



Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee 12 November 2012

Biannual Corporate Complaints and Compliments Digest

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Attached is the Biannual Corporate Complaints Digest covering the period from 1 April 2012 to 30 September 2012.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 21 complaints were received between April and September this year. This compares to 23 during the same period last year.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 In addition, the report highlights the 88 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.
- 1.6 Attached, at Appendix A, is a report from the Local Government Ombudsman which summaries the complaints about the council which were investigated in 2011/12.

2. Purpose of the report

- 2.1 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 20 working days. However, it is recognised that some complaints can involve complete investigations and take longer than 20 working days to complete. If additional time is required, this is agreed in conjunction with the complainant.

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 2011/2012

Attached at Appendix A is the Local Government Ombudsman Review for 2011/2012. It summarises the complaints it investigated about the council. It shows that there were 17 enquiries and complaints received about the council in 2011/2012, compared to ten in the previous year. Of this 17, only five were considered by the investigative team, as detailed below.

Investigative team – Decisions

Not investigated			Investigated			Report	Total
No power to investigate	No reason to use exceptional power to investigate	Investigation not justified and Other	Not enough evidence of fault	No or minor injustice and other	Injustice remedied during enquiries		
0	0	2	2	1	0	0	5

3. Complaints received and speed of response

21 complaints were received between April 2012 and the end of September 2012. The table below shows how this compares with previous years. In April 2012, the target for

responses was increased from 15 working days to 20 working days in order to bring the council's complaint policy in line with other Suffolk authorities.

	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 11 – March 12 (full year)			
Step 1	31	26	84%
Step 2	17	11	64%
	Total number received and completed	Number responded to within target of 20 working days (or within extension agreed with complainant)	Percentage responded to within target of 20 working days
April 12 – September 12 (half year)			
Step 1	14	11	79%
Step 2	7	5	71%

Whilst the council has a target of dealing with all complaints within 20 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 subject to detailed investigation.

4. Analysis of corporate complaints received by Directorate

	Chief Executive's	Community	Environment	Monthly Total
April 2012		1	3	4
May 2012		6		6
June 2012		2		2
July 2012	2			2
August 2012	1	5		6
September 2012	1			1
Total complaints received	4	14	3	21

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

	Service	Complaint regarding	Lessons learned
Chief Executive's office	Revenues and Benefits	Received through LGO: Recovery of Council Tax instalments.	Advice provided as to how to stop further recovery action explained.
	Revenues and Benefits (Step 2)	Recovery of Council Tax arrears, bailiffs' behaviour and request for personal information.	Complaint not upheld. Worked with complainant to put in place a payment plan. The bailiffs agreed to review the situation should the company receive any further complaints of this nature. The bailiffs request found reasonable to avoid any adverse affect on complainants health should they be required to attend the property at some time in the future.
	Revenues and Benefits	Recovery of Council Tax arrears through bailiffs	Bailiffs acting under ARP instructions. Further income and expenditure form sent and advice given about claiming further benefit.
	Democratic Services	Recording equipment failure at Development Control Committee and issues that ensued thereafter.	Acknowledgement that speakers should have been informed of the equipment failure. Revised procedure for setting up, usage of equipment; and more notice given to speakers to attend has been put in place. Assurance also given that the written record of the meeting and subsequent information for the site meeting was professionally and correctly addressed.
Community	Parks	Pay and display machines at Nowton Park	Explanation for the charges introduced at the beginning of April following a budget consultation.
	Parks	Regular family visitors disappointed with parking charges at West Stow.	Explanation for the charges and highlight the very good value for money season ticket option designed for regular visitors.
	Parks	Combined complaint and FOI re charges at Nowton Park	Detailed explanation covering FOI whilst highlighting the value for money season ticket option.
	Licensing	Various concerns over enforcement of Caravan Site Licence conditions.	St Edmundsbury to consider issues raised further and to discuss with Fire Service and site owners.
	Licensing (Step 2)	Site violations at Caravan Site and the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960	Complaint not upheld. Officers have considered issues and discussed with Fire Service and site owners and that officers will be meeting with the latter to review the site licence conditions.
	Licensing / Depot	MOT testing of a taxi	The council agree there may have been a breakdown in communication regarding defects to car requiring renewal of a private hire vehicle licence. The licensing team is currently making provision for the licensing software, which records all the test details to be available for vehicle inspectors to view, which will solve any potential future issues. Apologies given.

	Housing (Step 2)	Property banding complaint and a failure by the Council to re-house	Complaint not upheld. The Housing Options team processed the application in accordance with the council's Lettings Policy. The complainant advised that she will be provided with emergency accommodation if she is unable to successfully bid for a property.
	Housing	Homelessness couple complaint how they were treated by staff.	Re-banded highest priority as homeless, procedures followed and advice given correctly. Complainant would not accept temporary accommodation offered. Advised to keep bidding on properties fortnightly.
	Housing (Step 2)	Application for appropriate housing not been taken seriously.	Complaint not upheld. The Housing Options team acted correctly and followed procedures in accordance with the council's Letting Policy.
	Housing	Treatment by staff and banding	Procedures followed and advice given correctly.
	Housing	Homelessness, Home-Link and unsympathetic treatment by member of staff.	Temporary accommodation in the refuge is necessary until permanent social housing found. A review of the rules has been undertaken regarding the housing of victims of domestic violence within a 10 mile radius of the property they have fled. The member of staff acted entirely professionally.
	Housing	Home-Link incorrectly assessed and ignored by staff.	Housing application reviewed and re-assessed and new award given with backdated priority date.
	Housing	Lack of re-banding from October to Christmas and homelessness issues.	Customer banding reviewed and reallocated.
	Environmental Health	Abbeyfest Concert in Abbey Gardens –concerns about impact on neighbouring properties and Council's approach to managing event.	The Council had consulted widely on its new procedure for Abbey Gardens concerts, including with English Heritage in relation to the impact on scheduled monuments. This event was the first externally-promoted concert held under that policy and, while lessons had been learned, the new procedure had generally worked well, and steps had been taken to address identified issues as the festival progressed. Sound levels were also measured for the duration of the concerts. The Council's published out-of-hours number was fully functioning over the weekend in question. A flyer circulated anonymously caused confusion around the Council's out-of-hours contact number, although calls to it from the complainant and five others were logged over the weekend. The council has apologised for any teething problems, and will continue to refine the way the procedure is implemented at any future concerts.
Environment	Planning (Step 2)	Concerned about the consideration of a planning application.	Complaint not upheld. Situation will be monitored. Full explanations in response letters would have helped.

	Planning (Step 2)	Resident's complaint regarding anti social behaviour occurring on and around the local area of play in front of resident's property.	Complaint not upheld. The council acted reasonably in response to complainant's concerns. An autumn consultation to be undertaken as a result with complainant and other local residents.
	Planning (Step 2)	Concerns over the affect of a business flue to local resident's property and noise emanating from the take-away business. Complainant experienced hearing problems at the committee meeting.	Complaint not upheld. Planning permission not required and correct information provided. Environmental Health officers did not find that odour or noise witnessed by them to be a <i>statutory</i> nuisance. Hearing problems - the necessary steps addressed during meeting; and in future members of the public will be informed that the hearing loop is available.

6. Compliments received between April 2012 and September 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 April 2012 to end of September 2012

Between April 2021 and the end of September 2012, 88 compliments were received.

Directorate	Total compliments received
Chief Executive's	1
Community	33
Environment	54
TOTAL	88

6.2 Breakdown of compliments received from April 2012 to September 2012

Directorate	Service	Compliment / Comment Details
Chief Executive's	Legal and Democratic	S.106 FOI request to a number of selected authorities – yours was the only one that provided a substantive reply.

Directorate	Service	Compliment / Comment Details
Community Services	Leisure	Visitor from New Zealand - of all the tourist information offices they visited whilst touring England, St Edmundsbury was the best by far. Brochures of other counties available plus very helpful staff.
	Parks	Following a series of operations, thank you for work done on cutting and clearing over-hanging trees.
	Parks	Impressed with our men who reinstated the grounds following the tree work which had recently been undertaken on site. Thanks to the operatives concerned.
	Parks	Parkway roundabout - beautifully planted with orange tropical looking plants.
	Parks	Replacement estate fence - workmen did a good job.
	Parks	It was great having the 'sail top' on the Gathering Place yesterday - made all the difference to our event. We were really lucky with the weather too and I feel sure it was a useful promotion in every way for us all! All efforts appreciated!
	Parks	Hardwick Heath. Dying patient's wish to fish for one last time. 'Thank you so much for allowing this to happen' the patient and staff greatly appreciated your help with this.
	Parks	A massive thank you for all of your help and perseverance in the setting up and running of 'Load of Pants' event for St Nicholas Hospice Care.
	Parks	A good job has been done at top end of Symonds Road - much safer now for children walking to and from school and on other side much lighter in some gardens. Thank you.
	Parks	Haverhill Pightle and Station Road - Sincere thanks to St Edmundsbury and Haverhill in Bloom for the planters. They look an absolute picture at the moment and it makes such a tremendous difference to the area, please can you on our behalf thank everyone responsible.
	Parks and Landscapes	Parks and football pitches in excellent condition pass on compliments to the ground staff.
	Heritage Service	West Stow visit by Junior School from Essex. Will visit again it was brilliant! It was so interesting to see, touch and smell how they lived back all those years ago.
	Heritage Service	West Stow - We would like to say thank you for such an enjoyable day. All the Staff always greet you with a smile and are always willing to help at any time.
Heritage Service	Moyse's Hall WI guided tour thanks the two extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic guides who knew their subject.	

Environmental Health	Free loft and cavity wall insulation letter received and took up recommendation to take part in this scheme - I'm sure to benefit from the extra warmth this coming winter. Thank you.
Environmental Health and Housing	Thank you for the very swift and efficient response to both of my FOI requests. Staff have been very helpful in providing the information I was seeking. I completely understand the amount of time and work it takes to respond to FOI requests within such tight deadlines and unfortunately not many people appreciate it. Well done St Edmundsbury Council!
Housing Options	Thank you for going out of your way to help with the computer and placing the housing bids. So very helpful and polite.
Housing Options	We feel like we've won the lottery - no longer homeless, thank you so much for all your help!
Athenaeum	Meeting at the Athenaeum - staff were super helpful and kind.
Apex	Thanks to staff for the meeting arrangements.
Apex	Thanks and congratulations on the classical music series that has just come to a conclusion at The Apex. Impressed with both the high quality and variety of the performers and it has been a real treat to have artists of this calibre performing in Bury St Edmunds.
Apex	My wife and I live in Newmarket and visit Bury most Saturday's, our son lives in Cambridge; we all enjoyed the Searchers concert. Also it was the first time we have seen a show at the Apex, and we were really impressed.
Apex	Apex staff could not have been more helpful and accommodating; the auditorium was transformed exactly how I imagined it, into a new configuration the Apex hasn't tried before, which certainly worked well for us. We achieved the intimacy of the theatre with the acoustic of the Apex - perfect!
Apex	Thanks to staff that helped with a NHS West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group launch event - everyone walked away with a huge sense of achievement.
Apex	Enjoyed our performance at The Apex. Friendly and helpful staff, wonderful tech crew, fantastic venue and almost a full house to boot!
Apex	Thanks to Apex staff for their help and encouragement last night. The event was acknowledged to be a great success by almost everyone I spoke to and we all enjoyed it immensely.
Apex	Thanks again for letting us use the cafe on Saturday. Please also thanks to staff working there that morning as they were very helpful, as always.
Apex	Awards Ceremony – 'massive thanks to the team for our awards on Friday night. Everyone was gushing about the quality of your venue so many, many thanks.'
Apex / Festival	Enjoyed my visit to Bury on 19/20 May. Managed five concerts plus the Beer and Food Festival, a theatre tour and a band in the Abbey Gardens! Particularly impressed with Apex and its friendly and efficient staff.
Apex / Festival	Congratulations on organising a wonderful mix of events for the Festival, most of which have been of a very high standard. Comparable to Aldeburgh.
Apex / Festival	Thank you for a lovely concert on Sunday 27th May. A perfect evening with superb music, lovely weather and a very genteel atmosphere.

Apex / Festival	Thank you for a wonderful concert on Friday 25th May. A perfect evening with excellent groups, lovely weather and a lovely atmosphere.
Apex / Festival	Thank you for a delightful concert on Friday 18th May in the Abbey Gardens. The children performed so well and their voices were delightful.

Directorate	Service	Compliment / Comment Details
Economy and Environment	Car Parks	I would like to commend your car parks department on how they handled a road traffic accident at a roundabout on parkway. Staff were posted in the car park next to the Arc and opened a gate thereby making sure that cars exiting the car park did not add to the traffic jam and also making sure that the motorists were able to exit the car park easily without getting stuck in traffic. A great example of putting your customers first. A great example of customer service.
	Car Parks	A frequent visitor from Norwich experienced difficulty paying for car parking, but happily accepted two scratch cards for parking in BSE instead of waiting for a cheque.
	Waste	Thanks for the great service that your team provided for us during the Bury St Edmunds re-signalling project. It was a pleasure to work directly with a company rather than going through a broker which can have its problems. Also I am led to believe that the client, (Network Rail) is very pleased with the amount of re-cycling that we carried out! Please pass on my thanks to your team!
	Waste	Thank you to waste customer services team who has dealt with various (and changing) requests for bulky collections. Customer from Cornwall clearing out ill mother's shed in Stanton.
	Waste	CEO's office liaised with Waste Management who raised a ticket for the bin to be emptied. Customer phoned wanted us to know he was now very happy and thanks to all involved in getting his bin emptied.
	Landscapes	No ball sign fallen down, leaving a large hole in grassed area - resident sends thanks to team, the service and work carried out was "Excellent."
	Landscapes	Thank you for the interesting and informative talk given to the Hartest Garden Club re Abbey Gardens.
	Landscapes	Thanks very much for the work in the Anglo-Saxon village today; the new path will go a long way to improving young people's access to the activity area we are creating this summer. I really appreciate you fitting this work in during a busy period for the landscapes department.
	Landscapes	Thank you for your quick response in sending the landscape team to Hollands Road.
	Landscapes	Thank you to Cemeteries - they were very helpful and polite and helped find the location of the grave and agreed to raise the bird bath and sow seed.
Landscapes	Grass cutting Haverhill - thank you for your swift response and detailed explanation.	

Landscapes	Complaint grass cutting Haverhill - wonderful reply.
Landscapes	Thank you for arranging to have the small garden in Beaconsfield Court tidied up so quickly.
Landscapes	Please pass comment to Team - St Johns Street baskets - they look fantastic and the best ever.
Landscapes	Pass my thanks to Bury Cemetery personnel, for helping him locate the grave of his late Mother.
Landscapes	Thank you very much for the work to the planted area by Manor House - much appreciated.
Landscapes	We live in Essex and visited Abbey Gardens and were very impressed with the beautiful and well kept gardens and hanging baskets. You should be very proud of your staff they do a grand job.
Landscapes	Thank you for the prompt service.
Landscapes	We live on the banks of the River Linnet and applaud the efforts of the Borough Council to maintain it as a wildlife corridor that brings a small piece of the countryside to the town.
Landscapes	Excellent - thank you for your speedy response as always.
Landscapes	Thank you so much for chasing up the delivery of bins you have restored my faith in the Council.
Landscapes	8 Culvers Meadow - thank you for being so quick and efficient in arranging to have the shrub bed cut and also thanks to the guys they did a lovely job and were so polite.
Landscapes	Thanks profusely for arranging an inspection to put mother on an assisted collection - 'good old fashioned service'.
Landscapes	Thank you for such a quick response in arranging to have the hedges cut back off footpath. The guys did a wonderful job.
Landscapes	Thanks ever so much for attending to this so quickly - dying plants in planters Haverhill.
Landscapes	Thank you so much re emptying bottle bank Hawstead.
Landscapes	Thank you so much for your hard work, thoughts and ideas making such a very successful and happy event for Abbey Garden Friends. We have received lovely feedback and comments and all of the committee are extremely appreciative of your generous input and support.
Landscapes	Grove Park - hedge cutting - thank you as the street looks so much cleaner now the hedges have been cut. It is nice to know that the council listen to their residents and resolved this issue so quickly.
Landscapes	The Granary, Clare - a big thank you to office and team in Haverhill. Your guys have done a fantastic job. In these times of cut backs and austerity it is good to know that St Edmundsbury rises to the challenge. Residents young and old at The Granary, have asked me thank you well done!
Landscapes	Footpath From Cumberland Drive to Industrial Estate. Resident thanks Landscapes for trimming bushes on the footpath. Please pass on thanks to the Team. Work has been done and it looks great - thank you for all your help.
Landscapes	Clare - tidying area of weeds, grass, shrubs etc. - work has been done and it looks great - thank you for all your help.

Landscapes	Footpath adjacent to north bank of River Lark, off Rougham Road - residents are very pleased well done!
Landscapes	Cutting brambles back off footpath - thank you great service as always!
Office/ Cleansing	Thank you from ASDA for helping with their litter picking week.
Cleansing	Resident wanted to express this thanks to cleansing crew for finding and returning mobile phone. It belonged to his daughter.
Cleansing	Thank you for getting the path at Steward Road cleared of twigs and branches.
Cleansing	Thanks for getting the dog bin emptied so promptly.
Refuse	Big thank you for collection of bins when road blocked and little vehicle went in and collected the bin off the property.
Refuse	May Gurney – thank you for accepting our trade waste.
Refuse	Thank you for the service that allows disabled resident to have her bags collected.
Refuse	Resident emailed in again on 2nd May for brown bin and we delivered the bin on the 3rd May! Resident most impressed.
Refuse	Emailed in to say impressed how quickly we delivered replacement bins, i.e. next day!
Refuse	Thanks for service.
Refuse	Excellent service.
Refuse	Thanks for due diligence in delivering a blue 330 to resident.
Refuse	Many thanks to you and your colleague for the great talk last Friday at the drop-in. Everyone really enjoyed it, particularly getting involved and sorting the rubbish out! The bags went down well too! With very many thanks for all your time and work.
Refuse	Resident phoned in after receiving the information pack about the recycling of textiles and thinks it's wonderful!
Refuse	Resident would like to thank all the bin crews for the great service they provide.
Refuse	Resident thinks the service we offer is great value for money and Customer Services are always very helpful and polite.
Refuse	Resident phoned in to say thank you for getting the bags collected outside his house so quickly.
Refuse	Please pass on my thanks to your blue bin crew for coming back and collecting my bin, after my mistake in forgetting!! Excellent service!
Refuse	Please thank blue crew very courteous and kind, do a brilliant job. Blue and brown crew amazing!
Refuse	Thanks for getting the brown bin replaced so promptly.
Refuse	Thanks for getting replacement brown bin out so quickly – excellent customer service.

7. Documents attached

7.1 Appendix A is the Local Government Ombudsman Review for 2011/2012.

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