

General Purposes & Licencing Committee



30th September 2020

Agenda item 5 | Responses to follow-up written questions

Dear Members

I am sorry that technological glitches prevented me from properly contributing to the committee meeting. I have since received a number of queries which I will address below and understand that this document will be circulated alongside the minutes of the meeting. I hope it goes without saying that if there are any further or follow-up queries, you are welcome to get in touch.

Annual Complaints Report

Cllr Tunncliffe

I wonder where the terms 'mention' and 'aspect' arose from in the terminology?

Aspects is a term regularly used in the complaint handling sector, albeit maybe not one that has found its way into LBB reports before now. This is all part of continuous improvement work in gradually embedding a more professional, industry standard approach.

'Mentions' is a local term to denote the number of times a particular service / team is complained about.

P.25 Why the large increase in complaints / again in the box on P.52 against the CEO's Dept?

It should be noted that the percentage increase is affected by the comparatively small numbers involved.

Analysis conducted identified that historically we had attributed complaints about residential and domiciliary charges (for example) to adult social care when really they should have been allocated to Finance. We can now separate out those figures and attribute aspects more accurately.

How do our number of complaints compare to other London Boroughs?

There is no published benchmark data on complaint handling. Different local policies will lead to different outcomes. The National Complaints Managers Group (of which I, as Chair of the London Complaints Managers Group, am a member) are discussing an appropriate and/or feasible method to a universal approach.

A comparison of Ombudsman data is possible – it is available online [here](#) and discussed in my covering report at para.3.8. Bromley performs better than average

compared to its London counterparts even taking into account its shorter internal procedures.

Cllr Owen

My suspicion is that the report is a government requirement. I've questioned the purpose of the report many times. By the time it is published it is ancient history. As Cllr Cooke rightly stated, in care services, if something is reported as inadequate it needs to be dealt with immediately...

Unless the report leads to useful action we should keep the work (which looks substantial) to the absolute minimum. What we should not be doing is a long narrative explaining how things have 'improved' based on a pair of numbers.

All authorities are required by law to produce and publish an annual report. The specific requirement is for adult and children's social care, but in common with most authorities we cover the whole Council.

The complaints themselves are responded to at the time and if, in the course of so doing, potential service improvements are identified, then those are acted upon. In addition, quarterly reports are being produced for divisional managers to enable whole system transferable learning.

Cllr Allen

P30 compensation figures - what was the highest individual award and what was it for?

The £11,171,52 in children's services was all attributable to one particular case and reflected the backdating of a special guardianship allowance that the Ombudsman determined had been wrongly refused previously.

Cllr Mellor

Page 30 – financial consequences of complaints. The housing item has risen by £8,000.00 whilst the adult social care has risen by £10,057.00. I would like reasoning as to why this has happened and are the increases relevant directly or indirectly as a result of the migrant population?

Payments, whether compensation or reimbursement, only arise in a small minority of cases – there were 25 individual payments logged in 2019/20, some of which went to the same person. The figures can be substantial in some individual cases (usually social care-related), particularly if the complaint related to a financial issue in the first place.

The immigration status of complainants does not play a part in the process.

Cllr King

I would like clarity on the table on big page 41 of the agenda, in the "07 | HOUSING PLANNING & REGENERATION" section. I am interesting in know why when all the figures for complaints have moved in the right direction, the financial consequences have apparently increased significantly.

The total sum of the financial consequences is not directly related to the number of complaints – please see for example my reply to Cllr Allen above. The amount we are required to pay out is usually determined by the Ombudsman, based on the circumstances of the individual case and the action the Council is required to take to remedy the faults identified.

Environment & Public Protection

Cllr Tunncliffe

P.21 I wondered why EPP are the only service to manage their own complaints and why this dept. seems to have a better result with complaints, than those managed by the new system CE & CS?

Cllr Allen

General point - as mentioned, Environment is outside this whole procedure. It would not be appropriate for every missed bin collection or similar to be covered in this type of report, but there must be some way of incorporating Environment complaints above a certain "level" into this process so that it is measured using the same parameters and standards.

The reduction in complaints received by the Environment department is not a reflection of which team manages the complaints after they have been raised.

Complaint handling has been organically centralised over a number of years, which has resulted in an increasingly robust application of policy and procedure.

E&PP have retained that role within the department due to the close correlation between a 'complaint' and a business as usual service request, the same team handling both issues for the sake of efficiency. E&PP have received training and support from CE&CS to apply the corporate policy and procedure. This has enabled E&PP to distinguish better between formal complaints and service requests (such as one off missed bin collections) thus reducing the recorded number of formal complaints.

Should any complaint regarding the E&PP escalate to the Ombudsman the matter is managed by CE&CS.

Habitual Contact policy

P69 section 5 - unacceptable behaviour - the automatic warning stage should be triggered by bullet point 4 (hate crime) as well as by violent behaviour.

We will take this back for discussion with the Director.

P70 section 6 - there is a reference to the social care file in para 3 - is this a typo? Should this point apply to any file or record held by the council on that person?

The reference to social care file is not a typo. Social care files are specifically mentioned due to the statutory requirement to keep a comprehensive note of all dealings with service users.

P71 section 7 - the response in some cases should include the police where appropriate. I recognise this is covered in the next section too, but this is a later stage of the process.

Thank you – the police are indeed also included on page 72.

Mark Smeed

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