

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Director, Customer & Community Services

TO: Civic Affairs Committee 19/09/2013

WARDS: None directly affected

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2012-13

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 19th September 2013.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Civic Affairs to:
Consider the draft Annual Complaints Report for 2012-13, 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 2012-13 we received 498 complaints a 25% increase on the previous year. The increase 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 2012-13 we achieved a figure of 85%.
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 2012-13 more complaints were received via email than by letter, with 70% of complaints received by e-mail and 19% 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 602 compliments for 2012-13 up 10% on the 2011-12 total of 541.
- 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 2012-13 24 complaints were fully investigated by the ICI.
Of these, nine cases were not investigated, and fifteen cases were investigated. Of those fifteen cases that were investigated, ten cases were not up-held, one case was partially up-held, one case was largely up-held, and three cases were up-held.
Of the fifteen cases which were investigated, five cases were raised regarding City Homes, one case was raised regarding

Community Development, five cases were raised regarding Planning Services, one case was raised regarding Refuse and Environment, two cases were raised regarding Streets and Open Spaces, and one case was raised regarding Estates and Facilities. Three cases are current.

- 3.9 In 2012-13, the Local Government Ombudsman received 7 enquiries and complaints. This year The LGO have only presented the total number of complaints received and will not be providing the more detailed information that we have offered in previous years.
The reason for this is that the LOG changed their business processes during the course of 2012/13 and therefore would not be able to provide Cambridge City Council with a consistent set of data for the entire year.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 During 2012-13, the Council received two complaints that councillors had breached the Code of Conduct. The first complaint was that a councillor should not have participated in consideration of a planning application, as the complainants believed that the councillor had a personal interest by virtue of where they lived. The Monitoring Officer commissioned a report by the Independent Complaints Investigator, who concluded that there was no breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 3.12 The second complaint was that a councillor should have declared a personal interest at a meeting of a local forum looking at a planning application. The owner of the site was linked with the councillor's employer. The Monitoring Officer decided that the councillor had not breached the Code of Conduct but that it would have been good practice to declare the interest
- 3.13 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.

- 3.14 Subject to approval by Civic Affairs on the 19th September, 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 '12, September '12, December '12, March '13

To inspect these documents contact Chris Bolton on extension 7611. The author and contact officer for queries on the report is Chris Bolton on extension 7611.

Report file: N:\Strategy & Partnerships\Performance\COMPLAINTS,COMPLIMENTS\2012-13 Annual Complaints Report\Covering Report to Civic Affairs FINAL 26 June.doc

Date originated: 09 September 2013

Date of last revision: 09 September 2013