

APPENDIX K

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE - 30 NOVEMBER 2010

Title:

COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN WAVERLEY IN 2009/10

[Portfolio Holder: Councillor Robert Knowles]

[Wards Affected: All]

Summary and purpose:

This report provides information on complaints handling in Waverley in 2009/10, including the number of complaints received, Waverley's performance in responding to complaints, levels of customer satisfaction and lessons learned.

Waverley's performance in dealing with Ombudsman complaints is covered in a separate report.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

Investigation complaints from members of the public provides Waverley with an opportunity to keep under review the quality of all of the services it provides to the community. It can also help to identify areas in which the Council could provide better value for money in its services, and can result in action that will improve the lives of residents.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

Complaints provide Waverley with an opportunity to review its arrangements for delivering services to all sections of the community. The investigation of complaints can highlight areas where improvements or changes need to be made to ensure that no one is disadvantaged in accessing the Council's services.

Climate Change:

There are no implications for climate change arising from this report.

Resource/Value for Money implications:

See paragraph on the Corporate Priorities above.

Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Background

1. Attached as Annexe 1 is a brief overview of Waverley's complaints procedure and the arrangements for logging and tracking complaints.

Waverley's performance in dealing with customer complaints

2. There are four local performance indicators on complaints handling:
 - LI 1a – the number of level 3 and Ombudsman complaints
 - LI 1b – the total number of complaints received
 - LI 1c – percentage of complaints handled within WBC target time (currently 95% of complaints to be responded to within 10 working days)
 - LI 1d – customer satisfaction with complaints handling.

The first three indicators are reported quarterly and the customer satisfaction indicator is reported annually.

3. The following paragraphs provide an analysis of Waverley's performance in complaints handling in 2009/10.

(i) Total number of complaints received by service area and the percentage responded to within target

The table attached as Annexe 2 shows that in 2009/10 Waverley logged a total of 259 complaints. This is a small increase on the total of 253 recorded in the previous year. The Housing service logged the greatest number of complaints with a total of 92, followed by the Planning Service which recorded a total of 63 complaints.

There was a slight fall in performance during the year, with 90% of complaints being responded to within 10 working days for the last two quarters of 2009/10, which is just below the Council's target of 95%. As expected, the greatest number of complaints (138) were received at Level 1.

(ii) Outcome of complaints in recorded by each service area

The table attached as Annexe 3 shows that the majority of complaints (65%) were not upheld. 21% were partly upheld and 14% upheld.

(iii) Nature of complaints by service area

The database provides a menu of options for recording the nature of complaints. Seven of these categories are common to all services ie

- Action requested but not taken
- Inappropriate behaviour/attitude of staff
- Inappropriate bias by staff re race, gender etc
- Delay in responding to letters or emails
- Failure to return telephone calls
- Policy issue

- Other.
4. The table attached as Annexe 4 gives an analysis of the nature of complaints received by each service in 2009/10.

Lessons learned

3. When complaints are closed, the Service Complaints Administrators record any lessons learned. Not all complaints result in lessons learned, but there has been an increase in the number of comments recorded over the past year. As in 2008/09, these have tended to fall under two main headings - the need to improve communications, both between Waverley and its customers and between different service areas in the Council, and the need to improve/change administrative procedures. Annexe 5 gives some examples of the information that has been recorded during the past year.
11. There is still considerable scope for improving the way in which officers record lessons learned and, more importantly, the action taken in response to those lessons learned. Guidance notes have now been prepared for staff on this particular issue and these are attached as Annexe 6.

Customer satisfaction with complaints handling

12. At the end of each month, customer satisfaction forms are sent to all those who have received a response to their complaint in that month. A total of 232 forms were sent out to those whose complaints were closed in 2009/10. 74 forms were completed and returned to the Council, giving a response rate of 31%. This is a significant improvement on the 24% response rate for the previous year. The following table gives an analysis of those replies – comparable figures for 2008/09 are given in brackets.

	Yes %	No %	No response %
Did the Council's response provide a sufficiently detailed Answer?	50 (47)	50 (48)	(5)
Was the complainant satisfied with the outcome?	29 (38)	71 (59)	(3)
Did the complainant fully understand the answer?	66 (68)	29 (27)	5 (5)
Was the complaint dealt with in a reasonable amount of time?	66 (57)	29 (41)	5 (2)
Were staff helpful and courteous at all times?	64 (67)	26 (28)	10 (8)
Does the complainant feel that they are receiving a good service now?	29 (37)	43 (38)	28 (25)
Overall satisfaction	%		
Very satisfied	17 (18)		
Fairly satisfied	9 (22)		
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	16 (7)		5 (2)
Fairly dissatisfied	19 (14)		
Very dissatisfied	34 (37)		

13. As will be seen from the above table, a total of 26% of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied with the way in which their complaint had been handled. This represents a significant drop in levels of satisfaction when compared with the 2008/09 satisfaction rate of 40% of respondents being either very or fairly satisfied.
14. It is difficult to find a reason for these reduced levels of customer satisfaction. As is evident from the information provided earlier in this report, Waverley's performance in the time taken to respond to complaints has improved greatly over the past two years. It may be therefore that those who complained in 2009/10 had greater difficulty in distinguishing between the way in which their complaint was handled and the actual outcome. To address this issue, it is proposed to change the wording of the satisfaction questionnaire so that a clearer distinction is made between the complaints handling process and the complaint outcome.
15. 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. These comments provide valuable information on how Waverley's customers view the services that it provides. As soon as these comments are logged on the complaints database notification is sent to the Chief Executive and the relevant Head of Service so they can consider whether there is a need to take further action to improve service quality.

Conclusion

16. There has been a significant improvement in the time taken by Waverley to respond to customers' complaints, and efforts are being made to ensure that in 2010/11 95% of complaints (with the exception of Ombudsman complaints) are responded to within 10 working days.
17. Further work is needed on learning lessons from complaints and, more importantly, ensuring that action is taken promptly to resolve any identified problems.
18. Customer satisfaction levels with complaints handling will continue to be monitored, and it is hoped that an improved questionnaire will result not only in a greater response rate, but also enable complainants to make a clear distinction between their views on the complaints handling process and the outcome of their complaint.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

19. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered this report at its meeting on 15 November and endorsed the recommendation below. The Committee was also pleased that the improved questionnaire would make a clear distinction between satisfaction with the complaints process and the actual outcome of the complaint.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Executive

1. notes the observations of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
and
2. agrees to ask the officers to work to maintain the good improvement in response times and develop the process of learning from complaints.

Background Papers

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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