

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Director, Customer & Community Services

TO: Civic Affairs Committee 27/6/2012

WARDS: None directly affected

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2011-12

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has been recording the number of complaints received by each department and how they were dealt with, for a number of years. Regular complaints monitoring is recognised as good practice in customer service, and by looking at data across the Council we can monitor our performance and see where we are doing well and where there is room for improvement.
- 1.2 Civic Affairs Committee is asked for any comments that it wishes before it is published. The report will be considered at Civic Affairs on 27th June 2012.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Civic Affairs to:
Consider the draft Annual Complaints Report for 2011-12, shown at Appendix A, and approve for publication on the Council's website.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The City Council has been recording information about complaints for the last ten years. In 2011-12 we received 377 complaints a 35 % decrease on the previous year. There was a decrease in the number of complaints in all departments. The decrease in complaints was probably the result in the increased use of email that has allowed greater distinction between requests for service and genuine complaints.

- 3.2 The highest number of similar complaints was around missed bins. There were also a number of complaints for the Corn Exchange sound system.
- 3.3 Last year there were regular complaints about the time the Council took to do things like process benefit claims and undertake repairs. There were also complaints across a number of departments that the Council sometimes failed to communicate decisions and instructions clearly. Whilst there are still some complaints of this nature they are less common and departments do seem to have taken positive steps to improve these aspects of performance.
- 3.4 In January 2007 we reduced our target time to answer 100% of complaints to seven days. In 2011-12 we achieved a figure of 92%. This is a rise of 43% from the previous year. Where we are unable to respond fully within seven days we acknowledge receipt of the complaint and tell the complainant when they can expect a full response.
- 3.5 In 2003 the Council's Standards Committee asked officers to start recording how complaints are 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 has proved a popular method of reporting of complaints. This allows for complaints to be recorded for action immediately through the customer service centre.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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.

- 3.9 In 2011-12, the Local Government Ombudsman received 20 enquiries and complaints but only 9 decisions were made.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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. During 2011-12, we received no complaints alleging that councillors had breached the Code of Conduct. The Standards Committee dealt with one complaint that was made in 2010-11.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 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 councillor had not breached the Code of Conduct for Councillors. She found that the councillor 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 councillor 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 councillors.
- 3.14 As well as complaints we also receive many positive comments about the Council's services and staff. A section on compliments is included in the Annual Complaints Report because knowing where things are working well and are

appreciated is as important as knowing where things are not working.

- 3.15 Subject to approval by Civic Affairs on 27th June, officers will then finalise and publish the report on the Council's website with hard copies being made available on request.

4. CONSULTATIONS

The Annual Complaints report is compiled by Customer & Community Services. Data on complaints and compliments is collected quarterly by a designated complaints coordinator within each department and collated annually by Customer Services.

5. IMPLICATIONS

(a) **Financial Implications**

The time and resources spent on responding to complaints and Freedom of Information requests is a not insignificant cost to the Council. Our aim should be to get things right first time as often as we can and to ensure that as much information as possible is available on our website so that people can access the information they require for themselves.

(b) **Staffing Implications**

None

(c) **Equal Opportunities Implications**

Analysis and action taken as a result of complaints has an important role to play in ensuring that our services are accessible to all those who wish or need to use them and, that as far as possible, we are able to respond flexibly to the differing needs of our citizens and visitors.

(d) **Environmental Implications**

None

(e) **Community Safety**

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS: The following are the background papers that were used in the preparation of this report:

Departmental Quarterly monitoring reports – June '11, September '11, December '11, March '12

To inspect these documents contact Chris Bolton on extension 8603. The author and contact officer for queries on the report is Chris Bolton on extension 8603.

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