

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 6
15 MARCH 2010	Public Report

Report of the Head of Customer Services

Contact Officer(s) – **Mark Sandhu, Head of Customer Services and Belinda Evans, Customer Services Manager**

Contact Details - **(01733) 296321 and 296324**

COMPLAINTS MONITORING REPORT 2008 - 09

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the formal complaints which have been monitored between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009 and which fall under the Corporate Complaints' Policy.
- 1.2 To enable the Committee to scrutinise the annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about the council's performance on complaints.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee scrutinises the information presented in this report regarding complaints received between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009.
- 2.2 That the Committee supports the recommendation that senior managers actively encourage officers who undertake complaint investigations to attend specialist complaints training to improve the quality of Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This report analyses the performance of the Council's formal Corporate Complaints Procedure between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009. It is important to note that this report does not include complaints that fall outside of the Corporate Complaints Policy, for example, complaints relating to schools, Statutory Children Social Care and Adult Social Care.
- 3.2 Following the successful transfer of the Central Complaints Office (CCO) from the Strategic Improvement Division to Customer Services in February 2008, we are pleased to report that the service has since been fully resourced. In previous years the service suffered from insufficient back up resources. The resource for this service remains 1.5 FTE but this is split over more productive working hours with the fall back of other trained Customer Service staff who can cover should the need arise.
- 3.3 The database used within the service is under review. Both Central Complaints and Children's Services use the same database but different versions, which leads to some duplication. Customer Services are currently reviewing its options to introduce a CRM system. Any CRM implemented will include facility to monitor complaints more effectively.
- 3.4 The Corporate Complaints Policy has three-stages:
 - Stage One (First Contact Complaint)
 - Stage Two (Service Review)
 - Stage Three (Independent Person Review)

Note: * Stage 1 complaints can be responded to in various ways depending on how the customer contacts the council and the complexity of the complaint. For example, it is hoped that the majority of complaints will be resolved without delay on the telephone or in person, but those that are sent in by letter should be responded to within the corporate standard of 10 working days.

Stage	Action	Timescale
1	The council aims to settle the majority of complaints quickly and satisfactorily through the 'front line' employees who provide the service or the relevant manager. The complaint may be resolved informally by way of an apology, by providing the service required, or providing an explanation to the customer.	10 Working Days *
2	If the customer is not happy with the decision at Stage 1, he/she can appeal to the Central Complaints Office, who ask the relevant Head of Service or Assistant Director to investigate the complaint fully and provide a written response to the customer.	15 Working Days
3	If the customer is not happy with the decision at Stage 2, he/she can appeal to the Deputy Chief Executive who will appoint an independent person to investigate the complaint fully and provide a written report to the customer.	25 Working Days

4. STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS (FIRST CONTACT COMPLAINTS)

4.1 During 2008/09 the Central Complaints Office successfully received monthly returns from the complaint monitoring officers across the Council. For the first time the total number of Stage 1 complaints can be reported for the whole Authority on a monthly basis. The total for the year is shown below. Now that a robust process is in place, the Council has a clearer picture of the number of complaints that are being made about the services it provides. Unlike previous years clear comparisons can now be made year to year.

4.2 The table below shows the number of Stage 1 complaints received for each department during 2008/09 including those that were received and logged by the CCO. The data for the previous year is included to allow comparisons to be made. Table 2 illustrates a decrease in the number of Stage 1 complaints received in all departments and by Central Complaints.

Department	2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Total complaints received	Logged by CCO	Total complaints received	Logged by CCO
Strategic Resources	158	45	108	31
Environment and Community Services	225	128	173	83
Peterborough City Services	238	95	105	52
Chief Executive's	46	30	43	32
Children's Services	85	10	12	2
TOTAL	752	308	441	204

4.3 The decrease in Stage 1 complaints can be attributed to various factors:-

- Enhanced data collection from directorates by Central Complaints has distinguished between internal issues and corporate complaints. There is evidence that some departments were previously over-reporting, especially Strategic Resources and Children's Services. Previously only the number of Stage 1 complaints received locally

was reported to Central Complaints on a monthly basis. Now full details of these complaints are requested including customer details, complaint category, outcome and whether the complaint is corporate. This has uncovered that in previous years Human Resources reported internal disciplinary 'complaints' to Central Complaints, whilst Children's services were including schools complaints which do not fall under either the corporate or Children's social care complaints policy monitored by the Authority.

- The relocation of the Corporate Complaints office into Customer Services in February 2008 has had a major impact on the reduction of complaint volumes. The experience of the staff in Central Complaints now ensures that they can distinguish if a customer has a service request or complaint.

Before the change in department the previous team did not have the knowledge, tools or contacts to resolve simple requests for the customer. Therefore issues such as a missed bin or an overhanging tree, street lighting fault or parking enforcement issue could be recorded as a complaint. Now the current staff can remedy many of these minor service issues as they have access to the APP Flare system where a high percentage of these enquiry types can be immediately logged to ensure the relevant staff can immediately be alerted to the problem and action the request. This allows the staff member to confirm the solution to the customer immediately increasing customer satisfaction and ensuring that minor issues do not escalate into complaints. For service issues where system access is not available they contact the relevant service area promptly and keep the customer informed with progress.

For the first time the team have kept a log of all service requests they deal with and this began in August 2008. For the 8 months from then until the year end they had recorded 334 service requests passed to directorates.

- The most dramatic decline in complaint numbers has been in City Services. As well as the work of the Central Complaints team detailed above the work of the Peterborough Direct call centre also deserves some mention. General calls to Environment and Public Protection services were transferred to Peterborough Direct in April 2007. The staff there have had regular liaison with City Services to ensure procedures are streamlined and customer contacts especially in regard to refuse collection are resolved quickly. Customers can get their call answered and the officers who answer these calls, like the Central Complaints team, can give the customer a 'real-time' update through their access to Flare.

4.4 During 2008-09, there were 441 stage one complaints logged across the Council within this period and 60 complaints were logged at stage 2.

5. STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS (SERVICE REVIEW)

5.1 The number of stage two complaints is given below.

	No. of Complaints
April 2004 – March 2005	101
April 2005 – March 2006	117
April 2006 – March 2007	102
April 2007 – March 2008	71
April 2008 – March 2009	60

5.2 The number of stage two complaints by department

Table 4: Stage two complaints by department	
	No. of Complaints
Strategic Resources	11
Operations	30
Peterborough City Services	12
Assistant Chief Executive's	6
Children's Services	1

5.3 The Operations Directorate (formally known as Environmental & Community Services) continues to have the highest number of stage 2 complaints (30), but has seen a decline from the previous year which equals the decline in Stage 1 complaints for this area as a percentage.

5.4 The number of stage two complaints by business unit

Table 5: Stage two complaints by business unit	2006-07*	2007-08	2008-09
Strategic Resources Department	21	11*	11
Operational HR	3	1	0
Strategic procurement	n/a	1	0
ICT	0	0	0
Finance	0	0	0
Customer Service	16	7	0
Strategic Property	2	2*	5
Business Transformation	0	0	0
Internal Audit	0	0	0
Revenues & Benefits	n/a	n/a	6
Operations Department	52	43*	30
Transport and Engineering	12	16*	8
EPPS	13	7	8
Planning Services	20	12	10
Cultural Services	7	8	4
Peterborough City Services Department	11	7	12
Support Services	0	0	0
Street Scene and Facilities	10	7	9
Building and Technical Services	1	0	0
Property Services	0	0	0
Recreation (Moved from Operations 08-09)	n/a	n/a	3
Chief Executive's Department	7	10*	6
Communications	1	0	0
Strategic Growth and Development	6	7	6
Legal and Democratic	n/a	3*	0
Children's Services Department	6	2*	1
Specialist Services	4	0	0
Universal Services	0	1	0
Learning and Standards	2	0	1
Business Support	0	1*	0

Note: * - there were a number of complaints that included more than one department- these are shown *.

Corporate response times

- 5.5 98.3% of stage two complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days (See Table 6), this is an increase compared to last years figure of 95.7%. There was a delay of a day when acknowledging one complaint; this was due to the complexity of the case and trying to establish which department needed to investigate. This has highlighted that the complaint must at least be acknowledged and further information can then be provided when available.

Table 6: Stage two response times	2004-05 Outturn	2005-06 Outturn	2006-07 Outturn	2007-08 Outturn	2008-09 Outturn
The percentage of Stage 2 complaints acknowledged within 2 working days	94.0%	92.3%	99.0%	95.7%	98.3%

- 5.6 During 2008-09, 71.1% of all stage two complaints were responded to within 15 working days (See Table 7). This is lower than the 2007-08 performance (85.1%). Central Complaints ensures that holding letters are sent to complainants in delayed cases. The reasons for delays can range from the complexity of the complaint to possible legal implications.

Table 7: The percentage of Stage 2 complaints responded to within 15 working days					
	2004-05 Outturn	2005-06 Outturn	2006-07 Outturn	2007-08 Outturn	2008-09 Outturn
Assistant Chief Executive's	50.0%	100.0%	85.7%	75%	83.3%
Peterborough City Services	77.8%	82.8%	100.0%	100%	72.7%
Strategic Resources	69.2%	65.0%	85.7%	80.0%	81.8%
Children's Services	100.0%	50.0%	83.3%	100%	0%
Environment and Community Services	89.7%	71.7%	88.5%	87.2%	69.7%
Overall	77.6%	72.6%	88.2%	85.1%	71.1%

- 5.7 When the 2007/08 complaints report went before Scrutiny Committee last June it was queried that a high proportion of Stage 2 complaints were escalating to Stage 3. Although this year the number of Stage 2 complaints has gone down the percentage being escalated to Stage 3 has increased. There are a number of factors contributing to this increase.

- Objectivity – Many customers may not be satisfied with an escalation of the complaint within the same department.
- Quality – Minor issues such as poor punctuation or a lack of summary can leave the customer inclined to believe that the Council are not taking their concerns seriously.
- Timescales – Stage 2 investigations are often undertaken by senior managers who may find it difficult to dedicate the time required at short notice to investigate complaints thoroughly; often there is no proof-reading of the response to ensure important factors such as using the correct referral rights and including an apology are not missed.
- Training – With movement of staff some officers are completing complaint responses that have had little or no training in complaint investigations.

- 5.8 To reduce the number of complaints escalated to Stage 3 we need to ensure that the standard of Stage 2 responses is improved across all directorates. Earlier this year a meeting was held with Complaint Monitoring Officers in Operations. The feedback from this meeting was that the Central Complaints Office as an independent area should give feedback on Stage 2 responses which were found to be of poor quality. Quality checking of all Stage 2 complaints began and

this has already resulted in some senior officers being recommended to attend the next available LGO complaint training workshop. Central Complaints will continue to feedback on complaint responses where applicable to improve quality.

- 5.9 The next step in improving the quality of our Stage 2 investigations is for senior managers across the directorates to ensure that the officers who investigate and respond to complaints within their areas have the necessary skills to undertake this important area of work.
- 5.10 New corporate governance training is due to be rolled out shortly to all existing senior managers which will include the importance of effective complaint handling. Optional additional training is provided by the Local Government Ombudsman Service in the form of one day's training at a cost of approx £100 per person. It would be appreciated if directors could review which of their senior managers have not attended this training and managers who would benefit from this training are nominated to attend.
- 5.11 In March 2009 the LGO issued Guidance on Running a Complaints system – Guidance on Good Practise - to all Council's. It details six key principles, Accessibility, Communication, Timeliness, Fairness, Credibility and Accountability. Under timeliness they recommend that complaints should take no longer than 12 weeks from receipt to resolution. This is achieved within the timescales of the existing PCC complaints policy.
- 5.12 This guidance is not prescriptive on the number of complaint stages a council should offer customers before referral to the LGO. Although it would be our long term aim to reduce the number of stages from three to two we must first see the need for a third stage reduced by declining numbers wishing to go to Stage 3 or on to the LGO before this could be seriously considered. The raising in the standards of our Stage 2 investigations will gain us the trust of the customer and increasing respect from the LGO.
- 5.13 If stage 2 was the final stage a sign off/vetting by the legal department would need to be built into the process to protect the Council from prosecution or risk to reputation.

6. STAGE THREE COMPLAINTS (INDEPENDENT PERSON REVIEW)

- 6.1 During 2008-09, the Council received 25 stage three complaints, compared to 15 during 2007-08. 100% of these were acknowledged within 2 working days, and 88.9 % of the Stage Three investigations were sent a response within the permitted timescales (this is 30 working days following receipt of the complainants agreement to the scope of the investigation) (See Table 8).

Table 8: Stage three complaints	2004-05 Outturn	2005-06 Outturn	2006-07 Outturn	2007-08 Outturn	2008-09 Outturn
The percentage of Stage 3 complaints acknowledged within 2 working days	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	93.3%	100%
The percentage of Stage 3 complaints responded to within permitted timescales	55.6%	33.0%	53.3%	100.0%	88.9%

- 6.2 Of the 25 stage three complaints, 3 were upheld, 2 were partially upheld and 17 were not upheld. In addition, 3 complaints were closed prior to the start of the investigation; this was due to the complainants, either declining to provide information or wishing to withdraw their complaint.
- 6.3 Complaints at Stage 3 are investigated by the Compliance and Ethical Standards Team who produce reports of a very high standard. There is some evidence that even though they are frequently in agreement with the decision made at Stage 2, the customer is more satisfied with the thoroughness of their investigations. They are respected as a neutral party, and can give priority to complaint cases.

6.4 Due to the increase in the number of Stage 3 complaints and some temporary resource issues amongst this team toward the end of the year, a few of the investigations had to be referred to appointed investigators throughout the council. This in turn resulted in longer response times. This issue is now resolved and the team is now fully resourced.

7. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)

7.1 In July each year the LGO provides an annual review to the Council. The aim of the review is to provide a summary of the complaints received in respect of Peterborough City Council and includes comments on performance and complaint-handling to assist us with service improvements that contribute to improved customer service.

7.2 For the year 2008/09 the LGO received 43 complaints and enquiries regarding the work of Peterborough City Council. The highest number for a single business unit was the 13 cases for planning and building control.

7.3 Some enquiries will result in general advice being given to the customer or with the LGO asking the customer to use the Council's own complaints policy before they will become involved.

7.4 The LGO proceeded to investigate 24 of these complaints about the Council.

Table 9: Ombudsman complaints	2005-06 Outturn	2006-07 Outturn	2007-08 Outturn	2008-09 Outturn
Number of decisions received	44	25	25	24

7.5 During 2008-09 there was one decision classed as 'maladministration with report'. A summary of the decision in this case follows.

The LGO concluded that the Council did not properly consider the complainants objections to a planning application and did not keep a record of the site visit. As a result the Council granted planning permission for an extension which caused significant shadowing and loss of light. It was recommended that the Council obtained an independent valuation of the complainant's property as it is and as it would be without an extension, and paid compensation equivalent to the difference in value.

£5,000 was paid in compensation, as well as a further £500 for distress, anxiety and the time and trouble pursuing the complaint as recommended by the LGO.

The LGO also recommended that the Council reviewed the resources allocated to the Planning Department, and its record keeping, in particular the procedures for allocating and fast tracking planning applications and associated correspondence.

7.6 Maladministration is defined as when the authority has failed to act reasonably in accordance with the law, its own policies and the generally accepted standards of local administration. The law says that the Ombudsman must look for 'maladministration' when carrying out his/her investigation. The definition of maladministration is very wide and can include:

- delay
- incorrect action or failure to take any action
- failure to follow procedures or the law
- failure to provide information
- inadequate record-keeping
- failure to investigate or reply
- misleading or inaccurate statements
- inadequate consultation
- broken promises.

7.7 The table below outlines the number and types of decisions the Ombudsman made during 2008-09.

Table 10: Ombudsman decisions			
Ombudsman Decision	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Maladministration	0	0	1
Local Settlement*	4	6	5
No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration	12	7	8
Ombudsman Discretion**	3	4	9
Outside Jurisdiction***	6	8	1

Note: * Local Settlement: The term local settlement is used to describe the outcome of a complaint where, during the course of an investigation, the council takes, or agrees to take, some action which the Ombudsman considers is a satisfactory response to the complaint. This can include compensation

** Ombudsman Discretion: Complaints described as terminated by Ombudsman's discretion are those which have been terminated because, for example:

- the complainant wishes to withdraw his or her complaint;
- the complainant has moved away and the Ombudsman is no longer able to contact him or her;
- the complainant decides to take court action; or
- the Ombudsman finds there is no or insufficient injustice to justify continuing the investigation.

*** Outside Jurisdiction: The Ombudsman can investigate most types of complaints against local authorities. But there are some things the law does not allow them to investigate, such as personnel matters, the internal management of schools and colleges, and matters which affect all or most of the people living in the council's area. Such complaints, when they are terminated, are described as being outside jurisdiction.

7.8 The annual review highlights that of all the complaints the Ombudsmen decides annually, 27.4% were local settlements. For Peterborough City Council there were five cases classified as Local Settlements, that equated to 21.7% of the cases which the Ombudsmen decided were within their jurisdiction. In total the Authority paid £550 in compensation on local settlements compared to £1,900 in 2007-08, £1,550 during 2006-07, £7,760 during 2005-06 and £1,150 during 2004-05.

7.9 The review mentions that there were four complaints made to them about school admissions. Although in three they found no maladministration and one was a local settlement the review does invite the Council to consider reviewing the training given to appeal panel clerks. There were significant delays in responding to these enquiries due to staffing issues at the time. This has been resolved and in the current year there has been only one complaint about a school admission which went to the LGO and Children's Services responded to the enquiry well within the required timescale. This case has subsequently been decided by the LGO as no evidence of Maladministration.

Table 11: Ombudsman (Written enquiries)	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Number of written enquiries received	28	12	10	18
Average response times	34 days	34 days	33 days	32 days

7.10 The LGO made written enquiries about 18 complaints in the year. The annual review confirms that the Council are still taking too long to respond to these enquiries but an improvement from last year has been seen. The review from the Ombudsman confirms that he looks forward to the Council's continued improvement to bring the Council closer to the target response time of 28 days.

7.11 It is part of the role of the Central Complaints team to monitor and chase the reply to LGO enquiries by individual business units to ensure compliance with the 28 day timescales set by the LGO. Over the past nine months a new process has been used to escalate to the Head of Customer Services any cases which are not completed within 21 days so that contact can be

made between senior management to prioritise this work. This has had a positive effect and year to date the performance in this area has improved significantly to an average response rate of 28.33 days.

7.12 In summary the Ombudsman congratulates the Council's efforts in consulting his investigative staff about appropriate remedies in individual cases. He states that the Council generally investigate complaints thoroughly and fairly and makes good use of his published guidance on remedies.

8. COMPLAINT CATEGORIES

8.1 All complaints are classified into a category that represents the explanation of the complaint. The following table shows the percentage breakdown by category. Table 12 illustrates the categories for all complaints logged by the Central Complaints Office.

Complaint category	2006-07 Outturn	2007-08 Outturn	2008-09 Outturn	Examples
Not to standard	6.4%	8.0%	10.4%	Hearing loops which were not working
Poor facility/building	0.0%	4.9%	1.6%	Computers out of service at a library
Broken promise/appointment	11.0%	1.0%	2.4%	Housing Options viewing cancelled
Staff attitude/conduct	11.0%	11.7%	10.2%	Rudeness by refuse staff
Breach of confidentiality	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	Releasing information to the wrong party
Denial/withdrawal of service	2.8%	3.2%	2.8%	Withdrawal of free visitors parking permits
Delayed/failed service	33.9%	53.4%	40.9%	Delays in planning enforcement cases
Lack of/incorrect information about service	3.7%	4.6%	8.3%	Change in opening hours not updated on literature
About legislation	1.0%	1.0%	0.4%	Concerns with legislation used by Pollution Team
About policy	12.8%	6.3%	12.2%	Increase in residents parking charges
Other	17.4%	6.1%	10.2%	Potential damage to property as a result of a tree

8.2 The most common complaint category remains Delayed/failed service for the third year. However About Policy has taken over from Staff attitude/conduct as the second highest.

Delayed/failed service complaints include the following examples

- Continuous non-collection of refuse bins
- Failure of planning enforcement to adhere to realistic timescales in taking enforcement action

About Policy complaints include the following examples

- Several complaints about the Choice Based Lettings System and customers believing that this policy is unfair to them
- Several complaints about parking policy including eligibility requirements for disabled parking and the increased charges to residents parking permits
- Complaint about Benefits policy to continue chasing of small debts when it is more cost effective to write off the debt

8.3 In the current year we are now requesting that all departments provide this level of detail on a monthly return about their Stage 1 complaints which will ensure we are able to give a complete

breakdown of complaint categories at all levels in next years report.

Table 13 shows a breakdown by business area of all complaint categories for all centrally logged complaints a total of 254 complaints.

TABLE 13 : CATEGORY BREAKDOWN	Not to Standard	Poor facility/building	Broken promise/appointment	Staff attitude/conduct or breach of confidentiality	Denial/withdrawal of service	Delayed/failed service	Lack of/incorrect information about a service	About legislation	About policy	Other	
CHIEF EXECUTIVES DEPARTMENT	2	1	2	7	0	1	13	1	0	7	2
Housing Options	1	0	1	7	0	1	5	0	0	6	2
Members Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Private Sector Housing/ Care & Repair	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Supporting People	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Housing Strategy/Planning Policy & Enabling	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Investigation Team	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
CHILDRENS SERVICES	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	4	0
Family & Community	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Learning & Skills	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	4	0
CITY SERVICES	6	0	4	7	0	2	30	3	0	4	4
Facilities/Strategic Support	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Recreation	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	1
Arboriculture Team	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cleansing	4	0	3	3	0	2	22	2	0	1	1
Grounds Maintenance/Parks & Rec	1	0	0	2	0	0	6	0	0	0	1
OPERATIONS	14	3	0	7	0	3	45	8	1	12	14
City Centre Service (Other)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Arts/Bereavement/Library	0	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
Sports Services	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	3
Highways/Traffic Management/Engineering	8	0	0	0	0	0	14	1	0	1	1
Street Lighting	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	0
Parking Services	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	5	2
Passenger Transport/Travel Choice	1	1	0	1	0	0	4	1	0	1	0
Epps/Food/Pest Control/Pollution	2	0	0	2	0	0	8	1	1	0	3
Taxi Enf/Trading Standards & Licensing/	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Planning/Building Control/Enforcement	1	0	0	1	0	0	8	2	0	2	4
STRATEGIC RESOURCES	2	0	0	5	1	1	13	8	0	4	1
Strategic Procurement	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Insurance	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Human Resources	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	3	0	1	0
Local Tax/Business Rates	0	0	0	1	1	0	6	2	0	3	1
Property (Asset Management)/Strategic Projects	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
VARIOUS	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	5
TOTALS	26	4	6	26	2	7	104	21	1	31	26

9. SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

9.1 Complaints are a valuable source of information and, where appropriate, services use this information to develop service improvements. For each Stage 2 complaint, the Central Complaints Office previously sent out follow up forms to the service area to identify what service improvements or actions have been implemented with respect to the complaint. The Stage 3 complaint recommendations also identify service improvements which are monitored by the Central Complaints Office. Many of these forms were not being returned to Central Complaints and therefore the process has recently been changed so that each Stage 2 and 3 complaint response is analysed and promised service improvements captured on the complaints database. A quarterly report will then be run and sent to departments to ensure they have carried out the improvements which they had identified. From April 2010 this will be extended to Stage 1 complaints and all returns from business units will be analysed and their identified service improvements will be collated and analysed quarterly.

9.2 The table below lists a few of these service improvements:

Department	Service Improvement
City Services	Issues raised in connection to the failure of regularly collecting refuse in particular areas in Peterborough lead to a procedure being implemented that meant the refuse crews radioed in the office to confirm these properties had been visited.
Cultural Services	A complaint regarding the lack of adequate heating in the John Clare theatre prompted the need for an additional process to be implemented when setting up the theatre for use.
Planning Services	Introduction of new procedure to ensure that proper file notes are used to record site visits and telephone contact in planning cases to prevent important information being missed.
Council Tax	More robust checking procedure implemented before a debt is passed to bailiffs to ensure recovery action does not proceed against innocent parties

9.3 Last year there was a request from Scrutiny Committee members to increase the amount of data available about complaint outcomes and categories. Without a combined electronic system this has always proved difficult. However we have recently put in place both an outcomes and category column in the Stage 1 returns which are sent from each business unit each month. From next year we will be able to report the total category types for all complaints across the Authority and the total number of complaints upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. This will allow us to depict a fuller picture of why customers complain.

9.4 Table 15 illustrates that almost half of all complaints received by the corporate complaints team were received via email or the online form. This highlights that the complaints pages on the councils website are easily accessible and customers feel confident using this route to log a complaint. The majority of these customers request their responses via email, and this is clearly the most cost effective way to deal with complaints.

How received	2008-09
Chief Exec's Office	7.1%
Email/Online Form	47.5%
Fax	0.0%
In Person	3.4%
In Writing	18.9%
Local Government Ombudsman	5.9%
Telephone	16.8%
Through a representative	0.4%

9.5 Therefore it is important that we focus on developing the complaints pages on the council's

website. This leads on from the objectives we set in last years report:

- Recent direction from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) advises that Authorities who promote their complaints service well increase their focus on customer service and this should lead to improvements in customer satisfaction.
- Better signposting on the Council Website would also lead to more direct action on service requests, leaving Central Complaints officers more time to review complaints for service improvements.

Now that the new Council Website has been launched we will be able to bring about significant changes to ensure enquiries are directed electronically with less delay.

10. IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Customer Service

Customer service and perception of the Council will improve if complaints are processed quickly and effectively. If complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity this ultimately saves time by more senior officers when complaints are escalated. If service improvements are identified and acted upon this will lead to fewer complaints in the future and improve the Council's reputation.

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

11.1 Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review 2008-09