

Message from Bromley's Chief Executive

Welcome to the 2009/10 Annual Report of the Council's "Getting it Right" complaints, comments and compliments procedure. Customer service is vitally important to me and provides the focus for all we do as an organisation. Good complaint handling plays a central role in that concept.

Since this complaints procedure was introduced in 1991 the expectations both of customers and service providers have changed significantly concerning the way in which services should be delivered – especially what should happen when we do not live up to the high standards we have set ourselves. In these days of economic uncertainty it has never been more important to "get it right" first time and ensure our customers are given the best possible service at the minimum cost.

I am always pleased to receive feedback from our customers - it gives a valuable measure of how well we are doing and how we can improve our services. If things go wrong, we will do our best to put them right and learn from any mistakes. We will always try to deal quickly, courteously and effectively with every complaint we receive. Of course, compliments and suggestions are also very welcome so that we can build on good practice for the future.

I hope you will find this report useful and continue to let us know how you feel about our services so that we can continue to work towards "getting it right".

Doug Patterson
Chief Executive

Our commitment to a positive use of comments and complaints

- ✓ We aim to deal with comments and complaints from our customers promptly, courteously and effectively.
- ✓ We will use comments and complaints to help us put things right if they go wrong and to identify trends and recurring problems so they do not go wrong again.
- ✓ We recognise that comments and complaints help us to identify customer needs and to monitor and review our performance in meeting them.
- ✓ We provide information in this annual report on:

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Our definition of a complaint

We define a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not.

Equal opportunities

We value all the people who live and work in Bromley. We aim to provide our services fairly to all members of the community. One of the ways in which we monitor this is through our complaints procedure. We need to know if people feel they have been treated unfairly or discriminated against so we can investigate the situation. We do not treat people unfavourably because they have made a complaint about us.

The services we provide

We provide a wide range of services, including:

- council tax and housing benefits;
- libraries and museums;
- parks;
- social care;
- roads and pavements;
- refuse collection and recycling;
- education;
- planning;
- conservation;
- street lighting;
- environmental health services;
- trading standards; and
- registrars (births, deaths and marriages etc).

With such a diverse range of services it's not surprising that sometimes things go wrong but comments, complaints and suggestions help us put things right and learn from them.

The number of complaints we have recorded

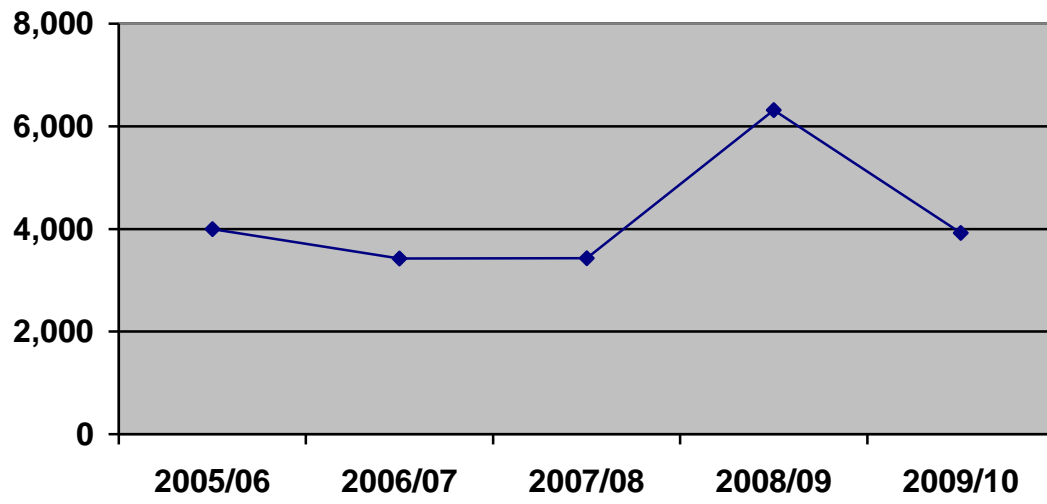
The number of complaints received by each department over the last five years is shown below. However, comparisons between departments should be treated with caution, as there are many factors that influence the number of complaints recorded. For example, a change in working practices can often result in a surge of complaints while teething problems are sorted out and people get used to new systems. In addition, changes in Government Regulations can also give rise to complaints.

There was a significant increase in the number of complaints recorded during 2008/09, but in 2009/10 the figure has dropped to be more consistent with the three previous years.

In 2006 a restructure of the Council's responsibilities resulted in a number of functions transferring from one department to another and new names being given to the restructured departments. A further restructure in 2008 saw the establishment of the new Recreation and Renewal Department.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Chief Executive's	91	147	73	0	3
Adult and Community Services (Established in 2006)	-	849	407	437	330
Children and Young People Services (Established in 2006)	-	384	362	255	251
Education and Library Services (Disbanded in 2006)	1,342	-	-	-	-
Environment Services (including Bromley Mytime)	1,739	1,647	2,119	3,684	1,096
Legal, Democratic and Customer Services	55	9	7	90	99
Renewal and Recreation (Established in 2008)	-	-	-	1,409	1,564
Resources	371	387	462	442	576
Social Services and Housing (Disbanded in 2006)	399	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	3,997	3,423	3,430	6,317	3,919

Total complaints recorded 2005-2010



The categories we record complaints by

We apply the following categories to monitoring and analysing complaints to give a corporate overview:

- operational – for example, cleanliness of leisure facilities;
- lack of action – for example, failure to answer letters promptly;
- Council policy – for example, a change in the way domestic refuse is collected; and
- information – for example, providing incorrect information.

The following tables show how many complaints fell within each category by department, a comparison with the last three years, and the percentage of the total number of complaints received in brackets.

Chief Executive's

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	13 (14%)	2 (1%)	2 (2.5%)	0	1 (33%)
Policy	5 (6%)	3 (2%)	5 (7%)	0	0
Lack of action	6 (6%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.5%)	0	1 (33%)
Operational	67 (74%)	142 (97%)	64 (88%)	0	1 (33%)

Education and Library Services

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	190 (14%)	-	-	-	-
Policy	339 (25%)	-	-	-	-
Lack of action	24 (24%)	-	-	-	-
Operational	789 (59%)	-	-	-	-

Adult and Community Services

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	-	36 (4%)	8 (2%)	60 (14%)	65 (19%)
Policy	-	90 (11%)	98 (24%)	2 (19%)	6 (2%)
Lack of action	-	83 (10%)	43 (11%)	73 (16%)	19 (6%)
Operational	-	640 (75%)	258 (63%)	302 (61%)	240 (73%)

Children and Young People Services

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	-	33 (9%)	39 (11%)	19 (8%)	28 (11%)
Policy	-	50 (13%)	44 (13%)	31 (12%)	38 (15%)
Lack of action	-	76 (20%)	76 (21%)	62 (24%)	55 (22%)
Operational	-	224 (58%)	198 (55%)	143 (56%)	130 (52%)

Environment Services

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	38 (2%)	70 (4%)	195 (9%)	211 (6%)	62 (6%)
Policy	521 (30%)	386 (23%)	459 (22%)	357 (10%)	86 (8%)
Lack of action	88 (5%)	128 (8%)	128 (6%)	95 (2%)	147 (13%)
Operational	1092 (63%)	1063 (65%)	1333 (63%)	3021 (82%)	801 (73%)

Legal, Democratic and Customer Services

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	13 (15%)	12 (12%)
Policy	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (4%)	3 (3%)
Lack of action	0 (0%)	5 (56%)	0 (0%)	9 (10%)	5 (5%)
Operational	54 (98%)	4 (44%)	6 (86%)	64 (71%)	79 (80%)

Renewal and Recreation

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	-	-	-	43 (3%)	77 (5%)
Policy	-	-	-	432 (31%)	263 (17%)
Lack of action	-	-	-	9 (1%)	22 (1%)
Operational	-	-	-	925 (1%)	1202 (77%)

Resources

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	6 (2%)	45 (12%)	10 (2%)	11 (2%)	26 (4%)
Policy	79 (21%)	17 (4%)	59 (13%)	62 (14%)	51 (9%)
Lack of action	66 (18%)	65 (17%)	44 (9%)	105 (24%)	125 (22%)
Operational	220 (59%)	260 (67%)	349 (76%)	264 (60%)	374 (65%)

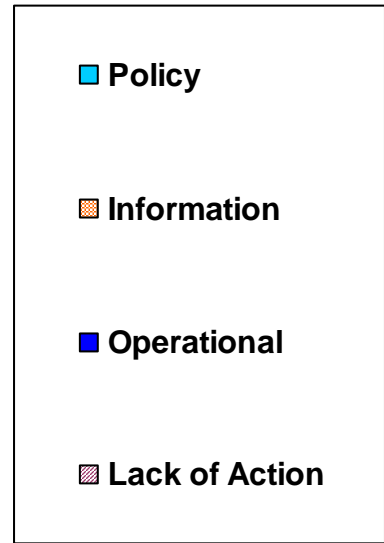
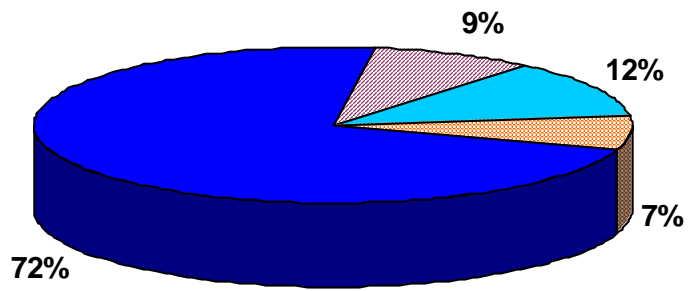
Social Services and Housing

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	48 (12%)	-	-	-	-
Policy	27 (7%)	-	-	-	-
Lack of action	65 (16%)	-	-	-	-
Operational	259 (7%)	-	-	-	-

Total

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Information	295 (7%)	186 (5%)	255 (7%)	357 (6%)	271 (7%)
Policy	972 (24%)	546 (16%)	665 (19%)	888 (14%)	447 (12%)
Lack of action	249 (6%)	357 (11%)	293 (9%)	353 (5%)	374 (9%)
Operational	2481 (63%)	2333 (68%)	2215 (65%)	4719 (75%)	2827 (72%)

Categories complaints have been recorded by in 2009/10



How quickly we respond

We aim to deal with complaints immediately but if this is not possible we try to reply within the following time limits:

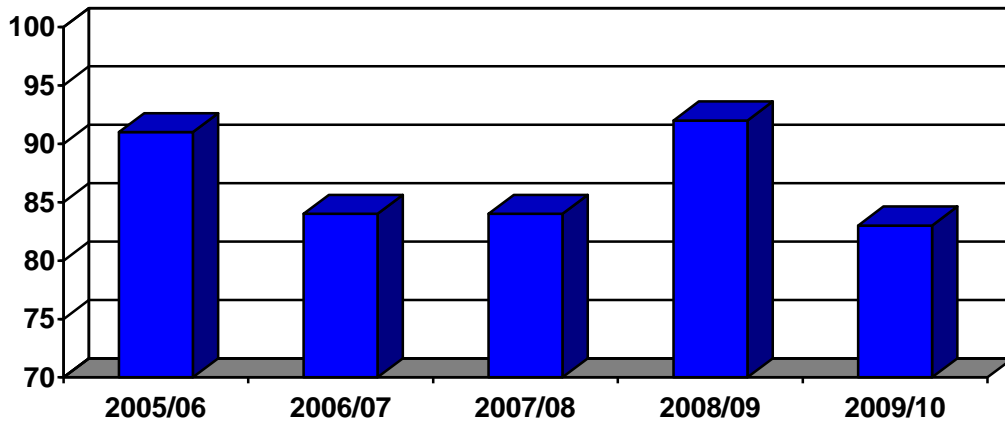
- we try to give a full reply within five working days of receiving the complaint;
- if this is not possible, we will acknowledge the complaint within five working days and give a full reply within a month;
- if the complaint will take some time to sort out (for example, we may need to gather information from several sources) we will explain when a full reply can be expected and the reason for the delay.

The table below shows how well we have met these targets, by department:

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
Chief Executive's	90	(99%)	145	(99%)	73	(100%)	0		3	(100%)
Adult and Community Services	-		668	(78%)	348	(86%)	268	(61%)	216	(65%)*
Children and Young People Services	-		261	(68%)	350	(97%)	213	(84%)	236	(94%)*
Education and Library Services	1,340	(100%)	-		-		-		-	
Environment Services	1,655	(95%)	1,492	(91%)	1,707	(80%)	3,504	(95%)	805	(73%)
Legal and Democratic Services	42	(76%)	9	(100%)	6	(86%)	86	(97%)	99	(100%)
Renewal and Recreation	-		-		-		1,400	(99%)	1,533	(98%)
Resources	301	(81%)	286	(74%)	413	(89%)	359	(81%)	450	(78%)
Social Services and Housing	190	(43%)	-		-		-		-	
TOTAL	3,618	(91%)	2,861	(84%)	2,897	(84%)	5,830	(92%)	3,243	(83%)

* Social Care response times are monitored differently from corporate complains and the criteria is as follows: acknowledge all complaints within 3 working days; a full response to be sent within 10 working days, with a further 10 days extension for more complex complaints. If an extension is needed, a holding letter is sent to the complainant to ensure they are kept aware of what is happening.

Percentage of total complaints responded to within our targets



The sort of compliments we receive

We always aim to offer a good service and it is certainly encouraging when customers let us know that we have succeeded. We are always delighted to know that our friendly, helpful and efficient staff are appreciated. We have recorded 3,794 compliments over the last year and the numbers received by department, together with just a few examples are given below:

- The Children and Young People's service recorded 1,334 compliments. This included praise for the Sensory Support Service, which was described as fantastic, helping children to overcome and triumph over considerable adversity.
- The Resources Department recorded 142 compliments, including praise for the Domiciliary Care/Fairer Charging Team who were thanked for the professional and sensitive way in which they carry out financial assessment interviews.
- Renewal and Recreation received 1,680 compliments. Among them, were praise for the Field Studies Centre and Bromley Museum on their activities; the Local Economy Team received many compliments on their People into Employment and business information events; and the well maintained and excellent condition of the golf course at High Elms was commended.
- Adult and Community Services logged 46 compliments including the care given to vulnerable adults and the Housing Team for their help in finding a property. Staff were also thanked for not only listening, but actually wanting to help service users.
- Legal, Democratic and Customer Services recorded 100 compliments including for the Customer Service Centre's cheerful, polite and professional staff; Registrars for making marriage ceremonies such a good start to married life; and Democratic Services for their helpfulness in guiding people through the committee system, particularly in the "public speaking" at meetings procedure.
- Environmental Services recorded 480 compliments. During the year the department's Customer Service Excellence accreditation was renewed and the assessor reported "a deep understanding and commitment to Customer Service Excellence" and commented on the department's good approach to seeking feedback in a variety of different ways. Other notable compliments relate to the improvement of grass verge cutting and the renovation of the tennis courts in Willett recreation ground. Compliments were also received for Waste Services and the kitchen waste collection scheme. Parents have been complimentary about the Council's road safety scheme, which trains children to ride safely.
- The Chief Executive's Department recorded 12 compliments all concerning the work of the Communications Team.

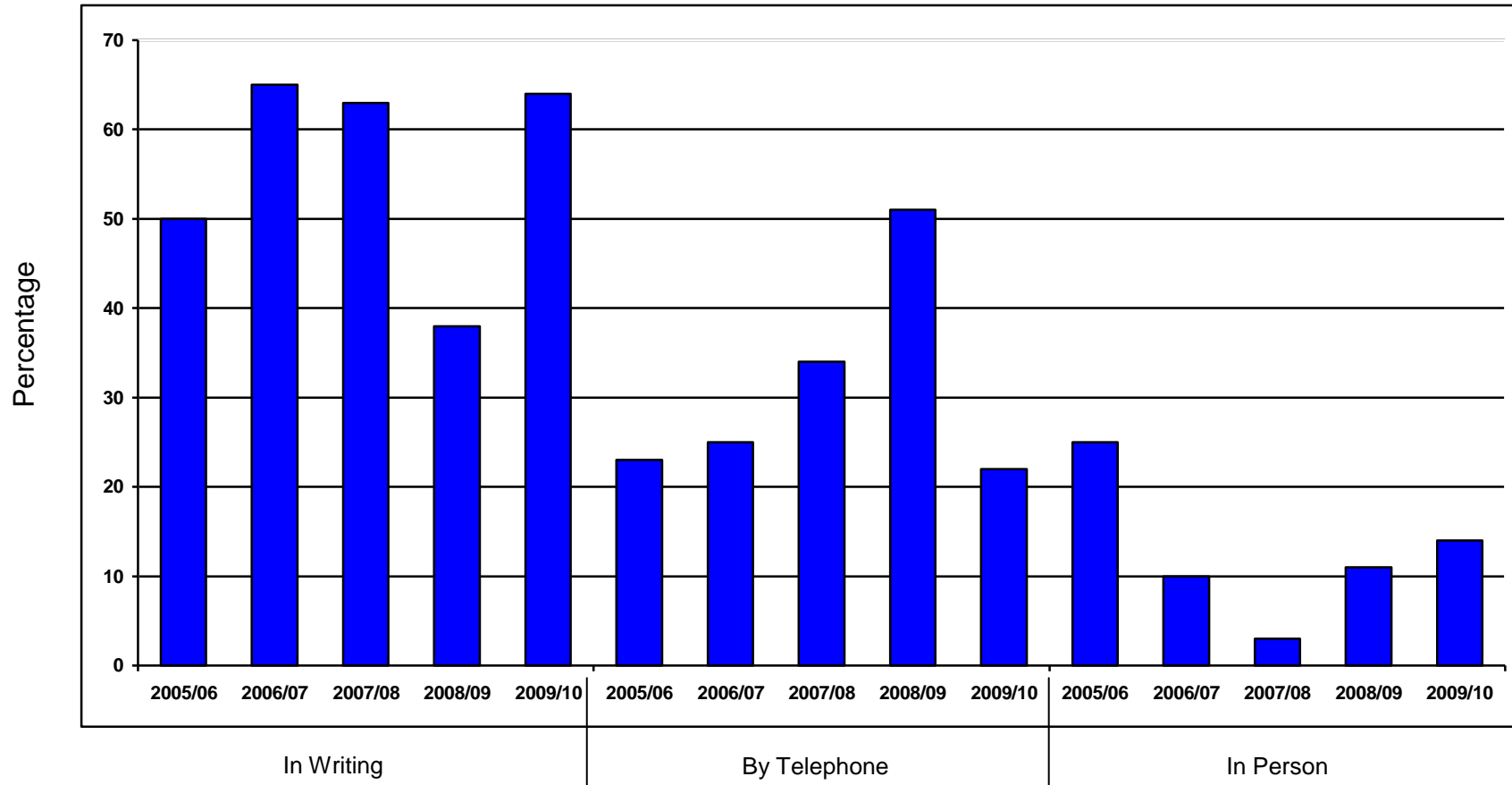
Methods of Contact

We monitor how people contact us, whether in writing (including e-mail), telephone call or in person. Whichever method people choose, we will treat their comments just as seriously. The next table shows how we have been contacted.

Methods of Contact

Department	In Writing (including e-mails)					By Telephone					In Person				
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Chief Executive's	65 (72%)	107 (73%)	62 (85%)	0	2 (67%)	25 (27%)	37 (25%)	10 (14%)	0	1 (33%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	0	0
Adult and Community Services	-	479 (56%)	322 (79%)	340 (78%)	268 (81%)	-	87 (10%)	85 (21%)	90 (21%)	58 (18%)	-	283 (34%)	0 (0%)	7 (1%)	4 (1%)
Children and Young People Services	-	250 (65%)	246 (68%)	196 (77%)	150 (60%)	-	91 (24%)	79 (22%)	45 (18%)	57 (22%)	-	43 (11%)	37 (10%)	14 (5%)	44 (18%)
Education and Library Services	251 (19%)	-	-	-	-	148 (11%)	-	-	-	-	944 (70%)	-	-	-	-
Environment Services	1,046 (60%)	1,027 (62%)	1,113 (53%)	709 (19%)	506 (46%)	641 (37%)	596 (36%)	944 (44%)	2,972 (80%)	587 (54%)	52 (3%)	24 (2%)	62 (3%)	3 (1%)	3 (1%)
Legal and Democratic Services	28 (51%)	9 (100%)	6 (86%)	74 (82%)	61 (62%)	26 (47%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	13 (15%)	38 (38%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	3 (3%)	0
Recreation and Renewal	-	-	-	710 (50%)	1,001 (64%)	-	-	-	49 (3%)	83 (5%)	-	-	-	650 (46%)	480 (31%)
Resources	324 (87%)	345 (89%)	408 (88%)	398 (90%)	530 (92%)	41 (11%)	35 (9%)	51 (11%)	43 (9%)	41 (7%)	6 (2%)	7 (2%)	3 (1%)	1 (1%)	5 (1%)
Social Services & Housing	319 (80%)	-	-	-	-	76 (19%)	-	-	-	-	4 (1%)	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	2,033 (50%)	2,217 (65%)	2,157 (63%)	2,427 (38%)	2,518 (64%)	957 (23%)	846 (25%)	1,169 (34%)	3,212 (51%)	865 (22%)	1,008 (25%)	360 (10%)	104 (3%)	678 (11%)	536 (14%)

How we have been contacted across the Council



The way we have used the information from comments and complaints to improve our services

Comments and complaints provide us with valuable information, which we use to improve our services. Some of the ways we have made changes this year, as a result of feedback received, include:

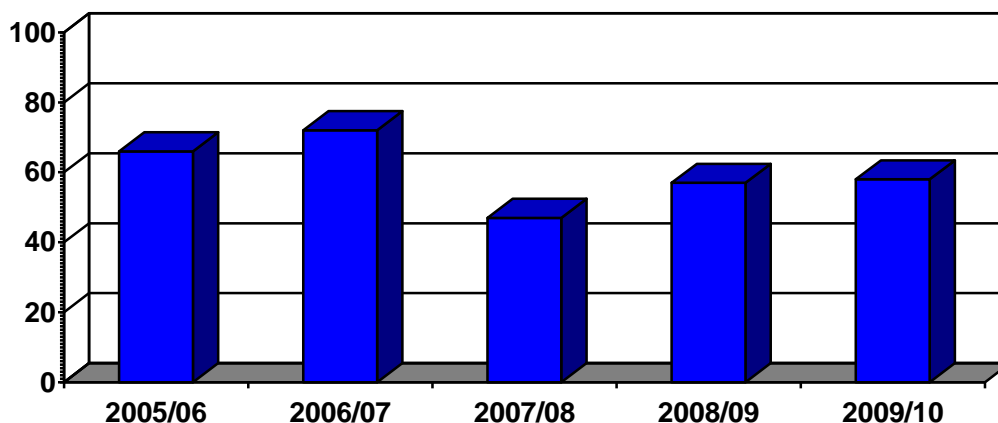
- Requests on book titles or media in libraries have been added to stock.
- Facilities for disabled users have been improved by a ramp being installed at Bromley Museum. In addition, the stairwell and signage in the Central Library has been changed and equipment/software has been purchased as recommended by the RNIB and Kent Association for the Blind.
- Committee documents are now available on-line, which has improved access to the democratic process.
- Domicillary Care statements are now sent out at four-weekly intervals. Steps have been taken to ensure that queries relating to statements are resolved quickly and refunds are dealt with promptly.
- The duty team in the Penge care management office now has three permanent staff. This ensures a quicker response and improved consistency of service to those people who contact the office. In addition, further training has been put in place to enhance customer service skills and improve the quality of communication.
- Two complaints were received from residents about the length of time taken to carry out assessments and delays in setting up Adult Social Care services. In response, the duty service for people with physical disabilities has been improved together with assessment timeliness. No further complaints have since been received.
- The Council has introduced an electronic monitoring system which records a carer's arrival and departure times. This monitors that carers do not cut visits short and where the service user has doubled handed care, it records that both carers are present.

Complaints handled by the Local Government Ombudsman

Everyone has the right to refer their complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman, who will look for evidence of maladministration. Although the Ombudsman will usually prefer the Council's own complaints procedure to have been exhausted before she carries out an investigation.

Details of the complaints referred to the Ombudsman between 2005/06 to 2009/10 are given below:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Resolved Locally by the Council	23	14	9	16	17
Ombudsman's Discretion	6	10	8	9	4
Outside Ombudsman's Jurisdiction	9	19	15	9	12
No evidence of Maladministration	28	29	15	23	25
Maladministration	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	66	72	47	57	58



Number of cases determined 2005/06 – 2009/10

If you would like more information about the Local Government Ombudsman, leaflets are available from Council enquiry points and libraries or visit the website at www.lgo.org.uk.

For advice on making a complaint or to make a complaint over the telephone, please call the LGO Advice Team on 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983 or send it to:

The Local Government Ombudsman
 PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH
 Fax: 024 7682 0001

The amount we have paid in redress and why

Sometimes we make redress payments to customers when we wish to apologise and offer some compensation. This is either totally at our own discretion, or following recommendations from the Local Government Ombudsman. Issues which have led to this include compensation payments in respect of Housing Benefit (which are paid by the contractor). These are considered on the individual merits of each Housing Benefit complaint where the claimant has suffered inconvenience, distress or financial loss due to the prolonged failure to remedy problems encountered in the processing of their application. The following table shows payments made.

Payments made from 1 July - 31 March

Department	Discretionary Payments					Ombudsman Payments					Total Payments				
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Chief Executive's	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Adult and Community Services	-	£454	£4,300	Nil	Nil	-	£150	£250	£250	£2,500	-	£604	£4,550	£250	£2,500
Children and Young People Services	-	£1,850	£400	£3,717	£50	-	£1,000	£7,900	£6,925	£6,225	-	£2,850	£8,300	£12,642	£6,275
Education and Library Services	£205	-	-	-	-	£13,000	-	-	-	-	£13,205	-	-	-	-
Environment Services*	£356	£1,186	Nil	£246	Nil	£575	£2,250	£950	£600	£3,600	£931	£3,436	£950	£846	£3,600
Legal and Democratic Services	Nil	Nil	Nil	£51	£4	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	£51	£4
Renewal and Recreation	-	-	-	£2,434	£2,579	-	-	-	£500	£1,150	-	-	-	£2,934	£3,729
Resources*	£120	£173	£250	£1,325	£1,674	£1,091	£700	Nil	£275	Nil	£1,211	£873	£250	£1,600	£1,674
Social Services and Housing	£7,820	-	-	-	-	£1,550	-	-	-	-	£9,370	-	-	-	-
-TOTAL	£8,501	£3,663	£4,950	£7,773	£4,307	£16,216	£4,100	£9,100	£8,550	£13,475	£24,717	£7,763	£14,050	£16,323	£17,782

Note: * Compensation payments in respect of Housing Benefit are paid by the contractor.

How we review our complaints systems to make sure they work effectively

We have continually sought to develop our complaints procedures since they were first established in January 1991. In order to do this we review our systems and the way in which complaints have been handled, to identify any problems. For example:

- we try to identify areas where complaints are not recorded consistently;
- we monitor response times to make sure replies are sent promptly;
- we look at the definitions of complaints and how they are categorised, to ensure consistency;
- we compare our systems with good practice guidelines such as those issued by the Local Government Ombudsman;
- we look at comments made about how complaints have been handled when we carry out customer research such as discussion groups and we also consider the results of national customer research; and
- the Chief Executive and Director of Legal, Democratic and Customer Services monitor how complaints are handled within departments. In the Director of Legal, Democratic and Customer Services' role as Monitoring Officer, under the Local Government and Housing Act, he also has a duty to report to Councillors if he considers that any proposal, decision or omission by the Council is likely to result in a breach of the law or a code of practice, or if it would give rise to maladministration.

When problems are identified, we take action to improve the situation. This may mean extra staff training, redesigning the way in which complaints are recorded, or revising a department's procedure. We also report to Councillors about customers' comments and complaints, how we have handled them and about our reviews of the system.

Comments on our services

If you would like to comment on our services, first of all get in touch with the department concerned. If you are not sure who to talk to, ring 020 8464 3333 or ask at any Council enquiry desk. Explain your problem and they will help you to contact the right person. Leaflets entitled “Getting it Right”, explaining about our complaints procedure, are available from enquiry points and libraries. Information is also available on the Council’s website.

You can also talk to one of your elected Councillors. If you do not know who they are, check our website, ring 020 8313 4364, or ask at any enquiry desk for their names and addresses. Alternatively, you can write to your Councillors at the Civic Centre address shown below.

Comments on this annual complaints report

If you would like to comment on this report, you can write to:

Chief Executive
London Borough of Bromley
Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley BR1 3UH

Alternatively, you can telephone Kaye Palmer, Complaints Co-ordinator, Legal, Democratic and Customer Services Department on 020 8313 4704 or use the Council’s website www.bromley.gov.uk.