

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 2 November 2023

Report of the Director of Law and Governance

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;

Statutory and Non-Statutory Annual Reports on Complaints and Customer Feedback 2022-2023

(Appendices 'A' to 'C' refer)

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Brief Summary

Lancashire County Council has a legal obligation to publish a complaints and customer feedback report on statutory social care complaints on an annual basis. There are two statutory procedures, both different: one for children and young people's social care complaints and one for adult social care complaints.

The Statutory Children's Social Care Annual Report on Complaints and Customer Feedback is set out at Appendix 'A'.

The Statutory Adult Social Care Annual Report on Complaints and Customer Feedback is set out at Appendix 'B'.

In addition to the statutory requirements, a Non-statutory Report on Complaints and Customer Feedback made through the Corporate Complaints Procedure (for complaints and feedback about all other services), is set out at Appendix 'C'.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to note the annual reports on Complaints and Customer Feedback for 2022/23, acknowledging the associated learning and recommended next steps, so that the county council can meet its legal obligations and community expectations.



Detail

Complaints are used by the county council as an opportunity to learn and improve. As a direct result of complaints made in 2022-2023, the council has learnt lessons and improved services as detailed within the respective annual reports.

Most complaints were found to be justified, and lessons learnt mainly centred around making improvements to the way the county council communicates with complainants. Many complaints could have been avoided by providing regular communication with customers and by being empathetic, clear, factual, and honest in our interactions, as well as doing what we say we will do.

Because complaints are an important tool to assess customer satisfaction, the complaints team regularly reports on statistics and trends. Quarterly monitoring of complaints data and lessons learnt are now considered at a new Compliance and Assurance Board, and through annual reporting to the Executive Management Team. There is also reporting by exception when a significant change or risk has been identified. In addition, the complaints team attends directorate management team meetings, and links in with managers to ensure that complaints which are upheld result in continuous improvements in service provision.

Received complaints represented just over 1% of all active adult social care and children's social care cases throughout Lancashire in 2022/23.

Children's social care statutory complaints (see Appendix 'A') decreased, whilst non-statutory complaints increased with a total of 434 in 2022/23 compared to 385 in 2021/22. This was mainly due to increased numbers of complaints in relation to children with special educational needs and disabilities. Compliments more than doubled from 98 in 2021/22 to 219 in 2022/23, mainly due to improved recording and an increase in inclusion service compliments.

In adult social care services (see Appendix 'B'), there was a steady upward trend in complaints, including joint complaints with the NHS, with a total of 579 in 2022/23 compared to 484 in 2021/22; it was likely that this was due to an overall increase in assessment volumes. However, it should be noted that people were more likely to compliment adult social care services rather than to complain. Compliments had increased by 5% from 659 in 2021/22 to 691 in 2022/23.

Appendices 'A' and 'B' show that the overall numbers of statutory complaints received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) had increased from 135 in 2021/22 to 148 in 2022/23. Additional investigators had been appointed by the Ombudsman, and initial assessment practices had also recently changed, leading to more upheld complaints nationally.

For non-statutory corporate complaints (see Appendix 'C'), out of 1,379 corporate reports of dissatisfaction, just 74 formal complaints had been made. This means that 95% of matters were resolved proactively, outside the formal complaints procedure. Only 3 corporate complaints had been upheld by the Ombudsman, the same number as in 2021/22. Compliments had increased by 93% on 2021/22 figures, mainly due to better recording and significant rises in public health positive feedback.



The statutory reports are made publicly available on the county council's website and shared with other interested agencies such as Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch Lancashire.

Recommended Next Steps

Given that the county council has received an increased number of complaints and compliments this year, several steps are recommended to ensure that patterns are identified and learning is utilised from our communities.

In 2023/24, the county council aims to:

- Refresh our customer relations policy and procedures, to ensure we are customer focused, and listen to our communities in an agile way to respond to feedback from residents, thereby building respectful and collaborative relationships to ensure all residents can prosper.
- Undertake an external review of our procedures, to ensure best practice and efficient use of resources.
- Undertake an integration of our teams to improve partnership working and the prioritisation complaints to ensure consistent standards within required timescales.
- Provide additional support for officers including an updated training offer.
- Undertake a digital review to design a single system for customer relations enquiries (to include executive correspondence, complaints, compliments, subject access requests and freedom of information requests).
- Ensure oversight of learning from complaints by a new Compliance and Assurance Board.
- Review how we monitor complaints and feedback key performance indicators.
- Work to shape our Corporate Complaints Procedure to ensure it meets the requirements introduced by the new statutory [Joint Ombudsman's complaints handling code](#). This will include changes to the reporting, logging and timescales of complaints, the appointment of a member responsible for complaints, more regular reporting to scrutiny committees and the publication of a detailed self-assessment, to provide a snapshot of not just compliance with the Code, but also the culture of our organisation, alongside the annual complaint performance reports.

Appendices

Appendices 'A' to 'C' are attached to this report. For clarification they are summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Statutory Children's Social Care Annual Report on Complaints and Customer Feedback 2022-2023
Appendix 'B'	Statutory Adult Social Care Annual Report on Complaints and Customer Feedback 2022-2023
Appendix 'C'	Non statutory Corporate Annual Report on Complaints and Customer Feedback 2022-2023



Consultations

Operational teams, managers and directors have been consulted on the annual report and the learning from complaints that has been identified.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Financial

The costs outlined within the report were funded from within 2022/23 service budgets.

Risk management

If statutory social care annual reports on complaints and customer feedback are not published, the county council would be in breach of its statutory duties.

Equality and Cohesion and Human Rights

The extensive lessons learnt sections in the annual reports outline improvements made to services, as a direct result of upheld complaints and listening to feedback from often the county council's most vulnerable customers and their representatives. This has contributed positively to the general aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty, particularly in relation to advancing equality of opportunity for those with protected characteristics. In terms of social care related issues, people are often from the age (both younger and older people) and disability protected characteristics groups.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
None		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
N/A		

