

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Chief Executive

TO: Civic Affairs Committee 29/6/2011
Standards Committee 15/6/2011

WARDS: None directly affected

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2010-11

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. In recent years information about the Freedom of Information requests that the Council receives has also been added to this report.
- 1.2 Standards Committee is asked for any comments that it wishes to pass on to the Chair of Civic Affairs about the draft Annual Complaints report 2010-11 before it is published. The report will be considered at Civic Affairs on 29th June 2011.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Standards Committee to:
Consider the draft Annual Complaints Report for 2010-11, shown at Appendix A, and agree any comments that it wants to pass on to Civic Affairs.
- 2.2 Civic Affairs to:
Note any comments from Standards Committee and approve the Annual Complaints Report 2010-11 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 2010-11 we received 576 complaints a 30 % decrease on the previous year. There was a decrease in the number of complaints in all departments except Environment and Planning. 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 on the relocation of Lion Yard toilets and the lack of heating for the Corn Exchange Johann Strauss concert.
- 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. This is the fourth full year of working towards this challenging target. In 2010-11 we achieved a figure of 49%. This is a fall of 41% from the previous year but it should be noted that this year the organisation went through a major restructure exercise. This may have resulted in extra time being needed to process some complaints over the transition period. 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.

The use of the corporate Customer Relationship Management system to record all complaints centrally in 2011-12, should allow for an increase in the percentage of complaints being dealt with within 7 days. Complaints officers will receive warning reminder/s via email as the complaint target date becomes closer.

- 3.5 In 2003 the Council's Standards Committee asked officers to start recording how complaints are received. In 2009-2010

more complaints were received via email than by letter, with 47% of complaints received by e-mail and 34% by letter. This trend has continued into 2010-11 with 56% of complaints received by e-mail and 24% 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 recorded for action immediately through the customer service centre.

- 3.6 The number of compliments is continuing to rise year on year with 461 compliments for 2010-11 up 7% on the 2009-10 total of 431.

Customer Services received 47% of the compliments total followed by City Homes and Arts & Recreation on 19% and 13% respectively.

- 3.7 For the past 5 years information about Freedom of Information requests has been included in the Annual Report. The requirement to provide information to anyone who requests it, unless an exemption applies was introduced in January 2005. Since 2005-06 the number of requests has risen from 78 to 438 in 2010-11. This continues to have significant resource implications for all departments but especially within Environment and Resources Directorate who receive well over half of requests between them. Not only has the number of requests risen, but also many are becoming more complex increasingly requiring coordination and input across more than one department.

- 3.8 This coordination role, and that of providing advice and support on how to deal with FOI requests, falls largely on the Performance Analyst post in Strategy and Partnerships with legal input from Legal Services. In May 2010, and at the request of Full Council (16th July 2009 minute ref: 09/68) a new Disclosure Log was added to the Council's website that provides basic information about the FOI requests the Council has received and also includes copies of responses to requests redacted as necessary to prevent breaches of Data Protection legislation. Developing and maintaining the Disclosure Log is now also the responsibility of the Performance Analyst. This disclosure log is regularly updated and has proved to be a success, with requesters being referred to it if a question has been asked previously thus enabling officers to concentrate on other tasks.

- 3.9 During 2010-11 20 complaints were fully investigated by the ICI we received 33 complaints in total, however 13 were not taken forward due to the complainant having not been through the departments complaints procedure first. 11 were for the C&CS department, 6 for Environment, 2 for Chief Executives and 1 for Resources.
- 3.10 The number of complaints dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman's Office (LGO) fell to 19, though only 12 decisions were made. There were no findings of maladministration and 3 local settlements. In 2007-08 the Council had taken an average of 34 days to respond to the LGO's requests for information and was in the bottom quartile of performance. In 2008-09 the average number of days taken to respond fell to 25.1, which placed the council in the mid range of performance and within the LGO's target of 28 days. In 2009-10 our performance continued to improve to an average of 24.5 days but fell to 33.8 days in 2010-11. However many District Councils achieve 21 days or less, so there continues to be room for improvement.
- 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 2010-11, we received three complaints alleging that councillors had breached the Code of Conduct. Following investigation by an independent Investigating Officer the Code was found not to have been breached for two of the complaints. With one complaint the investigation has been completed and a sub-committee of the Standards Committee will meet shortly to consider the report.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 Subject to any comments on the content of the draft Annual report from Standards Committee members, and subject to approval by Civic Affairs on 29th June, officers will then finalise and publish the report on the Council's website with hard copies being made available on request.

4. CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1 The Annual Complaints report is compiled by Strategy and Partnerships. Data on complaints, compliments and Freedom of Information requests is collected quarterly by a designated complaints coordinator within each department and collated annually by Strategy and Partnerships.

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 '10, September '10, December '10, March '11

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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