



AGENDA ITEM: 8

CABINET: 13th November 2012

**CORPORATE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
13th December 2012**

Report of: Transformation Manager

Relevant Managing Director: Managing Director (Transformation)

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor I Grant

**Contact for further information: Helen Morrison (Extn. 5091)
(E-mail: helen.morrison@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS MONITORING

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To present data on complaints received by the Council from April 2011 to March 2012.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

2.1 That the complaints data for 2011/12 be noted.

2.2 That the call in procedure is not appropriate for this item as the report is being submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13th December 2012.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION TO CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3.1 That the report be noted.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Types, numbers and trends in complaints provide a valuable insight into the quality of services and can make a valuable contribution to improving them. In this respect they should also be considered alongside other information such as performance indicators and securing value for money.
- 4.2 In order to contextualise this report and particularly the number of “complaints” recorded, the reader’s attention should be drawn to the vast number of interactions the Council has with its customers/stakeholders across all of its service areas in any one year. For example, within the Contact Centre alone, there are around 190,000 contacts made each year. As a further means of scale, Street Scene Services are responsible for carrying out 3,715,764 domestic refuse and recycling collections per annum. Further detailed information can also be found at 5.4 below.
- 4.3 It can be difficult to determine what is or is not a complaint. The Council has defined a complaint as being a written expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of a service provided by the Council. Or to put it another way, when someone claims the Council has:
- failed to do something they should have done;
 - done something badly or in the wrong way,
 - or the complainant feels they have been treated unfairly or discourteously

The complaints procedure is therefore not simply logging initial service requests, e.g. – for pest control, missed refuse collections, housing repairs etc.

- 4.4 My service is responsible for managing overall co-ordination of the corporate complaints process.
- 4.5 If a complainant wishes to pursue an issue further after the Council’s own internal procedures have been exhausted, this can be raised with the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) who will carry out investigations of their own.

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 The principal purpose of monitoring and responding to complaints is always to improve services. On the occasions where the Council acknowledged service should have been better, our focus is on putting the matter right AND preventing any re-occurrence. Even in those instances where actions have been in line with policies and procedures trends are now further examined corporately with input from staff, to see if there might be an underlying issue that might be further investigated in order to reduce the likelihood of future complaints.
- 5.2 This report provides Members with an update of complaints received during 2011/12. Data on the number of complaints, received by each section during this period is set out in Appendix 1 to this report. The numbers recorded are all written expressions of dissatisfaction and are not necessarily substantiated.
- 5.3 The figures for 2011/12 show an increase of 31 in the number of complaints received, when compared with 2010/11, i.e. from 76 in 2010/11 to 107 in 2011/12. Following investigation, it was established that 41 of the 107 received

were without merit i.e. the Council had complied with its own policies and procedures. Further details regarding the nature of the specific complaints are provided at Appendix 1.

5.4 Whilst complaints have increased, the numbers received should be put into perspective. As an example Street Scene Services received 11 complaints regarding collections, given that there are approximately 50,000 residential properties in the borough, this shows that 99.9% of residents are satisfied with the collection service. In relation to Planning services, 1039 applications were determined during this period and 13 complaints were received, which represents 1.25%. In all 13 of these, it was found that correct procedures were followed.

5.5 In relation to enquiries and complaints received by the LGO during 2011/12 the LGO, in her annual review letter, advised "I am pleased to say that I have no concerns about your authority's response times and there are no issues arising from the complaints that I wish to bring to your attention". During 2011/12 the total number of enquiries and complaints received by the LGO stood at 26. Of those 26 enquiries and complaints only 5 proceeded to an investigation during 2011/12, all of which were discontinued, as the LGO did not find sufficient evidence that the Council was at fault. By way of comparison in 2010/11 the total number of enquiries and complaints stood at 25, of which 10 proceeded to an investigation. Of those 10 cases, 8 were discontinued, 1 case was considered to be outside jurisdiction and 1 was classed as local settlement. The Council's performance in respect of LGO referrals has previously been the subject of a members update to the Corporate and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

6.1 The information set out in this report aims to help the Council to improve service performance and is consistent with the Sustainable Community Strategy in that it helps to deliver good quality services that are easily accessible to all.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no current financial or resource implications arising from this report. Improving service delivery will prevent any unnecessary additional expenditure associated with 'putting things right', particularly if the problem is a common or persistent one.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 Monitoring and managing complaints identifies areas where improvement to services may be required to prevent re-occurrence and helps to prevent these issues escalating to the Ombudsman.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The figures demonstrate that were there have been genuine complaints/issues these have been dealt with accordingly and wherever possible, improvements have been made to prevent re-occurrence. Future meetings will be held with service Complaints co-ordinators to help further ensure that additional improvements to service delivery are introduced wherever possible.
- 9.2 By taking complaints seriously the Council is ensuring that all genuine grievances are recognised and action taken to address the issue. The Councils positive record with the Ombudsman in terms of having no findings of maladministration demonstrates this.
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Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected Members and/or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendices

1. Complaints Received April 2011 to March 2012
2. Minute of Cabinet – 13 November 2012 (Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee only)