

# APPENDIX R

**WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 24 SEPTEMBER 2012**  
**EXECUTIVE – 2 OCTOBER 2012**

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**Title:**

**COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN WAVERLEY IN 2011/12**

**[Portfolio Holder: Councillor Robert Knowles]  
[Wards Affected: All]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

This report provides information on complaints handling in Waverley in 2011/12, including the number of complaints received, Waverley's performance in responding to complaints, outcomes, levels of customer satisfaction and lessons learned.

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

Comments from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be circulated at the meeting.

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

Investigating complaints from members of the public provides Waverley with an opportunity to keep under review the quality of its services to the community, and is a key part of understanding residents' needs. 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:**

Investigating complaints provides Waverley with an opportunity, if appropriate, to offer redress to its customers who have not received the service they should have and to review its arrangements for delivering services to all sections of the community in the future. Complaints investigations 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.

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## **Background**

1. Attached as Annexe 1 is a brief overview of Waverley's complaints procedure.
2. Complaints received by letter or email are logged on a corporate database and then passed to the relevant officer for investigation and response. In-coming letters/emails are scanned onto the database, which holds copies of all acknowledgements, background documentation and the final response sent to the complainant.
3. The current database is a Lotus Notes application, and following the Council's decision to change to Outlook last year, the database has lost a lot of its functions. Officers are therefore developing a new Sharepoint database which will be come into use later this year. This new database will enable officers to carry out a much more detailed analysis of complaints received by Waverley, including lessons learned and action taken, and customer feedback on how their complaint was handled.

## **Waverley's performance in dealing with customer complaints**

4. 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.

5. The following paragraphs provide an analysis of Waverley's performance in complaints handling in 2011/12.

### **(i) Total number of complaints received and outcome**

The table attached as Annexe 2 shows the number of complaints received by each service and the outcome of these complaints. The majority of complaints (67%) were not upheld, 17% were partly upheld and 16% upheld. In 2011/12 Waverley logged a total of 215 complaints compared with 271 in the previous year. Housing received the highest number of complaints with a total of 77 followed by Planning which received 51 complaints, and Environmental Services which received 50 complaints.

It is difficult to identify the reasons why there has been such a significant reduction in the number of complaints logged in 2011/12 compared with the previous year. However, one contributing factor may be that an increasing number of complainants are choosing to communicate with the Council by email. This means that more complaints are being sent to individual officers' email accounts, and these complaints may be resolved but not logged onto the corporate database. All new members of staff receive a short presentation on the complaints process as part of

their induction. The implementation of the new complaints database in the autumn will be accompanied by an awareness raising exercise and will enable better tracking of complaints.

(ii) Level of complaints

The following table shows the number of complaints received in 2011/12 and in the two previous years at each level:

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3 & Omb premature	Ombudsman	Total
2009/10	138	79	37	5	259
2010/11	138	78	51	4	271
2011/12	92	72	42	8	215

(iii) Time taken to respond to complaints

The percentage of complaints responded to within 10 working days has fallen from 94% in 2009/10 to 84% in 2011/12 against a target of 95%. Again it is difficult to identify the reason for this fall in performance, particularly since there has been such a significant reduction in the total number of complaints logged. As explained above, staff are being briefed on the need to log complaints and the new system will send email reminders.

One further point to bear in mind is that officers need to balance the requirement to respond to complaints within 10 working days with the need to give the complainant a comprehensive response to their complaint. A slightly delayed but comprehensive response to a complaint is likely to be more acceptable to the complainant than an incomplete response that is sent within 10 working days.

In addition it is quite possible that some of the responses which fail to meet the Council's target are missing that target by just one or two days. When this was last discussed by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny, Members asked that more information on this aspect of complaints handling be obtained, and this will be done once the new database is in use.

### **Lessons learned**

6. When complaints are closed, the Service Complaints Administrators record any lessons learned. In 2011/12 approximately 25% of complaints led to lessons being learned. The majority of these have concerned 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 3 gives some examples of the information that has been recorded on the database during the past year.

### **Customer satisfaction with complaints handling**

7. 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. The information provided by complainants is entered onto the database and is also drawn to the

attention of the relevant Head of Service so they can take further action if necessary to address complainants' outstanding concerns.

8. Response rates have continued to be very low, and in the second quarter of 2011/12 the form was changed to make it easier for complainants to give their views, first on the extent to which they were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint and second on the way in which their complaint was handled.
9. Due to problems with the Lotus Notes database it has not been possible to produce an analysis of all the responses received in 2011/12. However, the following table gives an analysis of those replies received in the third and fourth quarters of 2011/12 following changes to the satisfaction form. 104 forms were sent out and 23 responses were received – a similar response rate to that in previous years. However, the numbers are small and the analysis needs to be treated with some caution. The figures in brackets relate to the previous year 2010-11.

<b>Satisfaction with way in which complaint was handled</b>	Yes %	No %	No response %
Did the Council's response provide a sufficiently detailed answer?	35 (50)	61 (50)	4 (5)
Was the complaint dealt with in a reasonable amount of time?	48 (66)	43 (29)	9 (5)
Were staff helpful and courteous at all times?	39 (64)	48 (26)	13 (10)
Does the complainant feel that they are receiving a good service now?	17 (29)	48 (43)	35 (28)
<b>Satisfaction with outcome</b>	%		
Very satisfied	17 (17)		
Fairly satisfied	17 (9)		
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	0 (16)		4 (5)
Fairly dissatisfied	10 (19)		
Very dissatisfied	52 (34)		

10. When compared with responses in 2010/11 there has been a fall in satisfaction levels regarding handling of complaints, although it is encouraging to note that a total of 34% were either very or fairly satisfied with outcome of their complaint. Officers who deal with complaints will be reminded about good practice in complaints handling when training is given on the new database later this year. A corporate project on improving customer care is starting under the Foresight programme and reacting positively to complaints will be a key part of improving how Waverley deals with its customers.

## **Conclusion**

11. As highlighted in this report, there has been a reduction in the Council's performance with regard to the time taken to respond to complaints, and satisfaction levels regarding the way in which the Council handles complaints, although as mentioned previously this is based on a very small number of responses.
12. The reasons for this fall in performance are being addressed by briefing staff and the new complaints tracking IT system.

13. The new Sharepoint database will restore the functions previously provided by Lotus Notes, and will enable greater analysis of complaints handling. However, there also needs to be more officers overseeing the day to day operation of the complaints database (Service Complaints Administrators) and each Head of Service will be identifying an officer who can take responsibility for overseeing the investigation of complaints in their area. That officer will be responsible for ensuring that all complaints received are logged on the database and will also keeping the Head of Service informed about every aspect of complaints handling including any fall in response times, lessons learned and action taken in response to customer feedback.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive receives any observations from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and agrees any action to be taken as a result of the issues raised in the report.

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### **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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## Overview of Waverley's complaints procedure

1. Waverley's formal complaints procedure has just three stages – Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. The steps taken at each level are as follows:
  - Level 1 complaints concern matters that have not been previously raised with the Council, and are usually dealt with by an officer in the relevant service who can solve the problem quickly and informally.
  - Level 2 complaints are those which have 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. The Customer Relations Officer investigates these complaints and prepares a response for the approval and signature of the Chief Executive.
2. If a customer is still dissatisfied having completed the Council's complaints procedure, they can raise their concerns with the Local Government Ombudsman.
3. All complaints received by letter or email are logged on a Lotus Notes complaints database. This database:
  - records all complaints and compliments received across the Council
  - monitors the progress of complaint investigation
  - stores relevant scanned documents, and all other documents, including emails that are created during the investigation
  - creates standard word documents such as acknowledgement letters and memos
  - records outcome details including lessons learned and action taken
  - provides limited monitoring information.
4. Since the move to Outlook, the database has lost a lot of its functions. In particular, it no longer forwards complaints to the relevant investigating officer and does not create automatic reminders to relevant staff when deadlines are approaching or have passed
5. The database does not record complaints that are, in effect, requests for service. Such events are recorded in the relevant back office system. However, if a customer complains about the repeated failure of a service this is treated as a complaint which is logged and tracked on the complaints database.
6. The complaints database is managed by the Customer Relations Officer.

## Annexe 2

### Number of complaints received by each Service 2011/12 and outcome

	Total	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partly upheld
<b>Service area</b>				
Housing Options	14	1	13	-
Housing planned maintenance	21	4	13	4
Housing responsive repairs	21	8	7	6
Housing strategy and enabling				
Rent collection	3		3	
Tenancy and estates management	18	1	15	2
Planning development control	39	2	33	4
Planning enforcement	8		6	1
Planning policy	1		1	
Building control	2			2
Car parks and on-street parking	2		2	
Land drainage, engineering				
Benefits	2		2	
Business rates				
Council tax	4	1	3	
Care and repair	1		1	
Environmental health	11		10	1
Committee services				
Electoral services				
Freedom of information				
Legal services	1		1	
Licensing	2		1	1
Environmental services	54	14	26	14
Grounds maintenance				
Parks and landscape management	2		2	
Arts, culture and museums				
Countryside				
Sport and recreation	2		1	1
Youth services				
Locality offices				
Property facilities management	4	2	2	
Community care	1		1	
Community transport				
Waverley training services				
Human resources				
Insurance				
Communications	2		2	
Website				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>17%</b>

### Examples of lessons learned recorded on the complaints database

#### Development control

- Greater need for monitoring of accredited agent scheme
- Some informal design guidance could have been prepared when the site became available for redevelopment.
- Case officer should have been more familiar with timing of appeal decisions.
- More detailed assessment in officers' report would have been useful in clarifying issues.
- Further training needed for reception staff.
- Front team to liaise more closely with planning officer where there is recent planning history.
- Need for case officers to complete site visit notes and sign to confirm date of visit in accordance with procedure note.

#### Housing

- Officers should have informed complainants at a much earlier date of funding difficulties. Expectations were raised when officers had very little hope of securing funding.
- Contractors reminded of the need to make notes to remind themselves of outstanding issues.
- Officers need to ensure that they adhere to established policy at all times.
- New tenant take up process needs to be reviewed.

#### Environmental Services

- Crews need to be monitored to ensure they are putting back bins in the correct location.
- Teams should be clearer in their expectation of the processes involved.
- Need for more frequent inspections of street cleaning in High Street.
- Need closer scrutiny of applications for assisted collections.

#### Licensing

- Good practice to explain to the applicant on what grounds decision has been made to refuse application for minor variation.
- Officers should make file note of all decisions reached in respect of applications for minor variations.