

Committee: PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE
Date: Thursday, 12th February 2009
Title: FEEDBACK ON PUBLIC HEALTH COMPLAINTS (REQUESTS FOR SERVICE)
Author: Geoff Smith, Head of Environmental Health

Agenda Item

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Item for information

Summary

1. Following an Internal Audit review of Public Health, the performance Select Committee requested a further report be made on the following aspects of Environmental Health **requests for service (complaints)** received:
 - Speed of Responses – Update to be given on identification of method to monitor speed of responses
 - Number Outstanding – Update to be given on the number of outstanding complaints in Environmental Health
 - Recording Methodology – Update to be given on the current methodology for recording complaints

Recommendations

1. That this report should be noted.

Background Papers

1. Internal Audit Review of Public Health

Impact

Communication/Consultation	PSC
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Finance	N/A
Human Rights	N/A
Legal implications	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	N/A
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

2. The aforementioned Internal Audit review – and therefore this report - is concerned with **requests for service** made by customers to the Council's Environmental Health Division to respond to. These requests for service are referred to as "complaints" – but they are complaints about matters such as rats in domestic property or noisy neighbours, NOT a complaint about the council's service.
3. There have been no complaints against the service made through the Council's current Corporate Complaint procedure in the last year.
4. Environmental Health is essentially about protecting and improving the health and wellbeing of the community (one of the Corporate Plan key objectives) and covers the following areas:

Commercial Team

Food Hygiene Inspections and complaints
Health and Safety at Work
Infectious Disease Control
Port Health Control – Stansted Airport
Border Inspection Post & Imported Food Control
Food Hygiene Training Courses
Corporate Health and Safety
Licensing – of Skin Piercing, tattooists etc.
Statutory consultees under the Licensing Act 2003

Environmental Protection team

Nuisance Complaints – noise, smoke, smells etc
Private drainage complaints
Pest Control
Animal Welfare – animal licensing, stray dogs, dog fouling etc
Air Quality
Contaminated Land
Drinking Water Quality – private supplies
Noise monitoring – Stansted Airport
Private Sector Housing complaints
Disabled Facilities Grants

Action update:

Improvements have been made to the Ocella system (the database through which Environmental Health service requests are logged and monitored) so a report can now be run detailing monthly call levels and the status of those calls. Data on the following parameters is provided by the report and a copy of the most up-to-date figures will be available at the meeting for information.

No of Complaints Received

No of Complaints Evented
No of Complaints Not Evented
No of Complaints responded to within 1 day
No of Complaints responded to within 3 days
No of Complaints Evented over 3 days
No of Complaints Closed
No of Complaints still open
Average life of complaint (working days)

Recording methodology: _____

Requests for service from customers are received in a variety of ways:

Telephone request to the CSC
Telephone direct to Environmental Health admin staff
Telephone direct to Environmental Health team member
Email/Fax request to any of the above

Once received all requests for service are entered onto the Ocella database. This requires the inputting officer to record the method, date and time of receipt and identify a first action target date. Response times are then monitored on a monthly basis by the Head of Environmental Health for the Commercial Team and the Principal EHO for the Environmental Protection Team.

Target dates

5. Initial response within 1 – 3 days. Completion as soon as reasonably practicable.

Additional Information about Environmental Health

- Requests for service cover a wide range of topics within which there are many variations depending on the specific situation of the complainant and cause of the complaint.
- We aim to give an initial response to all requests within 1 – 3 working days depending on the urgency of the matter.
- Outcomes will vary both in the type of final resolution of the complaint and the timescale in which they are completed.
- It is not possible to give hard and fast completion target timescales as many investigations become complex involving third parties and or monitoring of a situation over several weeks or months on occasion.

- Officers endeavour to keep complainants informed as to the progress of the complaint investigation and seek to resolve matters as soon as practicable to do so.
- It is not always possible to meet every complainant's expectations of the outcome to their complaint. Often there are limitations within the legislation we enforce, for example on the criteria for establishing whether a statutory noise nuisance exists. We may not be able to establish that a nuisance exists or have the powers to remedy a problem if it falls outside the scope of the legislation.
- While we endeavour to resolve every complaint to the best of our ability and preferably informally in the first instance, it can mean that at times customers are not satisfied with the progress or that we have to resort to protracted statutory measures.
- In order to gauge customer satisfaction with the service they have received we give to customers a questionnaire they can complete and return to us. A copy of this will be available at the meeting. In general the responses we receive show a very high level of satisfaction with many complimentary remarks.
- We have introduced a new business customer feedback questionnaire so as to evaluate the level of business satisfaction with the contact they received from us. Again, this will be available at the meeting.

Risk Analysis

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

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That complaints are not investigated within a reasonable timescale	2 Lack of staff resource may cause delays	1 Customers dissatisfied with service	Complaints are logged onto the Ocella system and officers can check their outstanding complaints. Line managers aware of complaints received and monitor progress.
Initial response times are not met	2 As above	1 As above	Complaints are directed to officers on the same or next working day as received.
Complaints are not resolved as soon as reasonably practicable	2 As above	2 As above	Line managers aware of complaints received and monitor progress.

