

REPORT TO:	FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	09 JUNE 2022	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 2022\Complaints and FOI report for 09 June 2022
SUBJECT:	COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS & FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS 01 OCTOBER 2021 TO 31 MARCH 2022	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

- 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 2021 to 31 March 2022. Details of individual complaints and requests etc, can be found at:
<https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/about-us/open-data-and-transparency>.
- 2.2 Figures for the corresponding period in 2020/21 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 Council services.
- 3.2 1 comment, 53 compliments and 70 complaints have been received between 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.
- 3.3 The number of complaints received in the first half of this financial year has increased compared to the corresponding period of 2020/21 and the number of compliments received has decreased.

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. A copy of the response letter sent to the complainant has been provided to Ward members from 01 June 2019.

Freedom of Information

3.5 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.

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.)
- 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:

http://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/data_protection_and_freedom_of_information/default.asp

3.7 A total of 150 Freedom of Information requests have been received from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. This is a decrease of 166 over the corresponding period for 2020/21.

4.0 Detail

Comments

4.1 1 comment was received over the past six months. Any comments received are carefully considered and if appropriate, are investigated under the Complaints Procedure.

Department	1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021	1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022
Business Change and ICT/Operational & Environmental Services	0	1
Total	0	1

Compliments

- 4.2 The table below compares the number of compliments received for the second half of 2021/2022 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 2020 – 31 March 2021	1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022
Customer Services	14*	14*
Housing Services	8*	14*
Cultural and Community Services	3*	2
Operational Services	24*	16*
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	12	6
Business Change and ICT	3	0
Corporate Resources	0	1
Chief Executive	1	0
Total	65	53

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

Complaints

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

	1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021	1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022
Resolved at Stage 1	43	51
Stage 1 still ongoing	0	0
Resolved at Stage 2	7	16
Stage 2 still ongoing	0	0
Withdrawn	0	3
Total received	50	70

- 4.4 The 70 complaints received can be broken down as follows:

Department	1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021	1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022
Organisational Development and Performance	1	0
Corporate Property Services	1	0*
Customer Services	3	4*
Housing Services	21	23*
Cultural and Community Services	1	10
Operational Services	14	14*
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	5	13
Environmental Services	3	2*

Legal and Democratic Services	1	0
Economic Development and Growth	0	1
Business Change and ICT	0	1
Chief Executive	0	2
Total	50	70

* This indicates where one complaint has referred to more than one service

- 4.5 The increase in complaints in Planning and Strategic Housing Services is mainly due to a reduction of staffing resources in the Planning Service.
- 4.6 The slight increase in complaints relating to Housing concerns some applicants on the housing register not being satisfied with the property that they had been allocated and also relates to housing repairs.
- 4.7 The increase in complaints relating to Cultural and Community Services relates to various issues namely parking at Rosliston Forestry Centre, Cemetery issues, Christmas Lights and Stenson Fields Community Centre.
- 4.8 For comparison, the table below shows the total number of complaints over the last four complete years:

Department	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Organisational Development and Performance	1*	1	1	1*
Finance Services **	1	1	1	2*
Corporate Property Services **	2	2	2*	0
Customer Services	13*	18	5	20*
Housing Services	24	26	36	44*
Cultural and Community Services	7	10	6*	12*
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	16*	14	14	23
Environmental Services **	26*)	12	6	6*
Operational Services **)	22	29	33*
Legal and Democratic Services	7	5	5	2*
Economic Development and Growth	0	0	0	1
Business Change and ICT	0	0	0	1
Chief Executive	0	0	0	2
Total	97	111	105	147

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

** This indicates where Finance and Corporate Property Services, Environmental and Operational Services were counted as one service for the years 2018/19.

- 4.9 Managers dealing with the complaint are asked to complete a questionnaire following each complaint. This provides details of actions taken and improvements made because of a complaint.

4.10 If a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 2 of the Council's 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

4.11 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.

4.12 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.

4.13 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.

4.14 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.

4.15 The table below compares the Freedom of Information requests received for the second half 2020/2021 against the second half of 2021/2022.

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

	1 Oct 2020 – 31 Mar 2021	1 Oct 2021 – 31 Mar 2022
Total Number of Requests Received	316	150
Less passed to other organisations	52	13
Less those withdrawn or duplicate requests	5	1
Less exemptions/partial exemptions	5	6
Total Requests Answered	254	130
Number replied to within 20 statutory days	232	116
Number replied to after 20 statutory days	22	14
Percentage replied to within 20 statutory days	91%	89%
Percentage replied to after 20 days	9%	11%

4.16 The above table shows that the response times fell overall to 11% in the second half of 2021/22. This was mainly due to a reduction of resources in the Planning Service, with several staff vacancies. Coupled with an increase in planning applications, this resulted in reduced overall capacity in the service to deal with some requests within specified timescales.

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

Department	1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021	1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022
Corporate Resources	5*	0
Finance Service	17*	8*
Organisational Development and Performance	26*	9
Business Change and ICT	24*	12*
Corporate Property Services	8*	4*
Customer Services	59*	20*
Environmental Services	43*	31*
Housing Services	22*	11*
Cultural and Community Services	14*	4*
Operational Services	9*	6*
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	14*	12*
Legal and Democratic Services	23*	18
Economic Development and Growth	0*	2*
Passed to 3 rd Parties	52*	13

* Same request has involved several Services.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 None directly stemming from this report.

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 Under the Complaints procedure the Council will write to the complainant within five 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.

6.2 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 information requested relating to their area.

7.0 Community Implications

7.1 None.

8.0 Background Papers

None.