

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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| TO: | Audit and Governance | | |
| DATE: | Committee - 19 July 21 | AGENDA ITEM: | |
| TITLE: | 2020/21 - Customer Relations Team - Data on Complaints, FOIs, SARs & MP Enquiries for Audit & Governance Committee | | |
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides data relating to complaints received by the Council and Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), response times from the Council and key themes and outcomes for the financial year of 2020/21. Also included are the MP Enquiries, Freedom of Information (Fol) requests and Subject Access Requests (SARs) received for the Council and BFfC. These figures are tracked during the year by CMT on a quarterly basis.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS -

- 2.1 Audit and Governance Committee is asked to note the data detailed in this report.

3. SUMMARY

- 3.1 The Customer Relations Team manages the Complaints Procedures for the Council, including the Children's Services Statutory procedure for BFfC. The Team also manages the MP Enquiry, Fol Act process and Subject Access Requests for the Council and BFfC. Councillor Enquiries, data for these are also included in this report and are managed by Councillor Services.

The Team's work includes training, advice and a quality assurance service for Managers and Officers dealing with the above processes. The Team also provides advice and guidance for customers to access the complaints procedure.

The Customer Relations and Information Governance Manager is also the Link Officer for the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The LGSCO is due to publish their annual reports for Local Authorities this month. A summary of this report will be provided for the September 2021 Audit and Governance Committee.

Please note the Customer Relations service was suspended during Q1 2020/21 (01 Apr 20 to 30 Jun 20) during the initial Covid 19 lockdown as several of the staff from the team and Officers who normally respond to complaints and enquiries were redeployed to the One Reading Hub and other

projects that supported residents in the community.

4. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

- 4.1 This report on complaints which were received in the reporting period (01 Apr 20 to 31 Mar 21) includes data on all complaints to the Council and BfC. Two Annual Statutory Complaints Reports for BfC and Adult Social Care (DACHS) are produced for ACE Committee in the Autumn providing further analysis on statutory complaints.

NOTE: This report includes all complaints received at either Stage 0 or Stage 1, both Statutory and Corporate, but does not include any which were escalated to either Stage 2 or Stage 3, as these would be a duplication of the original complaint).

For clarity, the Customer Relations Team manage three separate complaints processes - Adult Social Care Statutory; Children's Social Care Statutory, and the Council's Corporate procedure. The stages each of these involve are as follows and on conclusion of the different stages the complainant is advised to contact the Ombudsman:

Adult Social Care Statutory

One informal stage (Stage 0), and one formal stage (Stage 1)

Children's Social Care Statutory

One informal stage (Stage 0), and three formal stages (Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3)

Corporate

One informal stage (Stage 0), and two formal stages (Stage 1 and Stage 2)

Any social care complaints received which do not directly relate to the statutory services provided are investigated under the Council's Corporate procedures.

4.2 Complaints Received, by Directorate for 20/21

| Directorate | Total Received | % |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| BfC | 95 | 10.9% |
| DACHS | 78 | 9.0% |
| DEGNS | 605 | 69.5% |
| DoR | 92 | 10.6% |
| Total | 870 | 100% |

4.3 Complaints Responded to, by Directorate for 20/21

Please note: The information in the following three tables relates to complaints which were sent out during the reporting period. The reason that these figures do not add up to the same total as for the 'Complaints Received', above, is that some complaints sent out in this period were

received at the end of the previous reporting period (e.g. February or March 2020) and were still on-going when the current period (01 April 2020 to 31 Mar 2021) commenced.

| Directorate | Total Sent Out | % |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| BFFC | 86 | 11.9% |
| DACHS | 67 | 9.3% |
| DEGNS | 470 | 65.1% |
| DoR | 99 | 13.7% |
| Total | 722 | 100% |

4.4 Complaints Responded to, Over Timescale, by Directorate for 20/21

Each complaint process managed by the Customer Relations Team has a different timescale attached to it. The timescales for each process are as follows:

Adult Social Care Statutory

Stage 0 = 5 working days

Stage 1 = 15 working days

Children's Social Care

Stage 0 = 5 working days

Stage 1 = 10 working days (but can be extended to 20 working days if the complaint is complex or require investigation by more than one team).

Corporate

Stage 0 = 5 working days

Stage 1 = 20 working days

| Directorate | Number Responded to Over Timescale | % |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| BFFC | 55 | 19.0% |
| DACHS | 27 | 9.3% |
| DEGNS | 185 | 63.8% |
| DoR | 23 | 7.9% |
| Total | 290 | 100% |

4.5 Outcomes from Complaints

This table shows the numbers of complaints which were investigated to an outcome. This means that they reached the end of the relevant complaints process and were not withdrawn by the customer part-way through the investigation.

| Outcome | Total Number | % |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Fully Upheld | 323 | 44.7% |
| Partially Upheld | 77 | 10.7% |
| Not Upheld | 241 | 33.4% |
| No Finding | 39 | 5.4% |
| Multiple Outcomes | 42 | 5.8% |
| Total | 722 | 100% |

NOTE:

‘No Finding’ is recorded against a complaint where the matter is a case of two opinions, and neither can be substantiated as there are no independent witnesses or a recording of a telephone conversation for example.

‘Partially Upheld’ means that the investigation has found fault with the Council’s actions however there are mitigating factors or there is some element of fault on both sides.

‘Multiple Outcomes’ means that a complaint had more than one complaint point, and the outcomes of the different points were not all recorded as the same.

5. Compliments Received, by Directorate in 20/21

| Directorate | Number Received | % |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| BFFC | 68 | 42.0% |
| DACHS | 29 | 17.9% |
| DEGNS | 49 | 30.2% |
| DoR | 16 | 9.9% |
| Total | 162 | 100% |

6. Freedom of Information (Fol) Requests, by Directorate in 20/21

6.1 The FOI Act 2000 states all responses must be sent out within 20 working days.

| Directorate | Number Received | % | Number Sent Out in Timescale | % |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| BFFC | 169 | 16.2% | 108 | 63.9% |
| DACHS | 94 | 9.0% | 62 | 66.0% |
| DEGNS | 450 | 43.1% | 246 | 54.7% |
| DoR | 303 | 29.1% | 175 | 57.8% |
| Various | 27 | 2.6% | 12 | 44.4% |
| Total | 1043 | 100% | 603 | 57.8% |

The number sent out in timescales is lower than we would like it to be as in Q1 of 20/21 a high percentage of FOI’s were responded to over timescales due to the service for responding being suspended, the Council did however accept FOI requests at the time and 142 requests were received in Q1. This created a backlog as a further 296 new requests were received in Q2 followed by 302 in Q3 and 272 in Q4. In Q3 however response times improved and 66.6% were responded to in timescales followed by 77.9% in Q4.

6.2 FOI Performance since 1st March 21 - 30 June 21 (New Firmstep system introduced)

6.3

The Council's management of FOI's were transferred to the Customer Relations Team in June 2020, to ensure a central team had oversight of all requests. Receipt of and responses to FOI's were moved away from emails to an online form via the Council's website on 1 March 2021. The system workflow now allows the Customer Relations Team to manage and have oversight of all requests from start to finish. The system generates reminders to Officers at regular intervals and allows the Customer Relations Team to publish all FOI responses on the disclosure log.

| Number of FOI's received | No. Sent Out in Timescale | % | No. Sent Out outside Timescale | % |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 253 | 153 | 60.5% | 100 | 39.5% |

We recognise that response times need to improve, in the first two months of the FOI system going live some Officers did not have access to the system and were also getting used to the system and new ways of working. Despite extensive testing on test system, the live system highlighted a number of issues which had to be resolved with input from the system provider. We are confident that the system is now working better, and staff are more confident using it. On line training, a frequently asked questions page on the intranet and one to one support for Officers is available should they have concerns/training needs.

7 MP Enquiries

7.1 MP Enquiries have a timescale of 10 working days by which the Council has to respond.

| Directorate | Number Received | % | Number Sent Out in Timescale | % |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| BfFC | 23 | 5.2% | 14 | 60.9% |
| DACHS | 21 | 4.7% | 14 | 66.7% |
| DEGNS | 367 | 82.5% | 220 | 59.9% |
| DoR | 34 | 7.6% | 24 | 70.6% |
| Total | 445 | 100% | 272 | 61.1% |

8 Councillor Enquiries received and response times (2020-21)

8.1 Councillor Enquiries have a timescale of 10 working days by which the Officers have to respond.

| Directorate | Count | % of Total | Answered in Time | Answered in Time (%) |
|---------------|-------------|------------|------------------|----------------------|
| BfFC | 35 | 1.9 | 29 | 82.9 |
| DACHS | 44 | 2.3 | 36 | 81.8 |
| DEGNS | 1703 | 90.1 | 1459 | 85.7 |
| DoR | 109 | 5.8 | 92 | 84.4 |
| Total: | 1891 | - | 1616 | 85.5 |

Councillor Enquiry statistics for 2020-21 financial year - please note Cllr enquiries were not recorded during the first lockdown period (April-May 2020).

9 Subject Access Requests received 20/21

9.1 Responses are required to be completed with 30 calendar days

| Directorate | Number Received | % |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| BfFC | 54 | 63.6% |
| DACHS | 16 | 18.8% |
| DEGNS | 8 | 9.4% |
| DoR | 7 | 8.2% |
| Total | 85 | 100% |

Of the 85 SAR's received in 20/21, 38 cases remain open and waiting to be processed.

This backlog is as a result of the complexities involved in processing SAR's, the lack of resource to meet these needs coupled with of the suspension of the service in Q1 and the rise in the number of cases received since lockdown. Like with FOI's the door was left open for customers to submit their request however the processing was suspended.

The process for handling SAR's is complex, time consuming and involves several teams. The Customer Relations Team redact the documents of third-party information but is reliant on the Service area, Records Management Unit (could not be accessed during lockdown periods) and Printroom (scanning and printing) to ensure completion.

Specialist software is used to redact the documents one page at a time, this is very resource intensive.

In order to clear the backlogs, we have increased the existing resource hours in the Customer Relations Team on a temporary basis and are in the process of recruiting two full time apprentices (one each for the Customer Relations Team and the Information Governance Team) to assist with printing and scanning and two casual members of staff to assist with the redaction work.