

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
29 MAY 2012

REPORT BY HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

6. REVIEW OF COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS
APRIL 2011 TO MARCH 2012

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All.

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To provide a summary of the formal comments, compliments and complaints (3Cs) logged by the Council between April 2011 and March 2012.
- To highlight the key issues arising from these 3Cs.
- To present the 3Cs action plan for 2012/13.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: That:**

(A)	The report summarising comments, compliments and complaints be received.
(B)	The actions detailed in this report be approved.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Council's corporate comments, compliments and complaints procedure (3Cs) was implemented in January 2009.
- 1.2 Quarterly monitoring of complaints is undertaken by Directorate Management Teams and an annual summary of 3Cs is presented to CMT.
- 1.3 Corporate Business Scrutiny on 14 July 2009 resolved that an annual report on 3Cs be added to the committee work programme.

2.0 Report

2.1 Performance

The Council regularly received more compliments than complaints. The Council recorded 156 (30% less than the previous year) formal comments, compliments and complaints in 2011/12. The number of Stage 1 complaints fell to 62, the number of Stage 2 (appeals) remained almost the same at 21. The Council's performance 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 is summarised below:

Performance Indicator	Performance 1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012 (2010/11 figures in brackets)
EHPI 5.1, % of complaints resolved in 14 days or less 2011/12 Target = 90%	<p>Overall Performance - 62.5% (72.3%)</p> <p>Customer and Community Services – 87.5% (96.2%)</p> <p>Internal Services – 83.3% (70.5%)</p> <p>Neighbourhood Services – 51% (43.3%)*</p> <p><i>*Longer resolution times in Neighbourhood Services compared to other Directorates reflect the additional time required to handle planning complaints. (15 cases escalated to Stage 2 in 2011/12).</i></p>
	<p>Comments:</p> <p>The percentage decreases in performance represent a difference in number of one or two, given the number of formal complaints recorded.</p>
EHPI 5.2a, % of complaints about the Council and its services that are upheld: 1 st Stage 2011/12 Target	<p>Overall Performance - 29% (32%) 18/62 stage 1 complaints</p> <p>Customer and Community Services – 33% (31%)</p> <p>Internal Services – 69% (73%)</p> <p>Neighbourhood Services – 15% (51%)</p>
	<p>Comments:</p>

= 25%	The number of Stage 1 complaints upheld has fallen closer to target.
EHPI 5.2b, % of complaints about the Council and its services that are upheld: 2 nd Stage – appeal	Overall Performance – 14% (4%) 3/21 stage 2 complaints Customer and Community Services – 17% (14%) Internal Services – 50% (0%) Neighbourhood Services – 11% (0%)
2011/12 Target = 25%	<i>*All complaints progressed to Stage 2 (appeal) have passed through Stage 1 of the complaint process.</i>
	Comments: Given the low volume of Stage 2 complaints (21), an increase in one or two upheld will show a significant % change in performance.
EHPI 5.4, % of complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman that are upheld	0%
	19 complaints were subject to decision by the Local Government Ombudsman. 11 were investigated and none were upheld.
2011/12 Target = 0%	<i>See section 2.5 of the report for further details</i> <i>See section 2.5 of the report for further details</i>

2.2 Volumes

2.2.1 The volumes of formal comments, compliments and complaints recorded are shown below, with last year's noted in brackets:

	April – June	July – September	October – December	January – March	Total
Comments	0 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (2)
Complime	21 (30)	20 (25)	22 (41)	31 (31)	94

nts					(127)
Complaints Stage 1	19 (37)	11 (13)	17 (24)	15 (20)	62 (94)
Complaints Stage 2	3 (5)	7 (8)	3 (5)	8 (5)	21 (23)
3Cs	40 (60)	31 (38)	39 (65)	46 (51)	156 (223)

(Please note: Stage 2 complaints pass through Stage 1 so are not added to the grand total).

2.2.2 The large number of compliments recorded reflects the use of the 3Cs system by Building Control to record their post visit survey results – 67 compliments logged.

2.2.3 The number of formal complaints recorded this year has fallen by almost a third. It is noted that the formal complaints recorded cover a wide variety of issues, last year a few significant issues such as the introduction of charging for replacement waste bins generated higher volumes of the same complaint.

2.3 Source of Complaints

2.3.1 The chart (**Essential Reference Paper B**) shows that customers prefer to raise formal complaints in writing either by letter (45%) or e-mail (40%). This illustrates the role of the 3Cs procedure for customers, handling formal complaints as opposed to issues and enquiries raised by other means, which are resolved as quickly as possible.

2.4 Cause of Complaints

2.4.1 The main causes of complaint are shown in **Essential Reference Paper C**. The top four reasons are: Disagreement with Council Policy/Decision (22%), Quality of Service (22%), Failure to Deliver a Service (17%) and Disagreement with Officer Decision (12%).

2.4.2 Customers may disagree with legislation, Council policies and the implementation of these by officers; there is often little that can be done in such circumstances to resolve a customer's dissatisfaction. However, complaints regarding

the 'quality of service' and 'delivery of service' feature within the main causes of complaint. It would appear that customers have experienced difficulties in the way in which their services are being delivered. Council services can take action to resolve and prevent such complaints.

2.5 Corrective Action taken following 3Cs

2.5.1 Key actions taken in response to issues raised in the last year are shown in **Essential Reference Paper D**. 10 out of 27 complaints upheld were concerning delivery of service followed by team meeting to discuss improvements and staff training. It would appear from the corrective action that services have discussed and improved the processes of getting things done and services delivered.

2.5.2 Key improvement actions are summarised below by directorate:

Neighbourhood Services

<u>Service</u>	<u>Action/Improvement</u>
Housing	Apologies for staff conduct
Development Control	Apologies for the way service was provided. Apologies for incorrect dealing with enquiries and things put right. Apologies for lack of communication.

Customer and Community Services

<u>Service</u>	<u>Action/Improvement</u>
Refuse and Recycling	Apologies for failure to deliver service, service provided.
Customer Services	Apologies for technical difficulties with systems. Apology for staff conduct

Internal Services

<u>Service</u>	<u>Action/Improvement</u>
Facilities	Apology in breakdown of communication

	Replacement of Union Jack on Wallfields
Housing Benefits	Apology for misunderstanding and reviewed decision Apologies for delay in service delivery
Revenues	Apologies for delays in response. Apologised for delay and cleared costs Apologised for attitude of staff and corrected information on database Apologised for incorrect information on database Apology for technical difficulties with systems.

2.6 Local Government Ombudsman

2.6.1 The Annual Review Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) will be published in June. Provisional statistics for 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2012 have been received and are presented in this report. The Annual Review Letter will be published on our website and a copy included in the Members' Information Bulletin.

2.6.2 19 cases were decided during this period. No cases of maladministration were identified. The decisions made were classified as follows:

<u>Decision</u>	<u>No of cases</u>	<u>Service</u>
No power to investigate	1	Environmental Services
No reason to use exceptional power to investigate	1	Facilities
Investigation not justified and other	1 1 4	Parking Planning Enforcement Development Control.
Not enough evidence of fault	1 1 2	Parking Planning Enforcement Development Control

No or minor injustice and other	1 1 5	Finance Licensing Development Control
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2.6.3 Six cases were passed from the LGO to the council as premature complaints as the authority had not had the opportunity to respond to the complainant.

2.6.4 The Council's performance in respect of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman continues to demonstrate that the Council follows its procedures and complaints procedures, taking corrective action where necessary.

2.7 Customer Survey

2.7.1 A direct survey of complainants resulted in insufficient responses for analysis, with comments about continued dissatisfaction with the outcome of legal or policy decisions being raised.

2.7.2 The Resident's postal survey undertaken between August – October 2011 (1,317 responses) found that 29% of those surveyed had contacted the Council with a complaint. However the figures suggested by the survey response are in direct contrast to the number of formal complaints the Council recorded. Since the 3Cs programme is well established at the council we must seek some other explanation for the return figures. Officers believe that the explanation that best fits the figures is that respondents have counted requests for service as complaints. This is most likely to occur with surveys which are undertaken using a postal questionnaire methodology.

2.7.3 When asked to expand on their experience the results below were recorded:

- 64% satisfied with the ease with which they were able to complain (19% dissatisfied)
- 48% satisfied with time taken to deal with the complaint (37% dissatisfied)
- 41% satisfied with how the complaint was managed

- 39% satisfied with how the complaint was handled overall
- 41% satisfied with final outcome.

2.7.3 In terms of outcome, it is important to note that customers may remain dissatisfied if their complaints are not upheld. The Council has many statutory functions and policies which may result in a difference of opinion with what the customer would like to happen or be done.

2.7.4 The results may have been clearer if a definition of a complaint had been included in the survey (and will be in the future).

2.7.5 The results appear to indicate that whilst the accessibility, method and process of making a complaint are good; the management of the complaint through the procedure needs further investigation to ensure we are providing the best communication and service possible.

2.8 Actions

Based on the review of complaints the Council is taking the following actions in 2012/13:

Action	Reason	Timescale
Include a definition of a formal complaint and clearer language in customer surveys	To ensure survey's record information about formal complaints and to exclude general dissatisfaction or service requests as far as possible.	Immediate
Conduct a review to identify and analyse complaints where complaint handling has been an issue, to identify key learning and improvements.	The resident's survey highlighted some potential concerns about the process of managing a complaint.	Q1 2012/13
Include a specific customer complaints	The resident's survey highlighted some	Q2 2012/13

survey in Link to further validate concerns expressed regarding complaint processing.	potential concerns about the process of managing a complaint.	
Introduce logging of complaints by Customer Services at the first point of contact. This will ensure speed of response as there is no delay on logging and maximise recording of formal complaints.	Recorded complaints have fallen by a third.	Introduce in May 2012
Refresher training for all staff through staff briefings and for complaint champions	Recorded complaints have fallen by a third.	Q2 and Q3 2012/13
To review a sample of complaints to establish any key issues that may be impacting the quality and delivery of service and propose appropriate actions. This will also ensure corrective actions were completed.	Both the quality of service and failure to deliver a service were a cause for complaint in 39% of complaints.	Q2 and Q3 2012/13

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None.

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