

DECISION-MAKER		GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE	
SUBJECT		CORPORATE COMPLAINTS 2011-12	
DATE OF DECISION		25 SEPTEMBER 2012	
REPORT OF:		SENIOR MANAGER, CUSTOMER AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT	
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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 2011 until 31st March 2012. 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 to the Corporate Complaint's Procedure during 2011/12. 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 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 corporate complaints system:
 - Stage 1 complaints are responded to by the relevant service manager
 - Stage 2 complaints are investigated and responded to by the appropriate Senior Manager
 - 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 2011/12

8. During 2011/12 there were 944 complaints recorded through the Corporate Complaints procedure. This represents a 7% decrease on the 1,016 complaints received in 2010/11. The second consecutive year that there has been a significant decrease in the number of complaints received.
9. A breakdown of the complaints received by each division is set out in Appendix 1 to this report. During 2011/12 the Council's Directorates underwent a major structural change which is not reflected in this report but has now been reflected in the Lagan Complaints module for 2012/13.
10. The distribution of complaints is not spread evenly across all divisions. Complaints are concentrated towards a number of customer facing Services. In 2011/12 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 2011/12, and compares this with figures for 2009/10 and 2010/11. The second table lists alphabetically those Divisions that have been included in the 5 with the highest proportion of complaints from 2009/10 to 2011/12.
11. It should be noted that during the industrial action in 2011/12 complaints in relation to missed bin collections were treated as an exception to the operation of the Council's normal complaints policy. This was because it affected all or the significant majority of residents in Southampton equally and the duration and impact of the industrial action was a matter outside the Council's control.

Rank of 5 Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints for 2011/12					
2011/12		2010/11		2009/10	
Decent Homes	16.0%	Local Taxation	18.1%	Local Taxation	19.3%
Local Taxation	14.0%	Waste & Fleet Transport	11.3%	Decent Homes	13.2%
Housing Management	11.4%	Decent Homes	11.0%	Waste & Fleet Transport	9.4%
Waste & Fleet Transport	8.2%	Housing Management	9.7%	Leisure & Culture	8.8%
Highways & Parking	7.4%	Highways & Parking	8.4%	Customer Services	8.3%
Customer Services	7.4%				

Divisions with the highest proportion of complaints 2009/10 to 2011/12			
	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Customer Services	7.4%	-	8.3%
Decent Homes	16.0%	11.0%	13.2%
Highways & Parking	7.4%	8.4%	-
Housing Management	11.4%	9.7%	-
Leisure & Culture	1.2%	-	8.8%
Local Taxation	14.0%	18.1%	19.3%
Waste & Fleet Transport	8.2%	11.3%	9.4%

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 the last three years.

Category	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Discrimination	1%	1%	1%
Misinformation	4%	5%	4%
Charges	14%	10%	4%
Speed	3%	3%	5%
Behaviour	14%	15%	19%
Performance	36%	40%	31%
Other	18%	14%	36%
Avoidable Contact	3%	5%	NA
Disagree with Decision	7%	7%	NA

13. The one significant area that stands out is the increase in the percentage of complaints relating to charges which were at 4% in 2009/10 and risen in each of the two years and made up 14% of complaints in 2011/12.

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 2010/11	Corporate Complaints received 2011/12	Adult population 2010	Complaints per head of adult population 2011/12
Southampton	1,016	944	201,400	0.0047
Portsmouth	807	622	172,800	0.0035
Brighton & Hove	1,804	1,434	217,200	0.0066
Plymouth	1,168	1,234	214,900	0.0057
Bristol	2,917	5,093	368,300	0.0138

Complaints Closed and Resolved During 2011/12

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.

Stage	Working days to close 2011/12		Working days to close 2010/11	
	≤ 10 days	> 10 days	≤ 10 days	> 10 days
1	753 (95%)	40 (5%)	764 (90%)	83 (10%)
	≤ 20 days	>20 days	≤ 20 days	>20 days
2	84 (87%)	13 (13%)	71 (80%)	18 (20%)
3	42 (89%)	5 (11%)	34 (87%)	5 (13%)
Total	879 (93%)	58 (7%)	869 (89%)	106 (11%)

N.B. This table shows the number of complaints *completed* in 2011/12 as opposed to the number of complaints *received*.

16. Overall the number of complaints dealt with in 2011/12 saw another small decrease, down 72 on the previous year with a slight improvement on those responded to within the timescales included in the complaints policy. Overall there has been an improvement in response times across all three stages, most significantly Stage 1 responses where there was a five percentage point improvement on complaints dealt with within the 10 day target.

Accessing the complaints process

17. 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 or via email. The updates to Lagan complaints system introduced from the 1st April 2012 include the recording of the method of contact and an analysis of this will be included in next year's report.

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.
19. Appendix 2 includes some examples of the initiatives for improvements arising from the consideration of complaints during 2011/12.

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 2011/12 of the 491 questionnaires sent out, 25% (127) were returned. 66% of complainants who fed back described the procedure for making complaints as easy, up from 53% in the previous year, and 19% as difficult.

The detailed response to each of the questions is included at Appendix 3.

The update to Lagan introduced in April 2012 caused a technical problem with the reports that were used to send out questionnaires to complainants. It was therefore decided that because of this and the relatively low response rate that this method of collecting customer feedback would be suspended for 2012/13 whilst alternatives are explored.

21. On the 4th September the Management Board of Directors agreed to a review being undertaken of the complaints procedures, handling and management across all Directorates of the City Council with a view to providing a single harmonised service. (The review will not include the management of complaints referred by the Local Government Ombudsman). Terms of reference for the review were agreed with the aim of any new arrangements being in place for the 1st April 2013. The review will also consider ways of improving response times to complainants and reducing the time spent by staff on investigations.

Freedom of Information and Data Subject Access Complaints

22. 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 2011/12		
Division	Type of complaint	Outcome
Children's Services and Learning	Freedom of Information	Original decision upheld
	Data Subject Access Review	Private foster care – small amount of information located and sent
Children's Services and Learning Health & Adult Social Care	Freedom of Information	Requesting the number of social work posts - full disclosure made
Health & Adult Social Care	Freedom of Information	Regarding mothers records further disclosure made
Decent Homes	Freedom of Information	Information not held
Skills, Economy & Housing Renewal	Freedom of Information	Empty properties - Original decision upheld
Planning & Sustainability	Freedom of Information	Original decision upheld – but situation had moved on so able to disclose some more information

Conclusion

23. 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 worked 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

24. N/A

Revenue

25. N/A

Property

26. N/A

Other

27. N/A

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

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

Other Legal Implications:

29. N/A

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

30. 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 2011/12
2.	Learning from Complaints
3.	Results of Complaints Questionnaire 2011/12

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
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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	
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Background documents available for inspection at: N/A

KEY DECISION No

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED None

