

## Appendix 2 – Complaints and Freedom of Information

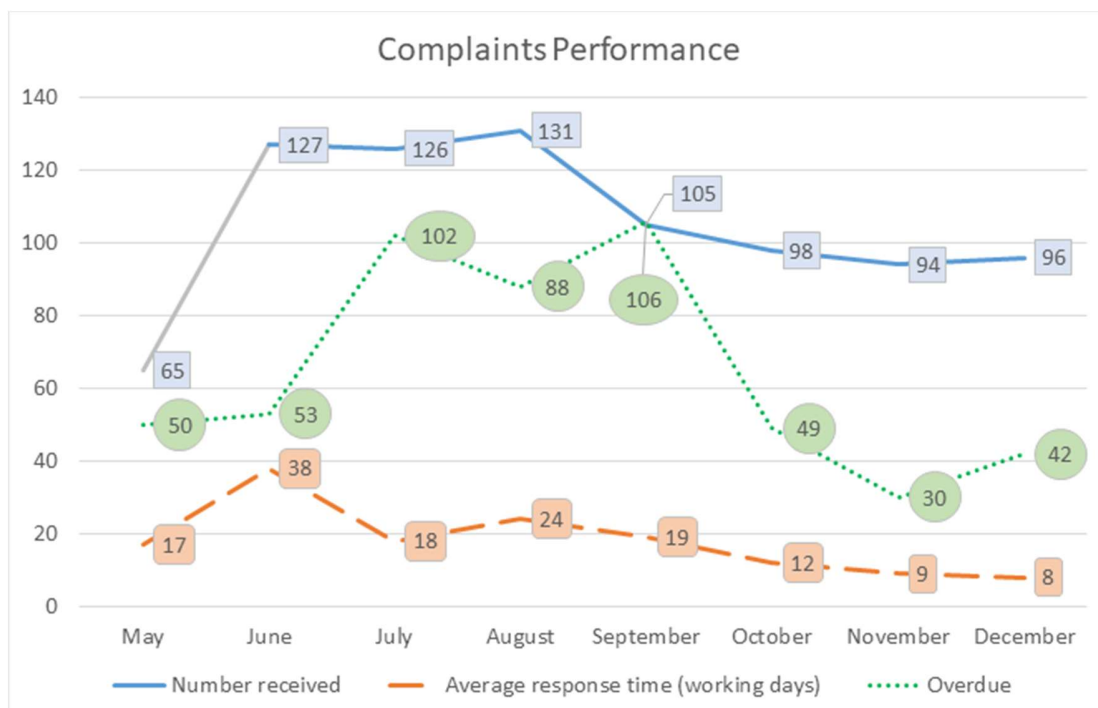
The purpose of this appendix is to provide more background information for Members in relation to the Complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) Performance Indicators.

### 1. Complaints

- 1.1. The complaints KPI tracks the number of complaints responded to within the target response time of 10 working days. During quarters 1 and 2 we were significantly below target. Performance during quarter 3 has improved and average response times have dropped back under target.
- 1.2. The indicator is a cumulative measure so the performance in the first half of the year will impact on overall performance across the year as a whole. We saw a significant spike in the overall number of complaints in the first quarter. Realistically therefore this indicator is likely to remain red all year, because, even if we were to answer all complaints within standard from now on, we are unlikely to receive complaints in sufficient volume to make up the lost ground.

#### *Progress tracked by month*

- 1.3. Consequently we are tracking progress month-by-month across a wider range of indicators and measures. These measures provide a more detailed and rounded picture of progress.
- 1.4. A summary of these additional month-by-month measures is contained in the graph below:
  - The total number of complaints received;
  - The number overdue (i.e. not responded to within the 10 working day target); and
  - The average time taken to respond.



- 1.5. Analysis of these measures indicates a significant increase in the number of complaints in the period from May through to August. Our average response times increased during this period, which had a knock on detrimental effect on the numbers of overdue complaints.
- 1.6. We believe the increase in complaints is in part seasonal (e.g. garden waste collection issues). It also results from a significant number of complaints in connection with other waste issues resulting from the move to a new service provider during lockdown and delays delivering new bins. We have worked closely with the Waste Partnership and the new service provider to resolve these issues. The level of missed collections and complaints are now greatly reduced, the new contractor is performing within contractual requirements relating to complaints and at a level better than the previous contractor.
- 1.7. The good news is that the numbers of complaints we are receiving has declined sharply, our average processing times have continued to improve (down to 8 days at the end of December) and the numbers of overdue complaints has declined. This is reflective of the increased focus on complaints during the last three months. However, there is still much work to be done.

#### *The Complaints Review*

- 1.8. We instigated a review of the complaints process over the summer in view of the poor month 4 (quarter 1) results. This review examined all aspects of the process.
- 1.9. The review identified a number of factors, which were influencing the low performance figures including:
  - The impact of increases in volumes of complaints
  - Cultural factors & a lack of priority being given to complaints
  - Procedural problems and 'log jams'
  - Our not having a two stage process as required by the Housing Ombudsman and preferred by the Local Govt. Ombudsman
  - Software issues with the process and form used
  - A lack of clarity as to which teams do what & consequently where complaints need to be directed to in the organisation leading to delays
  - Training requirements
  - The impact of Covid upon resourcing

#### *The Improvement Plan*

- 1.10. The Complaints Review identified actions required to improve our approach to complaints and performance against target. These actions are nearing completion and include:
  - Working with services to prioritise complaints and to change the cultural attitude to complaints
  - Bringing in additional resourcing in the short term to ensure we can quickly finalise and issue responses to complaints once the data is provided by services
  - Developing a new complaints process which:
    - Enables services to respond directly to customers thereby speeding up the response time; and
    - Building in a second stage review process for customers who are unhappy with the initial response – this follows Ombudsman guidelines

- Implementing changes to the complaints software to enable and support the new process
- Providing training & guidance for the staff in services who will be responding to complaints
- These changes free-up the time of the complaints officer to focus more on analysis to identify trends and areas for improvement

1.11. We are in the process of implementing these actions in order to drive improvement. However, as outlined above, there are a significant number of issues that need to be addressed so implementing these changes will not happen overnight.

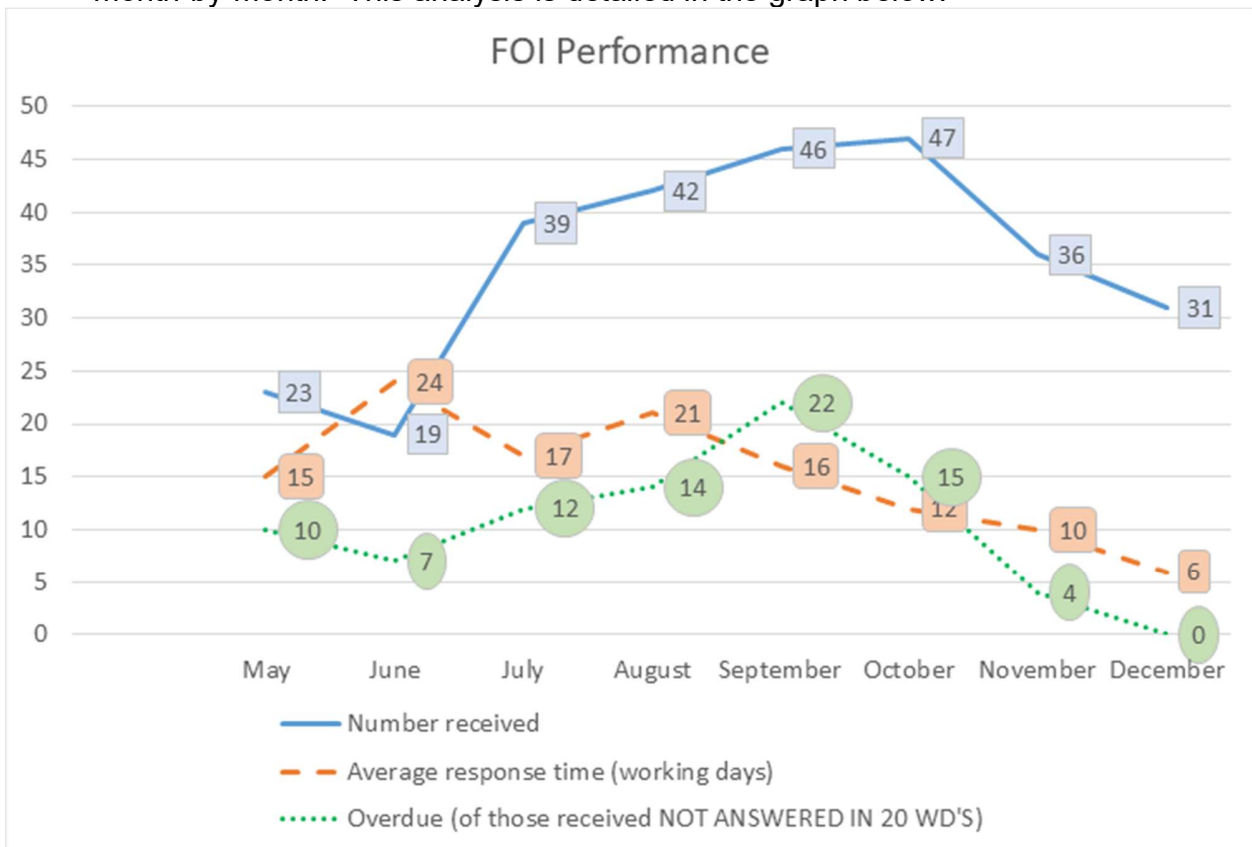
## 2. Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs)

2.1. We are required by law to respond to Freedom of Information Requests within 20 working days. For very detailed requests we are allowed a further 20 working days.

2.2. The Information Commissioner has relaxed their enforcement of the statutory timescales this year in response to Covid 19 and in recognition that the priority for local government is around assisting in the national response to the crisis.

*Progress tracked by month*

2.3. We are tracking progress against our performance in responding to FOI requests month-by-month. This analysis is detailed in the graph below:



- 2.4. This graph details the overall number of FOIs received month-by-month and maps this against the numbers overdue (i.e. outside of the 20 working day response timeline) and the average response time in days. Overall volumes per month are low in comparison to the numbers for other service requests, but individual FOIs can be complex and time consuming.
- 2.5. The data on the graph indicates that the number of requests reduced through the first national lockdown in the Spring, but picked up over the course of the Summer. Our average response times were higher throughout the Spring and Summer, which largely reflects the fact that our priorities throughout that period were on Covid response actions.
- 2.6. The numbers of cases overdue peaked in September, but have improved together with our average response times since then. Quarter 3 performance has been excellent with average response times reaching 6 days in December with no requests overdue.

*Process improvements*

- 2.7. We are keeping our FOI response times under close review and actions are being taken to improvement performance. Specifically we are:
  - Regularly contacting services to chase-up responses
  - Providing service managers with a weekly update of outstanding cases
  - Reviewing the computer software process to ensure that requests are being properly targeted
  - Developing training to be rolled out to staff responsible for responding to FOIs.