

Standards Committee

19 June 2023 – At a meeting of the Standards Committee held at 2.15 pm at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Bradbury (Chairman)

Cllr Burrett, Cllr Kenyon, Cllr Mercer, Cllr Sparkes, Cllr Walsh, Cllr Wild and Mr Donaldson (Independent Person)

Apologies were received from Cllr Wickremaratchi, Cllr Baxter and Mr Cooper (Independent Person)

Part I

1. Chairman's Welcome

1.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a particular welcome to Cllr Mercer and Cllr Walsh who had recently been appointed to the Committee.

1.2 It was noted that Cllr Baxter had also been recently appointed to the Committee but had given apologies for the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 None declared.

3. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

3.1 Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 31 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

4. Annual Complaints and Compliments Report

4.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Place Services (copy appended to the signed minutes).

4.2 David Tominey, Complaints Manager, introduced the report which outlined activity, data and learning in relation to complaints and compliments across the Council. It was reported that there had been a drop in the number of the complaints received of around 10%, perhaps due to a spike in a specific area in 2021.

4.3 It was noted that 27% of complaints had been upheld, down from 33% in 2021. Work is being done to address the timeliness of complaint responses as only 74% had been answered within published or statutory timescales.

4.4 In response to comments and questions from the Committee officers made the following statements:

- a. The apparent duplication of areas by team for Highways, Transport and Planning complaints was explained by directorate changes within the year and so the data represented the transition.
- b. The difference between 'closed with no further action' and 'not upheld' is that the Ombudsman can close a case with neither a positive or negative finding.
- c. Premature findings refer to cases reported to the Ombudsmen before they have been fully considered through the Council's complaints process.
- d. Place Services had a particularly high level of compliments compared to other directorates due to the library service receiving a high level of compliments, as they have done historically.
- e. When complaints are upheld at the first stage this represents the first reflection on a complaint in the formal process. Where complaints are upheld, findings are reported via a learning stage to draw out lessons.
- f. It was confirmed that most complaints for SEN are made by parents of children at the early stages of assessment, rather than those already on education health and care plans.
- g. It was confirmed that financial remedies mainly concern complaints against Adults' social care, Children's social care and Education & Skills. This is due to the impact of upheld complaints on individuals. It was confirmed that highway claims are separate from this system and published elsewhere.
- h. It was recognised that some issues create a high level of local comment which is not picked up via the complaints system but the role of the Customer Relations Team is to focus on formal complaints. Reassurance was given that managers take account of comment outside the formal complaints system.
- i. It was accepted that comparing figures for complaints and transactions does not necessarily reflect a level of satisfaction and it is hard to gauge total satisfaction levels.
- j. With reference to the number of not upheld complaints for Highways, Transport and Planning it is valid to assume that many complaints arise from a perception of what the Council should be doing, rather than what the Council does do or is required to do.
- k. It was noted that compliments are also recorded by the Customer Relations Team. It was recognised that social care is an area where it is a challenge to record compliments, as officers tend to feel that any compliments relate to what is normal working practice.
- l. It was accepted that a high level of complaints are linked to communication issues.
- m. The term 'failure demand' refers to where a customer is waiting for a call back that did not happen or where a promised action had not been carried out and needs to be chased.

4.5 Resolved – that the report be noted.

5. Standards Committee Annual Report 2022/23

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance (copy appended to the signed minutes).

5.2 Tony Kershaw, Director of Law and Assurance, introduced the report and commented that the low level of work for the year demonstrates that a high level of standards is being maintained.

5.3 The Committee welcomed the report and its account of the Committee's activity and also noted the report's account of the Committee's role in monitoring complaints and whistleblowing referrals.

5.4 Resolved – that the draft report be approved for submission to the County Council on 17 July 2023 (rescheduled from 14 July 2023).

6. Whistleblowing Policy Referrals

6.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance (copy appended to the signed minutes).

6.2 Tony Kershaw introduced the report and explained that the Council generally saw a low level of whistleblowing referrals but confirmed that all cases were reported to the committee.

6.3 The Chairman commented that the County Council did a good job of promoting the policy.

6.4 In response to the Committee's questions the Director explained:

- a. That whistleblowing investigations and outcomes would not usually come before a scrutiny committee but would, in most cases, be raised with the relevant cabinet member. The principal feature of the policy is to ensure confidentiality, and therefore members would not see the detail of a complaint. Whistleblowing is dealt with at a senior level. If patterns ever emerged from a number of referrals, this would likely then be considered by members of this committee.
- b. The policy only applies to schools that the local authority is responsible for. Academies will have their own policies.

6.5 Resolved – that the report be noted.

7. Date of Next Meeting

7.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting is due to be held on 30 October 2023.

The meeting ended at 3.10 pm

Chairman