

## **COMPLAINTS - MID-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT**

### **Report of the Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This is a progress update of the complaints service following the bringing together of all complaint's functions within the council in April 2021 into one team. The new service is responsible for Statutory Adult Social Care, Statutory Children's Social Care, Corporate Complaints and Schools Complaints all within one central complaints team within Citizen Focus (CSS).
- 1.2 This report covers the progress made in embedding the one team approach during its first 6-month period and the plans for the next 6 months. This report does not contain the full details of types of complaints received, volume of complaints or response rates as these will be presented in the annual complaints report at the end of the financial year. The Q2 CFE PPRR report does however contain the latest figures for the agreed complaints performance indicators.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 A new complaints team was launched in Q1. This was done in order to embed consistency of complaints handling across different directorates and to create additional capacity to both drive organisational improvements at stage 1 as well as handling complaints that had progressed to later stages in the process. (An overview of all complaints processes and stages was provided in the [Complaints Annual Report 2020-21](#))
- 2.3 The reorganisation that created the new team has enabled an increase of 2 FTE roles solely focused on complaints handling. This increase in capacity helps bolster the level of business continuity within the service; colleagues can work across different types of complaints ensuring greater resilience overall at times of leave or significant increases in one type of complaint.
- 2.4 Since April, the focus has been recruitment and the forming of a new team. There were three new recruits (to the council) who have moved into senior complaints officer roles and two internal moves into management roles. Given the level of change within the team this has required a significant amount of training to enable all colleagues to operate across the range of complaints the team handles.
- 2.5 Unfortunately, at the time the team was formed, the council also experienced a significant and unanticipated rise in complaints, with these peaking in the summer months. Whilst the reported complaints performance indicators (PIs) relate to corporate complaints, this increase has also been seen across children's services complaints. As a result, we have seen performance in relation to response times dip during this "bedding in" phase of the new team. However, we are now seeing increasing performance, particularly in relation to response times for stage 2

complaints. A year on year comparison of the numbers of complaints received in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 (until the end of Q2) is provided in Appendix 1.

- 2.6 It should be noted that stage 1 complaints are handled by the service the complaint relates to rather than the complaints team. However, the team have a role in training services to respond to complaints in a timely and accurate fashion. When done well, this in turn can have an impact on the number of complaints that need to be dealt with at later stages.

### **3. HIGHLIGHTS**

- 3.1 A one team approach provides the opportunity for improved business continuity and shared skill sets for all types of complaints. It is expected that the benefits of this will be seen from Q3 following the induction and training of newly appointed colleagues and the bedding in of new ways of working across the team.
- 3.2 Forming a new team and settling in new ways of working was a focus in Q1 and Q2; and to actively seek synergies and efficiencies for a one team approach. During this time, new senior complaints officers have become increasingly familiar with the complexities and scope of their role.
- 3.3 Regular complaints review meetings have been established with the ASC directorate. This engagement is assisting the new team become familiar with the complexities of the service as well as refining the processes to handle these complaints. Since this complaints process was adopted, the backlog of ASC complaints has reduced significantly by the closure of 181 cases from April – September 21.
- 3.4 Digital systems were reviewed in Q1 and as an immediate improvement, the childrens social care system was upgraded to a cloud-based version which enables the team to work from any location.
- 3.5 A management information dashboard to enable better monitoring of complaints has been developed in Q2. Early tests have identified the need for some improvements in data quality and recording in order the dashboard to be rolled out. This is underway, and a communications plan has been developed to ensure that, once available, the dashboard is understood and used across the council to aid the ownership and timely management of complaints.
- 3.6 Improvements have been identified to the data handling process for stage 1 and stage 2 corporate complaints, this includes: - additional data recorded, additional mandatory fields, rationalisation of closure codes and improving the ability to track stage 1 complaints that are escalated to stage 2. The benefits realised from this work will enable dynamic reporting alongside the removal of the manual data validation exercise that is done prior to corporate reporting.
- 3.7 The Netcall telephony system used in the council's contact centre has been adopted by the team, enabling more effective call handling with inbound calls across all complaints; calls are now routed to a group of staff rather than an individual.
- 3.8 The annual report for complaints was reviewed in Q1 and improvements to the content and layout was made. It was agreed with members that the depth of detail in

the annual report was to be supplied annually. Performance data and KPI's continue to be provided as part of the PPRR reporting cycle.

#### **4. CHALLENGES AND HOW THESE ARE BEING ADDRESSED**

- 4.1 During the pandemic, complaints in general saw a dip in demand. However in early 2021/22 the volume of complaints rose sharply to a level that was not anticipated. This sharp rise is in line with other GM councils and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who have also reported a significant rise in complaints related enquires.
- 4.2 Services to Place has seen a sharp rise in stage 2 complaints, particularly relating to Greenspace, Highways, Refuse & Recycling and Planning and the complaints team are working with Services to Place to review the reasons why citizens are unhappy around the issues raised and where fault is identified, recommendations for service improvements have been made.
- 4.3 There was a dip in response times for stage 2 complaints in Q1 and due to the settling in of a new team alongside the unanticipated rise in complaints. Assuming we do not see continued rises in complaints received, the team has a solid footing following its inception with improving response times.
- 4.4 The new complaints team inherited three different case management systems for the range of council complaints; having three different systems for different complaints processes impacts the team's efficiency when working across different processes and requires additional training; options are being explored to streamline processes where possible.
- 4.5 The team was formed in April 2021, when significant restrictions remained in place due to covid. Recruiting and forming a new team during this period required innovative approaches to training colleagues and supporting the ongoing learning of new members of the team, and as a result initial training took longer than it might do under other circumstances.

#### **5. PRIORITIES FOR Q3 AND Q4**

- 5.1 For the remainder of the year, the team's focus is to improve the operational journey. There will be a continued focus on the one team approach, team development and the following will be prioritised:
  - 5.1.1 Review all complaint policies to ensure they reflect the new ways of working.
  - 5.1.2 Council wide complaints engagement and refresher programme for managers who deal with stage 1 complaints; this includes workshops for new managers, plus an intranet site for all things complaints and FAQ's.
  - 5.1.3 Develop a management information dashboard that shows the volume of demand and performance of complaints handled across the council.

5.1.4 Implement a digital improvement plan with the aim to reduce the number of systems used to record complaints information.

5.1.5 Continue the development of staff to support the one team approach.

## **6 RISKS**

6.1 The council is not currently meeting its target for response rates to complaints, particularly in the context of increased complaints this year. This has a reputational risk as well as the risk of additional complaints being generated in relation to the timeliness of complaints responses. The measures outlined above demonstrate what steps are being taken to address this risk.

6.2 The previous model under which single officers had responsibility for dealing with one form of complaint represented a business continuity risk. This has been addressed through the reorganisation by developing a multi-skilled team.

## **7 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

7.1 There are no legal considerations arising from this report.

## **8 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

8.1 There is no human resources impact arising from this report.

## **9 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

9.1 There is no equalities impact arising from this report

## **10 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

10.1 The upgrade to a cloud based complaints management system has enabled colleagues in the complaints team to work from any location, reducing the need to travel into the office for the sole purpose of accessing this system. This will account for a small reduction in the carbon impact of travel on occasions when colleagues would have travelled solely for this purpose

## **11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Corporate, Resource Management and Governance Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the 6-month update report for the newly formed complaints team.

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Complaints Annual Report 2020-21](#) (p135-146)

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Kirsteen Roe - email [kirsteen.roe@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:kirsteen.roe@stockport.gov.uk)

## APPENDIX - COMPLAINTS DEMAND

8.1 The following is a snapshot of the number of complaints received by the council across all complaint streams - For corporate complaints performance data, this is supplied in the PPRR Q2 report.

### 8.2 Corporate complaints received

Number of formal complaints received	19-20 (Q1-Q4)	20-21 (Q1-Q4)	21-22 Q1	21-22 Q2	21-22 (Q1-Q2)	19-20 (Q1-Q2)	20-21 (Q1-Q2)
Corporate Stage 1 complaints	178	132	55	67	122	79	55
Corporate Stage 2 complaints	102	75	34	38	72	49	30
Corporate complaints that escalated S1 to S2			25	35	60		
Corporate complaints that went direct to S2			9	3	12		
Corporate complaints escalated to Ombudsman	26	12	7	6	13		

\* for 21/22 a summary of stage 2 complaints has been added for each quarter.

### 8.3 Adults Social Care complaints

Number of complaints received	19-20 (Q1-Q4)	20-21 (Q1-Q4)	21-22 Q1	21-22 Q2	21-22 (Q1-Q2)
Stage 1	167	85	31	39	70

### 8.4 Children's Social Care complaints

Number of complaints received	19-20 (Q1-Q4)	20-21 (Q1-Q4)	21-22 Q1	21-22 Q2	21-22 (Q1-Q2)
Children's Social Care Complaints	41	36	12	21	33
Complaints that escalated to stage 2	1	1	0	0	0
Complaints that escalated to stage 3	1	-	0	0	0

### 8.5 Statutory Schools' complaints

Number of complaints received	19-20 (Q1-Q4)	20-21 (Q1-Q4)	21-22 Q1	21-22 Q2	21-22 Q1-Q2
Statutory Schools Complaints	35	25	7	9	16
Complaints that escalated to stage 2	6	2	2	2	4
Complaints that escalated to stage 3	0	0	1	0	1

### 8.6 Complaints that were upheld by Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or the Housing Ombudsman for Stockport Homes

Ombudsman complaints upheld	19-20 (Q1-Q4)	20-21 (Q1-Q4)	21-22 Q1	21-22 Q2	21-22 Q1-Q2
Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman	10	6	1	1	2