

REPORT TO: **MANAGEMENT BOARD**

TITLE: **Corporate Complaints & Compliments Annual Report 2008-2009**

DATE OF MEETING: **Management Board 5th May 2009**
Resource & Performance Scrutiny Commission 27th August 2009
(for information only)
Standards Committee 20th August 2009
(for information only)

Lead Executive Member: **Cllr Yvonne Cresswell**
Deputy Leader of the Council

Project Sponsor: **Mike Kelly, Deputy Chief Executive**

Project Lead Officer: **Karen Brockway**
Customer Contact Co-ordinator

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 To provide information on the number of complaints and compliments received during the financial year 2008/2009.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 In June 2008 the first ever Corporate Complaints & Compliments Annual Report 2008-2009 was presented to the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission based on data which had been collated manually during the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

The accuracy of this data was at the discretion of the Complaints Officers recording complaints within their respective areas. Officers were asked to complete a monthly return which was then collated centrally by the Customer Contact Co-ordinator.

2.2 The amount of information was very limited showing a total number of 351 complaints and 311 compliments being received in 2007/2008 across all services within the Council.

2.3 A new computerised Complaints Manager System which was developed in-house and implemented into a 'Live' environment on 1st April 2008. This new system is now being used to record and monitor complaints and compliments coming into the Authority from across all service areas. This method of data collection has allowed for a more comprehensive view of the complaints received and how they have been dealt with.

2.4 The 2006 Residents Survey showed satisfaction with how complaints had been handled from those surveyed had remained the same as in 2003 at 33%.

The recent Place Survey omitted to ask the same question so there is no comparative data available for 2008. However, during 2009 it is expected that a Customer Service Survey will be undertaken using the Citizens Panel (Community Voice) as the method of consultation. This will assess the satisfaction levels for 2009/2010 where a performance target has been set at 49%. As comprehensive monitoring is now in place by asking complainants to complete a feedback card the data will be more accurate.

2.5 The key changes in which data has now been captured for 2008/2009 has allowed for the following comprehensive information to be collated.

The information available is as follows:-

- Total number of complaints
- % acknowledged with 5 day target
- % completed within 20 day target
- % completed within policy, but needed more time
- % of complaints closed
- % of feedback received as to how the complaint had been dealt with
- Complaints by source
- Complaints by category
- Complaint by classification
- Breakdown of complaints by ethnicity
- Learning from complaints

Selected information can be found further within this report.

3.0 DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT

A further important change was made in setting out the definition of a complaint to make the process more transparent and ensuring only legitimate complaints were logged.

A complaint is a way of informing the Council that service users are not happy with a particular service. It may be about the standard of service received, delay, lack of communication, discourtesy or failure to consult.

Please note: We do not class an initial request for service as a complaint. For example, when a street light is not working or there is a pothole in the road.

4.0 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY ADULTS AND CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE

4.1 Adult and Children's Social Care Complaints are subject to their own statutory complaints procedures. Consequently, these are bound by set policies and procedures so must be dealt with in a different way to complaints regarding other service areas. Adults and Children's Social Care Complaints are managed and co-ordinated by a dedicated Complaints Officer.

A separate report will be published later in the year.

5.0 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE OMBUDSMAN

5.1 The Ombudsman investigates complaints where the complainant has not been satisfied with the outcome of a complaint that has been made to the Council under the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Each year the Ombudsman publishes a report for each Local Authority outlining the number of complaints that have been received and the outcomes.

Ombudsman Complaints are co-ordinated and managed by Legal Democratic Services on behalf of the Chief Executive.

A separate report, if required, will be published later in the year.

6.0 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

6.1 The table below shows the total number of complaints recorded across Council Departments:

Department	Total Recorded 2007-2008	Total Recorded 2008-2009
Chief Executives	115	100
Environment & Development Services	129	144
Children's Services (Incorporated into Children's Social Care figure below)	0	22
Adult Care Services (Includes Social Care)	72	Report to be published later in the year
Children's Social Care	35	Report to be published later in the year
Total	351	266

6.2 Chief Executives Department

The total number of complaints recorded by the Chief Executives Department was 100, a 13% decrease from 2007/08 figure.

The table below shows the divisions within the departments to which complaints have been recorded.

Division	Total Recorded 2007-2008	Total Recorded 2008-2009
Assistant Chief Executives	0	3
Deputy Chief Executives	2	3
Finance & E-Government	112	86
Legal & Democratic Services	0	7
Personnel	1	1
Total	115	100

The vast majority of complaints were received by Finance & E-Government Division, within Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services. However, 49 of the complaints received were against Policy or Legislation.

6.3 Environmental & Development Services Department

The total number of complaints recorded by the Environmental & Development Services Department was 144, a 12% increase from 2007/08

The table below shows the divisions within the department to which complaints have been recorded.

Division	Total Recorded 2007-2008	Total Recorded 2008-2009
Arts, Libraries & Adult Learning	28	30
Environmental Services	30	41
Leisure	7	15
Operational Services	31	15
Planning, Engineering & Transportation	15	34
Property & Technical	18	8

Unidentified	0	1
Total	129	144

6.4 Children's Services

The total number of complaints recorded by Children's Services was 22 for 2008-2009. There is no comparison data available for 2007-2008.

The table below shows the divisions within the department to which complaints have been recorded.

Division	Total Recorded 2008-2009
Community Services	1
Financial Services	1
Inclusion	5
Planning & Commissioning	1
School Organisation	10
Student & Pupil Finance	3
Total	22

6.5 Complaint by Category

Each complaint is logged against a specified category so that service areas can understand and monitor the types of complaints that are being received.

Category	Total Recorded 2008 - 2009		
	Chief Execs	EDS	Children's Services
Not specified	0	2	0
Against Contractor/consultant	10	1	0
Against member of staff	10	12	7
Against advice given	6	9	3
Against legislation	28	2	0

Against policy	25	31	7
Delay in provision of service	10	21	4
Delay in provision of service to road and street lighting	0	1	0
Personal Injury	0	1	0
Planning decision	0	1	0
Quality of service provided	11	60	1
Regarding a tenant	0	3	0
Total	100	144	22

7.0 COMPLIMENTS

7.1 The total number of compliments recorded by department is as follows:-

Department	No of Compliments 2007-2008	No of Compliments 2008-2009
Chief Executives	118 (61 being from internal customers)	257 (96 being from internal customers)
Environmental & Development Services	64	138
Children's Services (Incorporated into Children's Social Care figure below)	0	47
Adult Social Care	99	Report to be published later in the year
Children's Social Care	30	Report to be published later in the year
Total	311	442

Please note that some of the Compliments received are from internal customers (i.e. service to service). Some sections within the Authority have internal customers only. These are highlighted by the numbers in brackets.

There is a 42% increase from 2007/08 figure of compliments recorded.

8.0 RESPONSE TIMES

- 8.1 Once a complaint has been received the formal process dictates an acknowledgement to be sent out within five working days outlining who is dealing with the complaint. Although only 156 have been sent out some complaints are however completed in full within the first five days.
- 8.2 A full response detailing the results of the investigation should be sent within a 20 working day timescale. If the investigation has not been completed a 'holding' letter should then be sent out giving further details as to when the investigation should be completed and a date when final response should be expected. The total number of complaints completed within the 20 day target was 214.

9.0 LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

- 9.1 Complaints are a valuable source of information which can be used to drive service improvements.
- 9.2 Learning is now being recorded on the new Complaints Manager System and services are asked to complete a Learning Proforma once the investigation into the complaint has been completed. This information is then fed into the system and shared across the Council via the Complaints Champions.
- 9.3 This is a new area of monitoring which is logged on the Learning Section of the system: classification can be either listed as being justified, part justified or unjustified.
- 9.4 To date there are only a few learning experiences which have been logged.

Example from:

Environmental & Development Services Department

Traffic Management & Road Safety – Justified Complaint

Brief details of the complaint

Concerns have been raised regarding noise and vibration due to vehicles passing over "Textureflex" and "Dragon's teeth" markings on Bury & Bolton Road outside complainant's property.

What was learnt?

Increased awareness that surface treatments can raise noise/vibration issues when located close to residential properties - particularly on busy, 40mph + roads used by regular HGV traffic.

Further Action

Ensure that residents potentially affected by proposed surface treatment measures are consulted during the promotion of the scheme

10.0 NORTHWEST COMPLAINTS NETWORK

- 10.1 Bury Council is represented on the North West Complaints Network by the Cashiers & Reception Manager. The group has been established to bring together various Local Authorities and other public bodies who are responsible for complaints.
- 10.2 North West Complaints Network acts as a support group for officers involved in the corporate complaints procedure.

The terms of reference for this group are as follows:

Opportunities for collaborative working.

To share ideas and information on all areas of local authority complaints procedures.

To support and encourage the sharing of electronic exchange of information and documentation (AGMA portal)

Agree on models of good practice (learning from complaints and taking account of diversity issues).

Act as a support group for officers involved in their corporate complaints procedure.

Identify relevant complaints training/conferences.

Invite external speakers, such as representatives from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Understand end to end lifecycle of complaints.

11.0 IMPROVEMENTS TO BE MADE WITHIN THE COMING YEAR

11.1 Monitor complaint performance

Quality standards have been put into place. Monitoring will be undertaken through the Complaints Manager System and reported to the respective management meetings via the Complaints Champions.

11.2 Feedback

Feedback cards will continue to be sent out once the complaint has been closed and the information returned is transferred into the Complaints Manager System. The information is then available to complaints officers to monitor performance and feedback to relevant service areas.

Alternative ways of securing feedback will be explored.

11.3 People find it difficult to contact the right person

To continue to promote Council Information Points, Corporate Contact Centre and the website so that customers find it easier to contact the Council. This work links to the corporate rollout of the Customer Relationship Management System.

11.4 Staff training in Customer Care

There is a continual emphasis on Customer Care Training. Organisational Development and Training have a comprehensive selection of training packages that staff are encouraged to access.

11.5 **Equality and Diversity Monitoring**

Capturing Equality & Diversity data has proven to be very difficult. Working with the North West Complaints Network it is hoped that best practice will be shared as to how other Local Authorities are addressing this issue.

11.6 **Review of Complaints Manager System**

As the system has now been 'Live' for 12 months there are a few amendments/refinements that need to be made to streamline the features within the application and make some additional fields mandatory to enable more accurate reporting.

12.0 **CONCLUSIONS**

12.1 This is the first comprehensive Annual Report on Complaints and Compliments to be published. There is now the opportunity to benchmark performance on a year on year basis as a robust mechanism for monitoring complaints etc. is now in place.

12.2 There have been some positive outcomes from the Corporate Complaints initiative that have had/will have a positive effect on citizens of the Borough. Please see table for further details at Appendix 1.

13.0 **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & COHESION (SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ECIA)**

13.1 A Equality and Cohesion Impact Assessment (ECIA) Initial Screening Form has been completed and attached at Appendix 2.

13.2 The Corporate Complaints Procedure is found to have a Positive Impact on all service users. They are freely able to make a complaint against any Council service should they wish to do so.

13.3 No adverse impact has been identified.

14.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

14.1 It is imperative that all service areas within the Authority record the necessary data on the new Complaints Manager System so that an accurate representation can be made of the number and nature of complaints that the Council receives.

14.2 Ensure that Complaint Officers keep up to date with their data input and not enter complaints retrospectively i.e. following month for previous month. A cut off point of 5 working days will be introduced from the end of the month to coincide with the acknowledgment letters being sent out.

14.3 Baseline data will be collected during this coming year so that comparisons can be made year on year but also targets can then be set to improve/reduce the number of complaints received across the Council.

- 14.3 It is also important that learning from complaints is recorded and any corrective action logged and shared so that service improvements can not only be made within the respective service area but also shared across the Council.

15.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

Management Board are requested to:

- 15.1 Note the information presented and note the progress made so far to improve complaints handling.
- 15.2 Reaffirms the commitment to Customer Care and the need for all services to log complaints in line with corporate standards.
- 15.3 All Directorates to consider the findings of this report and to consider what action can be taken to improve service performance were complaints have been made.

For further information please contact:

Karen Brockway, Customer Contact Co-ordinator, (5124