



Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee 30 April 2012

Biannual Corporate Complaints and Compliments Digest

SUMMARY

Attached is the Biannual Corporate Complaints Digest covering the period from 1 October 2011 to 31 March 2012.

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. 25 complaints were received between October and April this year. In total, 48 have been received during 2011/12. This compares to 49 during 2010/11 and 30 in 2009/10.

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 29 compliments which have been recorded across the authority during the reporting period (October to March) and outlines the teams and services who have received them. In total, 65 compliments were recorded during 2011/12.

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

25 complaints were received between October 2011 and the end of March 2012. In total, 48 complaints were received in 2011/12. This compares to 2010/11 when 49 complaints were received and 2009/10 when 30 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
April 09 – March 10			
Step 1	22	17	77%
Step 2	8	4	50%
April 10 – March 11			
Step 1	33	28	85%
Step 2	16	11	69%
October 11 – March 12 (half yearly)			
Step 1	14	12	86%
Step 2	11	7	64%
April 11 – March 12 (full year)			
Step 1	31	26	94%
Step 2	17	11	35%

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. Changes to the complaints procedure from April 2012

In order to align processes across both Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, it has been agreed to change the target for dealing with complaints to within 20 working days, as opposed to 15 working days. This change took effect from 1 April 2012.

The 20 working day target is used by most Suffolk councils. It is consistent with our target for responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests which is also 20 working days.

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
October 2011	0	2	1	3
November 2011	1	1	6	8
December 2011	1	2	1	4
January 2012	0	0	1	1
February 2012	2	2	2	6
March 2012	1	2	0	3
Total complaints received	8	18	22	48

5. What issues were raised through the complaints procedure during this period October 2011 and March 2012 and what lessons have been learned?

	Service	Complaint regarding	Lessons learned
Chief Executive's office	Human Resources (Step 2)	FOI review of request for emails	Complaint not upheld. All reasonable steps had been taken to provide information.
	Democratic services	Report considered at a Working Party	Formal apology given for mistakes made in handling a request.
Community	Licensing (Step 2)	Application for taxi licensing	Complaint not upheld. Appropriate procedure followed, although a recommendation has been made relating to the signing of paperwork.
	Licensing	Administration of a licensing application	Complaint not upheld. Appropriate procedures followed.
	Licensing	Administration of a licensing application	Complaint not upheld.
	Licensing (Step 2)	Procedure for accepting representations in respect of licensing applications	Complaint upheld. The process for receiving emailed representations is now under review.
	Parks	Inadequate tree maintenance	Complaint not upheld. However, the landscape team will continue to make regular inspections of the area.
	Parks (Step 2)	Issues around the installation and misuse of a local play area	Complaint not upheld. Officers had consulted correctly about the design.
	Parks	Inappropriate use of a local play area	Meeting held with residents to discuss and resolve the issues.
	Environmental Health (Step 2)	Various issues relating the actions of Environmental Health officers	Complaint not upheld. No evidence to support the claim that the complainant had been treated unfairly.
	Environmental Health (Step 2)	Failure to disclose information	Apologies given and information provided in its original form.
Environment	Planning	Compliance with a Development Control Committee decision	Complaint upheld in relation to the specific development. Introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy will prevent a reoccurrence.
	Planning (Step 2)	Inconsistent decision making by planners	Complaint not upheld. Decisions made were based on planning policy and procedures followed.
	Planning	Granting of planning permission for residential developments	Complaint not upheld. Appropriate consideration of application and correct procedures followed.
	Planning	Inaccurate advice given by the planning team	Complaint not upheld. No evidence to suggest that council had acted improperly at any stage.

	Planning	Planning process and the decision about a local play area	Complaint not upheld. Planning and landscape officers had worked with developer to find the best solution.
	Planning	Administration of a planning appeal	Complaint not upheld. Correct procedures had been followed.
	Planning (Step 2)	FOI review of response to request for information under Environmental Information Regulations	Complaint upheld. Apologies given and further information sent to complainant.
	Planning	Issues relating to highways and creation of a 'buffer zone'	Complaint not upheld. The application had been correctly assessed.
	Planning (Step 2)	Issues around the determination of planning permission	Complaint not upheld. However, recommendation made to ensure that planning officers keep a record of any site visits undertaken or steps taken when determining an application.
	Planning	Difficulties experienced at Development Control Committee and issues relating to the decision made	Apologies made in relation to difficulties experienced whilst attending Committee. All other issues addressed correctly.
	Property (Step 2)	Issues around the management of private residencies at the arc	Complaint not upheld. Managing Agent has taken sufficient action. Further issues must be dealt with by the Agent and developer.
Finance	Revenues and Benefits (Step 2)	FOI review of housing benefit claims	Complaint upheld. Apologies given and a reassurance that staff training had been identified.
	Revenues and Benefits	Housing benefit claim	Complaint not upheld. Correct procedures had been followed.
	Revenues and Benefits	Miscalculation of council tax bills	Complaint not upheld. Detailed calculations of bills provided.

6. Compliments received between October 2011 and March 2012

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 2011 to end of March 2012

Between October 2011 and the end of March 2012, 29 compliments were received. In total 65 compliments were received throughout 2011/12.

Directorate	Total compliments received
All	2
Community	22
Environment	5
TOTAL	29

Breakdown of compliments received from October 2011 to March 2012

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
All	All	I want to commend you on the way you have looked after Bury and made it a place fit for people to enjoy. I had the unfortunate experience of going to Colchester for a meal this evening and was disgusted with the place. The High Street had an air of menace and there was no sense of ownership or pride by anyone I encountered. Please visit it to see what not to do. You are managing a beautiful town in a way which makes everyone I know want to go there. Well done.
	All	Just to say we enjoyed our short trip to Bury St Edmunds - a nice town square with a lovely cathedral and large (St Marys) church which my dad found wonderful. Well done to all concerned!!
Community	Housing	Thanks all of the ladies in the Home Link team and Reception for the help given.
	Parks	I would like to thank you for all your help and support with the setting up of our Group. We appreciate all the help you have given us.
	Parks	I attended Fright Night with my family on Saturday Night which we thoroughly enjoyed
	Parks	Thank you, we came on the fungus walk on Sunday and it was brilliant. We all wished that you would do another walk as soon as possible.
	Heritage	A huge thank you on behalf of the Circle and its members - you and your staff looked after us so well it is not true. Everyone had a really great lunch and the feedback on the exhibition was brilliant
	Heritage	I am very impressed the venue at West Stow for the Benchmarking training day - a really good venue - great space and great staff - so thank you.
	Heritage	Clearly you have all done great work restoring the village and making the history of the Anglo-Saxons accessible to children, as well as, adults. Thank you for taking the time to put together the Quest. I've written a glowing review for West Stow on TripAdvisor and highly recommend it as a destination to all of our friends here in Guildford
	Heritage	Staff and children thoroughly enjoyed our visit to West Stow and would very much like to repeat the visit next year
	Apex	Just a quick email to say a huge thank you for you and all the people who assisted us on Thursday night. The event was a huge success and this would not have been made possible without your help

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
	Apex	I can honestly say that last night's event was absolutely faultless from my perspective
	Apex	Pass on thanks. Everyone we had dealings with were very efficient and very pleasant and we really enjoyed our time here.
	Apex	The Tour Manager called this morning to say how much the band enjoyed the show and the facilities at the venue.
	Apex	Thank you so much for today. Great to be at the Apex.
	Apex	We had a fabulous concert. I am so pleased that we are in the Apex.
	Apex	This was our first visit to the Apex and think it is an interesting and well planned venue – we'll be coming again.
	Apex	We were very pleased with how the event went for us and have had many very nice comments about the event and the choice of venue. Thank you all very much for making it all easy and stress-free
	Apex	Thanks so much to you and your VERY hardworking teams for a fab night. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed it
	Apex	Thank you for making our stay at the Apex such a pleasant one
	Apex	Compliments being so helpful and a great team of staff. Thank you for putting on the event and for it being such a success.
	Apex	The roadshow was excellent and the venue a pleasure to attend
	Apex	Thank you to you and the team at The Apex for making me feel so welcome last Saturday. I was treated extremely well by staff from the minute I arrived, and was supported with the use of a trolley and a radio. The staff were so friendly and helpful.
	Apex	We really enjoyed the Buddy Greco show and appreciated being met at the door by helpful and friendly staff who made us feel very welcome at the Apex. A thoroughly enjoyable experience

Directorate	Service	Compliment/Comment Details
Environment	Waste Management	Resident was most impressed at the speed of the phone call response.
	Waste Management	Thank you, I appreciate your taking the time to email me. My daughter and I walked down Eastgate St today and were delighted to find that the current pigeon mess has been cleared away. Many thanks to whoever kindly did this.
	Parking	Thank you for your prompt reply and action. I appreciate that enforcement of such notices can be difficult and that the authority must be robust, and be seen to be fair and consistent. You do have a difficult job, however I feel that my appeal was an exception and thank you for agreeing so.
	Parking	I cannot begin to tell you how very pleased and amazed I was to receive your email concerning my husband's fine. My faith in human nature and the trust in bureaucracy is renewed. It was really kind of you to refund the fine and I am extremely grateful. Thank you so much to the kind person who made the decision and I hope you all have the Happy Christmas you deserve.
	Parking	I would really like it if you could pass on my thanks to a car park attendant, as I know that many people get hostile towards car park attendants and traffic wardens doing their jobs. It would be good if he knew that his kindness and care is truly appreciated.