

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS MONITORING REPORT ANNUAL REPORT 2006/07 (PERIOD 01.04.06 TO 31.03.07)

Summary

1. Background

The corporate complaints procedure continues to work well in resolving customer complaints. The complaints process hasn't been as efficient as it could have been due to the problems with the CRM software and lack of reporting software. A complaints workflow within Lagan, the replacement CRM, was implemented on 14th May 2007 and this should improve complaints handling by simplifying inputting onto the CRM and improve the reporting by enabling computer extraction of the data.

2. Findings

- 2.1 We received 394 complaints during the year which equates to nearly 33 per month. This is a 15% increase in the number of complaints we received last year. The vast majority of complaints (95%) were dealt with at stage 1 which is similar to last year (93%). 4% (14) of complaints were considered at stage 3 and 43% (6) of those were upheld or partly upheld at that stage.
- 2.2 Just over half (56%) of the complaints were fully or partly justified which is nearly the same as last year (55%). 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.
- 2.3 The services which received the most complaints were Leisure & Environment (41% of corporate total), Housing (25% of corporate total) and PACS (24% of corporate total).
- 2.4 The service types which received the most complaints were refuse/recycling (31% of corporate total), council tax (18% of corporate total), and housing maintenance (15% of corporate total). The number of complaints received by Development reduced by 37% from the previous year. The number of complaints received by PACS increased by 126% over the previous year.
- 2.5 The two overarching themes that feature in many complaints, regardless of the service being complained about: are difficulties in accessing correct information, and delays in providing or processing information.
- 2.6 54% of responses were not sent within the target time, which is more than last year (38%) and this is an area that needs improvement. Lagan CRM and reporting software will highlight problems as they occur which should make identification and resolution easier and quicker.
- 2.7 The Audit Commission Access to Services Inspection undertaken in February 2007 reported that "Satisfaction with the way complaints are handled is good. Processes for handling complaints and learning from complaints are effective".
- 2.8 BV4 (percentage of complainants satisfied with the handling of their complaint): the provisional figure for 2006/07 has reduced slightly from 37% in 2003/04 to 36% in 2006/07. National figures are awaited to compare Charnwood with other local

authorities although the Audit Commission Access to Services Inspection reported that “Complaints handling is in the best 25% of Councils nationally.”

2.9 The Complaint Statistics from the Local Government Ombudsman were generally positive with a significant 40% reduction over the previous year in the overall number of complaints received and also a significant 27% reduction in response times. The proportion of non-premature complaints which resulted in a local settlement has, however, increased from 11% to 22% over the last two years. It is therefore proposed that a further report be submitted to SMT on the lessons to be learnt from these complaints.

Corporate areas for focus

1. Ensure that all complaint responses are sent out within the target times.
2. Ensure that all services record, consider and take action on complaints issues to demonstrate changes and improvements they have made to their service provision as a result of information from complaints, including the use of the monthly reporting and monitoring information. This will be a key theme for the 2007/08 SDP process.

Attachments

Attached are the following reports for the year 01.04.06 to 31.03.07:

1. Analysis of complaints by service and type at each stage of the complaints process
2. Details of each individual complaint with actions to be taken and lessons to be learnt
3. Analysis of stage 3 complaints

In relation to Report 2, where action has been taken as a result of the Lessons to be Learnt, the relevant date of implementation will be added, if appropriate.

1. Background

The corporate complaints procedure has now been in place for two years and is working well. The procedure is managed by a network of Service Development Officers and Administrators within all services, which ensures that complaints are dealt with and resolved in accordance with the corporate policy. The current CRM system has significant operating limitations and the replacement CRM complaints workflows went live on 14th May 2007. It is expected that the replacement CRM will be more flexible and user-friendly and will enable timely reporting to highlight problem areas and allow appropriate intervention, particularly in respect of meeting target times.

2. Findings

2.1 Number of complaints received

A total of 394 complaints were received during that time.

Of those:

	2005/06 (01.05.05- 31.03.06)		2006/07	
Dealt with at Stage	Total	%	Total	%
1	291	93	373	95
2	9	3	7	2
3	12	4	14	4
Total	312	100	394	100

This is an excellent result at stage 1, with only 6% of complainants taking their complaint further.

2.2 Outcome of complaints

Status of complaint	Total		Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	Number	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Upheld	186	47	182	46	1	0.3	3	1
Partly upheld	34	9	30	8	1	0.3	3	1
Not upheld	139	35	126	32	5	1	8	2
Other	35	9	35	9	0	0	0	0
Total	394	100	373	95	7	2	14	4

56% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld (54% at stage 1) which means that in just over half of all cases the complaints we received were fully or partly justified. This is similar to last year when 55% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld (52% at stage 1). 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.

2.3 Services

The number of complaints received by service is:

SERVICE	Complaints 2005/06 (01.05.05-31.03.06)		Complaints 2006/07	
	Total	%	Total	%
Change Management	7	2	7	2
Deputy Chief Executive	3	1	1	0
Development	41	13	26	7
Housing Services	86	28	100	25
Leisure & Environment	129	41	162	41
Partnerships & Customer Services	42	13	95	24
Risk Management	4	1	3	1
Total	312	100	394	100

There has been a reduction of 37% in the number of complaints received by Development over the previous year. There has been an increase of 126% in the number of complaints received by PACS (this may be because the 2005/06 figures do not include April which is a time many complaints may be received about council tax accounts following annual billing).

2.4 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:

	2005/06 (01.05.05-	2006/07

		31.03.06)				
Service	Type	Number	Corporate %age of total complaints	Number	Service %age of total complaints	Corporate %age of total complaints
Leisure & Environment	Refuse/recycling	96	31%	122	75%	31%
Partnerships & Customer Service	Council tax	26	8%	73	77%	18%
Housing	Maintenance	40	13%	61	61%	15%

There has been an increase in all of these types of complaints (as reflected in the number of complaints received overall), with the most significant rise (180%) being complaints about council tax (again this may be attributed to the 2005/06 figures not including April which may be when many complaints about council tax can be expected to be received following annual billing).

2.5 Complaint Themes

There are two overarching themes that feature in many complaints, regardless of the service being complained about:

1. Incorrect information given to customer or customer has difficulty in finding or accessing information.

Although not all complaints concerning the provision of information will be justified, the fact remains that the customer still felt sufficiently concerned about the difficulties they encountered getting hold of information or the correct information that they made a formal complaint.

2. Delay in providing or processing information.

Again, although not all complaints concerning delays will be justified, many customers perceive that this is the case.

2.6 Response times

The target response times are 15 days for stage 1 complaints and 20 days for stage 2 and 3 complaints. The achievement rates are:

SERVICE	Response rate achievement		
	Total number of complaints	Total response time achieved	%
Change Management	7	6	86%
Deputy Chief Executive	1	1	100%
Development	26	11	42%
Housing Services	100	40	40%
Leisure & Environment	162	48	30%
Partnerships & Customer	95	73	77%

Services			
Risk Management	3	2	66%
Total	394	181	46%

The target response rate was achieved in only 46% of cases, with some services achieving better rates than others. This is a significant reduction in 62% response rate achieved for 2005/06. It is acknowledged that services will sometimes have to delay sending a response for good reasons, sometimes outside of their control. However, the target should be achievable in the majority of cases and the reporting facilities in the new CRM will enable the CSDO and SDOs to monitor this and take any necessary actions in the forthcoming year.

2.7 Access to Services Inspection – February 2007

The Access to Services Inspectors were complementary about the complaints procedure: “Satisfaction with the way complaints are handled is good. Processes for handling complaints and learning from complaints are effective”. “Complaints handling is in the best 25% of Councils nationally.”

2.8 BV4 (percentage of complainants satisfied with the handling of their complaint)

The provisional figure for 2006/07 has reduced slightly from 42.4% in 2000/01 to 37% in 2003/04 to 36% in 2006/07. National figures will be published later in the year when a comparison can be made between Charnwood and other local authorities.

2.9 Local Government Ombudsman

A total of 20 complaints were made to the Local Government Ombudsman during the year, which is significantly less than the 33 made the previous year (2005/06) and the 51 made the year before that (2004/05). This can be attributed to the introduction of the corporate complaints procedure and the customer service standards. In particular there was a continued fall in the number of premature complaints to the Ombudsman – those which the Council had not had sufficient opportunity to deal with itself. These have fallen from 22 in 2004/05 to nine in 2005/06 and five in 2006/07. This suggests that the public is more aware of, and more confident in, the Council’s procedures to resolve complaints.

The Ombudsman reports the subject area of complaints according to his own criteria. The following table shows a breakdown of complaints by Directorate.

Ombudsman Complaints – Directorate	Total	%
Deputy Chief Executive	1	5%
Development	5	25%
Housing and Health	5	25%
Leisure & Environment	3	15%
Partnerships & Customer Services	4	20%
Risk Management	1	5%
Joint PACS/Housing and Health	1	5%

Total	20	100%
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There was a significant reduction in the number of complaints to the Ombudsman concerning the Development Directorate which reflects the reduction in the number of complaints received through the corporate complaints procedure regarding Development described above. In 2004/05 complaints about planning and building control accounted for 28 of the 51 complaints received by the Ombudsman about the Council (55%) and in 2005/06, 17 of the 33 complaints (52%).

There has also been a significant improvement in the Council's response time to enquiries from the Ombudsman. This has fallen from an average of 43 days in 2004/05 to 37 days in 2005/06 and 27 days in 2006/07. For 2006/07, the Council was, as a result, in the best performing category identified by the Ombudsman (<= the 28 day target set for responses).

Excluding premature complaints which were referred back to the Council, the Ombudsman made decisions on 23 complaints during the course of the year. This is slightly more than in 2005/06, when there were 19, but fewer than in 2004/05, when there were 28.

As in the previous three years, the Ombudsman did not issue a report finding maladministration about the Council. The Council did however agree to make five local settlements of complaints during the year. This is an increase on the three local settlements made in each of the past two years. The proportion of non-premature complaints resulting in a local settlement has risen from 11% in 2004/05 to 16% in 2005/06 and 22% in 2006/07. The local settlements resulted collectively in the payment of £600 compensation.

There have been positive developments over the course of the year regarding the continued reduction in the number of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman and the length of time taken by the Council to respond to enquiries by the Ombudsman. The increase in the number of local settlements is, however, of concern. In particular several of the complaints could have been resolved before reaching the Ombudsman, as suggested by the low financial level of the local settlements. It is therefore proposed that a further report be submitted to SMT setting out the lessons to be learnt from those and other significant complaints to the Ombudsman.

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04.05.07

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16.05.07