

Decision Maker: General Purposes and Licensing Committee

Date: 28 July 2010

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: COMPLAINTS - ANNUAL REPORT

Contact Officer: Kaye Palmer, Complaints Co-Ordinator
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Chief Officer: Director of Legal, Democratic and Customer Services

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

To consider the annual report on complaints and other feedback received prior to general publication; and the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review for 2009/10.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

1. That the trends identified within the report "Getting it Right 2009/10" be noted and the report be approved for publication; and

2. That the summary of complaints submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman, together with his Annual Review for 2009/10 be noted.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: N/A
 2. Ongoing costs: N/A.
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Democratic Services
 4. Total current budget for this head: £504,640
 5. Source of funding: N/A
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 1fte
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-statutory - Government guidance.
 2. Call-in: Call-in is not applicable.
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): There were 3,919 complaints recorded in 2009/10
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? N/A.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

Getting it Right

The "Getting it Right" report is published annually and enables the number of complaints received across the Council to be monitored. Significant trends in the complaints received are reported to Members, as appropriate. A draft copy of this year's Annual Report is attached at Appendix 1 for the Committee's comments and approval. A colour version of the report will be made available to members of the public in libraries, reception areas and on the website.

This report provides a means of identifying service shortfalls or areas for improvement in the Council's services. It also helps to ensure that that we are handling complaints well and efficiently and that changes are made directly in response to customer feedback, which is likely to contribute to a higher level of customer satisfaction.

The trends found in 2009/10 show:

- (a) All departments have recorded a consistent number of complaints compared to the previous year, with the exception of Environmental Services, where complaints recorded have dropped significantly (1,096 in 2009/10 against 3,684 in 2008/09). Although it is difficult to account for this reduction accurately, it is possible that the major changes to waste collection patterns in 2008/09 may have contributed significantly to this by boosting these contacts with the Customer Contact Centre. Last year's figures are more in line with previous years, but Environmental Services is working with their own staff and the Customer contact Centre to ensure that complaints recording is as precise and comprehensive as possible so that an accurate picture is maintained year on year.
- (b) The majority of complaints concern operational issues (72%), against policy (12%), lack of action (9%) and information (7%).
- (c) Our response rate has also remained fairly constant across the Council, except for Environmental Services which has reduced from 95% in 2008/09 to 73% in 2009/10. This has affected the overall total so that 83% of complaints were handled within the Council's target last year, against 92% in the previous year. Environmental Services believes the drop in response times is a reflection of the complex nature of some complaints they have dealt with over the last year. While some complaints are easily resolved, often within the same telephone call, others have required a thorough investigation and detailed response, which has extended the time taken to reply. Adult and Community Services has recorded the weakest performance in this area at 65%, but this is an improvement on the 61% recorded in the previous year. It should be noted that both Adult and Children's social care complaints are operated to a tighter standard of 10 days to resolve complaints, rather than 20 days which is the target of the rest of the Council.
- (d) It is gratifying to note that the number of compliments received over the last year, 3,794, is almost equal to the total number of complaints recorded, 3,919.
- (e) Last year's trend away from written complaints in favour of telephone has reversed with 64% of complaints being made in writing, against 22% by telephone in 2009/10. Many complaints are now received by e-mail which may account for this.
- (f) The amount of compensation paid in 2009/10 (£17,782) has risen slightly compared to 2008/09 (£16,323). This fluctuates from year to year and may also reflect more generous payments being recommended by the Local Ombudsman.

Local Government Ombudsman

During 2009/10 the Local Ombudsman made decisions on 58 complaints concerning Bromley (compared to 57 in 2008/09). The following breakdown shows the findings for last year, compared to the previous four years:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Resolved locally	23	14	9	16	17
Not pursued by Ombudsman	43	58	38	41	41
Formal investigations undertaken	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Finding of maladministration	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Number of decisions	66	72	47	57	58

The number of investigations carried out per department between 2005/06 and 2009/10 is as follows:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Chief Executive	0	2	0	0	0
Adult & Community Services*	-	16	8	9	17
Children & Young People*	-	14	12	9	13
Education and Libraries**	10	-	-	-	-
Environment Services	30	31	22	13	10
Legal and Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0
Renewal and Recreation***	-	-	-	8	15
Resources	8	9	5	5	2
Social Services & Housing**	18	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	66	72	47	44	57

* A&CS and CYP Departments established in 2006/07

** E&L and SS&H Departments disbanded in 2006/7 and services transferred to either A&CS (Libraries, Adult Social Care and Housing); or CYP (Education and Children's Social Care).

*** R&R Department established in 2009/09 (Planning function transferred from ES and Libraries from A&CS)

The Ombudsman issues an Annual Review of Council's performance, which is also attached as appendix 2 to this report for information. In addition to the information set out above, the Ombudsman refers to the Council's response times to her enquiries. In the past we have been criticised for our performance in this area and it is pleasing to note that we have continued to improve from 32 days in 2008/09 to 30.2 days in 2009/10. However, the Ombudsman has identified pockets of delay in her report and this will be addressed with those officers concerned.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Review of complaints is part of the planning and review process for all services and is monitored in accordance with BV4 of the Best Value Performance Plan. Each year the annual report is submitted to Members for consideration.

5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Where maladministration is found and compensation payments are recommended, these are reported to the appropriate portfolio holder as necessary. Compensation payments to achieve a local settlement are met by the contractor where appropriate, eg for Housing Benefits. Legal and Personnel issues are reported as they arise.

Non-Applicable Sections:	
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Local Government Ombudsman – Annual Letter 2009/10