

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Report for the Communities Directorate 2009/10

Judy Edwards, Director, Policy and Resources

Introduction:

Handling complaints appropriately, and using them as a source of feedback about services, is an important element of the Communities approach to community engagement and understanding. This report provides information on complaints received during 2009/10 and gives examples of where analysis has led to service change.

The main focus is on complaints, but for the sake of completion, statistics are also included about compliments and comments. All three categories represent 'unsolicited' feedback which, although not statistically representative, can nevertheless be valuable in service development.

The Communities Directorate adopted the revised and unified KCC Complaints Procedure in April 2009, and this is the first full year that all Units have operated their complaints procedures under the same set of standards. Several briefing sessions were held early in the year to communicate changes to standards and procedures to all units. New tools and templates were created to help units implement the standards locally while giving them enough flexibility to ensure they can introduce the procedures in a way that will be meaningful and useful to them and their service users.

The Directorate also continued with its Equalities Monitoring process, which has now been adopted as the corporate standard for all KCC directorates.

Statistics

The numbers of complaints, compliments and comments received in 2009/10 is shown in Table 1. The total number of complaints was 863 (up from 799 in 2008/09 and 521, 2007/08). We are not concerned by the increase in complaints received as the most significant contributing factors to the increase are likely to be the continued improvements to the understanding amongst staff about what constitutes a complaint that should be recorded, and the increased visibility of the complaints procedure to customers and service users.

It is generally recognised that an increase in the number of complaints does not necessarily mean poorer service and vice versa but even so, this information is taken seriously and service unit managers have reviewed it with their teams, alongside more formal satisfaction survey information. Data is now being monitored at quarterly intervals instead of six monthly.

Twenty four (24) complaints were made initially to the Managing Director during the year, but in 13 cases (54%) the unit concerned had not had the opportunity to resolve the complaint themselves and so the complaints were referred to the Unit Head for local resolution (known as Stage One in the Authority's complaints procedure). Eleven complaints (1.3% of all complaints) were raised formally with the Managing Director (Stage Two of the council's procedure). Of these, one was upheld and remedial action taken.

One complainant escalated matters to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), resulting in a finding of 'no maladministration'. A complaint about CMY originating in 2008/09 was also closed during the 2009/10 reporting period with the LGO finding that, whilst no maladministration had occurred, a procedural inconsistency warranted a 'local settlement' by way of a written acknowledgement to the complainant.

The high number of compliments received (1,247) is encouraging, with Libraries & Archives and the Registration Services, in particular, again all receiving high numbers of positive comments from customers. In addition there were an estimated 5,000 compliments for the "House" project which involved the Youth Service and KDAAT.

Compliance with standards

New corporate standards for complaints handling were introduced from April 2009 as follows: 3 working days to acknowledge a complaint (reduced from 5 days) and 20 working days to give a formal response (reduced from 25 - 28 days).

The percentage of complaints meeting KCC response standards is shown in Table 2. The majority of CMY Units achieved 100% compliance to these standards for sending out acknowledgements and responses to complainants.

The acknowledgement compliance rate for the Directorate as a whole decreased from 96% in 2008/09 to 87% in 2009/10. This decrease is not considered to be due to poorer performance but rather can be explained by last year's figure being artificially high as it did not include Libraries and Archives data as this was not routinely collected until this year.

Compliance with the response standard for the Directorate increased from 79% in 2008/09 to 96% in 2009/10. This is largely due to the improvements made to Libraries and Archives internal recording and reporting processes where the standard was met in 97% of complaints in 2009/10 compared to 68% in 2008/09. It's also worth noting the improvements in response times made in the Registrations Service which increased from 75% in 2008/09 to 90% in 2009/10.

Methods of communication

A high proportion of CMY complaints (63%) are received by Libraries (to be expected given the very high number of customers they deal with every year

and is not taken to be an indication of a generally poor service relative to others). So it is not surprising that most complaints were received by Library Comment Cards (45%)

The second highest method of contact was email, accounting for nearly a quarter (24.4%) of all complaints received. More than one in ten (11.1%) prefer to contact by phone while 9.5% prefer a letter. About three percent of complaints were received face to face (with the Youth Service accounting for more than two thirds of these). Very few are using online channels to contact us, but this might be because they prefer to raise the issue directly with the people they have been dealing with, which is in keeping with KCC complaints policy.

Compliments are again dominated by Library comment cards, but people are far less inclined to give compliments over the phone (1.4%) and prefer the written channels of email (17%) and letter (15%). A higher proportion of compliments are given face to face (4.1%) compared to complaints. Similarly comments are most often received via library comment cards (60%) while email (17%) and online (13%) are used for much of the rest.

Equalities Monitoring

It is a requirement to send equalities monitoring forms to complainants asking for information and the Directorate received 143 equalities monitoring forms returned from complainants in 2009/10 (compared to 3 in 2008/09). At 16.7% this is a significant percentage of the total number of complaints received, and suggests that the Directorate has achieved the right sort of balance in seeking equalities monitoring data. We are required to carry out this monitoring but we do get the occasional note from complainants questioning the value of the monitoring form. An equalities profile of complainants based on the forms returned to us is included at the end of this Appendix. We have concluded that no specific action is needed in response to the data received, as the equalities profile appears consistent with that of the county in general.

Reasons for complaints

The main grounds for complaints during 2009/10 tend to fall under one of the following themes (not in order of prevalence):

- Administrative errors and operational mistakes
- Availability of services (including accessibility and eligibility)
- Disagreement with decisions or policies made
- Dissatisfaction with services or products offered or received
- Impact of services on local residents and businesses
- Physical location, buildings and facilities
- Poor communication or information
- Prices, charges and fees associated with services
- Quality of the experience (directly delivered services)
- Relating to a third party supplier or contracted service provider

- Staff conduct and behaviour with service users
- Timings or delays involved in delivering services or responding

Service improvements

Examples of the ways in which services have already responded and introduced changes after analysing complaints and other feedback are given below:

- 1.1 Involvement in decision making - A number of community members and young people complained when a local school withdrew funding for the Community Youth Tutor, which led to the closure of some services. Following negotiations with the school concerned the Youth tutor position will be re-introduced. KDAAT is working on a new commissioning framework that will set out how service users, carers and other interested groups will be consulted, involved and informed throughout the commissioning process.

- 1.2 Improvements to procedures or business processes - All Trading Standards staff were reminded of the need to ensure every enquiry is recorded and procedures were changed to ensure officers working flexibly receive messages via their mobile phones. Community Warden's operational procedures and protocols were updated to address communications issues with Parish Councils. Adult Education Service (now Community Learning and Skills) has been refocused on the customer. This includes programme managers now focusing on one district to improve local knowledge, meet needs and improve local communications. The Arts Investment Fund application process has been launched early so the decision is finalised before the start of the next financial year.

- 1.3 Improved communications - Supporting People improved the information it provided about how the programme can assist people by making its leaflets and website content clearer. Several Trading Standards complainants were given an explanation of the Intelligence led approach to enforcement and this has also become a key message as part of the service's communications approach. The Youth Offending Service revised its advice on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. KEY Training has also improved its communications materials for learners and employers.

- 1.4 Improvements to service experience and quality - Supporting People updated its floating support referral form to make it easier for individuals to complete and to understand the services provided. Libraries Service updated its in-library PCs with the latest web browser (IE8) and included a more convenient link through the kent.gov.uk website for customers to access their PIN to use online services. Also books have been exchanged and changed at libraries throughout the county in response to comments received. Libraries have also agreed a standard greeting

with Contact Kent to avoid any confusion as to who the customer has reached when using the library service general contact telephone number. Adult Education website was upgraded to enable online enrolments and improved course information.

- 1.5 Improvements to customer feedback processes - Key Training introduced comment cards for learners to feedback their views more easily, and a process was introduced to capture learners' email to improve communications. Mystery shopping exercises are being carried out to highlight problems with customer care and centre standards. Supporting People now have monthly meetings between staff responsible for logging complaints and the Head of Service. Customers have said that they prefer their complaints to be dealt with locally so Libraries staff are encouraged to do this wherever possible, rather than initiate a formal investigation.

Staff training and information

The following training and information needs were identified during 2009/10 as a result of complaints monitoring and are being met during 2010/11:

- The Youth Offending Service is providing all staff with updated guidance on report preparation
- Staff have been given training on telephone technique and etiquette
- Libraries and Archives Service is holding a disabilities awareness day for staff and continues to offer NVQ Level 2 in Customer Service for frontline staff.
- KEY Training has raised awareness with its staff to ensure standards and procedures are complied with

Conclusions

All units' complaints handling procedures continue to be working well at a local level (Stage One). As with last year, only 1% of complainants took matters further (Stage Two complaint to the Managing Director). Positive action is being taken to respond to lessons learnt through complaints monitoring – through service development, training and through improvements to the complaints process itself. There is always room for improvement but Communities can be regarded as being well-managed in this respect.

*Contact Officer :Andrew Bose
Title: Public Involvement Manager, Communities Directorate
Telephone Number: 01622 694518
Email Address: andrew.bose@kent.gov.uk*

*Contact Officer: Andrew Swan
Title: Information Governance Officer, Communities Directorate
Telephone Number: 01622 221621
Email Address: andrew.swan@kent.gov.uk*

Table 1 - Numbers of complaints, compliments and comments 2009/10

Unit	Complaints		Compliments		Comments	
	09/10	08/09	09/10	08/09	09/10	08/09
Arts Development	3	2	42	21	2	0
Community Learning & Skills*	118	60	12	20	38	16
Community Safety	8	9	63	107	4	7
Coroners Service	1	**	0	**	0	**
Emergency Planning	0	0	0	0	0	0
KDAAT	11	10	12	2	10	0
Kent Scientific Services	31	28	14	10	1	1
Libraries & Archives	542	600	644	605	1615	372
Registration Service	10	8	265	180	0	0
Sport, Leisure & Olympics	0	4	32	37	7	0
Supporting Independence	2	6	16	120	0	0
Supporting People	19	***	30	***	0	***
Trading Standards	22	9	53	40	15	18
Turner Contemporary	7	4	64	29	1	1
Youth Offending Service	2	3	0	0	0	0
Youth Service	87	56	12	190	0	106
DIRECTORATE TOTAL	863	799	1247	1,361	1693	521

Table 2 - Compliance with acknowledgement and response time standards:

Unit	Acknowledged		Responded to	
	09/10	08/09	09/10	08/09
Arts Development	100%	100%	100%	100%
Community Learning & Skills*	94%	*	96%	*
Community Safety	100%	100%	100%	100%
Coroners Service	100%	**	100%	**
Emergency Planning	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
KDAAT	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kent Scientific Services	97%	100%	94%	100%
Libraries & Archives	84%	No data	97%	68%
Registration Service	60%	100%	90%	75%
Sport, Leisure & Olympics	n/a	100%	n/a	100%
Supporting Independence	100%	100%	100%	100%
Supporting People	79%	***	95%	***
Trading Standards	82%	No data	82%	100%
Turner Contemporary	57%	100%	86%	100%
Youth Offending Service	50%	100%	100%	100%
Youth Service	100%	100%	100%	98%
TOTALS	87.0	96%	96%	74%

*08/09 rate for KAES was 100% and 100% and for Key Training was 76% and 72%.

** 08/09 total was included in the Registration Service's count.

*** Supporting People joined Communities in September 2009 and so weren't included in our 2008/09 monitoring data.

TABLE 3 – Equalities profile of complaints (1st April 2009 – 31st March 2010):

Gender	Male	Female	Nil
	51	74	18

Age range	Up to 19	20-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66+	Nil
	0	1	1	13	7	21	56	4

	0-15	16-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81+
	0	0	4	6	4	7	10	5	4

Ethnic Origin	W British	W Irish	W&B Carib	W & Asian	W & B African	Other Mix	Indian	Bangladeshi	Pakistani	B Carib	B Afri	B other	Chinese	Nil
	129	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5

Disability	Yes	No	Nil	If Yes-DDA?
	27	105	11	15

Religion/Belief	Christian	Muslim	Jewish	Sikh	Buddhist	Hindu	None	Other	Nil
	76	0	2	1	0	0	13	1	49

Sexual orientation	Heterosex.	Bisex.	Lesb/Gay	Nil
	81	2	0	60

NOTES: During Q1/Q2 the age bands were adjusted, and so unfortunately returns are inconsistent. Both versions have been recorded for transparency. Also during Q1/Q2 the Religion/Belief & Sexual Orientation strands were added. Consequently 15 of 45 L&A forms returned during Q1/Q2 did not cover these strands. During Q3/Q4 only 7 of 60 L&A returned forms were also 'old' format.