

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM

8th JULY 2014

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report prepared by Sam Bailey

1. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS JANUARY-MARCH 2014 (QUARTER 4);

1.1 Issue for Consideration

1.1.1 To consider the Council's performance in dealing with complaints during January-March 2014 (quarter 4).

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Policy and Communications

1.2.1 That the Committee notes the performance in relation to complaints and makes recommendations as appropriate.

1.2.2 That the Committee notes the compliments received by teams and individual officers within the Council.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 In order to ensure that complaints are being dealt with effectively and within corporate timescales it is important that a monitoring mechanism is in place.

1.3.2 Details of the complaints received broken down by service area, timeliness and category can be found at Appendix A. Complaints have been categorised, but many complaints will be about more than one element (e.g. both policy and staff attitude).

1.4 Quarter 4 Performance

1.4.1 Details of quarter 4 complaints handling performance can be found in Appendix A.

1.4.2 During quarter 4, 118 stage 1 complaints were closed, of which 116 (98.3%) were responded to on time. This represents a 36% decrease in the overall number of complaints received this quarter compared to the previous quarter. This also represents an increase in performance in terms of answering complaints within target time

of 7.0%, as in quarter 3 91.3% of complaints were closed within target time.

1.4.3 Of the complaints responded to outside the target time:

- One was about Benefits; and
- One was about Housing Options

1.4.4 The reasons for these complaints being responded to out of time included:

- The complaint responded to late by Housing Options was responded to late as CCTV footage had to be retrieved from the Gateway. The complainant was kept up to date with the progress of the complaint throughout this time.
- The complaint responded to late by Benefits was responded to 5 days late. The reason for this delay was that it was originally misallocated to the wrong officer within the team.

1.5 Trends Identified and Action Taken

1.5.1 The services that dealt with the highest number of complaints were:

- Environmental Services (26);
- Parking Services (24);
- Development Management (13);and
- Revenues (13).

1.5.2 Environmental Services had the highest number of complaints this quarter. There has been a 49% decrease in complaints received by this service compared to the previous quarter. The number of complaints has been decreasing since Quarter 2 of 2013/2014 when the new waste contract was introduced. The number of complaints for Environmental Services has returned to a more regular level now many of the problems around the new waste contract have been resolved.

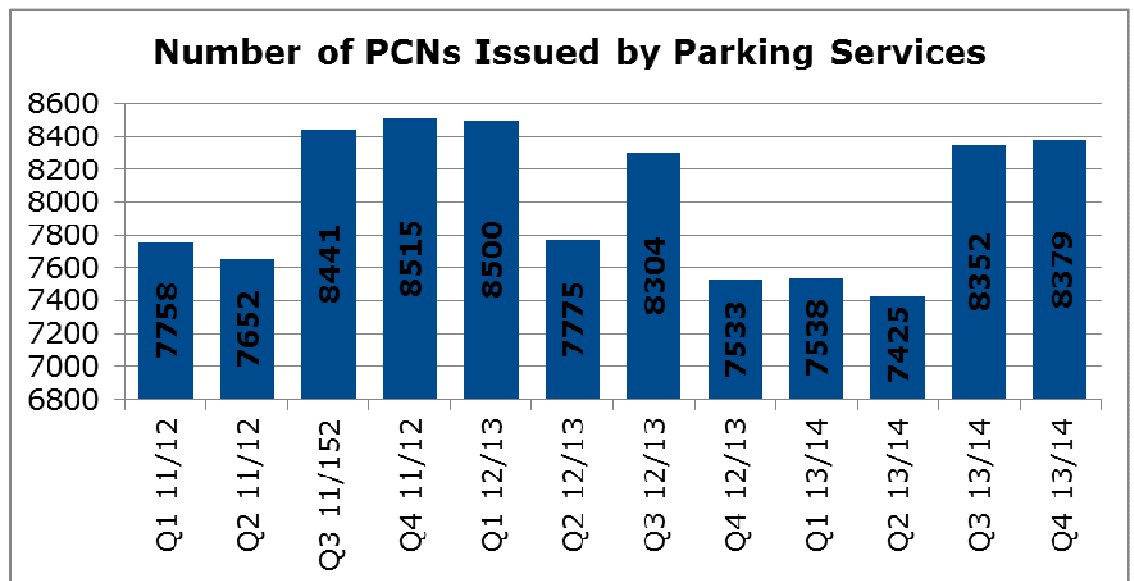
1.5.3 Parking Services saw an unusually high number of complaints for quarter 4 (24). Of these complaints, 12 were about service, 8 were about policy and 4 were about staff. After further analysis of these complaints the following trends were apparent:

- Four were about allegations of misconduct from Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs). None of these were found to

be justified;

- Three complaints were about requesting enforcement action on vehicles that are persistently illegally parked;
- Five complaints were about the system of visitor or resident parking permits;
- Three were complaints about outstanding or recently closed PCNs;
- Three complaints were about work vehicles using resident permit bays; and
- Six complaints were about various other issues.

1.5.4 Parking Services issued the most PCNs this quarter (see graph below for comparative figures) compared to the first three quarters of the year. However not all complaints were directly related to PCNs being issued and Parking Services issued a similar number during the previous quarters and did not receive as many complaints.



1.5.5 Development Management received thirteen complaints this quarter. This is lower than the previous quarter's figure of 22 complaints. Eight of these complaints were about service, three were about policy, one was about staff and one was about time taken. The three complaints about policy were about planning decisions that complainants were unhappy with. There were no

other trends in the complaints for development management during this quarter.

- 1.5.6 Revenues received 13 complaints this quarter. This is an increase compared to quarter 3 when they received 9 complaints. Of these complaints, nine were about service, three were about policy and one was about discrimination. The three policy complaints were all about the localised council tax support scheme, in particular the reduced council tax exemptions given for empty properties. The complaint about discrimination is covered in paragraph 1.9.1.
- 1.5.7 Of the nine complaints about service for Revenues, three were about the conduct of bailiffs acting on behalf of the council. During quarter 4 there were 234 accounts that were sent to the bailiffs for collection, representing 1.3% of cases sent to collection resulting in a complaint. This is a low proportion considering the nature of the complaint. It is also worth noting that quarter 4 saw the lowest number of accounts sent to bailiffs for collection during 2013/2014. There were no other trends in complaints received for revenues.
- 1.5.8 Other trends that can be noticed compared to the previous quarter are:
- Housing Options have seen a 50% drop in complaints made against them (16 in quarter 3 compared to 8 in quarter 4)
 - Customer Services have seen a 50% drop in complaints made against them (8 in quarter 3 compared to 4 in quarter 4)
 - Parks and Leisure have seen a significant drop in complaints, from 17 received in quarter 3 down to 4 in quarter 4
- 1.5.9 Three complaints received during this quarter were about the council's response to the floods during January. Of these complaints, two were alleging that the council prioritised other areas over the complainant's own. The other complaint was about not receiving sandbags to the complainant's door, instead being asked to pick them up from a particular area.
- 1.6 Stage 2 Complaints
- 1.6.1 17 stage 2 complaints were received this quarter. This is a significant drop in the number of stage 2 complaints received, as 39 were received in quarter 3. However the number of stage 2 complaints received in quarter 3 was exceptionally high. All stage 2 complaints were responded to on time this quarter. A breakdown

of stage 2 complaints can be found in Appendix C.

1.6.2 Of these stage 2 complaints, 4 were justified. No stage 2 complaints resulted in payments or compensation this quarter.

1.7 Complaints Handling Satisfaction

1.7.1 A breakdown of complaints satisfaction surveys can be found in Appendix B. For quarter 4, 36 complaints satisfaction surveys were returned. This represents a response rate of 30.5%.

1.7.2 41.7% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the way their complaint was handled. 2.7% of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 55.5% of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way in which their complaint was handled.

1.7.3 Of the services that received four or more satisfaction surveys back, Environmental Services received the highest proportion of respondents who were satisfied or very satisfied with their response (42.3%).

1.7.4 Some complainants made comments on their satisfaction surveys:

- Ten complainants gave further information on the reason for their dissatisfaction with the complaint response;
- Three complainants either requested a Stage 2 complaint investigation or were offered a Stage 2 complaint investigation as a result of the response;
- Five complainants commented on the outcome of their complaint; and
- One complainant praised the Benefits Manager who dealt with their complaint, stating:
`The Manager was very prompt, professional, courteous and invaluable to the Organisation. My complaint was rectified immediately - Thank you very much`.

1.8 Safety

1.8.1 Seven complaints received this quarter were about safety. Of these complaints, one was about building control, one was about community development, one was about economic development, two were about parking services, one was about parks and leisure and one was about revenues. There were no recurring issues or correlations in these complaints. Of these complaints, three were

upheld or partially upheld:

- One complaint against Community Development was about littering and drug paraphernalia on a piece of land opposite a school, requesting the police attend to the area to prevent the littering. The response stated that whilst the land itself is not in the council's ownership, Environmental Services had removed rubbish from the area due to the nature of the littering.
- One complaint was against Parks and Leisure, about some disused garages and a disused play park. In response we informed the complainant that the garages were the responsibility of Golding Homes, but that the play park was indeed owned by the Council and we would send contractors to secure the site.
- One complaint against Parking Services was about trailers being parked in resident parking bays, causing a hazard to motorists. The response informed the complainant that this was not within our jurisdiction, however as it was causing a hazard we requested an on-site visit from Kent County Council to assess the situation.

1.9 Discrimination

1.9.1 One complaint was *primarily* about alleged discrimination or unfair disadvantage for people with protected characteristics. The complaint was against Revenues and was about the wording of a letter about a council tax discount sent to a resident with Alzheimer's; however the wording had to be used as it was legally required.

1.9.2 Ten complaints were from complainants with protected characteristics under equalities legislation:

Characteristic	Disability	Maternity/ Pregnancy	Age
Complainants	8	1	1

1.10 Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants

1.10.1 There were no complaints from unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants this quarter.

1.11 Compliments

- 1.11.1 Many compliments have also been received by the Council this quarter. These can be summarised below:

Service	Number of Compliments
Waste Collection	6
Grounds Maintenance	2
Parking Services	2
Housing Options	1
Depot Operations	5
Customer Services	3
Benefits	1
Communications	16
Parks and Leisure	1

The Communications Team received a high number of compliments this quarter. The majority of their compliments were for the work they carried out on social media during the floods at Christmas time.

1.12 Methods of Contact

- 1.12.1 Complaints were received by the following methods of contact this quarter:

- 47 (39.8%) were made by email
- 11 (9.3%) were made face to face
- 12 (10.2%) were made by post
- 48 (40.7%) were made by telephone

1.13 Payments

- 1.13.1 There were no complaints that resulted in payments, refunds or compensation this quarter.

1.14 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.14.1 The Council could choose not to monitor complaints handling but this would impact severely on the Council's ability to use complaints as a business improvement tool.

1.15 Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 1.15.1 Customer service is a core value and one of the Council's priorities is Corporate and Customer Excellence. Management of complaints is critical to the success of this objective.

1.16 Risk Management

1.16.1 Failure to manage complaints in a robust fashion represents a service, financial and reputational risk to the Council. Regular reports are produced for CLT and also presented to the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Monitoring is carried out by the Policy and Information Team.

1.17 Other Implications

- 1. Financial
- 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

1.18 Appendices

- Appendix A: Complaints Categorisation and Timeliness
- Appendix B: Complaints Satisfaction Survey Results
- Appendix C: Stage 2 Complaints

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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