and Haringey. The Ombudsman has introduced an “Assistant Ombudsman” responsible

for relationship management, we are now looking at how we can hold partnership meetings with them where performance and learning can be shared.

- 3.28 The Housing Ombudsman has launched a role focused on development and learning. We have been in contact with them and they are coming into conduct some focused training around engaging with Landlords for both Haringey and HFH.
- 3.29 Haringey is already part of a London Wide Local Authority partnership group which looks at complaints (both statutory and non-statutory) and FOIs. It meets quarterly and shares best practice and future plans. We will look to see if this area of learning can be strengthened and performance data shared for benchmarking processes.
- 3.30 Regular half day training courses are already run by the team. These will be more proactively advertised and will be part of a wider campaign to raise awareness across the Council so staff are aware of their responsibilities and role in managing the organisation's reputation.
- 3.31 We need to consider how we can support Members and their relationship with their constituents so that queries and issues are raised and dealt with in the most appropriate way. As part of this we will look at how we determine the differences between service requests and member enquiries.

4. Contribution to Strategic Outcomes

- 4.1 This report is a general update on performance and trends, it is not specific to one Strategic Outcome but touches on all of them as it relates to providing an effective service to our residents.

5. Statutory Officer Comments

- 5.1 This report is a general update on performance, Strategic Officers for Finance, Procurement, Legal and Equalities have been informed and note the contents.

6. Use of Appendices

- Appendix One: Statutory Officer Group Report

7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 7.1 N/A – this report is a general update on performance