



Annual Complaints Report 2012-2013

Cambridge City Council

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL'S ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2012-2013

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Report, which gives an overview of all the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them (we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained).

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 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 customer services standards are published on our website at <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/customer-charter-and-service->

[standards.](#)

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, (ICI), 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 2012-2013

How many complaints were received?

We received 498 complaints in 2012-13. This was a 25% increase on those received in the previous year as can be seen in table 1 below.

Table 1. Cambridge City Council complaint totals 2012-13.

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals	% Change
2012-13	2	72	83	341	498	+25
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

Despite the increase in complaints over the last year the trend is that complaints to Cambridge City Council have been falling and have decreased by 37% since 2008-09.

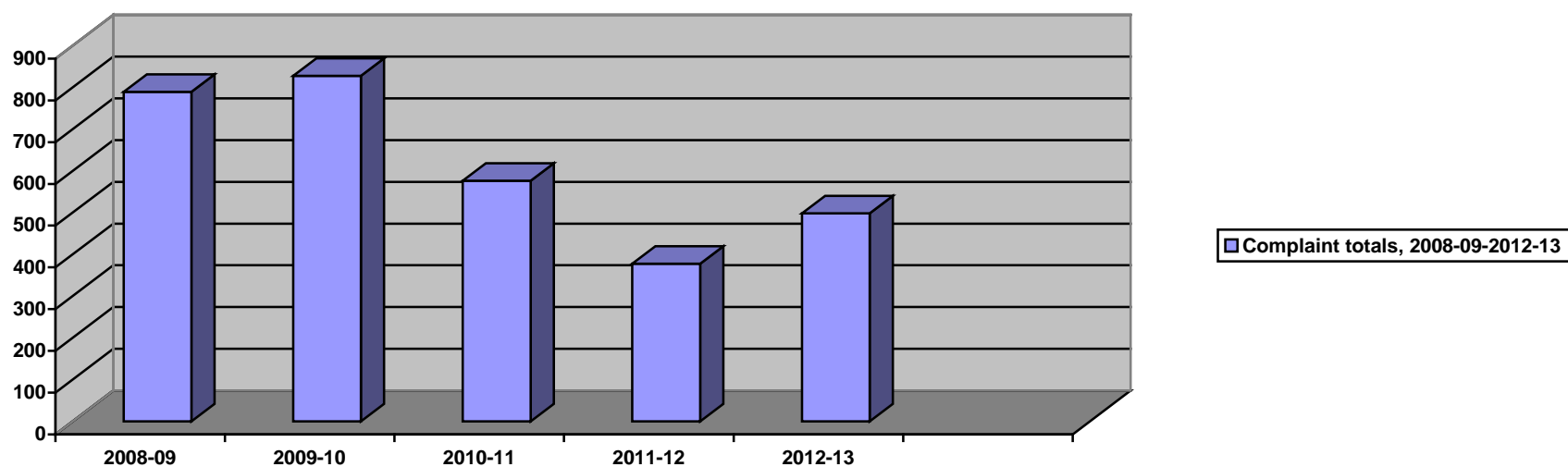
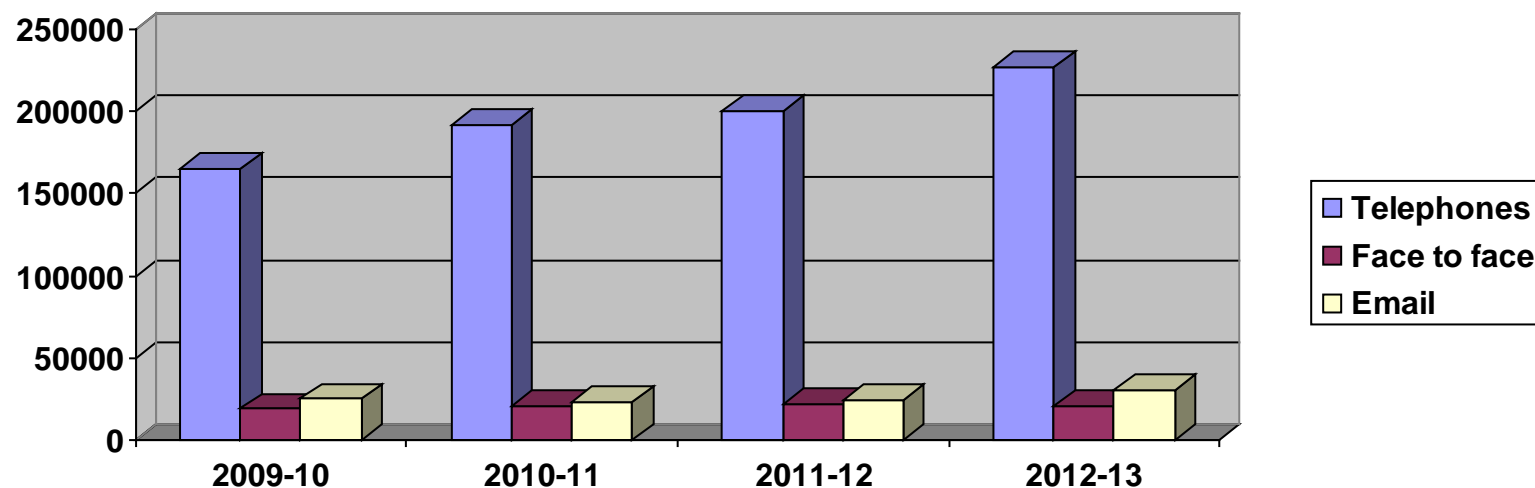


Figure 1. Cambridge City Council complaint totals 2008-2013.

To put the number of complaints in context, last year over 225,000 telephone contacts and 21,000 visitors' centre were recorded at the customer service centre. This is at a time where contact volumes are increasing.

Between 2010-11 and 2012-13 telephone contacts to the customer service centre increased from 165,000 to 225,000, face to face visits from 19,000 to 21,000 and emails from 25,000 to 30,000.

Figure 2. Contact volumes at the Customer Service Centre, 2010-2013



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

In previous years complaints were recorded in various manners including the use of paper, spreadsheets, Access databases and the ServiceMail system.

From this year all complaints and compliments that require a reply are to be recorded and administered through the corporate Customer Relationship Management, (CRM), system. Full training was arranged for all complaints officers in all departments. The use of CRM has streamlined the process for both the logging and the reporting of complaints and compliments.

From this year we will be including feedback from our Govmetric customer satisfaction tool. Govmetric collects customer feedback at the first point of contact, face to face, telephone and the web.

How were complaints 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 which is shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. How complaints were received.

Year	Face to Face %	Letter %	Email %	Telephone %	Other (GovMetric, Comment Cards %)	Total %
2012-13	1	19	70	8	2	100
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

How many complaints did we respond to on time?

The figures for 2012-13 show a decrease in performance from last year with the number of complaints responded to on time falling from 92% to 85% as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3. Complaint response times

Year	Chief Exec's %	Environment %	Resources %	Customer & Community %	Totals %	% Change
2012-13	100	72	78	89	85	-7
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

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 how service provision has changed arising from complaints made over the past year are shown below:

Environment

Refuse & Environment

For refuse and environment the main complaint trend was that refuse bins were not being emptied. The remedial actions were to empty the bins or residents were informed of the reason why the bins was not emptied. There were a number of complaints received regarding the change to bin rounds.

Resources

Estates & Facilities

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.

The housing repairs service and part of the housing improvement plan is currently undergoing a Lean efficiency exercise aimed at putting the customer at the heart of the service.

Customer & Community Services

Arts & Recreation

The main complaint trend for the Arts & Recreation service was that of the poor sound quality at the Corn Exchange. The Arts & Recreation section are to resolve this issue via some planned investment in a new sound system.

Folk Festival

There were 36 comments/complaints during the Folk Festival event. The majority of the complaints came from residents who were concerned about the Sky Lounge's effect on wildlife and parking in residential areas around the site.

Customer Services

The majority of complaints for Customer Services were with regards to the increase in face to face waiting times earlier in the year and disagreement with policy decisions. There were also a number of complaints regarding the Homelink re-registration exercise and whether it was actually needed.

Customer service advisors have undertaken communication skills training to handle such occurrences.

Community Development

For community development the major complaint was regarding the policy of grants awarded to the scouts. The Executive Councillor responded and the case was referred to the ICI.

City Homes

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.

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.

Housing Advice Service

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.

Compliments to the City Council in 2012-2013

The number of compliments is continuing to rise year on year with 602 compliments for 2012-13 up 15% on the 2011-12 total of 541 as seen in table 4 below.

Table 4. Cambridge City Council Compliment totals 2012-13

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals	% Change
2012-13	0	8	23	571	602	+10
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

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:

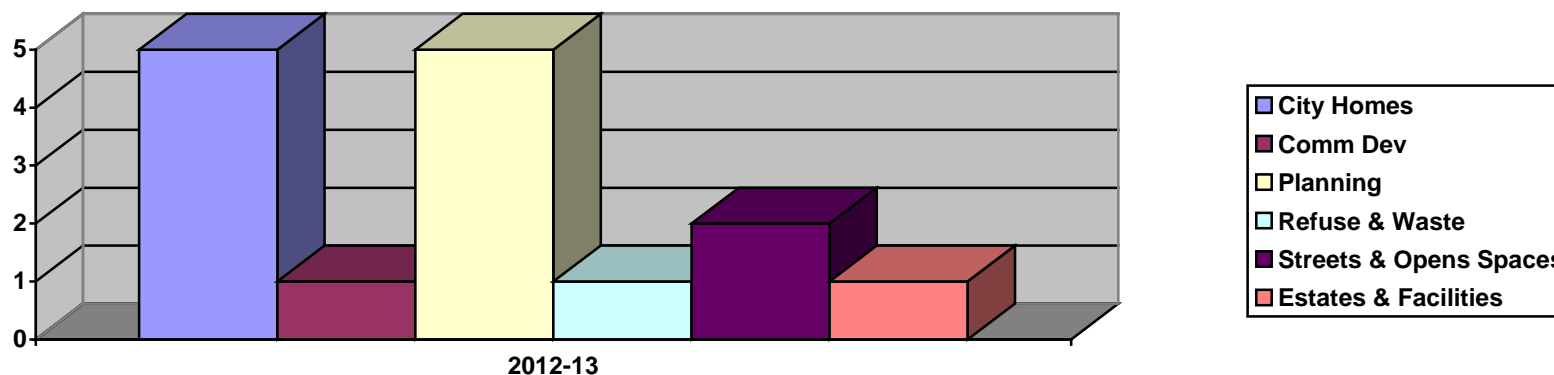
- We took a long time to do something
- We did not follow our own rules or the law
- We broke a promise to do something
- We treated someone unfairly
- We gave someone wrong or misleading information; or
- We did not make a decision in the correct way.

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 2012-13?

- During 2012-13, 24 complaints were received by the ICI.
- Of these 24 complaints received, 15 cases were investigated and 9 cases were not investigated.
- Of those 15 cases that were investigated, 10 cases were not up-held, 1 case was partially up-held, 1 case was largely up-held, and 3 cases were up-held.

Figure 5. Service breakdown of complaints forwarded to the ICI



The Local Government Ombudsman, (LGO).

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.

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 they have changed their business processes during the course of 2012/13 and therefore are not be able to provide Cambridge City Council with a consistent set of data for the entire year.

In 2012/13 Cambridge City Council received 7 complaints about the local authority. This compares to the following average number (recognising considerable population variations between authorities of a similar type):

District/Borough Councils-	10 complaints
Unitary Authorities-	36 complaints
Metropolitan Councils-	49 complaints
County Councils-	54 complaints
London Boroughs-	79 complaints

The LGO remain committed to sharing information about Cambridge City Council's performance and will be providing more detailed information in next year's annual review letter.

Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct

Councillors must adhere to the Council's 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 made significant changes to the standards regime for councillors in 2012 and has abolished the Standards Board. In response, the Council adopted a new Code of Conduct for councillors and introduced a local system for considering complaints.

Complaints about councillors are considered initially by the Council's Monitoring Officer (who is also the Head of Legal Services). When he receives a complaint, he consults one of two "Independent Persons" appointed by the Council. The role of the "Independent Persons" is to introduce external scrutiny of the complaints process. The Monitoring Officer can respond to a complaint, can commission a formal investigation or can refer it for consideration by the Council's Standards Sub-Committee. The Council's Standards Committee is made up of three councillors.

During 2012-13, the Council received 2 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.

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.

To find out more about the Council's Code of Conduct and how to make a complaint about a councillor go to <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions> 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 'Whistle blowing' 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 'Whistle blowing' is presented to the Council's Standards Committee in an Annual Report on our Prevention of Fraud and Corruption policy.

Departments 2012-13

Chief Executive's Department

- CEX Office
- Corporate Strategy

Resources Department

- Accounting Services
- Human Resources
- Internal Audit
- Estates and Facilities
- ICT Client
- 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