

Annual Report

April 2012 to March 2013

Complaints

Rotherham
Metropolitan
Borough Council 
Where Everyone Matters

Executive Summary

This report provides information about complaints made between **1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013** 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 number of complaints received by the Council is 668 (8% decrease - 724 received 2011-12)

This reduction is due to continued improvements in the management of complaints led by the improvements brought about by the creation of a centralised complaint function in 2012. There is an embedded one Council approach to complaint handling, best practice was brought together and shared and continuous improvement maintained throughout the year. There is better focus on the first response to the complaint, complaints are quality assured before they are sent and review for any learning and service development issues to prevent complaints being repeated.

Overall **98%** of all complaints were responded to within the timescales promised, compared to **94%** (2011/12) and **76%** (2010/11). This continues the Council's progressive approach to performance management, leading to year on year improvement. All Directorate leads are targeted to achieve 100% performance.

Headline Results April 2012 to March 2103

↓	Number of formal complaints (at all levels), 668 , decrease from 2011-12. (724 received 2011-12)
↓	Complaints for Neighbourhoods and Adult Services, 413 decrease from total in 2011-12. (478 received 2011-12)
↑	Complaints for Resources, 69 , increase from total in 2011-12.(44 received 2011-12)
↓	Complaints for Children and Young Peoples services, 76 , decrease from total in 2011-12. (87 received 2011-12)
↓	Complaints for Environment and Development services, 110 , decrease from total in 2011-12. (115 received 2011-12)
↑	Number of Councillor Surgery's received was 572 , increase from 2011-12. (531 received in 2011-12)
↑	98% of complaints were responded to within timescales.
↓	The proportion of complaints (at all stages) upheld, 256, 38% . (319, 43% upheld 2011-12)
↓	The number of complaints escalating, 7%, 48 Stage 1 complaints escalated to Stage 2. (8%, 61 escalated in 2011-12)
↑	Complaints about quality of service, 291 , increase from total in 2011-12.(195 received 2011-12)
↓	Complaints about actions of staff, 138 , decrease from total in 2011-12.(176 received 2011-12)

↓	Ombudsman average response time was 13 days. 30 first enquiries were received. (25.1 from 14 first enquiries in 2011-12). There were no decisions of Maladmistration.
↑	Total compensation awards made, £1433.40 , increase from total in 2011-12.(£540 received 2011-12)
↑	External complaint investigation costs in CYPS, £24,384 , increase from total in 2011-12. (£12,592 in 2011-12)
	Number of compliments recorded by the Complaint Team was 714 .
↓	Number of informal complaints* received, 1206 , decrease from 2011-12.(1457 received 2011-12)

** Please note, informal complaints are defined as contacts by customers who are expressing dissatisfaction but the Council has been previously unaware of the concern and has not had an opportunity to put things right. These complaints have been dealt with and resolved to the customer's satisfaction at this first point of contact and as a result the customer has not wanted to enter formal complaint proceedings. This is done with the agreement of the customer and it means that a large number of enquiries are dealt with much quicker and at less cost to the Council.*

The Directorate complaints team has continued to maintain 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
- Reduced the number of informal complaints received
- Reduced number of complaints escalating through the complaint procedure
- Less complaints upheld
- Reduced the time taken to respond to Ombudsman enquiries.
- Improving the quality of responses
- Has assisted with more Councillor Surgery enquiries

Complaint Trends

The number of complaints received has continued to reduce but the reduction is not as extensive as last year. The improvements in complaint handling introduced in year 2011-12 have been continued this year and is responsible for the continuation of the downward trend in formal complaints and complaints escalating through the complaint procedure. All complaint responses are quality assured before being sent to the customer and all possible remedies are considered to ensure the best response to the complaint.

The Council's budget reductions this year are not really apparent in the formal complaint figures, the majority of the formal complaints received are individual in nature. Some low level quick response complaints were received relating to grass cutting and the changes in housing benefit, but these did not lead to escalating through the formal complaint procedure.

However, it is expected to see this as a more prominent trend this year as more customers are directly affected.

Improved reporting and improved ownership of complaints by individual services can explain the increase in the amount of compensation paid. Typically these small payments are for low level quantifiable costs identified by customers. In some cases we have also awarded for non quantifiable loss such as inconvenience caused.

Complaint investigation costs in Children's Social Services have also increased, although only one more Stage 2 complaint was received compared the last year (6 in 2012-13 and 5 in 2011-12), the complexity and time taken to complete the investigations increased. Also some investigations for the previous year were invoiced and paid for in 2012-13.

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

Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

In Adult Social Services, **88** complaints received, the headline complaint trend was again around changes to care packages and the quality of assessments. Customer's also raised concerns over perceived delays in assessments and the outcome they were seeking, i.e. the level of care offered was not felt sufficient to meet their needs. Other complaints received were regarding Direct Payments (DP's), from customers requesting DP's paid to family members, and as a result of the day services review, customers were very concerned regarding how the review could impact on their care.

In Housing and Neighbourhoods Services, **325** complaints were received, nearly half of all complaints in the period (**156, 48%**) involved the council housing repair service delivered by Contract and Service Development Services and the Repairs Contractors. The most common complaints being about damp, gas boiler/heating issues, delay in repairs and action/attitude of contractors employees. Trends arising from the upheld and partially upheld repairs complaints include issues relating to rainwater goods, roof leaks and damp (Contract and Service Development Team) and missed appointments/Boiler issues (Willmott Dixon Partnership). The next highest volume of complaints (**91, 28%**) were made about services provided by the Housing and Communities Team. The largest number of the complaints being about the actions or attitude of staff, primarily complaints about enforcement actions taken by Housing Champions in relation to anti-social behaviour with almost a quarter being partially or fully upheld. Analysis indicates further guidance on communication skills may help reduce the number of this type of complaint. The Customer Contact Centre was also the subject of a significant number of complaints mainly relating to delays on the phone, with almost all being upheld.

Children and Young Peoples Services

In total **76** formal complaints were received. Complaints were received in relation to communication and customer care issues relating to Children's Safeguarding. Complaints were also raised regarding lack of information about any action taken or delays occurring in information being provided. The number and type of complaints are consistent with those received in previous 6 months.

Another consistent trend is the number of comments received relating to schools. Although subject to direct referral to the school in question, these require appropriate signposting and some advocacy work by the Complaints Team. Again numbers remain constant; however

there are always parents who require re-assurance their concerns will be dealt with properly by the school in question. The team also provided support and guidance to staff in schools in relation to the complaints process.

Environment and Development Services

In total **110** complaints were received. The highest number of complaints received related to Streetpride Services and were specifically around services delivered by Network Management where customer's complained about the content of standard letters, lack of maintenance of road surfaces and number of pot holes evident across the borough along with lack of feedback received from Streetpride Connect contacts. Complaints were also received relating to Waste Management and problems being experienced with Waste Collections crew re-siting bins in the wrong location and assisted collections being missed.

Resources

In total **69** complaints were received. The Revenues and Benefits Service and Local Taxation received the highest number of complaints. These were mainly regarding advice and information provided by staff.

Directorate Performance in 2012/13

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;

The total number of complaints received for Neighbourhood and Adult Services was 413 (Total received in 2011/12 – 478)

Overall 100% of all complaints were responded to within the timescales, compared to 91% in 2011/12.

↓	Total number of complaints upheld was 177 . (233 in 2011/12)
↓	Number of complaints escalating :- 25 Stage 1 complaints escalated to Stage 2. (44 in 2011/12)
↑	£1240 compensation payments. (£440 in 2011/12)
	Number of Councillor Surgery's received was 261 .
	Number of Compliments received was 450 .
↓	Number of informal complaints 377 . (774 in 2011/12)

Adult Services

Adult Services Complaints are dealt with under a separate complaint procedure, 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 was 88 (Total received in 2011-12 - 108)

Overall 100% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales. 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 2012/13

↓	Number of complaints, 88 , decrease from 108 received 2011-12.
↓	The proportion of complaints (at all stages) upheld, 16 , decrease from 43 upheld in 2011-12.
↓	The number of complaints escalating, 12% , 9 Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2, from 75 Stage 1 complaints. Decrease from 15% in 2011/12. (14 Stage 2 complaints and 90 Stage 1 complaints)
↑	Complaints about quality of service, 52 , increase from 28 received in 2011/12.
↔	Complaints about actions of staff 23 , remains the same as 23 in 2011/12.
↑	Ombudsman average response time was 20 days from 3 first enquiries
↔	Total compensation awards made, £0
↑	External complaint investigation costs, £2,345.01
	Number of Councillor Surgery's received was 15
	Number of Compliments received was 147
↓	Number of informal complaints received, 40 , decrease from 100 received 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
- Reduced the number of complaints escalating through the complaint procedure
- 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, SMS, information packs and campaigns in our reception areas.
- Learning from complaints – all complaints interrogated for learning.
- No compensation paid.

Top complaint issues

Assessment and Care management

The highest number of complaints received was regarding assessment outcomes. Customer's complained if they felt that the level of care was not adequate to meet their needs or the needs of a family member. The response to these complaints was to review the assessment provided and to provide assurances about the care provided. Complaints were received relating to both community and residential care provision.

Some complaints were regarding delays in assessment and about information and advice provided. Although these complaints were low in number and based on individual circumstances, services still considered the issues raised for learning and service improvement. Issues were raised with staff at team meetings and documentation was changed and improved.

Direct payments

The trend from 2011/12 continued into 2012/13 with more complaints relating to the request and provision of direct payments. In general this reflects the increase number of customers in receipt of direct payment and an increase in demand. Learning in this area was centred around making information and advice as clear as possible to customers and making sure that Council procedures regarding eligibility were streamlined and that all key staff are fully aware.

Financial Assessment

Complaints around the financial assessment procedure also maintained at a relatively high level. These were regarding information and advice provided. Some customers complained about a lack of information about care charges, that they were not made aware of the potential cost of care at assessment. Learning from this we have continued to strengthen the provision of information about the financial assessment process at assessment.

Councillor Surgeries 2012/3

Only **15** Councillor Surgery's enquiries were received regarding Adult Social Care services. The majority were requests for Occupational Therapy assessments or chasing up equipment following assessment. Other requests were received asking for Social care assessments to be completed. These were all directed to appropriate channels and the request completed.

Compliments 2012/13

147 compliments were received regarding Adult Social Care services, some examples are as follows;

Compliment for **Enabling Service** "I would like to say that during the recent bad weather the staff were brilliant in getting to me. Thank you very much"

Compliment for **Ms D Peters, Community Occupational Therapy Service** "she was excellent in giving me all the information and equipment which is very helpful for my condition".

Compliment for **Adult Care Management, Antonia Lees** “she is a true professional, very caring and explained matter at great length”

Compliment for **Helen Sanders, Social Services Officer, Assessment Team** “Care package Helen organised has been brilliant”

Housing and Neighbourhood Services

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

There was a **12%** reduction in the number of complaints in the period. The decline in complaints suggests the service is putting right what has gone wrong and learning from the customer experience to improve services. At the same time there has been a **47%** reduction of complaints progressing to stage two, this appears to reflect improved investigation of complaints and communication skills.

100% of complaints were responded to within the target timescales compared to **89%** in 2011/12.

Headline Results 2012/13

↓	Number of complaints (at all levels) was 325 , 12% reduction on the 370 received in 2011/12.
↓	305 New (stage 1) complaints were received, 9% reduction on the 336 received in 2011/12.
↓	The total number of complaints fully upheld was 161 , 15% reduction on the 190 received in 2011/2
↓	16 complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 or equivalent to a 47% reduction on the 30 received in 2011/12
↓	Complaints about lack of service decreased from 110 in of 2011/12 to 85 a 23 % reduction
↓	Complaints about delays in service decreased from 93 in 2011/12 to 48 a 48% reduction
↑	Complaints about actions of staff increased by one from 71 in the in 2011/12 to 72 in 2012/13
↑	There were 92 new complaints about the quality of service, 45 % increase on the 51 received in 2011/12.
↑	There were 6 complaints about the lack of information compared to 3 in 2011/12
↑	There were 2 complaints about the cost of the service compared to 1 in 2011/12.
↑	£1,240 compensation awards made.
↓	No Ombudsman investigations were received
	Number of Service Requests received was 300
	Number of Councillor Surgery’s received was 246
	Number of Compliments received was 303
↓	337 informal complaints were received in the period, representing a significant reduction on the 674 received in 2011/12

Top complaint issues

First Contact Team Complaints

It is critical that the service's access channels provide excellent customer service if the Council is to achieve its aim of becoming the best housing provider in the country. The First Contact Team experienced an unacceptable rate of abandoned calls in the period causing distress and inconvenience to customers. In response to this problem Housing and Neighbourhood Services took the following steps;

- Housing Champions were introduced into the team on a temporary basis to ensure sufficient resources to meet demand. The move has also supported the team by providing a greater depth of knowledge allowing enquiries to be answered first time.
- Neighbourhood and Housing Services conducted a Housing Access Review in the period. In October Cabinet agreed to implement the review findings to create an integrated call centre merging the First Contact Team, Corporate Call Centre and Rothercare, creating a 24 hour telephone access channel via a single number. Implementation of the review commenced for the start of 2013/4. Implementation of the Housing Access Review will improve customer choice and improve efficiency as web based self help routes are implemented.

The wider impact of the Housing Access Review will not be fully met until 2013/14 and the implementation of CIVICA but complaints of telephone delays had dramatically reduced by the end of the year.

Roofing/Rainwater Goods

The period has seen a trend of complaints about leaking roofs and rainwater goods, this appears to reflect past investment decisions about external enveloping of Council dwellings. A particular issue has been the number of complaints involving delays caused by the need to erect scaffolding. The need for scaffolding has also had a significant impact on the HRA because it has resulted in considerable variation costs. This is particularly an issue when scaffolding is required to deal with problems associated with three storey flats.

The service recognises the need for a clear capital strategy to address external envelope works. Capital and revenue programmes are being developed for the coming years although there is no short term solution because a 5-10 year programme may be required. High costs and repair histories are targeting and driving the programmes resources, this means in the last quarter of 2012/3 over two thirds of the flats in the Rockingham area will be reroofed, with the remainder due to be completed in 2013/4.

The wider impact of the strategy will take some time before it is completed but the targeted approach based on repair history will begin to have a positive affect on complaints in 2013/4 onwards.

Appointments

The number of complaints about the Willmott Dixon Partnership (WDP) significantly reduced in the period. However, there were a number of upheld complaints relating to missed appointments mostly caused by operatives running over time on the previous job. This appears to be linked to the Contractors use of Opti-time automated work allocation system rather than the use of work planners as used by Morrison Facility Services. One benefit of

using planners to allocate work to operatives is that it appears more customer friendly and the planner can intervene and phone the customer where the operative is running late.

The Contract and Service Development Team have been working closely with WDP to minimise the problem and during quarter one of 2013/4 its is planned for commence a three month pilot with the WDP to stop using the work allocation system for gas, 4 hour and 24 hour repairs and thereafter stop using it for all responsive repairs. An alternative work planning system will be used.

The Council and WDP have also introduced resources between 5.00PM and 8.00PM to contact customers and confirm and arrange appointments to minimise the number of aborted visits. It is envisaged the course of action taken will minimise avoidable abortive calls and contribute to a reduction of the total number of complaints.

Councillor Surgeries 2012/3

Service Area	Number of Surgeries
Contract & Service Development	87
Housing & Communities	77
Housing Options	59
Safer Neighbourhoods	17
Strategic Housing Services	5
Business regulation	1
Total	246

246 Councillor enquiries were received in the year, the vast majority being related to services received by existing or perspective council tenants. Repair issues (**87**) were the subject of the largest number of enquiries with damp (**8**), leaks (**7**), gutters (**7**) and footpaths (**6**) being the most common issues raised. Second in order of number of enquiries received were those made to the Housing and Communities service area (**77**) the dominant issues being raised were ASB/nuisance (**17**) and grounds maintenance related (**17**) . A further **9** enquiries about ASB/Nuisance related issues were also referred to the Safer Neighbourhoods service area.

The Housing Options service received the next highest number of enquires with almost all relating to customers request for re-housing.

Compliments 2012/13

303 compliments were received regarding Housing and Neighbourhood services, some examples are as follows;

Compliment for **Community Protection** “Thanks so much for your support and for your colleagues' involvement in leafleting and engagement which is still going on.”

Compliment for **Catherine Palmowski, Housing and Communities** “Wanting to thank Catherine for all the work she has put in to remedy the tree problem that has been ongoing over the last 2 years”

Compliment for **Terry Quinn, Housing and communities**” Terry Quinn and others were great with dealing with our problems”

Compliment for **Barry Senior, Ian Smith Key Choices Property Shop, empty homes**” A thank you for your kindness, advice consideration, sympathy, made are difficult situation easier“

Learning from complaints case studies

Housing and Neighbourhood Services

1. A customer registering an application for a garage and complained he had not received any notification whether he was registered on the garage waiting list.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Improved our reporting system which means when an applicant is registered on the garage waiting list it automatically generates an application number and acknowledgement letter confirming registration number along with the customer's areas of choice.

2. A new tenant complained about an asbestos garage, the garage should have been removed prior to letting. The complaint raised the issue of new lettings and the notification of asbestos.

In response to this problem;

- A report was designed to extract information from APEX and put it into a standard easy to read letter for new tenants identifying the type and location and level of risk of asbestos in each room.
- An easy to read advice leaflet was designed to reassure customers.
- The allocation process was amended and training given to allocation officers to advise prospective tenants of the presence of asbestos.

3. A resident complained about the impact of an overgrown regeneration site on their home. The complaint revealed the Strategic Housing Investment Team had no budget for the maintenance of such sites.

In response we have;

- Created a budget of £10,000 to maintain sites awaiting development.

4. A customer complained about a delay in resolving a problem with communal lighting in flats. The problem was in part caused by an issue with accessing keys. Similar issues have been experience by cleaners when cupboards have been broken into and locks changed.

In response to their concerns we are;

- Replacing all communal facility cupboards with key pads to avoid future delays.

5. Customer was concerned that the Assessment Direct hold message was difficult to hear and this could be a problem for other customers who were hard of hearing.

In response we have;

Reviewed the message and slowed it down making it easier to hear.

6. It was felt that there was a lack of clear advice provided to customers in respect of eligibility for Direct Payments

In response to their concerns we have;

- A clear Direct Payment policy is being written down and circulated to all relevant staff. In order to improve the information and advice provided to customers.

New Developments during 2012/3

- There is a continued commitment to putting things right and that enquiries and concerns are dealt with at the earliest opportunity. This has again seen a reduction in the number of complaints received.
- Improvement in learning from complaints; all complaints are reviewed by the complaint team and opportunity for learning and improvement is discussed with the investigating manager. All learning outcomes are reported to Directorate management team.
- The Key Choices website has been reviewed and redesigned to improve the accessibility of the service. Issues with the site were forcing customers to log simple service requests via the Councils Complaints web page rather than direct to the Key Choices Team. This change resulted in a more immediate service for the customer and improved the efficiency of the service.
- Weekly feedback sessions to the Director Of Housing and Neighbourhood Services has improved accountability, reduced risk and ensured timely service improvements.
- In June staff learning from complaints workshops was held engaging front line staff in the service improvement process.

2013/14 Improvement Actions

- Continue to work with managers and staff around learning and improvement, roll out staff workshops and training. To learn from complaints and improve customer satisfaction with how we respond to complaints.
- Information and advice relating to Adult Services complaints will be reviewed and refreshed. This will include all potential access channels, both online and through assessment channels.
- Maintain improvements in the complaint handling; continue to reduce the numbers of complaints received and to reduce the number of complaints escalating through the complaint procedure.
- Analysis of complaints by service and type will continue to inform service improvements and the corporate complaints teams focus. The Service will monitor the implementation of improvement plans generated by individual complaints.
- Training will be provided in complaint handling to all investigation managers on an ongoing basis. This will include supporting the Housing Access Review by providing complaints handling training to officers in the integrated call handling centre.
- Focus on improving the quality of Stage 1 complaint investigation and responses to drive service improvements and customer satisfaction.
- The Performance and Quality Unit will work closely with the CIVICA implementation manager to ensure the complaints investigation maximises the opportunities offered by the implementation of CIVICA.
- Changes to Housing (tenancy management and repair) complaints introduced under the Localism Act 2011. From April 2013 complaints are investigated by the Housing Ombudsman and not the Local Government Ombudsman. The outcome from the changes is that we will have a new two stage complaint procedure for housing complaints that accommodates the new right of the tenant to refer the complaint to their local MP, Councillor or tenant complaint panel.

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 complaints was 76, (87 in 2011/12)

Overall 84% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales, compared to 91% (2011/12).

Headline Results 2012-13

↓	Number of school complaint enquiries, 82 . Decreased from 161 in 2011-12
↑	Number of enquiries from MPs, 23 . Increased from 13 in 2011-12.
↑	Number of enquiries from Local Government Ombudsman, 14 . Increased from 7 in 2011-12. Average response time was 14 days.
↓	Number of complaints at all levels, 76 . Decreased from 87 in 2011-12
↓	Number of Stage 1 complaints, 68 . Decreased from 82 in 2011-12.
↑	Number of Stage 2 complaints, 6 . Increased from 5 in 2011-12.
↑	Number of Stage 3 complaints, 2 . Increased from 0 in 2011-12.
↑	Number of complaints escalating from Stage 1 to Stage 2, 6, 9% . Increased from 5, 6% in 2011-12.
↑	Number of complaints upheld at all levels, 17, 38% . Increased from 16% in 2011/12.
↓	Percentage of complaints at all levels responded to in timescales, 83% . Decreased from 91% in 2011-12
↑	External complaint investigation costs, £22,039 . Increased from £12,592 in 2011-12.
↔	Number of Councillor Surgery enquiries 2
↓	Number of compliments received about services, 31 . Decreased from 43 in 2011-12.
↓	Number of informal complaints received, 119 . Decreased from 241 in 2011-12.

Learning from complaints case studies - Children and Young People services

1. Customer complained to the Local Government Ombudsman that the School Admissions Appeals process had not been conducted effectively and this had led to their appeal regarding their child's school place being not upheld.

The Local Government Ombudsman concluded that there was an administrative fault in the way that the Appeal Panel carried out the Appeal and the way in which the Council applied the School Admissions Appeal Code and this had resulted in an injustice for the customer.

A new Appeal Panel was offered which remedied the injustice.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Made changes to the wording of the Appeal Panel's Decision Letter to clarify the reasons for the Panel's decision.
- The Local Authority also amended its statements supplied on behalf of the Admissions Authority to include further information.
- As a result we have addressed the administrative fault and demonstrated the School Admissions Appeal Code being correctly applied; which has led to no further findings of fault.

2. Customer complained about the way in which their personal information had been shared with a third party without their consent.

Although this complaint was not upheld, concerns were raised by the Team Manager over the guidance available to staff regarding procedures for sharing of information.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Revisited our Safeguarding Procedures to ensure that relevant guidance is provided.
- We have held workshops with staff across all social care team to provide advice and guidance to social workers about data protection and sharing of information.

Top complaint issues

Content and timeliness of assessments and reports

The most common types of assessments and reports which form the subject of complaints are Initial and Core Assessments, case conference reports; and Section 7 Welfare Reports.

- Customers unhappy with what is written about them in reports and assessments
- Customers are entitled and encouraged to share their views with the relevant social worker as part of the assessment and child in need or child protection process.
- Customers' views can be recorded in the appropriate section of the assessment.

Complaints about Section 7 Welfare Reports typically result in customer complaints 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.

Communication and Customer Service

Complaints about phone calls not being returned or customers being unable to contact members of staff account for a significant proportion of all complaints received, particularly in relation to Children's Social care. These types of complaints rarely form the basis of a complaint. Tend to be raised supplementary to the customer's main issues which they have complained about.

Cancellation of appointments or visits at short notice. Acknowledged that this issue arises from the significant demands on social workers time and often the immediate need to respond to emergency matters that may arise.

Application of criteria for accessing services. Particularly in relation to Children's Disability Service and Child in Need Assessment.

Actions, Conduct and Professionalism of Staff

Complaints are usually made supplementary to the main issues which the customer has complained about.

Particularly refer to verbal informal complaints or conduct 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.

School Admissions

A formal appeals process exists for school admissions. Where parents are unhappy with outcome of a School Admission Appeal then they may approach the Local Government Ombudsman if they feel that the appeal was not conducted properly.

There has been an increase in the number of parents complaining to the Local Government Ombudsman about School Admission Appeals in 2012-13. This should be considered in the context of a **65%** increase (**448** to **688**) in the number of school admission appeal panels taking place in 2012-13.

School Complaints

School complaints cover a diverse range of issues which include:

- Bullying by pupils
- Actions, conduct and professionalism of the head teacher and other school staff
- Complaints from parents of pupils who have been excluded from school
- Pupil attendance issues
- School uniform issues
- Examination issues

Councillor Surgeries 2012/3

Only **2** Councillor Surgeries enquiries were received regarding Children's Social Care services. They were both relating to concerns raised by parents about their child's school. One was referred directly to the school to respond to (regarding the alleged victimisation of the child by the school) and one was dealt with by the Council's Learning support service in conjunction with the school. (Regarding mixed age group classes)

Compliments 2012/13

31 compliments were received regarding Children's Social Care services, some examples are as follows;

'I am much happier where I am living now' – Compliment from **child recently placed in foster family**.

'Very impressed by the staff at Silverwood who cannot do enough for them. They are professional in the way they work and will go the extra mile and always give them time even when busy' They said that on occasions they have rung and could hear that things were happening in the background and even if they said we will ring you back the staff declined this and gave them time to discuss things with them' – compliment from **foster carers about staff at Children's Home**.

'You are brilliant, superb with J - you talk naturally to him and he is so comfortable with you that he is able to talk easily to you'. 'You have established a great relationship with him and that you are always totally honest with him.' – Compliment from **foster carers about social worker**.

Rotherham area were super for fostering and if she had any problems there was always somebody there to help her. State she was very pleased with the service provided as the others in the Fostering Dept. Said she had been fostering for eleven years and it was a brilliant service. Wanted to give credit where it was due. – Compliment from **foster carer about the Fostering Service**.

New Developments 2012/13

- Introduction of a new reporting framework including monthly reporting to Safeguarding Children and Families Management Team and quarterly reporting to the Performance and Quality Sub-Group of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- Development of budget monitoring process to ensure that all expenditure on Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints is regularly validated and reported.
- Business Process Review undertaken in relation to Stage 2 Complaint processes.
- Started work with disabled children to improve access to the complaints procedure by producing complaints information in accessible formats.
- Improvement in the published information about school complaints and introduction of email referral process for all school complaints so that complaints are quickly redirected to schools.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

- Re-focus on performance management of complaints at all stages.
- Review the process for dealing with enquiries from local MPs to ensure that recording is consistent and not duplicated.
- Continue to 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.
- Work with managers through consultation and provide training to all managers in complaints investigation, response and resolution at Stage 1; to improve the quality and effectiveness of Stage 1 complaints process.
- Focus on improving the quality of complaints responses through the introduction of quality checks on response letters.
- Address the outcomes of the business process review of the Stage 2 Complaints process to improve the timeliness and quality of Stage 2 Complaint response.
- Learn from customers by ensuring that learning issues and actions are identified for all complaints where appropriate; and improve the recording and reporting of informal complaints so that learning issues are identified and implemented.
- Re-introduce processes to capture the satisfaction of customers with the complaints handling process.
- Improve access to the complaints procedure for children in care and children with disabilities by improving information provided to them and opportunities to tell us their views.

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 was 110. This represents a slight decrease over the last year from **115** to **110**. However **578** informal complaints have also been received.

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

Headline Results 2012/13

↓	Number of complaints (at all levels) reduced from 115 in 2011/2012 to 110 .
↑	Complaints regarding Streetpride 64, 58% (2011/2012, 66, 57%)
↑	Complaints regarding Planning, Regeneration & Cultural Services 46, 42% (2011/2012, 47, 41%)
↓	Total number of complaints upheld was 42, 38% (2011/2012, 39, 45%)
↑	A slight increase in the number of complaints escalating has been seen:- From 12 in 2011/12 to 14 for Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2 in 2012/13.
↑	Complaints about quality of service increased to 67, 61% (2011/2012, 48, 42%)
↓	Complaints about actions of staff reduced to 14, 13% (2011/2012, 32, 28%)
	Three compensation awards were made, in total £93.40

	Ombudsman average response time was 10 days from 12 first enquiries
	Number of Councillor Surgery's received was 303 .
	Number of Compliments received was 224 . The majority of compliments received related to the high level of winter maintenance offered.
↓	Number of informal complaints decreased to 578

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 to customers
- Improving satisfaction of the complaint management process
- Learning from all Complaints to identify service improvements

Learning from complaints case studies - Environment and Development Services

1. A customer complained that a lack of direct consultation regarding the receipt of a planning application had meant that he had not had an opportunity to object to the application.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Apologised to the customer for not contacting his property directly and identified that additional public notices should have been erected on both sides of the road to allow greater consultation. However, it was considered that the objections put forward by the customer would not have changed the decision on the application when determined.

2. A customer complained that a visit to Thrybergh Country Park was unsatisfactory due to the toilet/shower facilities being out of order for the duration of the stay and the disabled toilet facility also being out of use

In response to their concerns we have;

- Apologised to the customer and offered a payment as a goodwill gesture.

Top complaint issues

Streetpride

The highest number of complaints received related to Streetpride Services and were specifically around services delivered by Network Management e.g. perceived lack of road maintenance.

Waste Management received complaints specifically around re-siting of bins once collected and pre-authorised visits to Household Waste Recycling Centres not being honoured.

Complaints were also received for the Home to School Transport Service concerning a users entitlement to transport provision being questioned when specific issues of where consideration to removal of facility were not evident within the Post 16 Transport Policy.

Planning, Regeneration and Cultural Services

Complaints were received around the consultation process undertaken and the suggestion that informal complaints supplied by a Parish Council should have been treated as a formal objection.

Complaints were also received relating to advice offered by Customer Service Advisers in a number of Customer Service Centres along with delays experienced by customers waiting to see a Customer Service Adviser.

Councillor Surgeries 2012/3

303 enquiries were received

Service Area	Number of Surgeries
Network Management	113
Leisure & Community Delivery	132
Waste Management	16
Highways Design and Transportation	29
Regeneration	1
Customer & Cultural Services	1
Planning	1
Total	303

303 Councillor enquiries were received in the year, the vast majority being related to services delivered by Network Management and Leisure and Community Services. Issues relating to Litter, Bins, Fly Tipping (**132**) were the subject of the largest number of enquiries. Second in order of number of enquiries received were those made to the Network Management service area (**113**) the dominant issues being raised were around potholes, street furniture and street lighting. Highways Design and Transportation received enquiries (**29**) relating to road design, speeding vehicles and parking enforcement whilst Waste Management received (**16**) enquiries relating to cardboard collection and waste collection in general.

Compliments 2012/13

224 compliments were received regarding EDS, some examples are as follows;

Compliment received for Drainage Team, Network Management, Streetpride relating to the efficient service received when requesting septic tank emptying

Compliment received relating to contact with members of staff in Streetpride particularly Jane Donaldson, Ian Hall and Peter Moorehouse.

Compliment for Network Management relating to the speedy clearing of a bridleway and service received from Alex Cousins and Richard Pett.

Compliment received quality of service received for work on a footpath connecting Anston Village and Greenlands School.

New Developments 2012/13

- EDS Directorate Management Team receives monthly exception reports which identify all new customer complaints received along with service improvement opportunities to reduce the likelihood of similar complaints being received in the future.

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

Resources

Resources 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 was 69. This represents an increase over the last year from **44** to **69**. However **142** customer informal complaints have also been received.

The Revenues and Benefits Service and Local Taxation received the highest number of complaints. These were mainly regarding advice and information provided by staff. **61%** of complaints received were around the quality of service received.

Overall 93% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales.

Headline Results 2012/13

↑	Number of complaints (at all levels) was 69 , increase from 12 month total in 2011-12 – 44, 64% .
↑	Total number of complaints upheld was 20, 29% compared to 17, 38% (12 month total) in 2011/12.
↑	Increase in the number of complaints escalating:- From 0 in 2011/12 to 3 for Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2 in 2012/13.
↑	Complaints about quality of service was 42, 61% (2011/2012, 16, 23%)
↑	Complaints about actions of staff was 8, 11% (2011/2012, 19, 27%)
↑	1 compensation award made of £100 , (2011/2102 nil)
	Ombudsman average response time was 25 days from 1 first enquiry
	Number of Councillor Surgery's received was 16 .
	Number of Compliments received was 9 .
↓	Number of informal complaints was 132, decrease from 12 month total in 2011-12 – 178 .

Resources maintained the recent significant improvements in the following areas:

- All complaint and informal complaints quality assured
- More timely responses to customer enquires
- More learning from all complaints issues identified

Learning from complaints case studies – Resources

1. A customer complained that the Council held wrong data about her on the Benefits System. This had lead to the DWP being advised that she had died and the information being passed to her husband during a telephone conversation.

In response to their concerns we have;

- Provided the customer with an apology
- Staff were reminded to check before divulging sensitive data to customers to ensure they are speaking to the correct person before proceeding with a call to validate information held on the Benefits System

2. A customer complained that a security breach had occurred which had potentially lead to personal bank details being shared with council creditors

In response to their concerns we;

- Apologised to the customer
- Investigated and rectified the IT failure which led to the error
- Paid £100 as a goodwill gesture

Top complaint issues

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 delays in processing benefit applications. Issues were resolved locally and individuals dealt with but learning and service improvements for the whole service were made.

Councillor Surgeries 2012/3

Only **16** Councillor Surgery enquiries were received in the year, the vast majority being related to services delivered by Asset Management and Local Taxation. Issues relating to Asset Management (**9**) were the subject of the largest number of enquiries then Local Taxation area (**4**). The types of enquiries received related to way customers were affected by changes in legislation relating to housing benefit and local taxation. Assessment management received enquiries relating to the maintenance of Council buildings.

Compliments 2012/13

15 compliments were received regarding Resources some examples are as follows;

Compliment for Registrars, customer thanked them for sending out her birth certificate, she was very impressed and wished to pass on her thanks to everyone.

Compliment for Town Hall team. "Having visited the Town Hall Saturday 2nd June 2012 we were shown around by Mrs Tracy Maycock. I would like to express our thanks for her enthusiasm and information during our enjoyable visit. We really enjoyed the D.V.D. presentation of 1950s Rotherham."

Compliment for RiDO and Asset Management service. "I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the property team which has helped me to get my business up and running with very few snags along the way. You and Marcus Rudkin will be the first port of call if Mr Snax expands further in Rotherham."

Compliment for Registrars. "We had our wedding at Rotherham Town Hall on 2 June. We just wanted to say thanks for an absolutely fantastic service; we were both put at ease and really enjoyed every part of the ceremony. Thank you for such a professional and friendly service."

New Developments 2012/13

- Improved quality assurance process for all responses. Complaints Team supporting managers to check 100% of response letters.
- Improved complaint investigations and responses, all investigating managers will make direct contact with the customer before responding to the complaint.
- Improved learning and service improvements from complaints, 100% of complaints considered for potential learning.

2012/13 Improvement Actions

- Revised training programme for investigating managers, bespoke training to be developed incorporating discussions around learning from complaints.
- Strategy developed to respond to a potential increase in complaints following changes to welfare system. Strategy to include training for staff on how to best to prevent customer contacts entering the complaint system.

New Developments in 2012/13

The Complaint team 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. Customers are being responded to more effectively and their concern is dealt with quickly and at a lower cost.

Following the Internal Complaint review in 2011, we have continued to deliver on its recommendations;

- Improved performance in complaint handling – an aim to achieve 100% complaints responded to in time and where not this is by extreme exception.
- 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.

In addition, the following actions have been completed and embedded in 2012/13;

- Corporate functions of complaint management into the Performance and Quality Teams within current Commissioning, Policy and Performance Structure.
- Procedures have been strengthened for all for complaints to be dealt with and resolved at the earliest opportunity. Informal complaints and right first time protocols
- Improved process for filtering out service requests (received by Complaint Team) at point of contact so that they are dealt with promptly for the customer.
- Absorbed Chief Executive complaints' handling within the Performance and Quality structure.
- Performance and Quality Managers now perform the strategic corporate overview role for complaints.
- Strengthened the approach to learning from complaints at service manager level.
- Improvements in the management of Local Government Ombudsman enquiries, improving the process, shortening the response time and reviewing the outcome of all enquiries to identify wider council improvement.
- Decision implemented to direct complaints around the schools admissions appeals process to Local Government Ombudsman.
- Reviewed the complaints database to ensure it provides value for money and it is fit for purpose.
- Removed the need for secondary complaints monitoring systems. One system now in operation.
Introduced a new customer complaint channel, complaints can be made by text.
- New streamlined, print on demand, customer complaint literature.
- Redesigned and updated complaint web page

Finally working with Self Regulation Select Commission we have;

- Improved sharing best practice in complaint handling between Directorates.
- Clarified how complaints are recorded classified, removing the classification of "comment".
- All Councillor Surgeries are now administrated by the Complaint Team
- Improved reporting and response to school complaint enquiries

2013/14 Improvement Actions

The following improvement actions are ongoing into year 2013/14;

- Review statutory responsibilities for Children's and Adult Social Care and revise structures accordingly in line with legislative guidance and best practice
- Put in place a consistent training programme for all investigating officers and Members.
- Develop an online mandatory complaints handling training package for all staff and managers.

- Strengthen guidance and training around apologising and early resolution to reduce complaints time and costs and ensure that this is embedded into general customer service at front end.
- Review the commissioning of independent investigator and independent person at Stage 2 to reduce costs.
- Publish performance with regards to complaints to customers including learning and improved outcomes.
- Review the handling of school complaints
- Introduce new complaint procedure for Housing to accommodate requirements in complaint handling due to the Localism Act 2011.
- Accommodate complaints received from Public Health services