

Report of the Head of Legal Services

Annual Compliments, Complaints, Concerns and Requests for Information 2021/22

Purpose of report

1. To update the Committee with details of compliments, complaints, concerns and requests for information made by the public to the Service over the past 12 months.
-

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee notes that during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022:

- i) a total of 270 requests for information containing 830 queries about the Service were received. No requests were passed to the Information Commissioners Office for review.***
- ii) a total of 40 compliments were received from the public;***
- iii) 28 complaints about Service activities were made; and***
- iv) 15 complaints or concerns were received about activities carried out by other organisations or individuals;***
- v) One of the complainants appealed the response provided and none were passed to the Local Government Ombudsman for investigation.***

Introduction and Background

2. It is important that the Authority has good corporate governance arrangements to ensure services are run in an open and accountable manner. The role of the Committee includes the monitoring and review of the Authority's corporate governance arrangements, which includes responsibility to consider the process and review of compliments, complaints, concerns and information requests made by the public about the Service.

Complaints and Concerns Received 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

(Last year's figures are shown in brackets for comparison)

3. The Service received a total of 43 (53) complaints and concerns from the public, with 28 (40) being concerned with Service activities and 15 (13) concerning

activities carried out by other organisations or individuals. 7 (6) of the complaints about the Service were upheld, a summary is set out below.

Summary of complaints upheld

| Complaint Category | Number of complaints upheld | Outcome |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Driving Standards | 1 | Reassurance and investigation |
| Staff Behaviour | 1 | Addressed with member of staff |
| Damage to Property | 1 | Remedial action and apology |
| Poor Response / Service | 1 | Apology and review of procedures confirmed |
| Other | 3 | Remedial action and apology Apology and matter addressed with staff |

4. One of the complainants appealed to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer regarding dissatisfaction with the response provided by the Service. The appeal was not upheld by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.
5. It should be noted that the complaints and concerns received regarding the responsibilities of other organisations or individuals included concerns over poor fire safety at business and residential premises and the potential lack of access to properties in an emergency. Where possible these type of concerns are directed straight to Prevention and Protection.
6. All complaints and concerns were acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt and all but one received a response within 10 working days.

Compliments Received 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

(Last year's figures are shown in brackets for comparison)

7. The Service received 40 (50) compliments during this period and it should be noted that the majority came following Service attendance at a fire or rescue, quite a few of which involved animals and conducting Safe and Well Checks. There were a number of compliments following Service attendance at an event or making a visit with the remainder concerning Service involvement at RTCs.

Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Requests (SAR) Received 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

(Last year's figures are shown in brackets for comparison)

8. The Service received 270 (276) requests for information including 4 (14) SARs during this period. Themes included requests for information on fires, ICT, HR and fleet information. From 1 April 2020 we have also recorded the number of queries within each FOI request, for example one email received under FOI on a particular topic could contain a list of queries or sub-requests about a variety

of related issues that need to be dealt with individually. In total we have received 830 queries within the 270 FOI requests during 2021-2022.

9. The seemingly small number of SARs received this year does not truly reflect the workload associated with them. SARs are often incredibly time consuming because of their complex nature and because they often involve processing large amounts of data that must be collated, reviewed and disclosed accurately within statutory timeframes. SARs will usually involve numerous officers from departments across the whole Service requiring coordination and accurate scrutiny of different systems.

Conclusion/Summary

10. The role of the Audit and Standards Committee includes the monitoring and review of the Authority's corporate governance arrangements. This includes responsibility for considering the process with regards to compliments, complaints and concerns made by the public. This process was last reviewed in December 2018 and was considered to be robust and fit for purpose. There have been no significant issues that have arisen since this date and it has not been necessary to make any changes in Service delivery. The FOI and SAR processes are continually monitored for improvement opportunities.
11. Your officers are satisfied that there are no significant levels of recurring themes or trends in the concerns and complaints being reported to give any cause for concern.

Corporate Considerations

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)</p> | <p>The complaints, concerns and compliments process uses existing resources.</p> <p>The FOI and SAR process uses existing resources.</p> |
| <p>Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).</p> | <p>The complaints, concerns and compliments process links to the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance.</p> <p>The FOIA and SAR process links to statutory and legislative frameworks. (GDPR and DPA 2018 FOIA 2000)</p> |
| <p>Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).</p> | <p>The Audit & Standards Committee receive an annual report to provide assurance to Members that the processes are effective. Legal Services Officers monitor for any emerging trends in reported concerns and complaints on a monthly basis.</p> |

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter) | N/A – no policy change is recommended |
| Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?) | N/A – no policy change is recommended |

Supporting Information

Background papers:

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority Annual Governance Statement and Code of Corporate Governance