

## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – RESOURCES 21 NOVEMBER 2012

#### CORPORATE COMPLAINTS MONITORING

##### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents a summary of complaints and other recorded feedback received by the Council from the public during the financial year 2011/12.

##### 2. BACKGROUND

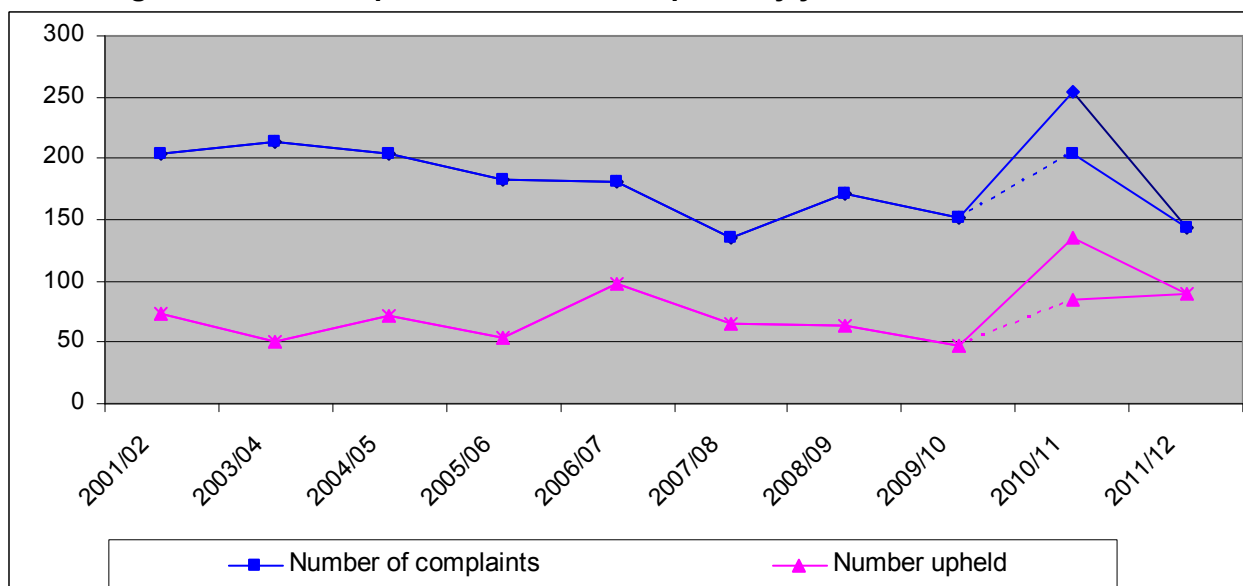
- 2.1 Corporate complaints are those where the customer is complaining about dissatisfaction with a service rather than a request for service. For example, if a customer complains about a fly tipping incident this would be considered as a request for a service to remove the items. If however the Council failed to remove the items and the customer complained then this would be considered as a corporate complaint about the level of service we have provided.
- 2.2 All corporate complaints are recorded and tracked by the Complaints Monitoring Officer to ensure that they are investigated and responded to in a timely way and to allow analysis of trends.

##### 3. RESULTS

###### **Total Number of Complaints Received and Number Upheld**

- 3.1 During 2011/12, a total of 144 complaints were received under the Council's corporate complaints procedure. This is a decrease of 44% on 2010/11 when 255 complaints were received.
- 3.2 At the same time the percentage upheld increased from 53% in 2010/11 to 62% in 2011/12.
- 3.3 The increase during the previous year was largely accounted for by Planning where 52 complaints were received about the same issue. The chart below shows both scenarios with the dotted line representing the total without the block of single issue complaints.

**Figure 1: Total complaints and number upheld by year**



### Breakdown by Service

- 3.4 Housing received the highest number of complaints during 2011/12 with 38. This is a 6% increase on 2010/11 when the service received 36 complaints. The majority of these related to Housing Needs and Landlord Services with 29 of those relating to the standard, or lack, of service. Following investigation only 10 Housing complaints were found to be justified or part justified.
- 3.5 Operational Services and Transport received 31 complaints during 2011/12 which is a 42% decrease on 2010/11 when they received 53 complaints. The majority of the 2011/12 complaints related to related to Parking Services (28) of which 8 were complaints related to dissatisfaction with Penalty Charge Notice appeals. Other reasons included car park signage, malfunctioning car park machines, car park prices and staff behaviour. Following investigation 36% of the complaints were found to be justified or part-justified.
- 3.6 The service that received the third highest number of complaints during 2010/11 was Treasury with 28. The majority of these related to the standard of service in Revenues (20) but only 5 were found to be justified or part-justified.

### Ombudsman

- 3.7 In 2011/12, the Local Government Ombudsman made decisions on 13 complaints and none of these were upheld. Six of the investigations were related to Housing and the rest concerned Planning, Environmental Health and Highways and Transport.

### Improvements to Services

- 3.8 Wherever improvements have been identified as a result of complaints, these are also recorded. Examples for 2011/12 include:
- Following a complaint about the standard of information available on mutual exchanges in council housing, the leaflet has been revised and is automatically sent out with all applications.

- A customer complained about an error in debiting their account for a Council Tax bill. It was found that information had not been properly passed from Housing Benefits to the Council Tax team. Staff have been reminded of the importance of following the procedures that are in place.
- A customer complained about the attitude of some staff in the Customer Service Centre. All staff were reminded about the importance of being polite and helpful at all times to customers. The complainant later wrote to thank the council for dealing with the issue and to compliment the Centre on the usually excellent service.
- A complaint about an election canvasser being too assertive with vulnerable residents resulted in reminders to canvassers about respect and polite behaviour. In future Devon Social Services will also be notified when the canvassing will be happening so that they can ensure their staff are able to assist vulnerable residents with filling out their returns.

### **Complainant Satisfaction and Equalities Monitoring**

- 3.9 In previous years figures for complainant satisfaction and equalities monitoring returns have been too small to make any useful analysis. Following research into how other councils gather this information, a survey has been developed which is automatically sent out to all complainants two weeks after the closure of the case. The responses are analysed by the Policy Unit to help make further improvements.
- 3.10 During 2011/12 31 surveys were returned which equates to a 22% response rate. Respondents range from 21 to 68 years of age and the gender and disability responses broadly reflect the population as a whole. Figures for other equality groups are too small to measure.
- 3.11 42% of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied overall with the way their complaint was handled. This figure was higher for men (54%) than for women (21%) while 57% of disabled people were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied overall.
- 3.12 There is a clear correlation between respondents who were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and those who were dissatisfied and the handling of the complaint. This makes it difficult to assess whether or not there were any genuine problems with the complaints process itself.
- 3.13 Thirteen of the respondents said that they lodged their complaint via the website using the electronic form and 85% of those found this process fairly easy or very easy.

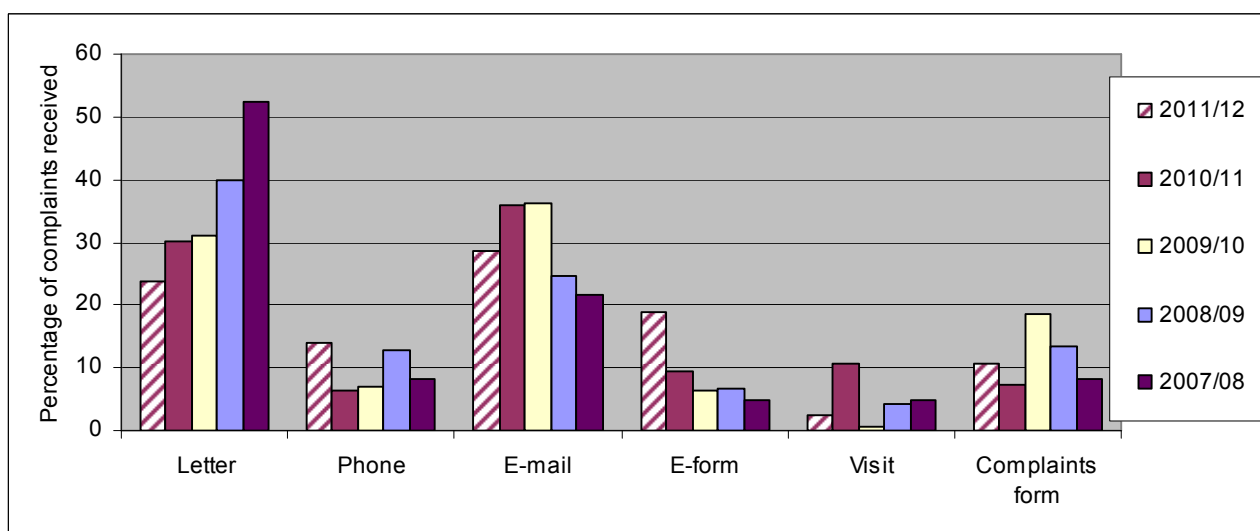
### **Response Rate**

- 3.14 The target response time for complaints is 15 working days or less. However, where complaints are complex this response time may not be achieved. For example during 2011/12 Treasury only achieved a response rate of 64% because many of the complaints they received were related to assessments and outstanding debts which took time to resolve. During 2011/12 Customer Services' response rate was only 58% because most of the complaints directed to them have cross departmental issues which take time to investigate and pull together.
- 3.15 All complaints must be acknowledged within 5 days unless a full reply can be sent immediately and where a full reply is going to take longer than 15 working days the complainant must be kept informed of progress.

## Method of Receipt

- 3.16 During 2011/12, 29% of new complaints were lodged via e-mail, while 24% were received by letter. Although this is a reduction over the last few years these two methods remain the most popular, perhaps indicating a preference for customers not to be restricted to the framework of a form. The link to the e-form has, since April 2012, been made much clearer on the Home Page of the Council's website which may help to build on its increased use over the next year.
- 3.17 The chart below shows the methods by which the Council has received complaints over the last five years.

**Figure 4: Method of Receipt**



## 4 Other types of feedback

- 2.3 In April 2011, following a review, the Council agreed to start recording other types of feedback in order to provide a better and more useful picture of customers' concerns. Up until now there has been no consistent recording and reporting of general comments and 'grumbles'.
- 4.12 General feedback such as comments, compliments and informal complaints can tell us a lot about how a service is being delivered without requiring the customer to commit to a lengthy complaint investigation. There may be a number of reasons why a customer does not want to make what they consider to be a formal complaint. For example, they may consider that their issue is not serious enough to warrant an investigation. It may be that the individual incident is quite minor but if a lot of similar comments are made across one particular service there would be a benefit in addressing it.
- 4.13 When a service receives feedback they simply pass this on to the Complaints Monitoring Officer as they would a complaint and this can be logged. Feedback is not subject to a full investigation but customers will receive a response, should they request one.

- 4.14 During 2011/12 55 feedback reports were recorded. It is difficult to detect any trends from this information as it covers a wide range of issues across services and staff behaviour and the majority of items (43) related to one directorate, Community & Environment. This is probably because the Complaints Monitoring Officer in that directorate had more success in getting officers to pass on items of feedback. The database therefore only reflects what has been recorded, not what may have been received by the Council.
- 4.15 The Complaints Monitoring Group will continue to develop the collection and analysis of the Council's corporate complaints and feedback. This will enable a clearer link to be established between complaints and service improvements and, in particular, will help the Council demonstrate that it learns from, and improves, as a result of complaints.

## **5. RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 That Scrutiny Committee – Resources note the report and the work being done to improve services as a result of complaints and feedback received from our customers.

## **CORPORATE MANAGER POLICY, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

#### **Background papers used in compiling this report:**

None.