

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 8 NOVEMBER 2022

TITLE OF REPORT: COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS Q2 JULY-SEPT 2022

Report of: Corporate Services

Cabinet Portfolio: Leader and Strategic Direction and Partnerships

Key Decision: No

Confidentiality: Non-Exempt

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report updates Members on the number and outcome of customer complaints for Quarter 2, July–September 2022.
2. The report looks at performance on a range of metrics and examines any learning that can be gained from the information presented.

RECOMMENDATION

3. The complaints report for July-September 2022 is noted.

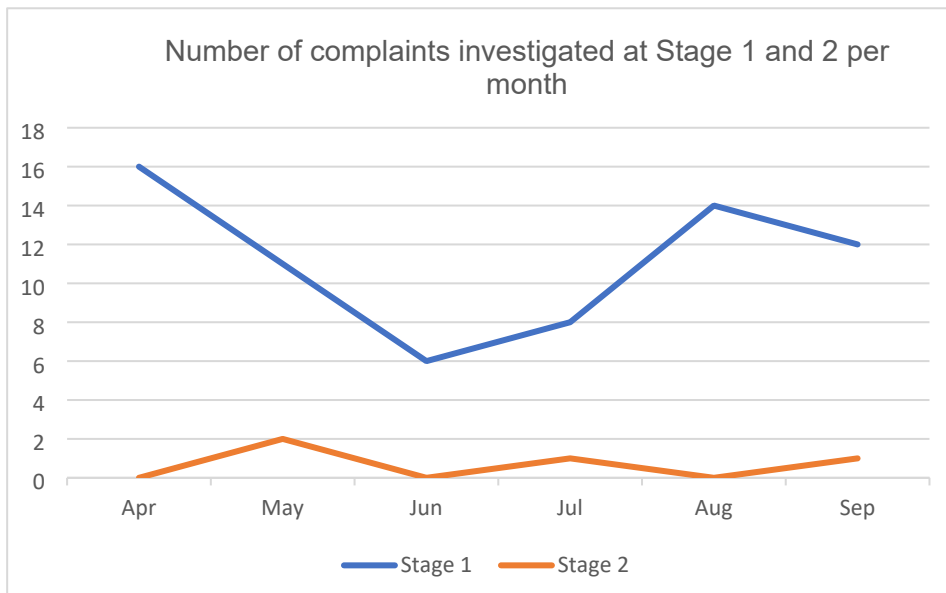
BACKGROUND

4. This paper is the second complaint report for this financial year. It provides details of formal complaints received during Quarter 2, July-September 2022. The report references performance in Quarter 1, April-June to provide a set of comparative data.
5. The complaints policy defines a complaint as ‘any expression of dissatisfaction about the way in which we have provided a service’. If a customer is contacting the Council for the first-time about a service request, we will endeavour to resolve as part of the informal stage. Complainants can choose to go direct to Stage 1.
6. The policy is based on a two-stage process. If complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome after Stage 1, they move to Stage 2. If the complaint remains unresolved, they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate.

COMPLAINTS OVERVIEW FOR QUARTER 2, JULY–SEPTEMBER 2022

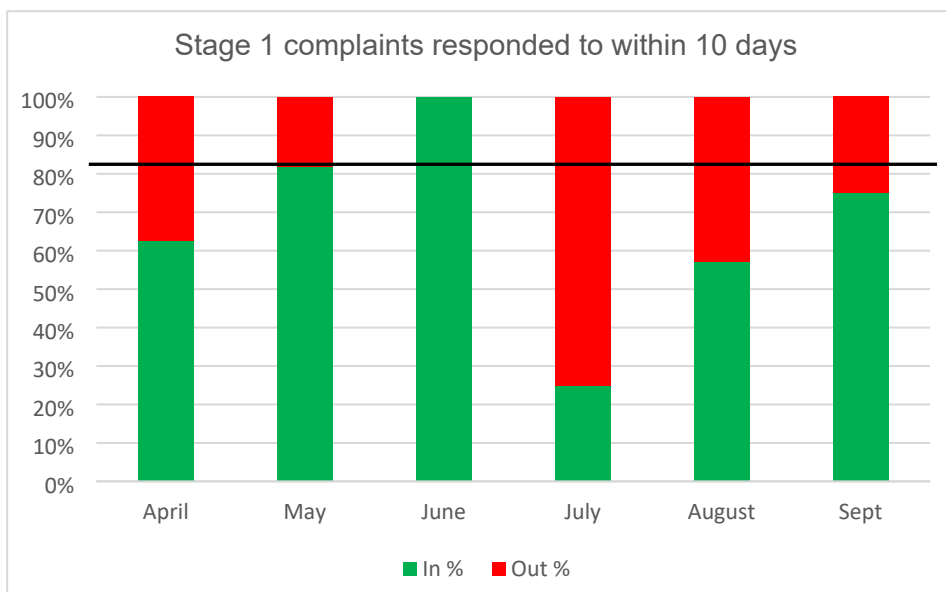
Number of complaints

7. The Council recorded a total of 36 complaints during Quarter 2. We received 35 complaints in Quarter 1.
8. Of those complaints received in Quarter 2, 34 were recorded at Stage 1 and two were recorded at Stage 2.



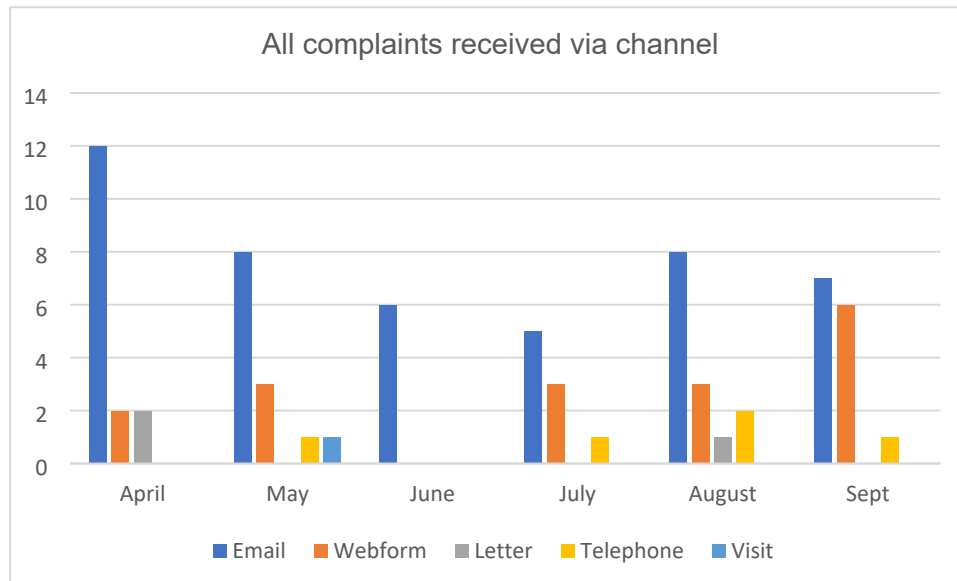
Responding to complaints in time

9. Responding to complaints within published timescales should be a key performance target. Performance indicators are used to monitor the speed of the Council's response to complaints dealt with through the procedure. This can be viewed as a feature of a well performing complaints handling system.
10. Complaints dealt with at Stage 1 should be responded to within 10 working days. Complaints at Stage 2 should be responded to within 20 working days. We have not committed to a target within the policy. Neighbouring authorities (Havant, East Hampshire) set an ambition of responding to 85% of all complaints within these timescales. Hart might want to consider a similar target to include within the Quarterly Performance Report.
11. If we were to set a target of 85%, the Council only met this target in one of the past six months, June. Waste Services account for 14 (61%) of all complaints outside of the 10 days for Stage 1, eleven of which occurred in July and August.



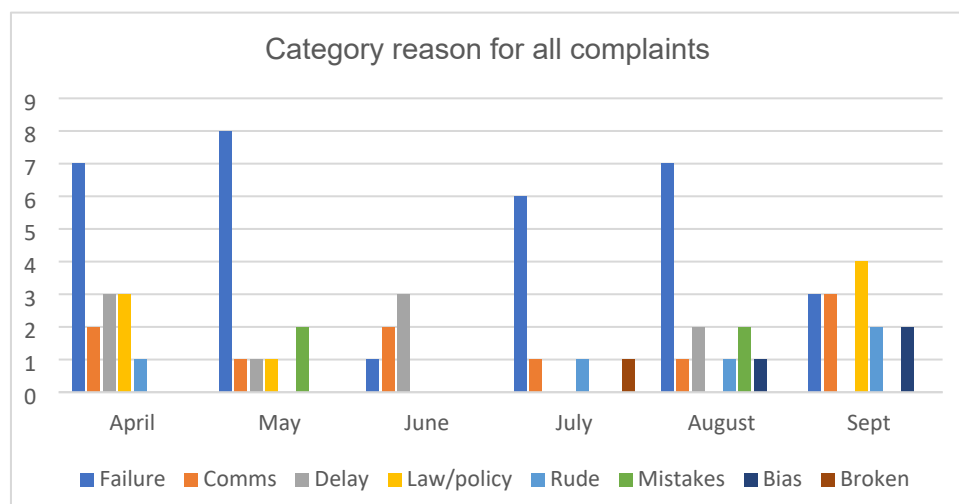
How complaints are received

12. We record the channel through which complaints are received. This will help us understand customer preferences and how these might change over time. It also helps to ensure that we operate a complaint handling system that is accessible and free of barriers.
13. Most complaints received were made through electronic means. Email, direct to the service or through complaints@hart.gov.uk is the most popular route. The redesigned webform has seen a rise in its use in Quarter 2. These two channels account for 85% in quarter 2.



Reasons for complaints

14. The Council records the reasons why a complaint has been made, in line with a list of categories set out in the policy.
15. “Failure to provide a service” accounts for 45% of complaints. 16 complaints in July-September were Waste related as the service struggled with several issues including vehicle repairs and staff sickness.
16. “Poor communication from staff” is the second highest category and relates to several teams including Waste, Parking, Council Tax and Housing Benefit.



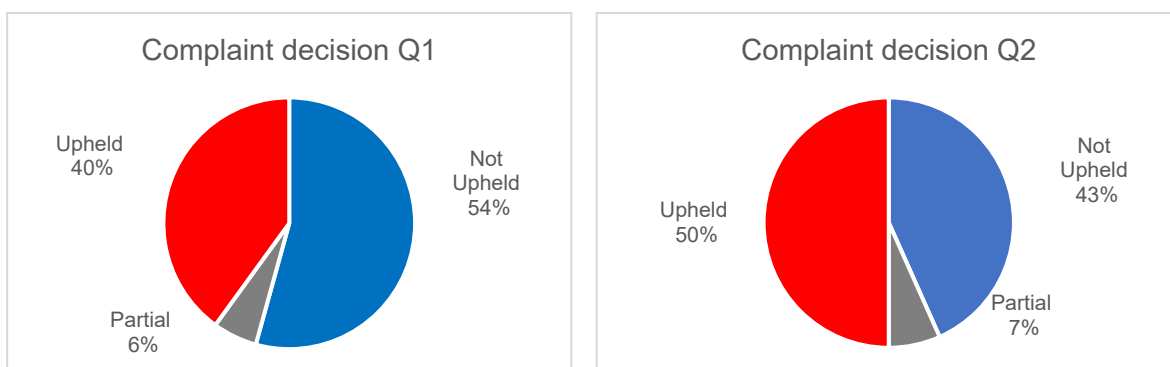
Complaint decisions

17. The Council records its decisions on complaints in three ways:

- upheld, where the Council agrees with the complaint made by the complainant
- partly upheld, where the Council agrees with some aspects of the complaint
- not upheld, where the Council does not agree with the complainant about the complaint that has been made

18. We have upheld/ agreed with 18 complaints in Q2 compared to 14 in Q1. Overall, this accounts for 44% of all complaints since April. We have partially upheld 6% of complaints in this time. We have not upheld/ disagreed with 50% of complaints.

19. We would expect to see a fairly even distribution between upheld and not upheld. If a high proportion of complaints are agreed within a reporting period, this can indicate that operational issues are not being dealt with at service level. If a high proportion of complaints are not agreed with, this could indicate a lack of understanding and/or willingness to accept feedback on service improvements by the respective team.



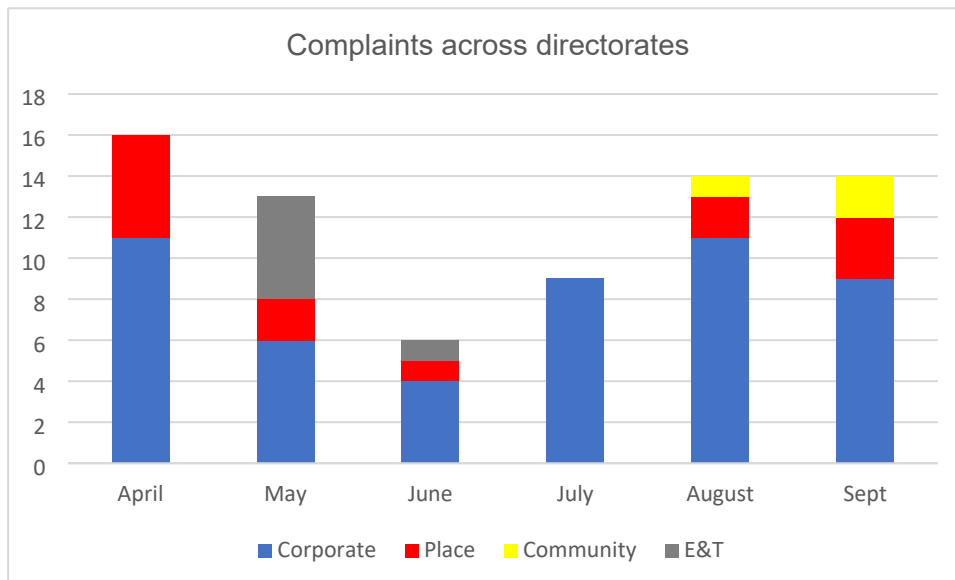
Complaints by directorate/ team

20. We record the number of complaints, by directorate and by team. This provides a way of monitoring service levels and standards. It can act as an early warning sign for significant service failure or disruption.

21. While this can be done by comparing reporting periods within each service, it is difficult to compare across directorates, given the diverse nature of business across the Council. Some services, such as waste collection and planning services, will feature towards the top of the list, due to the high levels of contact.

22. Corporate account for 69% of all complaints received across the first two quarters. Place have the second largest proportion with 8%.

23. There has been some movement during the reporting period. Communities now manage Parking and Countryside teams. Environment and Technical has been removed from August onwards.



24. Further analysis of Corporate shows that Waste Services account for 60% of all complaints, Council Tax account for 30%. Quarter 2 has provided some challenges for the Waste team, and this is reflected in the 100% increase in the number of complaints from Quarter 1.

Corporate	Waste	C.Tax	Elections	FOI	HB	other
April	6	3	1	0	0	1
May	4	2	0	0	0	0
June	0	3	0	1	0	0
July	8	0	0	0	1	0
August	6	4	0	0	1	0
Sept	6	3	0	0	0	0

Learning from complaints

25. The services receiving the highest number of complaints for Quarter 2 were Waste Services, Council Tax and Planning.
26. For Waste Services, the increase in complaints occurred between July and September. Approximately three quarters of these complaints relate to non-collection of waste. Smaller numbers relate to staff attitude and poor communication of the issues facing the service.
27. A new Performance Manager has been installed at Basingstoke and we're working closely to improve the process with Officers in the Waste team. The Waste team monitors the number of missed bins as part of its contract management with Serco. They are working with the contractor to address any issues raised within complaints so that we can provide the best service for our residents.
28. For Council Tax, complaints were single issues. The service normally resolves complaints quickly and efficiently and there is ongoing dialogue between Officers to monitor individual complaints.

29. For Planning, there were no clear trends emerging from the complaints, because of single issues.
30. We continue to work with all teams to remind them of the importance of responding within timescales.

Ombudsman decisions

31. The Council received decisions on two Ombudsman complaints in the reporting period.
 - May 2022. Council refused to take enforcement action over a fence. Closed after initial enquiries
 - August 2022. Councillor conflict of interests. Closed after initial enquiries

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

32. As this report is for information and no decisions required, no options have been considered.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or The Hart Vision 2040

33. Performance reporting is an essential element of understanding how the services are performing in the context of the actions being undertaken in Service Plans. Complaints analysis provides officers with invaluable feedback on the provision of services at an operational level.

Service Plan

- Is the proposal identified in the Service Plan? Yes
- Is the proposal being funded from current budgets? Yes
- Have staffing resources already been identified and set aside for this proposal? No

Legal and Constitutional Issues

34. There is no statutory duty to report regularly to Cabinet on the Council's complaint performance. However, under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended) an authority has a statutory duty to deliver continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Regular reports on the Council's complaints performance assist in demonstrating best value and compliance with the statutory duty.

Financial and Resource Implications

35. None identified

Risk Management

36. Complaints about services can indicate where identified operational risks have materialised. This should be monitored through individual departmental risk registers. Learning from complaints can help mitigate the same risks occurring in the future.

EQUALITIES

37. The analysis conducted through this paper potentially have relevance to the Equality Act. Three complaints reported in this period referenced bias or unfair discrimination.
- Complaint 1 (August). Complaint upheld by Capita following an allegation of unfair discrimination on race grounds
 - Complaint 2. (September) Complaint partially upheld although allegation of racism unfounded
 - Complaint 3. Complaint not upheld following an allegation of racism. Complainant has decided to take this to Stage 2 and is currently under investigation

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

38. There are no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the report

ACTION

39. This report enables Overview and Scrutiny to understand the Council's performance around complaints handling and performance. Those that are escalated to the Ombudsman could result in a significant detrimental impact on the Council if it is found to be at fault through maladministration or negligence. It is important that Cabinet and the public can be satisfied that we are running a well-managed and effective complaints system.
40. To ensure transparency, the report is available on the Council's website through the committee reports pages.

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