

**AGENDA ITEM**

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**11 DECEMBER 2007**

**CORPORATE COMPLAINTS - MONITORING**

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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1 To present to Members the first half yearly report in respect of the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.

**BACKGROUND**

- 2 The Council introduced a Corporate Complaints Procedure in 2002. In September 2004, the Audit Commission undertook a review of Access to Council Services. Although there were no problems reported with the way that the Council operated the Corporate Complaints Procedures, the Audit Commission did identify as a weakness the fact that the Council could not at that time fully analyse complaints dealt with through the Corporate Complaints system.
- 3 Following the Access to Services report, the Council decided to develop its own in-house Complaints IT system that could track, monitor and report on all Corporate Complaints. An interim IT Complaints System was introduced in January 2006. However, the launch of the full system was severely delayed due to the fact that the revised legislation relating to Social Care and Children' Services was some 12 months later than originally intended in getting approval of Parliament. The IT system could not be finalised until the legislative requirements were known.

- 4 The full version of the Corporate Complaints IT System (CCITS) was finally launched in January 2007. This system can administer complaints from referral to the Council, through the Council's three stage complaints procedure, and on to Ombudsman consideration.

## **COMPLAINTS APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2007**

- 5 This year (2007 – 2008) is therefore the first year that we have been able to fully monitor complaints, and their outcomes.
- 6 A brief statistical overview of complaints for the half year 1 April 2007 – 30 September 2007 is attached at Appendix 1.
- 7 Members will note that a total of 224 complaints were received during that period.
- 8 Table 1 gives a breakdown of the complaints received by Department. The largest number of complaints relate to Environment Department. This is to be expected, as Environment services (street lighting, bin emptying, street cleaning, etc) are used by all residents of Middlesbrough. Users of services such as Economic Regeneration and Social Care are considerably fewer.
- 9 Table 2 provides details of 27 complaints received that were not dealt with by way of the Complaints procedures, and the reasons for this. Non-qualifying complaints include complaints relating to decisions of Planning & Development Committee or Licensing Committee, complaints that should be dealt with by way of an insurance claim, or matters where other means for resolution exist (such as Tribunals or Courts).
- 10 Table 3 provides details of complaints dealt with by way of the Complaints Procedures, by Stage received. The Council has a three stage complaints procedure. Stage 1 is Local Resolution, Stage 2 is Formal Investigation, and Stage 3 is a Review Panel. For Social Services complaints this is an independent review panel. For all other complaints, this is the Complaints & Appeals Committee of the Council.
- 11 Table 4 provides details of the outcome of complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Procedures. Of the 186 complaints where a decision was made (that is, excluding those complaints that were either withdrawn or cancelled), in 108 cases the complaint was fully upheld. In a further 30 cases the complaint was partially upheld. This means that in 74% of cases, complaints were fully or partially upheld. This suggests that complainants are receiving fair treatment in the consideration of their complaints.
- 12 Table 5 expands on Table 4 and shows the outcome of complaints by Department.
- 13 Table 6 shows the completion times for Stage 1 complaints. The Council's Corporate Complaints Procedures require Stage 1 complaints to be completed in 20 working days unless there are exceptional reasons: examples would be that

the complaint is particularly complex, or the complainant is temporarily away from the area. During the period April – September, 83% of Stage 1 complaints were dealt with within this timescale. However, 45% were dealt with within 10 working days – just half of the timescale allowed. We shall do some more work with regard to why 17% of complaints are not completed within the timescale allowed, in order to try and improve this during the current period.

- 14 Members will note that totals for complaints received and outcomes do not tally. This is because some complaints received are not dealt with under the Complaints Procedures (see Table 2), and not all complaints received during a given period are resolved during that period. This means that some outcomes for the current period relate to complaints received during the preceding period. Conversely, some complaints received during the current period will not be resolved until the following period.
- 15 Overall, the figures contained in the Tables at Appendix 1 suggest that the Council investigates complaints in a fair and impartial manner, and with a genuine willingness to find a resolution whenever possible.
- 16 Finally, Members will be pleased to note that the Council has very recently embarked on an exercise to test complainants' satisfaction with the way in which their complaints were handled. Although this work has only commenced during the last few weeks before the preparation of this report, early indications are of a high level of satisfaction.
- 17 Some 27 questionnaires were sent to people who had complained recently, and to date 8 responses have been received. This represents a 30% response rate, which is extremely high for this type of questionnaire.
- 18 Of those that responded, all stated that it was "easy" or "quite easy" to make a complaint to the Council, and that the information about making a complaint was "clear and easy to understand". 5 respondents commented positively on the speed of the procedure, and 4 felt that we had listened to their complaint "straight away". Given that 4 of the respondents were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, this again suggests that the complaints procedures, and the way that complaints are handled, are satisfactory. In future, the half yearly monitoring report will contain more information relating to complainant responses.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 19 This is the first half yearly report that has been produced since the full launch of the Council's Corporate Complaints IT System.
- 20 A large percentage of complaints received by the Council - 74% - are either fully or partially upheld.

- 21 In respect of complaint handling time 17% of Stage 1 complaints are not being completed within the 20 working days required by the Council's Complaints Procedures. This will be addressed during the current period (Oct 2007 – March 2008).
- 22 Although it is early days, initial responses to work in respect of measuring complainant satisfaction with how we handle complaints indicates a high level of satisfaction with complaints handling, regardless of the outcome of the complaint.
- 23 Members are asked to note the content of this report.

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**Table 1: Complaints Received by Department**

DEPARTMENT	Children Families & Learning	Economic Regeneration	Environment	HBS (Mouchel)	Legal & Democratic Services	Social Care	Street Wardens	Total
NUMBERS	38	21	110	17	1	34	3	224

**Table 2: Complaints not dealt with by way of the Complaints Procedures**

REASONS	Non Qualifying Complaint	Passed to other organisation	Passed to Registered Provider
NUMBERS	12	5	2

Notes: Non-qualifying complaints are complaints that fall outside the definition of a complaint as set out in the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedures.  
 Complaints are passed to a 'registered provider' when they are a complaint about a service provided under certain social care legislation (for example, private care homes). This is legal requirement in respect of dealing with such complaints.

**Table 3: Complaints dealt with by way of the Complaints Procedures, by Stage received**

Received at	Numbers
<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Ombudsman</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>

**Table 4: Outcome of complaints**

Outcome	Numbers
<b>Complaint upheld</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Complaint not upheld</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Complaint partially upheld</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Complaint withdrawn</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Complaint cancelled</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>

Notes: Does not include Ombudsman complaints – these are subject of a separate annual report to Committee

**Table 5: Outcome of complaints by Department**

	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld
<b>Children, Families &amp; Learning</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Economic Regeneration</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Environment</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>HBS</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Legal &amp; Democratic Services</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Social Care</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Street Wardens</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 6: Completion times for Stage 1 complaints**

Completion times in working days	Number of complaints
<b>5 days or less</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>10 days or less</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>20 days or less</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>More than 20 days</b>	<b>28</b>

Notes: The Council's Corporate Complaints Procedures require Stage 1 complaints to be completed in 20 working days (Seven Stage 1 complaints were withdrawn and one was cancelled)