

LONGLIST OF INDEPTH TOPICS SUGGESTED BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2018/19
PROPOSED TOPICS FOR TASK GROUP IN-DEPTH REVIEWS

<p>Name of O and S Committee</p> <p>Business Support</p>	<p>Suggested topic: Complaint Handling</p> <p>Reason for Review:</p> <p>Complaints provide an opportunity to put right things that have gone wrong, and are a good source of learning about systems, processes, and customer service. Through this learning, alongside other feedback and improvement work, there is the opportunity to improve our services to customers.</p> <p>This review could focus only on ‘corporate’ complaints, i.e. excluding social care complaints. Separate regimes with statutory guidance exist for Adult Social Care complaints and for Children’s Service complaints. The production of annual reports is a requirement of both of those regimes and those reports are considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Including social care complaints is entirely possible but it would be a much larger review.</p> <p>Potential for impact on one or more sections of the population?</p> <p>In 2016-17, the Council received 1556 Stage 1 complaints (all services including social care). Members have noted that this represents a very small number of complaints compared to the hundreds of interactions that happen daily with the public. Nevertheless each was an opportunity to put things right if something had gone wrong, or an opportunity to explain better the council’s decision or position where we felt unable to agree with the complainant that something had been carried out incorrectly.</p> <p>As said above where something has been acknowledged as reflecting an incorrect decision, poor performance or communication for example, there is the opportunity to learn from that experience and prevent it from happening again. It is this experience that provides for a wider impact over the population by preventing a repeat of that incident or event.</p> <p>Is this an issue of corporate concern and/or an issue for partners?</p> <p>In 2016-17, the Council received the lowest number of complaints for four years. That downward trend was reflected across all corporate areas, Adult Social Care and Children’s Social Care. It was also the best year for four years with cases received by the local Government Ombudsman, LGO, (87 in 2016-7 compared to 137 in</p>
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2014-15 for example. The number of complaints upheld by the LGO in 2016-17 was 13 (19 in 2015-16 and 2014-15; 6 in 2013-14).

Whilst guarding against complacency, complaint handling is an area showing sustained improvement and is not an issue being flagged through the council's performance regime as of concern. It is fair to say that the majority of that improvement has been in the speed of attention to complaints raised. It is known that lack of communication is one of the key factors that irritates complainants and is often cited as a key factor in seeking to escalate complaints further. It has therefore been right to show a more prompt acknowledgment to complaints and where possible to achieve a resolution to concerns raised. Over the corporate service areas, over 8 out of every 10 Stage 1 complaints received are being responded to within 10 working days. (Children's social care has shown a very marked improvement to a similar performance level in recent months. There is some work to do in the Adults area but that is a very live issue with the Adults management team who have put new arrangements in place to strengthen complaint handling as a part of their recent re-organisation.)

Will it add value/lead to effective outcomes?

A review would offer a spotlight on the importance of complaint handling, offer an opportunity to examine practices in other organisations, and is likely to have positive outcomes.

Will the review duplicate other work?

Moving on from the sustained improvement in the timely response to complaints, the Corporate Management Team has set a clear agenda about learning from complaints, and understanding the reasons and issues that are causing people to complain. There is new work going on to analyse each quarter the generic reasons that have led to complaints; this would include issues such as 'poor service quality'; 'service did not meet expectations'; 'inaccurate or inadequate information provided'. This will be providing lessons at both service level and across the whole organisation as to the reasons that cause complaints in the first place, and trigger escalations through the complaints process.

There is further work in progress within each service area to identify the common reasons and areas that cause complaints within specific areas (e.g. complaints about a Blue Badge application; or waste collection). That work is expected to be operational before the close of the financial year.

Whilst the review would no doubt contribute to this existing improvement agenda, it would draw on the same resource to support its investigations.

Is it timely/ do we have the resources?

In terms of specific support to the review it would be fair to say that capacity would be an issue. The only dedicated complaint resource in the council is the Customer Relations Team which has 4.65 FTE (with approximately 1.65FTE mainly related to social care complaints). Other members of staff across the council have complaint handling (particularly coordination of responses) as a part of their role. The accountability for complaints on a day to day level rests with Service Managers. There is a great deal of complaint handling knowledge and expertise across the council that a review would be able to draw upon to understand how matters work across all council service areas.

Will the review provide scope for service improvement?

As indicated above there are streams of work in train now focused on improving the complaint handling experience for customers, and identifying the learning that comes from complaints. A review would supplement this effort, but supporting the investigations of Members would be a draw upon the CRT resource that is responsible for overseeing the complaints process and producing regular management information and analysis.