

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER, 2023

A MEETING of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER, 2023 at 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair – Councillor Jake Kearsley

Councillors      Leanne Hempshall,    Richard A Jones,    Majid Khan,    Martin Greenhalgh and Glynis Smith

Co-optees – Antoinette Drinkhill (Church of England representative)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Dulcie Aulton, Head of Customer Service Chief Executive Directorate  
Nicky Harvey - St Leger Homes of Doncaster  
Toni Illman - Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust  
Cathy Hinde – Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust  
Councillor Tim Needham, Vice Chair Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel  
Councillor Nigel Cannings, Vice Chair Community and Environment Scrutiny Panel

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jane Kidd and Gemma Cobby

		<u>ACTION</u>
1	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items on the agenda.	
2	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made.	
3	<u>MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 1ST JUNE 2023</u>	
	<b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2023, be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	

5	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS.</u>	
	There were no members of the public in attendance at the meeting therefore no public statements were made.	
6	<u>ANNUAL COMPLAINT AND COMPLIMENT REPORT 2022/23</u>	
	<p>The Committee was presented with a report setting out the complaints and compliment information relating to 2022/23 for Doncaster Council (CDC), St Leger Homes of Doncaster(SLHD) and Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust (DCLT). The following areas were addressed by the Committee:</p> <p><u>Complaints in the most important service areas</u> – a Member stated that the report seemed to paint an overall positive picture but compared to data from 2020/21 the overall number of complaints was much higher and in some of the most important service areas was not ideal and questioned if further scrutiny or investigation was required.</p> <p>It was explained that during the year DCLT had received 244 complaints, a 64% decrease on the previous year. The reason for this was due to a significant change in the method of reporting complaints, bringing it's process in line with the Council's corporate complaints procedure. Previously DCLT had reported all negative feedback as a complaint regardless of whether there was any allegation of fault. DCLT now record dissatisfaction as customer insight if there has been no allegation of failed service.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the number of complaints received in 22/23 was much higher than in 20/21, this was due to the impact of COVID in 20/21 which saw the number of complaints and communication to the Council drastically reduce overall. A more applicable comparison would be to pre-Covid 18/19 where the number of complaints for the council were 796 and Post Covid 21/22 there were 815, identified that the 22/23 figures of 736 was a more comparative amount.</p> <p>Members were informed that complaints and compliments were invaluable feedback from customers, with lessons learnt being used to improve the services provided.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the Place Directorate received the highest number of complaints, (450 a reduction of 100 complaints compared to previous year). It was noted that this was to be expected due to the nature of services provided, for example, Waste &amp; Recycling, Highways, Street Lighting and Street Scene services. However in contract, it was recognised that this Directorate also received the highest number of Compliments. During discussion it was highlight that the Waste &amp; Recycling service received 128 complaints in 22/23, a reduction of 21.5% on the previous year, but it made approximately 10 million waste collections a year. The figures also included the</p>	

Household Waste and Recycling Centres.

In response to a statement relating to the Annual Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Letter where it evidenced one particular response to a complainant was 'very poor'. This related to a complaint where a request for a statutory complaint to go to Stage 2 was denied by the previous Doncaster Children's Service 's Trust. It was noted that City of Doncaster Council has process in place where any requests for a Stage two are reviewed by a Customer Experience panel, which includes the Head of Service.

High level of housing complaints – a Member questioned if this statistic was reflective of the national picture and had external factors been and influence for example the increase in damp and mould that had developed in some properties throughout the winter months and the reality of sourcing materials through the pandemic.

It was explained that the increase was consistent with the picture nationally with tracking undertaken by HouseMark, for example, its monthly report in February reported an increase in complaints volumes across the UK, with average complaints volumes increasing by 15% from December and up 50% compared to January 2022 for some organisations. March's monthly report showed increases by almost 19% compared to February, with March's volumes 78% higher than the same point in 2022.

There were several factors which had an impacted including an initial increase in complaints about damp and mould towards the end of 2022, although this has since reduced. Increased publicity nationally by Government, the latest of which was published in March 2023 and local publicity about how to make a complaint.

Members noted that recent local data for Q1 23/24 detailed a reduction when compared to the Q1 22/23, with a 9% reduction in the number of complaints received.

Complaints relating to travel assistance in Children, Young People and Families – Further to the points raised by a Member, it was explained that In May 2023, the Travel Assistance Service delivered training to approximately 192 drivers and escorts employed by operators delivering transport services on behalf of the Council. Topics covered included positive handling, safeguarding, Child Sexual Exploitation, County Lines and the code of conduct that all staff operating on behalf of the Council were expected to adhere to, policies and procedures in place on home to school transport were also addressed.

The Committee noted that additional awareness sessions had been arranged on a monthly basis from October 2023.

The response continued to outline that in September 2023, training had been delivered to 36 internal drivers and escorts covering various

topics including positive handling, safeguarding and the code of conduct. The Witherslack Group had also attended the session to cover topics such as having a basic understanding of Special Education Needs in relation to communication and behaviour, practical strategies to implement in the taxi, to support the journeys to and from school, feeling safer when transporting young people, understanding how to communicate safeguarding concerns and improving relationships and communication between schools and drivers/escorts. This training gave attendees an accredited qualification.

It was noted that the Travel Assistance Service operated approximately 400 runs in 2022/2023 academic year. Whilst it was disappointing that approximately 12 complaints had been received but equated to around 2.75% of runs.

A Member of the Committee in response to a Councillors question relating to measuring impact, explained that this could be difficult to measure and explained, for example, that if a child had autism a positive journey to school would lead to a positive day at school with increased quality learning. This could not be measured.

The officer would provide further detail following the meeting in response to questions relating to whether the training was mandatory, if training had been provided on the back of the number of complaints received and after a 6 month period further feedback on how the training had made an impact be provided and what benchmarks were in place to measure improvements.

Ombudsman recommendations relating to the agreed 'moving in process' – It was confirmed that the recommendations from the ombudsman had been implemented, mainly through reorganising responsibilities between the Senior Officers and Managers to ensure there was weekly oversight of all children without a school or on reduced hours within mainstream school. Senior Officers were ensuring contact with other authorities was prioritised. Having the EHCP in advance of the child moving means a setting could be identified quickly and consultation undertaken prior to the child moving into the Doncaster area. The Head of Service responsible for SEND, Attendance and Pupil Welfare and Inclusion teams has brought them closer together ensuring a joined up approach from all the service areas.

Additional Social, Emotional and Mental Health provision – It was explained that there would be a Social, Emotional and Mental Health 'hub' in each locality in Doncaster by January 2024. This would introduce 40 places for children and young people, 30 of which would be in the primary phase and 10 in secondary. In response to this, Members wished for further comment on whether the numbers were adequate, which would be provided following the meeting.

It was outlined that the Local Authority was currently working with schools and families to oversee transition to these hubs. Whilst further provision was expected in future years, substantial changes were being made to the local system in order to ensure that needs could be identified and met at the earliest point, supported by funding and expertise from local authority teams. This would be accompanied by changes to the local landscape of alternative provision providers, which would make more places available to support assessment and reintegration into schools.

Furthermore, the local partnership was currently developing an integrated assessment model, which would also support schools with delivering support at the earliest point.

Complaint logging process where there could be an overlap of service – a Member sought clarification on whether there could be an overlap, for example, could the SEND and EHCP complaints be merged?

It was explained that complaints were allocated according to the service area, for example SEND, Attendance and Pupil Welfare, Inclusion and Behaviour. If the complaint is about an EHCP this was recorded separately to general complaints from parents about children who had special educational needs but do not have an EHCP. Usually complaints about EHCPs were relating to timeliness of issuing or refusal to issue a plan whereas the SEND panel agreed a child would not require an EHCP because their needs could be met with quality first teaching.

All complaints were allocated to relevant officers with a Head of Service quality assuring the response. Where there was an overlap of service areas the Head of Service would allocate the request to more than one officer to complete, one officer would hold overall responsibility with contacting the complainant, investigating the complaint and writing the response. The Head of Service had oversight of all complaints even though they were logged separately according to service.

The officer confirmed that the Committee's comments would be noted and tracking assessed.

St Leger Homes Customer Excellence Training Programme – It was report to the Committee that the Customer Excellence training programme was a continuing programme. The objective was for all employees to attend this mandatory training. As the training had only recently been completed it was too early to analyse the impact on complaints, but this and satisfaction with the services provided have been identified as a measure of success. Those employees, who for a variety of reasons could not attend the initial training would receive in-house training to ensure consistency of approach. The intention was that the training would be delivered internally to new employees and form part of their induction process.

Introducing training Adult Social Care Duty Teams – in response to a question relating to how can improvement be evidenced it was outlined that the improvements to the Adult Social Care Duty had been evidenced by reduced handovers to other workers ensuring that a person receives consistency and does not have to keep repeating their information to new people. If there was a change in worker the clearer handover process ensured that the worker holds all the information making it a smoother transition for the person as the same questions would not be asked.

Going forward the changes to the Access to Adult Social Care would embed the locality-based working further, in line with the practice framework and ensuring that every contact counts, that the person speaks to someone based in their community and that they had a named worker from that first contact.

The evidence of this improvement would be gained by feedback from the person making contact either on the same day if no follow up call was required or at the end of any involvement whether that was a follow up call or when the support from the worker was no longer required.

In response to a question relating to how complaints were monitored and practice quality assured by companies undertaking Council commissioned services, the officer explained that a response would be provided following the meeting.

Complaint ownership – Members held a detailed discussion relating to when numerous complaints about the same issue were being received through different mechanisms, by officers and Members, and if or when such enquiries were recorded as formal complaints.

In response it was explained that if Members or Officers received a number of reports from customers about the same issue, for example reporting potholes, dumped rubbish, street lighting these would not initially be classed as corporate complaints but as requests for services.

However, if the Council then continued to fail to provide that service or the customer was unhappy with the service, the customer may decide to make a corporate complaint which would be managed through the Council's Corporate Complaints process.

It was the responsibility of the public/member of community to raise a corporate complaint unless they provided explicit consent for a Member or Officer to do so on their behalf.

The Customer Experience Teams role was to provide advice and guidance to both Members and Officers on any complaints that were

received.

A Member of the Committee outlined their need to be clear on how service requests were further logged as a corporate complaint and whose responsibility would it be to do this, eg. Member or Officer. The Committee noted that it was dependent on each complaint and was highlighted that if a Member felt a service issue required escalating they could send it to the Customer Experience Team on behalf of the customer. It was stressed that it was everyone's responsibility to refer issues to the Customer Experience Team. An example relating to potholes was provided, it would initially be classed as a service request but if there was service failure then it could be classed as a corporate complaint.

Although it was moved and seconded during discussion that a clear pathway be set out in the corporate complaints procedure outlining whose responsibility it was to escalate a complaint, it was recognised during summing up that there was a need for the Committee fully understand the complaints procedure and that an outline be provided to the Committee on this issue following the meeting.

- Single point of contact (SPOC) – in response to when a SPOC came into effect, it was explained that in some incidences the Council experienced service users acting in an unreasonable way when accessing it's services. This could be when they had a complaint, pursuing their complaints in a way that could impede the investigation of their complaint, or residents who had not made complaints but take up a disproportionate amount of Council time and resources sending in emails, making phone calls, or visiting council buildings. It also covered abusive, threatening and offence behaviour which could be in person, over the phone, in writing or by electronic methods of communication.

In most cases before any action was taken under this policy the Council would explain to the service user by their preferred means of communication, why their behaviour was unacceptable and ask them to alter their behaviour. The communication would include a copy of this policy. The service user would also be warned that if their behaviour persists, they could be considered as unreasonable and the likely action the Council would take as a result.

The decision to place a person on the Unreasonable Behaviour Register had to be made by an Assistant Director in the relevant service area in consultation with the Head of Customer Service. The Customer Experience Team manage the register and ensure that each decision was regularly reviewed.

There were currently 16 individuals on the unreasonable behaviour register and the way in which their behaviour was being managed differed vastly, ranging from complete barring of attending the Civic

