

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS MONITORING REPORT ANNUAL REPORT 2005/06 (PERIOD 01.05.05 TO 31.03.06)

Summary

The corporate complaints procedure has now been in place for almost a year and is working well. The current CRM system has limitations but most of the day-to-day problems have been overcome. The replacement CRM will address those limitations.

We received 312 complaints during the period which equates to just over 28 per month, the vast majority of which (93%) were dealt with at stage 1.

Just over half (55%) of the complaints were fully or partly justified. This may seem high but it also indicates that we are admitting our mistakes early in the complaints process and, providing we implement the lessons learnt and prevent the same type of complaints occurring again, this is in accordance with the aims of the complaints process and can be viewed as positive.

38% of responses were not sent within the target time, which indicates that this is an area that needs improvement. This is also highlighted in the Annual Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman where their target time is 28 days and our average response time was 36 days.

The two services which received the most complaints were Housing (nearly 28% of corporate total) and Leisure & Environment (just under 37% of corporate total). The two service types which received the most complaints were refuse/recycling (31% of corporate total) and housing maintenance (13% of corporate total).

The Annual Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman was generally positive with a significant reduction in the overall number of complaints he received and in the number of premature complaints.

A corporate remedies policy was adopted and delegated powers given to Directors recently which includes the payment of financial compensation in cases of maladministration leading to injustice. This should further strengthen our complaints process and will be monitored and reported through the CRM system.

The Housing Inspectors were reasonably happy with the complaints procedure although they highlighted certain areas such as remedial actions and learning points not being used to inform service provision and improvement.

Corporate areas for improvement

1. Ensure that all services record and can demonstrate changes and improvements they have made to their service provision as a result of information from upheld and partially upheld complaints, including the use of the monthly reporting and monitoring information.
2. Strengthen the Stage 2 part of the procedure to limit the number of complaints going to stage 3.
3. Strengthen our responses to and communications with the complainant where the subject area and/or complaint are difficult and complex.

4. Continue to strengthen the initial identification of a complaint to ensure that all staff are able to identify a complaint, how to deal with it and to whom it should be passed to limit the number of complaints bypassing our corporate procedure and being sent to the ombudsman who may chose to investigate without us first having a chance to do so.
5. Ensure that all responses are sent within the target times.
6. Ensure that the complaints procedure is promoted throughout the borough.

Background

The corporate complaints procedure has now been in place for nearly a year and is working well. The procedure is managed by a network of Service Development Officers and Administrators within all service, which ensures that complaints are dealt with and resolved in accordance with the corporate policy. The current CRM system has significant operating limitations but services have persevered with the software and the day-to-day problems seem largely to have been overcome. The replacement CRM will address those limitations and will result in a more flexible and user-friendly system.

We are also experiencing problems with the software that produces the management reports and manual extraction of that data is undertaken and a monthly report is submitted to the SDO network.

The complaints software went 'live' on 01.05.05 and attached are the following reports for the period 01.05.05 to 31.03.06:

1. Analysis of complaints by service and type at each stage of the complaints process
2. Analysis of response times by service, type and stage
3. Analysis by residence of complainant; analysis of outcomes by stage; analysis of Ombudsman outcomes
4. Details of each individual complaint with actions to be taken and lessons to be learnt

In relation to Report 4, where action has been taken as a result of the Lessons to be Learnt, the relevant date of implementation will be added, if appropriate.

Findings

Number of complaints received

A total of 312 complaints were received during that time.

Of those:

Dealt with at Stage	Total	%
1	291	93
2	9	3
3	12	4
Total	312	100

This is an excellent result at stage 1. We would have expected to see more dealt with at stage 2 than stage 3 (rather than as has happened with more at stage 3 than stage 2). This may indicate that stage 2 complaints handling requires strengthening.

Outcome of complaints

Status of complaint	Total		Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	Number	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Upheld	115	37	112	36			3	1
Partly upheld	55	18	49	16	4	1	2	1
Not upheld	123	39	111	36	5	1	7	2
Other	19	6	19	6				
Total	312	100	291	94	9	2	12	4

55% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld (52% at stage 1) which means that in just over half of all cases the complaints we received were fully or partly justified. This may seem high but it also indicates that we are admitting our mistakes early in the complaints process and, providing we implement the lessons learnt and prevent the same type of complaints occurring again, this is in accordance with the aims of the complaints process and can be viewed as positive.

Ombudsman

A total of 34 complaints were made to the Ombudsman during the year (01.04.05 to 31.03.06), which is significantly less than the 51 received the previous year, and which can be attributed to the introduction of the corporate complaints procedure and the customer service standards. Of those,

Complaints to Ombudsman	Total	%
Premature and referred back to us	9	
Not Investigated	8	
Investigation undertaken	17	
Total	34	100

The ombudsman investigated half (50%) of the complaints he received. Of those being investigated:

Ombudsman Investigations	Total	%
Local Settlement	3	18%
No Maladministration	8	47%
Maladministration	0	
Ombudsman's Discretion not to pursue complaint	6	35%
Total	17	100

We have received a decision of "No maladministration" in just under half (8) of those cases, and the ombudsman chose to discontinue his investigation in 6 cases. In the 3 remaining case we made "Local Settlements" resulting in the payment of £1535 compensation.

44% (15 out of 34) of the corporate total of complaints to the ombudsman related to Planning issues, which is slightly less than the 51% (26 out of 51) for the previous year (2004/05).

Services

The number of complaints received by service is:

SERVICE	Complaints		Ombudsman	
	Total	%	Total	%
Change management	3	1	0	0
Contract & Public Services	4	1	0	0
Environmental Health	14	4	0	0
Financial Services	0	0	0	0
Housing	86	28	6	18
Information & Communication	0	0	0	0
Leisure & Environment	115	37	0	0
Partnerships & Customer Services	42	13	5	15
Planning	41	13	15	44
Property Services	3	1	0	0
Physical Regeneration	0	0	0	0
Risk Management	4	1		
Other			8	23
Total	312	100	34	100

Complaint types

A more detailed account of the type of complaints received by service is shown on the attached report. The complaint types that generated the most complaints are:

Service	Type	Number	Service %age of total complaints	Corporate %age of total complaints
Leisure & Environment	Refuse/recycling	96	83	31
Housing	Maintenance	40	47	13

Geographical residence of complainant

The geographical areas that generated the most complaints, as would be expected, were the major population centres in the borough.

Major town	Residents %age of borough population	Complaints %age of total complaints
Loughborough	35%	43%
Shepshed	8%	7%
Birstall	7%	4%
Syston	7%	7%
Thurmaston	6%	4%

However, it should be noted that the complaints generated by residents of Loughborough is slightly higher than the population suggests and the other towns are slightly lower. This could be because the council provides more services in the town (parish type services) than other locations, it could indicate a higher rate of satisfaction with council services outside of Loughborough, or could indicate a lack of awareness of the complaints procedure outside of Loughborough.

It is interesting to note that the number of complaints progressing to stage 3 and on to the ombudsman does not correlate to the number of complaints received by the services. For instance, the service with the highest number of service complaints is Leisure & Environment but only 2 progressed to stage 3 and only 1 went to the ombudsman. This may be because most of Leisure & Environment complaints are easier to deal with than say the more complex complaints received by Planning. Planning received approximately 13% of the corporate total of service complaints but approximately 44% of the corporate total of ombudsman complaints. It therefore may be that the more difficult and complex the subject area the less likely a complainant is to accept the findings of our corporate complaints procedure, particularly at stage 1, and are therefore more likely to go to the ombudsman. This may mean that we need to strengthen our responses to and communications with the complainant where the subject area and/or complaint is complex and perhaps difficult to understand to ensure that the complainant fully understand are policies/procedures and what we are/are not able to do. This may be time consuming but could result in far less time being spent responding to ombudsman investigations. Of course, this will never completely eliminate complainants going to the ombudsman.

This may also be due to complaints not being identified as such initially and therefore not being put through the complaints procedure. This means that the complainant receives a reply with which he/she is not happy and goes straight to the ombudsman. The ombudsman then chooses to investigate the complaint. This may be another area that requires strengthening to ensure that all staff are able to identify a complaint, how to deal with it and to whom it should be passed.

Housing Inspectors' findings

The Housing Inspectors were reasonably happy with the complaints procedure although they highlighted certain areas such as remedial actions and learning points not being monitored and reported corporately. This information now forms part of the annual report and will be included in the replacement CRM project. However, services should not wait until then to record changes and improvements they have made to their services as a result of information from upheld and partial upheld complaints, including the use of monthly reporting and monitoring information.