

## **Complaints Annual Report**

### **Summary of complaints to Bassetlaw District Council during 2010-11**

#### **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 2010 to 31 March 2011. It also details the level of adherence to the Council's timescales for dealing with complaints and shows the way in which complaints were made to the Council and to whom they were sent.

#### **2. Information and background**

2.1 The Council has a 3 stage procedure in place for complaint handling. Stage 1 is for the appropriate Head of Service to respond to the complaint, escalating the complaint to stage 2 of the procedure provides a review by the Chief Executive and stage 3 provides advice to refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.

2.2 Responding to complaints within 15 working days is measured as a Local Performance Indicator with a target of 91% of all stage 1 complaints for 2010/11 being responded to within 15 working days. The target was well achieved with an actual outcome of 96% of all complaints being responded to within 15 working days.

#### **3. Summary of complaints**

3.1 During the period 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011, there were a total of 91 complaints received, which is a 23% decrease on the previous year.

3.2 Of the total number of complaints received, 75% were received directly by the Complaints & Consultation Officer or the Chief Executive's office with the remaining received by the Services or by Customer Services directly.

3.3 The detailed figures are as follows (2009-10 figures also appear below for comparison):

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
Community Prosperity	12	22
Community Engagement & Performance	5	8
Environment & Housing	35	34
Finance & Property	2	2
Revenue & Customer Services	34	43
Support Services	5	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>93*</b>	<b>118</b>

\*Actual number of complaints for the year is 91; however some complaints overlap more than one service area, hence the total of 93.

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 2010-11 is shown below:

"Speak up... we're listening" (on-line form submission)	12
"Speak-up... we're listening" hard-copy form completed	3
E-mail	12
Written (letter to Complaints Officer/Chief Executive)	21
Face to face	5
Telephone	19
Letter to the service involved	15
Referred by the Ombudsman/other	4

3.6 The agreed timescales for responding to complaints for all 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), 96% of all complaints were responded to by all departments within the 15 working day timescale, compared to 90% for 2009-10.

3.8 At stage 2, (Review on behalf of the Chief Executive), 8 out of the 10 complaints that were escalated to stage 2 of the procedure were responded to within 15 working days. The remaining 2 complaints were responded to within 20 and 21 working days respectively due to officer availability and/or complexity of the complaint(s).

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 2010-11 was 21.7 days. This compares to an average of 27 days for 2009-10. More information about Ombudsman cases is detailed at point 6.

4. Overall, out of the 91 complaint received, 55% were either upheld or partially upheld.

5. Categories of complaints for 2010-11 and 2009-10 are shown for comparison.

<b>Category</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2009-10</b>
Communication (delays)	5	5
Officer (decision)	2	6
Advice (officer)	9	6
Service delivery (lack of action)	22	10

Procedural (delays)	3	8
Condition (infrastructure)	1	2
Procedure	5	10
Action (delays)	4	3
Conduct (officer)	2	10
Standard of work (officer)	11	15
Standard of work (contractor)	1	0
Dissatisfied (general)	7	11
Lack of response	4	3
Lack of information	2	5
Conduct (external agent)	2	6
Lack of communication	11	11

- 5.1 It is pleasing to note that when compared to complaint categories for 2009-10, out of the 17 complaint categories, 13 of the categories have seen a decrease in complaint numbers. In particular, complaints around officer involvement, ie officer decision/officer conduct and officer attitude have seen a decrease from 41 to 24.

## 6. Local Government Ombudsman

Once the Council's 2-step internal process is exhausted, a complainant has the right to take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman. On publication of her provisional statistics to the Council, it was shown that the Ombudsman had dealt with 27 complaints during 2010/11, compared to 26 for 2009/10. Of these, 2 were determined as Local Settlements, 1 was Ombudsman Discretion and 4 were Outside Jurisdiction. There were 6 cases investigated with no findings of maladministration causing injustice during this period. Of the remaining complaints, 7 remain open and are awaiting the outcome, 3 where advice was given to the complainant and 4 were classed as "Premature Complaints".

## 7. Evidence of learning from complaints

One of the benefits of having a recognised Complaints Procedure in place is so that we can identify service improvements as a result of a complaint being made that can bring long term benefit to the organisation. Here are a few examples of positive outcomes and illustration of the Council learning from complaints.

### 7.1 Council Tax registration

A lady complained that it had taken almost two months for her Council tax bill to be sent out to her after she had let us know that she had moved into the property. This was due to our processing procedures regarding the former residents, primarily due to the fact that the former occupants of the property were moving into a brand new house that was not yet on the system. The situation of the complainant was considered and the delay experienced was deemed to be unacceptable. So that a similar situation did not arise again, changes to procedure were implemented which included putting the former occupants into a "pending" system so that the new occupants could be duly registered together with staff training on the new procedure.

## 7.2 Refuse collection

A customer complained to us that the refuse lorry had not attempted to get down his street to empty his bin due to the severe weather conditions. He felt that this was unfair as some other streets had had their bins emptied. Environment Services agreed that “problem” areas during severe weather would be monitored wherever possible prior to the refuse crew arriving to ensure that an informed decision could be made and residents informed.

During the severe weather conditions, customers complained when there were disruptions to the normal bin collection days; whilst customers could understand the reasoning behind the decision to prioritise the normal “green bin” collections over the blue bin recycling collections, the main cause for complaint was around the communication of the decision. It has been recognised that to improve awareness, should changes become essential due to the weather conditions in the future, a strict protocol around informing residents will be in place.

## 7.3 Direct Debit letter

A customer complained when he had a problem with his direct debit and he experienced difficulties when trying to make a cash payment to catch up with the missing direct debit payment. In view of this, we have amended the standard letter which is issued to customers who have had a direct debit payment returned unpaid. The revised letter includes alternative methods of payment available to the customer, such as the local Post Office and Paypoint locations, the internet and 24 hour telephone payment line. The letter also has details of our website, where a customer can find details on all available methods of payment.

## 8. Equality Monitoring

As part of our commitment to ensuring we reach all parts of the community, we routinely ask our customers who have complained to supply information about their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and disability.

- 8.1 This information is only given where the customer is willing to do so. The majority of customers do not supply this information either in part or in full. However, for those who do provide the information, it does give us some useful data. For instance, the majority of complainants categorise themselves as White British.
- 8.2 Respondents who supplied information provided no information relating to having a disability.

8.3 In terms of how our customers describe their gender this is demonstrated as follows:

Male	Female
9	5

8.4 The age range of complainants who supplied the information is as follows:

16-21	22-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-64	65+
1	0	2	3	3	0	2

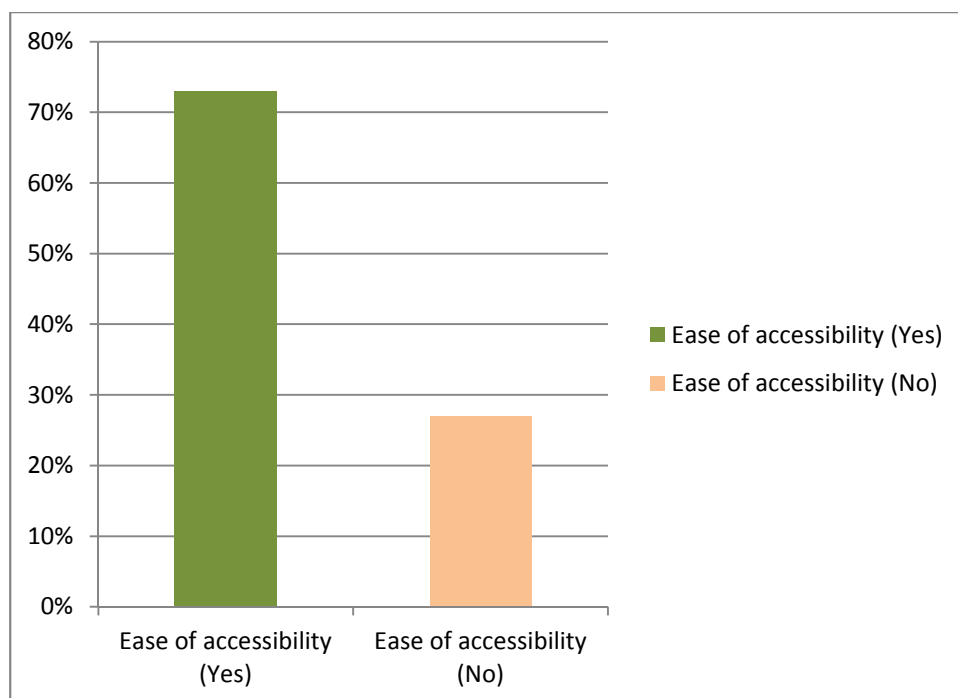
8.5 The sexual orientation of complainants who supplied the information is as follows:

Lesbian	Gay	Heterosexual	Bisexual
1	1	9	0

## 9. Customer feedback

9.1 As part of the Council's commitment to listening to its customers, the Complaints Officer routinely seeks feedback from each customer who has been through the complaints procedure.

9.2 Key messages have shown us:



9.3 It is also noted that the majority of respondents were happy with the helpfulness, politeness and depth of knowledge that staff displayed and were satisfied with the length of time taken to respond to their complaint.

## **10. Future developments**

10.1 We will continue to benchmark our complaint handling by working with our neighbouring authorities' complaints teams as part of the Nottinghamshire Complaints Network Group to ensure we are working to best practice at all times.

10.2 Through Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Liaison feedback we will continue to learn how best to handle the most complex and difficult complaints in the most effective way possible utilising the LGO standards.