



## Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee 26 April 2011

### Biannual Corporate Complaints and Compliments Digest

#### SUMMARY

Attached is the Biannual Corporate Complaints Digest covering the period from 1 October 2010 to 31 March 2011.

The aim of the digest is to provide an overview of the quantity and range of corporate complaints (complaints monitored by the Chief Executive's Office) that the council receives, as well as monitoring our effectiveness at responding and learning from any mistakes that have been made. 19 complaints were received between October and April this year. In total, 49 have been received during 2010/11. This compares to 30 during 2009/10 and 42 in 2008/09.

The report sets out the number of corporate complaints received, details of our response times to those complaints, a breakdown of the complaints by Directorate and also details of the complaints received.

In addition, the report highlights the 42 compliments which have been received across the authority during the reporting period (October to March) and outlines the teams and services who have received them. In total, 72 compliments were received during 2010/11.

#### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to consider the latest digest and make any recommendations to Cabinet arising from the information in this report.

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of the digest is to provide an overview of the number and type of corporate complaints that the council receives, as well as monitoring effectiveness at responding and learning from any mistakes that have been made.

Corporate complaints are co-ordinated and monitored by the Chief Executive's Office. The corporate co-ordinator is supported in this work via a network of service complaints co-ordinators who are responsible for ensuring responses within their service areas are made.

The council operates a two step complaints procedure. Step 1 involves a complainant who is dissatisfied with any part of the council's service, or wishes to point out a fault, making a complaint by email, telephone, and letter or via one of the feedback forms available from reception and on-line. Complainants receive a letter within five working days which provides them with the name of the person dealing with the complaint and either responds to the complaint and explains how the situation has been dealt with or lets them know that the complaint will require more investigation and advises when they can expect to receive a full reply.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the response received under Step 1 of the procedure, they can request that the complaint moves to Step 2. This involves the complaint being investigated by Legal and Democratic Services who will provide an explanation of how the situation has been handled, the investigations that have taken place and whether the response provided is reasonable and fair. If a complaint progresses from a Step 1 to a Step 2, both are logged for the purposes of this report.

The council aims to fully respond to 90% of Step 1 and Step 2 complaints within 15 working days.

The report also includes details on the number of compliments that the council receives. The monitoring of compliments is important to the authority as it provides an opportunity to praise services, teams or individual members of staff who have been praised by the customer for delivering an excellent service.

## 2. Complaints received and speed of response

19 complaints were received between October 2010 and the end of March 2011. In total, 49 complaints were received in 2010/11. This compares to 2009/10 when 30 complaints were received and 2008/09 when 42 complaints were received.

	Total number received and completed	Number responded to within target of 15 working days (or within extension agreed with complainant)	Percentage responded to within target of 15 working days
<b>April 08 – March 09</b>			
Step 1	30	23	77%
Step 2	12	10	83%
<b>April 09 – March 10</b>			
Step 1	22	17	77%
Step 2	8	4	50%
<b>April 10 – March 11</b>			
Step 1	33	28	85%
Step 2	16	11	69%

Whilst the council has a target of dealing with all complaints within 15 working days some complaints are very complex and these complaints will take longer than the target to resolve, particularly with Step 2 complaints which are independently investigated.

### 3. Analysis of corporate complaints received by Directorate

	Chief Executive's	Community	Environment	Monthly Total
April 2010	1	1	3	5
May 2010	1	1	3	5
June 2010	0	0	0	0
July 2010	2	3	1	6
August 2010	1	1	4	6
September 2010	1	4	3	8
October 2010	1	5	4	10
November 2010	2	0	0	3
December 2010	0	1	0	0
January 2011	0	0	1	1
February 2011	1	0	2	3
March 2011	0	0	2	2
<b>Total complaints received</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>49</b>

4. What issues were raised through the complaints procedure during this period October 2010 and March 2011 and what lessons have been learned?

	Service	Complaint regarding	Lessons learned
<b>Chief Executive's office</b>	Revenues and Benefits	Processing of housing benefit claim	Claimed reviewed and amended.
	Revenues and Benefits	Processing of housing benefit claim	Benefit officer met with customer and discussed application.
	Revenues and Benefits	Bailiff notification for former resident of property	Complaint upheld and apologies given for distress caused. Bailiff records updated.
	Legal (step 2)	Inadequate response to Freedom of Information request	Complaint upheld. Officers failed to correctly identify information requested.
<b>Community</b>	Housing	Frustration with the Homelink service and level of customer service from the team	Apologies given for level of customer service. Steps taken to improve service in the future.
	Housing (step 2)	Assessment of housing need	Complaint not upheld. Officers have sufficient training to assess housing need.
	Leisure	Alleged breach of Data Protection Act 1996	Complaint not upheld as insufficient evidenced provided to support claim.
	Leisure	Disappointment with the Christmas Fayre	Comments taken on board and will be considered during planning of any future Fayre.
	Leisure	Lack of response to request for pruning of trees	Apologies made for inadequate response. Pruning of trees undertaken.
	Environmental Health	Anti-social behaviour	Complaint not upheld. Enforcement action taken by the council had been appropriate.
<b>Environment</b>	Planning (step 2)	Ability to view scanned signatures online	Complaint upheld. Updated software purchased to ensure that redacted signatures cannot be viewed.
	Planning (step 2)	Signs and banners fixed to street furniture	Complaint not upheld. Enforcement action taken by the council had been appropriate.
	Planning	Planning permission in Haverhill	Complaint not upheld but reassurance given that the council supports the development of a strong and vibrant town centre.
	Planning	Haverhill growth area consultation process	Complaint not upheld and reassurance given that safeguards are in place to ensure that consultation is carried out in the public interest.
	Planning	Unauthorised change of land use	Reassurance given that enforcement action is being undertaken.
	Waste and street scene	Overgrown bushes in a residential area	Pruning work undertaken.

	Car parking	Inadequate customer service at car park office	Apologies given for lack of effective customer care. However, reassurance provided that the terms and conditions of season ticket had to be upheld.
	Car parking	Lack of customer care following incident at Parkway Car Park	Equipment investigated and staff interviewed regarding the incident. Confirmation given that claim must proceed through insurers.
	Engineering	Drainage complaint	Apologies given for the delay in responding. Duplicate paperwork applied for.

## **6. Compliments received between October 2010 and March 2011**

As part of the monitoring of feedback from our customers, the Chief Executive's Office maintains records of compliments received for particular services or individuals. Services are asked to pass on positive feedback in order to promote a culture which acknowledges and celebrates excellent customer service and also provides an opportunity to share that learning with other staff members.

This section of the report provides a breakdown of the number of compliments received during the financial year by directorate and also provides details of the individual compliments that have been received.

### **6.1 Analysis of number of compliments received by each directorate from October 2010 to end of March 2011**

In total 72 compliments were received throughout 2010/11. Between October 2010 and the end of March 2011, 42 compliments were received.

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Total compliments received</b>
Chief Executive's	5
Community	19
Environment	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>

### Breakdown of compliments received from October 2010 to March 2011

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
Chief Executive's	Revenues and Benefits	Card received thanking the team for their time and patience in helping her to resolve her situation.
	Revenues and Benefits	A thank you for all the help provided over the last few visits to our offices.
	Revenues and Benefits	Thank you for the help provided
	Customer service team	Thank you for the excellent service she has received from the switchboard operators over the last couple of months. Praise for the speed of the operators and the way the operators always help find the right member of staff to contact.
	Finance	Thank you for providing the correct information and for your prompt response.
Community	Environmental Health	Thank you for dealing with complaints and monitoring the situation at an event.
	Environmental Health	Thank you for the support provided with a housing grant application. Thanks to the help of staff there is no more worrying about the wind and the rain.
	Leisure	Thank you for the school visit.
	Leisure	Thank you very much for making it possible for my friends and I to view a selection of the beaded dress collection from your archive. It was it a very informative afternoon
	Leisure	The Council has received a large number of compliments for the Apex since it opened last October, as well as a lot of helpful feedback on the operation and design of the building as it comes into use. The following comments are typical of the compliments received: 'The Apex venue is stunning: it is really quite an achievement to make a theatre both spacious and intimate. The staff are helpful, enthusiastic and personable. It was worth every inch of our 85 mile round trip. A big thank you to all concerned. We will be back.' 'We were highly impressed....the auditorium was absolutely perfect'. 'I'm very impressed with the Apex....the best acoustics I've ever heard at a live music venue .....tremendous facilities too'.

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
	Leisure (x 11)	A total of eleven written compliments about the Baby Memorial Service. Some of the comments included: 'The whole event was organised in a very thoughtful and sensitive way', 'Many thanks for a wonderful and emotional service of commemoration', 'words can not explain how important the occasion was for us'.
	Leisure	Thank you so much for a great school trip to West Stow. It has really sparked the children's imagination and was a great start to our history project.
	Leisure	Thank you so much. We are delighted that you are open on New Year's Day [West Stow].
	Leisure	St Edmundsbury has long been a local authority with a fine 'floral tradition', but we all found the vision and provision of such a wonderful open space for local people [Nowton Park] and the number of people there on a wet and cold Saturday, was a fine testimony.
Environment	Waste and street scene	Please pass on our thanks to the entire team for their professionalism and empathy; a real credit to St Edmundsbury Borough Council. Without the assistance of your staff who were extremely helpful throughout this harrowing period [bereavement] it would have been very difficult and time consuming to complete.
	Waste and street scene (x 4)	Compliments received for maintaining a bin collection service throughout the bad winter weather. Comments included: 'thanks to everyone for still emptying the bins all through the bad weather and all over Christmas'. 'Thank you for the excellent service during the snow and over the holiday period'.
	Waste and street scene (x13)	Several compliments received relating to the cleansing service, including: 'thank you for your immediate response to sweep the footway', 'thank you for doing such a good job in cleaning up the paint that had been spilt' and 'compliments to your workers who keep the roadside paths tidy in this village'.