

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	1 st November 2011
Subject:	Corporate Complaints – Annual Report
Responsible Officer:	Carol Cutler, Director of Customer Services and Business Transformation
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Corporate Effectiveness Leads - Councillor Jerry Miles and Councillor Tony Ferrari
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report provides information on complaints received about services provided by Harrow Council and how they were handled.

Recommendation: That the report be noted

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introductory paragraph

1.1 Harrow has a three stage process for handling customer complaints:

- **Stage 1**
Where possible, complaints will be dealt with quickly and informally, preferably 'on the spot'. Where this is not the case, a record of the complaint will be made on the council's complaints system and acknowledged within 3 working days and a full response will be sent within 10 working days.
- **Stage 2**
If the customer is dissatisfied with our response, we will look into the complaint further. An investigation will be carried out by a Service Manager who will aim to resolve the complaint within 20 working days.
- **Stage 3**
If the customer continues to be dissatisfied, a corporate director will review the complaint for the final time and send a written response within 20 working days of the date received. This will set out our position and explain how the matter can be taken further through the Local Government Ombudsman, if necessary.

1.2 The following tables in this report show how service areas performed against key indicators for handling complaints and the lessons learned.

2.0 Current situation

2.1 Complaints are recorded across six directorates

- Adults,
- Children's,
- Community & Environment,
- Housing,
- Place Shaping,
- Corporate Health (Chief Executive, Finance, Legal)

2.3 There are 15 co-ordinators based within each, who meet on a regular basis.

2.4 A new Corporate Complaints manager for the Council has been recruited with a background in managing services within Access Harrow and a reputation for producing high quality management information which will be invaluable to this post.

2.5 The number of complaints recorded onto CRM has risen from 265 in 2009/10 to 1,585 in 2010/11. This increase comes as a result of improvements to the Complaints module within SAP CRM and mandatory usage by all service areas although there is more work to be done to ensure comprehensive recording.

Financial Implications

None specific to this report

Performance Issues

2.0 Summary of Figures for 2009/10

Service	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage3	Total
Access Harrow	54	1	0	55
Parking	38	3	0	41
Benefits	42	1	0	43
Revenues	75	31	6	112
Shared Services	14	0	0	14
TOTAL	223	36	6	265

2.1 In 2009/10 a lack of usage of CRM made it difficult to review complaint levels holistically. Following more rigorous guidelines and improvements to the CRM system, the quality of data has improved thus ensuring richer data for 2010/11

3.0 Summary of Figures for 2010/11

Service	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage3	Total	Compliments	Compensation Awarded
Community & Environment	653	3	0	656	67	£0
Place Shaping	63	9	2	74	31	£150
Children's	74	9	1	84	10	£200
Adults	68	10	0	78	46	£5,337
Housing	253	54	15	322	29	£105
Corporate Health	309	56	6	371	40	£3,776
TOTAL	1,420	141	24	1,585	223	£9,568

3.1 Overall, 85% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within the agreed timescales

4.0 Complaints data by Directorate

4.1 Adults

Complaints Received	% answered within SLA	% Upheld	% Escalated
78	80%	14%	13%

Primary reasons for complaint

- Issues arising from introduction of Reablement service
- Complex care/Safeguarding

Improvements made and future recommendations

- Working with care providers to improve levels of service

Compliments received

- Staff professionalism
- Staff attitude and helpfulness

4.2 Children's

Complaints Received	% answered within SLA	% Upheld	% Escalated
84	73%	10%	12%

Primary reasons for complaint

- Perceived failures within Safeguarding
- Lack of empathy from staff

Improvements made and future recommendations

- Improvements to internal processes
- Staff training

Compliments received

- Praise for Children in Need & looked after services
- Praise for Children's Centres

4.3 Community & Environment

Complaints Received	% answered within SLA	% Upheld	% Escalated
656	90%	35%	1%

Primary reasons for complaint

- The quality of service provided by the Leisure Connections
- Condition and age of public computers within libraries
- Lack of updates regarding Highways issues

Improvements made and future recommendations

- Swimming Pool programme introduced to meet the needs of swimmers
- Review of PCs within libraries

Compliments received

- Speed to clear street scene issues (cleansing & fly tipping)
- Collection of household waste
- Helpfulness of library staff

4.4 Housing

Complaints Received	% answered within SLA	% Upheld	% Escalated
322	61%	19	21%

Primary reasons for complaint

- Staff attitude and behaviour
- Dissatisfaction with decision made
- Failure/delay to take action (primarily Kier/Asset Management)

Improvements made and future recommendations

- Continuous training and development in customer service
- Work with Kier to improve response times
- Improve communication when relaying a negative decision

Compliments received

- Staff assistance in dealing with sensitive issues

4.5 Place Shaping

Complaints Received	% answered within SLA	% Upheld	% Escalated
74	88%	0%	30%

Primary reasons for complaint

- Perceived lack of enforcement action
- Lack of response by planning team

Improvements made and future recommendations

- Improve response rates to customers

Compliments received

- Help & assistance in planning process

4.6 Corporate Health

Complaints Received	% answered within SLA	% Upheld	% Escalated
371	90%	16%	17%

Primary reasons for complaint

- Unhappy with decision (entitlement, summons, parking ticket)
- Attitude of Bailiff

Improvements made and future recommendations

- Training staff to be empathetic when handling enquiries
- Feedback to bailiffs
- Continuous knowledge training for staff

Compliments received

- Speed of resolution
- Friendliness of staff
- Attitude and patience of staff

5.0 Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

5.1 In 2010/11 the LGO received 147 enquiries regarding Harrow Council compared to 117 the previous year. Of these, 46 were formal/ informal premature complaints and were returned to the Authority to respond. Of the remaining 101 complaints, 18 were given advice and 83 were investigated. This figure has increased from 47 in 2009/10 with the extra 36 complaints being spread across all services.

5.2 The following table shows the number of LGO complaints received by service area (as dictated by the LGO) and the average number of days to respond.

Adult Social Care	Benefits & Tax	Corporate	Education & Children's	Public Realm	Highways & Transport	Housing	Other	Planning & Development
4	18	4	13	3	18	11	0	10
25.7	32.4	17.5	24.7	20	20.1	44.1	0	28

5.3 Of the complaints received, there were no reports of maladministration and the LGO exercised discretion to close a further 13 without requiring any action by the Council. A further 15 were outside jurisdiction and referred back to the Council.

5.4 The term 'local settlement' describes the outcome of a complaint where, during the course of an LGO investigation, the Council takes, or agrees to take, some action which they consider is a satisfactory response to the complaints. Harrow settled 13 cases in 2010/11 thus requiring no further action from LGO.

5.5 The average response time to complaints from the LGO increased from 25.4 days in 2009/10 to 32.7 days against a 28 day target. This was caused by excessive delays in responding to two complaints rather than an overall decline in standards and the service area involved has improved procedures to ensure this does not happen in future.

5.6 Over 85% of LGO complaints were responded to within the 28 day target compared to a London Borough average of 64%.

5.7 Harrow has regular contact with the LGO offices to ensure complaints are dealt with constructively and two face to face meetings were held to discuss future improvements.

Environmental Impact

None specific to this report

Risk Management Implications

A higher quality of complaints data will assist us in reducing risks to the Council.

Equalities Implications

Equalities data is currently captured through the online web form and via the complaints leaflet. However, these channels only account for 4% of recorded complaints and does not constitute as a representative sample in order for us to analyse effectively.

49% of complaints are made over the telephone, 21% face to face and 26% are by letter/email. When complaints are taken either over the phone or face to face, experience has shown us that asking customers for equalities information is not popular (customers will ask what difference this makes to the issue they're complaining about)adds. In addition, on average, it adds between 90 – 120 seconds per enquiry. This is due to having to explain the reasons for asking for the data.

We recognise that the ability to collect equalities information would enrich our understanding of complaints and are actively working with the Corporate Equalities team in order to improve the collection and quality of valid data.

Corporate Priorities

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe
- United and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need
- Supporting our Town Centre, our local shopping centres and businesses

The complaints process supports the Council priorities through gaining a better understanding of customers' issues and addressing them to ensure that our focus is maintained on our objectives.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not Applicable

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Jonathan Milbourn, Head of Customer Services. Ext: 6711.
Loc: Access Harrow, Civic 1, Ground Floor.

Background Papers:

Not Applicable