

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 18 AUGUST 2010
REPORT ON: COMPLAINTS STATISTICS 2009/2010
REPORT BY: ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT NO: 409-2010

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Committee with an analysis of complaints processed through the Council's electronic recording system during 2009/10.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- i) note the attached analysis of complaints processed through the electronic system between April 2009 and March 2010, with a comparison to the figures for 2008/09
- ii) remit chief officers to ensure that complaints are logged on the system, to analyse their own complaints and to aim to use complaints to drive service improvements
- iii) note that changes made by departments to processes, training etc as a result of complaints will be summarised as part of the annual report to Committee in December on how the Council uses feedback from customers and service users to improve its services

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 An electronic system to log, monitor and report on formal complaints was introduced on a phased basis during 2007 and 2008. This report analyses the complaints processed by the system between April 2009 and March 2010, and includes breakdowns of complaints by department, nature and channel of complaint, as well as information on time taken to resolve complaints, repeat complainants and the outcome of complaints. Comparisons are shown with the figures for 2008/09.
- 4.2 The attached tables show that 186 complaints were processed through the system in 2009/2010. This is less than the figure of 326 in 2008/09 and considerably less than the average of around 700 recorded on the previous Helpline system over recent years. However, the previous system recorded as complaints a large number of contacts from customers which would be more accurately categorised as service requests or enquiries. Training on the new system emphasised that complaints are defined as:

'..... an expression of dissatisfaction with something the Council or its staff have done or failed to do, or with how a person has been treated, which requires us to respond'

The drop in recorded complaints reflects the fact that staff have been instructed that initial requests for information, explanations or a service, including seeking the Council's assistance with complaints about others, should be logged and monitored outwith the formal complaints system. However, the fall from 2008/09 to 2009/10 may also suggest that all complaints are not being logged on the electronic system.

- 4.3 The complaints recording system was developed in-house and has been commented on favourably by external inspectors. The auditor for the Leisure and Communities Department's ISO Quality Management System Certification described it as 'an excellent development, a true example of continuous improvement, with cogent, well-laid out guidelines for use'. Departments have been asked to ensure that complaints are logged on the system and that analysis of complaints statistics and the details of individual complaints are used to drive service improvements.
- 4.4 The attached statistics also reflect the fact that the majority of complaints to Social Work and Education were dealt with outwith the corporate recording system, but steps have been taken to ensure the corporate system also meets their needs, so a more comprehensive picture can be given in next year's report.
- 4.5 As well as ensuring that individual complaints are investigated and responded to, a key aim of the complaints system should be to help us learn from complaints, seeing them as valuable feedback on service performance. Depending on whether or not complaints are justified, and on their root cause, there may be a need to change policies or procedures, provide training for staff or consider service improvements. The statistics on Complaints Outcomes in Table 6 suggest that departments have been identifying the root cause of complaints. It is proposed that Corporate Planning continue to collate information on how this has worked in practice as part of a wider exercise to demonstrate the impact of customer feedback on service delivery. The report on Improving Services Through Listening to Customers and Service Users, which was submitted to Committee in December 2009, will now be an annual report and will include any changes made as a result of complaints.

5. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of sustainability, strategic environmental assessment, anti-poverty, equality impact assessment and risk management.
- 5.2 The complaints logging system incorporates a feature which asks officers to identify, when closing complaints, whether the complaint related to an equalities issue - age, disability, gender, LGBT, race or religion. Two complaints in 2009/2010 were identified as relating to an equalities issue - one to disability and one to race - compared to none in 2008/2009.

6. **CONSULTATIONS**

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive, Director of Finance and all Chief Officers have been consulted on this report.

Chris Ward
Assistant Chief Executive 12/08/2010

Table 1: Complaints each month by department

Department	Apr 09	May 09	Jun 09	Jul 09	Aug 09	Sep 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09	Jan 10	Feb 10	Mar 10	Total 09/10	Total 08/09
Chief Executive & Corporate Planning	1					2							3	2
City Development	3	1	2	3	3	2	1		1	2			18	50
Contract Services	3			2	2	1	1				1	2	12	23
Education		1		1									2	6
Environmental Health and Trading Standards														2
Finance (revenues)	7	8	8	5	6	5	8	5	3	4	5	5	69	87
Finance (general)														1
Housing	6	6	8	9	3	4		10	1	1	5	2	55	114
Information Technology														
Leisure and Communities	6	1	1	1	2	1		1				2	15	26
Personnel	1												1	
Public Relations														
Social Work	1	1		1									3	8
Support Services		1									2		3	1
Waste Management	2		1	1						1			5	6
Totals	30	19	20	23	16	15	10	16	5	8	13	11	186	326

Table 2: Nature of complaints

Nature of Complaint	2008/09	2009/10
Service not to the standard expected	46.9%	33.7%
Delay or failure to respond to a query or request for service	16.7%	14.2%
Failure to follow the Council's agreed policies or procedures	1.6%	3.2%
An employee's attitude or behaviour	11.2%	15.3%
Failure to take account of relevant matters	5.4%	13.1%
Malice, bias or unfair discrimination	2.2%	4.2%
Other	16.0%	16.3%

Table 3: Complaints by Channel

Channel	2008/9	2009/10
Email	23.1%	19.0%
Letter	29.7%	34.7%
Telephone	28.4%	20.0%
Contact Centre	4.1%	11.6%
In Person	0.9%	4.7%
Website	9.7%	6.3%
Complaint form	4.1%	3.7%

Table 4: Complaints by days taken to resolve

Number of Days Taken to Resolve	2008/09	2009/10
Less than 3 days	32.2%	23.6%
3 or more, but less than 6 days	39.2%	31.9%
6 or more, but less than 9 days	14.3%	23.1%
9 days or more	14.3%	21.4%

Table 5: Repeat Complainants

Number of complaints made by same person	2008/09	2009/10
2	20	4
3	1	2
5	1	

44% of complaints were resolved outwith the published target of 5 days. However, the complaints procedure acknowledges that some complaints are complicated and take longer than 5 days to investigate. This is mentioned in acknowledgement letters to complainants. The electronic system will continue to remind officers that a response is due unless they amend the target date, at which point they should also keep complainants informed.

Table 6: Complaints outcomes

40.1% of complaints were assessed as being 'upheld' compared to 39.3% in 2008/09. Of these, the 'root cause' was identified as follows:

Root cause	Definition	% of upheld complaints	
		2008/09	2009/10
System fault	Staff followed the correct procedure according to the process documented or training provided, but there is a fault in the procedure or process which requires to be corrected.	11.8%	8.1%
Process error	Staff did not follow the correct procedure according to the process documented or training they have been given.	60.6%	71.6%
Training required	Staff did not have the skills/knowledge to deliver the service effectively, and training is required.	6.3%	6.8%
Other	(If none of the above apply, officers closing complaints are asked to provide a brief explanation of the 'root cause' of the complaint and any action required to prevent recurrence)	21.3%	13.5%