

DECISION-MAKER		STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE	
SUBJECT		CORPORATE COMPLAINTS 2010-11	
DATE OF DECISION		8 SEPTEMBER 2011	
REPORT OF:		HEAD OF CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE	
AUTHOR	Name:	Tracey Arrowsmith	Tel: 023 8083 3050
	E-mail:	tracey.arrowsmith@southampton.gov.uk	

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

N/A

SUMMARY

This report summarises performance and issues arising out of the Council's Corporate Complaint's Procedure from the 1st April 2010 until 31st March 2011. Summary reports are also considered by the Management Board of Directors as part of its quarterly performance monitoring process.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (i) That the report be noted.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To update members of this Committee on performance and any issues arising out of complaints made by the public via the Corporate Complaint's Procedure during 2010/11. Identifying these issues assists the Council in understanding where things have "gone wrong" in the past year in order to improve service delivery.

CONSULTATION

2. This report is presented to Standards & Governance Committee for consultation purposes.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

3. N/A

DETAIL

4. The effective and responsive management of complaints is a vital part of the council's overall approach to customer care. In addition the customer feedback that valid complaints provide can be used to improve service delivery, facilitate council wide learning and demonstrate continuous improvement.
5. The Council operates a three part complaints system:
 - Stage 1 complaints are responded to by the relevant service manager
 - Stage 2 complaints are investigated and responded to by with the appropriate Head of Service
 - Stage 3 complaints are investigated by the Corporate Complaints Officer or by a Senior Officer independent from the service area that is being complained about..

6. A separate process is followed within the Children's Services and Learning Directorate and the Health and Adult Social Directorate, largely as a result of the statutory complaints procedure which applies in these areas. This is reported separately on this Committees agenda.
7. At the end of a Stage 3 investigation, the customer is advised that if they are still not satisfied with the outcome, they may address their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. This in effect represents the fourth and final stage from the customer's perspective.

Statistical Information for 2010/11

8. During 2010/11 there were 1,016 complaints recorded through the Corporate Complaints procedure. This represents an 8.6% decrease on the 1,112 complaints received in 2009/10.
9. A breakdown of the complaints received by division is set out in Appendix A to this report.
10. The distribution of complaints is not spread evenly across all divisions. Complaints are concentrated towards a number of customer facing services. In 2010/11 five divisions accounted for over half of the complaints received. The first table below lists the 5 Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints for 2010/11, and compares this with figures for 2008/09 and 2009/10. The second table lists alphabetically those Divisions that have been included in the 5 with the highest proportion of complaints from 2008/09 to 2010/11

Rank of 5 Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints for 2010/11					
2010/11		2009/10		2008/09	
Local Taxation	18.1%	Local Taxation	19.3%	Leisure & Culture	22.3%
Waste & Fleet Transport	11.3%	Decent Homes	13.2%	Housing Management	13.1%
Decent Homes	11.0%	Waste & Fleet Transport	9.4%	Decent Homes	10.7%
Housing Management	9.7%	Leisure & Culture	8.8%	Local Taxation	9.4%
Highways & Parking	8.4%	Customer Services	8.3%	Waste & Fleet Transport	9.0%

Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints 2008/09 to 2010/11			
	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09
Customer Services	-	8.3%	-
Decent Homes	11.0%	13.2%	10.7%
Highways & Parking	8.4%	-	-
Housing Management	9.7%	-	13.1%
Leisure & Culture	-	8.8%	22.3%
Local Taxation	18.1%	19.3%	9.4%
Waste & Fleet Transport	11.3%	9.4%	9.0%

11. Leisure and Culture improved in 2009/10 and are not included in the current analysis for 2010/11 because most leisure centres transferred to Active Nations, who now record their complaints separately. Discussions will be held with Leisure & Culture Division with a view to obtaining complaints information from Active Nations for inclusion in next year's report.
12. Complaints are recorded into one of a number of categories. The table below indicates the percentage of complaints within each category and compares this with figures for 2008/09 and 2009/10

Category	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09
Discrimination	1%	1%	1%
Misinformation	5%	4%	3%
Charges	10%	4%	8%
Speed	3%	5%	5%
Behaviour	15%	19%	12%
Performance	40%	31%	30%
Other	14%	36%	41%
Avoidable Contact	5%	NA	NA
Disagree with Decision	7%	NA	NA

13. Two new categories were introduced from April 2010; 'disagree with decision' and 'avoidable contact'. This, along with CCO training has resulted in a decrease in the number of complaints recorded against 'other'.

14. The table below provides a breakdown of this Council's performance in relation to complaints compared to the Council's statistical neighbours. The Corporate Complaints procedure is not a statutory requirement. However failure to have a Corporate Complaints procedure in place would lead to an adverse report from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The systems and processes that individual councils have in place are based on LGO guidance and are tailored to individual council structures and services. Comparison between authorities is therefore difficult. However, comparator information was requested from four authorities within Southampton's Audit Commission statistical neighbours. The responses confirmed that there are *some* similarities in the recording of complaints in these authorities. The following table sets out the overall figures for the number of complaints received.

Authority	Corporate Complaints received 2009/10	Corporate Complaints received 2010/11	Adult population 2010/11	Complaints per head of adult population 2010/11
Southampton	1,112	1,016	201,400	0.0050
Portsmouth	864	807	172,800	0.0047
Brighton & Hove	1,649	1,804	217,200	0.0083
Plymouth	2,152	1,168	214,900	0.0054
Bristol	3,607	2,917	368,300	0.0079

Complaints Closed & Resolved During 2010/11

15. The Corporate Complaints Procedure requires that complaints at stage 1 of the process are responded to within 10 working days and complaints at stage 2 and 3, within 20 working days.

The following table shows the number of complaints responded to at each stage of the procedure. Those complaints that cannot be responded to within the target period are frequently those that are more complex, and can involve investigating actions across more than one service area or division. Where this situation occurs the complainant will be contacted and a revised completion date agreed.

Overall the number of complaints dealt with in 2010/11 saw a small decrease, down 85 on the previous year with a slight improvement on those responded to within the timescales included in the complaints policy. However within these figures it should be noted that despite a reduction in the number of complaints escalated to Stage2 those responded to within 10 days fell from 95% to 80%. The number of complaints escalated to Stage 3 reduced by 6 and there was a significant improvement in the percentage of these that were responded to within 10 working days up from 56% in 2009/10 to 87% in 2010/11

Stage	Working days to close 2010/11		Working days to close 2009/10	
	≤ 10 days	> 10 days	≤ 10 days	> 10 days
1	764 (90%)	83 (10%)	811 (89%)	104 (11%)
	≤ 20 days	>20 days	≤ 20 days	>10 days
2	71 (80%)	18 (20%)	95 (95%)	5 (5%)
3	34 (87%)	5 (13%)	25 (56%)	20 (44%)
Total	869 (89%)	106 (11%)	931(88%)	129 (12%)

N.B. This table shows the number of complaints *completed* in 2010/11 as opposed to the number of complaints *received*.

Accessing the complaints process

16. Customers can make a complaint in a variety of ways. The most efficient way from a Council perspective is for customers to use the online complaints form that can be accessed through the Council's website. The following table shows the number of complaints made by customers using the online complaint form over the last three years.

Year	Received online	Percentage of total received	Total received (all mediums)
2008/2009	486	45%	1072
2009/2010	396	36%	1112
2010/2011	218	21%	1016

It appears that the percentage of complaints received via this method has steadily decreased. The reasons for this are currently unclear. The Lagan IT system, introduced in 2009, records how each complaint is received, but it has not previously been possible to produce a report containing this information. Lagan is now linked with CorVu (the Council's performance management system) and work is currently underway to extract from Lagan how customers submit their complaint and to include this information within a CorVu report. This report will enable further analysis to help determine how to promote access to the complaints process.

17. Work will also be undertaken during 2011/12 to assess whether access to the complaints system would be enhanced by the use of social networking e.g. Twitter, Facebook etc. to enable customers to submit complaints. The outcome of this assessment and any subsequent action will be included in next year's Annual Report to this Committee.

Learning from Complaints

18. In addition to using the complaints processes to redress customer dissatisfaction, the feedback generated through complaints is an important tool for improving performance and service delivery. The new monthly and quarterly reports created by CorVu now include a summary of service improvements and lessons learnt. Work is underway in 2011/12 to ensure that problems

encountered and learning experiences are shared across the entire council. This will provide an opportunity for initiatives developed to enhance customer satisfaction in one part of the organisation to be assessed for suitability in other directorates.

19. Appendix B includes a number of the initiatives for improvements arising from the consideration of complaints during 2010/11.

Developing the Corporate Complaints Process

20. Questionnaires on satisfaction feedback are sent to customers following the closure of a Stage 1 complaint. The questionnaires are intended to measure the quality and access to the complaints system. In 2010/11 of the 639 questionnaires sent out, 22% (142) were returned. 52% of complainants who feedback described the procedure for making complaints as easy and 22% as difficult. Due to the relatively low return rate, more effective ways of collecting customer feedback will be explored during 2011/12.
21. During 2010/11 a half day training programme was rolled out to Complaints Contact Officers across the authority. The training sessions covered general complaint handling, complaint classification and the importance of recording lessons learnt, as well as looking at effective use of the Lagan system.
22. All non-statutory complaints regarding Children Services & Learning and, Health & Adult Social Care are now recorded on Lagan. This has ensured that all complaints which should be dealt with through the Corporate Complaints procedure are recorded and reported in a consistent way.
23. Lagan is now linked with the corporate performance management tool CorVu. From April 2011 all reporting will be done through CorVu. This gives more control and greater flexibility in terms of reporting from Lagan.
24. Due to the restructuring of the council in 2011/12, significant changes will need to be made to Lagan to reflect the new structures. It is also intended to use this opportunity to make improvements to the Lagan system to make it more user friendly, as well as reducing time and cost of any future restructures.

Freedom of Information and Data Subject Access Complaints

25. Complaints made about responses to requests for information made under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act or Data Protection Act (DP) are processed outside the corporate complaints procedure. They do not follow the 3 stage process of other complaints, but are reviewed by the Corporate Complaints Officer in a similar way as a complaint at Stage 3. Customers are advised of the outcome of the review and advised that if they still feel unhappy with the response provided by the council they may escalate their complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office.

The following table provides a summary of the reviews undertaken:

Freedom of Information and Data Subject Access complaints responded to 2010/11		
Division	Type of complaint	Outcome
Health & Adult Social Care	Freedom of Information	Information provided to customer was not what requested. Explained unable to provide information requested due cost/time.
	Data Subject Access	Further information disclosed.
	Data Subject Access	Incorrect exemption applied. Explained to customer that information is not held.
Legal Services	Freedom of Information	Decision upheld, but access to related information offered.
	Freedom of Information	Decision upheld.
Housing Management	Data Subject Access Request	Further disclosure made.
Neighbourhood Services	Freedom of information	Reasons for refusal changed and further clarification given.
Planning a& Sustainability	Freedom of Information Request	Further disclosure made.

Conclusion

26. The council has continued to promote complaints as a means of addressing customer dissatisfaction and trying to put things right wherever possible. The Corporate Complaints Officer has continued to work with Capita to develop the Lagan system to record and report complaints and with the Complaints Contact Officers in Directorates to ensure a comprehensive and consistent approach to complaints handling.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital

27. N/A

Revenue

28. N/A

Property

29. N/A

Other

30. N/A

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

31. Local authority complaints mechanisms are operated under Section 11 Local Government Act 1972

Other Legal Implications:

32. N/A

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

33. The matters set out in this report are consistent with the Council's Constitution and Policy Framework.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1	complaints received by directorate 2010/11
2	learning from complaints
3	results of complaints questionnaire 2010/11

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
----	------

Background Documents

Title of Background Paper(s)

Relevant Paragraph of the
Access to Information
Procedure Rules / Schedule
12A allowing document to be
Exempt/Confidential (if
applicable)

1.	None	
----	------	--

Background documents available for inspection at:

KEY DECISION No

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

None

Total Complaints received 2010/2011				
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Total
Chief Executive's				
Communications	1	0	0	1
Economic Development	1	0	0	1
Legal & Democratic Services	8	5	4	17
Total for Chief Execs	10	5	4	19
Children Services				
Commissioning	5	0	0	5
Safeguarding	1	0	0	1
Standards	29	0	0	29
Total for Children Services	35	0	0	35
Environment				
Environmental Health	12	5	2	19
Highways & Parking	72	10	4	86
Planning	30	9	6	45
Transport	7	1	0	8
Waste & Fleet	109	5	1	115
Total for Environment	230	30	13	273
Health & Adult Social Care				
Business Support	3	0	0	3
Learning Disability	6	0	0	6
Locality Support	63	3	1	67
Mental Health	1	0	0	1
Total for Health & Adult Social Care	73	3	1	77
Neighbourhoods				
Decent Homes	102	7	3	112
Housing Management	81	11	7	99
Housing Solutions	19	4	1	24
Leisure & Culture	34	4	3	41
Neighbourhood Services	28	1	1	30
Total for Neighbourhoods	264	27	15	306
Resources				

Total Complaints received 2010/2011				
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Total
Cash Office	1	1	0	2
Customer Services	49	2	1	52
Exchequer Services	4	0	0	4
Housing Benefit	45	7	2	54
HR	1	0	0	1
IT	2	0	0	2
Local Taxation	155	24	5	184
Property & Procurement	6	0	1	7
Total for Resources	263	34	9	306
Grand Total	875	99	42	1016

Learning from Complaints

Customer Services

- 4 complaints received resulted in additional customer service and call handling training for staff
- A complaint about the processing times of Blue Badge applications lead to a review of the procedure and an improvement in processing times

Property and Procurement

- A complaint about the time it took to process a Garden Licence Application led to a review and strengthening of the procedure for processing these applications

Parking Services

- A customer complained that their vehicle was locked in a car park. This resulted in extra signage being added to the car park relating to closing times.
- A complaint about a vehicle that was removed led to website information on removal of dangerous vehicles being updated

Benefit Services

- A complaint that the wording of a letter caused distress, lead to a change in the wording of standard letters.
- A customer complained that a HB payment was received late due to the Easter Bank Holidays. This lead to procedures being amended to ensure payments go out a day earlier on bank holiday weeks

Housing Solutions

- A customer complained about the placing of kitchen units following housing improvement work. Procedures amended to ensure that clarification is included in the schedule of works.

Council Tax

- A customer complained that their new address had been disclosed to a former partner. Processes were reviewed and changed to ensure no such data protection breaches occur in the future.



Results of complaints questionnaire 2009/10

Q1 Before making a complaint were you aware of the Council's complaints process?

Yes

27%	38
-----	----

No

68%	96
-----	----

Q2 How did you find out about the Council's Complaints Process?

A friend or relative

4%	5
----	---

Council staff (e.g. switchboard, Gateway, local housing office or another council officer)

39%	55
-----	----

Council publications such as the Council's A-Z guide booklet, How to make a Complaint leaflet, City View

4%	6
----	---

The Council's website – Southampton Online

23%	33
-----	----

Another organisation e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau or a Community Group

1%	2
----	---

A Councillor or Member of Parliament

4%	6
----	---

Other please state

19%	27
-----	----

Q3 Which of the following do you feel best describes the procedure for making a complaint?

Very easy

23%	32
-----	----

Fairly easy

30%	43
-----	----

Neither easy nor difficult

19%	27
-----	----

Fairly difficult

11%	15
-----	----

Very difficult

12%	17
-----	----

Q4 At what stage was your complaint resolved?

Stage 1

31%	44
-----	----

Stage 2

8%	11
----	----

Stage 3

9%	13
----	----

Local Government Ombudsman

1%	1
----	---

Don't Know

30%	43
-----	----

Q5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the outcome of your complaint

	Agree Strongly	Agree Slightly	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly	Not applicable
I agree with the conclusion reached by the person who investigated my complaint	21% 30	14% 20	11% 15	5% 7	23% 33	13% 18
I am satisfied that the conclusion reached by the investigator of my complaint was fair	21% 30	13% 19	11% 16	6% 9	23% 33	12% 17
The investigation addressed all the concerns raised in my original complaint	21% 30	10% 14	11% 16	5% 10	30% 43	5% 10
There was a clear explanation of what would be done/will happen next from the council service	23% 33	14% 20	13% 18	10% 14	18% 26	8% 12
The apology I received was adequate	20% 29	18% 26	8% 12	3% 4	18% 25	15% 22
I was advised how to take my complaint further if I had wanted to	21% 30	17% 24	13% 19	11% 16	31% 44	6% 9

Q6 Overall, how satisfied were you with the result (outcome) of the investigation of your complaint?

Very satisfied	21%	30
Fairly satisfied	17%	24
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13%	19
Fairly dissatisfied	11%	16
Very dissatisfied	31%	44

Q7 If you were not completely satisfied with the result (outcome) of the investigation of your complaint, please say why

Q8 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the handling of your complaint

	Agree Strongly	Agree Slightly	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly	Not applicable
My complaint was dealt with within a reasonable time	29% 41	21% 30	4% 5	11% 15	25% 35	4% 5
The attitude of the person/people dealing with my complaint was appropriate	32% 46	23% 33	11% 15	8% 12	14% 20	4% 5
I was kept informed of the progress of the investigation	21% 30	15% 22	6% 9	8% 11	31% 44	11% 15

Q9 Overall, how satisfied were you with the manner in which we handled your complaint?

Very satisfied	21%	31
----------------	-----	----

Fairly satisfied	20%	29
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11%	15
Fairly dissatisfied	16%	23
Very dissatisfied	26%	37

Q10 If you were not completely satisfied with the manner in which we handled the investigation of your complaint, please say why

Q11 If you wish to make any other comment that could be used to improve the complaints service, please make it here.

Are you

Male	40%	57
Female	40%	57

Which of these age groups do you fall into?

Under 18	0%	0
18 to 24	1%	2
25 to 34	13%	18
35 to 44	15%	21
45 to 54	15%	21
55 to 64	25%	35
65 to 74	16%	23
75+	8%	11

Do you have any long term illness, health problem or disability which limits your daily activities or the work you can do?

Yes, limits severely	64%	91
Yes, limits but not severely	13%	19
No	23%	32

To which of these groups do you consider you belong?

a) White

British	75%	107
Irish	4%	5
Any other White background	3%	4

b) Mixed

White and Black Caribbean	1%	1
White and Black African	0%	0

White and Asian	0%	0
Any other Mixed background	0%	0
c) Asian or Asian British		
Indian	1%	2
Pakistani	1%	1
Bangladeshi	1%	1
Any other Asian background	1%	1
d) Black or Black British		
Caribbean	2%	3
African	0%	0
Any other African background	0%	0
e) Chinese		
Chinese	0%	0
f) Other ethnic group		
	0%	0

N.B. Percentages do not total 100% as not all respondents answered all questions