

Report of the Head of Legal Services

Annual Compliments, Complaints, Concerns and Requests for Information 2020/21

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.
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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee notes that during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021:

- i) a total of 276 requests for information containing 1,224 queries about the Service were received;***
- ii) a total of 50 compliments were received from the public;***
- iii) 40 complaints about Service activities were made; and***
- iv) 13 complaints or concerns were received about activities carried out by other organisations or individuals;***
- v) four of the complainants appealed the response provided and one was 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 and concerns made by the public about the Service.

Complaints and Concerns Received 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

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

3. The Service received a total of 53 (53) complaints and concerns from the public, with 40 (40) being concerned with Service activities and 13 (13) concerning activities carried out by other organisations or individuals. 6 (13) 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	2	Staff Reminders and Apology
Staff Behaviour	2	Staff Education Apology Passed to line manager
Use of facilities	2	Remedial Action and Apology

4. Four of the complainants appealed to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer regarding dissatisfaction with the response provided by the Service and one complaint was subsequently passed to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint further as they found insufficient evidence of fault by the Service. Two appeals are still in progress. The other 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 Community Risk.
6. All complaints and concerns were acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt and all received a response within 10 working days.

Compliments Received 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

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

7. The Service received 50 (100) compliments during this period and it should be noted that the majority came following Service attendance at a fire or flooding incident or conducting a Safe and Well Check. There were a number of compliments following Service attendance at an event or making a visit with the remainder noting miscellaneous compliments from animal rescues to missing children.

Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Requests (SAR) Received 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

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

8. The Service received 276 (325) requests for information including 14 (15) subject access requests 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 1,224 queries within the 276 FOI requests during the last year.

Conclusion/Summary

9. 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; The new categorisation system that was introduced last year has helped to better support data tracking and monitoring trends.

10. 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)</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>
<p>Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)</p>	<p>N/A – no policy change is recommended</p>
<p>Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)</p>	<p>N/A – no policy change is recommended</p>

Supporting Information

Background papers:

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