

APPENDIX F

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE - 2 SEPTEMBER 2008

Title:

COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN WAVERLEY IN 2007/08

[Wards Affected: All]

Summary and purpose:

This report is in two parts. The first part provides a summary of Waverley's complaints procedure and recent developments in complaints handling. The second part reports on complaints handling in Waverley in 2007/08, including the number of complaints received, Waverley's performance in responding to complaints, and the levels of customer satisfaction.

Waverley's performance in dealing with complaints referred by the Local Government Ombudsman is the subject of a separate report.

Environmental implications:

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

Social / community implications:

The receipt and investigation of complaints from members of the public provides the Council with an opportunity to keep under review the quality of the services it provides to all sections of the community, and to learn from mistakes that have been made. Complaints can highlight areas where improvement or changes to procedures need to be made for the benefit of Waverley's customers.

E-Government implications:

The Council's complaints leaflet can be downloaded from its website, and there is also an email account through which members of the public can submit complaints to the Council. It is also intended that customers will shortly be able to complete the complaints leaflet 'on-line'.

Resource and legal implications:

There are no resource or legal implications arising from this report.

PART 1 – RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN WAVERLEY

Background

1. In the autumn of 2007, the Chief Executive and senior officers carried out a management review of Waverley's complaints handling processes. This review resulted in a number of changes being made to the Council's complaints procedure, including a change in terminology to identify each stage of complaint and the introduction of a more challenging target for responding to complaints.

Summary of Waverley's complaints procedure

2. In accordance with recommendations made by the Local Government Ombudsman, Waverley's complaints procedure has just three stages – Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 (formerly known as Informal, Stage 1 and Stage 2). These can be summarised as follows:
 - Level 1 complaints are those which concern a matter that has not been previously dealt with by an officer in the relevant section who can solve the problem quickly and informally.
 - Level 2 complaints are those which concern a matter that has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant at Level 1. These complaints are investigated and responded to by the relevant Head of Service.
 - Level 3 complaints are those which have not been resolved satisfactorily at Level 2. These are investigated by the Customer Relations Officer who prepares a response for the approval and signature of the Chief Executive.
3. If a customer is still dissatisfied having completed the Council's complaints procedure, they can raise their concerns with the Local Government Ombudsman.
4. All complaints received by letter or email are logged on a database by the Service Complaints Administrators, and then passed to the relevant officers for investigation and response. Currently, complaints received over the telephone are not logged since these can usually be dealt with quickly. However, eventually it is hoped that it will be possible to log all telephone complaints. Original letters/emails are scanned onto the complaints database which also holds copies of all acknowledgement letters/emails and the final response sent to the complainant.
5. Until the end of the third quarter of 2007/08, the target for responding to all complaints was 15 working days, with all complaints being acknowledged within 3 working days. However, following the management review in the autumn of 2007, this target was changed to a more challenging 10 working

days for all complaints except those concerning planning, for which the target remained at 15 working days. The 15 working day target was retained for planning complaints due to the complexity of some of the issues raised in this area.

Recent developments

6. Since early 2006, the Council has used a stand-alone database, Datix, for tracking both complaints and freedom of information requests made by members of the public. While this software has increased the number of complaints logged, it has not proved to be a very easy tool to use in terms of providing an in-depth analysis of complaints.
7. As a result of the limitations of Datix, officers in the IT Section have developed a new Lotus Notes database for complaints. This new database was introduced at the beginning of the second quarter of 2008/09 and has the following functions. The system will:
 - record all complaints and compliments received across the Council
 - forward the complaint to the relevant investigating officer
 - monitor the progress of complaint investigation
 - create automatic reminders to relevant staff when deadlines are approaching or have passed
 - store relevant scanned documents, and all other documents, including emails that are created during the investigation
 - create standard word documents such as acknowledgement letters and memos
 - record outcome details including lessons learned and action taken
 - provide monitoring information.
8. The system will also provide monitoring reports on the local indicators on complaints handling that were introduced with effect from 1 April 2008. These are :
 - LI 1a – the incidence of level 3 and Ombudsman complaints
 - LI 1b – the variation in complaints volumes from the last quarter/year
 - LI 1c – percentage of complaints handled within WBC target times
 - LI 1d – customer satisfaction with complaints handling.
9. The new system does not record complaints that are, in effect, requests for service. For example, a complaint that a bin has not been emptied is treated as a request for the contractor to return and collect the rubbish. Such events are recorded in the relevant back office system. However, if a customer complains about the repeated failure of the contractor to empty their bin, then this is treated as a complaint which is logged and tracked on the Lotus Notes database.

10. The Council has also recently produced a revised complaints leaflet for members of the public (copy attached as Annexe 1) together with a revised policy on complaints handling (copy attached as Annexe 2). The new complaints leaflet is already on the Council's website, and the policy document will be added very shortly. The procedure document is intended primarily for staff and will be made available on the Council's intranet.
11. Currently all aspects of the new Lotus Notes database are managed by the Service Complaints Administrators. However, once the new system is considered to be working effectively, it is intended that all staff dealing with complaints should have access to the database so that they can log and complete the record for all Level 1 complaints. Training for staff will be carried out towards the end of September 2008.

PART 2 – COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN WAVERLEY IN 2007/08

Time taken to respond to complaints

12. The following information on the time taken to respond to complaints in 2007/08 is drawn from the Datix system. It has not been possible to re-programme Datix to reflect Waverley's new structure, and so for the information of Members, the services provided under the former departmental structure are listed in Annexe 3.
13. The following two tables provide information about the time taken to respond to complaints in 2007/08. The first table covers the first three quarters of 2007/08 when the target response time was 15 working days, and the second table relates to the fourth quarter of 2007/08 when the target changed to 10 working days for all services except planning.

Table 1 – Time taken to respond to complaints in Q1 to Q3 for 2007/08

	No. of Complaints	Replied within 15 wkg days	% replied within target
Environment and Leisure Department	137	106	77%
Finance Department	50	42	84%
Housing Department	110	80	73%
Chief Executive's Department	19	10	56%
Planning and Development Department	60	22	37%
Total	376	260	69%

Table 2 – Time taken to respond to complaints in Q4 for 2007/08

	No. of Complaints	Replied within 10 wkg days (15 wkg days for planning)	% replied within target
Environment and Leisure Department	18	10	56%
Finance Department	5	4	80%
Housing Department	30	19	63%
Chief Executive's Department	3	2	66%
Planning and Development Department	27	16	59%
Total	83	51	61%

14. Provisional results for the first quarter of 2008/09 show a further improvement to 64% of all complaints being responded to within the target, again to the more demanding standard. The target for 2008/09 is 75%, and all Heads of Service will be given regular feedback to ensure the target is met by the end of this year.

Customer Satisfaction with complaints handling

15. In March 2007 a pilot exercise was carried out to monitor customers' satisfaction with complaints handling in Waverley. This monitoring exercise has continued, with a total of 436 forms being sent out to those whose complaints were closed in 2007/08. A total of 103 complainants completed and returned monitoring forms to the Council in 2007/08 giving a response rate of 24%. This is a slight improvement on the 22% response rate for the initial pilot. The following table gives an analysis of those replies.

Customer satisfaction monitoring – summary of responses received for complaints closed in 2007/08

Question asked	Yes	No
Did the Council's response provide a sufficiently detailed Answer?	54%	46%
Was the complainant satisfied with the outcome?	36%	64%
Did the complainant fully understand the answer?	72%	28%
Was the complaint dealt with in a reasonable amount of time?	55%	45%
Were staff helpful and courteous at all times?	74%	26%
Does the complainant feel that they are receiving a good service now?	44%	56%

<u>Overall satisfaction</u>	
Very satisfied	20%
Fairly satisfied	22%
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	4%
Fairly dissatisfied	22%
Very dissatisfied	32%

16. As will be seen from the above table, a total of 42% of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied with the way in which their complaint had been handled. This figure compares very favourably with the statement made in the recent White Paper, Communities in Control, published by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government that only 34% of those who made a complaint to their council last year were satisfied with the way their local authority had handled their complaint. The White Paper contains suggestions about how the Council could improve redress for dissatisfied customers, which will be the subject of a future report.
17. In addition to answering the specific questions on the satisfaction monitoring form, a number of complainants take the opportunity to provide more detailed comments on the way in which their complaint was handled. Often these comments provide valuable information on how Waverley's customers view the service that it being provided, and these comments are now passed on the Head of Service concerned so that they can consider whether there is a need to take further action.
18. For serious complaints, the Customer Relations Officer is now preparing a brief lessons learnt summary to help both individual Service Managers and the Council corporately to improve service quality.

Conclusion

19. Unfortunately, not only has Datix failed to provide the detailed analysis of complaints promised by its developers, but it has also been impossible to re-programme the system to reflect Waverley's new structure, hence the rather limited information provided in the report on complaints handling in 2007/08. The new Lotus Notes database has already proved to be more 'user friendly' and next year it should be possible to provide Members with much more detailed information on complaints handling. Certainly the new system will report against the four local complaints indicators, and should provide information to services not only on the subjects of complaints, but lessons learned and action taken.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Executive:

1. considers whether there are any comments it would wish to make on the issues raised in this report; and
2. endorses the work undertaken by officers in developing a new Lotus Notes database for complaints handling, with a view to increasing the number of

complaints logged across the Council and improving the analysis of the causes of complaints, customer satisfaction and lessons learned.

Background Papers (CEx)

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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