



Audit & Governance Committee
2 September 2013

Complaints performance report for 2012/13

Purpose of the report:

The purpose of this report is to give the Audit & Governance Committee an overview of the council's complaint policy, procedures and performance in 2012/13.

1. Introduction:

- 1.1 The council's complaints policy is an integral component of the council's corporate governance and assurance framework and reflects the council's customer focused values and commitment to listen to and learn from feedback. Every complaint is an opportunity to put things right for the complainant and an opportunity to learn and improve. Table 1 shows the council's complaints policy.

Table 1: Complaints Policy

- We welcome complaints for the opportunities they give us to inform policy and improve service delivery.
- We encourage customers to complain by making it as easy as possible for them to find out how to do so.
- We maintain procedures for the management and investigation of all complaints made to officers and to Members, and continually monitor them to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- We investigate complaints thoroughly, objectively and impartially.
- When complaints are upheld we put things right.
- When we find maladministration has caused injustice we seek a remedy that would, so far as is possible, put the complainant back into the position they would have been but for the fault.

2. Surrey County Council's complaints policy and procedures and response standards:

- 2.1 The councils' complaints policy and procedures are based upon best practise advice from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) whose role is to provide an independent and impartial complaints review service.
- 2.2 Customer Services manages the complaints process for the council with the exception of complaints regarding Adults Social Care (ASC) and Children, Schools and Families (CSF) which are both governed by separate statutory procedures. Complaints made to ASC and CSF are managed by the ASC Customer Relations Team and the Children's Rights Service respectively. Schools have their own complaints procedures drawn up by governors.
- 2.3 Customers can make complaints directly to a service or via the council's website. Officers aim to make a satisfactory response in line with the timescales details in Table 2.

Table 2: SCC's complaints procedures and response standards

Area	Procedure	Response standard at a stage 1
Change & Efficiency	A two stage procedure	10 working days
Chief Executives		
Customer & Communities		
Environment & Infrastructure		
Adults social care	A single stage statutory procedure	20 working days
Schools & Learning and Services for Young People	A two stage procedure	10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)
Children's social care	A three stage statutory procedure	10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)

- 2.4 Please note: The Department for Health, who created the Adults Social Care complaint regulations in 2009, did not set a timescale for how long to respond. ASC has therefore set its own timescale of 20 working days (with flexibility to extend this with the agreement of the complainant).

3. SCC's complaint handling performance in 2012/13:

3.1 Table 3 gives an overview of the number of complaints received and the response performance in 2012/13.

Table 3: SCC's complaint handling performance in 2011/12 - 2012/13

Area	Response target	2011/12		2012/13	
		Complaints received	Performance against response target	Complaints received	Performance against response target
Change & Efficiency	90% within 10 working days	36	86%	24	88%
Chief Executives		5	100%	2	100%
Customer & Communities		168	94%	199	95%
Environment & Infrastructure		428	95%	463	95%
Adults social care	90% in 20 working days	233	92%	213	94%
Schools & Learning and Services for Young People	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	42	67% (within 10 working days) Not recorded	54	86% (within 10 working days) 94% (within 20 working days)
Children's social care	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	281	59% (within 10 working days) 80% (within 20 working days)	274	47% (within 10 working days) 71% (within 20 working days)
Total		1,193		1,229	

3.2 When there has been maladministration by the council which has led to injustice to the complainant compensation is paid. All compensation awards are approved by the relevant Head of Service, and if greater than £1,000 in consultation with the portfolio holder. In 2012/13 £6,694 was paid in compensation.

3.3 Overall the number of complaints being logged has increased from last year. This is likely to be as a result of work undertaken with the Contact Centre to promote complaint logging as an appropriate outcome for dissatisfied callers.

3.4 Despite the increase in volume of complaints, response performance for most Services continues to rise. Adults Social Care has risen from 72% to 94% in the last 3 years. Highways who consistently receive the most complaints have rarely dropped below 97%. It should be noted that the complexities of complaints in Children's Services impact significantly on timescales and that the average time to respond at stage 1 over the year was 17.5 days.

Complaint Escalation

3.5 Officers aim to resolve the complaints satisfactorily at the earliest opportunity however customers who remain dissatisfied can escalate their complaint. Table 2 (above) shows the internal stages prior to escalation to the LGO. The LGO will be unlikely to accept a complaint if it has not followed the council's internal complaints procedure.

3.6 Table 4 shows the number of complaints escalating through all stages and the proportion where fault was identified at the final stage by the LGO.

Table 4: SCC's complaint escalation in 2012/13

Area	Complaints received at stage 1	Complaints escalated to:			Fault found by LGO with investigation
		Stage 2	Stage 3	LGO	
Change & Efficiency	24	4	N/A	3	0
Chief Executives	2	0		0	0
Customer & Communities	199	11		0	0
Environment & Infrastructure	463	151		16	0
Adults social care	213	N/A		10	2
Schools and Learning	54	10		20	0
Children's social care	274	13		0	13

3.6 The LGO rarely find fault in the investigations carried out in the council. This is due to the emphasis put on robust and in-depth investigations.

4. Learning from complaints:

4.1 Every complaint is an opportunity to put things right for the complainant and also learn and improve. An individual complaint may result in corrective action being identified, or a number of complaints about the same thing may identify a need to review a process or the information provided to customers.

Children's Services

4.2 Specific examples of learning identified through the statutory procedures by operational and Children's Right Service (CRS) staff are listed below:

- a) Review of local authority's contractual arrangements with transport providers
- b) Eligibility criteria for children's disability services revised and made accessible on website
- c) Kinship care leaflet revised to ensure information about finance options is clear to carers
- d) Guidance to be developed to ensure contact arrangements between children or young people and their families respect cultural and religious needs

4.3 CRS will be working closely with front line teams developing plans to progress learning identified from complaints across the directorate, enabling improved performance and maintaining positive relationships with service users and their families

Schools & Learning

4.4 Specific examples of learning identified by operational and CRS staff are listed below:

- a) Special Educational Needs (SEN) Service reviewed arrangements with the Health Authority for provision of advice during the statementing process and agreed an escalation process in cases where there is extended delay in obtaining advice
- b) SEN Service developing County wide policy/protocol with all schools to improve the commissioning of speech therapy.

Adults Social Care

4.5 Key learning from complaints within ASC leading to service improvements this year include:

- a) Adult Social Care have put appropriate arrangements to ensure individuals funding their own care are supported to source alternative care (the Services Closure Protocol)
- b) Regarding services for people with learning disabilities, all assessments are now monitored and reminders sent to ensure that customers receive key documents
- c) Teams have been reminded to have systems in place when cases are transferred between Practitioners, in order to keep people using our services fully informed of these changes

Surrey Highways

4.6 Specific examples of learning identified and corrective action taken within Highways include:

- a) A new process for notifying property owners about overhanging vegetation
- b) Legal and Highways updated the policy on highway encroachment
- c) Removal of a poorly designed traffic calming scheme

Other Services

4.7 Examples across other services in the council include:

- a) Better management of the houseboat tenancy by Property Services
- b) Trading Standards improvements around the use of warrants by Animal Welfare Inspectors
- c) Strict enforcement of Local Committee Annexe deadlines

4.8 There has been a cultural shift and an increased commitment to listen and learn from complaints over this year. Highways, who notably receive the most complaints, have made improving customer service a priority this year and have launched a Customer Service Excellence (CSE) programme to drive continuous customer focused improvement.

5. Conclusions:

5.1 What are we doing well?

- a) Corporate Customer Relations has seen a cultural shift in the attitude towards complaints. They are now recognised as a mechanism for addressing customer concerns and identifying service failure.
- b) Children's Rights Service has seen a significant increase in the number of complaints being made directly by Young People that are supported by advocacy provision.
- c) Adults Social Care has seen a year on year increase in meeting the target of responding to complaints within an agreed timescale, achieving 94% this year.
- d) Children's Rights Service has seen a decrease in number of complaints escalating to stage 2 or 3 of the process, and a decrease in the number of complaints going to the LGO.
- e) Corporate Customer Relations has seen a significant decrease in the number of investigations at Stage 2 of the process where fault is identified.
- f) Adults Social Care now feedback learning from complaints to Area Management at Quarterly Accountability Meetings.
- g) Continued good working relationship with the LGO.

- h) Improved investigations leading to a reduction in cases whereby the LGO find against us.
- i) All three teams continue to build positive relationships with services, providing advice, training and support in the management of complaints, leading to improved service delivery.

5.2 What do we need to work on?

- a) Continue to improve the speed of response at Stage 1 by supporting services to improve their internal processes.
- b) Improve the quality of response at Stage 1 to avoid unnecessary escalation. This will be achieved through training and by working with services to implement quality assurance processes.
- c) Continue to promote the value of complaints internally and embed learning within the services through a network of customer service leads and by promoting the Customer Service Excellence programme.
- d) Increase awareness to ensure that customers know that we welcome complaints to put things right and help improve our services through promotion on our website and with people using our services

Financial and value for money implications

6. n/a

Equalities Implications

7. n/a

Risk Management Implications

8. n/a

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy

9. n/a

Recommendations:

- 10. Committee to note that the full performance information for Schools & Learning and Children's Services will be published later this year.
- 11. The Audit & Governance Committee to note the council's complaint policy, procedures and annual performance in 2012/13.

Next steps:

The Audit & Governance Committee to receive information on operation of the council's complaints procedures on an annual basis.

Report contact: Mark Irons, Head of Customer Services

Contact details: 0208 541 8567

Sources/background papers: SCC complaints database, ASC Annual Customer Relations Report, Children's Rights Service