



# **Corporate Complaints and Representations**

## **Annual Report**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**

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# Corporate Complaints & Representations

## Annual Report 2019 - 20

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is Gloucestershire County Council's Annual Report on the operation of the Corporate Complaints Procedure for the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. It provides information on the number and nature of all representations received from customers and the outcomes. It looks at the issues raised and what changes have been made as a result. It also provides a summary of some of the compliments received during this twelve month period.
- 1.2 This report demonstrates the importance the council attaches to feedback from our customers. By monitoring and analysing complaints, representations and compliments, we gain information about the services that we deliver to a good standard, as well as the areas that need some improvement. In using this information, the council demonstrates its commitment to continuous improvement, best value principles and a blame free learning culture.
- 1.3 This report is made available to staff, Senior Management, the relevant council Scrutiny Committee and the public.

### 2. Summary

- 2.1 The key findings in this report are:

- 121 complaints were received across all service areas in 2019-20. Of these, Gloucestershire Highways received 45% of the total complaints, which is a 14% increase from the previous year.
- Of the 121 complaints received, 112 (93%) of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days. 89 (74%) of complaints were responded to within the prescribed 10 working day timeframe. This is a decrease of 6% from the previous year.
- Of the 11 requests for a Stage 2 review, 2 were accepted on the basis that a review may provide a resolution to the issue.
- 28 complaints were referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, fault was found in one case.

The main reasons for complaints received:

**Delays (accounting for 27% of overall complaints)** – dissatisfaction with the general delay to action a range of council services when reported by members of the public; no urgency to deal with concerns; responses falling outside of published timescales and repairs not being completed within specified service level agreements.

**Communication (accounting for 26% of overall complaints)** – dissatisfaction with the length of time it takes to respond to a query, or, the issue reported by customers not being followed up at all; policies and procedures not clear and incorrect information provided to customers.

**Staff attitude (accounting for 25% of overall complaints)** – complaints of rude and unhelpful behaviour of staff and contractors across a variety of council services.

**Quality (accounting for 17% of overall complaints)** – work completed not in line with the relevant policy; repairs of a substandard quality.

**Unwelcome or disputed decision (accounting for 5% of overall complaints)** – decisions made by the council which the complainant believes to be incorrect or unethical.

### 3. Corporate Complaints

#### 3.1 The Corporate Complaints Procedure

There are two stages to the Corporate Complaints Procedure. The two stages are:

- Stage 1 - Local Resolution
- Stage 2 - Independent Review

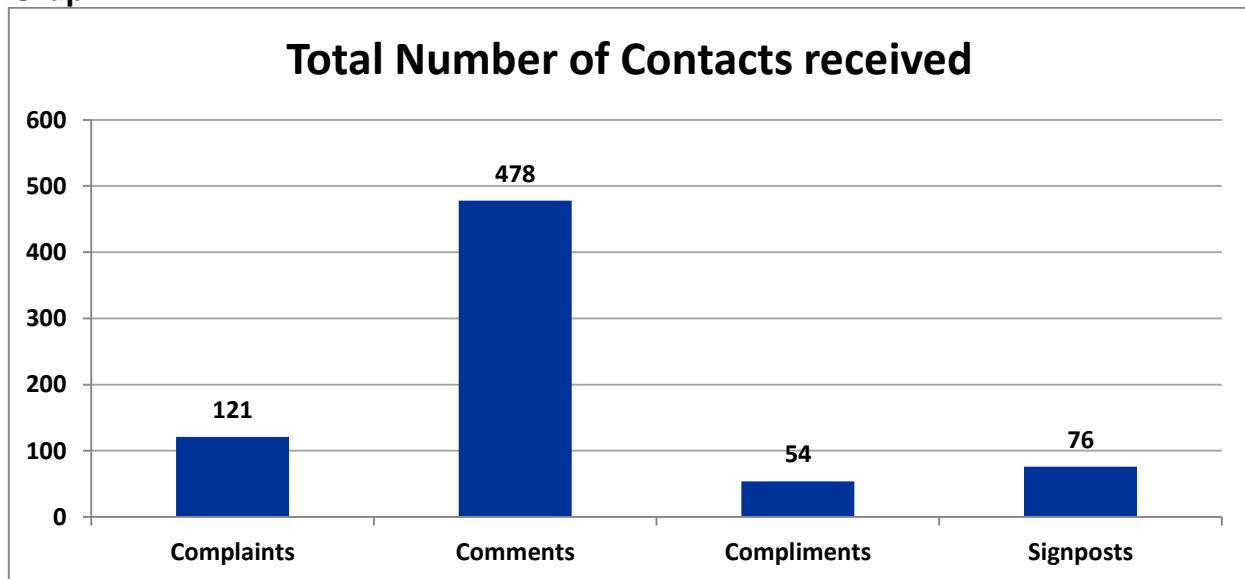
If a complainant is still dissatisfied following a Stage 2 independent investigation, it is possible for them to seek redress with the Social Care & Local Government Ombudsman.

### 4. Stage 1 Analysis

4.1 The Complaints Team received 729 contacts about the council's corporate functions, of which 121 were accepted as formal Stage 1 complaints (these figures do not include complaints about Adults Social Care or Children's Services).

4.2 Of the remainder, 478 were managed outside of the formal complaints process as comments that require a response; 76 were signposted to other local authorities and agencies and 54 were compliments. Further details on comments and compliments can be found later in this report.

**Graph 2**



#### 4.3 **Outcomes from Stage 1 Complaints**

4.4. Of the 121 complaints received, 33 were upheld, 36 were partially upheld and 44 were not upheld. 8 complaints were withdrawn.

#### 4.5 **Timeliness of response**

The council aim to respond to corporate complaints within 10 working days of complaint receipt. 104 (86%) of Stage 1 complaints achieved this response timescale. We aim to respond to all other comments within 20 working days.

4.6 Gloucestershire Highways received the most complaints with a total of 54; the Parking Team received 18. The next highest service complained about was Libraries who received 10 and Registrations who received 8. Complaints to Gloucestershire Highways were mainly about the disrepair of the county's roads, a lack of communication regarding issues reported and not being acted upon and the attitude of contractors manning road closure barriers for resurfacing works

The Parking Team received complaints about customers receiving charge certificates and not the original notice to owner paperwork, particularly for driving in the Clarence Street bus lane in Cheltenham, with customers only becoming aware of the offence when it was referred to bailiffs. Concerns were also recorded about the attitude of Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) and bailiff's acting on behalf of the council. The majority of complaints for Library Services were about unhelpful and rude staff.

#### 4.7 **Reason for Complaint**

Specific examples of complaints received over the year were,

##### **Communication:**

- A customer did not receive initial charge certificate after travelling through Boots Corner bus lane and therefore lost their right to appeal or pay lower charge
- A street light has been re-sited without any consultation which caused a customer to have light pollution
- Lack of communication and dates changing at short notice regarding Speech House Road resurfacing works
- A customer was informed that their dropped kerb was substandard and needed to be replaced but was not informed what guidelines they should be adhering to
- Minerals and Waste Team not responding to ongoing concerns regarding a noise and dust issue

##### **Delay in decision or provision of service:**

- A "No Through Road" sign was not replaced despite a customer reporting it 6 months prior to making the complaint
- An electric gate which has been installed across a bridleway was not removed despite the customer reporting it 5 months previously
- Poorly maintained gullies throughout a village despite this being raised with the council on several occasions
- A dispute regarding land was ongoing for over a year
- Ongoing issue with overgrown vegetation and muddy footpath was known about for 5 months without being addressed

**Cost:**

- Customer did not have enough change for a parking machine; when he called to pay for parking via MiPermit they were charging a different tariff to the one displayed on the machine

**Non delivery of service:**

- A customer claimed a wall was being damaged by the volume of traffic using their road as a thoroughfare due to the closure of another road
- A “H” marking outside of a customer’s property was not re-installed following resurfacing works

**Quality of service:**

- A registrar failed to adhere to a wedding plan and a special reading was missed
- A bus service which Gloucestershire County Council subsidise was consistently late, meaning children were missing a connecting bus to school
- The electronic “copy certificate form” was not working and when a customer called the Registrations Team to order one they were told that these could not be ordered over the telephone
- The cost of residents parking permits renewal for an eco car was incorrect on the MiPermit website and the customer was only advised of the change when they went to pay

**Staff attitude (staff member displaying rude/aggressive behaviour, being unhelpful or showing a perceived lack of competence):**

- Customer who attended Shire Hall to register his mother’s death found the registrar to be unhelpful and agitated
- Customer was very unhappy with the way in which a bailiff spoke to her and her young child which made them upset
- Various complaints about the attitude of staff at Household Recycling Centres
- An inappropriate e-mail exchange between a customer and the Street Lighting Team where personal thoughts were sent between team members and then sent in error to the customer
- Customer spoken rudely to by the Adult Helpdesk when they called to enquire about available services for a family member

**Unwelcome or disputed decisions:**

- A customer was unhappy that their road was closed for the installation of fibre broadband which meant that they had limited access to their home
- A library user felt that other customers were being allowed to block book computers in a library meaning that nobody else was able to use them
- Road being used as a “rat run” due to the closure of the bridges over the M50 motorway without a temporary lower speed limit put in place
- Customer unhappy with a Local Highways Manager not becoming involved in a dispute that was deemed a neighbour dispute and not a road safety issue

## 5. Stage 2 Analysis

A customer can request a review of their complaint at Stage 2 of the complaints process if they are dissatisfied with their Stage 1 response. Customers are asked to give the reasons why they are dissatisfied with the outcome to their complaint. Once this is received the request is passed to the Complaints Manager and Service Manager who will meet and decide whether a Stage 2 response will give the customer clarity in relation to the outcome they are seeking. A Senior Manager who has not been previously involved in the complaint will investigate at Stage 2.

Eleven complainants requested a Stage 2 review of their complaint. Only two of these were accepted by the council as it was felt that the Stage 1 response did not fully address the concerns which were initially raised. One complaint was responded to within our timeframe of 25 working days with the other one missing the deadline by 1 day.

Neither of the complaints were upheld.

## 6. Representations

Representations are classified as a contact which is a first request for a service; a question that Gloucestershire County Council should be given the chance to respond to or a concern or comment that can be easily resolved outside of the complaints process. The council aim to respond to these contacts within 20 working days.

There were 478 representations received during 2019-20. 242 were about the Highways Teams (GCC Highways = 153, Parking = 62, Public Rights of Way = 4, Local Planning = 3, Major Projects Team = 5, Minerals & Waste Team = 1, Strategic Infrastructure = 1, Street Lighting = 3 and Street Works = 10).

The remaining 236 representations were split across a variety of corporate services. The council saw a wider range of teams receiving representations than in previous years. Libraries received the most after the Highways Teams, closely followed by Waste. The Library Service had a higher than normal amount of contacts this year due to a change in e-book provider and a new reservation system which caused dissatisfaction amongst online library users.

## 7. Local Government Ombudsman

28 complaints were referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) regarding corporate issues; many of these were out of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and closed after initial enquiries. Of the 28 referrals to the Ombudsman, 3 complaints were formally investigated. The outcomes recorded by the LG&SCO were, 2 not upheld – no maladministration and the other complaint was not upheld for the substantive part of the complaint, but fault was found in the way in which the complaint was handled by the service. An apology was provided to the customer as a result.

Given the amount of contact the council received in the past year, these figures suggest that the council is well placed to effectively deal with customer concerns as they occur and where possible are able to either resolve the matter or provide an adequate explanation that is then accepted by the customer.

## **8. Learning from Complaints**

Of the 121 complaints received, 32 (26%) cases were identified as having learning as a result of the investigation. The managers of the service look at ways in which the learning can be implemented to improve service delivery. Below are areas which identified learning and the actions taken.

### **Gloucestershire Highways**

- Customer Service Officers were reminded to relay the correct information to customers and the use of effective communication
- All operatives reminded to be polite to the general public whilst working on sites and should give guidance to anyone not sure of alternative routes
- Customer Service Officers to look in to queries in more depth if a customer calls in more than twice rather than keep repeating the same information to them

### **Integrated Transport Unit**

- Staff to be reminded about using unhelpful and ill-advised comments
- Contractors have been reminded not to make assumptions and to ensure that all parents and guardians are made aware of any changes before they are implemented

### **Libraries**

- Staff spoken to about imposing their beliefs on to customers without being asked
- Staff were reminded that personal possessions should not be kept on the library floor

### **Parking**

- The service ensured that MiPermit charges were updated at the same as time charges on machines to avoid confusion or overcharging
- A Civil Enforcement Officer to receive training based on the way he handled a particular Penalty Charge Notice and the way in which he spoke to a customer
- All Civil Enforcement Officers were reminded to be polite and helpful towards customers and ensure a satisfactory level of customer service is maintained at all times and under all circumstances

### **Registrations**

- Registrars to undertake ongoing training and reminded of the importance of pronouncing names correctly during wedding ceremonies and checking beforehand to ensure an understanding
- Registrars were reminded of the importance of ensuring they have the correct paperwork for to save any unnecessary delays for customers

### **Street Lighting**

- Unprofessional email exchange between a member of staff and a customer. Staff were reminded about how to conduct themselves when interacting with members of the public

## Waste Team

- Contractors at Household Recycling Centres were reminded about how to conduct themselves when interacting with members of the public and the significance of maintaining standards and general customer service

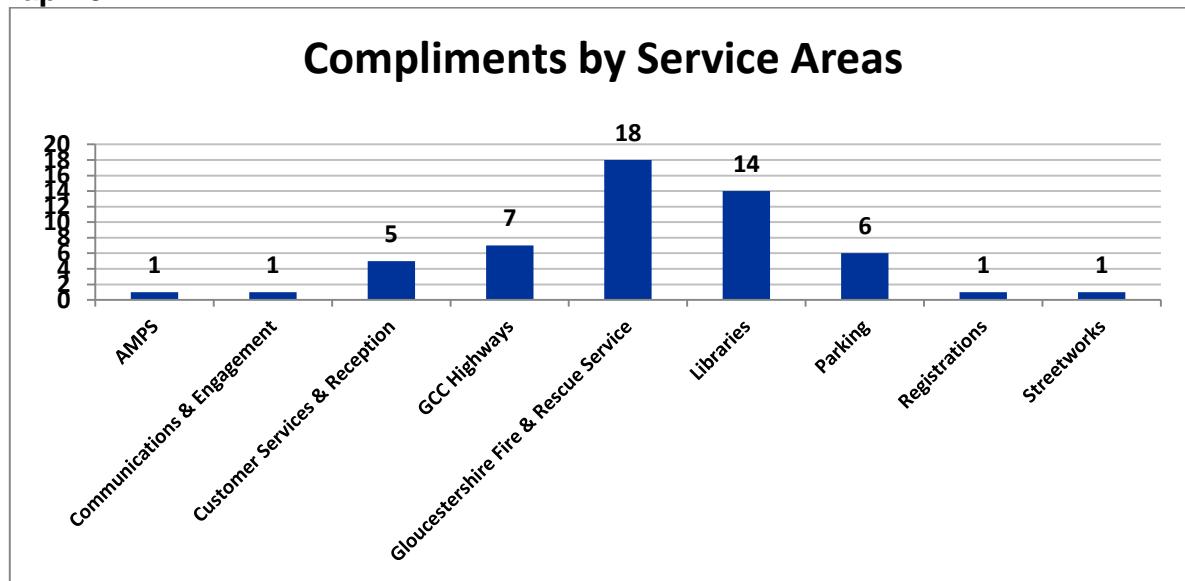
## 9. Compliments

Below is a graph showing compliments which have been received for the various corporate services across Gloucestershire County Council.

Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service (GFRS) received the most compliments overall and these have been received from customers praising staff for assisting them in getting services provided in a timely and efficient manner and for their general helpfulness. This is followed by Libraries, again customers thanking staff for their helpfulness and the general services being offered by the library service.

The Complaints Team have recorded compliments which have come in direct to their team or via the Customer Services Team. Service Areas which receive compliments direct are encouraged to send them to the Complaints Team for recording so that they can be incorporated within annual reports.

**Graph 3**



### Some examples of compliments received:

**Asset Management & Property Services (AMPS) in response to a poster put up near to their home reminding staff not to smoke near to their property:**

- Thank you so much, this is most helpful and beyond what I expected and saw the sign on my way home, so thank you.

**Communications and Engagement Team:**

- I tried to send an email earlier thanking staff for the clarity of information on the website regarding closures of roads, libraries etc due to floods today. It is easy to take these types of things for granted and complain when things are wrong, but I suspect not many people

write in to thank staff when they work well – please pass onto staff concerned. I believe that Council Tax is well worth the cost of all that it supports in local government.

### **Customer Services and Reception Team:**

- I contacted your adult social care department this morning re an elderly relative. I spoke to XXX (& later) another lady. Their calm, caring informative approach was so reassuring & before I knew it a hot meal delivery was in place for tomorrow!! What a wonderful service!! Many thanks to you all but especially XXX & the other lady (apologies for not registering her name).

### **GCC Highways:**

- Congratulations on a job well done. The resurfacing of the A417 at Hartpury/Maisemore is superb. Completed on time and to such a high standard. Minimal disruption. A great job, thank you.

### **Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service (GFRS):**

- I was unfortunately involved in a serious off-road motorbike accident in Goodrich on June 1st. which is in-between Ross on Wye and Monmouth. I was stupidly not wearing a helmet as it was only meant to be a quick go on friend's old army motorbike. My brother has been told through one of his good friends that it was one of your crews that helped and took a massive part in saving my life. I cannot thank you enough and I will always be truly grateful!!! Can this email please be shown to all the crew that took a massive part in saving my life. When I'm back to full fitness I plan on doing some fund raising for the Air Ambulance as my Dad told me they are completely self funded.

### **Libraries:**

- I visited Coleford Library, to do some family history research. The staff member I dealt with was very helpful and provided all the information that was available. It is a lovely library and it was a pleasure to use. Thank you.

### **Parking:**

- I'm just writing because this morning I dropped my phone as I got into my friend's car (at about 8am), and then I did not realise until I got to work in Gloucester! I rang my phone at about 8.30am and a traffic warden called XXX answered. Not only is she amazing for looking after my phone all day, she even dropped it off at my flat at about 6pm when it was pouring with rain! I was meant to be home by then and wanted to thank her properly, but she had been and spoke to my partner instead - he also said how lovely she was straight away. I would love it if I could track her down/ if my gratitude could be passed on.

### **Registrations:**

- I would very much like to give positive feedback following my husband & I's wedding yesterday. From start to finish your wedding service team offered a seamless service, it was straightforward & very easy for nervous folk to know exactly what was expected. The lady we initially met was so friendly; she asked all the necessary questions with kindness & a gentle manner, we felt special. Then choosing our vows online to form the service is a genius system, to be given the choice of basic, gender neutral & more 'floral' words made

designing our service so easy. We cried reading the lovely words the team had put together, it was beautiful & no means a utility option wedding.

Then on the day we were met by a lovely calm & welcoming lady who made it so easy for us to know what to do. The ceremony itself was amazing again your team excelled themselves, they were joyous & genuine in their happiness at marrying us & we left feeling we had to send recognition of the excellent service your wedding team offers.

So thank you from XXX, for making a rainy day a golden & sunny one & one that we shall remember for the rest of our days.

**Streetworks (following a courtesy email to customer regarding a broken drain cover):**

- Yes done thanks! And improved subsequently. Well done!

**Report author:**

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**September 2020**