REPORT TO:	**FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**	**AGENDA ITEM: 13**
DATE OF MEETING:	**20 MARCH 2025**	**CATEGORY: DELEGATED**
REPORT FROM:	**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION**	**OPEN**
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	**CATHERINE GRIMLEY** catherine.grimley@southderbyshire.gov.uk	**DOC:** s:\cent_serv\complaints\committee reports\working papers for December 2023\Complaints and FOI report for 15 February 2024
SUBJECT:	**CUSTOMER FEEDBACK Q3 REPORT 1 OCTOBER 2024 – 31 DECEMBER 2024**	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	**ALL**	**TERMS OF REFERENCE: FM11**

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 Members note the comments, compliments, complaints, and FOI requests received by the Council for the period 1 October 2024 – 31 December 2024.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

2.1 The report provides a summary of official comments, compliments, complaints, and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by the Council for the period 1 October 2024 – 31 December 2024. Further information can be found at: https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/about-us/open-data-and-transparency.

3.0 Executive Summary

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

3.1 The reviewed Complaint and Feedback Policy was approved at Finance and Management Committee on 6 February and is designed to encourage people to give feedback on Council services. The Members Code role of 'Member responsible for complaints' was also approved to be undertaken by the Finance and Management Committee.

As a minimum, the Committee must receive:

a) Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;
b) Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;
c) Regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and
d) Annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

This report forms the basis of the information sharing with the Committee in light of its role as Member responsible for complaints.

3.2 No comments, 24 compliments and 40 formal complaints were received between 1 October 2024 to 31 December 2024 (Q3).

Freedom of Information

3.3 The Council is committed to making itself open. A large amount of information is already available to the public, through for example, the Council's website and at community centres and village halls, etc.

3.4 We continue to receive a large volume of Freedom of Information requests, with 123 being received in Q3 for 2024/25. This is an increase of 12 compared to Q2.

Publication Scheme

3.5 Under the Freedom of Information Act, the Council has a duty to adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme describing:

- The classes of information it publishes
- How and where such information is published (e.g., website, paper copy, etc.)
- Whether or not a charge is made for such information

3.6 The purpose of a Publication Scheme is to let the public know what information will be automatically or routinely published by the Council and to ensure that a significant amount of information is available to the public, without the need for a specific request to be made.

3.7 FOI requests are now also managed through e-Case with a new online form and branded disclosure log now live on our website. This disclosure log will list all of the information that we have released in response to FOI requests. The public will then be able to search the disclosure log by specific topics or keywords to obtain the information they require, reducing repeat requests coming into the Customer Experience Team.

3.8 In line with guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office, the Publication Scheme is updated regularly, and the current version is available on the Council's website at: Freedom of information (FOI) releases from South Derbyshire District Council - Disclosure log

4.0 Detail

Comments

4.1 None were received during the reporting period. No comments have been received within the 2024-25 financial year to date.

Compliments

4.2 The table below compares the number of compliments received from the period 1 October through to 31December for corresponding periods in 2023 and 2024.

Table 1 - Number of compliments received

Department	1 October – 31December 2023 (Q3)	1 October – 31December 2024 (Q3)
Customer Services	5	2
Housing Services	10	11
Cultural and Community Services	2	0
Operational Services	1	9
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	0	1
Environmental Services	0	0
Organisational Development	0	1
Legal and Democratic	0	0
Business Change & IT	0	0
Total received	**18**	**24**

4.3 It is important to share when an individual or team has been recognised for something outstanding by our customers. Compliments received are always shared with Heads of Service and their wider teams so their success can be celebrated more widely.

A small selection of the compliments received in Q3 are detailed below;

"I can safely say, South Derbyshire are a joy to work with as far as the Planning authority goes – you are leaps and bounds above every other authority we deal with on a daily basis." – **Planning**

"Dear Sir/Madam, I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to start by complimenting you on your well-designed and user-friendly website. It's an impressive resource and, in my opinion, far superior to other Councils I have contact with." – **Organisational Development**

"A gentleman called and spoke to an officer to say his mother has been taken into hospital with a broken hip after her fall the other day. He wanted to thank officers for everything she had done as it had taken quite a few visits to get the unit working properly and the fall detector on the right sensitivity. He said without them sorting all that for her things could have been so much worse and her service was amazing. He asked to also pass on his gratitude to the operator who took the call and alerted them so quickly." – **Housing Careline**

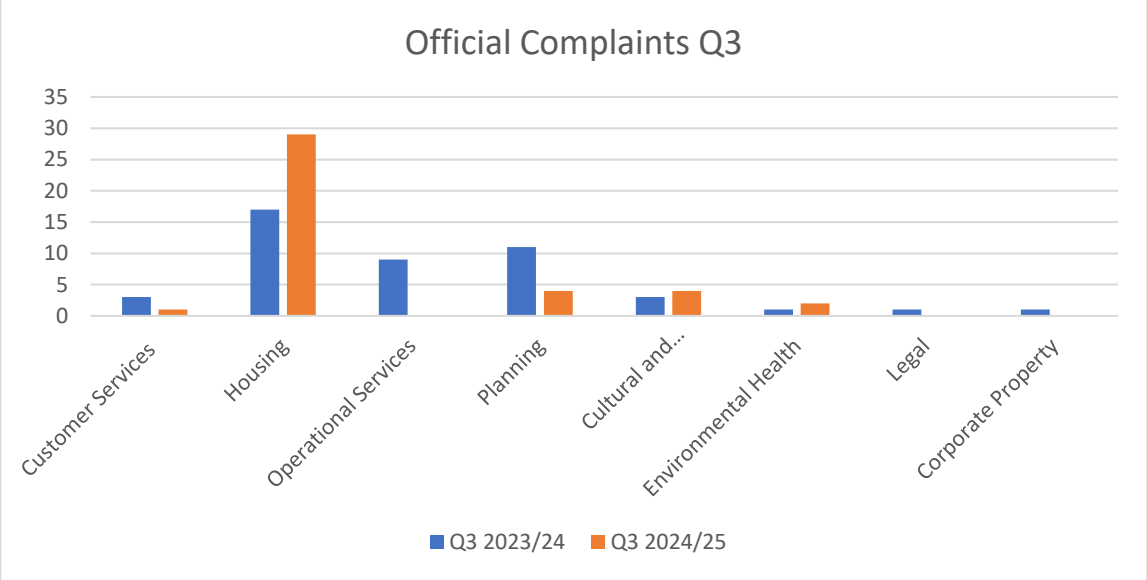
Complaints

4.4 Complaints should be seen as opportunities to learn and improve services. Good complaint handling promotes a positive relationship between the organisation and local people and improves perceptions of the organisation locally, regionally and nationally. Consistent reporting of complaint performance data allows the Council to benchmark performance and develop expected performance standards over time. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsmen's Complaint Handling Code states that:

"High volumes of complaints should not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that individuals are unable to complain."

4.5 The total number of formal complaints received in Q3 2024/25 was 40 compared to 46 in Q3 in 2023/24.

Illustration 1 – Official Complaints Q3 2025/26



4.6 Heads of Service must complete a monitoring form once a complaint is complete. Along with recording equalities information, the key terms surrounding a complaint and any remedial action that has been taken to avoid repeat complaints are recorded on this form.

The most common key terms recorded in Q3 were:

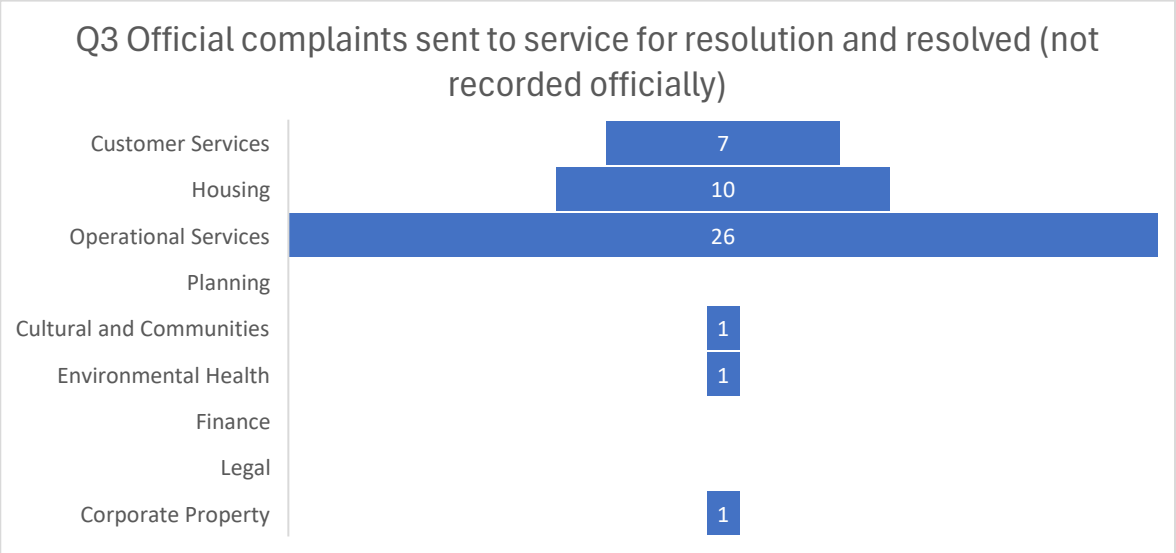
Housing – Repair Issues
Housing – Delays in repairs
Housing and Environmental Services – Staffing complaints

4.7 The Customer Experience Team have focused on trying to resolve complaints that are requests for service with the department directly away from the formal complaint process. This has included proactively contacting the customer to explore their reasons for dissatisfaction in more detail and then working with the department to resolve the issue promptly.

4.8 The graphic below details the 46 complaints that were submitted in Q3 that were ultimately resolved with the team as a request for service. The details surrounding

the requests for service are recorded through e-Case and are reported to managers as part of their suite of performance reports received.

Illustration 2 – Official Complaints sent to service for resolution and resolved Q3 2024/25



4.9 The table below compares the number of official complaints received in Q3:

Table 2 - Official complaints received

	1 October – 31December 2023 (Q3)	1 October – 31December 2024 (Q3)
Resolved at Stage 1	31	31
Stage 1 still ongoing	0	0
Resolved at Stage 2	15	9
Stage 2 still ongoing	0	0
Withdrawn (not recorded below)	1	0
Total Received	**46**	**40**

4.10 For comparison, the table below shows the total number of complaints over the last four complete years:

Table 3 - Official complaints recorded over the past four complete years

Department	**2020/21**	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**
Organisational Development and Performance	1	1*	1	0
Finance Services	1	2*	0	1
Corporate Property Services	2*	0	1	2
Customer Services	5	20*	23*	15
Housing Services	36	44*	49*	64
Cultural and Community Services	6*	12*	9	11
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	14	23	16	33

Environmental Services	6	6*	3**	4
Operational Services	29	33*	25*	54
Legal and Democratic Services	5	2*	1	2
Economic Development and Growth	0	1	0	0
Business Change and ICT	0	1	3*	0
Chief Executive	0	2	0	0
Total	**105**	**147**	**131**	**187**

* This indicates where one complaint has referred to two separate divisions.

4.11 If a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 2 of the Council's procedure the complainant can make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman for independent consideration. These complaints are the subject of a separate annual report.

4.12 During this period it has been reported through monitoring forms that learning and development has been identified along with wider plans in place to improve services. Examples of which have included;

- Additional training has been scheduled for the Housing Solution Team officers that process housing register applications. This is in response to a complaint where upon investigation, it was identified that the Housing Jigsaw system automatically cancelled a housing application due to the system showing outstanding documents, despite the customer having informed the Council that there would be a delay to them being provided. Additional training has now been provided to officers to ensure that instances such as this do not recur, with extensions to deadlines recorded on the Housing Jigsaw system. In the case of this specific complaint, the Housing Solutions Team re-opened the housing register application and application was made live again.

- Following a complaint that a bin was being repeatedly missed for collection the waste and recycling round was put on 'monitoring' where the waste crew are instructed to manually complete a check sheet to confirm that the property has been serviced.

Freedom of Information Requests

4.13 Although the Freedom of Information Act 2000 creates a general right of access to information, it also sets out information that the Council does not have to make available for specific reasons. This is information, which, if published, might prejudice the health, safety or security of the Council, its staff, systems, services, or property.

4.14 As much information is made available as possible without charging for it. The Council, however, reserves the right to levy a reasonable charge where the information request is extensive and would require more than two days' staff time to satisfy the request.

4.15 The Council deals with hundreds of routine requests for information every day. These are referred to as "business as usual requests". However, information that is not readily available and that has to be prepared or extracted is handled differently. The Council is entitled to make a charge for this kind of information.

4.16 Requests for information under Freedom of Information must be processed within 20 working days. However, requests for details under the Freedom of Information Act can be turned down if they fall within certain exemption criteria.

4.17 The table below compares the Freedom of Information requests received for the period 1 October – 31December 2024.

Note: the figures also include any requests that have been made under EIR (Environmental Information Regulations).

Table 4 - Freedom of Information requests received.

Freedom of Information Requests	1 April 24 - 30th September 24 (Q1+2)	1 October 24 – 31December 24 (Q3)
Total Number of Requests Received	223	135
Less passed to other organisations	19	1
Less those withdrawn or duplicate requests	1	3
Less exemptions/partial exemptions	4	0
Total Requests Answered	199	131
Number replied to within 20 statutory days	154	111
Number replied to after 20 statutory days	45	20
Percentage replied to within 20 statutory days	77%	82%
Percentage replied to after 20 days	23%	18%

4.18 The Customer Experience Team have worked with Heads of Service over the last quarter on the timeliness of response and as a result the percentage replied to within the 20 statutory days has improved. In Q2, 32% of FOI's were not responded to within 20 days. This represents a 14% improvement rate on timeliness of responses for Q3.

4.19 The requests for information received can be broken down as follows:

Table 5 – Freedom of Information requests by service area

Department	1 Apr 24 - 30th Sept 24 Q1&2	1 Oct 24 – 31December 24 Q3
Finance Services	18	4
Organisational Development and Performance	16	7
Business Change and ICT	9	5
Property Services	2	2
Customer Services	27	12
Environmental Services	25	11
Housing Services	22	25

Cultural and Community Services	14	12
Operational Services	12	12
Planning and Strategic Housing	27	17
Legal and Democratic Services	19	14
Economic Development and Growth	0	0
All Departments	8	12
Passed to 3rd Parties	19	2
TOTAL	**218**	**135**

* Same request has involved several service areas.

Transformation

4.20 Transformation work has been undertaken in the past 12 months with the creation of a new Customer Experience team and dedicated resources to ensure that the Council can proactively resolve dissatisfaction at first point of contact where possible. This has led to a decrease in the number of formal complaints being received and customers being satisfied that they have been listened to, and their contact has been managed more quickly and efficiently at service level.

4.21 The Complaint and Feedback Policy and Procedure has been reviewed to ensure that the Council considers The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) aligned Complaint Handling Codes, resulting in making make good complaint handling easier for the Council, while setting clear expectations for the public.

4.23 The implementation of Fivium e-Case software and a subsequent value report that has been produced shows that the Council has achieved an efficiency gain of 280 hours annually processing Freedom of Information Requests and Complaints through e-Case. This equates to a 76% overall efficiency gain in case processing and officer time being saved and invested back into the service.

4.24 Beyond time savings in processing cases, the Council has seen an additional reduction in the time required to generate performance reports, with an efficiency gain of 68.6%. Additionally, several qualitative benefits have been realised, leading to enhanced work quality and improved internal processes.

4.25 The key benefits that have been achieved through the implementation of e-Case are listed below:

Service Improvements

- Enhanced trend analysis and data insights by consolidating customer information, enabling Heads of Service to identify service gaps and proactively apply improvements to optimise service delivery.
- Improved documentation and templates helping to ensure communications are clearer, relevant and effective, enhancing service quality and professionalism.

- Enabled informed service improvements through detailed reports and trend analysis, which could help reduce repeat complaints in the future, examples are shared above at paragraph 4.6.

Efficiencies

- Streamlined case processing by eliminating spreadsheets and unnecessary steps, simplifying workflows and reducing complexity, leading to faster and more efficient case management.
- Optimised reporting by significantly automating report generation, enhancing access to timely insights while reducing manual efforts.
- Simplified case logging and management, further reducing manual input, processing time, and improving first-level resolution rates.
- Enhanced data consolidation by centralising customer information, making trend spotting and insights collection more efficient.
- Increased visibility of bottlenecks through simplified, detailed reporting, identifying key areas for improvement.

Process and Compliance Enhancements

- Enhanced security through the ability to monitor and restrict access to case information, ensuring only approved users can view or modify sensitive data, including the prompt removal of access for employees who leave the service.
- Process refinement and reduced maintenance by enabling the team to reassess workflows, eliminating unnecessary steps and improving overall accuracy and efficiency.
- Mitigated security risks by eliminating spreadsheets, reducing the likelihood of data breaches and human error, while ensuring better data governance.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 None directly arising from this Report.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 The Council has a legal duty under the FOI Act and EIR to provide information requested by members of the public and to publish information as set out in its Publication Scheme. The Council has a duty to operate a complaints procedure and to decide complaints in accordance with that procedure. The information provided in this report demonstrates that the Council is acting in accordance with these duties.

7.0 Corporate Implications

7.1 Under the Complaints procedure the Council will write to the complainant within five working days, informing them who is dealing with their complaint and when they can expect to receive a reply. In most cases a full reply will be sent within 10 working days.

7.2 Under the Freedom of Information Act the Council must respond to any requests received within 20 working days. For many requests the information required affects several areas of the Council. Consequently, a coordinated approach must be taken in the Council's response, with each service area being responsible for providing the requested information relating to their area.

8.0 Community Impact

None

9.0 Background Papers

None