

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## Standards Committee

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**Date of Meeting:** 27<sup>th</sup> September 2010.  
**Report of:** Customer Relations Manager.  
**Subject/Title:** Customer and Local Government Ombudsman Complaints  
– Quarter 1 2010/11.

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### **1.0 Report Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the corporate complaints and local government ombudsman complaints dealt with by Cheshire East Council for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

### **2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That having regard to the parameters of the Committee's terms of reference as outlined in this report, the Committee notes this report and makes any further response it considers appropriate.

### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 At its meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2010 the Committee considered a report which provided a summary of complaints dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman in respect of Cheshire East Council for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010. The Committee agreed that a summary report on both Local Government Ombudsman complaints and customer complaints be submitted to each meeting of the Committee.

### **4.0 Wards Affected**

- 4.1 All.

### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

- 5.1 All.

### **6.0 Policy Implications including**

- 6.1 Adherence to the Corporate Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints Policy.

### **7.0 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 If maladministration causing injustice is found, Cheshire East Council can be asked to pay compensation to a complainant. A compensation payment is

also possible where a matter is settled prior to a formal finding by the Ombudsman.

## **8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)**

8.1 The Committee's terms of reference as set out in the Constitution include the following:

- Ensuring that the Council maintains appropriate links with the Commission for Local Administration in England (Ombudsman)
- Referring issues, which impinge on staff conduct, performance, terms of employment, training and development to the appropriate and responsible Executive Member and/or Manager
- Promoting high standards of responsiveness by the Council to its clients and contacts

8.2 The Committee's role in considering this report is to determine what, if any, action it should take to further the above aims.

## **9.0 Risk Management**

9.1 In addition to other measures within the Council's management structure, the remit of this Committee contributes towards the management of risk in handling complaints, and the promotion of good practice.

## **10.0 Background and Options**

10.1 At its meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2010 the Committee considered a report which provided a summary of complaints dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman in respect of Cheshire East Council for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

10.2 During discussion of the report, the issue of customer complaints in general was raised. An outline of the process was provided for Members, together with an indication of current performance compared with the previous period. Complaints, suggestions and compliments management information was collated on a monthly basis.

10.3 Members considered that it would be helpful to receive a report at each meeting on complaints/compliments generally, divided into the type of complaint, response rates for responding to complaints and whether or not they were satisfactorily resolved from the perspective of the complainant. The information would enable the Committee to detect emerging trends and highlight areas of concern.

10.4 The Committee agreed that a summary report on both Local Government Ombudsman complaints and customer complaints be submitted to each meeting of the Committee.

## **The New Corporate Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints Policy**

- 10.5 The new Corporate Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints policy and procedure came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. The new policy is reduced to two stages, with the first stage investigated by the service that caused the dissatisfaction, and the second stage, or appeal, investigated by an Officer independent to the service that is being complained about. The new policy also provides improved definition of roles and responsibilities and improved guidance in dealing with unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants.
- 10.6 Compliments, suggestions and complaints continue to be managed using the former Macclesfield database, which provides very basic case management functionality and very limited management information. A new Complaints database (part of the Corporate CRM system) will be implemented during Q3 that will provide more sophisticated case management functionality and improved management information including customer satisfaction. This will be able to produce a more extensive report using this system for the year end.

## **Performance Highlights**

- During the first quarter, 453 new complaints were received. By 13<sup>th</sup> July, 414 (91%) had been responded to and closed.
- 342 (83%) of the 414 closed complaints were responded to within the target of ten working days.
- 9 Stage 2 Complaints were investigated. The average investigation time was 46 days, against a target of 20 working days. Some of the delay can be explained by delays in initiating the stage 2 process and identifying the independent reviewer.
- 32 complaints were carried over from 2009/10 (managed under the previous policy). Only 31% were answered on time.
- 59 Compliments were received. The training sessions have encouraged officers to officially recognise when customers complimented a service, as a result the compliments have increased by 86%.
- 34 suggestions were received.
- The Local Government Ombudsman asked us to investigate 20 complaints in the first quarter. Of these, 7 were premature complaints. The LGO discontinued 1 investigation due to lack of evidence. In 3 cases they found no maladministration and we are awaiting their decision on the 9 remaining cases.

## **Improvements Made Arising from Complaints and Suggestions**

- 10.7 Arising from public service improvement suggestions individual services have are encouraged to make improvements
- 10.8 Environmental Health – The public suggested the service should take payment for contaminated land enquiries over the phone rather than send in a cheque. This was established on the PARIS payment system, so now payment for contaminated land enquiries can be taken over the phone.

- 10.9 Children's Services – The public were unhappy with the School Organisation and Admissions 'appeals and admission' process and how siblings were treated. Revised admission arrangements for 2011 have been brought in to give higher priority to younger siblings.

### **Individual Service Performance**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Completed stage 1 complaints</b>	<b>Average number of days to complete</b>	<b>Number of ongoing complaints</b>	<b>Average number of days since received</b>
Planning & Performance	1	1	-	-
Registrars	4	2	-	-
Communications	4	3	-	-
Environmental Services	162	5	2	23
Health & Wellbeing	79	6	2	17
Safer & Stronger Communities	25	6	-	-
Children & Families	3	7	2	49
Customer Services	40	7	1	35
Planning & Policy	47	9	13	15
Council Tax	42	9	8	27
Democratic Services	12	10	-	-
Housing Benefits	20	11	-	-
Regeneration	-	-	1	31
Finance	-	-	1	21

(Note: All performance data is provided as of 13/07/10 as it is not possible to run historical reports in the existing Complaints database)

<b>LGO Complaints</b>	<b>On-Going</b>	<b>No Maladministration Found/Discontinued</b>	<b>Premature</b>	<b>Maladministration Found</b>
Planning & Performance				
Registrars				
Communications				
Environmental Health	2		1	
Health & Wellbeing				
Safer & Stronger Communities		2	1	
Children & Families	2	1		
Adult Social Care	2			
Planning & Housing	3	1	2	
Council Tax & Recovery			3	
Democratic Services	1			
Housing Benefits				
Regeneration				
Finance				

## **11.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Helen Gough

Designation: Customer Relations Manager

Tel No: 01606 271519

Email: Helen.gough@[cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:Helen.gough@cheshireeast.gov.uk)