

Report to:	OVERVIEW PANEL
Date:	27 September 2021
Reporting Officer:	Sandra Stewart – Director of Governance & Pensions Julie Speakman – Head of Executive Support
Subject:	UNDERSTANDING OUR CUSTOMER CONTACTS AND LEARNING FROM OUR COMPLAINTS, INFORMATION AND DATA REQUESTS
Report Summary:	The report provides an update and strategic overview in relation to dealing with and responding to customer contacts. This report also provides a summary of complaints received by the organisation, those that escalated to a statutory panel and or Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The report also provides a summary of information and data requests made to the local authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in addition to other information processes. Finally there is an outline in terms of the future work of the Information and Improvement Team and how they can help drive system improvement, working alongside the Budget Turnaround Team.
Recommendations:	Overview Panel are asked to note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the content of the update and strategic overview of complaint system/process (b) support the refreshed training offer being promoted across the organisations; and (c) receive further more detailed reports in relation to the top 5 key areas of complaints.
Corporate Plan:	Putting people at the forefront of services is a key element of the Council's Corporate Plan. An effective and robust complaints handling procedure is a necessary step to achieving this.
Policy Implications:	An effective complaint function means that residents who do not receive the best quality service can notify the Council for the purposes of redress and the improvement of services in the future. It is important for the Council to take notice of findings and guidance on complaint handling to aid best practice. As a leader for the Customer Service Excellence standard it is also important to use this as an improvement tool to inform our custom and practice for service delivery.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	This report is an update on our performance in relation to complaints. The cost of complaints to the service has resulted in an overspend of £13k budget allocated for the past 2 financial years as outlined in 4.10, which was mitigated from wider service budgets. Dealing with service failure has a financial impact both in terms of the consequences of the complaint and the significant resource required to respond to the complaint process.
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	On the 8 October 2020 in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman issued new guidance on effective complaint handling for local authorities -

<https://www.lgo.org.uk/assets/attach/5908/Good-complaint-handling-FINAL-1.7.21.pdf>.

Based on previous documents, the new guide offers practical, real-world advice and guidance on running a complaints system to ensure it is effective and helps improve services. It runs through the steps authorities need to take to ensure complaints are properly identified, investigated and put right where necessary. It also examines statutory procedures for children's and adult social care complaints, guidance on dealing with third-party complaints, and advice on how to draw out the learning from the issues raised. Michael King, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, said:

“We have been investigating complaints for more than 45 years, and throughout that time we have seen both good and bad practices.

“The guide we are issuing today offers practical advice, based on our vast experience, on how to run an effective complaints process.

“We urge local authority complaint handlers to take on board our guidance because we know how valuable the learning from complaints can be.

“The best authorities use complaints as a barometer of external opinion and as an early warning of problems that might otherwise stay unseen. They take that a step further and use critical feedback to drive a sophisticated culture of learning, reflection and improvement.”

The Ombudsman's jurisdiction is covered by the Local Government Act 1974 which defines the main statutory functions for the Ombudsman as:

- to investigate complaints against councils and some other authorities
- to investigate complaints about adult social care providers from people who arrange or fund their adult social care (Health Act 2009).

The Ombudsmen's jurisdiction under Part III of the Act covers all local authorities (excluding town and parish councils); police and crime bodies; and school admission appeal panels.

The LGO corporate strategy is based upon twin pillars of remedying injustice and improving local public services.


The Ombudsman is confident that the continued publication of decisions, focus reports on key themes and the data in the annual review letter is helping the sector to learn from its mistakes and support better services for citizens. Recently, Councils have been urged to scrutinise data on complaints to improve services. It is important that the Council takes even greater measures to ensure that it is able to evidence that it learns from complaints and uses this learning to improve and maintain the quality of the services it commissions and provides. Hence this is the first of many reports.

Risk Management:

Failure to understand complaints received by the Council and analyse volumes and themes overall will lead to a risk of poor service delivery.

Access to Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer Julie Speakman Head of Executive Support.

 Telephone:0161 342 2142

 email: julie.speakman@tameside.gov.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Tameside Council strives to deliver excellent customer service. The Council delivers a wide range of services and whilst endeavouring to provide a consistent, high quality service, with good outcomes for our customers, we also recognise that occasionally issues can occur and things can go wrong.
- 1.2 We recognise the importance of listening to any feedback we receive, as this provides a valuable source of information; it lets us know what we are doing well and equally where service improvements can possibly be made. The information that customers request is also a useful tool to understand what is important to them and what information we should be ensuring is readily available through our channels of communication including one of our main assets, our websites.
- 1.3 In recognising the ongoing pressures of the organisations, need to build in capacity and ensuring there was an overarching view of this area of work it was determined that like for like tasks would be brought together into a central function. Wholly managed under the umbrella of the Executive Support Service, under the arm of the Information and Improvement Team. The organisation also agreed investment for the procurement of a new information casework system following the withdrawal of the internal CRM system in 2016 due to security compliance.
- 1.4 The iCasework system was implemented by the Council and Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group in June 2020. The Greater Manchester Pension Fund also use this system. Although the system has been live for over a year, the service impacts of responding to the Covid pandemic has caused some delays in bringing forward information and learning reports for which this is the first.
- 1.5 The iCasework complaints and information case management system was implemented and went live within the organisation on 15 June 2020. The system, managed and maintained by the Information & Improvement Team, records, processes and monitors contacts received by the organisation which include:-
- Corporate Complaints
 - Social care complaints (Children's & Adult's)
 - LGO & ICO Enquiries & Complaints
 - MP Enquiries
 - Freedom of Information Requests (FOI)
 - Subject Access Requests (SARs)
 - PSI – Applications for re-use
 - Compliments
 - Suggestions (customers & staff)
 - General Customer Enquiries
 - Whistleblowing concerns

Prior to going live all the front facing website pages and contact forms were refreshed and relocated so easier for customers to navigate to the right channel to log complaints, compliments, suggestions and requests for information.

- 1.6 Table 1 outlines the case work volumes per theme, grey area is where case work was primarily processed within services (with wider admin by Executive Support)) prior to June 2020, yellow as the merged team, and from 15 June 2020 logged within the new system.

Table 1

	Work Areas	Case Volumes					
		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (up to June 21)	
A d m i n i s t r a t i o n o f :	Information & Data Team						
	Freedom of Information requests - TMBC	1287	1287	1295	1091	545	
	Freedom of Information requests - CCG	275	243	233	177	87	
	FOI Internal Reviews	9	3	7	10	3	
	ICO Investigations				1	1	
	Subject Access Requests - TMBC	45	81	227	230	118	
	Subject Access Requests - CCG	0	2	7	4	0	
	Missing Person searches	9	6	4	1	1	
	Coroners	n/a	5	24	3	0	
	Complaints & Customer Care Team						
	Childrens Complaints - Stage 1	105	152	182	102	114	12 Stat
	Childrens Complaints - Stage 2	9	19	24	41	37	3 Stat
	Childrens Complaints - Stage 3	3	2	2	4	2	2 Stat
	Adults Complaints - Stage 1	41	71	51	76	39	13 Stat
	Adults Complaints - Stage 2	15	8	13	21	13	5 Stat
	CCG Enquiries/Complaints	51	83	78	47	114	
	Corporate Complaints - Stage 1			102	457	348	
	Corporate Complaints - Stage 2			17	84	89	
	MP enquiries - TMBC	336	262	499	1130	479	
	MP enquiries - CCG	30	28	11	40	55	
	LGO enquiries / complaints		70	62	42	26	
	Whistle blowing		<10	<10	21	11	
	SAR Requests - to check complaints			82	99	47	
		2215	2322	2920	3681	2129	

- 1.7 In addition to the above the organisation receives general enquiries through the case management system and from 15 June 2020 – 31 December 2020 1911 were received, and from 1 January 2021 to 31 May 2021 there were 1654 , totalling 3645 since the system was introduced. Types of these enquiries will be predominantly what we will have classed as service requests previously.

2. COMPLAINTS AND CUSTOMER CARE

- 2.1 In most cases, before any issues are considered via the formal complaints process, they must have been highlighted to the appropriate Council service through the service request process. By raising the issue as a service request initially, it allows us the opportunity to resolve the matter quickly and efficiently, so that customers can get the service that they want.
- 2.2 A complaint is generally defined as any expression of dissatisfaction specifically relating to a council service, or a body acting on behalf of the council, about the actions the service has taken, or a lack of action that has occurred. If at the end of the service request process, if the customer remain dissatisfied, they can contact the Complaints & Customer Care Team to raise a formal complaint. We will provide an impartial, fair and structured process for dealing with complaints.
- 2.3 It is our aim to make sure customers get a response as soon as possible, and where we can resolve issues quickly we will always endeavour to do so. Where cases are more complex, customers might be asked to agree a statement of complaint to ensure that all issues are fully understood and can be investigated; in these cases resolution may take a little longer.

- 2.4 There are three distinct areas in terms of the Council's complaints process that customers can access; these are the statutory processes for a) Children's Social Care,(Stage 1, 2 and 3 process) Adults Social Care and the corporate complaints(Stage1 and 2 process) relating to issues regarding to any other council wide service.
- 2.5 For any customer that remain dissatisfied in the handling or response to their council complaint then they can escalate their concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) who are independent from the council and investigate complaints and maladministration. The Customer retain the right to approach the LGSCO during any stage of the complaints process, however the Ombudsman would ordinarily expect that contact is made with the council in the first instance, so that any issues raised can be considered locally and an attempt to reach a suitable resolution can be made.
- 2.6 The Customer Service Excellence Standard that the local authority has held for over 15 years is pivotal to the way we deliver our services to high standards.
- 2.7 Through research outlined in the Customer Service Excellence standard it shows that many customers are satisfied with the outcome of their contact but fewer are satisfied with the way the service kept promises and handled any problems. Handling problems in particular often receives one of the lowest ratings out of all the different areas measured.
- 2.8 In addition research further shows that the speed of our initial contact with the customer and our ability to keep to agreed timescales are vital. However, organisations can sometimes focus on providing a speedy service while forgetting to also consider quality.
- 2.9 Other research identified that learning from mistakes is an important way to gain trust from their customers. Listening to, and asking for, comments, feedback and complaints about the service delivered can be a great way to make small adjustments to the way your organisation runs, and both formal and informal feedback can be equally important.
- 2.10 In particular there are two criterion within the Customer Service Excellence standard to highlight. These are Criterion 4 Delivery, Criterion 5 Timeliness, and Quality of Service. These are fundamental in helping drive our service improvement and learning from what customers tell us.

Criterion 4

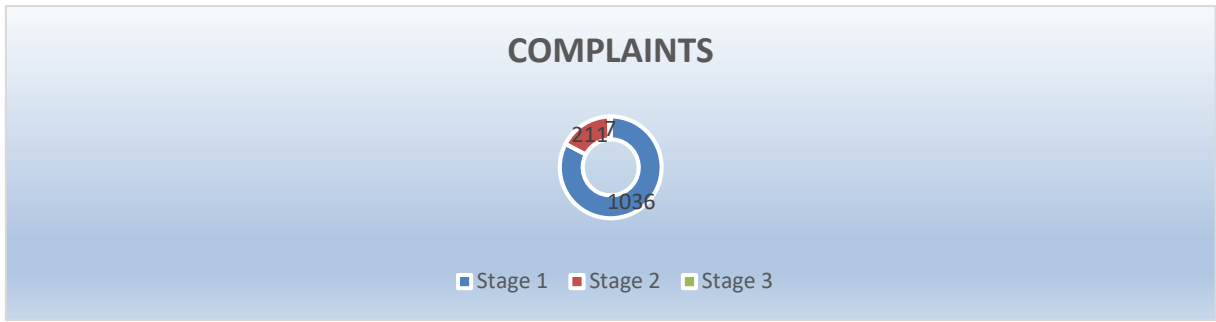
This criterion relates to how we as an organisation carry out our main business, the outcomes for our customers and how we manage problems that arise.

This criterion focuses on the outcome of our organisation's main business and whether we keep to the promises we have made to individual customers. It also relies on customers' views about the outcomes of our services, rather than just focusing on the main indicators our organisation uses to measure its performance. We should use the complaints we receive about the way we provide services and any dips in our performance to make sure customers receive the service we have promised them.

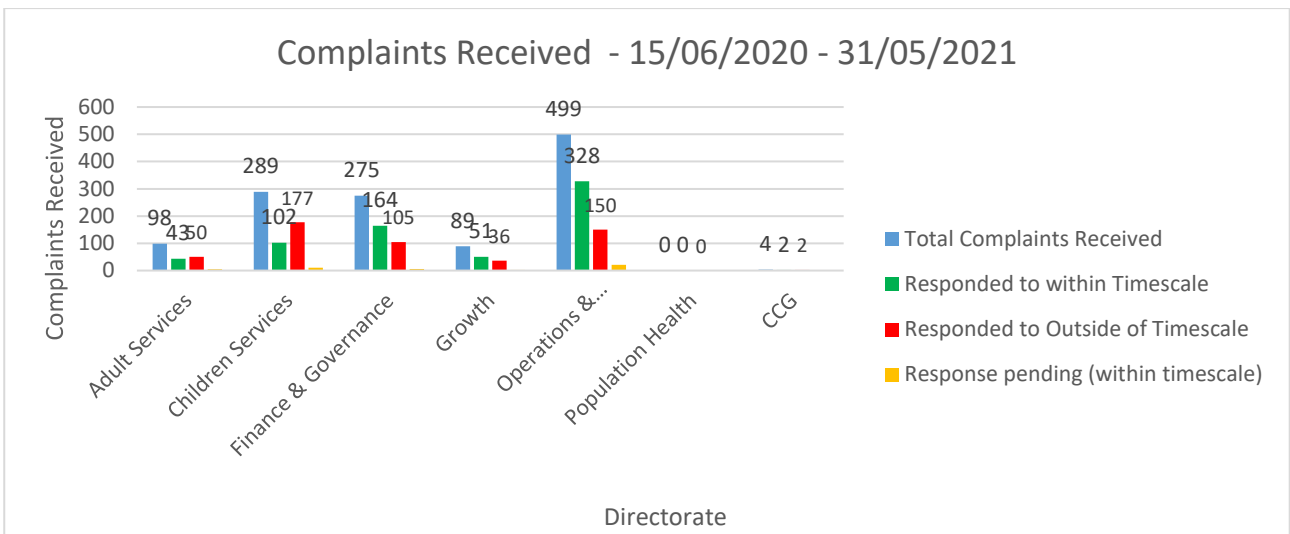
Criterion 5

This criterion looks in more detail at the standards we have relating to how we carry out our main business. It draws heavily on what users have identified as the most important factors of excellent customer service. Separating customer service standards from the main business standards makes the requirements for setting and monitoring standards in these areas much more strict. This plays a major part in developing the customer-focused culture.

- 2.11 Focusing on complaints, and from the time that the data was input /managed through the system, for the period 15 June 2020 – 31 May 2021 (quarter end), the organisation has received and processed a total of 1,254 complaints of which 1036 Stage 1, 211 Stage 2, and 7 Stage 3.



2.12 The breakdown of the complaints received and the volume per service directorate are outlined in the table below

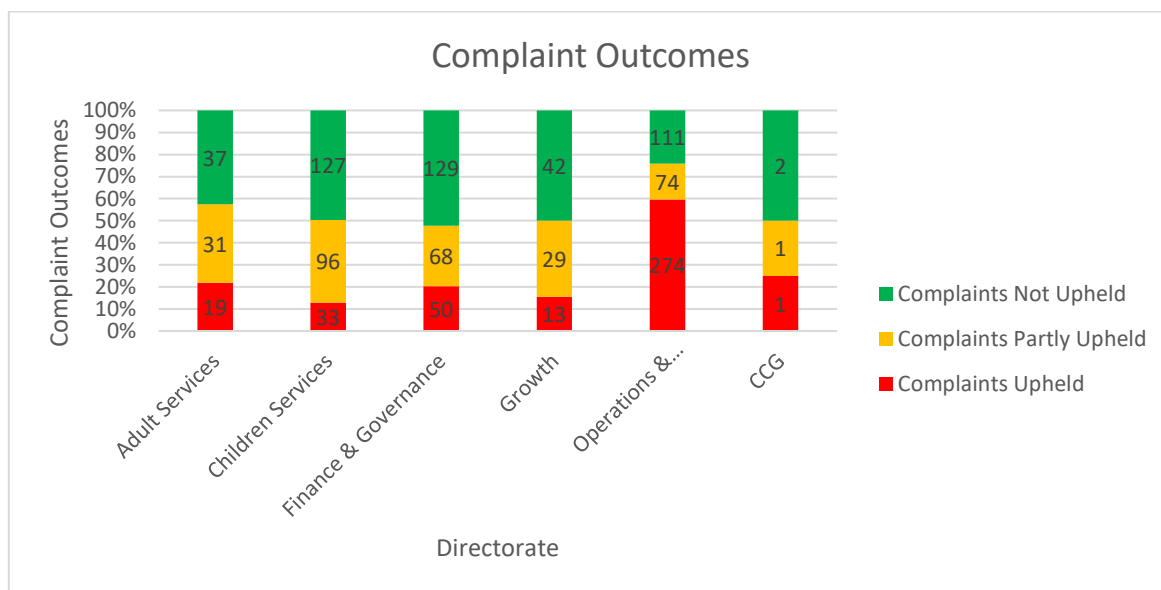


2.13 It should be noted that high volumes of complaints received, does not necessarily indicate the quality of the council's performance. High volumes of complaints can be a sign that we are an open organisation and complaints can act as an early warning of wider problems developing. Low complaint volumes, rather than always being an indicator that all is well, can be a worrying indicator that the authority is not alert to customer feedback and that service users do not believe that complaining will have an effect.

2.14 From the total complaints received during this reporting period, only 57% were responded to within the prescribed timescales. However, it is important to note that although these were outside of the prescribed timescales, active dialogue with customers will have taken place to keep them update on progress of when they would be likely to receive their responses. It should be noted that there has been a significant increase in requests for information, complaints and whistleblowing during Covid and we are still trying to manage the impact of the pandemic on resources. The breakdown of this by Directorate is as follows:



2.15 From the complaints processed and completed during the reporting period, the following complaint outcomes were recorded.



2.16 A summary of complaints currently in the system are attached to Appendix A.

2.17 It is important to note that during the last 12 months we have seen a step change in the number and type of contacts made to the organisation. Not only are staff across the organisation dealing with high volume of contacts not just in Customer Care and Complaints, but also in other areas like the Call Centre, many of these contacts can be very challenging due to the complexity of the demand and at times can be abusive in nature. It is unclear if these challenges can be part attributed because of the Covid pandemic.

2.18 We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to making our services as accessible as possible. However, because of the nature or frequency of their contact with the Council, a few complainants behave unreasonably and hinder the consideration of their own, or other complainants', cases. The organisation has policies in place to support staff in dealing with these type of contacts that set out the contract between us and customer and the standards customers can expect when contacting the council and of us from them. Support to staff in this area is further strengthened by the refreshed customer care training which is referenced later in the report

2.19 The organisation also has a policy in place for the management of any unreasonable complainant behaviour and we will not tolerate deceitful, abusive, offensive, threatening or other forms of unacceptable behaviour from complainants. When it occurs, we will take proportionate action to protect the wellbeing of our staff and the integrity of our processes. We must use our staff time and resources to best effect and for the benefit of all residents and service users. Our staff cannot do this if someone tries to dominate our attention with frequent, lengthy contacts and repetitive information. This hinders the consideration of their or other people's, complaints. When necessary, we will take action to restrict access to our services when unreasonable behaviour of this nature persists. However, that can be difficult if service have failed to address complaints properly in the first place.

3. COMPLAINT ROOT CAUSES

3.1 Understanding why customers (service users, residents) complain, is an important factor of the complaints process. Collecting and analysing this information, allows us to identify where service failure is occurring and provides us with the opportunity to put things right. Recognising where things are going wrong and implementing changes and improvements, will in turn

reduce the number of complaints received and the improve the quality and experience that customers receive.

3.2 In relation to the top 3 issues/root causes we can see general themes coming through across the organisations namely the main three overall:-

- a) Failure or delay in doing something
- b) Failure or delay in communication
- c) Inappropriate behaviour/staff conduct

The data that is held within the system will identify the specific issues that will help to inform service improvement and where additional staff training may be required across specific areas.

4. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN

4.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is the final stage for complaints about councils and some other authorities and organisations, including education admissions appeal panels and adult social care providers (such as care homes and home care providers).

4.2 Every July the Ombudsman publishes information on the complaints and enquiries received by individual local authorities and the decisions made during that financial year as part of an Annual Letter. A copy of this can be found at **Appendix A**. This information can be valuable in helping local authorities assess their performance in handling complaints. Intrinsic to the learning from this process the annual report is reported to Overview/Scrutiny to provide further challenge and inform learning of systems and process for improved outcomes for service delivery and customer experience from these.

4.3 The Annual Letter for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 will be reported to Overview in September 2021. At this meeting, members of the panel will be provided with an update on the current performance and how this compares with other local authorities in relation to number of cases, type and learning for example and this report outlines this additional information.

4.4 The reportable period for the annual report and the comparative data contained in this report is 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021. As part of the annual report local authorities receive data in relation to the service areas, the complaints received by the LGSCO relate. For the reportable period, the LGSCO received a total of 43 compared with 70 complaints for the previous year across the service themes below. Please note to allow authorities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, the LGSCO did not accept new complaints and stopped investigating existing cases between March and June 2020. This reduced the number of complaints received.

Authority Name	Adult Social Care	Benefits and Tax	Education and Children's Services	Environmental Services, Public Protection & Regulation	Highways and Transport	Planning & Development	Corporate & Other	Total
Tameside	5	9	12	7	4	5	1	43

4.5 Of the complaints received by the Ombudsman the following outcomes were determined. Some of those cases determined though could have been from a previous reporting year.

Outcome	Adult Social Care	Benefits and Tax	Education and Children's Services	Environmental Services, Public Protection & Regulation	Highways and Transport	Planning & Development	Corporate & Other	Total
Advice Given	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Upheld	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	9
Not Upheld	1	0	0	0	2	3	1	7
Closed after Initial Enquiries	1	4	5	3	1	3	0	17

Referred back for local resolution	1	2	1	2	1	0	0	7
	11	6	9	5	4	6	2	43

4.6 In addition for some cases where the LGSCO upheld the complaint the service area will have been asked to remedy the situation and of the 43 cases received there were 5 requiring further action.

Remedy	Adult Social Care	Benefits & Tax	Education and Children's Services	Environmental Services, Public Protection & Regulation	Highways and Transport	Planning & Development	Corporate & Other	Total
Apology	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Apology/financial redress – Time & Trouble	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Apology/financial redress – Time & Trouble/Review policy	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
New appeal/review decision	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

4.7 56% of complaints investigated by the Ombudsman were upheld (based on 16 detailed investigations), this compares with an average of 72% of similar authorities. In 100% of cases the Ombudsman was satisfied the authority had successfully implemented their recommendations (based on 5 compliance outcomes). In 11% of upheld cases the Ombudsman found that the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint had reached them (based on a total of 16 detailed investigations), this compares to an average of 11% in similar authorities. The Ombudsman thinks it is important that Council's work hard to resolve complaints before they go to Ombudsman and they now recognise that as a mark of success. This is an area that the Council needs to undertake more work in relation to. It demonstrates that there is significant room for improvement as in nearly 90% of cases Assistant Directors are failing to recognise there is an issue with service delivery and taking the necessary action to put right the wrongs caused.

4.8 The reportable period for the annual report and the comparative data contained in this report is 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021. As part of the annual report local authorities receive data in relation to the service areas, the complaints received by the LGSCO relate. Table below shows the breakdown of complaints received by local authorities by service theme in addition to the overall total number of complaints received. For the reportable period, the LGSCO received a total of 32 complaints for Tameside across the service themes below. This is compared to Manchester at the higher end with 54 and Salford at the lower end with 16 complaints.

Local Authority	Adult Social Care	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Education and Children's Services	Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
Bolton MBC	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	4	3	17
Bury MBC	3	2	1	3	5	0	1	0	4	19
Manchester CC	3	10	5	13	7	3	3	4	6	54
Oldham MBC	2	0	3	5	3	2	0	11	4	30
Rochdale MBC	5	2	3	2	2	0	0	2	3	19
Salford CC	3	5	2	4	0	0	0	1	1	16
Stockport MBC	4	3	4	1	4	1	0	0	1	18
Tameside MBC	5	4	3	5	4	2	0	6	3	32
Trafford	2	7	8	4	9	2	1	1	1	35
Wigan MBC	1	4	2	3	3	1	0	1	2	17

4.9 Table below outlines the number of detail investigations carried out by the LGSCO across GM local authorities. Manchester received the highest number of investigations with 22 of which 14 were upheld, compared to Wigan with 4 investigations and 3 upheld. Tameside were at the higher end with 18 detailed investigations with 9 being upheld. All local authorities achieved 100% compliance with the LGSCO recommendations.

GMCA - Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman - Investigations 2020/2021								
Local Authority	Number of details investigations	Number upheld	% Upheld	% Compliance with LGO recommendations	Number of Satisfactory remedies provided by council prior to LGO involvement	% Satisfactory remedies provided by council prior to LGO involvement	Public Reports Published by LGO in last 5 Years	Number of service improvements agreed by Council since April 2018
Bolton MBC	13	7	54%	100%	2	29%	2	17
Bury MBC	11	7	64%	100%	1	14%	1	9
Manchester CC	22	14	64%	100%	4	29%	0	16
Oldham MBC	15	10	67%	100%	0	0%	0	8
Rochdale MBC	6	6	100%	100%	1	17%	1	10
Salford CC	5	4	80%	100%	1	25%	1	9
Stockport MBC	8	6	75%	100%	1	17%	1	15
Tameside MBC	16	9	56%	100%	1	11%	3	10
Trafford	18	12	67%	100%	3	25%	1	18
Wigan MBC	4	3	75%	100%	0	0%	0	5
Average performance rates; (%)			72%	100%		11%		

4.10 In summing up in his Annual Review letter (**Appendix A**) and as reported in the Municipal Journal (5.8.2021 below) the Ombudsman Mr Michael King stated his concerns in the way that complaints are handled by councils. In the LGSCO report it was noted there were “widening cracks in councils complaints systems”. He was also quoted in saying that “*I am concerned about the general erosion to the visibility, capacity and status of complaint functions within councils*”. The oversight we now have within our own systems we hope will strengthen our systems, process and improvement work to avoid any widening of cracks at our local level.

Ombudsman highlights ‘cracks’ in complaints system

The local government ombudsman has warned about the erosion to the way complaints are being handled by councils.

An annual review of complaints by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman highlighted the ‘widening cracks’ in council complaints systems.

In 2020-21, the ombudsman upheld 67% of investigations, a greater proportion than ever before.

As a result, it made more than 3,000 recommendations to put things right for individuals



Michael King

and 1,488 recommendations for councils to improve their services for others.

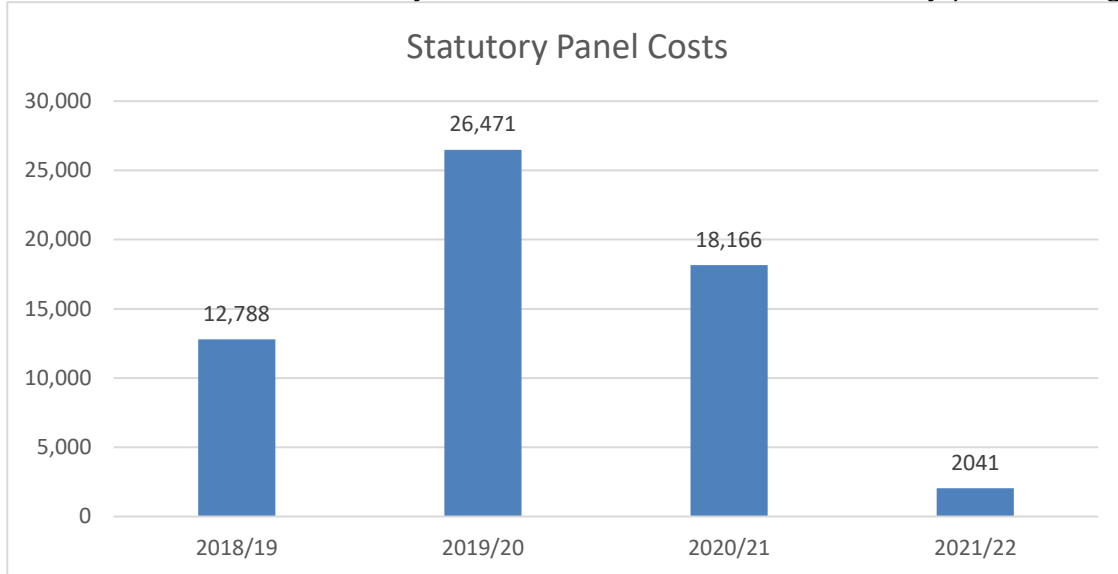
Ombudsman Michael King said: ‘While the way local authorities dealt with the pressures of COVID-19 is still being played out in our casework, early indications suggest it is only widening the cracks that were already there and has deepened our concerns about the status of complaints services within councils. These concerns are not new and cannot be wholly attributed to the trials of the pandemic.

‘I am concerned about the general erosion to the visibility, capacity and status of complaint functions within councils.’

4.11 Finally, in relation to complaints and the learning there are many costs (some hidden for example staff time) that can also be a driver for system improvement. Where complaints move either into a Statutory Stage 2 or 3 Panel and or move to the LGSCO there are in most instances additional costs incurred. Convening panels for independent reviews, report writing, holding of panels cost additional money and over the years we have seen increases in this area of work and in costs. Once panels have concluded, some recommendations could be to

make a remedy payment and this is similar to the LGSCO following some of their investigations.

4.12 There is an annual budget of £13k set aside to manage statutory Stage 2 and Stage 3 panels which sits within the Information and Improvements budget, the costs incurred for the last four years to date are noted below. The overspend on these costs for year 2019/20 and 2020/21 were absorbed within the overall Executive Support budget although it has no overall control of failure-demand in the statutory services which then result in statutory panels being held.



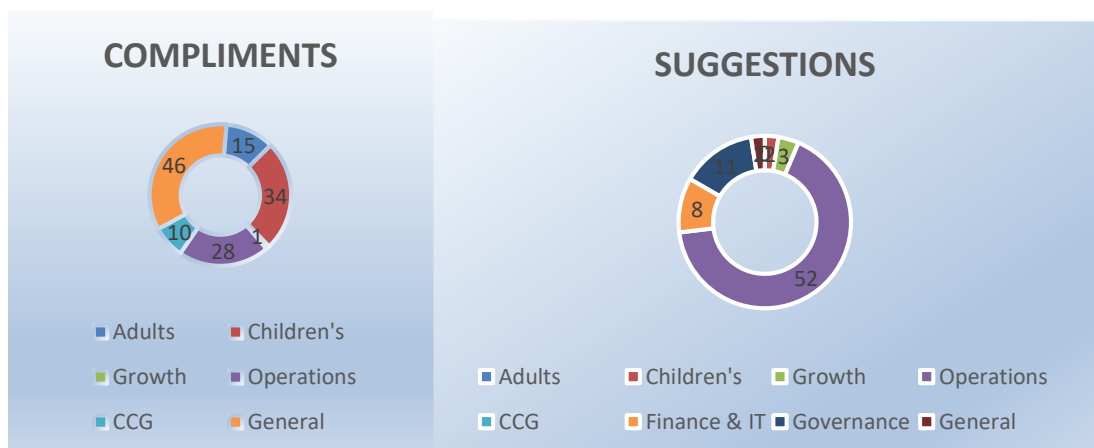
This is in addition to any “remedy costs” that might be paid out directly by the service as a result of the panel and any “remedy costs” incurred via any LGSCO involvement.

4.12 In relation to remedy costs as a result of the LGSCO involvement from June 2020 to date this totals an amount of £3500 over 7 cases. These costs are borne directly by the service area budget.

5 CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE, COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 As challenging it can be in effectively dealing with complaints and customers reports of dissatisfaction, it is also important to note that we do now have a digital system for the central recording Compliments and Suggestions received internal and externally.

5.2 Since the system has been live from 15 June 2020 there have been 134 compliments logged and 78 suggestions.



5.3 Examples of some of the compliments and suggestions can be found **at Appendix B.**

- 5.4 In addition the organisation has held the Customer Service Excellence standard for over 15 years, each year achieving with 100% compliance and with additional areas of compliance plus (areas of best practice).
- 5.5 2021 full assessment should be a further year to celebrate the achievements of this standard with recent confirmation being received following 5 days of onsite visits, that we continue to hold the standard with 100% compliance and a reported 12 areas of compliance plus. The Lead Assessor Andrew Mackey said;-

“It is interesting that so many of them are in Criterion 2 (the culture of the organisation) which underlines the importance of the cultural approach, and the success of Tameside in embedding an appropriate culture. Partnership working and supporting local communities are also included.

I believe this is a great achievement, given what we have all been through in recent months. It would have been easy for organisations to feel overwhelmed and to operate at a lower level than usual; this is clearly not the case at Tameside and this is a great commendation for staff across the piece who have continued to step up to the mark and to do what is needed to maintain (and even improve) services.”

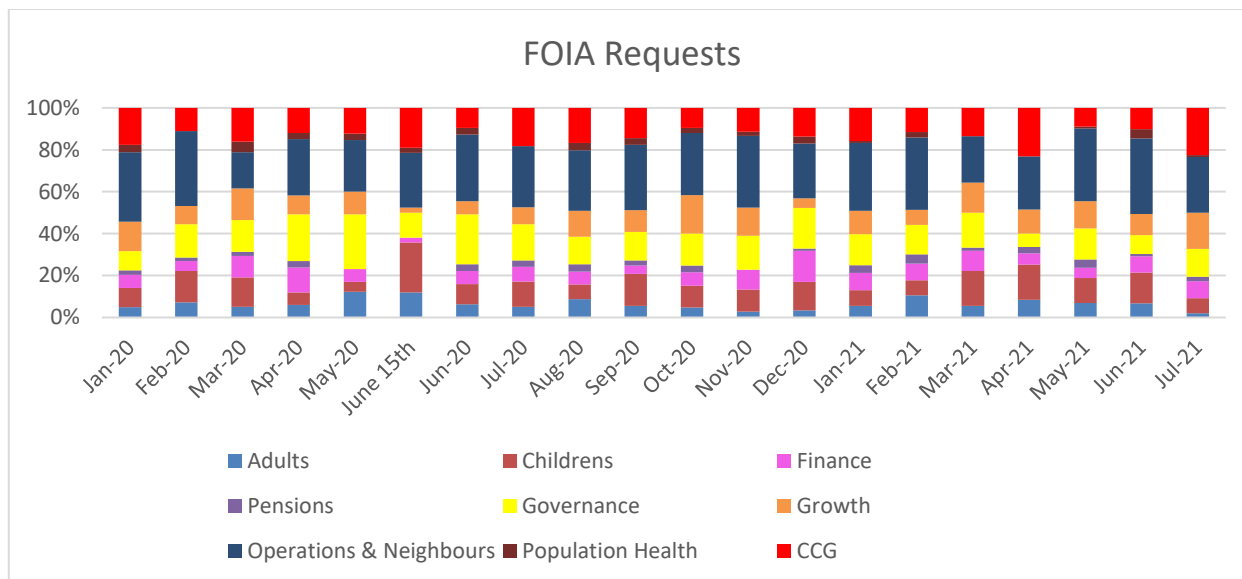
This is a remarkable achievement and one to be proud of.

- 5.6 As part of the bringing together of like for like information and data requests across the organisation, work has also taken place in the review and refreshing of the Customer Care training. This training originally developed and delivered by colleagues in Organisational Development. However in the spirit of using this training to help inform staff of the importance of good customer care reducing the chances of complaints being made, this has been further developed by colleagues in Information & Improvement.
- 5.7 This training has been trialled with some workgroups at the request of the Head of Service and initial feedback has been positive. Further work is ongoing with colleagues in OD to look at an online/interactive training to support the team training.
- 5.8 It is planned that all new staff to the organisation would be required to sign up for the Customer Care and Complaints handling training as part of their induction programme. The training would further offered to all parts of the organisation on a rolling programme, particularly to those with front line interaction with customers.
- 5.9 Another arm of training that has been delivered over the last few years has been the “Effective Complaints Handling” course delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Work is in progress to acquire new training dates for the coming months.

6 INFORMATION AND DATA

- 6.1 The information and data requests that the organisation receive are valuable insight tools as to what data is important to our customers. Whether it be a Freedom of Information Request, a case enquiry via a MPs office or a Subject Access Request for personal information.
- 6.2 Similar to complaints where the LGSCO monitors and provides independent adjudication on case work , the Information Commissioner is the UK’s independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest. For FOIA requests, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities. It does this in two ways:
- public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities; and
 - members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities
- Under the Act we have a statutory duty to respond to FOIA requests within a 20 working day timescale.

6.3 During 2020 the organisation received 1260 Freedom of Information Requests and from 1 January 2021 to date we have received 730. Of the requests received for last year and on average 82% of requests were responded to on time within the 20 working day statutory timescales.



6.4 Since the Icaseworker system has been live we have seen an increase in the number of Whistleblowing notifications also being received. Our Whistleblowing Procedure enables employees, councillors and members of the public to express any concerns regarding illegal, dishonest, or illegitimate practice that may involve the Council. For the period 2020 there were 21 cases recorded, and currently there have been 11 received to end of May 2021. Example of cases include staff conduct, management of contracts and misuse of service money/equipment to name a few.

7 NEXT STEPS

7.1 The information contained within this report will form part of the update report the organisations Board meeting in addition to an annual update report to Overview Panel in September 2021 and furthermore the outputs from the service reports will help in informing the work programme of the Scrutiny Panels for the coming year.

7.2 The work of the team going forward is to use the information and data from within the system to work with service areas at looking at what information and data is already published in the public domain, via the organisations' Publication Scheme. Will also be looking at areas of improvement to service web pages to further enhance the publically available data published.

7.3 In relation to complaints and other service requests the outputs from the reports including root cause analysis will help identify service areas where system process reengineering support might be of assistance or where staff training in particular areas of service delivery may be warranted. This work will also dovetail that of the Budget Turnaround Team whereby we can look at failure demand in more detail to inform service and system improvement.

7.4 The analysis work will also look at how demand is presenting itself into the organisation and what it is telling us and review which channel customers are making contact in addition to the monitoring and addressing any unreasonable complainant conduct.

7.5 As part of the Children's Service Improvement Journey, data will be provided to support the programme of activity, which will be reported through to Children's Services Improvement Board.

- 7.6 Directorate and service high level case work reports are already shared on a weekly basis. This information will be further enhanced going forward with the themed and root cause data beneath to assist managers in service improvement.
- 7.7 Quarterly reports will be taken through our Board meetings which will also include deep dive project work which will also link to the Corporate Health Scorecard has just recently been refreshed. This now includes key indicators for this area of work including Data Requests and Complaints, which will help in reviewing our impact and improvements in this area of work.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 As set out on the front of the report.

Local Government & Social Care **OMBUDSMAN**

21 July 2021

By email

Mr Pleasant
Chief Executive
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council

Dear Mr Pleasant

Annual Review letter 2021

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the decisions made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2021. At the end of a challenging year, we maintain that good public administration is more important than ever and I hope this feedback provides you with both the opportunity to reflect on your Council's performance and plan for the future.

You will be aware that, at the end of March 2020 we took the unprecedented step of temporarily stopping our casework, in the wider public interest, to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services during the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak. We restarted casework in late June 2020, after a three month pause.

We listened to your feedback and decided it was unnecessary to pause our casework again during further waves of the pandemic. Instead, we have encouraged authorities to talk to us on an individual basis about difficulties responding to any stage of an investigation, including implementing our recommendations. We continue this approach and urge you to maintain clear communication with us.

Complaint statistics

This year, we continue to focus on the outcomes of complaints and what can be learned from them. We want to provide you with the most insightful information we can and have focused statistics on three key areas:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find some form of fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before we investigated.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the authority upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit authorities that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your authority with similar types of authorities to work out an average level of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), along with a copy of this letter on 28 July 2021. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the decisions we have made about your Council, public reports we have issued, and the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

I would encourage you to share the resource with colleagues and elected members; the information can provide valuable insights into service areas, early warning signs of problems and is a key source of information for governance, audit, risk and scrutiny functions.

As you would expect, data has been impacted by the pause to casework in the first quarter of the year. This should be considered when making comparisons with previous year's data.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

I am increasingly concerned about the evidence I see of the erosion of effective complaint functions in local authorities. While no doubt the result of considerable and prolonged budget and demand pressures, the Covid-19 pandemic appears to have amplified the problems and my concerns. With much greater frequency, we find poor local complaint handling practices when investigating substantive service issues and see evidence of reductions in the overall capacity, status and visibility of local redress systems.

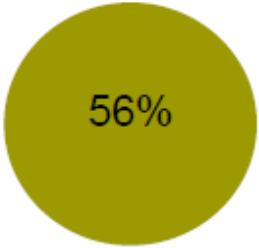
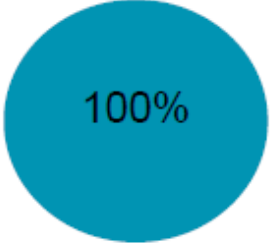
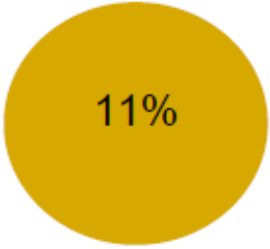
With this context in mind, we are developing a new programme of work that will utilise complaints to drive improvements in both local complaint systems and services. We want to use the rich evidence of our casework to better identify authorities that need support to improve their complaint handling and target specific support to them. We are at the start of this ambitious work and there will be opportunities for local authorities to shape it over the coming months and years.

An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. During the year, we successfully adapted our face-to-face courses for online delivery. We provided 79 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,100 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Yours sincerely,



Michael King
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld		
	<p>56% of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 72% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>9 upheld decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 16 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
	<p>In 100% of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 100% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>Statistics are based on a total of 5 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An authority with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority		
	<p>In 11% of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 11% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>1 satisfactory remedy decision</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 16 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>

NOTE: To allow authorities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, we did not accept new complaints and stopped investigating existing cases between March and June 2020. This reduced the number of complaints we received and decided in the 20-21 year. Please consider this when comparing data from previous years.

COMPLIMENTS

I wanted to take time to thank the Council for continuing to run reliable, good quality services during the pandemic. Apart from an initial wobble, refuse has been collected, recycling continued, parks and outdoor spaces maintained with the grass cut and bins emptied. These seem to be small everyday mundane issues but critically important to making life in restrictions easier and more pleasant. I live in Denton which abuts Stockport and Manchester-Tameside compares very favourably on the indicators listed above. You may not think what you do is appreciated, is it. so thank you.

I would like to thank the Urgent Care Team and Reablement Team for the support they have provided for my mum MP. The staff who have visited mum have all been so kind and compassionate, providing excellent care and reassurance when mum was really quite anxious and carers coming into her home. As a family we are grateful to the teams and also felt assured that mums care and comfort have been their priority.

I just wanted to convey my thanks and congratulations for the vaccination service you provided last Sat. My parents had appointments at 13.48 and 14.08. We were immediately greeted and given clear instructions. The process was a very slick and well organised. My other observation was how friendly and cordial the staff were. It was a cold day but they all appeared to bear it with a smile. And they all gave us a big wave as we drove off. Well done to all concerned. Thank you again.

I reported fly tipping and the lovely team came out and cleared it up beautifully. Plus while I was passing the street needed curb repairs. The two work men leapt out and got on with it. it was a miracle of speedy well done work on both counts. Please pass on my thanks
CHR

SUGGESTIONS

Parking Services – A new wellness centre in Denton, Great facility, superb car park. Yet not even one charging point for cars. None of supermarket parking in Denton nor public car parks has a single car charging point. Contradicts policies regarding reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I suggest charging points in Crown Point north or the new wellness centre

This park needs drastic improvement, the facilities that are currently there are not beneficial to all age groups! I think there is sufficient room to put a skateboard and bmx area to accommodate older ages groups (10-16 year olds). This would stop kids gathering around Tesco's and local shops. It could be made into a central hub for all age groups to meet and socialise. Please consider and

This might sound like a very trivial matter but could options please be considered for laptop desktop backgrounds. An iconic image of Tameside or even just the Council's logo would be a significant improvement on the current default (