

Item 4

REPORT TO STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th June 2007

REPORT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Strategic Leadership

ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY CORPORATE COMPLAINTS STAFF

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This Report outlines the complaints/issues received by the Corporate Customer Relations Staff in the Chief Executive's Department in the period 1st April 2006-31st March 2007. Figures are also given for the period 1st April 2005-31st March 2006 to enable comparisons to be made (Appendix 1).

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the Annual Report be received and published on the Borough's Website.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Borough adopted a revised Complaints Policy in December 2004, which allows residents and other users of Borough Services the opportunity to comment on/criticise Borough Services or service delivery.

3.2 The Policy provides for the publication of a half yearly and an Annual Report on complaints handling. The half yearly report was considered at the meeting of this Committee on 21st November 2006.

4. DETAIL

4.1 It is pleasing to note that the number of complaints/issues received by Corporate Complaints Staff has decreased from 1053 in 2005/2006 to 679 in 2006/2007, a decrease of 374 (35%). Departments have been encouraged to resolve issues at the first point of contact and this is reflected by the reducing number of complaints reaching Corporate Complaints.

4.2 The main area of complaint (40% of the total) relates to Housing Maintenance, Management and Capital Improvements. However the total number of complaints about these services has fallen from 545 to 269 (50%) with justified complaints falling from 150 to 34 (77%).

4.3 There has been a marked decrease in the overall number of complaints about the Maintenance Service from 384 to 147. Similarly the number of justified

complaints has decreased from 132 to 31. 48,000 repairs were carried out in 2006/07 and justified complaints represents 0.06% of that total.

- 4.4 The main reason for complaints on maintenance relate to repairs not being carried out within timescale. It has to be accepted that, on occasions, resources are simply not available to complete every job within timescale e.g. following high winds.
- 4.5 The need to effectively manage the repairs service within budget resulted in 2,250 low priority jobs reported between June 2005 and March 2006 not being attended to in that financial year which led to a substantial number of complaints being made. This issue was addressed in the Budget for 2006/2007 with £240,000 additional revenue funding being allocated which has cleared the backlog and, generally, has enabled new jobs to be completed within target.
- 4.6 The Borough provides a comprehensive housing management service to 8,650 properties. 104 complaints (39 from one tenant – none justified) were made about the service with only three being found to be justified.
- 4.7 The first related to recharging a former tenant for clearing out a garage without informing him that a charge would be levied for removing items which had been left and, therefore, not giving him the opportunity of doing it himself. The redesign of garage termination forms will address this when the rechargeable items policy has been fully reviewed. The second involved a breakdown in communications on the same complaint which led to further recovery action being instigated. This was simply human error and staff have been reminded of the need to follow the correct procedure. The third related to documents being lost and controls have been introduced to track documents between offices.
- 4.8 None of the 18 complaints made about Capital Improvements were found to be justified.
- 4.9 No complaints have been made about adaptations for the benefit of people with disabilities in 2006/2007. As explained in the Annual Report for 2005/2006 the Director of Housing had reviewed this service area and a number of specific actions to improve the service had been incorporated in the Housing Service Improvement Plan. An additional £350,000 had also been allocated for adaptations in 2006/2007 to clear the backlog which had built up.
- 4.10 Corporate Complaints Staff continue to offer advice and direct people to Other Agencies e.g. Police, County Council as well as directing service requests to the correct Department (some 38% of the issues raised).
- 4.11 There were no complaints made against Committee Services who are responsible for the franking and despatch of mail. This is pleasing bearing in mind the hundreds of thousands of mail items which are despatched each year.
- 4.12 Customer Services had 2 justified complaints made against the Service, all relating to the failure of the call centre telephony. A new system was installed in early May 2006 and there have been no further complaints since that time.

- 4.13 33 complaints were made against the Benefits, Council Tax and Business Rates Services but none were found to be justified. Viewed against the transactions carried out over the period the performance of these services is very good.
- 4.14 6 complaints (5 from one complainant) were received about the Borough's adoption of the Coalfield Communities Regeneration Policy but none were justified. One complainant did complain to the Ombudsman who did not find any maladministration by the Council.
- 4.15 There were 15 complaints about Development Control with two being found to be justified. The first involved the giving of incorrect advice in 2003 which had led to a conservatory being erected without the benefit of planning permission. Development Control are working with the complainant to resolve this issue in line with the Ombudsman's Guidance on remedies. Staff have been reminded to carry out the correct checks when responding to informal enquiries regarding proposals. The second related to delay in responding to a request for a meeting and staff have been reminded to respond within a reasonable time.
- 4.16 There has been a reduction in the number of complaints received about Environmental Health (from 8 to 3) with none being found to be justified.
- 4.17 The number of complaints made against the Street Cleansing service has also fallen (from 4 to 3) with none of the complaints being justified.
- 4.18 Refuse Collection has seen a fall in the number of complaints received from 101 to 59 (42% reduction) with only 3 complaints being justified. Two were missed collections which were rectified. The third was where the bin had not been returned to its presentation point and the crew were reminded of our Policy. Viewed against the number of collections/deliveries carried out each year e.g. almost 3 million domestic collections (wheeled bins and Kerbit), there is not any cause for concern.
- 4.19 Only 2 complaints were made against Leisure Services with none being justified.
- 4.20 An apology is given whenever the Borough has been at fault.
- 4.21 The Corporate Complaints Staff aim to respond to 100% of complaints and enquiries within 10 Working days and achieved 98.5% in 2006/2007 compared with 98.8.% in 2005/2006 . The average time to respond to a complaint/enquiry in 2006/2007 was 1.5 days compared with 1.95 days in 2005/2006.
- 4.22 If complainants are still not satisfied after they have exhausted the Borough's Complaints Procedure they are advised that they have the right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. Where the Borough has been at fault, however, Staff do try to reach a settlement so that complainants do not feel it necessary to approach the Ombudsman. When attempting to reach a settlement Staff do refer to the Ombudsman's Guidance on remedies.

- 4.23 2005/2006 26 cases were investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Borough was not found guilty of maladministration in any of these cases. In 2006/2007 21 cases were investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Borough was not found guilty of maladministration in any of these cases and in three cases reached a local settlement to the Ombudsman's satisfaction.
- 4.24 It is pleasing to note that there were no complaints made relating to any of the six strands of the Equity and Diversity Standard for Local Government i.e. race, disability, age, religion and philosophical belief, gender or sexual orientation. Any complaints of this nature which are received will be discussed with the Borough's Equity and Diversity Staff and appropriate action taken.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are not any resource implications arising from this Report.

6. CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 The Report will be available on the Council's website.

7 OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Link to Corporate Objectives/Values

- 7.1 The complaints process is aimed at being open, accessible, equitable, fair and responsive to the public and to speedily resolve any problems. This report is a public document and is available on the Borough's Website. The analysis of complaints received helps drive service improvement through the presentation of regular reports to Departments and Scrutiny Committee.

Risk Management

- 7.2 Systems are in place to provide a Half Yearly Report and an Annual Report on Complaints to ensure that the complaints process informs learning throughout the Council and encourages service improvements. The failure to provide regular reports to Committee could adversely affect our CPA Assessment Score.

Health and Safety

- 7.3 There are no additional Health and Safety implications.

Equality and Diversity

- 7.4 The Complaints Process actively promotes the Borough's commitment to promote equality and diversity. Complaints can be made in any form e.g. in writing, by phone, e-mail and interpreters and signers are available for people requiring such assistance.

Legal and Constitutional

7.5 No new implications have been identified.

No other material considerations have been identified.

8. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 A Half Year Report for the period 1st April 2007 – 30th September 2007 will be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 on 20th November 2007.

9. LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Complaints/Issues received by Corporate Complaints Staff.

Contact Officer	Jerry Miller/Chris Ward
Telephone Number	01388 816166 Ext. 7709/4100
E-mail address	jmiller@sedgefield.gov.uk cward@sedgefield.gov.uk

Wards: All

Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Councils Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. The content has been examined by the Councils S.151 Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix 1 – Complaints/Issues received by Corporate Complaints Staff

	2005/06		2006/07	
	Total	No. Justified	Total	No. Justified
Housing Maintenance	384	132	147	31
Housing Management	96	4	104	3
Housing Improvements	28	3	18	0
Adaptations for Disabled	37	11	0	0
Advice/Other Agency	152	N/a	128	N/a
Committee Services	2	2	0	0
Customer Services	13	8	6	2
Freedom of Information	0	0	1	0
Regeneration	0	0	1	0
Benefits	13	1	14	0
Business Rates	0	0	1	0
Collections	1	0	0	0
Council Tax	10	0	18	0
Valuation	3	0	1	0
Coalfield Communities	N/a	N/a	6	0
Regeneration Policy				
Anti-social Behaviour	0	0	1	0
Community Safety	0	0	2	0
Neighbourhood Wardens	3	0	5	0
Carelink	5	0	2	0
Development Control	19	1	15	2
Building Control	1	1	0	0
Homelessness	1	0	0	0
Environmental Health	8	0	3	0
Licensing	3	0	2	0
Horticulture	18	0	12	1
Street Cleansing	4	0	3	0
Refuse	101	22	59	3
Transport	1	0	0	0
Concessionary Travel	1	1	0	0
Leisure	2	0	3	0
Service Requests	147	N/a	127	N/a
Total	1053	182	679	41