

Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

21 June 2023

Customer Feedback Annual Report 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Recommendation

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the content of the report

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This is the Annual Report for Communities Directorate in relation to Compliments, Complaints, Questions and Comments covering the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.
- 1.2 The report summarises the compliments, complaints, questions and comments received by the two services including the lessons learned. The data, trends and themes have been collated over the last 3 years.

2. Corporate Complaints Process

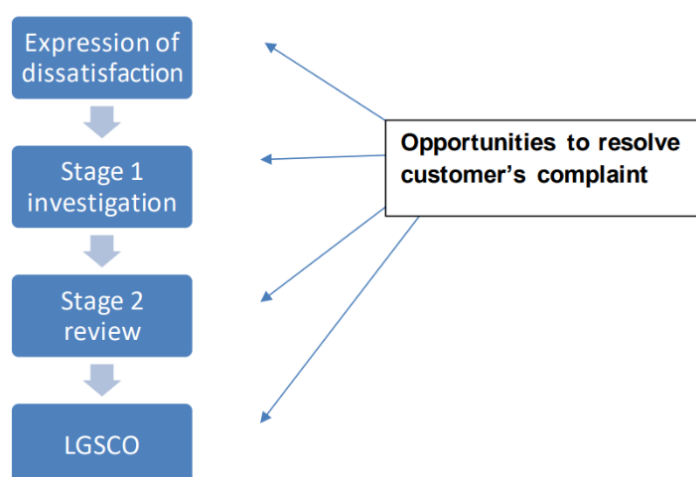
- 2.1 The Council has a Corporate Complaints Process as part of the overall Complaints Policy which involves two stages and includes the following:
 - 2.1.1 Stage one complaints are investigated and responded to by the appropriate service area. Complaints should be responded to within 10 to 30 working days. The expectation should be to complete stage 1 complaints within 10 working days where possible and the maximum timescale would be where the complaint is considered more complex to deal with.
 - 2.1.2 Stage two, if a customer remains dissatisfied with the response that has been given a complainant can request their complaint to be escalated to stage two. The Customer Relations Team (CRT) are responsible for the stage 2 review process and the expectation is to complete the stage 2 review if this is undertaken within 30 working days. The County Council Complaints Policy also states that:

“Complaints about all other services have a two-stage (non-statutory) process but there is no automatic right to take a complaint to stage two. The customer must provide an explanation of why and how the initial response failed to fully

address their concerns, and evidence what element(s) of the complaint have not been answered.”

2.1.3 After consideration, if it is decided that there is no reason to escalate the complaint to a stage two review, this will be explained within ten working days.

2.1.4 If a complainant remains unhappy after exhausting all stages of a complaints process, the complainant can take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). A complainant can access the LGSCO at any point during the complaint process; however, the LGSCO normally allows the Local Authority the opportunity to process a complaint through every stage of the appropriate complaints procedure, before investigating it themselves. Complaints referred to a Local Authority by the LGSCO to process under the relevant complaints process are classed as ‘premature’ complaints- <https://www.lgo.org.uk/>



3. Analysis of the Customer Feedback Received During 2022 and 2023

3.1 Feedback from members of the public is recorded on a customer relations software referred to as ‘Contact Us.’ Feedback can be shared through either an online portal, or via telephone, email or through the postal service and is categorised into Complaints, Compliments, Comments or Questions. Depending on the type of contact, feedback will be processed through different internal procedures.

3.2 The County Council takes every submitted case seriously, especially complaints, as it wants to make sure its customers are dealt with fairly, consistently and within timelines. It is essential that the County Council is dealing effectively with all feedback to provide efficient services, learning and improvements. Procedures relating to how it deals with and responds to complaints is detailed in its Complaints Policy -

<https://api.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/WCCC-550390340-762> This Policy has been developed in line with best practice recommendations and

legislation that covers complaints about local authority services. The Policy is currently being reviewed and updated to ensure it covers all up to date legislation. In the policy, a complaint is defined as:

“... any expression of dissatisfaction with a service that the Council (or one of its partners or contractors) has provided, and that requires a response.”

Method of Analysis

3.2.1 This report provides a summary of all cases that were submitted to Contact Us during 2022/2023 and sets this in relation to cases received over the previous two years. It focuses on cases allocated to the Communities Directorate (except the Fire and Rescue Service), whilst Customer Feedback reports detailing the Children & Families and Education Services, Resources and Fire and Rescue Services and Adult Social Care and Public Health will be reported to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3.2.2) Data presented in this report was obtained directly from ‘Contact Us.’ Where appropriate, data was summed over different time intervals and averages and percentage changes over time were calculated. Data was extracted for the past three years, i.e., 2020/2021; 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

3.3 Trends in received cases over time

3.3.1 In 2022/2023, Contact Us received 4,335 cases across all Directorates of the Council, a 13.6% decrease from the previous year (n= 5,017). 2021/2022 had more cases than 2020/2021, with 4,737 total cases.

3.3.2 There was an overall decrease in cases from 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 to 2022/2023. Questions and compliments experienced a significant decline falling by 13.3% and 32.4% respectively. Complaints for 2022/2023 have also decreased by 7.11% in comparison to the previous year. Questions have decreased by 12.39% (Figure 1).

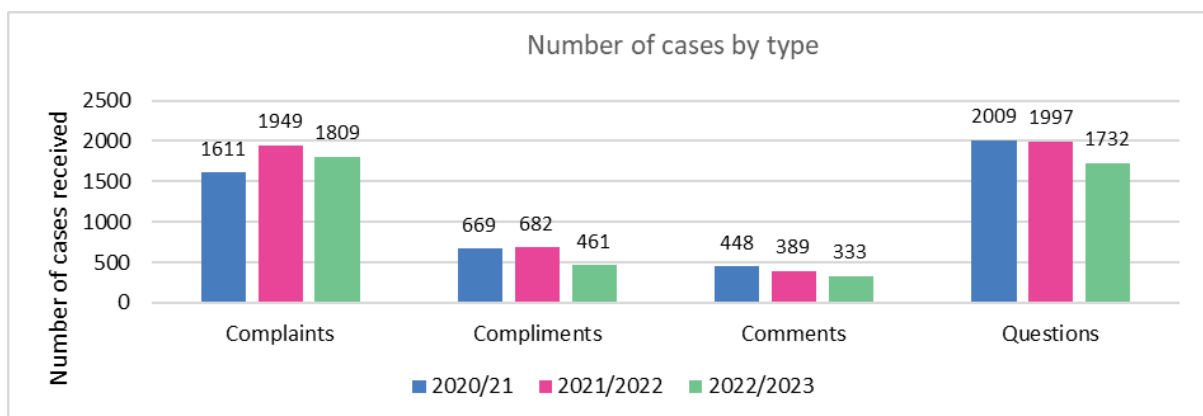


Figure 1: Number of cases received during the years 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 across all Directorates within the Council by type of case.

3.3.3 Once a case is received, it is reviewed by the CRT. Depending on each case, the CRT can assign a case to the team it concerns or complete a case themselves. CRT will most often complete a case where the case:

- references a service that is not provided by Warwickshire County Council (WCC), for example, issues on private land;
- does not fall in the specific subject area of any other WCC team, for example, it may be a Warwick District Council issue such as waste collection from members of the public's homes;
- is submitted anonymously and cannot be followed up. Anonymous complainants will often go on to complain that their complaint has not been addressed; and
- can be dealt with by the CRT team which has a broad knowledge of many areas so can answer and close questions and comments without sending them to the services directly.

3.7 During 2022/2023, 1915 (44.2%) of cases were assigned to the CRT, which is an increase of 9.1% compared to the previous year. Compared to 2020/2021, cases assigned to the CRT have nearly doubled. Of the remaining 2,420 cases received during 2022/2023, 1,112 were assigned to Communities Directorate (Table 1). Please note, Communities Directorate figures throughout the report include Communities Service and Environment Services only, as Fire and Rescue Service data can be found in the Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview & Scrutiny Customer Feedback report.

Service	Communities Directorate		
	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Complaints	733	634	528
Compliments	146	121	78
Comments	210	106	67
Questions	936	656	439
Total	2,025	1,517	1,112

Table 1: Number of cases assigned to Communities Directorate by type over the previous three years.

3.8 In 2022/2023, the number of cases tht Communities Directorate received decreased by 26.7% from 2021/2022 and decreased by 45.1% compared to 2020/2021. These cases comprised of 47.5% complaints, 7% compliments, 39.5% questions, and 6% comments. Since 2020/21 the number of complaints has gone down from 2025 to 1112 in 2022/23, a decrease of 45%; however, complaints as a percentage of contact volume have risen from 36.2% in 2020/2021 to 47.5% in 2022/2023.

Complaints Data

3.9 Data on Complaints received via Contact Us:

- i.) Complaints received by Communities Directorate per month showed a steady decrease over the past three years. In 2022/2023 the highest numbers were received during August 2022 and January 2023, with 60 and 56 complaints, respectively.

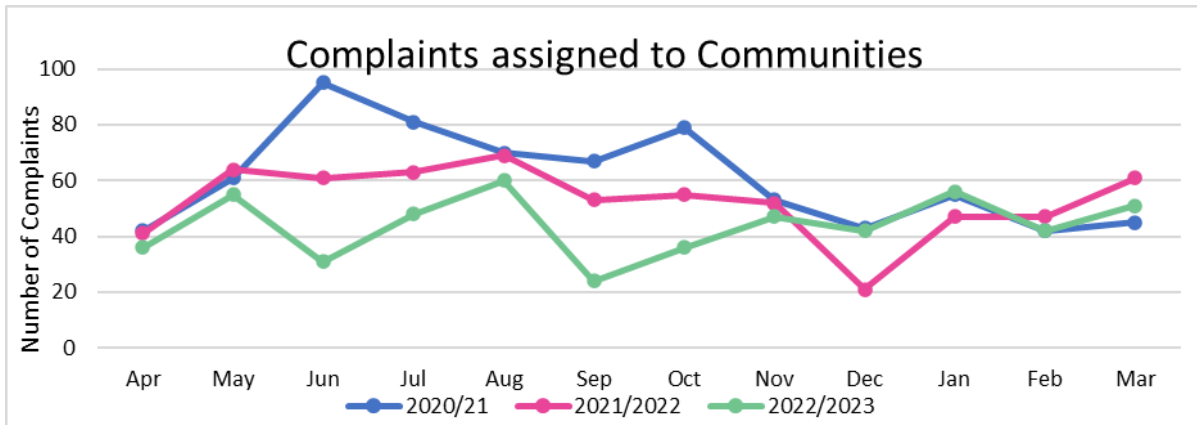


Figure 1: Number of complaints assigned to Communities Directorate over time.

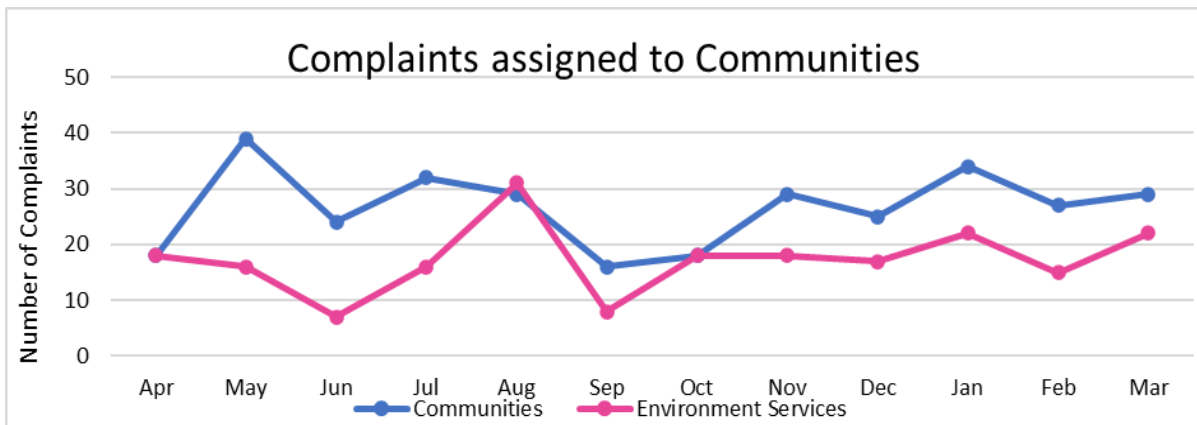


Figure 2: Number of complaints assigned to Communities and Environment Services in 2022/2023

- ii.) Within Communities Directorate, case volumes were dealt with by several teams, with Parking Civil Enforcement having the highest number in 2020/2021, accounting for 13% (n=95) of all cases and increasing to 20.1% (n=106) in 2022/2023. This was followed by Waste Management with 10% (n=53) of cases.
- iii.) For Communities Directorate, most complaints were related to the initial investigation (Stage 1), accounting for 80.1% (n=423) in 2022/2023. The remaining 19.9% (n=105) were assigned to 'Other' complaints.
- iv.) During 2022/2023, subject categories of complaints assigned to Communities Directorate most often related to issues in Physical Environment and Communication (Table 2):

Subject Categories	Communities Directorate	
	Number of cases	%
Physical environment issues	224	42.4%
Communication	119	22.5%
Financial Issues	56	10.6%
WCC Service standards	52	9.8%
Staff conduct	24	4.5%
Outside contact us process	17	3.2%
Policy	16	3.0%
Protection of user	8	1.5%
Commissioned Service Provision	8	1.5%
Discrimination	4	0.8%

Table 2: Subject Categories of complaints assigned to Communities Directorate during 2022/2023

- iv.) In 2020/2021, the proportion of complaints assigned to Environmental Services that addressed physical environment issues was 9% (n=66), which increased to 32.5% (n=206) in 2021/2022 and 42.4% (n=224) in 2022/2023. Complaints relating to communication decreased from 78.9% (n=578) in 2020/2021 to 51.6% (n=327) in 2021/2022 and 22.5% (n=119) in 2022/2023.

Complaints Closed

- 3.10 The number of closed complaints resolved within the expected service standard has stayed static over the last three years for Communities Directorate. In 2020/2021, 94.5% (n=689) were closed, slightly increasing to 94.7% (n=610) in 2021/2022 and then decreasing to 92.9% (n=486) in 2022/2023.
- 3.11 The number of Communities' closed complaints exceeding the service standard has also remained static over the last three years, with 5.5% (n=40) in 2020/2021, 5.3% (n=34) in 2021/2022, and a slight increase to 7.1% (n=37) in 2022/2023.

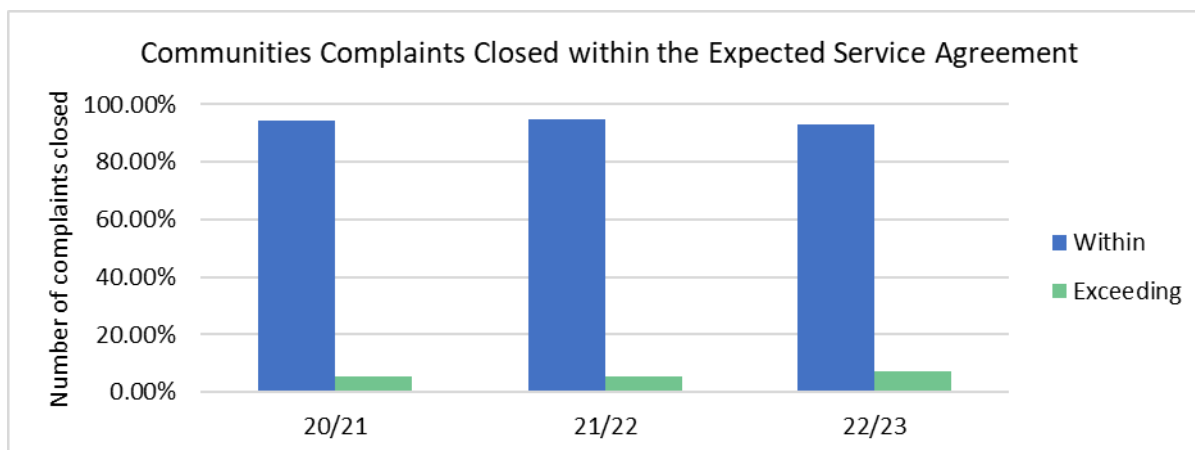


Figure 4: Total Complaints Closed for Communities Directorate within service standard over time.

- 3.12 The system records how a particular case is resolved under a number of category headings. These include provision of an apology, financial remedy, change in process and change of policy which are self explanatory. The remaining possibilities are “providing an explanation” (for example, the Council provides an explanation to a customer in response to a query or complaint as to why/how a course of action has been taken, or the meaning of a policy or criteria for service are explained) or “providing a service” (where the Council will agree delivery of a service to a customer in response to a query or complaint raised).
- 3.13 In 2020/2021, the most common complaint remedy for Communities Directorate complaints was "providing an explanation". This occurred for 52.7% (n=384) of all resolved complaints. “Providing a service” and “apologies” accounted for 26.8% (n=195) and 9.5% (n=69) respectively, with only a small number of complaints resulting in “changes in process” (0.7%; n=5), “change of policy” (0.3%; n=2) or financial remedies (0.3%; n=2).
- 3.13 In 2021/2022, the % of complaints resolved through “providing an explanation” decreased to 48.8% (n=314) of all complaints resolved. “Apologies” increased to 11.3% (n=73), “providing a service” increased to 33.2% (n=214), while “changes in process” (0.6%; n=4), “change of policy” (0.2%; n=1), and financial remedies (0.2%; n=1) remained stable.
- 3.14 In 2022/2023, “providing an explanation” remained the most common remedy at 49.7% (n=260). “Apologies” decreased to 11.1% (n=58) and “providing a service” increased to 38.2% (n=200). The least common remedies were “change in process” (0.6%; n=3) and financial remedies (0.4%; n=2) (Table 3).

Complaint Remedies	Communities Directorate	
	Number of cases	%
Explanation Provided	260	49.7%
Service Provided	200	38.2%
Apology	58	11.1%
Change in Process	3	0.6%
Financial Remedy	2	0.4%
Change of Policy	0	0.0%

Table 3: Closed Complaint Remedies for Communities Directorate over time.

- 3.15 In the Communities Directorate, the most common complaint outcome since 2020/2021 has been “Question Answered”, accounting for with 59.7% (n=312) of complaints resolved in 2022/2023. This was followed by cases where no

outcome was selected on Contact Us with 9.2% (n=48) and Complaint: Not Upheld with 7.3% (n=38) in the same year.

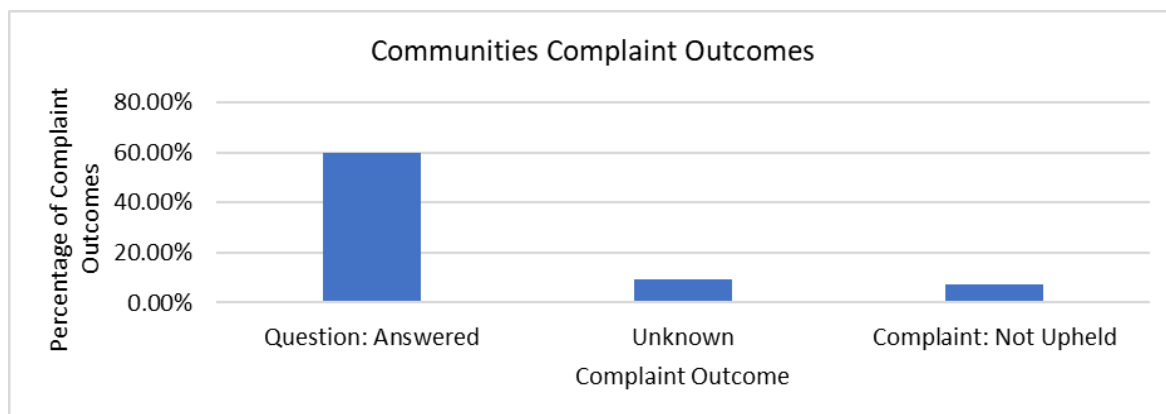


Figure 5: Complaint Outcomes for Communities Directorate in 2022/2023.

4 Lessons Learnt

- 4.1 When a complaint, question, comment, or compliment is completed and closed, colleagues must record certain information including 'Lessons Learned.' This is an opportunity for staff to reflect on how a case could have been handled differently or better – whether a complaint could have been avoided or prevented, whether our response could have been improved and whether there are lessons for the Council that will improve our approach. This is used for learning and training purposes within both the team who have handled the case and the wider Council. Officers are encouraged to capture all relevant ideas and suggestions to inform future approach.
- 4.2 In 2022/2023, 13.2% (n=69) of closed complaints in Communities Directorate had recorded lessons learned, 2.5% (n=13) for organisation processes and 2.3% (n=12) for additional training.

5. Compliments, Comments and Questions

- 5.1 In 2022/2023, compliments, comments and questions made up 52.5% (n=584) of the total cases assigned to Communities Directorate, this is a 33.9% decrease from 2021/2022. Communities Directorate have experienced a steady decline in the number of compliments, comments, and questions over the past 3 years. In 2021/2022, these types of cases accounted for 58.2% (n=883) which is lower than the 63.8% (n=1292) in 2020/2021.
- 5.2 In 2022/2023, 75.2% (n=439) of the total compliments, comments and question cases received were Questions, 13.4% (n=78) were compliments and 11.5% (n=67) were comments.

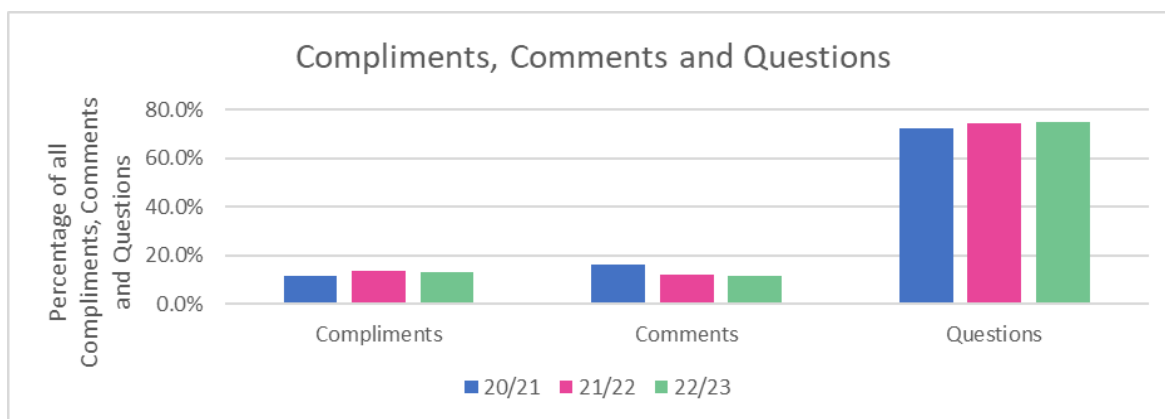


Figure 6: Compliments, Comments and Questions for Communities Directorate over time.

- 5.3 In 2020/2021, the Communities Directorate received 1292 comments, questions, and compliments. Out of these, 90.2% (n=1165) were closed within expected service standard and 9.8% (n=126) exceeded service standard, and 0.1% (n=1) were not closed. The number of comments, questions and compliments decreased to 883 in 2021/2022, with 90.4% (n=798) being closed within expected service standard and 9.6% (n=85) exceeding it. In 2022/2023, 584 comments, questions and compliments received, of which 84.6% (n=494) were closed within expected service standard and 15.2% (n=89) exceeded it. The remaining 0.2% (n=1) were not closed.
- 5.4 Complaints during COVID were often due to confusion and misunderstanding of the situations arising because of the fast changing legal and medical landscape. Customers were not happy with certain activities and changes in process during this time. As COVID restrictions lifted, contact regarding County Highways (North/South, increased due to the increase in users on the highway network. These had understandably been lower during the COVID period as travel was limited and the network was a lot quieter. Complaints against Streetworks departments within Local Authorities are difficult to gauge, particularly given that the public perception of who is responsible for the works that are being undertaken can be confusing. Most of the complaints registered with WCC against Streetworks are in reality against third parties whether that be utilities, contractors or other organisations working in the public highway.
- 5.5 Appendix 1 gives examples of complaints and compliments received through Contact Us.

6 Customer Platform

- 6.1 In January 2023 Cabinet agreed that the Microsoft Technology Platform (Dynamics) would be used to replace the existing customer relationship management system solution. This is a significant change which will help to address some of the weaknesses in the data, recording and insight about customer feedback set out in this report.
- 6.2 A single customer platform for the Council, allows:

- direct 1-to-1 communication with citizens so they can view and easily understand where they are in any process with us;
- a single view of the citizen;
- consistent and quality data collection and analytics accessible to our reporting tools; and
- simple and repeatable digitisation for those able to use it.

6.3 The first release of the customer platform, currently planned for August 2023, includes the modules for dealing with customer feedback and complaints. This will provide a single customer platform enabling officers to view the full history of the Council's interaction with a customer including actions taken previously. This will allow officers to access a fuller record of contact so as to provide a more joined up response. Further releases are planned throughout the financial year.

6.4 It is important that the Council has an effective and efficient customer feedback system in place which ensures that:

- we are able to actively listen and respond empathetically and professionally to concerns, complaints or queries from members of the public
- to allow us to work with colleagues to provide the best response within the timescales determined by the appropriate complaints procedure,
- complaints and compliments are accurately recorded, leading to accurate performance data being produced to drive improvement;
- when things have gone wrong, they are put right as quickly as possible
- both complainants and staff understand the relevant complaints procedure, how it relates to them and their rights and responsibilities within it;
- any learning from complaints is acknowledged and that the Customer Relations Team, work with the appropriate service area to ensure that the necessary changes are made to improve services provided; and
- high quality and timely performance reporting is provided to management teams, to ensure that they are aware of issues arising and can work with the Customer Relations Team to resolve these and maintain a high-quality service.

6.5 Over time, the customer platform will provide a foundation for the careful application of automation and other technologies to enhance customer experience. This will help meet increasing demand, provide greater consistency and assurance about process, and support the Council's challenging financial position.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 Where customer feedback resulted in a service being provided, a process change or other activity such as staff training, the cost was managed within

the existing resources of the relevant services. The Customer Platform funding was approved by Cabinet on 27th January 2023.

8. Environmental Implications

8.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

9. Supporting Information

Not Applicable

10. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

Not Applicable

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Complaint and Compliment Examples

Background Papers

None

	Name	Contact Information
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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Councillors Dahmash, Crump, Watson, Timms and Matecki.