

30 September 2014

Audit Committee

Corporate Complaints Monitoring and Freedom of Information Requests

Report of: *Steve Summers, Head of Customer Services*

Wards Affected: *None*

This report is *Public*

1. Executive Summary

This report is before Members to monitor and review the complaints received through the Council's formal complaints process and provide information on the number of Freedom of Information requests received to date. It is intended through the introduction of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system the council will be able to understand, monitor and manage better customer's complaints and requests.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 That the Committee notes the complaints received through the Council's formal complaints process and the number of Freedom of Information Requests received.

3. Introduction and Background – Corporate Complaints

3.1 The Council has a two stage complaints process which has provided a very successful route for customers to take issue with any perceived failure to provide a service, failure to respond to requests or failure to adhere to standards on the part of the Council and its officers.

3.2 The process itself has two stages. In the first instance, the complaint is forwarded to the Head of Service for the department concerned for a full investigation into the complaint. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response from the Head of Service they can request the Complaints Co-ordinator to conduct a second stage investigation into the matter. At both stages, the Council aims to respond fully following the investigation within 20 working days.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 During 2013/14 financial year there were 33 complaints for first stage investigation, 10 complaints have been received so far this year.
- 4.2 The table below shows the breakdown for the financial year 2012/13 to 2013/14. Since the last report to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 1st July 2014 there has been a further 2 Stage One complaints received.

Stage One

Department	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (Apr-Sep)
Housing	10	10	6
Planning	8	10	3
Revenues and Benefits	6	9	1
Countryside, Parks and Cemeteries	3	-	-
Governance	2	-	-
Legal and Debt Recovery	2	3	-
Environmental Health	1	-	-
Community Safety	1	-	-
Street Scene	1	1	-
Total	34	33	10

- 4.3 Details of the 10 complaints included
- Works to trees
 - Housing repair issues
 - General housing issues
 - Non payment of business rates
- 4.4 Nine complaints have progressed to the second stage for the financial year 2013/14. The table below shows a comparison for the previous year. Since the last report to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 1st July 2014, 2 Housing complaints have moved to Stage Two.

Stage Two

Department	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (Apr-Sep)
Housing	1	2	2
Planning	3	3	-
Revenues and Benefits	2	3	-
Governance	2	-	-
Legal	-	1	-
Total	8	9	2

- 4.5 There continue to be no particular trends or themes to the complaints made so far this year which would result in concern about a process failure or service delivery breakdown in any service areas.
- 4.6 However, it is inevitable that there will be a proportion of cases where the complainant is unhappy with the outcome. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage 2 response, it would be appropriate for them to approach the Local Government Ombudsman should they choose to do so.
- 4.7 At the time of the last report, 7 complaints had progressed to the Local Government Ombudsman. A comparison with last year is included in the table below.

Department	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (Apr/Jun)
Housing	1	2	-
Planning	2	3	-
Revenues and Benefits	-	2	-
Building Control	1	-	-
Total	4	7	0

5. Freedom of Information Requests

- 5.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities. It does this in two ways:
- Public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities; and
 - Members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings. The Act does not cover access to individual's own personal data, such request need to be made under the Data protection Act 1998.

- 5.2 Set out in the table below is a breakdown by department of the number of Freedom of information Requests received since 1st April 2014 to date. This information is available for public viewing on the Council's website. As set out in the Executive Summary of this report future monitoring of requests through a CRM will enable the Council to review and offer appropriate access to resident's and businesses.

Department	2014/15 (Apr-Sep)
Revenues and Benefits	77
ICT	19
Corporate Services	50
Environmental Health	38
Housing	27
Streetscene	47
Finance Services	23
Built Environment	17
Community Services	10
Democratic Services	3
Total	311

6. Implications

Financial Implications

Name & Title: Jo-Anne Ireland, Acting Chief Executive
Tel & Email 01277 312712/jo-anne.Ireland@brentwood.gov.uk

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: ChrisPotter, Monitoring Officer and Head of Support Services
Tel & Email: 01277 212743/christopher.potter@brentwood.gov.uk

- 6.2 None - although a robust complaints mechanism contributes towards good governance.

7. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices to this report

8.1 None.

Report Author Contact Details:

Name: Lorraine Jones
Telephone: 01277 312691
E-mail: lorraine.jones@brentwood.gov.uk