

To Simon Pollock

Mr Simon Edge
9 Vincent Close
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Surrey
KT22 9PB

20 October 2009

Dear Mr Pollock

STANDARDS COMMITTEE CONCERNS ABOUT RESPONSES TO COMPLAINTS

Thank you for attending the Standards Committee meeting on 2 October and for providing a detailed account of complaints handling within the Highways Department. Members of the Committee welcomed the opportunity to discuss their concerns with you, and now have a better understanding of the procedures you operate. I trust that you also have a clearer understanding of Member's concerns.

Your letter of 14 September correctly identified the Standards Committees role in relation to complaints handling. The Committee's specific concerns are about the effective operation of the complaints handling system within Highways, as distinct from service delivery which are rightly the responsibility of the Transportation Select Committee. Specifically, the Committee finds that there is an apparent disconnect between Member's day-to-day experience of the public raising a large number of 'complaints' about highways with them, and the figures you present showing low levels of complaint. During your attendance at the Committee it became clear that one possible explanation for this disconnect is how complaints are defined and logged. It may well be that members of the public are being recorded by the system as reporting issues about highways matters when, as far as they are concerned, they are actually making a complaint.

A number of Members were able to relate incidences where members of the public state that they have 'complained' about an issue on a number of occasions, and have been given a series of reference numbers, but without result. While the Committee accepted your explanation that not all requests for action (or complaints) can be resolved in the way the member of the public would necessarily prefer, the volume of these occurrences should be cause for concern. The Committee would, therefore, like you to look again at the system in terms of answering the following questions:

1. How does the system properly identify and differentiate between reports from the public, and complaints by them – and is it doing so in practice?
2. How does the system engage with the public to manage their expectations of what can, and cannot, be done to action their report / complaint?

The Committee would welcome your reporting back on the above questions and attending again, say in six months time, to further discuss matters.

To join the effectiveness of the operation of the system, with the issues of service delivery, I am copying this letter to David Ivison as the Chairman of the Transportation Select Committee.

Thank you once again for your engagement with this issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Edge', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chairman of Standards Committee
Mr Simon Edge

cc Mr David Ivison (Chairman of Transportation Select Committee)