

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Audit and Governance Committee

Date of Meeting: 17 November 2010
Report of: Customer Relations Manager
Title: Six Month Review of Corporate Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints Procedures

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of performance during the first and second quarters against the defined Corporate Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints policy and procedure. It also summarises the performance of complaints received under the Adult Social Care Complaints Procedures and the Children's Social Care Complaints Procedures.

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 That according to the Terms of Reference for this Committee, a summary report on both Local Government Ombudsman complaints and customer complaints is submitted to the Committee in order that it can seek assurance that arrangements are robust

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All.

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All.

6.0 Policy Implications

- 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

- 8.1 The Committee's terms of reference as set out in the Constitution includes seeking assurance that customer complaint arrangements are robust.

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 The new Corporate Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints policy and procedure came into effect from 1st 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.
- 10.2 Complaints, suggestions and compliments management information is collated on a monthly basis. Such information highlights trends and areas of concern. A summary report on both Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) complaints and customer complaints is submitted quarterly to the Corporate Management Team and to every Standards Committee. The information is used to detect emerging trends and highlight areas of concern.

10.3 Individual Service Performance

Service	Q1		Q2			
	Completed stage 1 complaints	Average days to complete	Completed stage 1 complaints	Average days to complete	Number of ongoing complaints	Average number of days since received
Planning & Performance	1	1	1	3		
Adult Social Services	-	-	6	3	1	16
Environmental Services	162	5	138	4	7	26
Safer & Stronger Communities	25	6	9	4		
Customer Services	40	7	30	4		
Housing Benefits	20	11	37	4		
Children & Families	3	7	4	5		
Finance	-	-	1	5		
Regeneration	-	-	9	6	1	18
Health & Wellbeing	79	6	48	7	7	38
Legal & Democratic Services	12	10	2	7		
Housing Strategy	-	-	9	7		

Service	Q1		Q2			
	Completed stage 1 complaints	Average days to complete	Completed stage 1 complaints	Average days to complete	Number of ongoing complaints	Average number of days since received
Council Tax	42	9	36	8		
Communications	4	3	2	9		
Planning Services	47	9	27	12	7	43
ICT	-	-	1	15		
HR	-	-	1	18		
Registrars	4	2	-	-		

Note: All performance data is provided as of 21/10/2010 as it is not possible to run historical reports in the existing Complaints database.

10.4 Q1 Performance Highlights

- During the first quarter, 453 new complaints were received. By 13th July, 414 (91%) had been responded to and closed.
- 342 (83%) of the 414 closed complaints were responded to within the target resolution time of 10 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 8 complaints in the first quarter. The LGO discontinued 3 investigations due to lack of evidence. In 2 cases they found no maladministration and we are awaiting their decision on the 3 remaining cases.

10.5 At the end of April and May 2010, only 60% of complaints were responded to within the agreed target of 10 days, but following investigation by the Customer Relations team, it was established that many complaints had been resolved with the customer, but the database had not been updated. It is important that Complaints Coordinators update the database, or notify the Customer Relations team if they do not have access, so that it is possible to measure performance in responding to complaints and have an accurate audit trail in cases where the complaint is escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman.

10.6 Q2 Performance Highlights

- During the second quarter of the year, 384 complaints were received. By 21st October, 361 (94%) had been answered and closed down.
- The average response time is 7 days – well within the target resolution time of 10 days.
- 12 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

- 8 to Planning Services (of which 4 are ongoing)
- 1 to Adult Social Care
- 2 to Council Tax
- 1 to Regeneration (which is ongoing)
- We received 21 complaints from the LGO (compared to 8 in Q1)
 - 6 have been discontinued
 - 5 are premature complaints
 - 2 have been closed,
 - 5 await decision
 - 3 are ongoing
- Therefore the LGO have not found maladministration within any Council Service in Q2.
- However, the LGO have found maladministration in an Adult Care Complaint which was received in Q1. They have asked us to pay £250 compensation to the complainant.
- We are still waiting on 2 decisions from LGO complaints received in Q1.
- 120 compliments were received (compared to 59 in Q1) and 62 suggestions were received (compared to 34 in Q1).

10.7 Children's Social Care Complaints 01/04/2010 – 30/09/2010

- Since 1st April 2010, 12 new Children's Social Care Complaints have been made as follows: April 2; May 4; June 1; July 0; August 2; September 3
- Of these, 7 have been resolved at Stage 1 (although 2 received in April were responded to outside the statutory deadline), 1 has been escalated to Stage 2 (and is ongoing) and the 4 most recent cases are still ongoing.
- At 1st April 2010, there were 5 ongoing complaints. 2 had been reinstated following suspension of the complaints (1 at stage 1 and 1 at stage 2).
- 2 are ongoing Stage 2 complaints.
- The final complaint has recently been resolved without having had to go through Stage 2 of the Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure.
- *Performance data as at 30/09/2010.
- 2 comments were received and 2 compliments were received.

10.8 Adult Social Care Complaints 01/04/2010 – 30/09/2010

- Since 1st April 2010, 73 new Adult Social Care Complaints have been received as follows: April 13; May 7; June 7; July 12; August 14; September 20 (of these 6 were about the introduction of new uniforms for care staff).
- 52 out of the 73 complaints were completed by 30/09/2010. The average response time being 16 days.
- As at 30/09/2010, 21 investigations were still ongoing. The average number of days since they were received being 41.
- 200 compliments were received

For Further Information

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