

**By:** Mike Hill, Cabinet Member and Amanda Honey, Managing Director  
**To:** Policy Overview Committee – 17 September 2009  
**Subject:** Annual Complaints Report 2008/09  
**Classification:** Unrestricted

---

## **FOR INFORMATION**

**Summary:** This report provides Members with information arising from the operation of the Communities Complaints Procedure for 2008/09

---

### **1. Introduction**

1.1. 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 2008/09 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 as all three categories represent 'unsolicited' feedback which, although not statistically representative, is nevertheless very valuable in service development.

### **2. Statistics**

2.1. The numbers of complaints, compliments and comments received in 2008/09 is shown in Table 1, Appendix One. The total number of complaints was 799 compared with 521 recorded as having been received during 2007/08. A contributing factor to the increase in 2008/09 has been a better understanding amongst staff about what constitutes a complaint that should be recorded. 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. Trends will be closely monitored at 6 monthly intervals.

2.2. 34 complaints were made initially to the Managing Director during the year, but in 24 cases (76%) the unit concerned had not had the opportunity to resolve the complaint themselves and the complaints were referred back for local resolution (known as Stage One in the Authority's complaints procedure). 8 complaints (1%) were raised formally with the Managing Director (Stage Two in the procedure) and 1 complainant escalated matters to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). It resulted in a finding of 'no maladministration' and the case was closed in July 2009. A complaint about CMY during 2007/08 was also closed during the 2008/09 reporting period when the LGO determined that there were insufficient grounds for investigation.

2.3. The high number of compliments (1,361) is encouraging, with Libraries & Archives, the Youth Service, Community Safety and Registration Services, in particular, all receiving high numbers of positive comments from customers

### **3. Methods of communication**

3.1. Email is the most popular method for submitting a complaint with 39% of complaints being submitted this way, followed by phone (31%) and letter (25%). The remaining complaints were received in person and by fax (less than 1% combined). Most people prefer to put their complaints in writing (64%) but a significant minority use the phone. The range of methods used for complaining indicate that units must be able to provide the same high level of customer service and complaints handling no matter how the complaint was received.

### **4. Compliance with standards**

4.1. The majority of the Directorate's units achieved 100% compliance to 2008/09 standards for sending out acknowledgements and responses to complainants. Reference Table 2 in Appendix One. The compliance rate for the Directorate as a whole (based on figures where data is available) is 96% for acknowledgements and 74% for responses. The latter rises to 94% if Libraries is excluded (see paragraph 4.2 below).

4.2. The low compliance level found in Libraries has been investigated by senior managers and was traced to inconsistencies in how complaints are recorded and reported by some front line members of staff. This has been addressed and early indications for 2009/10 data show that improvements are already being made.

4.3. New corporate standards for complaints handling have been introduced in 2009/10 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 days). Future annual monitoring reports will be against these new standards which ensure KCC meets the standards recommended by the Local Government Ombudsman.

### **5. Equalities Monitoring**

5.1. The Communities Directorate received 3 completed equalities monitoring forms from complainants in 2008/09 and clearly this is insufficient to draw any meaningful conclusions. It is a statutory requirement to carry out this monitoring and low response rates are the rule rather than the exception. Good progress has been made in encouraging a higher response rate with 40 forms returned this year to date.

### **6. Reasons for complaints**

6.1. The main grounds for complaints during 2008/09 are categorised below. Capturing systematic information under these headings is a possible development for introduction in 2010 to enable better targetting of responses at service level.

- Timings or delays involved in delivering services or responding
- Price or pricing of services
- Availability of services (including accessibility and eligibility)
- Quality of the experience
- Physical location, buildings and facilities
- Dissatisfaction with services or products received

- Administrative errors and operational mistakes
- Disagreement with decisions or policies made
- Staff conduct
- Poor communication or information
- By association or about a third party

## **7. Service improvements**

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

### 7.2. Improved communications

The Community Safety Unit improved communications with Parish Councils and the public about the role of the Community Wardens. KEY Training simplified its induction booklet and other information that is given to service users. Turner Contemporary's website, communications and publicity messages were all made clearer to ensure that the public and local residents are kept well-informed and up to date about the project.

### 7.3. Improved service experience and quality

Libraries and Archives have made 226 local changes in response to comments from customers. Feedback is given to tutors if dissatisfaction has been expressed about Adult Education classes and they have been supported in making improvements. KEY Training has introduced a centralised 0800 contact number to help assure a quick response and better partnership working. Kent Youth Service's togogo website has been changed since its launch in response to feedback gained from users and a new version is scheduled for release winter 2009/10.

### 7.4. Increased convenience or reliability

If courses have had to be cancelled as a result of late notice of tutor unavailability, KAES has recruited new tutors and re-instated some courses. Car parking issues at some KAES centres have also been resolved by investigating local alternatives and telling students about alternative parking. The Registration service has speeded up certificate issue by simplifying the process. Kent Scientific Service has removed a 2MB maximum size filter set on the email system to speed up transfer of documents to clients.

### 7.5. Involvement in decision making

The Sports, Leisure and Olympics Service considered complaints about some of the rules during the Kent School Games and amended them as a result. The event specification will also be sent out earlier than previously. KEY Training has re-introduced a focus group to help share good practice and further identify areas where services could be improved.

## 7.6. Improved complaints management processes

The priority for improvement to the process during 2008/09 has been to consolidate consistent recording and reporting across the whole Directorate and implement new corporate requirements. Communities' staff are based in more than 200 different locations, and many are part time, so this has been a big undertaking over the last three years and will continue to be so.

A number of practical improvements to the process are also being introduced by individual units this year including:- giving front line staff an opportunity to give feedback about some "low level" expressions of dissatisfaction which may not warrant the application of formal complaints procedures; developing joint processes with other agencies to cover complaints that involve two or more organisations; incorporating analysis of complaints into future service and workforce development planning; and implementing complaints management training – reference para 11 below.

## 8. Staff training and information

8.1. The following training and information needs were identified during 2008/09 as a result of complaints monitoring and are being met during 2009/10:

Togogo data quality training for Youth Service HQ staff and Youth Centre staff

Library Management System training for all staff in Libraries

Tutor development and customer care for some frontline Adult Education staff

Development programmes for individual members of staff

Training on a new complaints management and reporting system in Turner Contemporary, especially for front of house staff.

Improved training for staff registering work in Kent Scientific Services.

Introduction of a package of targeted training for staff in KEY training including customer service.

Ensuring that any issues arising from complaints are fed into the workforce development programme for YOS staff.

## 9. Conclusions

9.1 All units' complaints handling procedures seem to be working well at a local level (Stage One), as only 1% of complainants took matters further. 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 is regarded as well managed in this respect.

## **10. Recommendations**

10.1. Members are asked to NOTE this report

*Contact officers*

*Andrew Bose, Public Involvement and Communications manager*

*Andrew Swan, Information Governance officer*

## APPENDIX ONE

Table 1 Numbers of complaints, compliments and comments 2008/09

Unit	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
Libraries and Archives	600	605	372
Adult Education Service	31	9	16
KEY Training	29	11	0
Arts Development Unit	2	21	0
Sport, Leisure & Olympics	4	37	0
Youth Service	56	190	106
Youth Offending Service	3	0	0
KDAAT	10	2	0
Community Safety	9	107	7
Trading Standards	9	40	18
Registration & Coroners	8	180	0
Kent Scientific Services	28	10	1
Emergency Planning	0	0	0
Turner Contemporary	4	29	1
SIP ( <i>including Kent Works</i> )	6	68 (+52)	0
<b>DIRECTORATE TOTALS</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>1,361</b>	<b>521</b>

Table 2. Compliance with acknowledgement and response time standards

Unit	Acknowledged	Responded to
Libraries and Archives	<i>No data</i>	68%
Adult Education Service	100%	100%
KEY Training	76%	72%
Arts Development Unit	100%	100%
Sport, Leisure & Olympics	100%	100%
Youth Service	100%	98%
Youth Offending Service	100%	100%
KDAAT	100%	100%
Community Safety	100%	100%
Trading Standards	<i>No data</i>	100%
Registration & Coroners	100%	75%
Kent Scientific Services	100%	100%
Emergency Planning	n/a	n/a
Turner Contemporary	100%	100%
SIP ( <i>Kent Works</i> )	100%	100%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>74%</b>