

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

3RD DECEMBER 2013

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report prepared by Sam Bailey

**1. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS JULY-SEPTEMBER (QUARTER 2)
2013**

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the Council's performance in dealing with complaints during July-September (Quarter 2) 2013.

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 note 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 Answers to questions raised at the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3rd September 2013

1.4.1 Members asked for further information on action taken to improve the complaints handling satisfaction surveys. The following action has been taken:

- Surveys now ask two questions- one about satisfaction with the complaint response; the other about satisfaction with the way the complaint was handled. There is evidence, through different answers given for the questions, that complainants are separating the two issues
- Surveys are now sent out weekly instead of monthly
- An online survey has now been launched for those who have sent their complaints in via email

1.4.2 The effect of these measures is to increase performance in complaint handling satisfaction. Complaint handling satisfaction improved from 20% in quarter 1 to 40% in quarter 2. Although the response rate only increased by 1.7% compared to quarter 1 (from 12.5% to 14.2%); the response rate for quarter 3 currently stands at around 32%.

1.4.3 Members asked for an update on the progress of allowing members to add and track complaints to the system. The system is a corporate complaints system, designed to allow complaints to be dealt with in line with the council's complaints policy. Members can add a complaint on behalf of their resident by contacting the Policy and Information Team. This will then be dealt with in line with the corporate complaints policy. It is also possible to ask for a note to be put onto the system ensuring that members are kept up to date with the progress of the complaint. Another possibility is an option on the initial form of a box to tick which will indicate this is a complaint via a member, with the member's details on it.

1.5 July- September (Quarter 2) Performance

1.5.1 During the period July to September 2013, 175 stage 1 complaints were closed, of which 170 (97.1%) were responded to in time. This represents an 88% increase in the number of complaints received this quarter compared to the quarter 1 of 2013/2014; as well as an increase in performance of 1.4% in terms of answering complaints within target time.

1.5.2 Of the complaints responded to outside the target time:

- Two were about Housing Services
- One was about Customer Services
- One was about Development Management
- One was about Parks and Leisure

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

- The complaint responded to late by Customer Services was because it was a complicated matter about a payment that

had been made to an account which could not be traced. The customer was kept up to date with the progress of the complaint whilst investigations were ongoing.

- The complaints responded to late by Development Management, Parks and Leisure were responded to late due to the system generating the wrong due dates.

1.6 Stage 1 Complaints: Trends Identified and Action Taken

1.6.1 The services which dealt with the highest number of complaints were:

- Environmental Services (77)
- Customer Services (18)
- Development Management (15)
- Housing Services (14)
- Parking Services (12)

1.6.2 It should be noted that all of these services saw an increase in complaints compared to quarter 1.

1.6.3 There were two services with unusually high numbers of complaints- Customer Services and Environmental Services. The increases in complaints for these services were a result of the new waste contract.

1.6.4 Environmental Services received the highest number of complaints this quarter. Of the 77 complaints that were received, 52 were related to issues around the new waste collection contract. The main issues complained about were:

- Six complaints were received about having to wait a long time for waste collection due to the change in collection rounds.
- Forty were about missed collections or irregular collections for domestic or garden waste.
- Two were about missed bulky collections.
- Two were about the lack of communications regarding the new service.

Other issues complained about for Environmental Services that were unrelated to the new waste collection contract were:

- Two complaints were received about the council's pest control contractor, Mitie. One complaint was unhappy that

we had referred them to complain to Mitie. The complainant felt that we should deal with the complaint as it is us who contract Mitie to deliver the pest control service. The other complaint about Mitie was that they asked for a payment up front, did not deliver the service and then did not issue a refund. At the time of these complaints, Mitie were moving premises and were having teething problems.

- Four complaints were received regarding the delay in being able to report a missed bin. The system has now been changed and residents can now report a collection on the day it has been missed.

1.6.5 Customer Services received 18 complaints this quarter. Twelve were about service, four were about staff, and two were about time taken. Four of these complaints were about long wait times for the contact centre. These long wait times were the result of a high number of calls received due to the new Waste Contract being implemented. The other 14 complaints were all about unrelated matters with no other correlations.

1.6.6 Of the 15 complaints about Development Management, six were about service, eight were about policy and one was about staff. The eight complaints about policy were all complainants who were not happy with planning decisions. Of the policy complaints one decision in particular generated two complaints- the granting of permanent planning permission of a gypsy site that previously had temporary permission. One of these complaints went to stage 2 and the other was dealt with by Legal as the complainant was requesting a Judicial Review of the decision. Other than this there were no clear trends in the complaints for Development Management.

1.6.7 Of the 14 complaints received by Housing Services; six were about service, five were about policy, two were about staff and one was about lack of contact. Of the five policy complaints, four were regarding the way the Housing Allocation policy works, although they were all about different elements of the policy. There were no other trends or correlations in these complaints.

1.6.8 Of the 12 complaints received by parking services; five were about service, two were about policy, four were about staff and one was about time taken. One of the complaints was about the fact that residents have to re-apply for their permits in-year, even if their previous permit has not run for a whole year. This issue has been ongoing and there have been several complaints about this issue over the previous year. The Business Improvement Team have recently conducted a review of the Visitor Parking Permit service;

and are currently looking to implement a paperless solution which should prevent this situation happening in the future.

1.6.9 Community Development received two complaints regarding a Careers Fair held at the Chequers Centre. One complaint was regarding misleading information given regarding council vacancies before the fair. The misleading information in question was actually given by Jobcentre Plus and not the council. To prevent this happening in the future they now send us a copy of literature to check before distribution. The second complaint regarding the Careers fair was that its location was not advertised well enough during the day, leading to the complainant not being able to find the fair. The fair took place on one floor in the old TJ Hughes unit in the mall, and it seems that the complainant went to the wrong level of the unit and assumed it had been cancelled. The council apologised, but do not believe there was anything wrong with the advertising as we had 1300 people attend the fair. It is worth noting that the fair was seen as a success, with 23 businesses available to discuss opportunities with interested attendees.

1.6.10 Revenues received two complaints about the policy of reducing the period of council tax discount for empty homes from six months to one month.

1.6.11 There were two complaints against Parks and Leisure about noise from Mote Park due to events being held there. One of the complaints was about the stunt show, which complained of Monster Trucks excessively revving their engines; the other was about events on Mote Park over a weekend creating too much noise and came from residents of Mote House. In both these cases we apologised for the disturbance caused but reminded complainants that Mote Park is a public park so there may be some activities that cause noise that take place there.

1.7 Stage 2 Complaints

1.7.1 Sixteen stage 2 complaints were received this quarter, all but one was responded to on time. The reason for the one complaint responded to out of time was because of an error in the system generating the wrong due date. A breakdown of Stage 2 complaints can be found at Appendix C.

1.7.2 Of these stage 2 complaints, six were justified. No stage 2 complaints resulted in payments or refunds to the complainant this quarter.

1.7.3 In the complaints report for the previous quarter it was mentioned that the number of Stage 2 complaints received was relatively

high, but that this could be a cyclical trend. Seven less Stage 2 complaints were received in quarter 2 compared to quarter 1 of 2013/2014, which represents a 30% decrease. However the number of Stage 2 complaints remains at a high level compared to quarter 2 in 2012/2013. Nine Stage 2 complaints were received in Quarter 2 of 2012/2013, compared to sixteen in Quarter 2 of 2013/2014. This represents a 78% increase in stage 2 complaints compared to quarter 2 last year. The Policy and Information Team will continue to monitor the situation.

1.8 Complaints Handling Satisfaction

- 1.8.1 A breakdown of complaint satisfaction surveys can be found at Appendix B. For July-September 2013, 25 complaint satisfaction surveys were received back. This is an increase in numbers of complaint satisfaction surveys received compared to previous quarters, but still represents a low response rate of 14.2% as a high number of complaints were received this quarter. However the response rate increased by 1.7% compared to Quarter 1.
- 1.8.2 52% of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 8% of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 40% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the handling of their complaint.
- 1.8.3 Some complainants made comments on their satisfaction surveys:
- Eleven of the complainants who made comments commented on their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the resolution of their complaint, rather than the handling of their complaint.
 - One complainant mentioned that they expected the complaint to be resolved by a personal telephone call by the Cabinet Member responsible, rather than 'standard letters' sent by Officers.
 - Three complainants stated that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled, but not with the resolution of the complaint.
 - One complainant stated that the problem was sorted after several phone calls to the contact centre, but overall they were very helpful.
 - One complainant mentioned that their complaint was not dealt with how they had hoped.

- One complaint survey was received back stating that their bins had still not been collected. The original complaint was that bins had not been collected. There was a further missed collection for this address after the complaint due to crew error because the driver was on holiday. This collection is now being monitored and the crews are aware they should empty this bin every fortnight.

1.9 Safety

- 1.9.1 Five complaints received this quarter were about safety. Of these complaints, two were about Parks and Leisure, two were about Economic Development and one was about Environmental Services. In quarter 1, three complaints were received about safety.
- 1.9.2 The two safety complaints to Parks and Leisure were both regarding zip lines. One was questioning the safety of a zip line at Penenden Heath play area, the other was about the manner of the repair to a broken zip line at Cobtree Manor Park.
- 1.9.3 The two safety complaints about Economic Development were both about falls on the High Street as a result of regeneration work. Both of these were regarding holes that had been left uncovered with members of the public falling over as a result. Both of these complaints were dealt with by our contractor, Conway. Neither complaint resulted in a compensation payment.

1.10 Discrimination

- 1.10.1 One complaint was *primarily* about alleged discrimination or about unfair disadvantage for people with protected characteristics. This complaint was against the Benefits department. This complaint was not upheld.
- 1.10.2 Seven complaints had claims about alleged discrimination or about unfair disadvantage for people with protected characteristics within the complaint, but the complaint was not primarily about this issue. This is an increase in these type of complaints compared to quarter 1, when three of these type of complaints were received.
- 1.10.3 Of these complaints, one was upheld. This complaint was against the Revenues department. The complainant, who has multiple mental health problems, was unhappy with recovery action being taken. The response apologised for the action taken, informed the complainant that we were unaware of the complainant's circumstances and ensured the complainant that these circumstances would be taken into account in the future.

1.11 Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants

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

1.12 Compliments

1.12.1 Many compliments have also been received by the Council this quarter:

- Environmental Services received twelve compliments this quarter. Of these compliments:
 - A compliment was received about how well dealt with an enquiry about the new waste collection arrangements was. The enquiry was about how the new arrangements will affect the resident's grandmother, who has dementia. A subsequent compliment was also received via twitter.
 - Three compliments were about how helpful, hardworking and friendly the waste collection crews are. One of these compliments was received via facebook.
 - Two compliments were thanking the waste collection crews for pulling bins out that weren't out for collection when the new waste collection contract had begun.
 - One compliment was thanking Environmental Services for clearing a fly tipped freezer swiftly.
 - One compliment was thanking Environmental Services for removing a dead fox swiftly.
 - One compliment thanked the team for being helpful when responding to fly tipping enquiries.
 - One compliment thanked the team for the swift delivery of their garden waste bin.
- Parks and Leisure received five compliments this quarter. Of these five:
 - Three were about the new play facilities at Cobtree Manor Park.
 - One was thanking everyone involved in the CBeebies event in Mote Park.
 - One was commenting on how good Mote Park has looked since the restoration.
- Housing Services received two compliments this quarter. One was thanking a housing advisor for all their help in the assistance given to the person during their housing benefit application. The other compliment was thanking another

housing advisor for all the help and support they had given whilst the person had been made homeless.

- A compliment was received for the museum, thanking the member of staff on duty when the person visited with their son. The person said the member of staff 'went out of his way to make our visit fun and is a credit to the service you provide.'
- A compliment was received for Licensing. The compliment came from a parish council thanking the Licensing Team for the speed of their response to a disturbance issue, and for the information provided to pass on to the residents of the parish.

1.12.2 The museum received one compliment this quarter, but received no complaints.

1.12.3 Four compliments were received via Twitter and one compliment was received via Facebook this quarter.

1.13 Methods of Contact

1.13.1 Fifteen complaint records did not have a method of contact filled in. Of the complaints with method of contact information provided:

- 1 (0.6%) was made by Facebook
- 57 (35.6%) were made by email
- 8 (5.0%) were made face to face
- 44 (27.5%) were made by post
- 50 (31.3%) were made by telephone

1.14 Payments

1.14.1 The cost of payments, compensation, refunds and cancelled charges as a result of complaints in July-September 2013 are set out in Appendix D.

1.15 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.15.1 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.

1.16 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.16.1 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.

1.17 Risk Management

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

1.18 Other Implications

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	

1.18.1 Financial Implications

All financial implications are set out in Appendix D

1.19 Appendices

- Appendix A: Complaints Categorisation and Timeliness Q2 2013/2014
- Appendix B: Complaint Handling Satisfaction Q2 2013/2014
- Appendix C: Stage 2 Complaints Q2 2013/2014
- Appendix D: Payments Q2 2013/2014

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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