



Annual Complaints Report 2011-2012

Cambridge City Council

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL'S ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2011-2012

Every year we publish an Annual Complaints Report, which gives an overview of all the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them (we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained).

A summary of the Freedom of Information performance was sent to all those who are on the weekly FOI distribution list.

Why we produce this report

We want to learn from our mistakes so that we can improve our services

We want to encourage people who have cause to complain to make comments and suggestions to help us make these improvements.

We want to show you how we've responded to complaints and what we've done to try and put things right.

We want to publicise and explain our complaints process.

Our Complaints Procedure

When should I make a complaint?

You should complain to us if:

- You are unhappy about something we have or haven't done.
- You are not satisfied with the way a member of staff has treated you.
- You are not happy with the way a councillor has treated you.
- You want to complain for any other reason.

How do I make a complaint?

We publish a 'How to Complain Leaflet' which is available on our website at <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/complaints> or you can ask for a paper copy from our reception points.

Details of how to make a complaint and how the Council will put things right for you are also published in our service guarantees.

You can make a complaint by letter or email, telephone or face-to-face, or you can use our on-line complaints form.

We keep a book for complaints and suggestions at our reception points so that we can record customers' complaints and suggestions.

We aim to deal with your complaint quickly and efficiently. Our target response time is seven working days. If we need longer to respond, we will tell you why and keep you informed of progress during our investigation. We will also tell you who is dealing with your complaint.

We will apologise when we have made mistakes, try and put things right as soon as possible and make sure we do better next time.

If you are not happy with the response to your complaint you can ask for your complaint to be passed to a service manager.

There are some things we can't change because we are legally required to do them or because they concern services provided by other organisations. In these cases we will always explain why we can't change things and tell you who else you can contact if you are still unhappy.

Each of our departments has a complaints co-ordinator who keeps details of all complaints for their service areas. Managers review the complaints regularly and decide whether they need to change things to prevent any problems from happening again.

If you have any questions about how to complain, please contact our Customer Service Centre, phone 01223 457000, fax 01223 457982, Typetalk 18001 01223 45700 or e-mail enquiries@cambridge.gov.uk

The Independent Complaints Investigator

If you have not received a reply to your complaint within seven days or you are not satisfied with the way we have dealt with your complaint, you can ask for it to be referred to the Head of the relevant service. If you are still dissatisfied with the reply you can refer the complaint to the Independent Complaints Investigator who will investigate your complaint for you.

The Independent Complaints Investigator is not an employee of the Council but is paid by the Council on a contract to investigate complaints. This ensures that the role can be independent of the Council's departments.

The Independent Complaints Investigator investigates complaints to see if they are justified and acts on the complainant's behalf to try and find a way of resolving the issues raised. They aim to acknowledge each complaint within seven days and let the complainant know a date by which they can expect a full response. They will also arrange a confidential interview at a convenient time and place if it is required.

The Independent Complaints Investigator's role is not intended to be a substitute for handling complaints effectively within departments. It is intended to complement our complaints procedures and ensure consistency throughout the Council. Cambridge City Council is one of the few councils to operate this service.

The Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still not satisfied with the way your complaint has been handled you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman's office. The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and certain other bodies. The Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted on 0300 0610614 or by visiting www.lgo.org.uk.

Complaints to the City Council in 2011-2012

How many complaints were received?

We received 377 complaints in 2011-12. This was a 35% decrease over the 576 received in the previous year. Over the last 5 years complaints have fallen by 50%.

The filtering of complaints through the customer service centre and the increased use of email, has allowed a greater distinction between requests for service and genuine complaints over the years and this has been reflected in the final totals.

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals	% Change
2011-12	0	65	40	272	377	-35
2010-11	8	81	56	431	576	-30
2009-10	21	168	61	577	827	+5
2008-09	8	169	36	576	789	-5
2007-08	8	199	40	500	747	

How were complaints received?

In 2011-12 more complaints were received via email than by letter, with 48% of complaints received by e-mail and 26% by letter.

The CCC online complaints form went live this year and has proved a popular method of reporting of complaints. This allows for complaints to be actioned immediately through the customer service centre.

Year	Face to Face %	Letter %	Email %	Telephone %	Other (GovMetric, Comment Cards %)	Total %
2011-12	2	26	48	6	18	100

2010-11	1	24	56	4	15	100
2009-10	4	34	47	11	4	100
2008-09	5	37	40	14	4	100
2007-08	2	56	29	10	3	100

Are there any trends and what have we changed as a result of the complaints?

Each council department reviews the complaints and compliments that it receives on at least a quarterly basis.

This enables services to identify if there are any trends in the types of complaints being made or the services that complaints are being made about. As a result changes may be made to services and how they are provided. Examples of the sorts of changes arising from complaints made over the past year are shown below:

Environment

Planning

There were complaints surrounding the decisions made by planning officers and the amount of time taken to make decisions and where people who were not consulted on a planning application felt that they should have been.

The online planning portal supports self-monitoring of applications by allowing customers to create a personalized account that sends automatic notifications of new applications within their area and changes in status to applications and it is hoped that this will reduce complaints from applicants about the delay in or lack of communication about progress on planning applications.

Refuse & Environment

Complaint trends included bins not being emptied in particular. The remedial actions were to empty the bins and residents informed the reason for the not being emptied.

Resources

Repairs and Maintenance

The bulk of complaints related to day-to-day repairs and problems with the contractor.

In the cases of bad practice or snags the contractor Apollo and operatives made good the jobs.

There were some complaints regarding miscommunication between operative and residents. In these cases appointments were re-scheduled or a case officer appointed

Other complaints related to staff attitudes and the Lion Yard walkway.

A complaint was made about attitude of a member of staff following an enquiry into a vacant commercial property.

The manager spoke to the member of staff in question and apologised to the complainant as they felt they were not dealt with professionally.

A complaint about Lion Yard walkway being locked on Easter Sunday was made, contrary to the walkway agreement between the City Council and the Barclay's representatives.

Our officer forwarded the complaint to Aberdeen Asset Management who responded stating that it was an oversight by the newly appointed centre manager and that it shouldn't happen again.

Customer & Community Services

Arts & Recreation

The main complaint trend was that of the sound quality at the Corn Exchange. The Arts & Recreation department aim to resolve this via investment in a new sound system in 2012-13.

Folk Festival

There were seventy-one comments/complaints during event. The main trends including overcrowding (twenty -six), price of beer and the quality of the shop.

This year capacity has been reduced to help overcrowding & Stage 1 has been moved back a little.

Customer Services

The majority of complaints were due to longer face to face waiting times earlier in the year and disagreement with policy decisions in particular Homelink.

Customer service advisors have undertaken soft skills training / conflict resolution training (communication skills, conflict resolution) to handle such occurrences.

Community Development

Community Development had eight complaints in 2011-12 but there were no trends or service changes related to these complaints.

City Homes

Apply for your garage on line

A customer complained that they did not know where the garages were in the City and did not know why we did not have garage applications forms that could be completed on line.

Information on garages was hard to find on the website and directed you to the Customer Service Centre to make an enquiry.

Therefore, we have now improved the website. There is a link directly from the home page to a garage website that provides an interactive map to show garage sites, and you can now also download an application form.

Being part of the decision making process

Residents were concerned that grants awarded for community projects did not have a resident group providing their recommendations on whether or not applications should be approved or refused.

The Head of City Homes is keen to have residents involved in the decision making process. Therefore, applications are now sent first to the Housing Regulation Panel (a group of tenant and leaseholder volunteers who scrutinise Housing Services) for their recommendations before being presented to the City Homes Management Team.

Home-Link

Home-Link's complaints over the last year have generally followed a similar pattern, mostly regarding applicants' banding status or the fact that they are not being housed. There have also been a number where overcrowding and living conditions in the property have formed a part of the overall complaint.

The Council is working with sub-regional partners to develop the Home-Link system. A new targeted housing options feature on the website went live in September 2011 and provides personalised information for individuals seeking housing options assistance.

We are also about to launch a new private sector module on the Home-Link system, which will provide more information for customers on private rented accommodation available across the 7 local authority districts.

Housing Options and Advice

Much of the correspondence that is logged as complaints tends to be correspondence in support of a homelessness/housing application.

In these cases the complainant is updated on where we are at with the case.

Some of the complaints related to temporary accommodation that is considered to be unsuitable, notably bed and breakfast in Peterborough.

In these cases the team explain the position with temporary accommodation generally and check that the Housing Advisor has followed the process for identifying alternative temporary accommodation.

In the past year we have identified two new sources of B&B, which are more suitable than some of the other B&B's we have traditionally used and we will continue to work on alternative solutions for emergency accommodation within Cambridge City.

Revenues & Benefits

The vast majority of complaints Revenue & Benefit Services receive are one-offs and are usually not system changing. If there are any trends/bad working practices then these are looked at and reviewed if necessary. Complaints are put right and customers are reminded/ informed of the change.

However, during 2011-12 we did amend the Direct Debit form on the Council website following a complaint concerning the coloured background. Regarding Council Tax discounts we also undertake reviews on a regular basis to make sure the correct discounts/ exemptions are being awarded. A National Fraud Initiative has been undertaken to identify those who have been incorrectly claiming Single Person Discount. In the near future another initiative will be driven forward with neighbouring authorities to identify further incorrectly claimed discounts.

How many complaints did we respond to on time?

In 2007 we reduced our target time to answer 100% of complaints from ten working days to seven working days. This is a challenging target, particularly where complaints are complex and need input from several departments or external agencies.

The figures for 2011-12 show an increase in performance from last year with the number of complaints responded to on time rising from 49% to 92%.

Year	Chief Exec's %	Environment %	Resources %	Customer & Community %	Totals %	% Change
2011-12	NA	80	73	97	92	+43
2010-11	38	78	43	68	49	-41
2009-10	62	77	90	91	90	-3
2008-09	100	85	92	96	93	+12
2007-08	50	79	73	80	81	

Compliments to the City Council in 2011-2012

As an organisation we get many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide. Knowing where things are working well and are appreciated is as important as knowing where things are not working, so we keep a record of the compliments we receive as well as the complaints.

The number of compliments is continuing to rise year on year with 541 compliments for 2011-12 up 15% on the 2010-11 total of 461.

How many compliments were received?

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals	% Change
2011-12	0	7	3	531	541	+15
2010-11	6	35	12	408	461	+7
2009-10	2	121	Not recorded	308	431	+6
2008-09	0	86	Not recorded	321	407	+19
2007-08	1	149	28	153	331	

Here are examples of some compliments we have received:

City Homes

- **Rent Enquiries** *'Very helpful and pleasant'*

Arts & Recreation

- **Folk Festival** *'79 compliments - festival overall (32), The Den stage, line-up & good organization were the trends'*

Revenues & Benefits

- **Benefits** *" Very Friendly lady to talk to"*
- **Local Taxation** *'The advisor was very helpful. Very thorough explanations for complex matter, for which I am most grateful.'*

Customer Services

- **Customer Services** *" The lady on the front desk was very helpful in answering my queries.'*
- **Customer Services** *" I was very impressed with the overall service and help provided.'*

Freedom of Information Requests

A summary of the FOI performance is to be sent around to all those managers and members who are on the weekly FOI distribution list.

Role of the Independent Complaints Investigator

Your right to have a complaint reviewed by an independent person is an essential part of our complaints procedure.

If you are not satisfied with the way any of our departments deal with your complaint, you can ask the Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI) to review your concerns. Because the ICI operates independently of our departments, they can give an objective overview of a department's handling of your complaint.

Sometimes a department will refer a complaint to the ICI. This happens when they feel that an impartial review will help them to resolve a problem.

The ICI will not always carry out a formal investigation of a complaint. Sometimes they will find a solution by talking to the complainant and the departments.

The ICI reviews each complaint to find out whether we did anything wrong, such as:

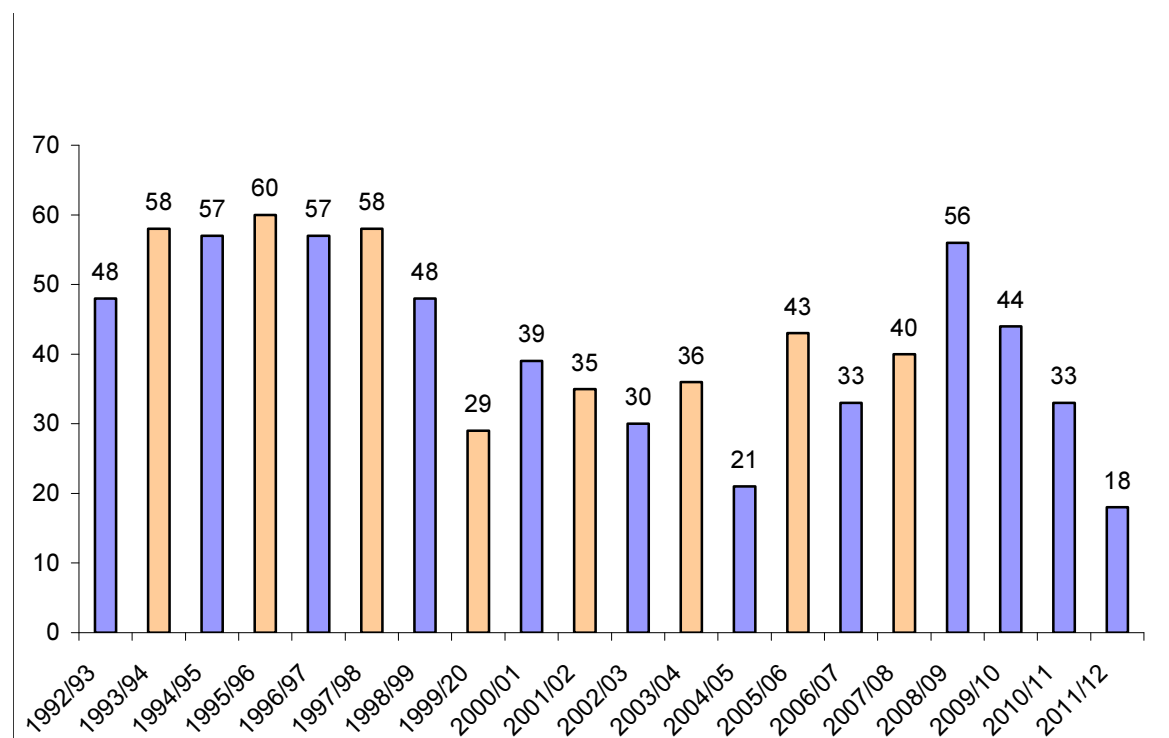
- We took a long time to do something
- We did not follow our own rules or the law
- We broke a promise to do something
- We treated someone unfairly
- We gave someone wrong or misleading information; or
- We did not make a decision in the correct way.

Sometimes, the ICI will look at a complaint about several issues. They might find that they agree with some parts of the complaint but not others. In these circumstances they will report that they have partly agreed with the complaint.

How many complaints did the Independent Complaints Investigator deal with in 2011-12?

During 2011-12 18 complaints were fully investigated by the ICI. 10 were for the Customer & Community Services, 5 for Environment and 3 for Resources departments respectively. 4 were upheld, 2 partly upheld, one resolved through mediation, one outcome was unknown and 10 were not in the complainants favour.

Complaints to the ICI are recorded against the department that has taken the lead in dealing with the complaint, but they often involve more than one department or service.



Outcome of Investigations in 2011-12

	CEX	Customer & Community Services	Environment	Resources	Total
Complaints received by ICI		10	5	3	18
Agreed with complainant		3	1	1	5
Not agreed		7	3		10
Partly agreed			1	1	2
Not suitable for the ICI				1	1

If you would like more details about the Independent Complaints Investigation Service please see our web page www.cambridge.gov.uk/complaints, call 01223 457000 or pick up a leaflet at the Customer Services Centre at Mandela House.

The Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still not satisfied with the way your complaint has been handled you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman's office. The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints and determines if there has been any injustice arising from maladministration. The Local Government Ombudsman issues a letter to all councils by the end of June each year stating how many complaints they have received and the decisions they have made about them.

How many complaints did the Local Government Ombudsman deal with in 2011-12?

Enquiries & Complaints Received	Benefits & Tax	Corporate & Other Services	Environmental Services & Public Protection & regulation	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning & Development	Total
Advice given	0	0	2	1	1	0	4
Premature complaints	1	1	3	2	3	3	13
Forwarded to Investigative Team (New)	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
Total	2	2	5	3	4	4	20

Since April 2008 the LGO Advice Team has been the single point of contact for all enquiries and new complaints. The advisors provide comprehensive information and advice to callers at the first point of contact with a full explanation of the process and possible outcomes. This enables callers to make a more informed decision about whether putting their complaint to the LGO Investigative Team is the right course of action.

Investigative team - Decisions

Not Investigated			Investigated			Report	Total
No Power to investigate	No reason to use exceptional power to investigate	Investigation not justified & Other	Not enough evidence of fault	No or minor injustice & Other	Injustice remedied during enquiries		
1	1	0	0	2	5	0	9

Although in 2011-12 the Local Government Ombudsman received 20 enquiries and complaints, only 9 decisions were made.

In 2011-12 the average number of days taken to respond to the LGO's first enquiry was 27.5 days which is inside of the Ombudsman's Office's target response time of 28 days and is an improvement on our average response time of 33.5 days in 2010-11.

Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct

Councillors must adhere to a specific Code of Conduct whenever they are conducting Council business, representing the Council or conducting the business of the office to which they were elected. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure high standards of ethics and conduct are maintained and that Councillors treat everybody in an equal capacity and with respect, ensuring at all times that the integrity of the Council is not compromised in any way.

The Government is making significant changes to the standards regime for councilors and has abolished the Standards Board. The Council will shortly have to adopt a new Code of Conduct for councilors and will need to introduce a local system for considering complaints.

Complaints about councillors are considered locally by the Council's own Standards Committee. The Council's Standards Committee is made up of six councillors and three independent members of the public.

During 2011-12, the Council received no complaints that councillors had breached the Code of Conduct. The Standards Committee dealt with one complaint that was made in 2010-11.

The complaint was that a councillor should not have asked for a planning application to be decided by an area committee, in the light of an alleged personal interest in the application.

An assessment sub-committee of the Standards Committee referred the complaint for investigation by the Independent Complaints Investigator. The Independent Complaints Investigator carried out an investigation into the complaint. Her report concluded that the councilor had not breached the Code of Conduct for Councillors. She found that the councilor had a personal, but not prejudicial, interest in the application by reason of his association with his neighbour. However, the Code of Conduct did not oblige the councilor to declare this interest when asking for the application to be considered by the Area Committee. The Independent Complaints Investigator considered that the appropriate (good practice) course would have been to advise the complainant, the objectors and Council officers of his personal interest and to hand the conduct of the matter over to another ward councillor. The Committee accepted the Investigator's findings and recommended that training in the Council's Planning Code of Good Practice be offered to all councilors.

To find out more about the Council's Code of Conduct and how to make a complaint about a councillor go to <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/content/contact-us/how-to-complain-about-a-councillor.en> or contact the Council's Monitoring Officer, Simon Pugh (simon.pugh@cambridge.gov.uk).

The Council's Whistle blowing Policy

The Council sets equally high standards of conduct for its own employees. The Council will not tolerate malpractice or wrongdoing in the provision of its services. All officers have a responsibility to report any serious concerns about bad practice or behaviour, in any aspect of the Council's work. This is encouraged through the 'Whistleblowing' policy that aims to provide a sensitive and confidential route for officers to step forward and voice their concerns without fear of reprisal.

An overview of the actions and results from 'Whistleblowing' is presented to the Council's Standards Committee in an Annual Report on our Prevention of Fraud and Corruption policy.

Departments 2011-12

Chief Executive's Department

- Corporate Strategy

Resources Department

- Accounting Services
- Human Resources
- Internal Audit
- Repairs and Maintenance
- ICT Client and Information Management
- Property Services
- Legal Services

Environment Department

- Planning
- Refuse and Environment
- Specialist Services
- Tourism and City Centre Management
- Streets and Open Spaces

Customer and Community Services Department

- Arts and Recreation
- City Homes
- Community Development
- Customer Service
- Strategic Housing
- Revenue and Benefits