

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JUNE 2011
REPORT ON: COMPLAINTS STATISTICS 2010/2011
REPORT BY: ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT NO: 311-2011

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Committee with an analysis of formal complaints processed through the Council's electronic recording system during 2010/11.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- i) notes the attached analysis of complaints processed through the electronic recording system between April 2010 and March 2011, with comparisons to the figures for 2008/09 and 2009/10
- ii) remits chief officers to ensure that complaints are logged on the system, to analyse their own departments' complaints and to aim to use lessons learned from complaints to drive service improvements
- iii) notes that changes made by departments to processes, training etc as a result of complaints continue to be summarised as part of the annual report to Policy and Resources Committee 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 logged on the system between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011, 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 given with the figures for 2008/09 and 2009/10.
- 4.2 The attached tables show that 216 complaints were processed through the system in 2010/2011. This is a slight increase on the figure of 186 in 2009/10 but still 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. The Helpline 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 using the new system 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 comparison between the past two years and 2008/09 may also suggest that all complaints are not being logged on the electronic system.

- 4.3 The attached statistics also reflect the fact that the majority of complaints to Social Work and Education early in the financial year were dealt with outwith the corporate recording system. Last year, the Scrutiny Committee referred to making the system corporate and steps were taken to ensure that the corporate system also meets the needs of these departments. They are now using the corporate system, so a more comprehensive picture will be given in next year's report. The slight increase from 2009/10 to 2010/11 may reflect the inclusion of Education and Social Work figures towards the end of 2010/11. The corporate complaints system focuses on issues which require investigation and response. There are separate systems which deal with high volume requests (e.g. complaints to Waste Management about missed bins) which can simply be resolved without detailed investigation.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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. Such information will be included in the report on Improving Services Through Listening to Customers and Service Users which is now submitted annually to the Policy and Resources Committee.

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. There are no major issues.
- 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. No complaints in 2010/11 were identified as relating to an equalities issue, compared to two (one race, one disability) in 2009/10.

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

08/06/2011

Table 1: Complaints each month by department

Department	Apr 10	May 10	Jun 10	Jul 10	Aug 10	Sep 10	Oct 10	Nov 10	Dec 10	Jan 11	Feb 11	Mar 11	Total 10/11	Total 09/10	Total 08/09
Chief Executive & Corporate Planning				1								1	2	3	2
City Development		2	2	1	2			1	1	1	1	2	13	18	50
Contract Services	1				1	4	2					2	10	12	23
Education									3	10	1	1	15	2	6
Environmental Health and Trading Standards								1		1	1		3		2
Finance (revenues)	4	7	12	10	14	5	9	6	3	9	12	6	97	69	87
Finance (general)												1	1		1
Housing	5	5	3	1	3	2	4	6	1	4	3	4	41	55	114
Information Technology								1		1			2		
Leisure and Communities	3	3	1	1		1	1						10	15	26
Personnel				1									1	1	
Public Relations															
Social Work		1			1		1			2	7	4	16	3	8
Support Services						1							1	3	1
Waste Management	1		2						1				4	5	6
Totals	14	18	20	15	21	13	17	15	9	28	25	21	216	186	326

Table 2: Nature of complaints

Nature of Complaint	2008/09	2009/10	2010/2011
Service not to the standard expected	46.9%	33.7%	30.5%
Delay or failure to respond to a query or request for service	16.7%	14.2%	18.1%
Failure to follow the Council's agreed policies or procedures	1.6%	3.2%	1.4%
An employee's attitude or behaviour	11.2%	15.3%	12.5%
Failure to take account of relevant matters	5.4%	13.1%	14.4%
Malice, bias or unfair discrimination	2.2%	4.2%	4.6%
Other	16.0%	16.3%	18.5%

Table 3: Complaints by Channel

Channel	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Email	23.1%	19.0%	25.0%
Letter	29.7%	34.7%	26.4%
Telephone	28.4%	20.0%	21.3%
Contact Centre	4.1%	11.6%	11.1%
In Person	0.9%	4.7%	3.7%
Website	9.7%	6.3%	9.3%
Complaint from	4.1%	3.7%	3.2%

Table 4: Complaints by days taken to resolve

Numbers of Days Taken to Resolve	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Less than 3 days	32.2%	23.6%	24.1%
3 or more, but less than 6 days	39.2%	31.9%	46.3%
6 or more, but less than 9 days	14.3%	23.1%	10.2%
9 days or more	14.3%	21.4%	19.4%

Table 5: Repeat Complainants

Number of complaints made by same person	2008/09	2009/10	2010/2011
2	20	4	12
3	1	2	1
4			1
5	1		
6			1

39% 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

47.7% of complaints were assessed as being 'upheld' compared to 39.3% in 2008/09 and 40.1% in 2009/10. Of these, the 'root cause' was identified as follows:

Root cause	Definition	% of upheld complaints		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
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%	16.5%
Process error	Staff did not follow the correct procedure according to the process documented or training they have been given.	60.6%	71.6%	30.1%
Training required	Staff did not have the skills/knowledge to deliver the service effectively, and training is required.	6.3%	6.8%	1.9%
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%	51.5%