

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

22ND MAY 2009

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES
AND PARTNERSHIPS AND THE HEAD OF CORPORATE LAW AND
LEGAL SERVICES**

Report prepared by IT Manager

1. ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2008 – 2009

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the Council's performance in dealing with complaints for the period 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009.

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 2008 to 31st March 2009.

1.3.2 Since the introduction of a set of Corporate Complaints policies 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 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 245 complaints. Performance of Stage 1 complaints overall during the year was excellent with 93% answered within 10 working days. A further more detailed analysis identified the following headline issues:

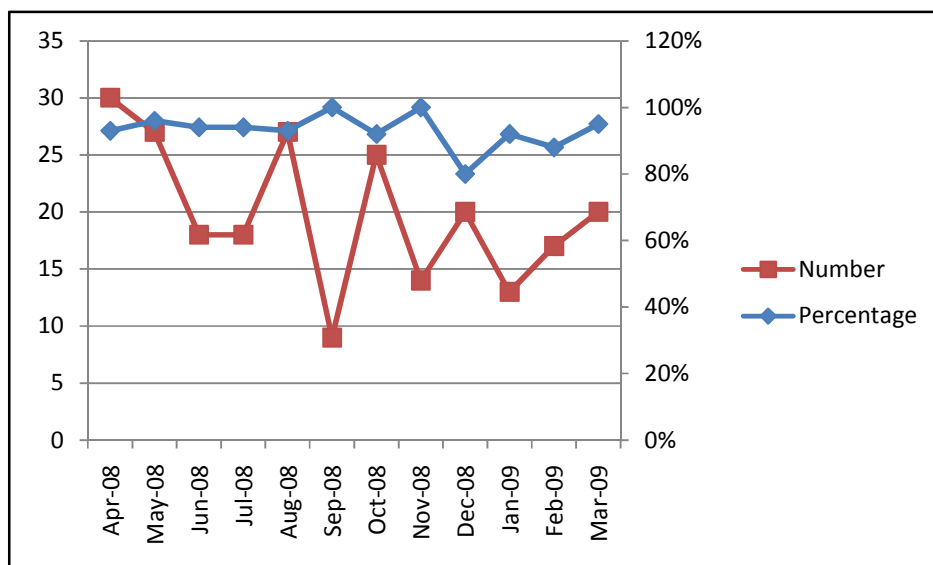


Fig 1: Monthly breakdown of number of complaints and % answered within 10 days

- The number of complaints per month remained reasonably consistent between 10 and 30.
- Performance in responding to complaints within this period was consistently high, only falling below 90% in December.
- The four services with the highest numbers of complaints received were:

Service	Number of complaints	% answered on time
Revenues/NNDR	32	93%
Development control	32	96%
Parking Enforcement	32	96%
Waste Collection	30	96%

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

Service	Number of complaints	% answered on time
Building Surveying	4	50%
Conservation & Landscape	5	60%
Sports and Play	4	75%
Housing	16	75%

1.3.4 In October 2008 The Council (along with all Local Authorities) carried out the 'Place Survey'. 5,000 questionnaires were sent out, of which 2,300 were returned and 46% stated that they were happy with the way the Council runs its affairs.

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

- In 2008/09 the number of complaints decreased by 25% compared to 2007/08.
- The following sections received no complaints during the year 2008/09 – Audit, Change & Improvement, Secretariats, Communications, Hazlitt Theatre, IT Section, Legal Services, Overview & Scrutiny, and Registration Services.
- 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.
- Complaints to the Ombudsman rose slightly from 31 in 2006/7 to 36 in 2007/8 . However, once again the LGO did not find maladministration in any of the cases- the LGO will be issuing his annual report for 2008/9 in the summer.

1.3.5 A more detailed breakdown of complaints received is attached at Appendix 1.

1.4 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.

1.5 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. The process corporately is overseen by the Head of Customer Services and is supported by the work of the Reputation Project.

1.7 Other Implications

1. Financial
2. Staffing

X

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

1.8 Financial

1.8.1 During the year 2008/9 the Ombudsman recommended that the council make a local settlement in 4 cases, involving the payment of £900, relating to a homelessness application, an anti-social behavior issue, and two relating to planning consultations.

1.8.2 In addition to these local settlements the Council made payments of £125 in relation to 3 other complaints without Ombudsman intervention as set out below:

- £25 in respect of council tax mistaken identity;
- £50 (x2) in relation to planning consultations

1.9 Background Documents

1.9.1 None.

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 1: Breakdown of complaints by Service 2008 - 9

Date From: Date To:

01/04/2008 31/03/2009

Service Breakdown (Stage 1)

Service	Total	On Time	Late	Success
Council Tax or Business Rates	32	30	2	93%
Development Control	32	31	1	96%
Parking Enforcement	32	31	1	96%
Waste Collection	30	29	1	96%
Housing and Council Tax Benefits	16	14	2	87%
Housing Options, Private Sector Housing or Housing Policy	16	12	4	75%
Contact Centre	14	14	0	100%
Planning Enforcement	14	13	1	92%
Concessionary Fares	9	9	0	100%
Pollution	8	8	0	100%
Leisure	7	7	0	100%
Conservation and Landscape	5	3	2	60%
Other	5	5	0	100%
Bereavement Services	4	4	0	100%
Building Surveying	4	2	2	50%
Sports and Play	4	3	1	75%
Grounds Maintenance	3	3	0	100%
Street Sweeping	3	3	0	100%
Public Toilets	2	2	0	100%
Community Safety	1	1	0	100%
Food and Safety	1	1	0	100%
Licensing	1	1	0	100%
Social Inclusion	1	1	0	100%