

Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills, Executive Director Communities

Report to:	Audit Committee
Date:	31 January 2011
Subject:	Complaints 2010/2011

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to give an understanding of the number of complaints received by LCC from April 1st 2010 to December 31st 2010, our performance against defined targets and ongoing improvement initiatives.

Recommendation(s):

That Members note the 2010/11 results and where appropriate suggest corrective actions.

Background

LCC corporate complaints are recorded, by the customer service centre, on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Social Care complaints are recorded on QA Plus by the Social Care Complaints Manager. Customers also have the ability to report complaints themselves via the LCC web pages. A variety of commitments are made regarding acknowledgement and resolution times depending on which service the customer is complaining about.

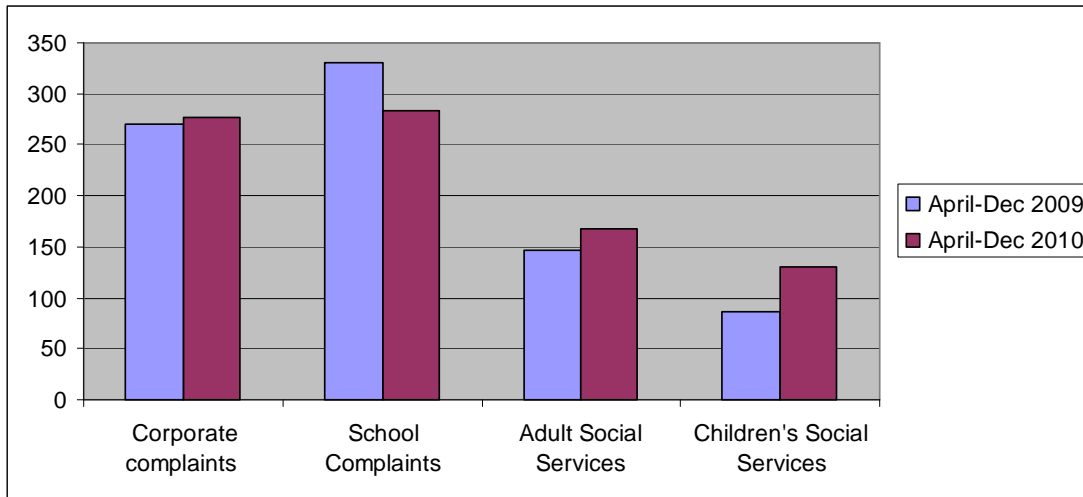
Analysis of Complaints – 01.04.10 to 31.12.10

A total of 933 complaints were received between April 1st and December 31st 2010. This represents an increase of 53 from 880 complaints received during the same period in 2009.

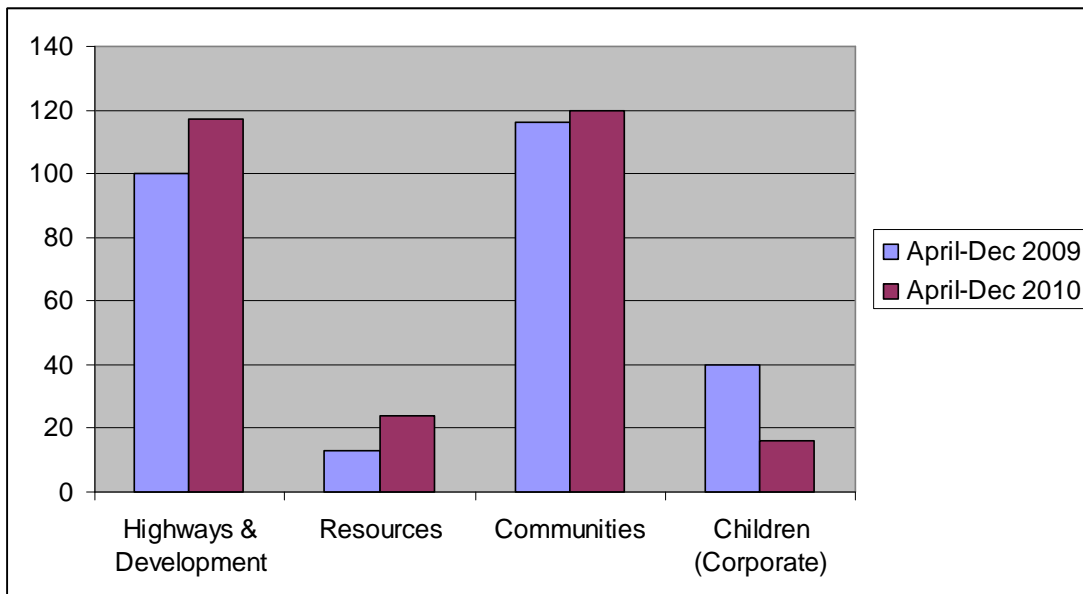
The increase was partially due to a number of complaints received in Q1 regarding changes to library charges. This rise was to be expected as various charging mechanisms/increases etc were introduced. However, the total complaints (29) are far less than those received during the corresponding quarter of 2008/09 (a total of 261) when the service made changes to opening times and to the days and location of stops for the mobile library service.

Additionally 14 complaints, regarding the lack of gritting and snow clearing during the severe weather across Lincolnshire in November & December, were received.

The table below shows a breakdown, by service, of the number of complaints received overall and a comparison between 2009/10.



The table below shows a breakdown of the number of complaints received by corporate service areas for 2009 & 2010.



The table above shows that a total of 16 complaints were received for the Children's (corporate) during this period. This represents a decrease of 24 from 40 complaints received in 2009. Children's services believe that the reason for the decrease in complaints is that there are more schools that have been transformed into academies across Lincolnshire so complaints don't touch LCC.

The volume and type of complaints have remained fairly steady for a number of years and in 2010 a report as produced to highlight the following key findings based on analysis of around 60 complaints:

- 69% could have been avoided as they were as a result of actions known that lend themselves to customers feeling they have had a bad experience - and processes and practices could have been in place to mitigate against their submission

- 15% related to issues that could and should have been dealt with at the source of the comment/complaint event.
- Current reporting of complaints does not readily highlight issues of concern, areas for service improvement or capture organisational learning. This naturally leads to repetition of mistakes and poor practice
- The council is currently geared to dealing with complaints on a totally reactive basis when a more pro-active approach to complaint reduction would prove advantageous
- Complaints are not viewed as part of the customer service responsibility of a service area but as an additional process it unfortunately has to deal with. Customer service is seen as the sole responsibility of the Customer Service Centre.
- The councils Customer Experience Policy is not used as a reference point for guidance or complied with.
- There is a lack of commonality to the approach of reporting complaints and there is no mechanism from learning from best practice where services have improved due to an action they have taken
- Targets are focused on compliance with the complaint handling process and are not geared to the encouragement of reducing the actual receipt of complaints
- Written responses are not of an adequate standard and potentially lead to increasing the frustration of already disgruntled customers

As a result of the above findings, which also reflect the complaints situation throughout 2010, a function (Customer Insight Team) has been set up from existing resource to ensure improved complaint handling, learning and service improvement in association with other customer feedback.

During the OFSTED review of Children's services the plans for future complaint handling were presented to them and they responded very positively and stated that they would welcome the planned changes.

As part of the Customer Insight Team work, a specification to develop CRM has been drafted and, once implemented, will mean that Social Care complaints will be handled on this system and QA+ can be retired.

The Customer Insight Team is already monitoring complaint daily and intervening when targets are in danger of not being met. This is proving successful and has already demonstrated a reduction in out of target complaints.

The team is also advising services of the learning that can be taken from complaints and customer feedback and positive changes have been made as a result.

Conclusion

Complaints to LCC remain fairly steady, in terms of volume, with the odd peak as a result of major change or event. There is little evidence of learning and change from complaints.

If the proposed changes to the way complaints are handled and in the way learning is taken from them is progressed we should see a reduction in the complaint volumes and an improvement in customer satisfaction.

Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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