

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Corporate Director for Corporate Services
to

Cabinet

on

17th September 2013

Report prepared by Sue Hewitt – Information Governance
Officer (Complaints Lead)

**Corporate Comments, Complaints and Compliments
received throughout 2012-2013**

**Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee – Executive Councillor: Councillor Moring
A Part 1 Public Agenda Item**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on the performance of the corporate Comments, Complaints and Compliments process and to provide comparisons with previously reported results. Complaints and compliments in respect of adult and children's social care functions are subject to a statutory process and are not monitored by the corporate procedure. Their results are reported separately.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1. To note the continued progress of the corporate complaints process since April 2012.

3. SUMMARY

3.1.1. Receiving, responding to, and learning from customer feedback continues to be well established within the Authority and is firmly embedded within departments across the organisation.

3.1.2. Despite the operational challenges this year the significant improvements of the previous 2 years have continued, with the number of Stage 1 complaints received in this reporting period reflecting a decrease of 28% when compared to last year's results. The majority of this reduction has been achieved within the Enterprise & Tourism department.

Complaints in respect of missed waste collections have again reduced and when the results are put into context of the number of interactions with every resident in the Borough, on a weekly basis, the overall number of complaints remains low. The process of Cory dealing

Comments, Compliments & Complaints 2012/13		Report No CS13 13/14
--	--	----------------------

directly with complainants continues to contribute to timely responses as well as deliver a high level of customer care from within that specific area.

Changes as a direct result of customer feedback continue to drive service improvements with over 220 identifiable improvements recorded in the current reporting period, which is a similar number to that reported last year.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1. The Council's corporate comments, complaints and compliments process **Appendix 1** deals with all general complaints about the Council and currently has three stages. As well as the children and adult social care complaints there are certain other functions which are outside of the corporate procedure and have their own processes. Examples include appeals against parking tickets and concerns about schools.
- 4.2. The current process, which was introduced in 2009, is now firmly embedded in the organisation and continues to ensure the Council maintains a customer focused service whilst being able to further develop improvements to services.
- 4.3. The benefits achieved in operating a comprehensive feedback process remain the same:
 - To incorporate comments and compliments as part of the routine process
 - To facilitate additional ways for customers to give their feedback (through the web, by phone and in person)
 - To learn lessons from the types of feedback made
 - To improve service delivery
 - To increase customer satisfaction
 - To improve the consistency and timeliness of responses
 - To reflect Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) best practice.
- 4.4. The purpose of this report is to update Members on how the process is working and to provide an analysis of customer feedback data.

5. PERFORMANCE TO DATE

5.1. Performance

This year's performance data is set out in **Appendices 2 to 5.**

5.2. Trends

The robust monitoring system that is in place has identified trends and issues that are subject to complaints. Areas that have been of most concern, at all stages, this year include:

- Parking Management Schemes and related parking matters.
- Suspension of dropped kerb (PVX) applications and delays in introducing the new policy.

- The effect of trees on properties and overgrown shrubs in areas maintained by the Council.

5.3 Complaints by Directorate with Response Times

The table below shows the three year performance for each Directorate on the 10 working day service standard for responses to complaints.

Directorate	Stage 1 & 2 Total Complaints Apr 2010-Mar 2011	Responded to in 10 working days	Stage 1 & 2 Total Complaints Apr 2011-Mar 2012	Responded to in 10 working days	Stage 1 & 2 Total Complaints Apr 2012-Mar 2013	Responded to in 10 working days
Adult & Community Services	113	89%	92	82%	89	76%
CE & Support Services	106	85%	87	82%	72	94%
Children & Learning	5	60%	5	40%	5	60%
Enterprise, Tourism & Environment	508	91%	266	76%	164	87%
Grand Total	732	90%	450	79%	330	85%

A significant reduction in the average response time for Stage 3 complaints has been achieved this year with 10 of the 16 recorded complaints being responded to within the published timescale. Whilst the improvement is to be welcomed, and the average response time of 28 days is a significant improvement, the average response time for the more complex complaints still reflect a longer response period than desired. Work will continue in the coming year to further reduce the response timescales.

5.4. Nature of Complaints

Set out in **Appendix 2** is detail about the nature of complaints under the following headings:

- Communication
- Decision making
- Discrimination
- Policy or procedure
- Providing a service
- Service not provided
- Staff conduct/staff behaviour
- Quality of service

Whilst the overall number of complaints have reduced, the main areas of concern to residents remain as last year, with providing a service and quality of service representing 76% of all complaints received.

5.5. How the Complaints Were Received

The three year trend chart in **Appendix 3** shows that 50% of complainants contacted us by e-mail and via the web, which is an increase of 14% on last year. This is a reflection of the continued work undertaken corporately to encourage customers to use the website as their channel of choice. Whilst the reduction in contact via telephony at 12% continues to show a downward trend, contact either by letter or in person has remained broadly static for the last three years with around 23% of complainants using this method of contact.

5.6 Progression of Complaints & Satisfaction

- 90% of stage 1 complainants were satisfied with their response which is a slight improvement on last years reported figure of 88%.
- Of the 39 recorded Stage 2 complaints 11 were escalated directly to Stage 2 of the process as they were received via the Local Government Ombudsman or the Chief Executive’s office. The remaining 10% represents 28 complainants of the total 346 complaints responded to at all stages, which in percentage terms is broadly in line with last year.
- Of the 39 complaints that were addressed at stage 2 the most common complaints were about providing a service or the quality of service that was delivered.
- The total number of complaints that escalated to Stage 3 for the year was 16 which is 4.8% of the total complaints recorded. The use of mediation between Stage’s 2 and 3 has been partially successful and will continue to be promoted in an effort to reduce the number of complaints reaching stage 3. Whilst it is disappointing that the number of escalated complaints increased over last year it is worth noting that of the 16 investigated only 3 were upheld and one partially upheld.
- 4 complainants that completed the corporate process escalated their concerns to the Local Government Ombudsman. In all cases the Ombudsman determined no fault with the Council’s actions.

5.7 Complaint Resolution

The continued emphasis on learning from customer feedback has contributed to the overall reduction in complaints and, additionally, informed reviews to provide improved targeted services. This is evidenced by how complaints have been resolved this year:-

- Specific action has been taken in 37% of cases - by doing something that hadn’t been done, putting something right, revising a procedure, carrying out work or updating a policy.
- 34% of customers that complained received an apology when we hadn’t got things right and no action was needed other than to apologise or where we needed to provide further explanation of why we had done something.
- 25% required no action, this was where our actions were correct and no apology was required.
- Compensation 1% (two cases). The Council paid compensation to an individual for damage to a push chair caused by workers pruning bushes and to an individual in respect of incorrect information being processed.

The chart in **Appendix 5** reflects the actual numbers.

5.8 Learning Points

Analysis shows that the continuous review of customer feedback, and resulting changes to service provision, has contributed to the overall reduction in Stage 1 complaints. A pro-active approach on learning points will continue so that:-

- Previously identified trends will be monitored to ensure that the resulting service changes are reducing the number of related complaints.
- Officers will continue to review and improve standard correspondence when clarification is sought from customers.
- Continuous review of responses to ensure that identified service improvements promised are implemented.

5.9 Comments and Compliments

Govmetric, the customer satisfaction measurement tool used by the Council, specifically captures the provision of service by the Customer Service Centre and web and these figures are reflected in the Support Services analysis. As predicted in last year's report the introduction of the self-serve suite in the Customer Service Centre, together with the reduction in face to face appointments, as well as a reduction in footfall to the Civic Centre, has resulted in a significant decrease of recorded compliments and comments for the reporting period when compared with previous year's results. It is anticipated that as the drive towards channel shift, and thus less personal interaction with residents, continues so will the reduction in the level of recorded compliments. Of the 1,653 comments and compliments recorded for Support Services 458 were compliments, which compares to 563 recorded last year.

As before comments received are responded to and commentors advised if their suggestion is to be taken up or not. Compliments are acknowledged and shared with the appropriate Head of Service to inform the service or member of staff. This may then inform the staff's performance review discussion.

The table below shows the 3 year comparison on total number of comments and compliments received by each Directorate.

Directorate	Total 2010/11	Total 2011/12	Total 2012/13
Adult and Community Services (excl statutory)	85	101	91
CE & Support Services	341	2990	1653

Children and Learning (excl statutory)	0	1	0
Enterprise, Tourism and Environment	138	160	135
Grand Total	564	3252	1879

6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)

Judgement 2010/11		Investigative Team Decisions 2011/12		Combined format for 2012/13	
Outside LGO jurisdiction	4	No power to investigate	1	Outside LGO jurisdiction	1
Lack of significant injustice	0	Investigation not justified & other	11	Not investigated	12
Ombudsman discretion not to proceed with complaint	4	Not enough evidence of fault	6	Not enough evidence of fault to cause injustice	1
Local Settlement	6	No or minor injustice & other	5	Local settlement	1
No Fault	10	Injustice remedied during enquiries	5	No fault	8
Report produced	0	Report issued	0	Report produced	0
Grand Total	24	Grand Total	28		23

The

Local Government Ombudsman will not be producing annual letters for individual councils, about complaints received against them, in the same way as in previous years. This is because they changed the way they handle complaints part way through the year, and therefore any statistics will not provide a comparable picture throughout the year. The table below reflects the overall number of complaints considered by the LGO, in each of the last three years, based on differing criteria. For this reporting period the overall description of outcomes has been restricted to general headings based on our internal records.

The results reflect a small decrease in the number of cases considered by the Ombudsman. There have been no findings of maladministration and the overall total of complaints to the Ombudsman remains low.

Comments, Compliments & Complaints 2012/13		Report No CS13 13/14
--	--	----------------------

7. THE FUTURE

- 7.1. The expected rise in complaints due to the implications of budget cuts, and the resultant effects on service delivery, has again not materialised in this reporting year. However, early indications in 2013 are that complaint levels are starting to rise and the ten day response time, in particular, is proving a challenge in certain areas.
- 7.2. It is proposed that a review of the current three stage process will be undertaken during the year. The review will focus on the timeliness of the overall process and the added benefit, if any, to complainants having three stages.
- 7.3. An increased use of mediation by officers will continue to be encouraged in an effort to reduce the number of complaint escalations as well as to further improve the customers experience when raising concerns.

8. MONITORING AND REPORTING

- 8.1. Regular reporting continues to inform Departmental Management Teams to coincide with their monthly report on performance.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1. The process continues to deliver improved performance and a more robust system of monitoring and real service improvements.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

Customer feedback and complaints management is directly relevant to the Council's corporate priorities.

10.2 Financial Implications and value for Money

Service improvements and mediation continue to result in meaningful outcomes for customers and so ensure getting things right first time.

10.3 Legal Implications

This process is overseen by the Local Government Ombudsman.

10.4 People Implications

See 10.7

10.5 Property Implications

None

10.6 Consultation

None

10.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The process is open to all and has multiple methods of access for customers. Equality and diversity implications are a routine part of the process in recording customers details and are considered as part of any response. Mediation ensures people that may be vulnerable are able to access this service and receive the appropriate support.

10.8 Risk Assessment

The anticipated rise in complaints did not materialise this year, however early indications are that there is an upward trend already established in the current year. Meeting the expected 10 day response timeline is proving a particular challenge. Continued monitoring of the process will be used to inform any future action plan.

10.9 Value for Money

See 10.2

10.10 Community Safety Implications

None

10.11 Environmental Impact

Processes used are predominately in line with minimum input for the environment.

11. Background Papers

None

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 The Council's Comments, Complaints & Compliments Procedure.

Appendix 2 Nature of Complaints

Appendix 3	How Stage 1 Complaints Were Received
Appendix 4& 4a	Stats – Response Times and Directorate Numbers
Appendix 5	Complaint Resolution

Appendix 1 - The 3 Stage Process

Complaints

Stage 1

An initial complaint responded to by the respective service Group Manager.

Stage 2

A complaint that has been responded to but where the complainant is still unhappy and a response is required from the appropriate Director or Head of Service.

Stage 3

If the complainant is still unhappy after the Stage 2 process, they have a right of appeal to the Council's Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. In the first instance mediation is offered, if

Comments, Compliments & Complaints 2012/13		Report No CS13 13/14
---	--	----------------------

APP C

unsuccessful an investigation is undertaken and a report presented to the Chief Executive for consideration.

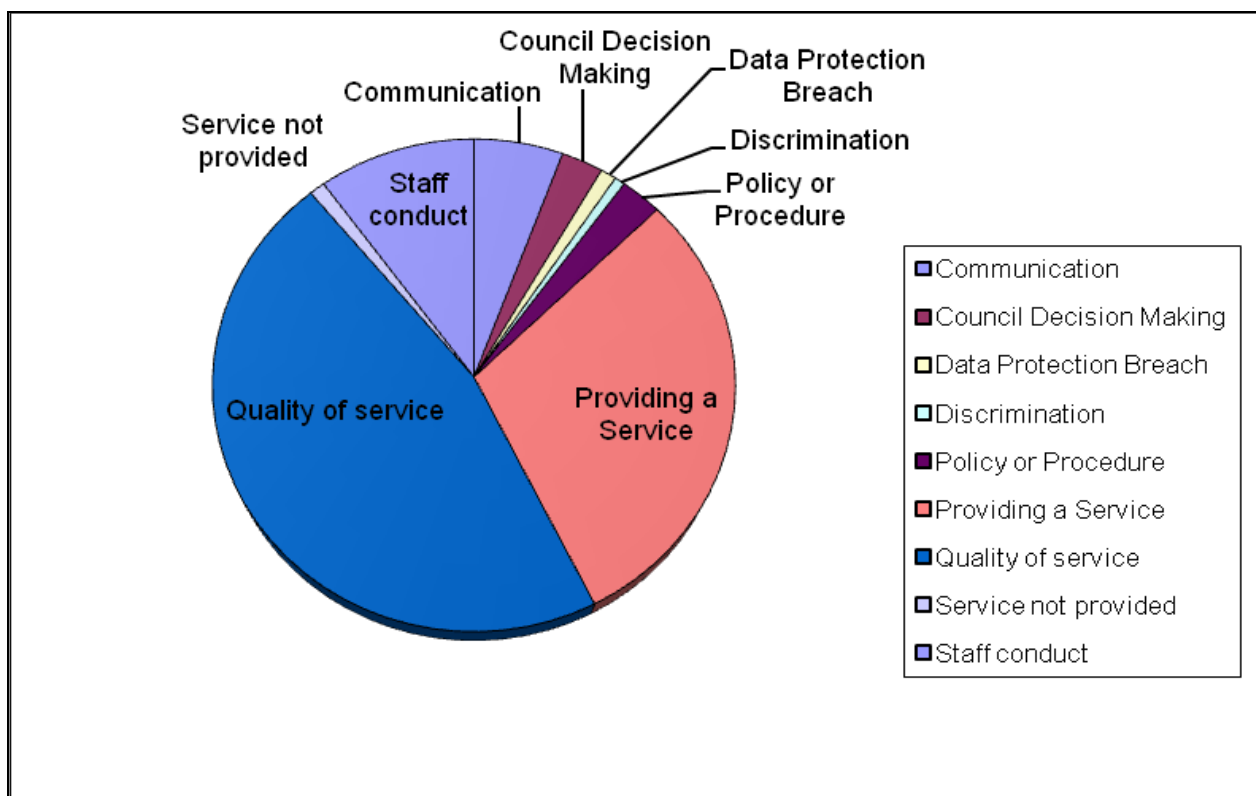
Comments and Compliments

Any comment or compliment should be responded to within 10 working days. If a suggestion is not to be progressed then an explanation should be provided. Compliments must be gratefully acknowledged. Comments & Compliments should be logged into Covalent by the Departmental Complaints Officer and reported as part of routine reporting to CMT.

Any compliments relating to staff should be shared with the appropriate Head of Service to share with his or her team member

Appendix 2 – Nature of Complaints – April 2012 to 2013

Comments, Compliments & Complaints 2012/13		Report No CS13 13/14
--	--	----------------------



Appendix 3 – 3 Year Comparison of How Stage 1 Complaints Were Received

	Apr 2010 - Mar 2011	Apr 2011- Mar 2012	Apr 2012- Mar 2013	Change 2013 to 2012
Telephone	51%	38%	26%	Reduction of 12%
email / internet	26%	36%	50%	Increase of 14%
In person	6%	7%	6%	Reduction of 1%
Letter/post	16%	17%	18%	Increase of 1%
Other	0%	1%	0%	Reduction of 1%

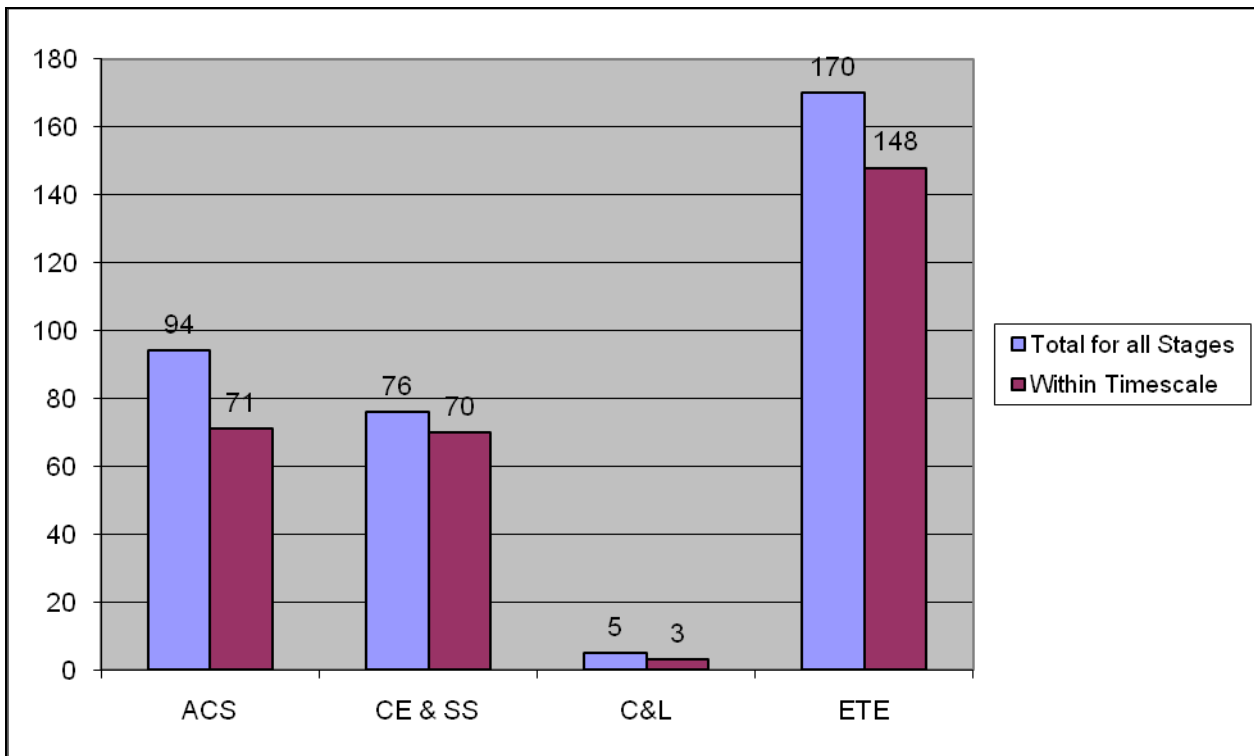
Appendix 4 Response Times Apr 2012- Mar 2013

	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
Communication	16	14	1	0	0	0
Decision making	8	7	3	3	4	2
Data Protection Breaches	3	3	1	0	0	0
Policy or Procedure	9	6	4	3	4	3
Providing a Service	88	82	9	7	3	1
Quality of Service	134	111	17	13	4	3
Service not Provided	3	3	0	0	0	0
Staff conduct or behaviour	30	27	4	1	1	1
Total	291	253 87%	39	27 69%	16	10 63%

Key

Total
In time

Appendix 4a – Response Rate by Directorate



Appendix 5 Complaint Resolution

