

**Committee:** PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE  
**Date:** 13 November 2008  
**Title:** CORPORATE COMPLAINTS  
MANAGEMENT  
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Performance Manager, 01799 510636

**Agenda Item**

**11**

Item for  
information

**Summary**

1. This report presents a summary of progress to date with regards to the review and implementation of a Corporate Complaints management process within the Authority. It includes details of the investigations conducted and possible recommendations that will be included in a final Business Improvement management report.

**Recommendations**

2. That the Committee reviews and comments on the content of the report and suggests any further areas of investigation they wish the Business Improvement Team to consider as part of the review.

**Background Papers**

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of the report:
  - LGO Annual Letter 2008 Local Government Ombudsman
  - Running a Complaints System – Guidance on Good Practice Local Government Ombudsman
  - Remedies for Justified Complaints – Guidance on Good Practice Local Government Ombudsman
  - How to Deal with Complaints Cabinet Office
  - UDC Customer Care Standards
  - UDC Customer Contact Strategy (February 2005)
  - UDCP001 – UDC Corporate Complaints Management Policy – DRAFT

**Impact**

Communication/Consultation	Internal and external bodies will be consulted during the development of a corporate complaints process. This process will be communicated both internally and externally once approved.
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Community Safety	None
Equalities	The complaints process will ensure that all Equalities requirements will be addressed and monitored regularly to guarantee adherence.
Finance	All costs involved with recommendations will be reviewed and agreed at appropriate levels.
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	The process will adopt appropriate quality assurance controls to ensure legal implications are limited, or preferably, non-existent.
Sustainability	No direct impact resulting from report findings

**SITUATION**

**Complaints Process Review**

4. Prior to joining the Business Improvement and Performance Team, Victoria Borges and Paula Evans were assigned to a project which had an objective of investigating current complaints management processes within the authority. Of particular interest was how these processes could be improved by them becoming ‘joined-up’ and conducted at a corporate level. The project was progressed through to a stage where new processes, both system and operational, were defined and documented and a ‘pilot’ of the process commenced.
5. In addition, the current Business Improvement and Performance Team have undertaken a number of Service reviews since their formation in October 2007. During these reviews the recording, monitoring, resolution and reporting of customer issues and complaints has been investigated, to varying degrees, and all supporting processes noted.
6. These investigations have identified that there is a lack of corporate focus for the process and that, although some service areas have procedures in place to record, monitor and report complaint data, the authority does not have an accurate overall understanding of the number and nature of the complaints it receives.
7. The ICT systems used to record complaint data in many areas are generally not ‘fit for purpose’ in terms of their functionality and reporting capabilities. Any data that is extracted from them is either difficult to obtain or is not specific enough for statistical analysis to be completed and subsequent improvement/action plans developed. In some cases data is collated and reported manually with no system intervention of any type.
8. In addition there is little evidence of a robust process for the escalation and resolution of complaints. Again, in some service areas this part of the process is managed fairly well (albeit manually) but in others not so well. This lack of co-ordination and control may lead to duplication of effort and, ultimately,

detrimental satisfaction levels.

9. Customer satisfaction levels are recorded and monitored for some services offered (Customer Service Centre face-to-face enquiries) but not for all complaints that are received and managed through to resolution. The only performance indicator that is currently being monitored relating in any way to customer complaints/satisfaction is CI 09 – Satisfaction with Customer Services.

## **REPORT**

### **Provisional Recommendations**

10. The following provisional recommendations are currently being formulated for inclusion in a formal Business Improvement Management Report which will be presented to both SMB and PSC for comment and approval early next year. The recommendations are as follows:
11. To gain an understanding of the issues and/or complaints that the Authority receives and the subsequent identified opportunities for service and performance improvements, a complaints process needs to be developed and implemented that is adopted by all areas of the authority receiving complaints.
12. This process adopted should be managed and monitored at a corporate level to ensure the following:
  - Accurate and timely data recording
  - Distinction between ‘complaints’, ‘enquiries’ and ‘suggestions’
  - Procedures and criteria for escalation and resolution
  - Accurate and appropriate targets
  - Resolution satisfaction levels
  - Uniform reporting format
13. A specialised system should be used to record, track, monitor and report data. There are various options to consider in the selection of such a system; developing an already established system within the Authority (such as Ocella or Northgate CRM), utilising complaints modules from existing systems (Covalent) or the purchase of an independent ‘ready-made’ system (various). There are obvious positives and negatives for each of these options, all of which are currently being explored.
14. There should be a series of performance objectives to manage the process. At the very least the following key statistics should be collected and reported at both a corporate and service level:
  - total number of complaints received
  - complaint types (top 5 and other)
  - average resolution times
  - % complainants satisfied with resolution outcome

These statistics would help to identify potential ‘problem areas’ and

## Corporate Complaints Management

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opportunities for process improvement, but more importantly, monitor the effectiveness of the services provided from a customer perspective.

15. There should ideally be a dedicated Officer assigned to oversee the complaints process. This role would have direct responsibility for ensuring that all complaints data is captured in a uniform manner, that resolution targets are being monitored and that appropriate follow-up action is taken when dissatisfaction with a service is identified. This role should ideally have a corporate focus and have a direct reporting line to a member of SMB.
16. There should be a series of procedural and reference documents introduced to ensure consistency in the application of the process. These documents should be communicated and be available to all levels of Officer within the authority and externally where relevant. The documents would provide evidence of a controlled process that could be easily audited to confirm compliance and support all identified performance measures.
17. The implementation of a Corporate Complaints Management Process would be a significant project to undertake. It would be recommended that it be led by a team of Officers that currently have experience of complaint handling and that representatives from all Services areas provide input as and when required. To manage the implementation through to a successful conclusion, it would be recommended that the Prince2 Project Management technique be applied.

## Risk Analysis

The following have been assessed as the potential risks associated with this issue:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigating actions</b>
That customer complaints are not responded to and/or resolved in a timely manner and customer satisfaction levels will worsen	3 At least in the short term, resources may not permit swift adoption of all the recommendations.	3 Customer satisfaction levels would not improve as quickly as desired.	Implementation of a corporate complaints management process Identification of key process performance measures Reporting of complaint data at service, strategic and committee level

*1 = Little or no risk or impact*

*2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary,*

*3 = Significant risk or impact – action required*

*4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.*