

Annual Complaints Report 2012 / 13

Annual Report for the analysis of closed Complaints

Period: April 1st 2012 to March 31st 2013

Introduction

Bath & North East Somerset Council closely monitors the compliments, comments and complaints that we receive from our customers, so we can use the information to improve the services that we provide. This process is managed through the Council's Complaints Procedure (available on the Council's website at www.bathnes.gov.uk in the 'Your Council & Democracy' section and from any Council office).

The purpose of this annual report is to highlight the Council's performance in handling corporate complaints and the key actions or service improvements that have resulted from reviewing them.

Bath & North East Somerset Council delivers a wide range of services to customers, some of which are highlighted below. The figures shown also provide an insight into the high level of activity undertaken by the Council and should be considered when viewing the complaint figures contained within this report.

- The Council Connect Contact Centre received 117,944 calls and 17,023 emails requesting services and information during the year.
- One Stop Shops in Bath, Keynsham and Midsomer Norton were visited by 99,513 customers.
- Individual household waste collections exceeded 3.9 million a year.
- 2,359 Planning applications were processed.
- We maintained 15,200 streetlights and 2,400 illuminated street signs.
- We continued to maintain 1,100km of highway, 1,900km of footpaths, 300 bridges, 37km of cycleways, and 79 zebra / pelican crossings.
- We had over 1.27m day visitors to our heritage facilities; 13,936 study facilities users; 65,945 external corporate hospitality guests.

We will continue to focus on how well we respond to the issues our customers are raising by regularly reviewing the complaints we receive and providing feedback through our interim quarterly reports.

We will continue to encourage staff to record customer complaints as it helps us identify potential service issues and is a valuable source of communication, enabling us to clarify the information that our customers need about our services. In the same way we are pleased to receive compliments about the service we provide as they enable us to ensure we are meeting customer expectations.

During the year a number of changes and improvements have been made as a result of complaints we've received. Highlights of these improvements are provided in the next section.

Service improvements introduced as a result of complaints received

All council service areas are invited to provide feedback on the complaints they receive during each quarter. This enables us to highlight any service improvements made as a result of complaints received. A high level summary of these is shown below:

Service Delivery

Customer Services (Council Connect and Revenues & Benefits)

- Process by which residents inform the Council of a change of address is being reviewed by the Revenues team. Process to ensure information is shared with all relevant Council departments and service packaging opportunities maximised.

Environmental Services (Waste Services)

- The introduction of a new residents permit scheme for the Recycling Centres led to an increase in complaints received during quarter 4. Improvements were made to the online permit application as a direct result of this feedback from users. The application process is now running smoothly.

Housing

- The Homesearch policy has recently undergone review and will be implemented shortly.

Tourism Leisure & Culture (Library Services)

- Temporary walls have been erected in Bath Central Library in order to reduce noise disruption experienced by customers using the quiet study area.

Complaints regarding members of staff

Where complaints have been made concerning a member of staff, and upheld, apologies have been made and other appropriate action has been taken.

Children's Services (Learning & Inclusion)

- A complaint about a member of staff blocking a visitor in at a Children's Centre car park led to the implementation of the following procedure:
All people parking in the car park must sign in a visitor's book leaving the registration number of their car. When the car park is busy; staff and visitors to be redirected to the local public car parks to avoid double parking and incidents in the car park. Consideration was also being given to installing a new barrier in order to help manage the number of cars in the car park.

Customer Services (Council Connect and Revenues & Benefits)

- Contact Centre staff reminded of the need to explain to customers why they require certain information from them; in order to avoid the customer feeling like they are being quizzed and asked for irrelevant information.
- Members of front line staff reminded of the manner with which they should conduct themselves around customers.
- All Benefits staff reminded of the need to be thorough when checking information related to a claim for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support. Staff to receive further systems training to support this.
- All staff reminded of the eligibility criteria for concessionary travel passes and where to find the information if unsure.

Communication with customers

Customer Services (Council Connect and Revenues & Benefits)

- All Revenues staff requested to ensure that their name and timescales for the return of documents are added to all outgoing correspondence.

Planning

- As a result of complaints received when Committee notifications were not received in good time; Planning Services have adopted a policy to send notifications by email where possible, and use First Class post where no email address is available.

Finance

- Feedback received about the new online payments system will be considered when carrying out future development. Changes to information around paying penalty charge notices have already been made as a result of feedback from users.

Actions taken this year to improve our performance in the handling of complaints

- On-going monitoring of complaints and timescales.
- Review of complaints & feedback processes and policy

Future objectives to improve our complaints & feedback process

We are committed to reviewing the effectiveness of the complaints & feedback process and the system used to record complaints, to help us improve the service to our customers. Here are some of our objectives for the year 2013/2014:

- Introduce new customer feedback policy, procedure and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to improve efficiency and effectiveness of this important customer feedback process.
- Promote and publicise the new Corporate Feedback policy and procedure both internally and externally, including training and awareness for key Customer Feedback Officers based in all our Services.
- Restructure and amend the existing complaints web pages to be more user friendly, and reflect the Council's new approach to feedback.

Reporting structure

This report has been produced using recorded data on complaints that have been closed during the period of April 1st 2012 to 31st March 2013.

An issue has been recorded as a complaint where the customer has registered dissatisfaction with our service. In some instances these issues have subsequently been identified as falling outside the complaint process (as they may have been subject to different legislation and or statutory requirements). However, for the purposes of this report, they have been included to take into account the initial customer contact

Complaint figures for this annual report have been provided from complaint information which has been recorded in our corporate complaints recording system.

Exclusions

Some service areas already have mandatory or legislative routes for formal complaints. These complaints are therefore excluded from the corporate process and information on them is available from the service directly. The main areas excluded are complaints relating to:

- Adult Social Services
- Children's Services
- Councillors
- Individual Schools
- Matters over which the Council has no legal authority or powers of action.

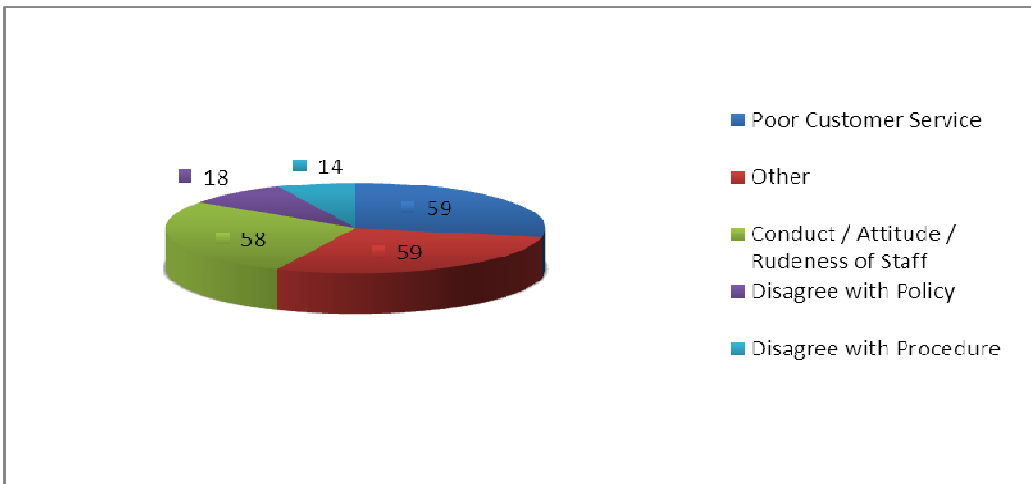
Further examples of other commonly raised issues that are not covered by the Corporate Complaint Process and information can be found within the full Complaints Procedure on our website (at www.bathnes.gov.uk in the 'Your Council and Democracy' section) or from any Council office.

Complaint statistics for the year

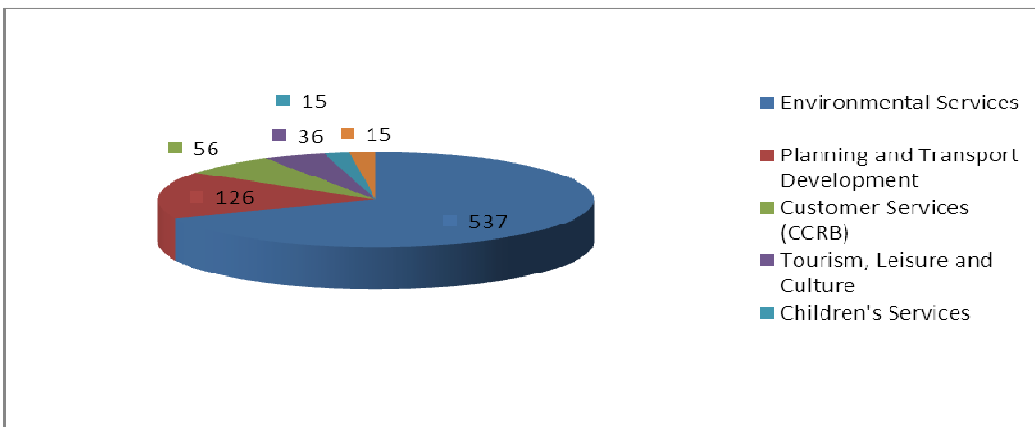
The Council's SAP CRM system recorded the following key figures:

- Total number of complaints received between April 1st 2012 and March 31st 2013 was 821. (Compared to 748 between April 1st 2011 and March 31st 2012.)
- 272 (33%) of the complaints received were either upheld or partially upheld.
- 88 (11%) complaints were recorded as completed outside of the Council's agreed timescale. Work will continue to ensure we improve the percentage of complaints completed within our agreed corporate timescales.
- 57 (7%) complaints reached Formal Stage 1 of the complaint process (involving a full investigation of the complaint by the service area concerned).
- A further 5 (less than 1%) complaints reached Formal Stage 2. Formal Stage 2 involves a Senior Officer from outside the service area concerned carrying out a review of how the initial complaint was handled (not on the decision reached). A report is produced and the customer informed.

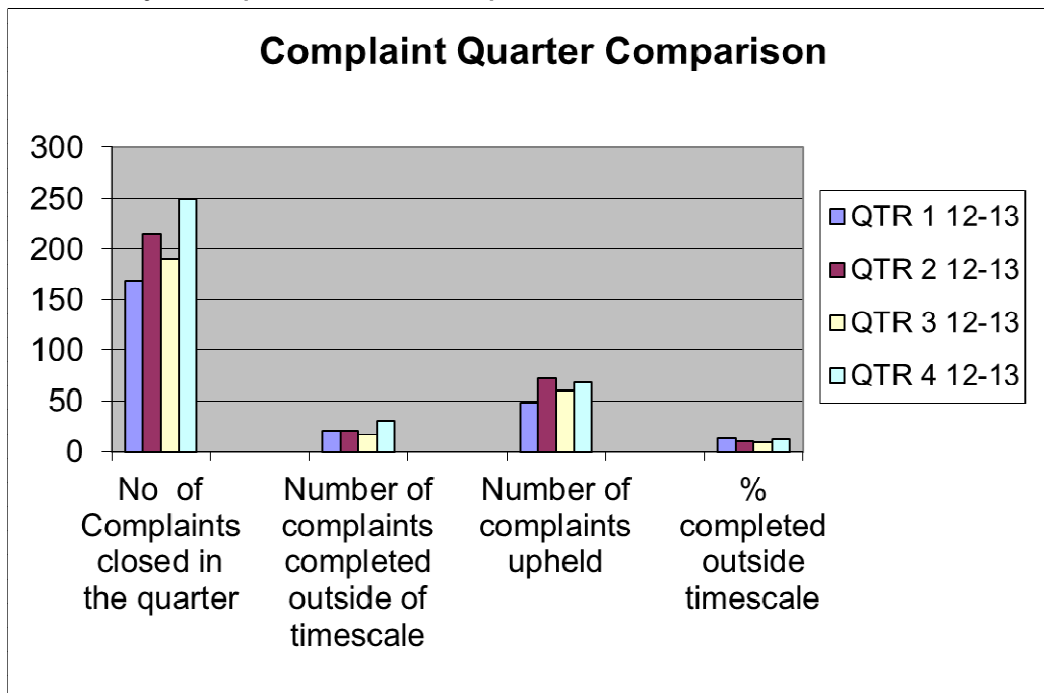
Top 5 reasons for corporate complaints



Top 6 services for complaints received



Quarterly comparison of complaints closed



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Annual Summary of Closed Complaints							
Service Area	Complaints Closed	Complaints outside corporate timescale	Formal Stage 1	Formal Stage 2	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld
Adult Care and Health	1				1		
Housing	15	3	1		11	2	2
Safeguarding, Social Care & Family Service	7	4			3	3	1
Health, Commissioning & Strategic Planning	2				1		1
Learning & Inclusion	6	1			5		1
Customer Services (CCRB)	56	7	3	1	31	7	18
Council Solicitor	9	2			7		2
Development and Major Projects	8	3			5		3
Environmental Services	537	48	2	1	342		195
Finance	8	1			6	2	
Improvement & Performance	2	1			1		1
Planning and Transport Development	126	10	51	2	104	5	17
Policy and Partnerships	2	1			2		
Property Services	5	2			4	1	
Tourism Leisure and Culture	36	4		1	25	4	7
Audit Risk and Information	1	1			1		
Totals	821	88	57	5	549	24	248

Complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

At the time of compiling this report there are no LGO statistics yet available for the year 2012/13. The LGO are not issuing the usual annual letter with statistics as during the year they changed their way of dealing with complaints and they have advised any new statistics will not be comparable. During July 2013 they expect to issue a letter including new information about complaints.

The last available statistics available are therefore for the year 2011/12:

- 38 complaints and enquiries were received by the LGO, 10 of which were classed as premature (meaning that they had not gone through the Council's complaint process first) and in 10 cases, advice was given.
- The average number of days to respond to first enquiries was 24 days, compared to 25.6 days in the previous year.

Ombudsman decisions made during period

Again, these figures date from 2011/12 as no newer data is available:

A total of 19 decisions were made: 1 Local Settlement, 9 No Maladministration, 5 Ombudsman's Discretion and 4 Outside Jurisdiction.

Please note it is not possible to make a direct comparison between the numbers of complaints received in the period to the decisions made, as decision outcomes may relate to complaints received in the previous year.

Additional information about the complaints process

A range of information about complaints is available on our website (at www.bathnes.gov.uk in the 'Your Council and Democracy' section) or from any Council Office.

This includes:

- The full Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- 'Make a Complaint' and other relevant 'Report it' forms.
- The Council's "Speak Out" leaflet and complaints form.
- Quarterly complaints reports.