

Report of: Chief Executive

To: Standards Committee

Date: 7th September 2007 **Item No:**

Title of Report : Quality Improvement System – Analysis of Corporate Complaints 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 during 2006/2007. Comparative data for 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 is also provided, where available.
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.

Analysis of Complaints Received

7. Appendix 1 provides summary details of complaints received at Stages 1 and 2 and the actions taken in respect of justified complaints for the two halves of the year 2006/2007. Some comparative data for 2005/2006 is included.
8. 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 two halves of the current year, comparative figures for both halves of 2005/2006 and information for the full year 2004/2005 is provided.

9. 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

10. 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.
11. As to be expected, the Council continues to receive complaints because some of the decisions it takes in its regulatory roles are disputed. Planning, Environmental Health, Community Housing and Oxford City Homes have each received complaints in this category. As reported previously, 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

12. 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.
13. The following trends and comments have been reported by business units:

i. Oxford City Homes

34,000 repair jobs are undertaken by Oxford City Homes each year. During 2006 – 2007, it received 481 complaints related to repairs, 1.4% of the total number of jobs carried out.

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 the management team monitors the complaints on a monthly basis. The purpose of the management team monitoring the complaints is to detect trends. In summary, 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.

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ii. Revenues and Benefits

The number of complaints received during the period 1st October 2006 to 31st March 2007 fell from the first half of the year, mainly the result of the reduction in complaints about the time taken to process appeals. However, this improvement was partly off set by an increase in complaints received about errors in claims administration. 22 such complaints were received in the second half of the year. Of those, 10 were found to be justified and five part-justified. Many of these complaints related to delays or the information required before a decision about entitlement could be made. The Revenues and Benefits Business Manager is considering how these matters can be addressed.

iii. Transport and Parking

During the first half of the year, complaints were received that related 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. No further complaints on this matter were received in the second half of the year.

iv. City Works

The vast majority of complaints continue to relate to "missed bins". However, the number has increased because of the changes to the refuse collection arrangements that were introduced last year.

v. Leisure and Culture

The number of complaints received in the second half of the year decreased due to seasonal factors. There were fewer complaints about the upkeep of the Council's parks and open spaces.

vi. Planning

Complaints continued to be received about the decisions to either grant or refuse planning permission. A number of complaints were also received about the lack of consultation, mainly because of a lack of understanding of the regulations and guidelines that apply.

Stage 3 Commentary

14. The number of complaints received at the Stage 3 level during 2006/2007 was down slightly on the figure for the previous year.

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15. The reduced number of complaints about housing-related services (previously Housing and OBS and now covered by Oxford City Homes) that was apparent in the first half-year figures was maintained and the annual total was below the 2005/2006 figures and was similar to those 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 to be justified). 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 continue to show a slight increase on previous years, although the second half-year figures were less than those for the first half of the year. The majority of Revenues and Benefits complaints were found not to be justified. Those 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 majority of complaints about Transport and Parking were about the Council not extending concessionary travel to include travel outside the city boundary.
16. The total number of complaints referred to the Chief Executive in respect of disputed decisions fell significantly from 2005/2006 and were the same as in 2004/2005. The majority of complaints received continue to be about dissatisfaction with service delivery, although the number in the second half of the year was less than in the first six months. 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.
17. Dissatisfaction about planning decisions continues to be a significant reason for complaints about Planning. Concerns were also expressed about the planning process and the alleged failure to consult adequately. None of the complaints about Planning investigated to date was considered justified.
18. The number of complaints received about City Works at Stage 3 decreased by one from the previous year. The changes to the refuse collection service did not have a marked impact on the number of complaints made to the Chief Executive in 2006/2007.
19. Dissatisfaction with service delivery remained the highest category of complaints found to be justified. While the total of justified complaints increased, when analyzed at business unit level, the figures continue to be low and no apparent trends or concerns were identified.
20. The number of justified complaints about staff attitude and behaviour remained low and with no material increase in the total of complaints received that attribute staff behaviour as the primary cause of concern.

21. When a complaint was deemed justified, the main action taken to resolve matters continued to be to carry out the work 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. As evident in previous years the majority of complainants do not make any further contact with the Council after they receive the substantive response to their complaint. However, the number who disputed the findings and have continued to vehemently disagree with the decision taken, showed a significant increase from previous years, although the number received in the second half of the year was much reduced from the first six months. This figure includes a small number of regular complainants.

Ombudsman Complaints

23. The total number of complaints about the Council that were referred to the Local Government Ombudsman to determine remained low. There was an increase in the first half of the year (in part due to five complaints in respect of Planning about the same matter) but this upward trend was not maintained during the remainder of the year.
24. The number of cases where the Ombudsman found against the Council has continued to be low. Full details of the two cases where a Maladministration and Injustice report was issued have already been considered by Committee. Four of the local settlements resulted in the Council making compensation payments that totalled £589. The other three local settlements resulted respectively in a noise survey being undertaken, an apology being given and a visit by senior officers to discuss the complainants concerns.
25. The Ombudsman has expressed some concern about the Council's processes for following up reported anti-social behaviour and this matter is being addressed.

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 2005/06	1.4.06- 30.9.06	1.10.06- 31.3.07	Total	Total 2005/06	1.4.06- 30.9.06	1.10.06- 31.3.07	Total	Total 2005/06	1.4.06- 30.9.06	1.10.06- 31.3.07	Total	Total 2005/2006	1.4.06- 30.9.06	1.10.06- 31.3.07	Total	Total 2006/2007
Built Environment	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	6
Business Systems	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
City Works	5	5	1	6	0	1	0	1	5840	3654	5257	8911	0	0	1	1	8919
Customer Services	5	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Health	3	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	7	1	4	5	2	0	0	0	7
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Finance & Asset Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing Services	26	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	19	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Legal & Democratic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leisure & Culture	13	1	0	1	31	5	5	10	57	66	16	82	3	0	0	0	93
Neighbourhood Renewal	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Oxford Building Solutions	19	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	101	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Oxford City Homes	-	1	31	32	-	49	80	129	-	236	245	481	-	0	6	6	648
Community Housing	-	4	2	6	-	0	0	0	-	1	11	12	-	0	1	1	19
Planning	0	0	0	0	64	11	9	20	3	7	3	10	0	1	1	2	32
Revenues & Benefits	2	8	3	11	28	5	0	5	105	49	37	86	34	8	4	12	110
Strategy & Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transport & Parking	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3
Total	76	25	38	63	138	71	94	165	6149 (309)	4017 (363)	5573 (316)	9590 (679)	43	12	13	25	9840 (921)

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
	Total 05/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total 06/07	Total 05/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total 06/07	Total 05/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total 06/07	Total 05/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total 06/07	Total 05/06	1.4.06-30.9.06	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total 06/07	
Built Environment	12	2	3	5	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Business Systems	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints received
Customer Services	9	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
City Works		5	1	6		1	0	1		3615	5211	8826		0	0	0		0	0	0	8833
Environmental Health	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0	0	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	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
Housing Services	13	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	33	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-
Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0	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	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints received
Leisure & Culture	24	1	0	1	2	5	0	5	41	63	16	79	4	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	87
Neighbourhood Renewal	0	0	6	6	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Oxford Building Solutions	91	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	44	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-
Planning	0	4	4	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Community Housing	-	4	6	10	-	0	0	0	-	1	3	4	-	0	4	4	-	0	0	0	18
Oxford City Homes	-	21	75	96	-	9	1	10	-	247	258	505	-	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	611
Revenues & Benefits	16	12	10	22	0	0	0	0	104	15	14	29	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	51
Strategy & Review	0	0	0	0	0	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	0	0	0	0	0	No complaints justified
Total	168	49	112	161	6	15	1	16	227	3945	5505	9450	10	2	4	6	1	0	0	0	

Appendix 2

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

1. Analysis by Business Unit – Complaints Received

	Complaints Received						
	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	1.10.06- 31.3.07	Total
Planning	13	8	7	15	8	7	15
Housing	16	12	20	32	5	0	5
Community Housing	-	-	-	-	1	7	8
Environmental Health	4	5	2	7	0	2	2
Finance & Asset Mgmt	9	7	1	8	2	3	5
Human Resources	2	0	0	0	2	0	2
Revenues & Benefits	5	1	4	5	6	5	11
City Works	7	5	5	10	4	5	9
Neighbourhood Renewal	10	3	2	5	4	1	5
Leisure & Culture	2	3	4	7	4	2	6
Transport & Parking	2	1	0	1	5	2	7
Legal & Democratic	7	3	2	5	0	1	1
OBS	7	10	7	17	0	0	0
OCH	-	-	-	-	7	11	18
Chief Executive's	1	1	0	1	1	1	2
Business Systems	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Built Environment	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Strategy & Review	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	86	59	54	113	50	52	102

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1. **Analysis by Business Unit – Complaints Determined**

	Complaints Determined Justified						
	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	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total
Planning	1	2	2	4	0	0	0
Housing	4	2	1	3	1	0	1
Community Housing	-	-	-	-	0	2	2
Environmental Health	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Finance & Asset Mgmt	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Human Resources	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Revenues & Benefits	2	0	0	0	2	0	2
City Works	4	2	4	6	6	3	9
Neighbourhood Renewal	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leisure & Culture	1	0	2	2	2	1	3
Transport & Parking	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Legal & Democratic	2	1	2	3	1	0	1
OBS	2	5	1	6	0	0	0
OCH	-	-	-	-	2	4	6
Chief Executive's	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Business Systems	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Built Environment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facilities Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strategy & Review	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	25	12	12	24	16	13	29

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2. **Nature of Complaint - Received**

	Complaints Received						
	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	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total
Staff Behaviour/Attitude	13	7	3	10	7	5	12
Disputed Decision / Disagreement	24	24	29	53	5	19	24
Dissatisfaction with Service Delivery	38	28	20	48	30	22	52
Related to Policy Decision	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Total	75	59	52	111	46	46	92

2. **Nature of Complaint - Determined**

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	Complaints Determined Justified						
	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	1.10.06 - 31.3.07	Total
Staff Behaviour/Attitude	6	1	0	1	1	0	1
Disputed Decision / Disagreement	1	1	3	4	0	1	1
Dissatisfaction with Service Delivery	18	10	9	19	14	12	26
Related to Policy Decision	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	25	12	12	24	15	13	28

3. **Action Taken when Complaint Justified**

	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	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total
Apology/Explanation	13	3	5	8	4	2	6
Compensation Paid	0	0	1	1	1	2	3
Service Change	3	1	1	2	0	0	0
Service Review	0	0	1	1	2	2	4
Policy Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Work Undertaken	6	8	4	12	8	7	15
Total	22	12	12	24	15	13	28

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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	1.10.06-31.3.07	Total
No Further Response Received	39	26	51	77	28	32	60
Referred to Ombudsman	3	3	9	12	2	4	6
Ongoing	13	7	4	11	0	3	3
Outcome Accepted	3	2	2	4	3	3	6
Complainant Disputed Findings	10	10	5	15	22	6	28
Total	68	48	71	119	55	48	103

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	Total
Housing	6	6	-
OBS	2	0	-
Oxford City Homes	-	-	9
Planning	5	8	11
Revenues & Benefits	3	2	5
Leisure & Culture	1	2	0
Built Environment	1	0	0
Neighbourhood Renewal	1	0	0
Finance & Asset Mgmt	1	1	1
City Works	1	0	2
Human Resources	1	0	0
Environmental Health	0	0	2
Total	22	19	30

2. Analysis by Business Unit

Category	Number	Breakdown by Business Unit
No Maladministration	3	1 Planning 2 OCH
Local Settlement	7	5 OCH 1 Revenue & Benefits 1 Planning
Ombudsman Discretion (No or insufficient evidence of injustice)	5	1 City Works 1 OCH 3 Planning
Ombudsman Jurisdiction (Outside jurisdiction)	13	4 Revenues & Benefits 1 City Works 2 Environmental Health 5 Planning 1 OCH
Reports (Formal report issued)	2	1 Finance & Asset Management 1 Planning
Sub Total	30	
Premature	9	
Total	39	