

AGENDA ITEM 4

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

18 JULY 2008

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS - MONITORING

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To present to Members the second half yearly report for 2007 – 2008 in respect of the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.

BACKGROUND

- 2 As previously reported to Members, the full version of the Corporate Complaints IT System (CCITS) was launched in January 2007. The system assists in administering complaints from referral to the Council, through the Council's three stage complaints procedure, and on to Ombudsman consideration.
- 3 The first statistical report from the new system, covering the period April – September 2007, was reported to Members in December 2007
- 4 This report provides statistical information for the period October 2007 – March 2008, along with the figures for April – September 2007, so that a comparison may be made.

COMPLAINTS OCTOBER 2007 – MARCH 2008

- 5 A total of 236 complaints were received during the second half of last year, compared with 224 for the first half of the year.

- 6 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.
- 7 The largest reductions in complaints over the two periods relate to Children Families & Learning Department and Environment Department.
- 8 The largest increases in complaints relate to Mouchel and Legal & Democratic Services. Almost all of the complaints received in respect of the latter related to the fact that the central heating boiler in the Registrar's Offices broke down during last winter, and was out of action for some time whilst spare parts were obtained.
- 9 Table 2 provides details of 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). There was a slight reduction, from 19 to 14, in the number of complaints not dealt with under the Complaints Procedures.
- 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. Members will note that only 15% of complaints received go on to Stages 2 and 3 of the Complaints Procedures. This would suggest that most complaints are resolved at Stage 1 of the procedures, and that Local Resolution is effective in resolving the majority of complaints.
- 11 Table 4 provides details of the outcome of complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Procedures. Of the 411 complaints where a decision was made (that is, excluding those complaints that were either withdrawn or cancelled), in 236 cases the complaint was fully upheld. In a further 62 cases the complaint was partially upheld. This means that in 72% 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 2007 to March 2008, 82% of Stage 1 complaints were dealt with within this timescale. However, 42% were dealt with within 10 working days – just half of the timescale allowed.

- 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 (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.

USER SATISFACTION AND COMPLIMENTS

- 15 Members previously requested that we provide information on Compliments, as well as Complaints. Table 7 shows a breakdown by Department of the 89 Compliments that the Council received through the corporate procedures between October 2007 and March 2008. We shall incorporate these figures in future reports as a matter of course.
- 16 As previously reported to Members, last year the Council embarked on an exercise to test complainants' satisfaction with the way in which their complaints were handled. This work had only commenced during the few weeks prior to the preparation of the previous report.
- 17 During the period October 2007 to March 2008, 163 questionnaires were sent to people who had complained recently, and 46 responses were received. This represents a 28% response rate, which is extremely high for this type of questionnaire. Table 8 provides details of forms sent out and the number of responses received.
- 18 Table 9 gives some indication of feedback comments received. Almost all of the respondents 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".
- 19 There appears to be a high correlation between satisfaction with the Complaints process, and the complainant's perception of the outcome of their complaint. If we resolved the complaint to their satisfaction, then they were more likely to be satisfied with the process.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 20 Overall, the figures contained in the Tables at Appendix 1 suggest that the Council investigates complaints quickly, in a fair and impartial manner, and with a genuine willingness to find a resolution whenever possible.
- 21 This is only the second half yearly report that has been produced since the full launch of the Council's Corporate Complaints IT System, and so it is too early to identify meaningful trends.

- 22 However, it is positive that of all complaints received by the Council some 72% are either fully or partially upheld, and less than 15% progress to Stages 2 and 3 of the Complaints Procedures.
- 23 In respect of complaint handling time 18% of Stage 1 complaints are not being completed within the 20 working days required by the Council's Complaints Procedures.
- 24 Although it is early days, initial responses to work in respect of measuring complainant satisfaction indicates a high correlation between satisfaction with the Complaints process, and the complainant's perception of the outcome of their complaint.
- 25 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	Mouchel (HBS)	Legal & Democratic Services	Social Care	Street Wardens	Other Corporate services	Total
April – September 2007	38	21	110	17	1	34	3	0	224
Oct 2007 – March 2008	26	22	96	42	15	31	1	3	236

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

REASONS	Non Qualifying Complaint	Passed to other organisation	Passed to Registered Provider	Passed to contracted agency
April – September 2007	12	5	2	0
Oct 2007 – March 2008	6	2	4	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:	April – September 2007	Oct 2007 – March 2008
Stage 1	174	189
Stage 2	19	24
Stage 3	4	5
Ombudsman	8	4
Total	205	222

Table 4: Outcome of complaints

OUTCOME	April – September 2007	Oct 2007 – March 2008	Totals
Complaint upheld	108	128	236
Complaint not upheld	48	52	100
Complaint partially upheld	30	32	62
Complaint withdrawn	7	1	8
Complaint cancelled	2	3	5
Total	195	216	411

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	
	April – September 2007	Oct 2007 – March 2008	April – September 2007	Oct 2007 – March 2008	April – September 2007	Oct 2007 – March 2008
Children Families & Learning	9	5	6	7	8	9
Economic Regeneration	14	9	1	11	0	1
Environment	72	84	19	2	13	5
HBS	7	9	9	24	0	9
Legal & Democratic Services	0	13	1	2	0	0
Social Care	5	8	11	6	9	8
Street Wardens	1	0	1	0	0	0

Table 6: Completion times for Stage 1 complaints

COMPLETION TIMES IN WORKING DAYS	April – September 2007	Oct 2007 – March 2008	Percentage of all Stage 1 complaints completed within timescale
5 days or less	28	30	16%
10 days or less	46	50	26%
20 days or less	64	80	40%
More than 20 days	28	38	18%

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)

Table 7: Compliments by Department

Children, Families & Learning	23
Economic Regeneration	3
Environment	47
HBS	3
Social Care	10
Street Wardens	3

Table 8: Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires

MONTH	Number sent out	Number received	Response rate %
OCTOBER	32	14	
NOVEMBER	38	10	
DECEMBER	20	7	
JANUARY	32	7	
FEBRUARY	25	1	
MARCH	16	7	
TOTALS	163	46	28.2%

Table 9: Feedback from Questionnaires

Of the 46 people who returned questionnaires:	
41	stated that it was easy/quite easy to complain
42	stated that the information they obtained on how to complain was clear and easy to understand
30	were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint
14	were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint
21	felt that the Council had done what it promised in order to resolve the complaint
17	felt that the Council had not done what it promised in order to resolve the complaint