

Annual Report

April 2011 to March 2012

Complaints

Rotherham
Metropolitan
Borough Council 
Where Everyone Matters

Executive Summary

This report provides information about complaints made between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 to the Local Authority, under the Corporate Complaint's Procedure, the Adult Social Services and Childrens Social Services complaint regulations

The figures in the report include details of the number of customers and the number of complaints they have made, each Directorate area has provided information and a breakdown summary.

In total over the last 12 months the total number of complaints received by the Council has reduced from 1248 to 724 - 42% reduction. This reduction is due to improved management of complaints, the restructures in Resources, an internal review of complaint handling and that wherever possible complaints are dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity – this is why the number of quick response concerns has increased. *(Further explanation of these changes is provided throughout the report)*

Complaint information is shared and monitored by the Council through the central database and a quarterly / annual reporting mechanism to its Strategic Leadership Team and to Cabinet. Directorate Services also report monthly and quarterly at both a Directorate and Service area level and to Directorate Cabinet Members.

Overall 94% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales, compared to 76% (2010/11). This demonstrates a progressive approach to performance management across the Council, leading to year on year improvement. All Directorate leads are targeted to achieve 100% performance.

Headline Results 2011/12

- Number of comments (quick response concerns) increased **30%** from **1457** in 2010/11 to **2095**
- Number of complaints (at all levels) reduced from **1248** to **724** (42% reduction)
 - Complaints for NAS – Housing and Neighbourhood services reduced from **781** to **370** (**52%** decrease)
 - Complaints for Resources reduced from **86** to **44** (**49%** decrease)
 - Complaints for Children and Young Peoples services reduced from **120** to **87** (**27%** decrease)
 - Complaints for Environment and Development services reduced from **148** to **115** (**22%** decrease)
 - Complaints for NAS – Adult services reduced from **113** to **108** (**4%** decrease)
- Total number of complaints (at all stages) upheld increased, **319**, **43%** compared to **380**, **40%** 2010/11.
- Reduction in the number of complaints escalating reduced **40%** from **102** in 2010/11 to **61** (Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2)
- Complaints about quality of service reduced from **286** in 2010/11 to **195**
- Complaints about actions of staff reduced from **222** in 2010/11 to **176**
- Ombudsman average response time was **25.1** days from **14** first enquiries (**25.1** days from **7** first enquiries in 2010/11)
- Total compensation awards made in 2011/10 was **£540**

- External complaint investigation costs in CYPS reduced from **£22,541** in 2010/11 to **£12,592** in 2011/12.
- Savings made in Resources and CPP restructure in respect of complaint team's resources was **£112,391** (staffing costs).

The Directorate complaints team has maintained the recent significant improvements in the following areas:

- Learning from all Complaints to identify service improvements
- Improved performance on enquiries responded to in time
- Reduced the number of complaints received
- Increased the number of comments (quick response concerns) received
- Improving the timeliness of responses to customers
- Improving the quality of responses
- Improving satisfaction of the complaint management process
- Training in complaint handling which is delivered on a rolling programme to all managers.
- Learning from complaints workshops with staff.
- Reduction in the amount of compensation paid.
- Reduction in cost of responding to complaints, reducing cost of external investigators
- Aligned complaint functions – improved sharing of best practice.
- Internal review of complaint handling completed – see **2011/12 Improvement Actions** page 18.

Top complaint issues - complaints received 2011/12

Directorate complaint teams have reported complaint trends around the following areas;

Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

Adult Services

The main areas of complaint in Adult Social Services were regarding the assessment process in older people's services (38% of complaints received) and direct payments (10% of complaints received). These were centred on the outcomes of assessments, delays in the process and lack of information and advice. Changes and restructuring of the assessment teams are expected to reduce the number of complaints received and work to improve information and advice provided at assessment is ongoing. There were also significant numbers of complaints received about direct payments. Direct payment complaints increased in line with an increase in the provision of direct payments but work has also been completed to improve advice available and to clarify Council procedures.

Housing and Neighbourhood Services

The number of complaints has dramatically reduced by 52% in 2011/2. Reductions in complaints have been seen across all services, however, the reduction has been particularly driven by improvements in the repair and maintenance service and contractors performance. The level of complaints in 2010/11 was also skewed upwards by the severe winter and the response to the problems experienced by gas boilers. There is no room for complacency

because repair and maintenance complaints remain the majority of all complaints received by the service. The next highest number of complaints were made against the Housing and Neighbourhood Teams, this area also showed a 41% reduction in complaints in the year.

Resources

Although formal complaints more than halved (52% reduction), it was again Revenues and Benefits (65% of complaints received) and Contact Centre (31% of complaints received) that received the highest number of complaints. These were mainly regarding advice and information provided by staff and individual members of staff making incorrect decisions and providing misinformation. Action was taken with individuals through supervision and HR procedures but also through robust ongoing training and briefing protocols.

Environment and Development Services

The number of official complaints received has reduced by 22% in 2011/12. However this has been met with an extraordinary (66%) increase in customer comments (unofficial complaints). The highest number of complaints received related to Streetpride and were specifically around services delivered by Leisure and Community Services including complaints around litter build up, lack of weed killing and a reduction in grass cutting. In Network Management customer complained about the lack of maintenance of road surfaces and number of pot holes evident across the borough along with complaints relating to re-siting of new street lighting columns without consultation. 41% of complaints received centred around the quality of service received.

Children and Young Peoples Services

Complaints regarding all aspects of children's social care accounted for over 96% of all complaints received by the directorate in 2011/12. The highest number of complaints relate to services provided by the Locality Social Work Teams who collectively received 74% of all Stage 1 complaints, which has reduced from 86.8% in the previous year. Locality Teams deal with the vast majority of people who receive a service and the number of complaints reflects the nature of the social care role and the role of the complaint procedure.

Learning from Complaints

Learning from Complaints discussions with accountable managers to promptly identify service improvements and changes in current practice now take place in respect of all complaints responded to.

Learning outcomes case studies are presented in the Directorate Performance update sections in the shaded text boxes;

Directorate Performance in 2011/12

Neighbourhood and Adult Services

Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate complaints are split into statutory (Adult Services) and non statutory complaints (Housing and Neighbourhood Services). They are usually recorded and reported separately.

However, combined results for the whole Directorate are as follows;

Over the last 12 months the total number of complaints received for Neighbourhood and Adult Services has reduced from 894 in 2010/11 to 478 (53% reduction).

Overall 91% of all complaints were responded to within the timescales, compared to 75% in 2010/11.

- Number of comments increased from **498** to **774**
- Total number of complaints upheld was **233** compared to **205** in 2010/11
- Decrease in the number of complaints escalating :-
- From **81** (2010/11) to **44** for Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2
- **£440** total compensation awards made in 2011/12 (HNS only)

Adult Services

Adult Services Complaints are dealt with under the complaints and representations procedures established through the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 (Making Experiences Count).

Over the last 12 months the total number of complaints received for Adult Social Services has reduced from 113 to 108 (4% reduction).

Overall 100% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales for the third year in a row, compared to 94% (2008/09) and 88% (2007/08). This performance again benchmarks the best against the regional Yorkshire and Humberside Local Authority complaints group based on numbers received (15 Local Authority areas).

Headline Results 2011/12

- Number of comments increased from **73** to **100**
- Number of complaints (at all levels) reduced from **113** to **108**
- Complaints regarding Action of Staff increased from **15** to **23**
- Complaints regarding quality reduced from **29** to **28**
- Complaints regarding Delay reduced from **22** to **13**
- Total number of complaints upheld was **43** compared to **27** in 2010/11

- Increase in the number of complaints escalating :-
 - From **9** (2010/11) to **14** for Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2
- No compensation awards made in 2011/12
- External complaint investigation costs were maintained at zero in 2011/12

The Adult Social Services complaints team has maintained the recent significant improvements in the following areas:

- Reduced the number of complaints received
- Maintained performance at 100%
- Maintained high levels of satisfaction with the complaint process
- Promoting and increasing accessibility of the complaints procedure through the development of the internet, information packs and campaigns in our reception areas.
- Training in complaint handling which is delivered on a rolling programme to all managers.
- Learning from complaints workshops with staff.
- No compensation paid.
- Reduction in cost of responding to complaints, investigations (no external investigators were procured in 2011/12).

Learning from complaints case studies

1

Adult Services

Customer was not happy that they had been provided misleading information about Direct Payment regulations. The customer wanted to employ a family member as their personal assistant.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Taken action to ensure that customers are given accurate information regarding the use Direct Payments to employ close relatives. We have reviewed and updated available information.
- Managers reminded to be certain that information contained in correspondence to customers is checked for accuracy before being sent.

Top complaint issues - complaints received 2011/12

Delays in Assessment process

There has been a significant reduction the number and proportion of complaints received regarding delays in assessment. The reorganisation of the Assessment and Care Management service has streamlined the process by which referrals are received and planned and unplanned reviews take place. There is now a single point of contact for new referrals via Assessment Direct and the intake team focuses on ensuring that initial assessments are completed in a timely manner and that where appropriate planned reviews are arranged within a specific timescale.

Information about services

A significant number of complaints received were from customer's not happy about the availability of information or the accuracy of information they had received. Complaints were received about information not correctly recorded on assessment documents that could potentially impact on the outcome of the assessment. Other complaints were received about out of date information online or in leaflets and advice booklets. As well as advising individual members of staff regarding mistakes we have an ongoing process of reviewing the information

we provide to customers. In addition complaints were received about lack of information available, customers felt that they were not advised about what services were available or were not kept informed following requests for service. We have changed processes for individual services and teams to make sure that customers are kept better informed. We are in the process of reviewing the availability of information about our services, including signposting to information available in our partner organisations.

Direct payments

There was an increase in the number of complaints received that involved Direct Payments. These were regarding delays in the process, lack of or inaccurate information provided about Council direct payments rules. This reflects an increase in the provision of Direct Payments by the Council, however, we have looked at ways to reduce the complaints received by making sure customers are better informed about the Direct Payment process at the time of assessment and by reviewing our internal procedures around direct payments.

New Developments in 2011/12

- There is a continued commitment to putting things right and that enquiries and concerns are dealt with at the earliest opportunity. Again as a result complaints have decreased and comments have increased In 2011/12 Adult Services received 108 complaints and 100 comments. This compares with 113 complaints and 73 comments received in 2010/11.
- Regular feedback sessions to the Director Of Health and Wellbeing has improved accountability, reduced risk and ensured timely service improvements.
- The Ombudsman has published new guidance documents providing advice regarding their new powers to investigate complaints from customers in receipt of self funding care. We have ensured that these documents were distributed to independent providers throughout the borough.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

The Adult Services complaints Team will ensure that all enquiries through the team are dealt with in the best possible way, that any issues of concern are resolved at the earliest possible opportunity and take the opportunity to learn and seek improvements to service.

They will work with management and staff to improve customer care around; information and advice provided to customers and to reduce complaints regarding actions of staff and lack of service.

They will increase the number of learning from complaint issues and work with managers to ensure these lead to real service improvements. They will also ensure that learning issues are referred into the wider service level reviews. They will also develop ways of keeping customers informed of service improvements that were generated by their complaints.

Learning from complaints case studies

2

Adult Services

A customer visiting one of the contact centres was given the wrong information regarding eligibility for a Blue Badge.

In response to their concerns we have;

- We now ensure when changes are made to how we issue documents like Blue Badges, information is updated and all frontline staff are made aware of the information customers will need.
- Changes to Blue Badge applications nationally highlighted a need to ensure that customers are advised to apply for renewals one month before their current Blue Badge runs out. Where a customer has difficulty doing this they will be advised to contact Rothercare Direct for further advice.

Housing and Neighbourhood Services

Housing and Neighbourhood Services' complaints are dealt with under the Council's corporate Complaint's Procedure, Tell Us Your Views.

The figures presented in this summary include the complaints for services previously managed by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. They also include Environmental Health, Business Regulation and the previously retained housing function – for the purpose of this report they will be referred to as Neighbourhood Services.

The combined figures show a significant reduction of complaints over the last 12 months, reducing from 781 to 370- 52 % reduction. The biggest single improvement being the reduction in complaints about the repair and maintenance service.

Overall 89% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales. (Neighbourhood services recorded 100% throughout the year and Housing services maintained 100% performance since January 2012)

Headline Results 2011/12

- Number of complaints (at all levels) reduced from **781 to 370**
- New (stage 1) complaints about the former 2010 Rotherham Ltd managed services fell from by 52% from **616 to 293**
- New complaints about services not previously contracted out to 2010 Rotherham Ltd reduced by 43% from **76 to 43** (Neighbourhood Services)
- The total number of complaints upheld was **190** or **57%**, **178** or **24%** 2010-11.
- The number of complaints escalating from stage 1 to stage 2 to reduced by 58.5% from **72 to 30**
- New complaints about lack of service decreased from **180 to 110** or 39%
- New complaints about delays in service decreased from **266 to 93** or 65%
- New complaints about actions of staff decreased from **80 to 71** or 11%
- New complaints about the quality of service decreased from **116 to 51** or 56%
- New complaints about the lack of information reduced from **21 to 3** or 86%
- New complaints about the cost of the service reduced from **20 to 5** or 75%
- **£440** total compensation awards made in 2011/12

- Number of comments increased from **425** to **674**

The figures which show both improvements in service delivery and case resolution have had a positive impact, with both the number of complaints reducing and the percentage escalating beyond stage 1 dramatically reducing. This suggests the service is putting right what has gone wrong and learning from the customer experience to improve the services.

Top complaint issues - complaints received 2011/12

Improved variation process

A considerable number of customers experienced delays generated or exacerbated by the repairs partners seeking approval from the client for a variation to the contract before starting repair work. The process was reviewed and from the 16th January 2012 a more streamlined service was introduced, contributing to a reduction in the delay in services category of complaint in 2011/2. The improvements included:

- Partners self approving any work outside of price per property which is required to restore "*minimum service*"
- Partners self approving any work outside of price per property which is required to restore "*normal service*" which requires less than one persons – day labour.
- Client approval is deemed to be given unless otherwise authorised within 24 hours.

Improvements to the Standard of Empty Homes

The year also saw a trend of complaints about the standard of empty homes, this in part has been addressed by restructure of the Housing and Neighbourhood Service and the creation of a dedicated Empty Homes Team. A significant improvement adopted by the team following a complaint in December has been the adoption of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to assess and quality check empty homes. It is anticipated this will reduce the number complaints.

Improving how we respond to damp and disrepair

Reports of damp constituted a significant proportion of repair complaints and disrepair claims received in 2011/12. The issues were highlighted to the director who chaired a meeting of managers which resulted in the following improvements being implemented:

- 100% of damp reports are now inspected.
- 100% empty homes to be inspected for damp using a damp meter.
- ITC Reports developed to map all damp reports and inform future preventative investment programmes.
- A revised disrepair process has been implemented with Legal and Democratic Services resulting in a more responsive service for the customer and minimisation of risk for the service.

Learning from complaints case studies

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Housing and Neighbourhood Services

A complaint was received stating the decision letter following a licensing Board decision was inaccurate.

In response to this problem;

- Officers now have access to the rationale behind each board decision and incorporate into the decision letter.

New Developments in 2011/12

- The re-incorporation of 2010 Rotherham Ltd and realignment of the service has provided greater transparency and accountability, this combined with embedding the externalisation of the repair service has resulted in an improved service and greatly reduced level of complaints.
- The re-incorporation of 2010 has released resources to analyse complaints in more detail and target common themes of complaint and then work alongside service managers to share best practice and put things right.
- The volume of repair related complaints has allowed trends to be identified and focused upon the most significant being; loss of heat, delays caused by the repairs variation process, damp and the standard of empty homes.
- Regular feedback sessions to the Director Of Housing and Neighbourhood Services has improved accountability, reduced risk and ensured timely service improvements.
- Reports have been introduced to identify learning from complaints and allowed best practice to be shared.
- Staff learning from complaints workshops have been introduced to allow front line staff a contribution into the service improvement process.

Learning from complaints case studies

4

Housing and Neighbourhood Services

A new tenancy start date was delayed by weeks due to a high security door being damaged and the need to measure and supply a new one.

In response to their concerns we have;

- The contractors now have arrangements to access temporary high security blank doors which can be installed pending the delivery of a standard high security door.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

- Housing and Neighbourhood Services Complaint Officer will continue to assist the service to make service improvements based on the outcomes of the complaints received, and on what our customers have told us are their main concerns.
- Analysis of complaints by service and type will continue to inform service improvements and the corporate complaints teams focus. Trends show that despite the reduction in repair related complaints there are still significant improvements that can be made in areas such as communication with the customer. This means the complaints team will particularly support this area of the service in 2012/3.
- There will be an increased emphasis on improving the accountability of the complaint service in 2012/3 by engaging both staff and customers in complaint based service developments.
- Training will be provided in complaint handling to all investigation managers on an ongoing basis.
- The authority is preparing for changes to Housing (tenancy management and repair) complaints introduced under the Localism Act 2011. From April 2012 complaints will be investigated by the Housing Ombudsman and not the Local Government Ombudsman. It is also considering the introduction of tenant complaint adjudication panels, in line with suggested good practice in the legislation (Localism Act 2012).

Learning from complaints case studies

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Housing and Neighbourhood Services

A new tenancy in a sheltered bungalow was let with a damp problem and level floor trip hazard, resulting in reimbursement and a significant delay in the tenancy starting.

In response to this problem;

- The Empty Homes Team has now issued all surveyors with Damp Meters and provide specifications of work based on their readings.
- The Empty Homes Team has implemented the use of the Housing Health and Rating System for all empty properties which provides a robust template to assess the hazards.

Children and Young People Services

Children and Young People's Services complaints are responded to in accordance to The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

The Service records customers and complaint points as is required under their regulations. **The number of people making complaints has decreased from 120 to 87, which is a 27% decrease.** (422 complaint points were registered).

Overall 91% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales, compared to 61% (2010/11).

Headline Results 2011/12

- Number of people making complaint at Stage 1 has decreased from **115** to **82**
- Reduction in the percentage of complaints which were upheld from **77 (64%)** in 2010/11 to **30 (34%)** in 2011/12
- **30** compliments were received about services.
- External complaint investigation costs reduced from **£22,541** in 2010/11 to **£12,592** in 2011/12.

The Children and Young People's Services Complaints Team has made significant improvements in the following areas:

- Improving the timeliness of responses to customers
- Improving the quality of responses
- Learning from complaints

Top complaint issues - complaints received 2011/12

Inaccuracies and omissions from assessments and reports

The subject of some of the most complex complaints often relates to the contents of assessments and reports produced by social workers. Because of the nature of children's social care, customers are often unhappy with what is written about them in reports and assessments and customers are entitled and encouraged to share their views with the relevant social worker as part of the assessment process.

Complaints about Section 7 Welfare Reports typically result in customers complaining as the reports are usually completed as part of contested private court proceedings between parents in divorce / separation. Customers typically complain as they feel that reports favour one party and are inaccurate or omit facts about the other party in the case.

Training in the completion of Assessment and Section 7 Reports is provided to social workers where training needs are identified. Issues of social work practice are identified through regular supervision with Team Managers and Social Workers.

In some cases where complaints about assessments and reports are upheld inaccuracies and omissions are put right straight away and reports and assessments are amended.

Communication and customer service

Complaints about phone calls not being returned or about customers being unable to contact members of staff still account for a significant proportion of all complaints received. However these types of complaints rarely form the basis of a complaint and tend to be raised supplementary to the customer's main issues which they have complained about.

A significant proportion of complaints are also about the actions, conduct and professionalism of staff while undertaking their duties. Again these types of complaints are usually made supplementary to the main issues which the customer has complained about. These types of complaints particularly refer to verbal comments made by social workers while undertaking their duties and it is acknowledged that in most cases there is little evidence to support or disprove the complaint being made.

From May 2012 issues of practice learning for social workers are fed into workforce development plans through the Practice Improvement Group. These issues of customer care and professionalism when dealing with customers will be addressed through staff training in 2012/13.

Lack of information

A significant number of customers make complaints about not receiving documents on time; or in some cases not receiving documents at all. The documents referred to often relate to Case Conferences, Core Group and Children in Need Meetings.

Customers often complain about not receiving reports on time to enable them to respond to them at meetings; particularly social worker's reports for case conferences. This issue has been reported to the Practice Improvement Group and further work is planned to explore the reasons for delays in submission of information and decision-making around information that is sent out to customers. This work will then lead to service improvements and will address this issue.

Learning from complaints case studies

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Children and Young People services

Customer was not happy that some of the details included in the Initial and Core Assessment were not accurate and they had felt that they had not been able to have their views represented within the assessment.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Changed our practice to now encourage customers to challenge the content of assessments with their social worker as part of the assessment process.
- Have reported the issue to our Practice Improvement Group to contribute to improvements in social work practice through workforce development.

New Developments in 2011/12

- Following the Commissioning Policy and Performance review in 2010 the complaints function for Children and Young People Services is undertaken by the Performance and Quality Team by an identified lead officer.
- Reporting protocols have been reviewed, complaints performance and key issues will be reported on a monthly and quarterly basis to CYPS DLT and SMT meetings.
- Learning from complaint procedures have been refreshed, all complaints are considered for learning.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

Maintain the improvement in performance which has seen 100% of Stage 1 Complaints responded to within statutory timescales since September 2011; by continuing the excellent performance management of complaints.

Reduce the number of complaints dealt with through the formal complaints process by working with teams to take immediate actions to put things right at the earliest opportunity and achieving resolution for our customers.

Improve the timeliness of Stage 2 Complaint responses so that more Stage 2 Complaints are dealt with within statutory timescales through performance management and working closing with the independent investigators.

Focus on improving the quality of complaints responses through the introduction of quarterly quality checks on response letters.

Re-introduce processes to capture the satisfaction of customers with the complaints handling process.

Learn from customers by ensuring that learning issues and actions are identified for all complaints where appropriate; and improve the recording and reporting of comments so that learning issues are identified and implemented.

Improve access to the complaints procedure for children in care by improving information provided to them and opportunities to tell us their views.

Provide training to all managers in complaints investigation and response.

Learning from complaints case studies

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Children and Young People services

A child complained that they were fed up of having lots of different social workers.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Made sure that since the beginning of 2011, all children in long-term care have an allocated social worker in the Looked After Children's Team.

Environment and Development Services

Environment and Development Services' complaints are dealt with under the Council's Corporate Complaint's Procedure, Tell Us Your Views.

Over the last 12 months the total number of complaints received for Environment and Development Services has reduced from 148 to 115 - 22 % reduction.

Overall 97 % of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales.

Headline Results 2011/12

- Number of complaints (at all levels) reduced from **148** to **115**
- Complaints regarding Streetpride **66**
- Complaints regarding Planning, Regeneration & Cultural Services **47**

- Total number of complaints upheld was **39, 45%** compared to **46, 35%** 2010/11
- Reduction in the number of complaints escalating reduced:-
 - From **16** to **12** for Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2
- Complaints about quality of service increased from **39** to **48**
- Complaints about actions of staff reduced from **34** to **32**
- One compensation award made in 2011/12 as part of LGO enquiry
- Number of comments increased from **543** to **902**

Environment and Development Services has maintained the recent significant improvements in the following areas:

- Improving the timeliness of responses to customers
- Improving the quality of responses
- Improving satisfaction of the complaint management process
- Learning from all Complaints to identify service improvements
- Training in complaint handling delivered to new Managers

Learning from complaints case studies

8

Environment and Development Services

A complaint was received relating to a planning application which suggested that the customer couldn't understand from the planning officer's report why a certain recommendation had been made.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Made improvements to the standard of the case officer reports to ensure that specific detail is included within the reports which clearly identifies why a recommendation has been made by the planning officer.

Top complaint issues - complaints received 2011/12

Improved Planning Consultation Process

A considerable number of customers complained that the level of consultation and information provided relating to planning applications via Planning Officer reports wasn't acceptable. A review of the statutory consultation requirements was undertaken along with reviews of case officer reports. The following improvements were implemented:-

More detailed reports produced containing as much information as possible and careful checking of documentation against all objections received with the statutory 21 day consultation period to ensure all details are referenced within the report for determination.

All planning application documents and objections to be made available for public view on the web site as soon as possible after receipt.

Frequently asked questions to be produced for customers relating to enforcement cases.

Most prominent position for planning notification signage identified so that wider consultation takes place.

All objection letters publicised on the website must contain address information of the sender i.e. no anonymous objections will be considered

Cross referencing of Right to Speak for attendance at Planning Board requests takes place with objections received to ensure all objectors have had the opportunity to make representations to Members of the Planning Board.

Improved Access to Household Waste Recycling Facilities for customers that don't own a vehicle

Following a complaint and an LGO investigation relating to the fact that only registered vehicle keepers could receive free entry to our Household Waste Recycling Centres a review of our policy was undertaken. The following improvements were implemented:-

Entry is now allowed on an appointment basis for family members who have access to a vehicle to dispose of domestic waste for relatives that don't have access to a vehicle

Improvements in process undertaken in the siting of new Street lighting Units

A number of complaints were received from customers who had had a new street lighting column positioned in close proximity to their homes without prior consultation. In order to ensure complaints of this nature weren't received in the future the following improvements were implemented:-

The addition of a consultation process has been added to the scheme for the placing of new street lightings columns where they are in a different position to an existing unit. Customers are also provided with contacts details for the Council Officer that is responsible for the scheme so that direct contact can be made should they have any queries.

New Developments in 2011/12

- There has been a greater focus on putting things right, consideration has been given to dealing with the issue of concern at the earliest possible opportunity. This is manifested itself in the reduction of complaints and the increase in the number of comments. In 2011/12 EDS received 115 complaints and 902 comments. This compares with 148 complaints and 543 comments received in 2010/11.
- The team supplies complaints performance information (complaints, comments, MP enquiries, compliments and Freedom of Information Requests) and contributes to Learning from Customers Workshops.

Learning from complaints case studies

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Environment and Development Services

A number of customers complained that new street lighting columns had been erected close to their property without prior consultation.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Reviewed our procedure for dealing with the placement of new columns and introduced a consultation phase to ensure that customer feedback is received prior to works being undertaken to reduce the need to re-site the column following a complaint.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

Environment and Development Services will continue to assist the service to make service improvements based on the outcomes of the complaints received, and on what our customers have told us are their main concerns.

The Directorate lead, based on the trends apparent in 2011/12 will work with management and staff to improve customer care around; information and advice, seek to continue to reduce complaints regarding actions of staff and lack of service. The team will continue to highlight the need for improvements where customers express a concern regarding quality of service.

The recording of comments and concerns will be improved and learning issues will be captured from all feedback and not just formal complaints.

Training will be provided in complaint handling to all managers and senior staff in EDS on an ongoing basis.

Resources

Resources' (former RBT services) complaints are dealt with under the Council's Corporate Complaint's Procedure, Tell Us Your Views.

Over the last 12 months the total number of complaints received for Resources has reduced from 86 to 44 - 52 % reduction.

Overall 100% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales.

Learning from complaints case studies

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Resources

Customer complained, in April 2011 regarding the lack of response from a case opened in June 2010.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Apologised to the customer, this case should have been followed up by making a simple diary entry. Procedures have now been put in place to ensure all staff carry this out.

Headline Results 2011/12

- Number of complaints (at all levels) reduced from **86** to **44**
- Complaints regarding Revenue and Benefits **29**
- Complaints regarding Contact Centre **14**
- Total number of complaints upheld was **17, 38%** compared to **52, 55%** in 2010/11
- Reduction in the number of complaints escalating reduced:-
 - From **3** (2010/11) to **0** Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2
- Complaints about quality of service decreased from **41** to **16**
- Complaints about actions of staff decreased from **48** to **19**
- No compensation awards made in 2011/12

- Number of comments increased from **98** to **178**

Resources maintained the recent significant improvements in the following areas:

- All complaints dealt with in time
- All complaint and comments Quality Assured
- More timely responses to customer enquires
- More learning from all Complaints issues identified

Top complaint issues - complaints received 2011/12

Information and advice

A significant number of complaints were received about information and advice provided. This is reflective of the type of service officered by the Directorate, i.e. from the Customer Service Centres and Contact Centre. Where individuals have found to have provided misinformation or poor and incomplete advice, they have been dealt with on a one to one basis. However, the services will always feedback to their wider team and service areas to ensure errors are not repeated. Issues included customer enquiries not being processed correctly leading to a lack of response or promises made to a customer that was not kept.

Revenue and Benefits

The majority of complaints for the Directorate were received in Revenue and Benefits. These complaints were mostly regarding how people had been dealt with by staff and the advice that they had been provided. Complaints were received around how quickly benefits would be assessed and processed and how housing benefit can be paid – landlord/ tenant. Again in response issues were resolved locally and individuals dealt with but learning and service improvements for the whole service were made.

New Developments in 2011/12

- Launch of a new print on demand leaflet for complaints. To significantly reduce costs and place a greater emphasis on services / outlets resolving complaints at the point of access
- Officer guidance for managing customer complaints / comments
- Revised complaint officer group, new terms of reference and reporting structure.
- Rollout of processes for capturing key learning issues and time / cost recording for complaints

- Concerted effort to deal with all enquiries within 10 days. Remove need for complaint escalations.

Learning from complaints case studies

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Resources

Customer complained that their details had been passed to a third party.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Spoken to the member of staff concerned and issued a reminder to all staff regarding Data Protection and have refreshed information governance training.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

The Resources complaint service is part of the corporate complaint team structure. Resources complaint handling will be a shared responsibility of team.

The improvements and new developments from previous years will be delivered at a significantly reduced cost as part of the new structure.

New Developments in 2011/12

In 2011-12 the Council's complaint service as part of the new Performance and Quality teams in Commissioning Policy and Performance continued to embed the changes and improvements to their operating structures. As expected this led to much improved communication, sharing of best practice and a more joined up approach between the Directorate Complaint Officers. This is evident in the reduction in complaints, improved learning from complaint outcomes and overall reduction in costs, including compensation awards. Performance was also improved and is at its current highest ever level.

The Complaint teams continued to make improvements in complaint handling attempting to reduce unnecessary processes for customers. There is a focus on putting things right, dealing with the issue of concern at the earliest possible opportunity. This is partly why there is an increase in the number of comments recorded, customers are being responded to more effectively and their concern is dealt with quickly and at a lower cost.

The staffing structure of the complaints function also reduced with a greater support role being provided by the Performance and Quality Teams. This means that efficiencies in complaint handling within the teams that were once desirable have become essential and processes were improved to accommodate the reduction in resource.

Teams continued to provide and improve levels of complaint training in some areas, either ad-hoc or part of a rolling programme. The consistency and frequency of training for staff across the Council will be addressed as an improvement action in 2012-13.

Teams continued to improve learning from complaint outcomes and continue to work with services to drive forward improvements to services. Complaints data is recorded better and learning issues contributed to a number of Directorate level service improvements.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

Internal Complaint review

Following the restructures of the Performance and Quality services across the Council, the creation of the Commissioning, Policy and Performance Department and Resources Directorate, we internally reviewed how we can most effectively deal with customer complaints.

The Directorate complaint functions, now part of the new matrix management structure, are all working in an aligned team in one department. This structure allows for a consistent approach to how complaints are dealt with and how they are used to improve services.

However, as shown in the report, although significant improvements in how the Council deals with complaints have already been made and we have already made great progress towards our review recommendations, there are still further improvements that we would like to make. Our review made recommendations of how the new structure could be the mechanism to continue to deliver step change in the following areas:

- Responding to complaints in appropriate timescales so that the customer receives a more timely response to their concerns
- To ensure that there is a consistent, customer focused approach, adopted across the organisation
- Addressing complaint issues quickly and putting things right for the customer at the earliest opportunity, removing internal layers of bureaucracy that may act as a barrier
- Reducing the cost of delivering a complaints service through reducing bureaucracy and getting things right first time
- Learning from customers to improve services and make sure poor customer service is not repeated
- Clarifying roles and increasing accountability through removing duplication throughout the complaint process and current structures
- Improving governance and reporting arrangements to become accountable to members and customers.
- Provide customers with a faster, more effective and streamlined complaints process.
- Putting in place a flexible resource to provide a faster response for customers.
- The Council's complaints service is fit for the future.

Review outcomes

It was clear from the review that complaint staff wanted a new approach to allow them greater ownership in how the Authority deals with complaints. Previously they felt that their views, knowledge, skills were dismissed and overlooked due to complete lack of flexibility in the current system. They felt that the previous system was too prescriptive and did not allow much scope for ideas around service improvement. This led to good practice being put in place at Directorate level, with good learning and service improvements gains, but not been shared across the Authority.

Complaint staff in the Commissioning, Policy and Performance Structure wanted a complaint handling system in place that at the same time as maintaining the objectivity of the complaint procedure, allows them a greater voice and allows them to add value to the experience of the customer and wherever possible provide real outcomes for customers.

The change in structure and the alignment of the Directorate complaint functions in the Commissioning, Policy and Performance department has meant that we have the opportunity to facilitate improvements in complaint performance, a more consistent approach around complaint handling, better value for money and improved learning from complaints, addressing problems with the current complaint handling arrangements.

There are a number of cashable and non-cashable efficiency savings that can be delivered through the implementation of the recommendations through, removing duplication, reducing complaint escalation, revising the current stage 3 process, reducing need for independent investigation and getting things right first time.

The changes should be used as an opportunity to completely refresh the way that complaints are responded to. Under a Putting Things Right approach each complaint should be considered to be an opportunity for service improvement, by doing so this will in turn provide better value and better quality of service for the customer.

The recommendations in the review are expected to continue to deliver;

- Improved performance in complaint handling – an aim to achieve 100% complaints responded to in time and where not this is by extreme exception.
- Reduced costs in investigation and escalation.
- Reduced number of complaints escalating through the complaint procedure (Stage 2 and Stage 3) through an earlier resolution and acceptance of service failure
- Improved customer satisfaction, as evidenced in best practice models that exist across the council.
- Improve the learning and service improvement from complaints
- A better experience for customers making a complaint.