



Corporate Overview Group

Tuesday, 7 November 2023

Annual Customer Feedback Report 2022/23

Report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1. This report summarises the customer feedback received during 2022/23 and provides a comparison to previous performance. Key points include the following:

- 50 complaints were received by the Council at Stage 1 of its complaints process – this is a slight decrease compared with last year, and roughly in line with the three years before that.
- The percentage of complaints escalated past Stage 1, 36%, has increased by over 50% compared with 2021/22.
- Consistency in handling complaints has stayed at a high level, as has the number of complaints that are responded to within target time – 46 out of 50 or 92% (although this percentage is down slightly compared with 98.2% achieved in 2021/22).
- Analysis of the 50 complaints received in 2022/23 showed that 66.0% were unjustified – a similar figure to the previous year.
- The Council received 177 compliments about its services in 2022/23 – 50 more than the previous year
- Overall, given the range of services, the amount of customer contact across the Borough and increasing demand for services, this is a very positive report.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that this report is scrutinised and, subject to any comment, is accepted as a true record of customer feedback in 2022/23.

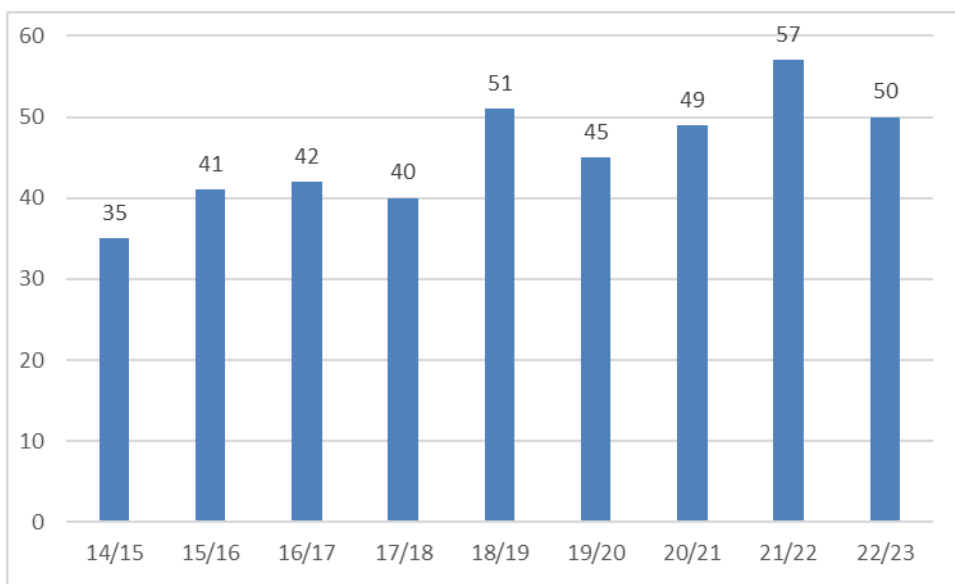
3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 Officers work hard to investigate complaints quickly and thoroughly. Learning points are identified and fed back at team meetings, and this year have led to customer engagement events to better understand the issues. Where the interpretation of policy is at the root of the problem, this is considered, and changes made where necessary.

4. Supporting Evidence

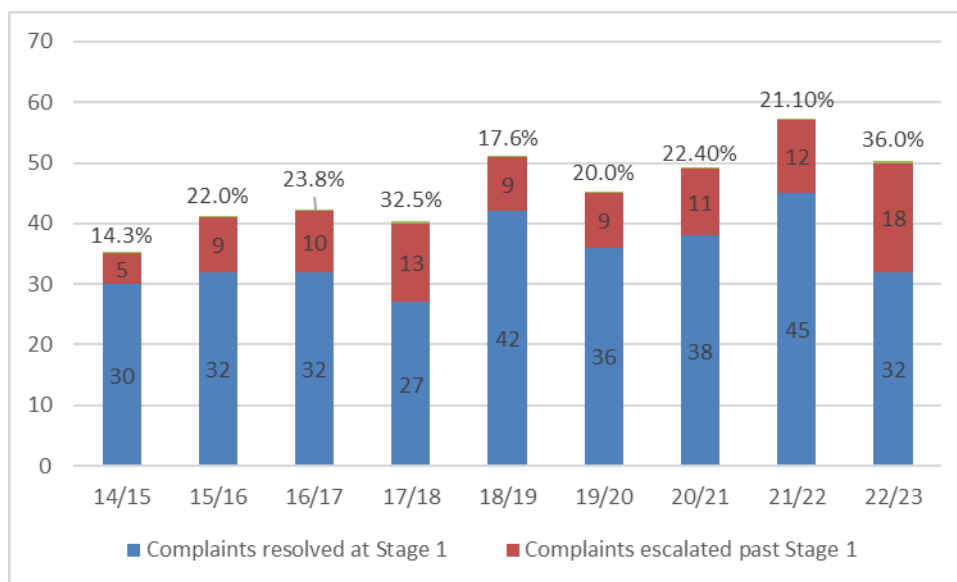
4.1. Total Complaints

The number of complaints received by the Council in 2022/23 was 50. This is seven fewer than last year and reverses the slight upward trend of the last few years, as shown on the graph below. There were also four complaints against Nottinghamshire County Council, not included in the total above.



Total Complaints Year by Year

4.2. Escalation of Complaints



Percentage of complaints escalated past Stage 1

The standard of response at Stage 1 remains high and, more often than not, the complaint is concluded at this stage. However, 18 out of 50 complaints were escalated to Stage 2, the subjects being:

- Planning application / decision / communications / enforcement (nine)
- Council Tax (four)

- Environmental Health enforcement
- Housing allocation
- Benefits
- High hedge dispute
- Environmental Health damage / loss of property.

The percentage of escalations past Stage 1 in 2022/23 is 36.0% (18 out of 50) – considerably higher than last year (21.1% or 12 out of 57).

4.3 Complaints handling – Timeliness and Quality of Response

46 out of 50 complaints in 2022/23 were answered within target time. There were a few cases where there were unavoidable delays in responding to complaints, but in these instances, the complainants were informed. Figures for each service area are shown in the table below. It is felt that complaints were well-handled in all cases except two – both were Planning complaints where deadlines had been missed. Due to a high turnover of staff and changes in responsibilities, a training need relating to complaints handling was identified and a training session was delivered in early 2023. This has been effective in addressing the issue.

Service Area	Total Complaints	In Target Time (10 working days)	%
Development and Economic Growth	22	18	81.8
Neighbourhoods	14	14	100.0
Finance and Corporate Services	14	14	100.0
Chief Exec's Department	0	0	-
Total	50	46	92.0

4.4 Justified Complaints

A complaint is adjudged to be justified if an individual or service area has done something wrong to cause the complaint, or if the level of service does not come up to the standard expected.

If learning points arise as a result of someone complaining about a particular service area, they are raised at sectional team meetings as part of on-going training for staff.

17 out of 50 (34.0%) complaints were judged to have been justified. This is slightly higher than last year, when 17 out of 57 (29.8%) were felt to have been justified.

4.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Statistics

Occasionally, complainants escalate their complaints to the LGO. This is an option when the Council's process has been exhausted and the customer still does not consider that they have achieved a satisfactory outcome.

During 2022/23, the LGO received seven complaints and/or enquiries about services offered by Rushcliffe Borough Council:

- two were about Planning and Development
- two were about Benefits and Tax
- one was about Environmental Services
- one was about Highways and Transport
- one was about Housing.

The LGO issued decisions on ten complaints, and they were as follows: one was upheld (Planning); one was not upheld (Environmental Services); two were referred back for local resolution (one about Planning and one about Benefits and Tax); six were closed after initial enquiries (three about Planning; one about Housing; one about Benefits and Tax; one about Highways).

The complaint that was upheld concerned the Planning department and related to a calculation error concerning the volume of a house extension in the greenbelt which occurred in 2020. The LGO recommended that the Council provide an apology and £200 financial redress for the distress caused to the complainant and also for their time and trouble. The recommendations also included a change in procedure and retraining and guidance for Planning staff which has been completed.

The LGO data for detailed investigations is shown in the table below, along with a comparison with other neighbouring local authorities.

Local Authority	Total detailed investigations	Upheld	Not upheld
Rushcliffe	2	1	1
Ashfield	5	3	2
Bassetlaw	1	1	0
Broxtowe	2	2	0
Gedling	1	1	0
Mansfield	1	1	0
Newark & Sherwood	0	0	0
Charnwood	7	6	1
N W Leics	4	2	2

Melton	0	0	0
S Kesteven	3	1	2

4.6 Distribution of complaints between service areas

The table in **Appendix 1** gives brief details of the complaints received during the year 2022/23, how they were distributed across the four service areas, whether they were resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2, and whether or not they were felt to be justified.

4.7 Complaints Monitoring

Although we did send out monitoring forms where appropriate, none were returned. Therefore, we did not get a picture of how complainants felt their complaints were handled.

The level of response to the short questionnaire asking ‘how did we do?’ has always been very sporadic, and as such, firm conclusions are difficult to draw. The feeling is that where a problem has been easy to fix, and the customer has got their desired outcome, satisfaction tends to be higher. Where the complaint involves a protracted case, involving services such as benefits or planning, the complaint is as of a result of misinterpretation / misunderstanding of policy, and so satisfaction tends to be much lower.

4.8 Compliments

The number of recorded compliments has increased significantly compared to the previous year. The distribution among service areas is shown in the table below, along with a comparison to last year:

Service Area	Number of Compliments 2022/23	Number of Compliments 2021/22
Finance and Corporate Services	33	32
Neighbourhoods	115	78 (+1 for Streetwise)
Growth and Economic Development	24	12
Chief Exec's Dept	5	4
Total	177	127

5 Risk and Uncertainties

Serious reputational damage could be suffered if the Council fails to respond appropriately to complaints. Training is offered to those investigating and

responding to complaints, and support is given to individuals during the process to ensure a thorough investigation is undertaken and the response to the complainant is clear, complete and customer-focused.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial Implications

Very occasionally compensation may be given where complainants find themselves at a financial loss due to an error made by the Council.

6.2 Legal Implications

Should complainants remain dissatisfied after the Council has concluded its investigation, they can take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

6.3 Equalities Implications

The Council and its officers strive to treat each complaint on its merits.

6.4 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no direct Section 17 implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6.5 Biodiversity Net Gain Implications

There are no biodiversity net gain implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	The successful resolution of complaints supports all of the Council's priorities.
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	
The Environment	

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that this report is scrutinised and, subject to any comment, is accepted as a true record of customer feedback in 2022/23.

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Background papers Available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices (if any):	Appendix 1 – Complaints by Service Area

Appendix 1

Service Area	Number of Complaints	Subject of complaint	Resolved at Stage 1 or 2	Justified?
Growth and Economic Development	22	9 x Planning applications 5 x Delays / lack of communication 2 x Neighbouring businesses 1 x Enforcement policy 1 x High hedge issue 1 x Staff conduct 1 x Data protection issue 1 x House numbering policy 1 x Closure of retail outlet	5 x Stage 2; 4 x Stage 1 1 x Stage 2; 4 x Stage 1 1 x Stage 2; 1 x Stage 1 Stage 2 Stage 2 Stage 2 Stage 1 Stage 1 Stage 1	2 x Yes; 7 x No 5 x Yes 2 x No Yes No No Yes No No
Neighbourhoods	14	6 x Staff / enforcement issues 5 x Housing allocation / bidding issues 1 x Damage / loss of property 1 x Sports pitch booking 1 x Empty Homes issue	1 x Stage 2; 5 x Stage 1 1 x Stage 2; 4 x Stage 1 Stage 2 Stage 1 Stage 1	2 x Yes; 4 x No 5 x No No Yes No
Finance and Corporate Services	14	9 x Council tax issue 2 x Benefits claim issues 2 x Staff issues 1 x Business rates	4 x Stage 2; 5 x Stage 1 1 Stage 2; 1 x Stage 1 2 x Stage 1 Stage 1	4 x Yes; 5 x No 2 x No 2 x No No