



Report No GA.23 11/12
Governance and Audit
Date: 29th September 2011

Subject: Summary of Complaints 2010/2011

Report by:	Adrian McCormick Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources T: 01427 676524
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Purpose / Summary:	To review the number, type and results of complaints made to the Council during 2010/2011

RECOMMENDATIONS:
That Members note the 2010/2011 results and where appropriate suggest corrective action

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None

Financial : None

Staffing : None

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights : N/A

Risk Assessment : N/A

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : None

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

Yes

No

Key Decision:

Yes

No

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2008 the Corporate Governance Group agreed to submit an annual report to this Committee on Complaints.

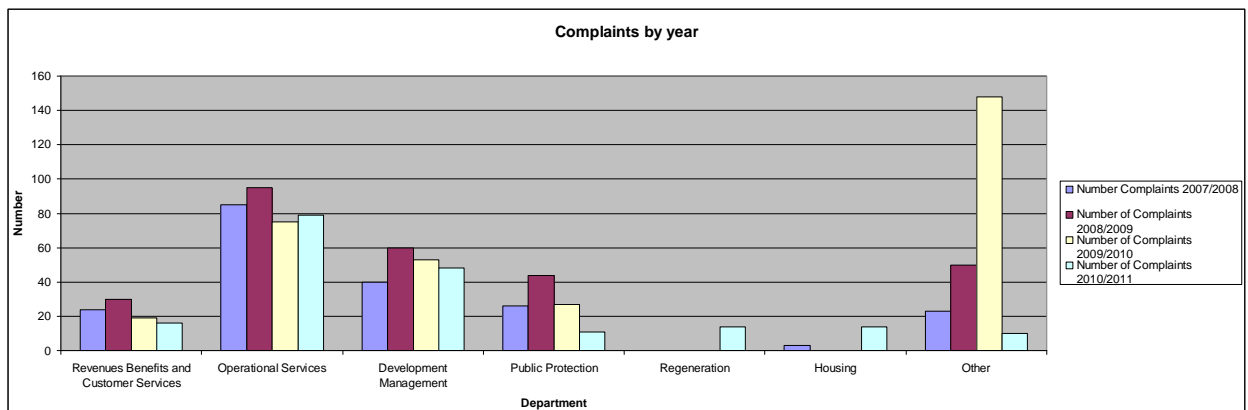
2. Background

- 2.1 Complaints are recorded by the Customer Services team and are dealt with in accordance with the Council's Complaints Comments and Compliments procedure.

3. Analysis of Complaints for 2010/2011

- 3.1 A total 192 complaints were received during 2010/2011. This represents a decrease of 678 from 870 in 2009/2010. This reduction was expected as 2009/2010 had specific issues that resulted in high volumes of complaints. There were 548 complaints regarding noise nuisance at the former MOD site at Faldingworth and 141 related to the proposed closure of Trinity Art Centre. If we exclude these specific causes there has been an increase of 11.

- 3.2 The table below shows a breakdown of the number of complaints received by service.



- 3.3 The 6 main areas for complaints are Operational Services (79), Development Management (48), Public Protection (11), Revenues Benefits and Customer Services (16), Regeneration (14) and Housing and Renewal Services (14).

- 3.4 **Operational Services** – This includes waste collection, street cleansing and public toilets. There were 79 complaints received for this service during 2010/2011 and a majority of these was as a result service failure such as missed bins. The level of complaints has remained fairly constant from last year and the figures should be put the context of delivering more than 1.5 million instances of service per year.

- 3.5 **Development Management (Planning)** – Customer Services have continued to work closely together and this is reflected in the continued reduction in the number of complaints. As a regulatory service such Development Management will always generate some complaints. It is not always possible to make decisions that satisfy both applicants and objectors. Work is continuing to improve the customer experience of this service including regular liaison meetings between Development Management and Customer Services as well improving the way we deal with complex complaints.
- 3.6 **Revenues Benefits and Customer Services** – A vast majority of the complaints received were related to Debt Recovery for Council Tax and other debts. Documentation and procedures are constantly under review in this area and these have contributed to the reduction in complaints this year.
- 3.7 **Public Protection** – This service has reviewed their working methods and has put a focus on the Customer. This has resulted in a significant reduction in complaints.
- 3.8 **Regeneration** - There have been 14 complaints in this area this year due to the relocation of the Market during refurbishment of the Market Place.
- 3.9 **Housing and Renewal services (including Community Safety)** - These complaints cover a variety of service issues from way we have dealt with a lost dog to way points have been allocated on an housing application for re-homing.

4. Local Government Ombudsmen

- 4.1 It should be noted that the Local Government Ombudsman now provides more details in terms of recording complaints and this is captured below.
- 4.2 There were a total of 17 enquiries to the Local Government Ombudsmen, which is the same as last year, 10 complaints were concluded by the Ombudsman in 2020/2011 – the previous year they concluded 12. * see end of report
- 4.3 Of the 17 complaints a total of 9 were classed as premature complaints. This means that the Customer contacted the Ombudsman with their complaint before giving the Council the opportunity to deal with the complaint via our complaints procedure. In these instances the Ombudsman will contact the council and ask us to deal with the complaint but will give us 12 weeks in which to do this. If the Customer remains unhappy with our response the Ombudsman will then take the case on as a full investigation.
- 4.4 1 customer contacted the Ombudsman for advice this was in relation to Housing. This case did not go any further as the Ombudsman did not investigate any Housing related complaints in 2010/2011.
- 4.5 7 cases went were submitted for full investigation in 2010/2011. (No figures for previous years)

- 4.6 Of the 10 cases one was a Local Settlement whereby we had to apologise to the Customer, 6 were found to have no maladministration and 3 the Ombudsman found no maladministration but made recommendations on a way forward. All these recommendations were taken on board
- 4.7 An area of concern is our response times. Whilst the Ombudsman has investigated fewer complaints we have taken longer to respond. Our average days to respond this year was 38.8 compared with 20.5 the previous year. In order to rectify this all Ombudsman complaints will be assigned to the Customer Services Team Leader for monitoring and progress chasing.
- 4.8 Cases investigated by the LGO are not recorded against the council until they are closed and sometimes this falls into the following financial year. In 2010/11 this affected 3 cases – hence the difference of 3 from complaints referred for investigation (7) to complaints concluded (10)

5. Complaints system

- 5.1 The logging and monitoring of complaints is done via Share Point and is the subject of continual improvement. Share point is a computer system for sharing information and tracking progress
- 5.2 With this in mind we have recently identified the need to approach cross sectional complaints and complaints logged via the Chief executive and Councillors differently.
- 5.3 With immediate effect all complaints that fall in to the categories identified in 5.2 will be overseen by the Customer Services team leader, Lyn Marlow, who will ensure that these complaints are dealt with effectively with the relevant team/sections working together to address the complaints made.
- 5.4 As a result all Councillors should pass complaints to Lyn Marlow for action and monitoring.
- 5.5 Work is also underway with the Business Transformation team to further enhance Share Point so that Service Managers can receive quarterly reports in relation to complaints in an appropriate manner. Currently this can be done but involves a lot of intervention from a member of staff which is time consuming.

6. Compliments

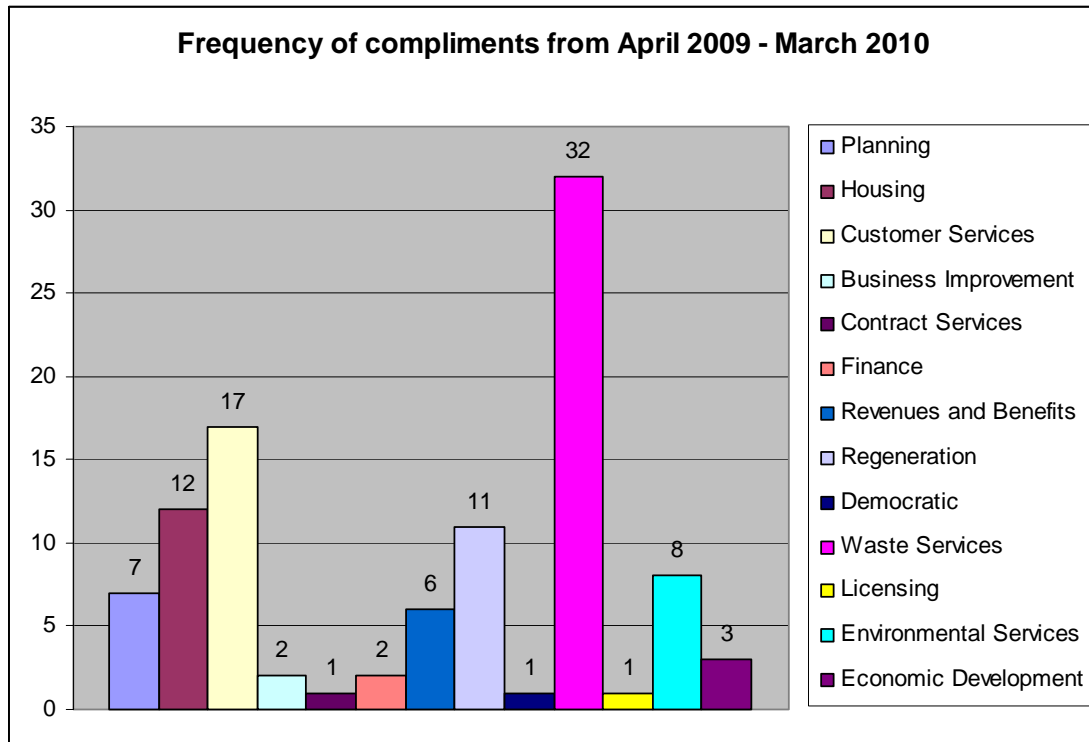
- 6.1 In addition to complaints the council also receive a number of compliments each year. Appendices A and B show details of the compliments received during 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 This report sets out comprehensive information on Complaints which has and will continue to be used to improve the services delivered to the residents and visitors of West Lindsey. We continue to develop the way we manage and learn

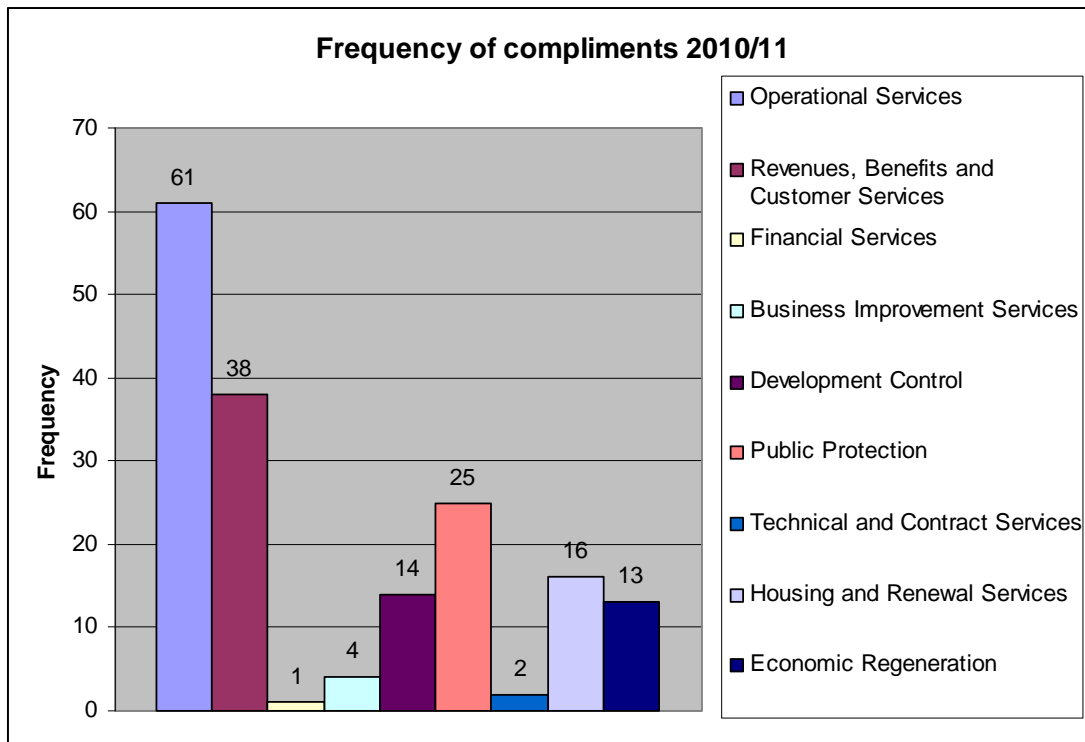
from all feedback. Work is ongoing to introduce a web based monitoring system to help share best practise and to increase transparency. Appendix C shows details of the learning during the year.

Appendix A - Compliments 2009/10



Section	Frequency
Planning	7
Housing	12
Customer Services	17
Business Improvement	2
Contract Services	1
Finance	2
Revenues and Benefits	6
Regeneration	11
Democratic	1
Waste Services	32
Licensing	1
Environmental Services	8
Economic Development	3

Appendix B – Compliment 2010/11



Section	Frequency
Operational Services	61
Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	38
Financial Services	1
Business Improvement Services	4
Development Control	14
Public Protection	25
Technical and Contract Services	2
Housing and Renewal Services	16
Economic Regeneration	13

Appendix C - Learning from Complaints 2010 to 2011

Every year we aim to learn from complaints made by the public. Sometimes the nature of the complaint means we are not able to change anything because what the Customers is complaining about is a procedure or process that is governed by legislation and/or regulations.

But where we can learn from these complaints then we should do

Below is a list of initiatives put in place in 2010/11 as a result of complaints from members of the public.

Waste Services:

Every year we receive complaints about “Missed Bins” which damage the reputation of West Lindsey, result in angry customers and cost money in terms of fuel and time of the crews in returning for these missed bins. We have worked with the Waste Services Team to overcome these issues and the following Initiatives have been put in place

- Customer Services staff reiterating to residents how important it is to have bins out by 7am in the morning, regardless of what time the crews have collected bins in the past. We explained to residents that the times that the crews collecting will vary from collection to collection.
- Sometimes residents do not present their bins outside the property in the correct way – this can result in bins being missed. The Customer Services team discuss with residents how they are presenting their bins and can give advice or arrange for a supervisor to visit the property to agree where the bin should be presented.
- Where bins are missed for situations outside of the crew’s control, the crew driver will contact Customer Services and advise what the problem is and which address will be missed. Customer Services are then able to advise residents of the problems and how we intend to resolve them.
- Where problems have continue to exist we work with local residents and if needed involve the police. This may seem harsh but on many occasions double parking is an issue and freighters can not gain access.
- Where missed bins occur and appears to be no valid explanation then a discussion takes place with the crew to make them understand the financial implications and reputation to the Council of a missed bin.
- Crews are issued with maps as well as lists of addresses as some staff work better with maps rather than lists. Resulting in less missed bins.
- A resident complained about the wording of a letter which they felt was misleading. The letter was amended to ensure that they would be no misunderstanding in future.
- Residents complained that bins had disappeared – it came to light that sometimes the freighters “Eat the bins”. When this happens the driver lets Customer Services know so we can order a new bin straight away and a note is put through the resident’s door advising what has happened and that a new bin has been ordered.

Public Protection

- Following a complaint in relation to noise abatement issues, identified that in future early engagement with partner agencies, residents and local ward members is essential. Planning and Public protection now work closely in early identification of potential noise abatement issues that may arise from a planning application.
- Following on from extensive work done on flooding, some residents complained that some of our processes, letters and leaflets were not very customer friendly and difficult to understand and this was seen as the council being obstructive at a difficult time. The leaflets, letters and have been amended and staff will undertake Customer Care training.

Market Place

- Complaints received that during works that customers had damaged shoes due to carelessness of contractor. WLDC undertook a walk through every morning and at various times during the day whilst works were in progress to ensure that this did not happen again.

Building Control

Complaint about the quality of information on the website about the responsibilities of Building Control, poor quality note taking by staff undertaking site visits, staff not in possession of the full facts before undertaking a site visit and quality of customer care skills of staff within that section.

- The website was amended to ensure that it is clear to customers about the responsibilities of Building Control.
- A new system of comprehensive note taking has been implemented for site visits
- Admin Support within that team prepares case files so that officers are in full possession of the facts relating to a site visit.
- All staff within Building Control are to attend Customer Care and Complaint Training during 2011/12

Planning

Complaints about the quality of information in a leaflet, which lead to customers, misunderstand the planning process.

- The leaflet has been amended following Plain English guidelines and the customer who made the complaint was involved in the new wording.

Complaint about the handling of a Tree Preservation Order

- The team worked with the customer having regular meetings to resolve this situation. The customer understood the process about tree preservation orders and was happy with the outcome.

On-going enforcement issue and despite promises that the customer would be kept up to date with issues this did not happen. Therefore the Customer then complained about this and assumed that we were not taking action and trying to hide issues from them.

- Put in place a system of a “Single Point of Contract” for the customer, with their agreement. The customer now receives fortnightly updates, even if nothing to report, and updates as and when enforcement happens if outside of the fortnightly telephone call we have with the customer. This will continue until the enforcement matter is satisfactorily resolved.

Complaint about lack of enforcement taken.

- Meetings set up with Customers to advise them what enforcement involves, what our powers are and what the restrictions are. Whilst customer not happy they did understand the situation. This action prevented customer from taking complaint further. This format has now been successfully used on a number of occasions as it is easier to explain enforcement procedures face to face than in a letter.

Complaints about planning officers not getting back to customers despite voicemails being left and emails being sent.

- Have introduced two support systems to reduce these complaints. Now have a duty planner service in place whereby the duty planner sits within Customer Services which means they are visible to the customer services team and can take calls and deal with face to face enquiries.
- Additional training has been provided to Customer Services staff to enable them to deal with basic enquiries and encouraging customers to use the planning portal for their enquiries.
- When workload is heavy, officers divert their telephone to administration support or customer service in order to ensure that the Customer calls get answered. If the call is case specific then emails are sent to the relevant officer so that they can call the customer when appropriate. The Customer is made aware that they will not get a call back immediately
- Regular meetings take place with planning and customer service teams to resolve issues on an on-going basis

Housing

Complaint about the quality of contractors used for works undertaken for Disabled Facilities Grant and Home Improvement grants

- Set up a list of approved contractors that are used to undertake this work. The quality of the work is also monitored on a regular basis.