

COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Norman Williams
LEAD OFFICER: Jane Salt, Head of Customer Services
REPORT AUTHOR: Marissa Joyce, Customer Relations Officer

Summary:

In 2006/07, 106 complaints were investigated through the Council's Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, a significant reduction to the 173 recorded in 2005/06.

Recommendation: that

- (A) the report be received, and
- (B) all Managers be encouraged/reminded to record and feedback details of complaints and compliments received to the Customer Relations Officer for monitoring and reporting purposes.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has had a written procedure for the resolution of customers formal complaints since 1992, it has been revised several times since then, most recently in April 2007. The procedure is based on the Local Government Ombudsman's published recommendations for best practice on Local Authority complaints procedures.
- 1.2 In the second half of 2006/07 the Customer Relations Officer recorded 68 complaints; a summary is attached at Appendix "A".
- 1.3 The outcome of the Regeneration complaint which was still undergoing investigation at the time of the previous report was that the Complainant subsequently took Cumbria County Council to Court and lost his case, incurring considerable costs.
- 1.4 The Ombudsman subsequently investigated another complaint recorded in the previous report against Revenues and Benefits which resulted in a £100.00 compensation payment.

2. ARGUMENT

- 2.1 Please note these figures do not include anonymous complaints, complaints about Councillors, complaints about a Policy and initial requests for a service.
- 2.2 Neither do they include complaints dealt with by the department which they have not subsequently reported to the Customer Relations Officer for monitoring and recording purposes.

3. OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

- 3.1 To refine the process to ensure that all complaints are logged by the relevant department to enable thorough monitoring and accurate reporting.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 In order to achieve 3.1 there is a need to develop an I.T system which will automatically record and monitor all comments, compliments and complaints received via e-mail and letter. Each department will then be able to record incoming correspondence and the system will automatically confirm receipt of e-mails and issue reminders when responses are due. The Customer Relations Officer will have access to this information for monitoring and recording purposes.

5. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

- 5.1 One £250.00 payment was paid in compensation for distress and/or inconvenience.
- 5.2 Waste Management refunded 16 payments for chargeable collections not carried out in timescale or customers subsequently making alternative arrangements for disposal, totalling £297.00.

6. PROJECT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 None

7. IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN

- 7.1 The lessons learnt from comments, compliments and complaints should help the Council deliver 2.5 objectives in the Corporate Plan.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Oct 06 – March 07 report

List of Background Documents: None

List of Consultees: Cllr N Williams

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed. This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	Ensure complaints are properly dealt with
Impact on Sustainability	Ensure complaints are properly dealt with
Impact on Rural Proofing	Ensure that the whole borough is dealt with equally

Health and Safety Implications	Ensure complaints are properly dealt with
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	Ensure complaints are dealt with equally and sensitively
Children and Young Persons Implications	Ensure complaints are properly dealt with
Human Rights Act Implications	Ensure complaints are properly dealt with

Please say if this report will require the making of a Key Decision NO

Appendix A

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
<p><u>Customer Services</u></p> <p>Revs and Bens</p> <p>Delay in processing benefit change of circumstances. Details had only been received the week before but urgent due to threat of eviction. Processed within 10 days.</p> <p>Alleging not acting on information given and applying relevant benefit relating to period daughter was at University. Responded in writing and invited for an interview to discuss further.</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>		<p>No</p> <p>No</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Complaint about delay in processing claim and conflicting letters. Apology and explanation given.	√		Yes, letter reviewed.	√	√
Wrong information given re a benefit enquiry, no call back received and information then sent to wrong office address. Apology, explanation and contact details changed.	√		Yes, contact information on system reviewed.	√	√
Council Tax Direct Debit cancelled without consultation after wife's death. Apology given, Officer error not following procedure.	√		Officer reminded of procedure	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Complaint about inflexible approach to Council Tax recovery and non response to e-mail. Apology and explanation given.	√		Yes, reminder to check Officers e- mails whilst they are on leave.	√	√
Delay in processing benefit change of circumstances whilst under an Eviction Notice. Apology given, further info requested, landlord contacted and claim assessed ASAP.	√		Reminder issued to give priority to claims which are subject to eviction	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Delay in processing benefit change of circumstances resulting in overpayments, compensation requested. Apology for the delay, compen refused on the grounds that she didn't provide details of changes as they occurred.	√		No	√	No, apology given
Complaining attachment of earnings is too much and can't talk to member of staff about it. Apology he was unable to speak to someone but on review attachment is in line with his earnings so correct.	√		No	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Delay in processing claim. Apology given but delay explained as awaiting further information.	√		No	√	√
Delay in processing claim whilst landlord seeking eviction. Apology given, claim assessed, further info requested.	√		Reminder issued to give priority to claims which are subject to eviction	√	√
MP enquiry re recovery action against a resident who has now moved from the area. Apology for delay in response, but explaining why case was correctly referred to the Bailiff.	√		No	√	No, apology given

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Complaint he's paid o/s Ctax balances of which we have no record. Replied he must provide proof.	√		No	No but nothing we can do.	√
Alleging hadn't received prior notice of recovery action before Summoned to Court, requested refund of costs. Explained, gave him copies of prior Notices, no refund.	√		No	No but nothing we can do.	√
Complaint repeatedly requesting action re car park lights in St Bees, Explained repairs requested with Capita.	√		No	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Complaining no response to e-mails to main Council address re Council Tax discounts. Apology given with direct address for Ctax I.T informed of problem	√		Yes, I.T. asked to investigate	√	√
Complaining recovery action is too aggressive. We replied explaining the recovery procedure, letters sent etc.	√			√	√
Complaint about delay in processing claim whilst on sick leave. Apology given but explained awaiting info from Job Centre.	√		No	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Complaint about delay in responding to a letter re Non domestic rates. Apology given and query answered.	√		No	√	√
Complaint benefits asking for information she has already provided. Apology and explanation given that request crossed over with her providing the info.	√		No	√	√
Complaint about Coax taking recovery action too soon. Letter sent explaining procedure followed correctly.	√ No case to answer		No	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Complaining no sign up relating to late opening on Wednesday, but thanked the Security guard for dealing with her enquiry Apology given.	√		Yes, temporary sign put up whilst awaiting permanent one.	√	No, apology given
Complaint from landlord re delay in processing claim then further delay in sending cheque. Apology given, cheque issued to previous landlord in error. Re-issued.	√		Yes, reminder to check landlord code	√	√
Complaint recovery action taken when account should have been on hold whilst previous complaint investigated. Apology given.		Refused permission to proceed	No, human error.	No, but has no grounds for further investigation.	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Revs and Bens cont'd...					
Complaint about difference in letter date and date received. Explained it's because it was year end benefit notification letter, bulk postage.	√		No	No but makes regular complaints about Council services	√
Complaint about the delay in Setting up a Council Tax account for a new property. Apology given and account set up.	√		Yes, highlighted area in which there is a slight backlog	√	√
Delay in responding to letters re C Tax disabled reduction. Apology given for delay with an explanation of why she doesn't qualify	√		No	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
<u>Copeland Direct</u>					
Delay in answering the telephone. Apology given.	√		Ongoing improvements to Contact Central	√	√
Dissatisfaction with discussing personal benefit information at reception and staff attitude. Apology and explanation given.	√		Review of reception area and benefits pilot	√	√
Delay in answering the telephone. Apology given.	√		Ongoing improvements to Contact Central	√	√
Delay in answering phone so wrote instead. Apology given and query resolved.	√		Ongoing improvements to Contact Central	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Copeland Direct cont'd...					
Officer attitude when dealing with his telephone benefit enquiry. Apology given.	√		Complaint discussed with the Officer	√	√
Officer attitude when handling benefits telephone enquiry. Apology given.	√		Complaint discussed with Officer. Call back system reviewed.	√	√
Complaint given wrong receipt when handing a benefit cheque back to reception. Apology given.	√		Reminder of procedure issued to staff	√	√
Complaint about staff attitude at reception when dealing with a benefit enquiry, she couldn't understand the letters. Apology given	√		Complaint discussed with the Officer	√	No, Apology given

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Copeland Direct cont'd...					
Complaint about telephone response to his query re street lighting. Apology given and issue resolved.	√		No	√ Letter of thanks received	√
Complaint about non response to e-mail about a fall in the street. Apology given and query resolved	√		Yes, address delay in answering e-mails to the info Copeland box	√	√
Complaint about lack of information given and Officer attitude Apology given.	√		Yes, complaint discussed with the Officer	Yes, letter of thanks received	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
<u>Finance and Business Development</u> Complaint re fire escape provision for the disabled. Procedure review explained ongoing. Complaint about the lack of publicity re the changes to the travel concession scheme. Explained Parish Council informed and thanked her for her comments. Complaint disabled rail travellers had not been considered in the travel concession scheme. Apology and explanation given.	√ √ √		No To continue to consider comments for improving methods and timing of communication and distribution in future years. Ensure in future greater clarity for disabled users of the concessionary travel scheme	No went to Omb who subsequently found no case to answer √ √	√ √ √

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Finance and Business Development cont'd...					
Complaint Gosforth/Seascale residents not aware of changes and having to travel to Egremont with forms and I.D. Apology given thanked for comments.	√		Perhaps possible to staff remote areas such as this again next year?	√	√
Complaint no local surgery for concessionary travel means having to post sensitive documents. Apologised for the inconvenience explained comments will be considered in the 2008 review.	√		As above	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
<p><u>Legal and Democratic Services</u></p> <p>Complaint that licensing had given incorrect legal advice resulting in a gambling event being cancelled. Informed we had contacted the Gambling Commission who confirmed our advice was correct.</p> <p>Threat to verbally abuse Officers involved in a recent complaint on the www. Brief look on the web nothing on as yet.</p>	√		<p>No</p> <p>Review the website be aware of effect of comments if they become libellous</p>	<p>√</p> <p>No, an ongoing matter</p>	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
<u>Leisure and Environmental Services</u>					
Several complaints about delays in bulk collections. Apologies given and £ refunded	√		Still experiencing some problems due to staff/ vehicle issues.	√	√
Repeated complaint re request for more litter bins on an estate. Apology given and bins sited.	√		No	√	√
Complaint about delay and non response to requests to replace a wheelie bin swallowed by the wagon. Apology given and bin replaced	√		No	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Leisure and Environmental Services cont'd... Complaint missed bin several times. Not leaving it at the edge of his property. Argued would be unsafe to do so after the Supervisor visited and disagreed.	√		No	Put phone down when I asked if he wanted to progress the complaint.	√
Complaint had to buy a replacement bin when stolen, also not emptying bin properly. Explained she bought a wheelie bin through choice prior to the twin bin scheme, we would now replace free of charge. Unsafe for crews to rummage in bins which haven't emptied.	√		No	√	√

<u>DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 1</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 2</u>	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Leisure and Environmental Services cont'd					
Complaint forgot to put his bin out then took it to next street and asked crew to empty it they refused. Not satisfied with response that they were just following procedure.	√		No, crew adhering to procedure.	No, thinks there should be some flexibility but said he was wasting his time complaining.	√
Complaint that Env Health not providing assistance re a neighbour dispute. Explained a civil matter we have done all we can to assist but CRO contacted CDRP who visited and gave advice.	√		Reminder to use CDRP.	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Leisure and Environmental Services cont'd... Complaint about missed bin several times. Not leaving it at the edge of his property. Argued would be unsafe to do so after the Supervisor visited and disagreed.	√		No	Put phone down when I asked if he wanted to progress the complaint.	√
Complaint had to buy a replacement bin when hers was stolen and also crew not emptying them properly. Explained she bought a wheelie bin through choice prior to the twin bin scheme, we would now replace free of charge. Unsafe for crews to rummage in bins which haven't emptied.	√		No	√	√

<u>DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 1</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 2</u>	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Leisure and Environmental Services cont'd...					
Complaint missed his collection took it to next street and asked crew to empty it they refused. Not satisfied with response that they were just following procedure.	√		No, crew adhering to procedure.	No, thinks there should be some flexibility.	√
Complaint that Env Health not providing assistance re a neighbour dispute. Explained a civil matter we have done all we can to assist but CRO contacted CDRP who visited and gave advice.	√		Reminder to use CDRP.	Yes	√

<u>DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 1</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 2</u>	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Leisure and Environmental Services cont'd...					
Complaint no response to complaints about repeated missed collections in St Bees. Apology given, advised discussed with the crew and Customer Services.	√		Improve communications between Copeland Direct and Waste	√	√
Complaint about deteriorating cleanliness of the Haverigg area Explained lot of it is private property and therefore owners responsibility but will contact them and we'll do a sweep ASAP.	√		Not always our responsibility but to work with owners if possible	√	√

<u>DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 1</u>	<u>Resolved at STAGE 2</u>	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Leisure and Environmental Services cont'd...					
Complaint about missed bin which escalated into him bringing the rubbish bags to the Council offices and subsequent article in the media.	√		No, the crew noted bin not out on arrival.	No	√
Complaint bin not returned to point of collection. Apology given and discussed with the crew.	√		Yes, reminder to crews to return bins to point of collection.	√	√
Complaint about Fixed penalty notice issued for putting xs waste out when felt a warning letter should have been issued first. Explained following procedures and Notice cancelled	√		Yes, over zealous on this occasion	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Leisure and Environmental Services cont'd...					
Complaint he was misadvised over tree felling in a conservation area. Apology and explanation given.	√		Yes	√	√
Complaint from a market trader alleging another trader being given preferential treatment. Explained actions taken impartially, compromise offered and accepted.	√		No	√	√

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
<p><u>Regeneration</u></p> <p>Complaint not kept informed of Planning Panel decision in response to his objections. Alleged his property has been devalued and approval shouldn't have been given. Apology and explanation given re Civil matter parts of complaint.</p> <p>Complaint about delay in assessing whether or not his property will qualify for a discretionary grant, told could take up to 6 months. Apology given, explained staff shortage assessed within 8 weeks of receipt.</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>		<p>No</p> <p>No</p>	<p>No subsequently went to Omb and District Valuer. D.V. said no loss of value but Omb suggested £250.00 adequate compensation.</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>No, an apology given</p> <p>√</p>

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Regeneration cont'd... Complaint about neighbours and lack of enforcement action re Planning permission. Responded that action ongoing and explained cannot act on civil matters. Complaint about entering a private property without permission. Apology given with explanation it was to measure a boundary in response to their complaint about their neighbouring property.	√	Refused permission to proceed to Appeal	No No	No but essentially a neighbour dispute. √	No, an apology given √

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Regeneration cont'd... Complaint we are not enforcing conditions of a development, also questioning Cllr involvement and possible former employee's conflict of interest. Explained why enforcement action not taken. revised plans have been submitted, Cllr issues to be referred to Standards Board and former employees involvement an issue for his current employer.		Refused permission to proceed to Appeal.	No	No going to the Omb	No, an apology given

DEPARTMENT/ DETAIL	Resolved at STAGE 1	Resolved at STAGE 2	Lessons learnt?	Complainant satisfied?	Dealt with within timescale?
Regeneration cont'd... Complaint re procedure and outcome of interview, allegation of racial discrimination.		Appeal pending			No, an apology given

	Total number of complaints	Total resolved at Stage 1	Total resolved/ refused at Stage 2	Appeal	Total complainants satisfied	Total answered within timescale	Compensation payment/refunds
Customer Services	38	37	1		34	34	
Finance and Business Development	5	5			4	5	
Legal and Democratic Services	1	1			1	1	
Leisure and Environmental Services	18	18			13	18	£297.00
Regeneration	6	2	3	1 (to be heard July 07)	-	2	£250.00
Total	68	63	4	1	52	60	£547.00

COMPLIMENTS

Revs and Bens

2 Compliments to members of Benefits staff for going that extra mile to help Valuation office gave their thanks for assistance from Officers in Council Tax.

Copeland Direct

5 Compliments for members of Copeland Direct for taking the time to resolve an outstanding issues regarding other services.
Thanks to Security guard for dealing with an enquiry when the office was closed Wed am, saving them having to wait or come back another time.

Finance and Business Development

Thanks received from an Officer of the Audit Commission for our help over the years, enjoyed working with the department.
Thanks to the Fraud team from neighbours of someone committing fraud which the team investigated and stopped.

Leisure and Environment

Thanks for providing an elderly lady with an assisted collection.
Thanks to the Crematorium Staff for their professionalism and expertise
Thanks to the Pest Control Team for their efficiency.
Thanks to the refuse crew in Millom “a credit to the Council”
Thanks to the Horticultural Team for the improvements on Hillcrest.
Thanks to Parks for the stunning flower display at the bottom of Midgely.
Cleator Moor Town Council thanks to Parks for the presentation regarding programmed of works for the Square

Regeneration

Numerous compliments about the Beacon and TIC