

Standards Committee			
<b>Title</b>	Annual Complaints Report		
<b>Key decision</b>	No	<b>Item no</b>	3
<b>Wards</b>	All wards		
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Director for Customer Services / Head of Public Services		
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	9 November 2010	

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report provides performance information on complaints dealt with by the Council at stages 1 and 2 as well as complaints and enquiries to the Mayor and Councillors and complaints and enquiries from MP's during 2009/10. There were a total of 6,622 complaints received in 2009/10, an increase of 6% when compared to 2008/09. The biggest increase was in the number of MP's and Councillors enquiries and complaints, with the increase evenly spread throughout the year. The overall number of complaints received at stage 1 decreased by 20%.
- 1.2 The Independent Adjudicators (IA) report is attached at appendix 1. The IA dealt with 100 complaints between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 of which she upheld 46. The IA responded to 89% within the 30-day response standard, a slight decrease in performance of 1% against the 2008/9 performance. The IA identified a number of issues from the complaints and makes recommendations for improvement.
- 1.3 The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) report is attached at appendix 2. In 2009/10, the LGO received 94 complaints representing a 9% decrease from 2008/9. Lewisham received one public report, which related to the way that the Council had dealt with an abandoned vehicle. The Council apologised and paid the complainant £2,000 in compensation.
- 1.4 A review of the Council's complaints management computer system, iCasework, was undertaken in 2009. Key outcomes were recommendations to introduce a Council wide Quality Checking Framework to support the drive to improve the quality of response by officers; and the introduction of an iCasework User Group to ensure key learning and best practice is being disseminated throughout the Council and to our partners who manage complaints on our behalf.

## **2. Purpose of Report**

- 2.1 To update the Standards Committee on the Council's complaints performance for 2009/10 at all stages including the Independent Adjudicator's report and the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review.

## **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 Note the contents of the report.

## **4. Introduction**

- 4.1 This report summarises how the Council and its partners performed when dealing with complaints and how it is using the feedback from complaints to improve services.
- 4.2 The report includes a summary of the Independent Adjudicator's report and a summary of the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review with the full reports attached as appendices.
- 4.3 The iCasework complaints management system has been in place since February 2008. A review of the system was undertaken in July 2009 with recommendations for improvement; this report includes an update on implementing the recommendations.

## **5. Stage 1, 2, MP, Mayor and Councillor Complaints**

- 5.1 The standard response times and responsibility for responding to complaints at each stage are:

Stage 1 – 10 days by the Service Manager

Stage 2 – 20 days by the Head of Service or Executive Director

Stage 3 – 30 days by the Independent Adjudicator

MP/Mayor/Councillor – 10 days by the Head of Service or Executive Director

- 5.2 The table below shows how many complaints each Directorate dealt with in the year and the percentage dealt with in the standard response time. The statistics are for cases logged onto iCasework between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010. The figures in brackets show the same information for 2008/2009.

Directorate	Stage 1	%	Stage 2	%	MP	%	Mayor	%	Cllrs	%	Total
Children & Young People	<b>66</b> (54)	<b>52</b> (31)	<b>6</b> (6)	<b>33</b> (50)	<b>123</b> (74)	<b>51</b> (49)	<b>19</b> (7)	<b>42</b> (29)	<b>67</b> (35)	<b>66</b> (40)	<b>281</b> (176)
Community Services	<b>81</b> (101)	<b>60</b> (70)	<b>4</b> (6)	<b>50</b> (83)	<b>83</b> (75)	<b>51</b> (41)	<b>32</b> (16)	<b>63</b> (87)	<b>71</b> (63)	<b>66</b> (63)	<b>271</b> (261)
Customer Services	<b>1103</b> (1584)	<b>73</b> (64)	<b>163</b> (182)	<b>75</b> (54)	<b>694</b> (582)	<b>79</b> (58)	<b>206</b> (158)	<b>81</b> (46)	<b>604</b> (541)	<b>89</b> (62)	<b>2770</b> (3047)
Lewisham Homes	<b>978</b> (1108)	<b>84</b> (63)	<b>199</b> (116)	<b>79</b> (68)	<b>443</b> (316)	<b>70</b> (41)	<b>91</b> (61)	<b>77</b> (21)	<b>352</b> (209)	<b>81</b> (60)	<b>2063</b> (1810)
Regeneration	<b>174</b> (171)	<b>61</b> (20)	<b>28</b> (40)	<b>64</b> (67)	<b>168</b> (126)	<b>47</b> (51)	<b>186</b> (90)	<b>55</b> (49)	<b>644</b> (438)	<b>59</b> (56)	<b>1200</b> (865)
Resources	<b>21</b> (9)	<b>67</b> (78)	<b>1</b> (1)	<b>100</b> (0)	<b>3</b> (3)	<b>67</b> (67)	<b>4</b> (65)	<b>100</b> (51)	<b>8</b> (10)	<b>75</b> (70)	<b>37</b> (88)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2423</b> (3027)		<b>401</b> (351)		<b>1514</b> (1176)		<b>538</b> (397)		<b>1746</b> (1296)		<b>6622</b> (6247)

\* All percentages are rounded

5.3 Overall, there has been an increase in complaints by 6%. However, there has been a 20% decrease in the number of complaints received at Stage 1. Complaints training has focused on trying to reduce the number of complaints received at Stage 1, by ensuring front line staff have the skills to deal with situations that have resulted in complaints in the past. By empowering them with the authority to resolve disputes at the time they arise rather than requiring the customer to complete a complaints form, has hopefully contributed to the reduction at this stage of the process. The biggest decrease was in the Customer Services Directorate with 481 less Stage 1 complaints (30%), followed by Community Services with a reduction of 20% at Stage 1. Stage 2 complaints increased by 14% overall but decreased by 30% in Regeneration.

#### Trend Analysis

5.4 The table below summarises the top three complaints received in each directorate, excluding Resources who did not have sufficient volumes to establish trends. The table includes Lewisham Homes because of the number of complaints relating to housing issues. The most common complaint is at the top.

Community Services	Children & Young People	Customer Services	Regeneration	Lewisham Homes
<b>Community Education Lewisham - Curriculum Team</b>  Unhappy with decision	<b>Education Access</b>  Unhappy with school allocation  Poor Communication	<b>Re-housing/ Re-housing Development</b>  Delay in processing application  Delay due to waiting list	<b>Repair and Maintenance/ Traffic Management Act</b>  Request for service	<b>Plumbing/ Repairs</b>  Delay in taking action  Delay in completing work  Request for service
<b>Sport and Leisure - Contractor</b>  Failure to provide service	<b>Special Education Needs</b>  Change of escort service- poor communication  Withdrawal of transportation	<b>Other homeless &amp; temporary housing/ Advice and Reviews</b>  Delay in giving advice	<b>Planning applications/ Development control</b>  Delay in making decision  Delay in taking action  Failure to provide information	<b>Repairs Inspection/ Repairs</b>  Delay in taking action  Delay in completing work  Request for service
<b>Community Education Lewisham - Enrolment / Curriculum Team</b>  Delay in providing information  Failure to provide information	<b>Student and Pupil Services</b>  Delay in processing student finance  Failure to provide information.	<b>Collection/ Refuse</b>  Request for service  Service not to expected standard	<b>Enforcement Development control</b>  Failure to provide information  Unhappy with decision  Delay to respond to letters/emails	<b>Damp/Repairs</b>  Delay in taking action  Delay in completing work  Request for service

## Directorate Comments

### 5.5 **Children and Young People**

*Things that have been put in place to improve the quality of complaints handling:*

- Complaints relating to education are now centrally recorded and monitored by the CYP Complaints Team.
- New monitoring and reminder systems have been implemented to ensure response times are improved.
- The CYP Complaints team audit check responses and are available to provide advice and support on the handling of complaints to staff.
- The creation of "customer friendly" response templates.
- CYP Complaints team has rolled out "Complaints Handling" briefing sessions across the directorate.
- Introduction of complaint feedback forms to improve the service provided.
- The majority of education complaints received by the Council relate to school based complaints .e.g. bullying. The CYP Complaints Team offers guidance and advice to parents in respect of school based complaints.

*Lessons learnt from upheld complaints*

Only 5% of corporate complaints were upheld. However, the lessons learned from these complaints are listed below;

- Importance of responding in a timely and appropriate manner to initial parental enquiries and requests for information to avoid such enquiries developing into formal complaints.
- Response letters should not contain unnecessary use of jargon.
- Importance of providing parents with feedback from meetings promptly and identifying timescales for agreed actions.
- Staff to update contact details.
- Staff to be courteous and sensitive in handling confidential information.
- Giving priority to both assessment and revisions of student finance applications.

### 5.6 **Community Services**

*Things that have been put in place to improve the quality of complaints handling:*

- The Customer Relations Team in Community Services provides managers with a quality standards document which sets out what is expected to be included in a response. In addition managers are provided with a letter template to assist them in drafting high quality responses.
- The Customer Relations Team continue to audit complaint responses for quality and report findings both to DMT and to Corporate complaints colleagues for their council wide monitoring. The team also attend service

meetings to provide advice and support and to clarify what is expected and to reinforce timescales.

- All teams across the Directorate have been encouraged to attend the 'Good complaint handling' training sessions.

#### *Lessons learnt from upheld complaints and resulting service improvements*

- The Youth Offending Service has reviewed the procedures for when parents of children in custody need to make contact in emergency situations have been reviewed.
- 'Closing time procedures' have been reissued to all Library staff. These ensure that customers can complete their transactions in good time and without feeling rushed.
- Following queries from users of one of our community centres regarding noise nuisance, information was provided to them on what action they could take to address noise nuisance concerns.
- Following issues raised regarding the procedures for home visits made by Lewisham Intermediate Care staff, an improvement plan was produced and the revised procedures are now used by all staff.
- In order to help young Library users understand the Library fines process, separate and specific information about Library fines has now been produced for young people.
- Information on how fees are set for courses in Community Education Lewisham (CEL) is now included in the CEL prospectus.
- All CEL enrolment staff are now regularly provided with up to date information to ensure students are correctly enrolled.
- The position of one of the three medical points on site at the annual fireworks display was reviewed and subsequently moved.

#### *Future objectives in your area for the improvement of complaints management*

- iCasework will continue to be rolled out across the directorate and more staff will be given access to the system, in order to better aid the efficient administration of complaints.
- New local procedures reflecting statutory guidance will be issued in November.
- Following the release of the new local procedures, training will be enhanced and will also include information on the use of SharePoint.

## **5.7 Customer Services**

#### *Things that have been put in place to improve the quality of complaints handling:*

- Implemented a scheme where caseworkers review complaints in detail and highlight key points to the relevant service area including the type of response required.

- The casework team work closely with officers from Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3 on all categories of complaints and raise and resolve issues with them that impact on the speed and quality of responses.
- Close monitoring of response times has enabled the casework team to efficiently turn around draft responses and, issue final letters in time to the complainants.
- Providing copies of the final letter to service areas so that they might review in order to understand the quality of response required. This is an on-going practice and has contributed to improvements.

#### *Learning from complaints and feedback*

- Implementing electronic scanning at Housing Options Centre (HOC) – The casework team noted a trend of complaints about lost correspondence at HOC. A few cases had escalated to the LGO and resulted in the Council having to pay compensation. As a result stringent procedures were put in place to ensure that letters were scanned and logged to ensure that they did not go missing and were registered and responded to on time.
- Allocations Policy amended - In the Allocations Policy that came into effect in November 2009, there was an income limit of £16k, which disqualified anyone with assets or earnings over £16k from the Council's Housing Register. The Casework team, recognising that this could have an adverse effect on applicants highlighted this point and as a result, the Allocations Policy was amended in February 2010 and this limit for income was increased to £30k.
- Tightened procedures for homelessness applications – As a result of complaints there is better awareness of the impact of delayed decisions on the client. Closer monitoring was introduced to ensure adherence to timescales and to ensure that clients are better informed about the progress of their applications.
- New procedure for managing abandoned vehicles – complaints were received that the Council did not have a robust policy/procedure for managing abandoned vehicles. Consequently a formal consultation was undertaken and a new procedure was written and implemented providing clarity in this area.
- Improved telephone services for out of hours noise abatement calls – Following difficulties in callers contacting the Environment Enforcement team in the evening, voicemail was set up on their phone line to direct callers to the Council switchboard so that details of their complaint can be taken, logged and passed on to an officer to investigate.

#### *Future objectives*

- The customer services casework team are working to develop detailed reports on trend analysis to further enhance learning from complaints and make quicker and practical improvements to services.

## **5.8 Regeneration**

*Things that have been put in place to improve the quality of complaints handling:*

- In September 2009 changes were made to the way performance is reported to RMT to make the process more transparent and to identify the cause of delays. This process has been helpful as it shows instances where cases are late because of delays within the casework team or where delays have been caused by service areas providing late drafts. The results have been used to motivate the casework team and service areas to improve response times.

#### *Learning from complaints and feedback*

- A local review of casework management was undertaken in January 2010, which looked at the casework process in Regeneration and the scope to make improvements. The review identified that a large number of cases were being channelled through the casework team some of which were stage 1 complaints or were non-casework related which caused delays. The volume of cases often meant that delays were caused within the casework team (either passing complaints/enquiries to the service area or in drafting responses) and meant they were less able to monitor cases due. Some progress has been made and stage 1 cases received by the casework team are now passed to the service area via iCasework.
- Additional iCasework training was provided for staff dealing with stage 1 complaints.

#### *Future objectives*

- Work still needs to be done to ensure thorough use of icasework for stage 1 complaints management.

## **5.9 Resources**

*Things that have been put in place to improve the quality of complaints handling:*

- The new Corporate Complaints Quality Checking Framework has been sent to all Heads of Service (HOS) and Service Unit Managers (SUM). The results from the quality checking are presented at the Resources Directorate Management Team Performance Meetings.
- The use of iCasework is increasing within the directorate.

#### *Learning from complaints and feedback*

- As the numbers of complaints are relatively low and, with the exception of the clusters mentioned above, are dispersed across the directorate, it is difficult to establish trends. However, the directorate complaints representative attends the Corporate Complaints and Improvement Group (CCIG) meetings, where lessons learnt from across the council are disseminated and best practice in complaints management discussed.

#### *Future objectives*

- The Resources directorate will continue to be represented on the Corporate Complaints and Improvement Group, and participate in its drive to "help the Council improve its customer satisfaction rating through the effective review and monitoring of complaints and casework management".

### **Lewisham Homes Comments**

#### 5.10 *Things that have been put in place to improve the quality of complaints handling:*

- Since July 2009 we quality check 50% of all written responses each month.
- Between August - October 2009 51 staff received letter-writing training to improve the quality of their written responses and 51 front line staff received complaints handling training.
- Following a review, in November 09 we initiated a complaints project to look at improving quality, handling, response times, and reporting. This led to improvements being made to iCasework such as the ability to analyse reasons for stage 2 complaints escalation, record informal complaints, and improving contact information by linking to known data on our Academy system, which for example gives us the ability to respond appropriately if the customer has a known vulnerability that we need to take into account.

#### *Lessons learnt from upheld complaints*

- As part of the complaints project, we put a new learning from complaints process in place whereby a monthly report is sent out to ensure teams discuss upheld complaints at their team meetings. The managers of the repairs teams meet to share their learning.
- Key learning points for 2009/10 are:  
53% of complaints related to delays taking action;  
A number of new procedures have been introduced to prevent delays occurring for e.g. pre-ordering boiler parts to ensure stock is held;  
Repairs 'work in progress' reports are now being produced and reviewed by Works Supervisors to flag and address any potential delays before they result in a complaint;  
New processes to prevent distress to tenants e.g. checking vulnerability before serving an NTQ;  
Providing improved information to leaseholders, as most complaints from them related to disputes about charges, and it was recognised that invoices could be clearer.

#### *Future objectives*

- Improve the usage of iCasework with additional training to staff. A programme commenced in April 2010 and is being followed up by Customer Relations team holding regular surgeries with staff, for training they require to improve complaints handling.

- Improving the quality of complaints resolution to reduce the number of complaints, particularly to reduce the proportion of complaints that escalate to stages 2 and 3.

## 6. Independent Adjudicator

- 6.1 The Independent Adjudicator (IA) deals with stage 3 complaints on behalf of the Council. This section summarises the IA's report and the action being taken in response to the issues raised. The report covers the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.
- 6.2 The IA dealt with 100 cases and upheld in full or part 46 cases and responded to 89% of them within the 30 day standard. When compared to the previous period the number of cases the IA upheld has decreased by 7%. Of the 100 complaints considered by the IA 53 related to housing issues.

### Cases by directorate:

No. of complaints against each directorate and each partner - All Council  
(withdrawn cases in brackets)

Customer Services	Regeneration	Children and Young People	Community Services	Resources	Lewisham Homes	Regenter B3	TOTAL
44 (2)	5	1	2	1	41 (2)	6	100 (4)

- 6.3 Compensation was awarded in 27 cases ranging from £50 to £4,000. The total amount of compensation paid is £9,559. This compares to 26 cases in 2008/9 with the total amount being £12,105.

### Compensation:

Up to and including £100	£101 - £500	More than £500
11	14	2

- 6.4 The IA's report for the Council is attached at Appendix 1.

### Key issues highlighted by the IA

#### 6.5. High rate of upheld cases

The IA highlights the percentage of cases upheld (46%) once they reach stage 3 and that this may indicate the ineffectiveness of the process at stage 1 and 2. She suggests the upheld rate is used as an indicator of how well the other stages are working, and that the Council should aim for a rate nearer 30%. She did note that the upheld rate for stage 3 Lewisham Homes cases had decreased from 71% to 56%.

- The Councils Corporate Complaints and Quality Team analysed those cases that were upheld to see if any learning could be derived from the

data. Of those upheld, 19 were partially upheld and 27 fully upheld. Some of the reasons for partially upholding cases were due to poor administration i.e. unreasonable delay in responding or thoroughness of response. The iCasework User Group will be used to highlight the need for further improvement in the quality of response at Stage 2.

#### **6.6 The role of partnerships**

Some of the partnership arrangements for housing management involve a number of different organisations, which has led to confusion on who should be responsible for ensuring compensation is paid or a remedy implemented. The IA highlights these issues are of concern, particularly with Regenter B3. She also notes issues when a complaint is upheld and there have been failures by both the Council and Lewisham Homes to take responsibility for following through on recommendations.

- In response the Council and Regenter B3 are in discussions to simplify the process for administering complaints from the IA.
- Lewisham Homes have identified an officer who will be responsible for monitoring follow up actions and will act as the liaison point for Stage 3 complaints.

#### **6.7 Compliance with remedies**

The IA is happy that compliance is good in the majority of cases, however, notes a particular case where recommendations were not implemented resulting in the complainant going to the Local Government Ombudsman, who also upheld the complaint. Still actions were not taken with the complainant then making a fresh complaint to the IA. Services need to ensure that follow up action is regularly monitored, and the complainant kept informed

6.8 The Independent Adjudicator has prepared a separate annual report for Lewisham Homes which deals specifically with any issues relating to them. The Independent Adjudicator will attend their management team to present the report and the Council will monitor any actions arising from it.

### **Directorate comments on the Stage 3 Independent Adjudicator**

6.9 The Corporate Complaints and Quality Team sent out 160 requests for feedback from Directorates and Lewisham Homes, on their experience of dealing with the IA. Some of the responses are summarised below:

#### **6.9.1 In your dealings with the Adjudicator, which parts of the process do you think have worked particularly well?**

- The issue does get properly explored and the right questions asked. The process normally happens within timescale.
- The opportunity to meet the adjudicator and discuss at length my experience of the problem.

- The IA that I worked with was quick to try and understand about planning law and the enforcement procedures available to us.
- Communication has been very clear and expectations in terms of actions required, date responses needed by etc have been well defined. The IA has been accessible to discuss matters less formally where that was more appropriate than written communication.

#### **6.9.2 How have you found the adjudicator's enquiry process and the outcomes of the adjudicator's investigations?**

- It is difficult because the outcomes were not always what we wanted. But, with this in mind, I am able to accept that things could have been handled differently and it was important for us to learn from the outcomes.
- I think that she investigates things from the complainants point of view, and likes to take their side.....
- Some surprises on cases I think we have dealt with correctly and should be upheld but mostly ok.
- Thorough and detailed. The outcomes were acceptable.
- I think it fundamentally is a good process. Complainants do tend to feel it's 'Lewisham's ' process and the outcome will be in Lewisham's favour. In my view the outcomes are usually fair.
- The process appears good to me but the investigation is, obviously, reliant on co-operation of relevant service departments which can sometimes frustrate the process. I believe that investigations in which I have been involved have had thorough investigation and fair, impartial conclusions.

#### **6.9.3 Do you have any suggestions on ways in which the process could be improved?**

- Maybe face to face meeting to discuss overall responses to cases and lessons learnt or how we can work better together.
- She needs to have more awareness of what staff actually do and how many cases they have to deal with on a daily basis. She is able to devote quite a lot of time to each case she deals with, but most staff and complaints officers do not have that luxury.
- The process appears sound but from my service's point of view, I think it would be useful for complainants to be advised that the outcome of civil claims (and probably other areas) is beyond the boundaries of what the IA can investigate so that expectations are managed as early as possible.
- Not really. Worked pretty well in this instance.

6.10 Directorates were asked to rate the service provided by the IA on a scale of 1 to 10. The results were:

Rated 1 - 4	Rated 5 - 7	Rated 8 - 10
7%	36%	57%

6.11 The IA, when necessary, attends Directorate Management Teams and Lewisham Homes Management Team to provide feedback on the process and feedback on any observations she has made that may have a wider implication on processes and procedures.

## **7. Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter 2008/09**

7.1 The Local Government Ombudsman produces an annual review for all Councils. The review summarises complaints received over the past year by the Ombudsman against local authorities. It is a useful exercise, which gives Councils an opportunity to reflect on the types of complaints received against them, how they deal with these complaints and to consider where improvements, or changes might be made.

7.2 Enquiries received from the Ombudsman are managed, on behalf of the Chief Executive, by the head of his office. For the year ended 31 March 2010, a total of 94 complaints about Lewisham were determined by the Ombudsman. This continues the downward trend of complaints against Lewisham that are dealt with by the Ombudsman. The Council settled each of the 21 complaints where the Ombudsman found it to be at fault.

7.3 Lewisham received one public report, the first for six years. This related to the way that the Council had dealt with an abandoned vehicle. The Council agreed to apologise to the complainant and pay the sum of £2000 in compensation.

7.4 One other complaint was highlighted by the Ombudsman in her review. This concerned a child with special educational needs and the way in which the Council dealt with those needs and complaints made to it by the child's father. The Council accepted the Ombudsman's suggested remedy, apologised and paid the sum of £1000 by way of compensation.

7.5 The Ombudsman was congratulatory about the positive way that the Council engages with the LGO staff. The seriousness that Lewisham affords to complaints was highlighted and the Ombudsman again stressed the willingness of the Council to seek a remedy where things have gone wrong.

7.6 The improvement in the Council's response time to Ombudsman enquiries continues. The Council is pleased with the positive report it has received this year. The report has been considered at Executive Management Team and cascaded to directorate management teams to take any specific action necessary. The Council continues to build and develop a positive professional relationship with the York Ombudsman's office, as well as continuing to learn from mistakes made in complaints management.

- 7.7 A pilot scheme which extends the Ombudsman's jurisdiction in dealing with schools complaints was launched in April 2010. Further information is awaited as to the success of this pilot scheme. It is intended that this new power will be extended to all state schools from September 2011.
- 7.8 The Ombudsman has new powers, under the Health Act 2009 to investigate complaints about privately arranged and funded adult social care. These powers came into effect on 1 October 2009.
- 7.9 The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter is attached at appendix 2 and a comparison of our performance of responding to LGO cases with our neighbouring authorities at appendix 3.

## **8. iCasework Complaints Management System Review Update**

- 8.1 iCasework was implemented as the Council's complaints management system to improve the way complaints and feedback was being logged by officers; improve the way complaints are administered; and to assist Councillors in the management of their complaints. A review was carried out in 2009 and recommendations made, as follows:
- A report is commissioned from Tagish Ltd to simplify the process of reporting to DMTs.
  - A robust quality-checking framework is implemented across the Council, to ensure the quality of responses is of a high standard.
  - To form an iCasework user group to support and provide guidance to services in order to increase confidence in the system and enable the identification of training needs across the Council.
  - To carry out robust quality checking on iCasework to ensure that complaints and feedback is correctly logged and remedies followed through via the system.
  - A new procedure is agreed for handling service requests from Councillors.
- 8.2 Progress on recommendations from the review are as detailed below:
- A bespoke report was commissioned from Tagish Ltd to simplify the process of reporting to DMTs. The report is widely used across the Council and provides comprehensive management information for all directorates and our housing partners.
  - A robust quality-checking framework has been implemented across the Council, to ensure the quality of responses is of a high standard. Quality checks are being carried out on a bi-monthly basis and the results are recorded and fed back to Heads of Services and Service Managers.

- An iCasework user group was set up to support and provide guidance to all iCasework users. The group meet on a quarterly basis and the sessions cover topics suggested by the users.
- A dedicated Sharepoint site has been set up for all iCasework users which holds training manuals, guidance notes and best practice information.
- The system is regularly checked to ensure that correspondence is uploaded to the system correctly. Follow on remedies and tasks are also checked to ensure that they have been carried out in a timely fashion.
- A new procedure was agreed for handling service requests from Councillors. The procedure was implemented in July 2009 and the process is working well for both staff and Members.

8.3 The number of users on iCasework continues to increase and the logging of complaints to the system has improved, with a marked reduction in the number of incorrect categorisations of complaints. The system provides transparency in the way complaints are administered and responded to, which has led to greater accountability by officers. Reports are produced that enable more robust monitoring of complaints by senior managers and caseworkers alike. iCasework is also being used by our housing partners, some of whom have further developed part of the system to suit their individual reporting needs.

## **9. Learning and Improvements in Complaints Management and Administration**

9.1 The Corporate Complaints and Quality Team held 'Learning Lunches' with the theme '*getting it right, first time, every time*'. The key areas of discussion focused on ways to improve complaints management, taking into account, preventative action, providing local resolutions and managing customer expectations. The sessions also addressed effective letter writing, which was identified as a learning need from previous sessions.

9.2 Third tier managers attended a seminar especially tailored for their needs. The purpose of the seminar was to equip delegates with the skills required to take ownership of complaints management, help their staff learn from complaints and support/empower staff. The seminar also addressed achieving customer satisfaction at first point of contact and preventing service requests from escalating to a complaint. The session was well received by managers and highlighted some issues that were fed back to the Council's Complaints and Casework Forum (CCF) which monitors and reviews complaints management.

9.3 Part of the function of the Corporate Complaints and Quality Team is the systems administration of iCasework which includes checks on how staff are using the system, and offering guidance and training on its use. The team used iCasework User Group as a means of reinforcing good practice and addressing any issues users identified. This approach has seen a reduction in

the number of complaints incorrectly logged on the system and a reduction in system support calls.

## **10. Legal Implications**

10.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. It is recommended good practice from the Local Government's Ombudsman's Office to make full and specific reference to handling complaints within a management agreement entered into under section 27 of the Housing Act 1985.

## **11. Financial Implications**

11.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **12. Personnel Implications**

12.1 There are no personnel implications.

## **13. Crime and Disorder Implications**

13.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

## **14. Equalities Implications**

14.1 The iCasework system enables the Council to collect equalities monitoring information which is used to ensure the complaints process remains accessible and that no particular parts of the community suffer inequity in service delivery.

14.2 The corporate complaints and quality team will continue to work with voluntary community groups to ensure no one is disadvantaged from using the complaints process.

## **15. Environmental Implications**

15.1 There are no environmental implications.

## **16. Conclusions**

16.1 The Council has been continually improving its complaints process in response to feedback and best practice. However, there is still a lot more to do to ensure customers receive excellent services. The actions contained in the report will ensure excellence is achieved.

## **17. Further Information and background documents**

17.1 For more information, please contact Ralph Wilkinson on extension 46040

Background documents: None