

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1ST SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CHANGE AND SCRUTINY AND THE HEAD OF CORPORATE LAW AND LEGAL SERVICES

Report prepared by Head of Change & Scrutiny

1. ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2009 – 2010

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the Council's performance in dealing with complaints for the period 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010.

1.1.2 It should be noted that this report to Standards Committee is designed to examine the Council's performance against agreed standards, not to investigate individual service issues.

1.1.3 The annual report will now be published in August annually in order to incorporate the results of the Ombudsman's report.

1.2 Recommendation of the Assistant Director of Customer Services and Partnerships and the Head of Corporate Law and Legal Services

1.2.1 That the issues outlined in the report be noted and endorsed.

1.3 Reasons for recommendation

1.3.1 On June 1 2005, the Council's Management Team introduced a new corporate complaints' system. Standards Committee have since received quarterly reports detailing the Council's performance in relation to the agreed Complaints' Policy, and this report sets out the Council's performance in handling complaints for the year 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010.

1.3.2 Since the introduction of the Corporate Complaints' policy and management system the Council has been able to monitor its response to complaints in order to achieve significant improvements in both response times to complaints and the quality of response. Prior to introducing the new system the Council responded to approximately 60% of all complaints within 10 working days. Performance now is

regularly over 90%, and as well as monitoring the performance of complaints, the Council carries out quarterly satisfaction surveys.

1.3.3 During the year, the Council received 284 complaints. Performance in terms of responsiveness to Stage 1 complaints overall during the year was very good with 96% answered within 10 working days.

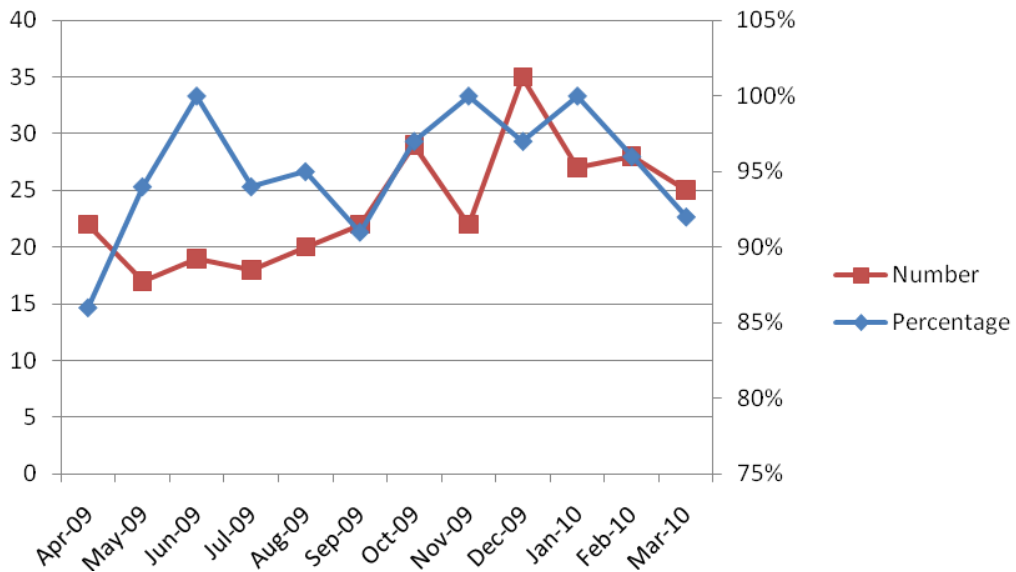


Fig 1: Monthly breakdown of number of complaints and % answered within 10 days – a more detailed analysis compared to previous years is attached at Appendix 2.

1.3.4 A further more detailed analysis identified the following headline issues:

- The number of complaints per month remained reasonably consistent between 17 and 35.
- Performance in responding to complaints within this period was consistently high, only falling below 90% in April.
- The services with the highest numbers of complaints received were:

Service	Number of complaints	% answered on time
Waste Collection	34	100%
Development Control	34	97%

Revenues/NNDR	33	93%
Parking Enforcement	28	96%
Planning Enforcement	27	100%

- The services with the worst response rate within 10 working days were:

Service	Number of complaints	% answered on time
Economic Development & Tourism	1	0%
Housing	18	77%
Housing & Council Tax Benefits	24	87%

1.3.5 In October 2009 The Council (along with all Local Authorities) carried out the annual 'Place Survey' in which 44% of those that responded stated that they were satisfied with the way the Council operates.

1.3.6 The annual Ombudsman's report identified 26 enquiries, of which 22 were treated as complaints, of which none were deemed to be as a result of maladministration.

1.3.7 In terms of comparison with complaints' data for the previous years:

- In 2009/10 the number of complaints increased by 16% compared to 2008/09.
- The following sections received no complaints during the year 2009/10 – Arts Development, Audit, Change & Improvement, Secretariats, Communications, Community Safety, Food & Safety, HR, Legal Conveyancing or Litigation, Market, Museum, Overview & Scrutiny, Property & Procurement, Registration Services and Social Inclusion.
- During 2006/07, 34 Stage 2 complaints were raised; 10 (29.4%) were dealt with within SLA and 24 outside of the service agreement.
- During 2007/08, 48 Stage 2 complaints were raised, 42 (87.5%) were dealt with within the service agreement and only 6 outside.
- During 2008/9, 38 stage 2 complaints were raised, 36 (95%) were dealt with within the service agreement and only 2 outside.
- During 2009/10, 33 stage 2 complaints were raised, 30 (91%) were dealt with within the service agreement and only 3 outside.

1.3.8 A more detailed breakdown of complaints received is attached at Appendix A and a chart of complaints statistics since 2006 is attached at Appendix B.

1.3 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The Council's complaints' policies and management systems underpin its commitment to excellent customer care and therefore a robust system needs to be in place.

1.4 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 Customer Services is a key priority, and the nature of complaints from our Customers and the manner in which the Council responds to those complaints touches upon every priority theme in the Council's strategic plan.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 Failure to manage complaints represents both a financial risk to the Council and a risk to its reputation. Regular reports are produced for Management and individual Heads of Service are reminded of their responsibilities.

1.7 Other Implications

- 1. Financial
- 2. Staffing
- 3. Legal
- 4. Social Inclusion
- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement

X

1.8 Financial

1.8.1 The Council made payments of £475 in relation to 5 complaints as set out below:

- £50 awarded for a complaint relating to communications issues over a planning enforcement matter;
- £300 awarded for a complaint relating to administrative errors made during a Development Control report;
- £50 awarded for a complaint relating to consultation issues in development control;
- £25 to a customer following a misaddressed letter from planning; and
- £50 to a customer following a misplaced council tax payment

1.9 Relevant documents

1.9.1 Appendices

Appendix A Breakdown of complaints by service 2009/10

Appendix B Complaints statistical comparison 2006/10

Appendix C

1.9.2

NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED

Is this a Key Decision? Yes No

If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan?

Is this an Urgent Key Decision? Yes No

Reason for Urgency

Appendix A Breakdown of complaints by service 2009/10

Service	Total	On time	Late	Success
Development control	34	33	1	97%
Waste collection	34	34	0	100%
Council tax or Business rates	33	31	2	93%
Parking enforcement	28	27	1	96%
Planning enforcement	27	27	0	100%
Housing and Council Tax-benefits issues only	24	23	1	87%
Housing options, private sector housing or housing policy	18	14	4	77%
Contact centre	11	11	0	100%
Pollution	10	10	0	100%
Concessionary fares	7	7	0	100%
Planning policy	7	7	0	100%
Bereavement services	6	6	0	100%
Grounds maintenance	5	5	0	100%
Building surveying	4	4	0	100%
Conservation and landscape	3	3	0	100%
Democracy and democratic support	3	3	0	100%
IT support	3	3	0	100%
Sports and play	3	3	0	100%
Leisure	2	2	0	100%
Licensing	2	2	0	100%
Street sweeping	2	2	0	100%
Accountancy	1	1	0	100%
Complaints	1	1	0	100%
Economic development and tourism	1	0	1	100%
Hazlitt Theatre	1	1	0	100%
Public toilets	1	1	0	100%
Other	13	12	1	92%
Total	284	273	11	96%

Appendix B: Complaints statistical comparison 2006 – 2010

