

## **Report of the Head of Legal Services**

### **Annual Compliments, Complaints, Concerns and Requests for Information 2022/23**

#### **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 2022 to 31 March 2023:***

- i) a total of 297 requests for information containing 774 queries about the Service were received. No requests were passed to the Information Commissioners Office for review.***
- ii) a total of 60 compliments were received from the public;***
- iii) 39 complaints or concerns about Service activities were made; and***
- iv) 26 complaints or concerns were received about activities carried out by other organisations or individuals;***
- v) 4 of the complainants appealed the response provided but none were passed to the Local Government Ombudsman for further investigation***
- vi) the Service has recently implemented an external, confidential reporting line for complaints and concerns which will be included in future reports.***

#### **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 2022 to 31 March 2023

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

- The Service received a total of 65 (43) complaints and concerns from the public, with 39 (28) being concerned with Service activities and 26 (15) concerning activities carried out by other organisations or individuals. 14 (7) 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	3	Apology and investigation
Staff Behaviour	1	Addressed with member of staff, revisited procedures
Damage to Property	2	Remedial action and apology Insurance details provided
Poor Response / Service	5	Apology and review of procedures confirmed
Other	2	Remedial action and apology Apology and matter addressed with staff
Fire Safety Inspection	1	Remedial action and apology

- Four of the complainants appealed to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer regarding dissatisfaction with the response provided by the Service. The appeals were not upheld by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.
- 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.
- 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 2022 to 31 March 2023

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

- The Service received 60 (40) compliments during this period and it should be noted that the majority came following Service attendance at a fire or rescue, 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 2022 to 31 March 2023**

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

8. The Service received 297 (270) requests for information including 14 (4) 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 774 queries within the 297 FOI/SAR requests during 2022-2023.
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.

### **Independent Reporting Line**

10. The Service has recently implemented an independent, confidential reporting line that can be used by staff to report complaints or concerns about the organisation [www.say-so.co.uk](http://www.say-so.co.uk). Your officers intend that in future, when reporting the annual review of complaints and concerns received, we will also look to include details of the number of concerns that have been raised via this new route.

### **Conclusion/Summary**

11. 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.
12. Your officers are satisfied that there are no significant levels of recurring themes or trends in complaints being reported to give any cause for concern.

## Corporate Considerations

<p><b>Resource Implications</b> (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><b>Strategic Policy Links &amp; Core Code of Ethics</b> (Identify how proposals link with current priorities &amp; policy framework and align to the Core Code of Ethics)</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><b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).</p>	<p>The Audit &amp; 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><b>Consultation</b> (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><b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)</p>	<p>N/A – no policy change is recommended</p>
<p><b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b> (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling)</p>	<p>N/A</p>

## Supporting Information

Background papers:

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