

20 September 2012		ITEM 5
Audit Committee		
2011/12 ANNUAL COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS & ENQUIRIES REPORT		
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Phil Smith – Central Services		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key	
Accountable Head of Service: Director Accountability (see below)		
Accountable Director: Martin Hone - Corporate Director of Finance & Corporate Governance		
This report is: Public		
Purpose of Report: The purpose of this report is to:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Detail complaints and compliments statistics for 2011/12 2. Detail complaints dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) 		

Comment [s]: Please leave this for completion by Democratic Services

Comment [s]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the name of the Committee you are reporting to (in font 16, not capitals)

Comment [sj]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the title of your report (in font 16 and in capitals) – a Cabinet Report should be consistent with the wording on the Forward Plan – see Guidelines 2.3

Comment [s]: Please state the name of the Cabinet Member and the Portfolio to which the report refers

Comment [s]: Please enter details of any Wards and Communities affected by the report. If this section is not applicable, you should enter "none".

Comment [s]: Yes/No/Not Applicable – a 'Key Decision' is generally one affecting more than 2 wards or above £50,000 expenditure – see Guideline 2.7

Comment [sj]: Please state the Head of Service's name and job title

Comment [sj]: Please state Director's name and job title

Comment [sj]: State whether your report is Public or Exempt. If Exempt (i.e. not to be given to the public or discussed in

Comment [sj]: Briefly set out the purpose of your report

Comment [sj]: Please provide a summary of the key points in your report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- There has been an 18% decrease in complaints compared to 2010/11 (statistics shown in 3.1.1 below)
- The service areas that received the highest volume of complaints are shown below. However these services will always receive the highest volume of complaints, due to the nature of the services and the number of residents that these services are provided to.
 - Missed Bin collections
 - Housing Repairs
 - Council Tax.
- Performance in responding to complaints within timeframe has improved. During the reporting year (2011/12), 97% of complaints were responded to within timeframe (compared to 89% for 2010/11).
- There has been a reduction in external compliments received. During 2011/12, 527 external compliments were received (compared to 677 for 2010/11).

- Our LGO performance in responding to enquiries has continued to improve. Our average response time has reduced to 15.4 days compared to 20.5 days during 2010/11. The LGO stated within their annual review letter, that they were pleased to report that there are no concerns regarding Thurrock's response times and there are no issues arising from the complaints that require attention.
- Members enquiries performance has dipped during 2011/12, even though there has been a decrease in volumes. During the reporting year, 881 were received with 83% processed within timeframe (for 2010/11 performance was 92% with 1259 received). However since December 2011, the responsibility for logging, tracking and co-ordinating these enquiries is managed by the Corporate Complaints Team, with 99% (274 out of 276) being processed within timeframe.
- The number of MP enquiries has increased in 2011/2012. During 2011/12, 298 were received (245 received during 2010/11). The performance has improved from 86% for 2010/11 to 94% during the reporting year.
- The key task for this year ahead is to drive forward learning from complaints. More work is required to identify common trends and themes with complaints and to address the root causes and ensure that recommendations are implemented. This will allow the Council to demonstrate that we are learning from complaints.
- Children's Social Care - There was a 13% decrease in complaints received for Children's Social Care in 2011/2012, along with 143% increase in compliments (90 this year compared to 37 last year). 82% of complaints were responded to within the set deadlines.
- The number of complaints received within Adult Social Care has decreased for the third year. More issues are now successfully resolved at the point they are raised, which avoids progressing through the complaints route unnecessarily.
- Within Adult Social Care, key development of shared services and protocols with local health services will benefit the council, for example free mediation services will be shared between organisations within the Essex region. In addition continuous training has contributed to a significant decrease in staff complaints being received.

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.1 To note the statistics for 2011/12.
- 1.2 To note that the Council will continue to learn from complaints as a mechanism to drive forward service improvements.

2. **INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 This report sets out details relating to the Council's corporate complaints statistics and performance for 2011/12.
- 2.2 Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care have separate statutory complaints procedures, which are managed separately by the Statutory Complaints Managers within the People Services Directorate.

Comment [s]: The recommendations should be set out in bold in the form of the decision that the decision-maker is being asked to make - See para. 5.2 of the report writing guidelines

Comment [s]: You should briefly explain why the report is on the agenda - See para. 5.3 and 5.4 of the report writing guidelines.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1.1 During 2011/12, the Council received, registered and dealt with 2618 corporate complaints. The table below shows complaint numbers received over the last 6 years along with the % of complaints that were processed within time.

Year	Complaints received	% Responded on time
2011/12	2618	97%
2010/11	3187	89%
2009/10	2787	82%
2008/09	2185	75%
2007/08	2313	65%
2006/07	1992	80%

3.1.2 The Council’s target for 2011/12 was to process 89% within timeframe, so to achieve 97% is an excellent outcome. This is due to the successful implementation of the corporate complaints team which was set up in April 2011. However service areas should also be praised for helping turn around complaints within timeframe.

3.1.3 During 2011/12, the Council received 569 fewer complaints than the previous year. When analysing section 3.1.4 below, it is evident that there has been a significant reduction regarding complaint volumes within the following service areas. Figures in brackets show the reduction in complaints received as a comparison against the previous year (2010/11):

- **Council Tax (187)** - The Debt Recovery Team has streamlined their processes and has been more pro-active when chasing arrears which are both current and historic. It is evident that this new approach, coupled with ‘Debt surgeries’ offering advice and support, has highlighted the importance to residents regarding their obligations.
- **Missed Bin Collections (355)** - During September 2010 the waste collection rounds were reviewed and re-shaped which resulted in an increase in complaints for 2010/11 as crews familiarised themselves with new rounds. The aim of this review was to reduce the number of vehicles in daily use.

However it should be noted that the Council received an increase of 179 housing repair complaints compared to the previous year. The corporate complaints team will work alongside Housing to assist them with any work that can help move this forward. Some examples of this will include:

- To work alongside Housing at the Morrison Operations Board meetings to analyse complaints data to learn from complaints
- To track and ring complaints directly to ensure agreed actions from complaints responses have been completed. This will prevent unnecessary escalation due to promised actions not being delivered.

- To change our processes for responding to complaints with more resources targeted at ringing complaints directly.

3.1.4 The table below shows the most common complaints received for 2011/2 across the Directorates. Figures in brackets represent previous year volumes.

Directorate	Complaint Type	Number of complaints received
People Services	Special Education Needs	10 (4)
	Admissions	10 (7)
	Early Years	5 (3)
Housing	Repairs	562 (383)
	Grays Office	61 (68)
	Tilbury Office	39 (54)
	Stanford/Corringham Office	17 (28)
	Purfleet Office	14 (35)
	Chadwell Office	26 (45)
	Ockendon Office	29 (82)
	Thurrock Choice Based Homes	13 (47)
	Private Housing & Adaptation	10 (14)
	Rent	17 (15)
	Homeless	36 (36)
	Europa	Basic Maintenance
Decent Homes		18 (4)
Gas breakdown		10 (7)
Parking		15 (13)
Traffic Management		9 (23)
Vertex	Council Tax	256 (443)
	Housing Benefit	68 (91)
	Contact Centre	36 (71)
	Face to face	36 (27)
	Exchequer Services	13 (18)
Central Services	Organisational Development	8 (24)
Environment and Planning Services (previous Sustainable Communities Directorate)	Missed Bin Collections	313 (668)
	Waste and Recycling staff	39 (62)
	Street Services	57 (121)
	Development Control	11 (31)
	Pollution	14 (14)
	Parking	43 (54)

	Non return of bins	46 (64)
	Horticulture	26 (35)
	Greening services	14 (20)
	Kerbside collection	19 (56)

3.1.5 All Social Care complaints are managed under separate statutory guidance from the respective regulatory bodies and as such, are required to provide dedicated annual reports regarding the effectiveness of the process. Both follow separate processes from that set out for corporate services. Appendix 2 contains the annual complaint statistics and summary for children's social care complaints, however a high level summary has been provided below:

- 2011/12 saw a 13% decrease in complaints received for Thurrock's Children's Social Care (93 complaints received for 2011/12 compared to 107 received for 2010/11)
- The decrease could be attributed to the introduction of an Information Pack that is distributed to service users new to working with Children's Social Care. The Information Packs give service users an insight into what they can expect from the teams they are working with, and what the teams expect from the service users. The packs also contain information of additional support services available to the service users.
- A successful 'Mystery Shopper' complaints exercise was carried out by Children's Social Care. Six teams were randomly chosen to receive 'complaints', in all cases the 'complaint' was forwarded to the Complaints Manager within the five day deadline for acknowledging complaints.

3.1.6 Appendix 3 contains the annual complaint statistics and summary for People Services Adult Social Care complaints. To support the ongoing development of the one stage complaints process within Adult Social Care, all investigating officers have attended complaints training and one to one support is provided by the Statutory Complaints Manager. The principles of this statutory process have been set by the Department of Health, and the process aims to be flexible, to the needs of the complainant rather than being process driven. Each complaint is signed off by the Head of Adult Services and each response is quality checked by the Statutory Complaints Manager, to ensure that all lessons identified have been learnt from. This also includes complaints received regarding commissioned providers.

3.1.7 Training - Staff within People Services who handle complaints have been trained in complaints handling by the Statutory Complaints Manager. The training package includes how to investigate complaints and respond to them effectively following the LGO's principles. The Statutory Complaints Manager and the Workforce Planning Team have also developed a package for front line staff, with regards to dealing with complaints effectively to avoid escalation. This package has now been developed into an e-learning package, to enable staff to have training as and when needed and has received excellent feedback.

3.1.8 Outcomes and categories - The table below provides the % of upheld complaints across all stages. Figures in brackets represent 2010/11 statistics.

Stage	Total complaints	Complaints upheld	% upheld
Stage 1	1939 (2630)	599 (860)	31% (33%)
Stage 2	596 (508)	134 (148)	22% (29%)
Stage 3	83 (see 3.1.9 below) (49)	10 (16)	12% (33%)

3.1.9 The increase in stage 3 complaints shown this year is due to the way in which these have been classified. The 83 shown for 2011/12, include 39 which were assessed and rejected therefore the number of stage 3 complaints fully investigated is 44. The 39 rejected were done so following a meeting with the complainant and the corporate team, as it was considered that all issues had been answered during the earlier stages of our complaints process. This assessment meeting is key to avoid the Council unnecessarily investigating complaints.

3.1.10 The Corporate Complaints Team also frequently resolve concerns from residents at first point of contact, thereby stopping formal complaints, either by face to face meeting or over the telephone. This has improved the customer's experience with council services and has resulted in savings for the council in terms of officer's time i.e. formalising complaint responses.

3.2 Compliments

3.2.1 During 2011/12 a total of 765 compliments were received (527 external and 238 internal). This is a reduction to the previous year (as last year 677 external and 286 internal were logged). The table below shows compliments received since 2006/07 (includes Adult Social Care and Children Social Care compliments).

Year	Compliments received
2011/12	765
2010/11	963
2009/10	1068
2008/09	733
2007/08	350
2006/07	275

3.2.2 The table below shows external compliments per Directorate for 2011/12:

Directorate	External Compliment
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Central Services	3
Vertex	30
Europa	34
Environmental and Planning	125
People Services	263
Housing	72

3.3 MP and Councillor Enquiries

- 3.3.1 **Member Enquiries** – 881 enquiries were received in 2011/12, and of these 83% were responded to on time. During 2010/11, 1259 enquiries were received with 92% responded to within timeframe. This dip in performance was due to the logging and tracking not being the responsibility of the corporate complaints team until December 2011. Since December 2011, 274 out of 276 enquiries have been responded to within timeframe (99%).

Since the corporate team inherited responsibility for this area of work, the average timeframe to respond to enquiries is 5 days. Prior to this, the average response timeframe was 8 days with 161 enquiries exceeding 10 days.

- 3.3.2 **MP Enquiries** – 298 MP enquiries were received in 2011/12 with 94% responded to within timeframe. During 2010/11 245 enquiries were received with 86% processed within timeframe. The improvement in response time is a positive achievement and can be attributed to the enhanced tracking process set up by the corporate complaints team.

3.4 Learning lessons from complaints

- 3.4.1 The most important aspect of any complaints management framework is the ability to demonstrate that the Council can show evidence that it is learning from complaints received. Appendix 1 details a sample of case studies that have been published on the Councils 'You Said We Did' website. During 2012/13 more work will be done to improve from learning from complaints.

3.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

- 3.5.1 The LGO set the Council a deadline of 28 days to respond to their first enquiries, however Thurrock have implemented a 21 day deadline due to a dip in performance during 2006- 2009.

3.5.2 Below is Thurrock’s average response time over the past 6 years, and the figures in brackets represent number of enquires that were received from the LGO investigation team.

- 2006/07 - 26.8 days (19)
- 2007/08 - 31.2 days (31)
- 2008/09 - 35 days (24)
- 2009/10 - 23.6 days (28)
- 2010/11 - 20.5 days (20)
- 2011/12 – 15.4 days (33)

3.5.3 The Council continues to improve in responding to LGO complaints/enquiries as during 2011/12 our average response time was 15.4 days. The management of corporate LGO complaints transferred to the Corporate Complaints Team in April 2011 and there is a dedicated officer in this team who ensures that timeframes are maintained.

3.5.4 Enquiries and complaints received by the LGO are shown in the table below. Previous year’s information has also been shown as a comparison. Figures in brackets represent premature complaints. In most cases the LGO will not investigate premature complaints/enquiries, as these have not gone through our internal complaints process. Premature enquiries will be directed back to the Council to look into.

LGO Service Area Classification	2010/11	2011/12
Adult Social Care (statutory)	7 (1)	7 (1)
Benefits and Tax	37 (17)	19(11)
Corporate and other Services	4 (0)	6 (37)
Education/Children	12 (4)	12(3)
Environment Services/Public Protection/Regulation	16 (7)	14 (4)
Highways transport	3 (0)	6 (2)
Housing	22 (11)	38 (16)
Planning and Development	4 (1)	5 (1)
Total	105	107

3.5.5 Of the 107 enquiries received in 2011/12, the LGO looked into 52 complaints. (during 2010/11 43 cases were looked into).

3.5.6 Formal published reports are issued by the LGO, if they consider the actions or lack of actions by the Council in processing complaints have resulted in some form of maladministration on the part of the Council. During 2011/12 the LGO did not issue any formal reports against the Council.

3.5.7 Within the LGO’s Annual Review Letter, the LGO confirmed that they were *pleased* to report that they have no concerns regarding our response times, and there are no issues arising from the complaints that warrant attention.

3.6 Centralisation of complaints

3.6.1 The centralised complaints team commenced on the 1st April 2012. This has proved a success, as the team feel like a team and the location of the team together allows resources to be pooled to undertake a range of complaint activity tasks. The service is more streamlined and there is consistency with process.

3.6.2 The centralisation has allowed a range of additional value added tasks to be introduced, which provide a benefit to a number of service areas, customers and the Council. A summary of these are shown below:

- **Quality checking complaints responses** – This has saved Departments time, as the central team through their day to day involvement with complaints, check a sample of responses for stage 1 and stage 2 complaints. This check is key to ensure all issues have been answered which will prevent unnecessary escalation to the next stage. During 2011/12 1676 complaints responses were quality checked (at stages 1 and 2), with 22% rejected as all complaint issues had not been responded to by the service area.
- **Improved performance in responding to complaints/enquiries at all stages** – Since the commencement of the team in April, corporate wide performance has improved in responding to complaints within timeframe across all stages.
- **Improved performance in responding to corporate LGO enquiries** – As a result of streamlining the process and the corporate team providing the additional support to the service areas.
- **Independent investigations at stage 3 of the complaint process** – The management of stage 3 complaints has extended to include those complaints which have been directly entered at stage 3 (at the request of the Chief Executive). Independent investigations have also resulted in some complaints being upheld, which were previously not upheld by the service area, and has resulted in lessons being learnt and recommendations actioned. The independent review supports and promotes Thurrock as a transparent Council.
- **Savings for the Council** - Year on year savings (£30k) due to centralisation of staff (and a reduction in FTE) have been achieved which form part of the transformation programme.
- **Tracking to ensure actions are implemented** – Some service areas who agree to implement changes/actions as a result of a complaint, do not always implement the agreed actions resulting in the customer being let down by the Council (and the complaint escalated to the next stage). The complaints team are now logging all actions on the complaints system, and the service areas are chased to ensure they are actioned.

4. **ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS:** -

- 4.1 The key tasks for 2012/13 will be to:
- Maintain strong performance
 - To embed a learning from complaints culture.

5. **CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 This report was sent for consultation to Performance Board. The report was also submitted to Directors Board on the 28th August.

6. **IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 6.1 Complaints impact on the Councils' priority of delivering excellence and achieving value for money.
- 6.2 The complaints process seeks to create a culture of corporate learning from best practice from listening to our customers and by acting on complaints. All complaints received must have learning applied if the complaint outcome is upheld.
- 6.3 The complaints process aims to improve customers and users experience of accessing council services. This will support our customer services strategy.

7. **IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: Sean Clark
 Telephone and email: 01375 652010
 sclark@thurrock.gov.uk

- There are no direct financial implications with this report

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: David Lawson
 Telephone and email: 01375 652087
 dlawson@thurrock.gov.uk

- Both the Courts and the Local Government Ombudsman expect complainants to show that they have exhausted local complaints / appeal procedures before commencing external action.

Comment [s]: Other headings may be appropriate. The report should outline the reasoning that leads to its recommendations and **must** include:

1. a brief summary of options considered;
2. consultation outcomes
3. a risk assessment.
4. Whether the responsible cabinet members have been consulted/contributed to the report (NB professional and political advice must be clearly distinguished)

- See para.5.5 of the report writing guidelines.

Comment [j]: This should include any consultation with Ward Members and Shadow Portfolio Holders, as well as any public or statutory consultation

Comment [a]: Please refer to Section 5.7 of the Report Writing Guidelines

Comment [sj]: This section should always be completed – if they are dealt with fully in another part of the report, they also need a brief cross reference here. The names and job titles of the officers providing the implications should be

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 6.2

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 6.3

- The implementation of our learning from complaints and listening to our residents should lead to a reduction of complaints received and a reduction in those going to the Ombudsman or the Courts.
- Social Care for Adult and Children are required to follow a separate procedure stipulated by the Department of Health (DOH) and Department for Education & Skills (DFES).

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: Samson DeAlyn
 Telephone and email: 01375 652472
 sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

- It is important that there is accessibility to complaints information in respects of language, Braille, audio, and the new complaints leaflet incorporates this.
- The Information Management Team will continue to work with the Diversity Team to provide data that can be broken down into race, gender and disability themes in order to address any inequalities in relation to service delivery. This initiative will also support our aim to reach of using complaints data as a service improvement tool.

7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

None

8. **CONCLUSION**

8.1 The information within this report is for Audit Committee to note performance in relation to complaints and compliments for 2011/12. The report focuses on corporate complaints and compliments but also includes appendices that cover complaints and compliments performance for Children’s and Adult Social Care.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- None – Information obtained from the complaints system.

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1 – Sample case studies
- Appendix 2 – Children’s Social Care complaints Report
- Appendix 3 – Adult Social Care complaints Report

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 6.4

Comment [sj]: This should inform the recommendations in the report

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 8. If any Papers are to be placed in the Members room that relate to this report, you should also list them here

Comment [sj]: List the Appendices referred to in the Report

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Comment [sj]: Insert the full contact details of the author of the report