

Annual Report

Summary of complaints to Bassetlaw District Council during 2009-10

1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to present a summary of the number and nature of complaints made to the Council between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010. It also details the level of adherence to the Council's timescales for dealing with complaints and shows the way in which the complaints were received by the Council and to whom they were sent.

2 Information and background

2.1 In January 2007, the Community Engagement & Performance Service gained the responsibility for all three stages of the Council's complaints procedure; previously three different service areas dealt with the three stages. The centralised system assured a more robust procedure was in place for complaint handling.

2.2 Although complaints information has been provided to the Performance Improvement Scrutiny Committee (PISC) on a quarterly basis, this is the first Annual Report to be published for complaints.

3 Summary of complaints

3.1 During the period 2009-10, there were a total of 118 complaints received, which is a 9% decrease on the previous year (2008-09).

3.2 Out of the total number of complaints received, 79% were received directly by the Complaints & Consultation Officer or the Chief Executive with the remaining being received by the Services or by Customer Services directly.

3.3 The detailed figures are as follows (2008-09 figures also appear below for comparison):

Service Area	2008/09	2009/10
Community Prosperity	23	22
Community Engagement & Performance	8	8
Environment & Housing	41	34
Finance & Property	1	2
Revenue & Customer Services	50	43
Support Services	6	9
Total	130	118

3.4 Customers may complain in a variety of ways. The financial year shows us that customers' preferred way of getting in touch to make a complaint is by writing to the Council.

3.5 A breakdown of the ways that complaints were received for 2009-10 is shown below:

"Speak-up... we're listening" on line form submission	19
Email	18
Face to face	3
Telephone	18
Letter to Complaints Officer/Chief Executive	37
Letter to the Service	19
Referred by Ombudsman	4

3.6 The agreed timescales for the three stages of the complaints procedure are set out below with all references to days being working days.

3.7 At stage 1, Investigation by the Head of Service, 90% of complaints were processed by all departments within the 15 working day timescale, compared to 89% during 2008-09.

3.8 At stage 2, Review by the Chief Executive, 96% of complaints were processed within the 15 working day timescale, compared to 75% during 2008-09.

3.9 Stage 3, Investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman normally allows the Council 28 calendar days to respond. The Council's average response time for 2009-10 was 27 days. This compares to 2008-09 average of 21 days to respond. The increase in the number of days taken in 2009-10 was due to some particularly complex cases requiring further time to prepare the response. More information about the Ombudsman is detailed at point 5.

3.10 Overall, out of the 118 complaints received, 37% were either upheld or partially upheld.

4. Categories of complaints

Communication (delays)	5
Officer (decision)	6
Advice (officer)	6
Service Delivery (lack of action)	10
Procedural (delays)	8
Condition (infrastructure)	2
Procedure	10
Action (delays)	3
Conduct (officer)	10
Standard of work (officer)	15
Attitude (officer)	4
Dissatisfied (general)	11
Lack of response	3
Lack of consultation	3
Lack of information	5
Conduct (External agent)	6
Lack of communication	11

5. Local Government Ombudsman

Once the Council's 2 step internal process is exhausted, a complainant still has the right to take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman. On publication of her Annual Report to the Council, it was shown that the Ombudsman had dealt with 26 complaints. Of these, 1 was determined as a local settlement, 3 were Ombudsman's discretion and 4 outside jurisdiction. There were no findings of maladministration causing injustice against the Council during this period.

6. Learning from Complaints

Whilst every effort is made to make improvements when complaints are made, to date there has been no formal process of logging, identifying or reporting where changes to procedure/policy have been implemented. We have therefore introduced a procedure that centrally records when improvements are recognised and implemented. The details will record a brief summary of the improvements made together with the implementation date and will be signed off by the relevant Head of Service.

Part of the Stage 2 complaint review process now involves the Chief Executive signing off a pro-forma that identifies where recommendations or actions are identified in specific service areas, a further review date is given to track that the said changes are in place.

7. Future developments

Equal opportunities monitoring

As part of our commitment to making sure we reach all parts of the community, we will routinely ask our customers who have complained to supply information about their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and disability. The information we receive will ensure a fair service is being given to all.

Customer feedback

As part of our commitment to listening to our customers, we will routinely seek feedback from each customer who has been through the complaints procedure. The information we receive will help to shape and enhance the delivery of the complaints procedure.