

Learning from complaints case study – School admissions

Ms A complained that she had received a letter advising her that her child did not have a place at a specific school but then further on in the same letter it stated that the complainant needed to confirm whether or not they wished to accept the place at the said school by completing the necessary form.

The necessary form was duly completed and it was then identified that an error had been made and a subsequent letter was issued confirming that a place had not been offered.

The complaint was investigated by the service but due to the continued dissatisfaction of the complainant it was escalated to the final stage of the council's complaints procedure.

The investigation concluded that the decision not to offer a place was the correct one and was based on the fact that the year group was full and that the infant class size legislation limiting classes to thirty applied. However, a clerical error was made in the original letter which was issued to the complainant and an apology was extended to the complainant in the earlier stages of the complaint investigation by the service.

Consideration was given to all communications and whilst it was recognised that there was no intention to offer a school place for the child, the letter which was issued was misleading and caused unnecessary confusion. The complaint was upheld on this basis. The service implemented a review of formal letters so that future incidents of this nature would not be repeated.

Whilst the complaint was under investigation the complainant informed the council that she would be presenting a case for appeal.

The learning from this complaint is to ensure that all communications provide clear, concise information to parents/carers. The service has already implemented this learning.

Learning from complaints case study – Environment

Miss W complained about the waste and recycling service and that she had experienced repeated missed waste collections from her property.

The complainant was advised by the service that the collections would be subject to monitoring by the waste crew supervisor and an apology was extended for the missed collections.

The complainant remained dissatisfied with the level of service received and requested an independent investigation by the Corporate Complaints Team.

The independent investigator requested copies of all monitoring reports which had been undertaken for this property and sought clarification from the complainant as to what particular collection service was being missed.

Some detail entered on the monitoring sheets was unclear and the investigating officer was not confident that robust monitoring had been undertaken. The service was further advised to continue to monitor the collection service until further notice and this resulted in no missed collections being reported by the complainant.

The waste and recycling collection service needs to ensure that where monitoring is taking place, this is clearly documented and evidenced as this can be requested at any time, either by the Corporate Complaints Team and/or the Local Government Ombudsman should the complaint escalate.

Learning from complaints case study – Highways

Mr X complained about a missing 100 yards countdown marker on the A13 and the length of time it has taken the council to replace this. Despite numerous contacts with the council and updates being provided, there had been a delay in providing the complainant with a definitive date as to when this work would be completed.

In view of the way in which the service had managed this complaint and the expression of dissatisfaction from the complainant, the complaint was subject to an independent investigation at the final stage of the complaints procedure.

The investigation found that the installation of the replacement sign was originally scheduled to coincide with planned traffic management works being undertaken by the Environment Team along the A13. However, it transpired that the Environment Team had only passed on details of the location on the date the contractor had planned to install the sign and therefore the opportunity was missed.

As a result the works had to be completed separately and this took a total of 11 months which was unacceptable. An apology was extended to the complainant for the unacceptable delay.

As a result of this complaint it is expected that timelines of works are better managed within the service to ensure unnecessary escalation of complaints within the council's complaints process.

Learning from complaints case study – Housing

Mr C complained about missed appointments with regard to repairs to his property which he claimed had resulted in further unnecessary damage.

The repairs related to the roof at the property. Mr C moved into the property and soon after noticed that the roof was in a poor condition, so much so that it leaked water and allows cold air to enter into the property. The matter was reported to Housing Repairs and the complainant was advised that a repair would be undertaken. However the contractor failed to attend the property to undertake the repair. The complainant also advised that no cards had been left at the property to advise that a contractor had been to the property when he was not at home.

The tenant then advised that as a result of the lack of repair there was further damage to his personal effects.

The Housing Service advised that feedback received confirmed that the roof did not warrant repair and the complainant escalated the complaint to the final stage of the council's complaints procedure.

An independent investigation was carried out by the Corporate Complaints Team. The property in question is on Year 2 of the council's Transforming Homes programme. This programme sets out to refurbish every council home in Thurrock. Part of this programme will include consideration of a new roof depending upon the outcome of a property survey. However, in the meantime, the council will continue with responsive repairs if deemed necessary.

In order to determine if works were required the investigating officer requested that a further site visit take place with senior officers within the Housing Service. The purpose of the site visit was to ascertain whether the initial recommendations were accurate. This did take place and it was concluded that works were required to remedy to defects. An apology was extended to the resident and works were subsequently scheduled and completed to their satisfaction.

The Corporate Complaints Team have recommended that the Housing Service consider all further concerns raised by residents in the earlier stage of the complaint process as a further visit by senior officers concluded that there were defects which warranted further action. Had this been actioned, the customer's experience of the service received could have been positive that much sooner.