



Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee 31 October 2011

Biannual Corporate Complaints and Compliments Digest

SUMMARY

Attached is the Biannual Corporate Complaints Digest covering the period from 1 April 2011 to 30 September 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. 23 complaints were received between April and September this year. This compares to 30 during the same period last year.

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 36 compliments which have been received across the authority during the reporting period (April to September) and outlines the teams and services who have received them.

Attached, at Appendix A, is a report from the Local Government Ombudsman which summaries the complaints about the council which were investigated in 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. However, it is recognised that some complaints can involve complete investigations and take longer than 15 working days to complete.

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. Local Government Ombudsman report 2010/2011

Attached at Appendix A is the Local Government Ombudsman Review for 2010/2011. It summarises the complaints it investigated about the council. It shows that there were ten enquiries and complaints received about the council in 2010/2011, compared to nine in the previous year. Of this ten, only four were considered by the investigative team.

3. Complaints received and speed of response

23 complaints were received between April 2011 and the end of September 2011. The table below shows how this compares with previous years.

	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
April 10 – March 11 (full year)			
Step 1	33	28	85%
Step 2	16	11	69%
April 11 – September 11 (half year)			

Step 1	17	14	82%
Step 2	6	4	67%

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.

4. Analysis of corporate complaints received by Directorate

	Chief Executive's	Community	Environment	Monthly Total
April 2011	0	1	2	3
May 2011	0	2	3	5
June 2011	0	1	0	1
July 2011	0	3	2	5
August 2011	1	2	3	6
September 2011	2	0	1	3
Total complaints received	3	9	11	23

5. What issues were raised through the complaints procedure during this period April 2011 and September 2011 and what lessons have been learned?

	Service	Complaint regarding	Lessons learned
Chief Executive's office	Finance	Various issues relating to payment of council tax and services received	Explanation of services delivered by the Borough were provided.
	Revenues and Benefits	Payment of council tax on an uninhabitable property	Complaint not upheld and the rules around council tax exemptions were clarified.
	Revenues and Benefits	Council tax repayment	Complaint not upheld. Clarification given relating to council tax repayments.
Community	Leisure	Various issues relating to ownership of land and lack of response	Apologies given for the inadequate response and for confusion caused in relation to landownership.
	Leisure	Issues arising from a large tree.	Complaint not upheld. The tree is not on council land.
	Housing (Step 2)	Length of time on the Housing Register	Complaint not upheld. The council has acted in accordance with the Lettings Policy.
	Housing (Step 2)	Eligibility for housing	Complaint not upheld. A correct assessment of housing need has been made.
	Housing	Inadequate advice given relating to Home-Link application	Complaint not upheld. The advice provided was correct and support was given to find suitable accommodation.
	Housing	Behaviour of a member of staff	Complaint not upheld. The language used by the member of staff was appropriate.
	Housing	Home-Link/Housing Options Team	Apologies that letters had been misplaced. However, confirmation given that the housing advice provided was correct.
	Environmental Health	Various anti-social behaviour issues relating to High Baxter Street	Reassurance that the council is taking all steps within its powers to resolve the issues.
	Environmental Health	Noise relating to Abbey Fest	Apologies were made for the noise and inconvenience caused by the event. Lessons will be taken into account during the formulation of an events policy for the Abbey Gardens.
Environment	Planning	Failure to notify of amended plans	Complaint not upheld. Correct procedures were followed.
	Planning (Step 2)	Failure to notify of amended plans	Complaint not upheld. Statutory requirements and guidelines were complied with.
	Planning	Failure to notify of planning application	Complaint not upheld. Correct notification procedures were followed.
	Planning (Step 2)	Issues relating to enforcement action	Complaint is partly upheld. Delays were caused due to lack of capacity at senior level in the planning team. Additional resources have been committed in order to prioritise cases.

	Planning (Step 2)	Issues relating to enforcement action	Complaint not upheld.
	Planning	Consideration of a planning application	Complaint not upheld. The correct procedures were followed.
	Planning (Step 2)	Failure to notify about a planning application and issues relating to the application	Complaint relating to the failure to notify was upheld and apologies given. Failure to consider the impact of the building work was not upheld.
	Highways (relating to an issue prior to SCC transfer)	Installation of road hazard marker posts	Complaint upheld. Apologies were given for the lack of communication.
	Parking	Attitude of a parking attendant	Complaint not upheld. The attendant was acting to ensure that a parking fine was not issued.
	Parking	Issuing of an excess charge notice	Complaint not upheld. The parking team explained the correct way to display a disabled parking badge.
	Parking	Inadequate pay and display signs	Complaint upheld. Following a site inspection, it was acknowledged that the signs were inadequate. This has now been rectified.

6. Compliments received between April 2011 and September 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 April 2011 to end of September 2011

Between April 2011 and the end of September 2011, 36 compliments were received.

Directorate	Total compliments received
Chief Executive's	2
Community	31
Environment	3
TOTAL	36

Breakdown of compliments received from April 2011 to September 2011

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
Chief Executive's	Reception and Conservation	Efficient liaison between sections and courteous. Not only was my e-mail picked up and routed by 1 minute past 9:00am, a response was received and swapped a couple of further e-mails with the planning people who answered my question by 10:30. You can't do better than that.
	Reception	Haverhill Reception staff are very helpful.
Community	Leisure	Thank you to the staff in the Tourist Information Centre for helping to find bed and breakfast accommodation.
	Housing	Housing partner very complimentary and thinks our Housing Team are fantastically diligent with scanning; recording accurate journal notes which helps their short-listing process.
	Environmental Health	Thanks to a member of staff who helped resolve an issue about pollution from security light directly into a private property.
	Heritage Service	Sincere congratulations on allowing us to have a very enjoyable and informative visit to West Stow. We will certainly be making a return visit. It is many years since my last visit. I wish to congratulate you and your staff on the extremely high standard of the exhibits and facilities. All of the staff last Sunday were very welcoming and helpful.
	Heritage Service	Visit and tour – fantastic the Council supports West Stow, wonderful archaeological site.
	Heritage Service	Would love to volunteer if we lived closer to West Stow. Our visit 'knocks socks off Sutton Hoo' which is far too expensive.
	Heritage Service	Amazed father that his son enjoyed a totally engrossed day out at West Stow rather than his Play Station
	Heritage Service	Really enjoyed taking part in different crafts at no extra cost – best day out in ages.

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
	Heritage Service	Fantastic visit – great re-enactment at West Stow, fired daughters imagination and curiosity.
	Heritage Service	School party had an enthusiastic day out at West Stow. Visit was well organised with very informed staff to answer a plethora of questions. Liked the idea of 'Instant Expert Packs'.
	Heritage Service	Thank you and all the staff at West Stow for making our group's visit today so enjoyable. A special 'thank you' also for the interesting, lively and informative tour of the village. It really helped us to get a feel for life in Anglo Saxon times as well as helping us to brush up on our school history lessons.
	Heritage Service	Couple from Australia have travelled all around the UK and found West Stow to be the very best museum they've visited.
	Heritage Service	Parents and 11 year old found West Stow to be fun and educational – really enjoyed their visit.
	Heritage Service	Visited three times during half term, as so much on offer and has appealed to grandparents and grand children alike. Thank you.
	Heritage Service	Congratulations to West Stow on the unique gift ideas in the shop and reasonably priced.
	Heritage Service	Teacher particularly liked the 'hands on things' in the museum at West Stow.
	Apex	Festival orchestral performers gave their grateful thanks to St Edmundsbury's excellent staff. The players LOVED the Apex, and it seems that staff couldn't have been more helpful.
	Apex	Festival performer - the new hall is great with a beautiful acoustic; enthusiastic audience; excellent facilities and an attentive; and thoughtful administration. It is just right for this size of orchestra and particularly well-suited to Mozart Piano Concertos.

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
	Apex	The Apex is a wonderful building, the sight lines are good, the seats comfortable, and all the bar, lounge, and public areas very nice. We hadn't been there before, you have a really top class venue. Bury St Edmunds is most fortunate to have The Theatre Royal, The Athenaeum, The Guildhall, and now The Apex. We are spoilt for choice.
	Community	Housing Association attended a Community Picnic organised by members of the council, Havebury Housing and Abbeycroft Leisure. It was great opportunity to meet the residents of Haverhill and to learn more about the town. From this event I was able to make contact with other service providers to discuss the possibility of working on a joint youth diversionary project tackling anti-social behaviour. The event was a great success.
	Parks	Compliment for the Parks Administration Team – Event held at Nowton Park - clear and precise answer to all visitors questions.
	Parks	Thanks to Rangers for all their support for a charity event. The event was a great success and hopefully raise over £200,000 for the charity which is brilliant.
	Parks	Excellent new facilities in the Abbey Gardens keeping grandchildren amused for several hours. Well done and excellent planning.
	Parks	Twitter: "Loving the new Abbey Gardens playground. Congratulations to @stedsbc, my 3yr old sister loves it."
	Parks	Thanks for prompt response on trees.
	Parks	Thank you to the person that designed the beach sand play area in the Abbey Gardens, my two children really enjoyed it.
	Parks	"Help for Heroes Event" held in the Abbey Gardens thanks for the advice and with the organisation of this event.

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
	Parks	Very grateful for sorting out tree problem. The men were professional and left the site clean and tidy.
	Parks	Thanks to everyone at St Edmundsbury who were involved in putting on the fantastic Children's Festival in the Abbey Gardens on Tuesday. Judging by the numbers of families arriving by car in the Ram Meadow car park, it brought many people into the town to enjoy the day. How refreshing to be able to bring a family out to enjoy a super day – especially at no cost.
	Parks	Councillor wishes his thanks be put forward also to say what a fantastic event the Children's Festival is, when the economic situation for everybody is tough and some parents may not be able to afford a holiday this year.
	Parks	Thanks and appreciation to the ranger involved in a wonderful day out on the Autumn Ramble at East Town Park on 11 September. It was both interesting and informative, the event was ran with just the right mix of informality and authority. It is reassuring to know that in the austere economic climate that we find ourselves in, events such as these are still supported by the council for the benefit of the residents of the Borough. They are most appreciated.
Environment	Waste	We have lived in St Edmundsbury since 1999. During the whole of this period the people who work weekly to collect our rubbish have been efficient, speedy, cheerful and pleasant. When I hear of reports of the service in many other parts of this country I am grateful to your organisation and team work.
	Waste	Compliments to the Waste Management Team on their very prompt action re-attaching a dog bin back into its normal position and clearing dogs mess up that had been thrown all over a garden.
	Land Charges	Two members of your staff are an absolute credit to St Edmundsbury and have made a house move bearable through their hard work, fantastic customer service skills and their ability to communicate proficiently and selflessly.

For information on interpretation of statistics click on this link to go to www.lgo.org.uk/CouncilsPerformance

LGO Advice Team

Enquiries and complaints received	Benefits & Tax	Corporate & Other Services	Education & Childrens Services	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Highways & Transport	Housing	Planning & Development	Total
Formal/informal premature complaints	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Advice given	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	4
Forwarded in investigative team (resubmitted)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Forwarded to investigative team (new)	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	4
Total	2	1	0	2	1	2	2	10

Investigative Team

Decisions	Reports: maladministration and injustice	Local settlements (no report)	Reports: Maladministration no injustice	Reports: no Maladministration	No Maladministration (no report)	Ombudsman's discretion (no report)	Outside jurisdiction	Total
2010 / 2011	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	4

No adult social care decisions were made in the period

Response times	First enquiries	
	No of first Enquiries	Avg no of days to respond
01/04/2010 / 31/03/2011	1	9.0
2009 / 2010	1	21.0
2008 / 2009	5	25.0

Provisional comparative response times 01/04/2010 to 31/03/2011

Types of authority	<= 28 days %	29 - 35 days %	> = 36 days %
District councils	65	23	12
Unitary authorities	59	28	13
Metropolitan authorities	64	19	17
County councils	66	17	17
London boroughs	64	30	6
National parks authorities	75	25	0