

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

8 JUNE 2011

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CHANGE AND SCRUTINY

Report prepared by Ellie Kershaw

1. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2010-2011

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the Council's performance in dealing with complaints for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011.

1.1.2 In order that this information may be considered in a timely fashion a further report detailing the results of the Ombudsman's report will be brought at a later date.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Change and Scrutiny

1.2.1 That the Committee endorses the recommendations outlined in this report.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 Over the last 12 months Maidstone Borough Council has taken a more robust approach to complaints monitoring. The purpose of this is to improve the overall customer experience by using complaints not only to measure dissatisfaction but as an improvement tool.

1.3.2 All complaints are now categorised not only by area but by the broad type of complaint as shown at Appendix A. This allows the Council to note any trends in complaints. For example, a high number relate to policy decisions which can be expected when new policies such as the food waste collection are implemented. Continued monitoring can show whether this is an initial reaction to change or whether a policy may require some evaluation.

1.3.3 In order to ensure that complaints are being answered within corporate timescales and to a high standard it is important that a monitoring mechanism is in place. The Council also monitors customer satisfaction with complaints handling through a monthly survey.

1.3.4 During the year the Council received a total of 292 stage 1 complaints of which 90% were answered within 10 working days. This is lower than the 96% recorded in 2009-2010 and is due in large part to the complexity of some complaints, particularly housing related ones.

1.3.5 The services with the highest number of complaints were;

Service	Complaints	% answered in timescale
Waste collection	34	100%
Housing options	33	58%
Parking enforcement	33	100%
Development management	30	88%

1.3.6 The services with the lowest performance for answering complaints within 10 days were;

Service	Complaints	% answered in timescale
Communications	1	0%
Community safety	1	0%
Property, procurement and projects	1	0%
Housing options	33	58%
Council tax and business rates	26	81%

1.3.7 There were a total of 48 stage 2 complaints over the year, 36 of which (75%) were answered on time. The services with the most stage 2 complaints were Development control (10), Parking enforcement (6) and Planning enforcement (6).

1.4 Actions taken in 2010-11

1.4.1 Complaints are now categorised in reports to show if any service is receiving a high number of complaints about a particular subject. Where this is the case, the Head of Service is then made aware so that, if necessary, action can be taken to improve or change service delivery.

1.4.2 Complaints surveys are now sent to customers on a monthly basis rather than quarterly. This has improved the rate of return. Where a customer has raised issues on their survey these have been followed up by the Head of Change and Scrutiny to ensure that the Council has done as much as is possible to resolve the complaint.

- 1.4.3 As a result of complaints about litter enforcement staff actions have been taken to improve this service including members of MBC staff going out with the litter enforcement staff to see how they work.
- 1.4.4 Where complex complaints take longer than the target time to respond to, the reasons are noted in the quarterly reports so that the performance of a service is not judged according to this type of complaint.
- 1.4.5 Due to the high number of complaints about housing issues, the Head of Housing and Community Safety has nominated one member of staff to be responsible for answering all complaints. This should improve response times.
- 1.4.6 Due to a number of complaints being received about the change in garden refuse sacks the exchange period where customers could receive the new style bags in return for the old was extended.

1.5 Future plans

- 1.5.1 In order to improve and streamline complaints reporting a new correspondence system is under development. This system will enable the creation of customer records where all their written contact is registered, including compliments, complaints and general comments/enquiries, FOI and EIR requests. The specification for this system is currently being agreed.
- 1.5.2 A number of future actions are planned including a review of the complaints policy and staff training. Details of all actions currently planned can be found at Appendix B.

1.6 Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 1.6.1 Customer service is a core value for the Council and improving complaints management is critical to the success of this objective.
- 1.6.2 The Strategic Plan 2011-15 sets Corporate and Customer Excellence as one of the Council's 3 priorities. Moving forward robust management of complaints will help to deliver this priority.

1.7 Risk Management

- 1.7.1 Failure to manage complaints represents both a financial and reputational risk to the Council. Regular reports are produced for the

Corporate Management Team to ensure awareness of issues being raised by customers and what is being done in response to complaints.

1.8 Other Implications

1.8.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	

1.8.2 The Council made compensatory payments of £655.65 in 2010-11;
Housing benefit: £525.65
Planning advice: £50
Planning enforcement: £50
Concessionary fares: £30

1.9 Relevant Documents

1.9.1 Appendices

Appendix A Complaints 1 April 2010-31March 2011

Appendix B Complaints action plan

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

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

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This is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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Appendix A Complaints 1 April 2010-31 March 2011

Service	Total	On time	Late	% in target	Lack of Info/contact	Time taken	Policy	Discrimination	Service	Staff
Bereavement services	7	7	0	100%	0	0	2	0	5	0
Building surveying	4	4	0	100%	1	1	1	0	0	1
Chief Executives Secretariat	1	1	0	100%	0	0	1	0	0	0
Communications	1	0	1	0%	0	0	1	0	0	0
Community safety	1	0	1	0%	0	0	0	0	0	1
Concessionary fares	5	5	0	100%	0	0	0	0	2	3
Conservation and landscape	3	3	0	100%	1	0	2	0	0	0
Contact centre	15	15	0	100%	0	0	3	1	8	3
Council tax or business rates	26	21	5	81%	2	0	9	0	14	1
Customer services	3	3	0	100%	0	0	0	0	1	2
Development management	60	55	5	88%	6	2	9	1	21	4
Grounds maintenance	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	0	1	0
Housing and council tax-benefits issues only	11	10	1	91%	1	0	0	0	7	3
Housing options/private sector housing/housing policy	33	19	14	58%	3	2	8	0	15	5
IT support	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	0	1	0
Leisure	3	3	0	100%	1	0	1	0	1	0
Licensing	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	0	1	0
Other	4	4	0	100%	1	0	0	0	2	1
Parking enforcement	33	33	0	100%	3	0	13	0	12	5
Planning policy	5	5	0	100%	1	0	0	0	2	2
Pollution (litter enforcement)	25	25	0	100%	0	0	2	0	5	18
Property, procurement and projects	1	0	1	0%	0	0	1	0	0	0
Public toilets	3	3	0	100%	0	0	1	0	2	0
Registration	3	3	0	100%	0	0	0	0	3	0
Street sweeping	5	5	0	100%	0	0	1	0	2	2
Waste collection	33	33	0	100%	0	0	16	0	15	2
Total	288	260	28	90%	24	7	76	3	124	54