

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

01 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CHANGE AND SCRUTINY

Report prepared by Policy and Review Officer

1. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS APRIL-JUNE 2010

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the council's performance in dealing with complaints during April to June 2010 and to note the areas identified for improvement.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Change and Scrutiny

1.2.1 That the Standards Committee notes and endorses the issues outlined in the report.

1.2.2 That the broad categories of complaint are noted as well as the service area to enable easier trend analysis.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 On June 1 2005, the Council introduced a new corporate complaints system and Standards Committee have since received regular quarterly reports and annual reports detailing the council's performance in relation to the agreed Complaints' Policy.

1.3.2 Since the initial launch of the Complaints' system, significant improvements have been made to the reporting facilities to ensure better management information can be retrieved.

1.3.3 It should be noted that whilst this report deals with complaints, the council also receives a number of compliments. Details of the complaints received, broken down by service area, category and performance against the council's published service agreement is shown in **Appendix 1**

1.3.4 A summary of the analysis of the complaints data for the period April to June 2010 is set out below:

- During the period under review a total of 68 stage 1 complaints were processed;
- During this period the most complaints related to parking enforcement (16), council tax or business rates (12), and development control (8);
- The percentage of stage 1 complaints processed within 10 days for this period was 99% (67);
- During the period 11 Stage 2 complaints were made, all of which were processed within the target time.

1.3.5 A summary of the same period in 2009/10 is set out below:

- During this period a total of 59 stage 1 complaints were processed;
- During this period the most complaints related to council tax or business rates (8);
- The percentage of stage 1 complaints processed within 10 days for this period was 93% (55);
- During the period 3 Stage 2 complaints were made, all of which were processed within the target time.

Although council tax complaints were among the highest both quarters the numbers are not sufficiently large for any conclusion to be drawn from this except that it is a service which is likely to attract more complaints due to the volume of customers the team is in contact with. No other comparisons can be drawn between the quarters.

1.3.6 The CMT has initiated a review of policy and the complaints handling system. This will be lead by the Head of Change and Scrutiny and the Policy and Review Officer. It is intended that the new policy will be more outcome focused, enabling the Council to learn from complaints that have been made. The new policy will include more emphasis on customer satisfaction and lessons learned as well as implementing a quality assurance regime. It is intended that complaints will be grouped thematically as well as by service so that it is easy to identify trends in complaints. Discussions will also be held with key staff members to identify any problems or concerns they have with the current policy and any action they think could be taken to improve the customer experience.

1.3.7 A review of the complaints monitoring system is being undertaken, in conjunction with the Council's requirements for managing Freedom of Information, Environmental Impact Requests, Data Protection Subject Access Requests, MPs letters, and compliments. The review will consider the options for combining all these requests into a single system. Systems are being investigated that would allow a single record to be maintained for each customer, allowing officers to see immediately whether a reported issue is new or ongoing and what action has already been taken. This should also avoid duplication of

effort where a customer complains through more than one channel e.g. through the contact centre, their MP and the Ombudsman.

1.4 Trend analysis

1.4.1 A trend analysis has been undertaken using the WOCAS report ('what our customers are saying') to provide additional data concerning the type of complaints being received, and any policy implications or learning experiences.

1.4.2 A number of the complaints against parking enforcement relate to the policy around residential parking restrictions and it is therefore recommended that the relevant manager should keep monitoring these type of complaints throughout the year in order to determine whether a policy review should be undertaken

1.4.3 As part of the review of complaints a template will be created to record actions taken as a result of complaints so that lessons learnt can also be reported in the future.

1.5 Alternative action and why not taken

1.5.1 The Council's complaints' management follows the Local Government Ombudsman best practice. Managing complaints is a key means of ensuring the council's services are delivered to a consistently high standard.

1.6 Impact on corporate objectives

1.6.1 Customer Services is a core value and improving complaints' management is critical to the success of this objective.

1.7 Risk management

1.7.1 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 is overseen by the Head Change and Scrutiny and the Head of Legal Services supported by the Policy and Review Officer

1.8

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal

X

4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

- 1.7.2 The council made compensatory payments of £625.65 in this period
- £525.65 in April in relation to a housing benefit claim that was made to the wrong account
 - £50 in June for slow giving of planning advice
 - £50 in June for poor communication relating to a planning enforcement matter.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Breakdown of complaints by service April to June 2010
 Breakdown of complaints April to June 2009

1.8.2 Background Documents

None

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 –Breakdown of stage 1 complaints 01/04/10-30/06/10

Service	Total	On time	Late	Success	Lack of Info/contact	Policy	Discrimination	Service	Staff
Building surveying	2	2	0	100%	1	1	0	0	0
Chief Executives Secretariat	1	1	0	100%	0	1	0	0	0
Contact Centre	3	3	0	100%	0	0	0	3	0
Council tax or business rates	12	12	0	100%	2	4	0	5	1
Development control	8	7	1	88%	3	3	0	1	0
Grounds maintenance	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	1	0
Housing and council tax-benefits issues only	3	3	0	100%	1	0	0	2	0
Housing options/private sector housing/housing policy	3	3	0	100%	1	0	0	2	0
Leisure	1	1	0	100%	1	0	0	0	0
Other	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	0	1
Parking enforcement	16	16	0	100%	2	8	0	3	3
Planning enforcement	4	4	0	100%	3	1	0	0	0
Planning policy	3	3	0	100%	1	0	0	1	1
Pollution	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	1	1
Public toilets	1	1	0	100%	0	1	0	0	0
Street sweeping	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	1	0
Waste collection	7	7	0	100%	0	0	0	6	1
Total	68	67	1	99%	15	19	0	26	8

Appendix B –Breakdown of stage 1 complaints 01/04/09-30/06/09

Service	Total	On time	Late	Success	Lack of Info/contact	Policy	Discrimination	Service	Staff
Accountancy	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	1	0
Bereavement	1	1	0	100%	0	1	0	0	0
Building surveying	2	2	0	100%	0	2	0	0	0
Concessionary fares	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	0	1
Conservation and landscape	2	2	0	100%	0	0	0	2	0
Contact Centre	4	4	0	100%	0	2	0	2	0
Council tax or business rates	8	7	1	88%	0	2	0	6	0
Democracy & Democratic support	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	1	0
Development control	3	2	1	67%	1	0	0	2	0
Economic development	1	0	1	100%	1	0	0	0	0
Housing & council tax benefits	6	6	0	100%	0	1	0	3	2
Housing options/private sector housing/housing policy	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	1	0
Licensing	2	2	0	100%	0	0	0	1	1
Other	1	0	1	0%	0	0	1	0	0
Parking enforcement	5	1	0	100%	0	1	0	1	3
Planning	6	6	0	100%	1	1	0	4	0
Planning enforcement	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	0	1
Planning policy	4	4	0	100%	0	0	0	4	0
Pollution	3	3	0	100%	0	0	0	2	1
Property and procurement	1	1	0	100%	0	1	0	0	0
Sports and play	1	1	0	100%	0	0	0	1	0
Waste collection	4	4	0	100%	0	0	0	3	1
Totals	59	55	4	93%	3	11	1	34	10

NB At the beginning of this quarter Planning existed as one category. It was then split into two for easier analysis.