

REPORT TO:	FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 9
DATE OF MEETING:	10th JUNE 2021	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (CORPORATE RESOURCES)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	KEVIN STACKHOUSE (595811) kevin.stackhouse@southderbyshire.gov.uk	DOC: s:\cent_serv\complaints\committee reports\working papers for June 2021\Complaints and FOI report for June 2021
SUBJECT:	COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS & FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS 01 OCTOBER 2020 TO 31 MARCH 2021	REF: KS/SH
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: FM11

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the comments, compliments, complaints and FOI requests, as detailed in the report, are considered and noted.

2.0 Purpose of Report

This report provides:

- 2.1 A summary of official comments, compliments, complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by the Council for the period 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021 can be found at:

[Open data and transparency | South Derbyshire District Council](#)

Figures for the corresponding period in 2019/20 are given for comparison purposes.

3.0 Executive Summary

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

- 3.1 The comments, compliments and complaints procedure is designed to encourage people to give informal feedback on our services.
- 3.2 0 comments, 65 compliments and 50 complaints have been received between 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021.

- 3.3 The number of complaints received in the second half of the financial year has decreased compared to the corresponding period of 2019/20, and the number of compliments received has increased.
- 3.4 Members are informed via e-mail (enclosing a copy of the original complaint) when a complaint is received relating to their ward. This is for information purposes only.

Freedom of Information

- 3.5 South Derbyshire District Council is committed to making itself more open. A large amount of information is already available to the public, through our website or through our offices and at local libraries.

Publication Scheme

- 3.6 Under the Freedom of Information Act, South Derbyshire District 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.) and
 - Whether or not a charge is made for such information

The purpose of a Publication Scheme is to let everyone 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.

In line with guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office, the scheme is updated regularly and the current version is available from the Website at:

[Freedom of Information | South Derbyshire District Council](#)

- 3.7 A total of 316 Freedom of Information requests have been received from 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021. This is a decrease of 49 over the corresponding period for 2019/20.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 The Comments, Compliments and Complaints customer leaflet and procedure is available for download from the Website at or can be completed using an electronic form:

[Comments, compliments and complaints | South Derbyshire District Council](#)

- 4.2 The aim of The Freedom of Information Act 2000, which came into force on 1st January 2005, is to extend the right to allow public access to information that the Council holds.

5.0 Detail

Comments

- 5.1 0 comments were received over the past six months. Any comments received are carefully considered and, if appropriate, are investigated under the complaints procedure.

Department	1 October 2019– 31 March 2020	1 October 2020– 31 March 2021
Operational Services	1	0
Cultural and Community Services	0	0
Corporate Property Services	0	0
Derbyshire County Council	0	0
Total	1	0

Compliments

- 5.2 The table below compares the number of compliments received for the second half of 2019/2020 against the second half of 2020/2021. Compliments generally relate to the quality of the service provided and/or actions of individuals.

Department	1 October 2019- 31 March 2020	1 October 2020- 31 March 2021
Customer Services	2*	14*
Operational Services	17*	24*
Environmental Services	1*	0
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	0	12
Housing Services	0	8*
Legal and Democratic Services	2	0
Organisational Development and Performance	1	0
Cultural and Community Services	13	3*
Business Change and ICT	0	3
Chief Executive	0	1
Total	36	65

* This indicates where one compliment has referred to two separate services

The increase in Compliments for Customer Services related mainly to an appreciation of dealing with Business Grant applications. Planning Services increase related to help in the main with determination of planning applications in a timely manner.

Complaints

5.3 The table below compares the number of official complaints received:-

	1 October 2019– 31 March 2020	1 October 2020– 31 March 2021
Resolved at Stage 1	42	43
Stage 1 still ongoing	0	0
Resolved at Stage 2	8	7
Stage 2 still ongoing	1	0
Withdrawn	2	0
Total received	53	50

5.4 The 50 complaints received can be broken down as follows:-

Department	1 October 2019– 31 March 2020	1 October 2020– 31 March 2021
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	8	5
Housing Services	10	21
Customer Services (including Revenue)	10	3
Environmental Services	3	3
Operational Services	12	14
Legal and Democratic Services	3	1
Corporate Property Services	2	1
Cultural and Community Services	5	1
Organisational Development and Performance	0	1
Total	53	50

5.5 For comparison, the table below shows the total number of complaints over the last three complete years:-

Department	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	16*	14	14
Housing Services	24	26	36
Customer Services (including Revenue)	13*	18	5
Environmental Services **	26*)	12	6
Operational Services **)	22	29
Cultural and Community Services	7	10	6*
Legal and Democratic Services	7	5	5

Finance Services	1	1	1
Corporate Property Services	2	2	2*
Organisational Development and Performance	1*	1	1
Total	97	111	105

* This indicates where one complaint has referred to two separate services

** This indicates where Environmental & Operational Services were counted as one service for the Year 2018/19.

5.6 Managers dealing with the complaint are asked to complete a questionnaire following each complaint. This provides details of actions taken and improvements made as a consequence of a complaint.

5.7 If a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 2 of our procedure, it can be taken to the Local Government Ombudsman for independent consideration. These complaints are the subject of a separate annual report.

Freedom of Information Requests

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

5.9 We make as much information available as possible without charging for it. We do however reserve the right to levy a reasonable charge where the information request is extensive and would require more than 2 days' staff time to satisfy the request.

5.10 The Council deals with hundreds of routine requests for information every day by phone and by letter. These are referred to as "business as usual requests". We will deal with these in the normal way. However, information that is not readily available and that has to be prepared or extracted is handled differently. We are entitled to make a charge for this kind of information.

5.11 Requests for information under Freedom of Information have to 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.

5.12 The table below compares the Freedom of Information requests received for the second half 2019/2020 against the second half of 2020/2021.

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

	1 Oct 2019 – 31 March 2020	1 Oct 2020 – 31 March 2021
Total Number of Requests Received	365	316

Less passed to other organisations	63	52
Less those withdrawn	0	5
Less exemptions/partial exemptions	3	5
Total Requests Answered	299	254
Number replied to within 20 statutory days	280	232
Number replied to after 20 statutory days	19	22
Percentage replied to within 20 statutory days	94%	91%
Percentage replied to after 20 days	6%	9%

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

Department	1 October 2019– 31 March 2020	1 October 2020– 31 March 2021
Environmental Services	51	43*
Operational Services	16	9*
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	20	14*
Legal and Democratic Services	23	23*
Finance Services	11	17*
Business Change and ICT	27	24*
Customer Services	64	59*
Housing Services	34	22*
Organisational Development and Performance	20	26*
Cultural and Community Services	20	14*
Passed to 3 rd Parties	63	52*
Corporate Resources	5	5*
Corporate Property Services	9	8*
Economic Development and Growth	2	0*

* Same request has involved several Services.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 None directly stemming from this report.

7.0 Corporate Implications

7.1 Under the Complaints procedure the Council will write to the complainant within 5 working days, telling 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 has to respond to any requests received within 20 working days. For many requests the information required cuts across areas of the Council. Consequently a co-ordinated approach has to be taken in the Council's response, with each service area being responsible for providing the information requested relating to their area.

8.0 Community Implications

8.1 None.

9.0 Background Papers

None.