

Report of: Chief Executive

To: Standards Committee

Date: 1st December 2006 **Item No:**

Title of Report : Quality Improvement System – Analysis of Corporate Complaints First Half 2006-2007

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To provide statistical information and analysis of customer feedback through complaints.

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Rundle

Scrutiny Responsibility: N/A

Ward(s) affected: All

Report Approved by: William Reed, Democratic Services Manager

Policy Framework: Corporate Governance

Recommendation(s): The Committee is asked to note and comment on the report.

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 28th April 2006, Committee agreed that it should receive a report on complaints monitoring and overseeing twice-yearly.
2. This report provides statistical information and analysis of complaints received and determined by the Council in the first half of the year 2006/2007. Comparative data for 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 is also provided.
3. The report will be forwarded to Community Scrutiny Committee for information purposes.

Quality Improvement System

4. Committee is reminded that complaint handling is part of a wider quality improvement system, which aims to ensure that feedback received from customers, whether positive or negative, is used to help improve services. As such, the Council welcomes any feedback.
5. Committee is further reminded that the handling of complaints is undertaken either within the business units themselves (Stages 1 and 2) or by the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors (Stage 3).
6. Recording details and monitoring of complaints at Stages 1 and 2 is the responsibility of the individual Business Managers. They have provided the summary statistical information and the commentary on the significant trends, which they believe have been apparent from the number of complaints received in their respective units, and the action, if any, that has followed.
7. The Chief Executive and Corporate Secretariat Manager meet regularly to analyse and review complaints and other feedback information that is available. At these meetings, where appropriate, they discuss with the relevant Business Managers and Complaints Officers the trends and the actions that have been taken place because of the feedback received.

Analysis of Complaints Received

8. Appendix 1 provides summary details of complaints received at Stages 1 and 2 and the actions taken in respect of justified complaints for the first six months of the year 2006/2007. Some comparative data for 2005/2006 is included.
9. Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Appendix 2 provide an analysis of the complaints handled by the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors in accordance with Stage 3 of the Council's complaints procedure. Information is categorized as follows:
 - a. Breakdown by business unit and whether or not the complaint was justified (Table 1);
 - b. The nature of the complaint (Table 2);
 - c. The action taken by the Council where the complaint was deemed to be justified (Table 3);
 - d. The result of the reply being sent (Table 4).

In addition to the totals for the first half of the current year, comparative figures for both halves of 2005/2006 and information for the full year 2004/2005 is provided.

10. Appendix 3 provides details of decisions issued by the Local Government Ombudsman in respect of complaints made about the Council.

General Commentary on Complaints Received

11. Committee should continue to be aware that not only are complaints a welcome method of feedback but the number of complaints also needs to be viewed against the wide variety of services the Council provides and the number of decisions it takes on behalf of the citizens of and visitors to Oxford.
12. Complaints continue to be received because decisions taken by the Council in its regulatory roles are disputed. Planning, Environmental Health, Community Housing and Oxford City Homes have each received complaints in this category. When there has been adherence to proper procedures and staff have acted in a proper manner, such complaints have not been considered to be justified.

Stages 1 and 2 Commentary

13. As in previous reports, the highest numbers of complaints are made against the business units that provide frontline services to most members of the public – City Works, Revenues and Benefits, Leisure and Culture, and Oxford City Homes.
14. The following trends and comments have been reported by business units:

i. Oxford City Homes

Not surprisingly, most of the complaints relate to service delivery, which in itself is a large category and includes missed appointments, failure to follow up on previous repairs, recalls on the quality of work undertaken, recalls because of material failure, jobs beyond target date and the failure to keep the tenant informed of progress.

Oxford City Homes investigates and responds to all complaints and every complaint is monitored by the management team on a monthly basis. The purpose of the management team monitoring is to detect trends. In summary, to date, no clear trend has emerged, but continual analysis of data will highlight issues as and where they occur.

In terms of action taken, where appropriate, tenants receive an apology, remedial work is undertaken and, if necessary, employees are counselled/disciplined for poor quality of work or poor customer care.

ii. Revenues and Benefits

Compared to the same period last year, the total number of complaints received has dropped but the number of complaints that are justified has increased slightly.

The length of time taken to process appeals has been a recurring theme of complaints. The main reason was lack of experienced appeals team members to deal with matters. An experienced team of two full time and one part time person are now in place.

A new method of prioritizing and allocating work has been implemented and a temporary person appointed to process Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications.

Both actions have had a positive effect on the processing times of appeals, reconsiderations and DHP applications.

There have been a significant number of complaints from self-employed claimants about the frequency of reviews. Self employed claims used to be always reviewed every 13 weeks. Where possible, the review period has now been extended to 26 or 52 weeks.

Some complaints relate to administrative errors. Four were received about mislaid documents and two from people who had received other people's notification letters attached to their own. Procedures are in place that should prevent this type of mistake occurring. However, investigation has uncovered instances where the procedure has not been followed. The individual in question has been spoken to and a general reminder issued to team members.

iii. Transport and Parking

The complaints that have been received relate to the introduction of free bus passes to those over 60 years old. The complainants were unhappy that the free travel concession did not extend outside the city boundary and varied from the schemes operated by some of the neighbouring local authorities. They were informed that the scheme had been implemented in accordance with Government requirements.

iv. City Works

The vast majority of complaints continue to relate to "missed bins". As the Committee has been advised previously, it is not possible identify whether this has been due to the failure of Council operatives to collect the rubbish or because residents have not made refuse containers available for emptying. It is thought likely that the vast majority fall in the former category.

Stage 3 Commentary

15. The number of complaints received at the Stage 3 level in the first half of the current year is down slightly on the figures for the two halves of 2005/2006.
16. Complaints about housing-related services (previously Housing and OBS and now covered by Oxford City Homes) have reduced and they are in line with the figure for 2004/2005. Committee may recall that the 2005/2006 numbers for Housing included complaints from several residents in one street about the same matter (a complaint that was found not be justified).

There have been increases in the number of complaints about Revenues and Benefits (in relation to Council Tax and Housing Benefit), and Transport and Parking compared to the two previous years. The majority of Revenues and Benefits complaints were found not to be justified. Those that were determined as justified concerned procedural problems: a wrong summons (for the non-payment of Council Tax) was issued while a person who was exempt from Council Tax was not identified until after the matter had been referred to the bailiffs. The complaints about Transport and Parking were about the same issue as those received in the business unit: the Council was not extending concessionary travel to include travel outside the city boundary.

17. The total number of complaints referred to the Chief Executive in respect of disputed decisions has fallen markedly. The majority of complaints received are now about dissatisfaction with service delivery. It is suggested that the decrease in the disputed decisions category may be the result of better explanations being given about the service standards that apply.
18. Some complaints about Planning continue to be the result of dissatisfaction about planning decisions. However, it should be noted that concerns have also been expressed about the planning process and the alleged failure to consult adequately. None of the complaints about Planning investigated to date has been considered justified.
19. Dissatisfaction with service delivery has remained the highest category of complaints found to be justified. While the total of justified complaints appears to be increasing, when analyzed at business unit level, the figures continue to be low and no apparent trends or concerns have been identified.

20. The number of justified complaints about staff attitude and behaviour has remained low and there has been no material increase in the total of complaints received that attribute staff behaviour as the primary cause of concern.
21. When a complaint has been deemed as justified, the main action taken to resolve matters continues to be to carry out the work that is necessary to rectify the problem. In these circumstances, as mentioned in previous reports, although not shown separately in the apology category, where appropriate, the Council has also apologized for its earlier lack of action.
22. Whilst the majority of complainants do not make any further contact with the Council after a substantive response has been sent to address their concerns, the number who have disputed the findings and have continued to vehemently disagree with the decision taken, has shown a significant increase. This figure includes a small number of regular complainants.

Ombudsman Complaints

23. The number of complaints about the Council that were referred to the Local Government Ombudsman to determine has remained low. There has been an increase in the first half of the year (in part due to five complaints in respect of Planning about the same matter) but whether there is anything significant in this trend is uncertain. Even if the level is maintained, the total needs to be borne in the context of the number of people who use the Council's services.
24. The number of cases where the Ombudsman found against the Council has continued to be low. Full details of the case where a Maladministration and Injustice report was issued were considered by Committee at its meeting on 8th September 2006. The two local settlements resulted respectively in a noise survey being undertaken (to try to establish the source of a noise only the complainant had heard) and the payment of £200 compensation.

Name and contact details of author: Michael Newman, Corporate
Secretariat Manager

Background papers: None

Appendix 1

Summary details of complaints received at Stages 1 and 2

Business Unit	Staff Behaviour			Dispute			Service Delivery			Policy			Total 1.4.06-30.9.06
	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	
Built Environment	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	6
Business Systems	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
City Works	2	5	5	0	0	1	2863	5840	3654	0	0	0	3660
Customer Services	5	5	0	3	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Health	2	3	1	2	2	0	6	7	1	2	2	0	2
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Finance & Asset Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7	0	0	0	0	0
Housing Services	22	26	-	3	4	-	12	19	-	1	2	0	-
Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Legal & Democratic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leisure & Culture	11	13	1	26	31	5	43	57	66	3	3	0	72
Neighbourhood Renewal	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	1	0	1
Oxford Building Solutions	14	19	-	0	6	-	51	101	-	0	1	-	-
Oxford City Homes	-	-	1	-	-	49	-	-	236	-	-	0	286
Community Housing	-	-	4	-	-	0	-	-	1	-	-	0	5
Planning	0	0	0	18	64	11	3	3	7	0	0	1	19
Revenues & Benefits	1	2	8	28	28	5	44	105	49	7	34	8	70
Strategy & Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transport & Parking	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	59	76	25	80	138	71	3029 (166)	6149 (309)	4017 (363)	13	43	12	4125 (465)

NB Amounts in brackets exclude City Works numbers

Response to Justified Complaints (NB - * Figures include where more than one response made to individual complaint and includes data of complaints from previous year determined in the current year and considered justified)

Business Unit	Apology			Compensation			Work Undertaken			Service Review			Policy Review			Total 1.4.06-30.9.06
	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.4.05-30.9.05	Total 2005/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	
																4
Built Environment	11	12	2	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	No complaints received
Business Systems	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
Customer Services	8	9	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
City Works			5			1			3615			0			0	3621
Environmental Health	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints received
Finance & Asset Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
Housing Services	10	13	-	2	2	-	26	33	-	0	0	-	0	0	0	-
Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
Legal & Democratic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints received
Leisure & Culture	18	24	1	1	2	5	30	41	63	4	4	2	1	1	0	71
Neighbourhood Renewal	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
Oxford Building Solutions	37	91	-	1	1	-	40	44	-	0	0	-	0	0	-	-
Planning	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
Community Housing	-	-	4	-	-	0	-	-	1	-	-	0	-	-	0	5
Oxford City Homes	-	-	21	-	-	9	-	-	247	-	-	0	-	-	0	277
Revenues & Benefits	5	16	12	0	0	0	20	104	15	0	1	0	0	0	0	27
Strategy & Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints received
Transport & Parking	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
Total	91	168	49	5	6	15	118	227	3945	8	10	2	1	1	0	

Appendix 2

Responses from the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors (Stage 3)

1. Analysis by Business Unit

	Complaints Received					Complaints Determined				
						Justified				
	2004/05	2005/06		2006/07	2004/05	2005/06		2006/07		
Total	1.4.05-30.9.05	1.10.05-31.3.06	Total	1.4.06-30.9.06	Total	1.4.05-30.9.05	1.10.05-31.3.06	Total	1.4.06-30.9.06	
Planning	13	8	7	15	8	1	2	2	4	0
Housing	16	12	20	32	5	4	2	1	3	1
Community Housing					1					0
Environmental Health	4	5	2	7	0	1	0	0	0	0
Finance & Asset Management	9	7	1	8	2	3	0	0	0	0
Human Resources	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1
Revenues & Benefits	5	1	4	5	6	2	0	0	0	2
City Works	7	5	5	10	4	4	2	4	6	6
Neighbourhood Renewal	10	3	2	5	4	3	0	0	0	0
Leisure & Culture	2	3	4	7	4	1	0	2	2	2
Transport & Parking	2	1	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0
Legal & Democratic	7	3	2	5	0	2	1	2	3	1
OBS	7	10	7	17	0	2	5	1	6	0
OCH					7					2
Chief Executive's	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Business Systems	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	86	59	54	113	50	25	12	12	24	16

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2. Nature of Complaint

	Complaints Received					Complaints Determined				
	2004/05 Total	2005/06		2006/07 Total	2006/07 1.4.06-30.9.06	Justified				
		1.4.05-30.9.05	1.10.05-31.3.06			2004/05 Total	2005/06		2006/07 1.4.06-30.9.06	
Staff Behaviour/Attitude	13	7	3	10	7	6	1	0	1	1
Disputed Decision / Disagreement	24	24	29	53	5	1	1	3	4	0
Dissatisfaction with Service Delivery	38	28	20	48	30	18	10	9	19	14
Related to Policy Decision	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Total	75	59	52	111	46	25	12	12	24	15

3. Action Taken when Complaint Justified

	Complaints Determined				
	2004/05 Total	2005/06		2005/07 Total	2005/07 1.4.06-30.9.06
		1.4.05-30.9.05	1.10.05-31.3.06		
Apology/Explanation	13	3	5	8	4
Compensation Paid	0	0	1	1	1
Service Change	3	1	1	2	0
Service Review	0	0	1	1	2
Policy Review	0	0	0	0	0
Work Undertaken	6	8	4	12	8
Total	22	12	12	24	15

4. Responses from Complainant

	Complaints Determined				
	2004/05	2005/06		2006/07	
	Total	1.4.05-30.9.05	1.10.05-31.3.06	Total	1.4.06-30.9.06
No Further Response Received	39	26	51	77	28
Referred to Ombudsman	3	3	9	12	2
Ongoing	13	7	4	11	0
Outcome Accepted	3	2	2	4	3
Complainant Disputed Findings	10	10	5	15	22
Total	68	48	71	119	55

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Appendix 3

Ombudsman Cases 2005/2006 – Decisions Issued

1. Analysis by Business Unit (excl. premature complaints)

Business Unit	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
	Total	Total	1.4.06-30.9.06
Housing	6	6	3
OBS	2	0	4
Planning	5	8	7
Revenues & Benefits	3	2	1
Leisure & Culture	1	2	0
Built Environment	1	0	0
Neighbourhood Renewal	1	0	0
Finance & Asset Management	1	1	0
City Works	1	0	2
Human Resources	1	0	0
Environmental Health	0	0	1
Total	22	19	18

2. Analysis by Business Unit

Category	Number	Breakdown by Business Unit
No Maladministration	3	1 Planning 2 OBS
Local Settlement	2	2 OBS
Ombudsman Discretion (No or insufficient evidence of injustice)	4	1 City Works 2 Housing 1 Planning
Ombudsman Jurisdiction (Outside jurisdiction)	8	1 Revenues & Benefits 1 City Works 1 Environmental Health 5 Planning 1 Housing
Reports (Formal report issued)	1	
Sub Total	18	
Premature	3	
Total	21	