

# North Tyneside Council

## Report to Cabinet

### Date: 28 November 2022

#### Title: Annual Corporate Complaints Report 2021/22

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Portfolio(s): Deputy Mayor

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Carl Johnson

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Report from Service Area:

Corporate Strategy and Customer Service

Responsible Officer:

Jacqueline Laughton, Assistant Chief Executive

Tel: (0191) 643 5724

Wards affected:

All

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## PART 1

### 1.1 Executive Summary:

The Authority's Annual Complaints Report, attached in Appendix 1, shares information about the corporate complaints the Authority has received in 2021/22.

Both the Our North Tyneside Plan 2021 – 2025, agreed by Council on 23 September 2021 and the customer service programme, agreed by Cabinet on 28 May 2019, make clear the Authority's commitment to using customer feedback, including complaints, to design, deliver and improve its services.

Every complaint received by the Authority, is an opportunity to demonstrate that the Authority listens to its residents and cares about their views and concerns. The way in which complaints are received and responded to is an important element of a customer's experience and should follow the Authority's Corporate Complaints Procedure.

All complaints provide an insight into what is working well and what is not. The analysis of complaints data can provide a rich source of intelligence, to inform future prioritisation, planning and service delivery by the Authority.

The Authority serves over 208,000 residents each year with millions of individual services and transactions, including those to businesses and visitors. Whilst the overwhelming majority of the services are well received, the Authority knows it does not always get it right, for every one of those customers, first time. Our aim is to listen, learn and improve, where we don't get it right.

The Authority received 647 corporate complaints in 2021/22. Whilst this number is very low as a proportion of the services provided, the Authority is committed to learning from each and every complaint raised and is grateful to those who take the time to share their experiences.

At its meeting of the 17 October 2022, Cabinet agreed the 'We Listen, We Care', Customer Service Programme End of Phase Two report which detailed other feedback on customer experiences of council services and the improvements the Authority is making in response to this feedback.

## **1.2 Recommendation(s):**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (1) notes the Annual Complaints Report for 2021/22 (Appendix 1),
- (2) approves the publication of the Annual Complaints Report on the Authority's website from 12 December 2022, and
- (3) receives the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review of complaints concerning North Tyneside Council for 2021-22 (Appendix 2).

## **1.3 Forward plan:**

28 days notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 5 August 2022.

## **1.4 Council plan and policy framework**

The Our North Tyneside Plan sets out bold ambitions for ensuring that's the Borough's residents, businesses, environment and economy continue to thrive; making North Tyneside an even greater place to live, work and visit by 2025. The plan outlines a vision of building a better North Tyneside, looking to the future, and listening to and working better for residents.

Listening and learning from all customer feedback, including that from complaints, is an integral part of this ambition.

## **1.5 Information:**

### **1.5.1 Background**

The definition of a complaint can be wide-ranging but can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided, or lack of action by the Authority or its employees. This can include failure to achieve specific standards of service

The Authority's Corporate Complaint Procedure covers all services it provides and has a three-stage process. Corporate complaints also include statutory complaints received through the Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006.

Cabinet recently reviewed the work of the second phase of its Customer Service Programme – 'we listen, and we care' at its meeting of 17 October 2022. This report detailed other feedback on customer experiences of council services and the improvements the Authority is making in response to this feedback.

The Authority has many ways that it receives feedback about the services it provides. Whatever the channel, nature or purpose of this feedback, its benefit is not only to the customer but also to the Authority.

All feedback or complaints are an opportunity to demonstrate that the Authority listens to its residents and cares about their views and concerns. The way in which complaints are received and responded to, is an important element of a customer's experience and should meet the standards set out in the Authority's customer promise, every time.

Complaint information is an insight into what is working well and what is not and helps the Authority to meet the needs of the communities it serves, especially as those needs evolve. The organisation wide assimilation and analysis of this feedback can then provide one of the most reliable sources of intelligence, to inform future prioritisation, planning and service delivery.

A new Customer First Office (CFO) was established by the Authority in July 2022. This Authority team continues to administer the Authority's corporate complaints in line with its corporate complaint procedure but are now also delivering the work using lessons learned from the Customer Service Programme, as well as ongoing learning from complaints received by the Authority.

### 1.5.2 Summary of Corporate Complaints in 2021/22

Appendix 1 is the Annual Authority's Annual Corporate Complaints report for 2021/22.

- The Authority received 647 corporate complaints in 2021/22. Whilst this number is low as a proportion of all services provided, the Authority committed to learning from all complaints raised and is grateful to those who take the time to share their experiences.
- The number of corporate complaints received, is a significant decrease from 2019/20 (1,069) but an increase from 2020/21 (519).
- 7.4% of the corporate complaints received this year, were subsequently reviewed by either the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or the Housing Ombudsman (HO).
- 81% of corporate complaints were resolved at stage one of the Authority's corporate three stage complaint process.
- The number of corporate complaints resolved outside of the Authority's three stage complaint process, has increased this year. This *may be* linked in part to the establishment of a new Customer First Office and the Customer Service Programme, both focused on making it easier for customers to share their experiences with the Authority.
- Just over half of corporate complaints received this year were upheld by the Authority, - acknowledging lower than expected performance in service delivery standards or what our customers should expect from the customer promise. This figure has decreased since a rise during 2021-22 but is now lower than in previous years.
- The factors driving corporate complaints are broadly in line with those of the previous three years; the top three reasons are:

- time taken to receive a service
  - communication, often linked to the first point when waiting for a service to be delivered, and
  - disagreement with a decision made by the Authority, such as priority rating for housing or the outcome of an assessment by a service team.
- Just over 40% of corporate complaints relate to housing, property and repairs; this includes customer dissatisfaction with decisions on the priority in which council houses are offered to residents.
  - There are increasing numbers of customers opting to register corporate complaints online.
  - There has been a notable decrease in the number of Children's Services and Adult Social Care corporate complaints, since 2018/19. However, the pace of reduction in Adult Social Care complaints, has halted this year, with only one fewer complaint received, when compared to 2020/21. This trend will be explored in next year's learning and improvement activity.
  - The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) annually provides a performance letter to every Local Authority on the complaints that have been referred to their service during the course of the year. Highlighted are any areas where recommendations have been made. During 2021/22, the Authority received two recommendations, one for Childrens Services, and one for Community Protection. Both recommendations were quickly actioned, and confirmation of compliance issued with the LGSCO.

### 1.5.3 Learning and Priorities for 2022/23

Complaint activity over the past two years has undoubtedly been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and it's clear that trends and patterns have become more difficult to interpret and predict as a result. Other changes made by the Authority in terms of embedding its values of 'we listen' and 'we care', may also be changing how the Authority better responds to initial complaints and seeks early resolution of any customer complaints.

Priorities for the year ahead reflect the learning from the Authority's Annual Corporate Complaint report for 2021/22 and focus primarily on strengthening the processes, practices and recording systems, which support the Authority in making the most from corporate complaint feedback.

- Work will be undertaken in 2022/23 with Authority services whose complaint patterns have shifted significantly over the past 4 years, to understand the reasons for this.
- The Authority remains committed to the prerequisites of a good complaint system. Action will be taken next year to strengthen customer complaint statements, including the outcomes they wish to see and the learning outcomes and actions for services.
- A new IT system will assist with easier collation of corporate complaint data and frequency of reporting.

- The CFO is still in its infancy and will continue to embed in the year ahead, developing positive and proactive relationships with Authority customers and service teams. Particular focus will be given to the relationship between the CFO and the Authority's dedicated housing, repairs and property customer experience function.

## **1.6 Decision options:**

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet:

### Option 1

Cabinet notes the content of the Authority's Annual Complaints Report 2021/22 and approves publication of it, on the Authority's website.

Cabinet notes the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review of complaints concerning North Tyneside Council for 2021-22.

### Option 2

Cabinet refers the Authority's Annual Complaints Report 2021/22 back to officers and requests that further analysis and information is provided.

Cabinet notes the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review of complaints concerning North Tyneside Council for 2021-22.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

## **1.7 Reasons for recommended option:**

Option 1 is recommended for the following reason:

All Local Authorities providing social service functions are legally required to publish an annual report on complaints received.

## **1.8 Appendices:**

Appendix 1: North Tyneside Council Complaints Service Report 2021-22

Appendix 2: The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review of complaints about North Tyneside Council 2021-22

## **1.9 Contact officers:**

Haley Hudson, Customer Services and Digital Strategy Manager, tel. (0191) 643 7008

Eilidh Cook, Customer First Office Manager, tel. (0191) 643 5363

David Dunford, Senior Business Partner, tel. (0191) 643 7027

Adam Hagg, Customer Interface & Service Improvement Manager, tel. (0191) 643 6684

## 1.10 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

- (1) The LGSCO Annual Review of Social Care Complaints October 2022\_  
<https://www.lgo.org.uk/assets/attach/6312/ASC-Review-2021-22-FINAL.pdf>
- (2) Report to Cabinet - We Listen, We Care - Customer Service Programme End of Phase Two Review 17 October 2022\_  
<https://democracy.northtyneside.gov.uk/documents/s10006/We%20Listen%20We%20Care%20-%20Customer%20Service%20Programme%20End%20of%20Phase%20Two%20Review.pdf>
- (3) The LGSCO Review of Local Government Complaints July 2022\_  
<https://www.lgo.org.uk/assets/attach/6280/LG-Review-2021-22-F.pdf>
- (4) The Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and Guidance (Children)\_  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1738/contents/made>
- (5) The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and Guidance (Adults)\_  
[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/DH\\_12036\\_1](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/DH_12036_1)
- (6) North Tyneside Council Corporate Complaints Procedure\_  
<http://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/479/complaints-procedure>
- (7) The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities Regulations 2012\_  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/3094/introduction/made>

## PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

### 2.1 Finance and other resources

There are no financial or other resource implications arising directly from this report. The delivery of the service is provided for from existing budget provision. Compensation payments are funded from existing budgets in the relevant service areas.

### 2.2 Legal

As a 'responsible body' under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 the Authority must make arrangements for handling and considering complaints concerning the provision of social services in accordance with the 2009 Regulations.

The Regulations specify what should be included in the complaints handling arrangements and also require the Authority to prepare an annual report for each year which must specify the number of complaints which the Authority has received.

specify the number of complaints which the Authority decided were well-founded and specify the number of complaints which the Authority has been informed have been referred to the LGSCO and HO.

## **2.3 Consultation/community engagement**

### **2.3.1 Internal Consultation**

The findings from the Authority's 2021/22 Annual Complaint Report, have been shared with the Authority's Chief Executive, Elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care and Children, Young People and Learning.

Meetings with senior service management teams across the top five complaint areas, have provided feedback on lessons learned, improvements made and priorities for 2022/23.

### **2.3.2 Community engagement**

Satisfaction surveys are sent to all complainants following the closure of their complaint. Feedback from these surveys is valuable in helping the Authority to improve and enhance the complaint management process. A summary of survey responses can be found in section 9, Appendix 1, of this report.

The Authority has identified this as an area which requires development work in 2022/23, to increase the number of customers who take part in the surveys.

## **2.4 Human rights**

The service promotes equal access to complaint services and opportunities to contribute to service improvement.

## **2.5 Equalities and diversity**

The Authority promotes equal access to complaint services and opportunities to contribute to service improvement. Material is available in different formats and Officers actively help those with individual needs as required.

Equality monitoring is undertaken so that the service can ensure it meets the needs of people with protected characteristics across all of the borough's communities.

## **2.6 Risk management**

There are no risk implications directly arising from this report.

## **2.7 Crime and disorder**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report.

## **2.8 Environment and sustainability**

There are no environment and sustainability implications arising from this report

### PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive  X
- Director(s) of Service  X
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)  X
- Chief Finance Officer  X
- Monitoring Officer  X
- Assistant Chief Executive  X