



# **Customer Relations**

## **Corporate Complaints & Commendations**

### **Annual Report April 2012 – March 2013**

## CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Purpose & Summary of Report                 | 2    |
| 2. Complaints & Commendations Analysis 2012-13 | 2    |
| 3. Departmental Details                        | 11   |
| 4. Monitoring the Process                      | 13   |
| 5. Final Comments                              | 14   |

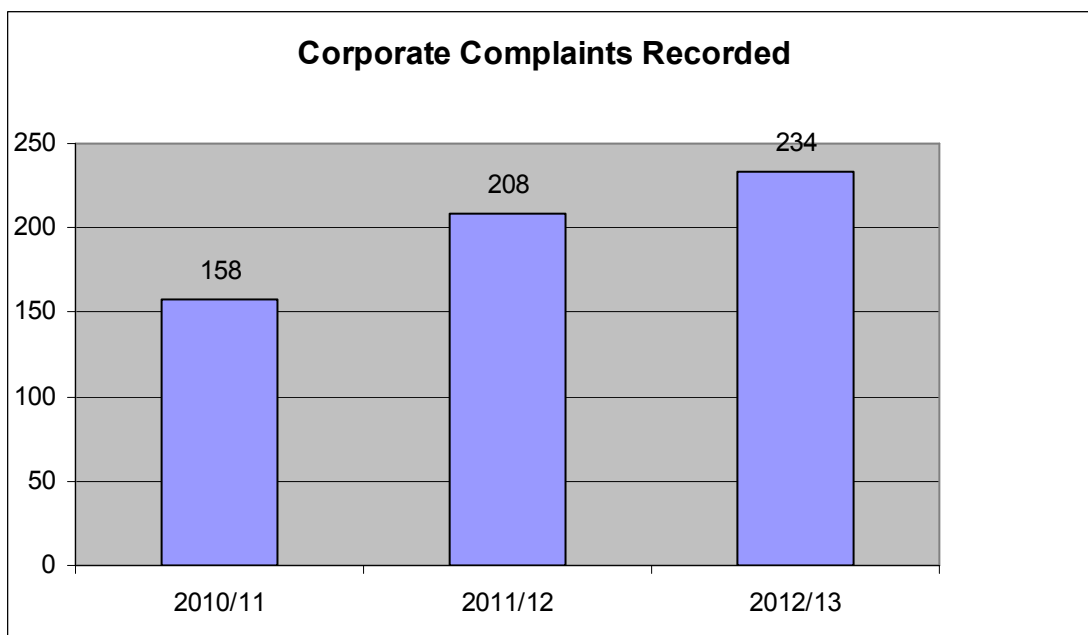
## 1. Purpose and Summary of Report

- 1.1 To report statistical information to Members and Officers detailing Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Corporate Complaints activity from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 including developments and planned improvements.

## 2. Complaints and Commendations Analysis

### 2.1 Complaint Volumes

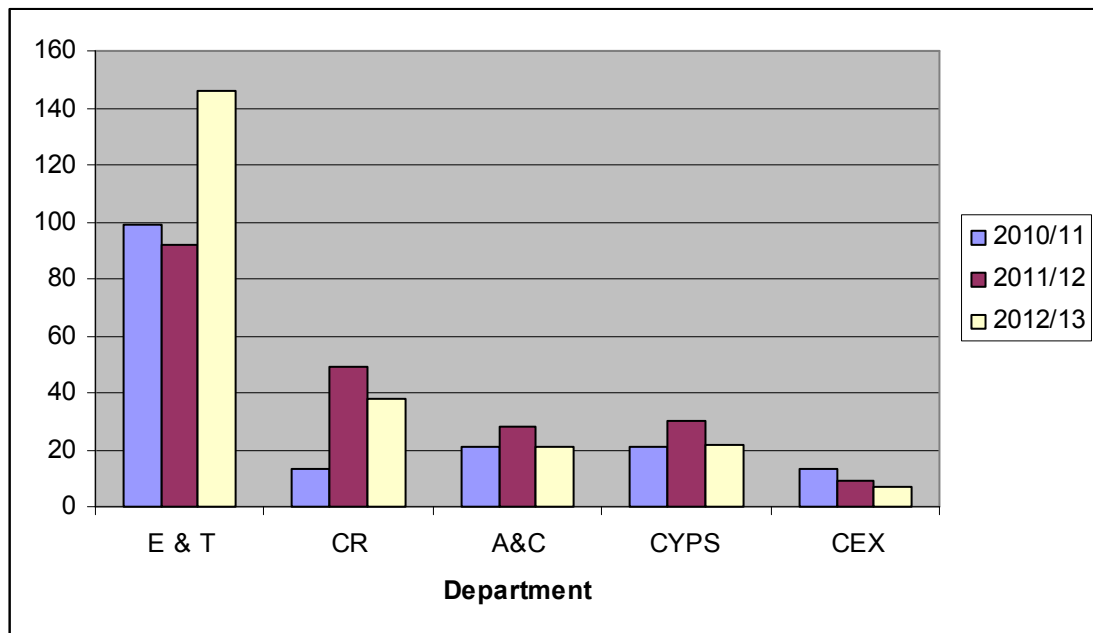
Table 1: Corporate Complaints recorded



As illustrated above the total number of corporate complaints received this year has increased by 26 (13%) since last year. Much work has been done with departments to ensure all complaints are captured and monitored, and as such this increase should not be viewed negatively.

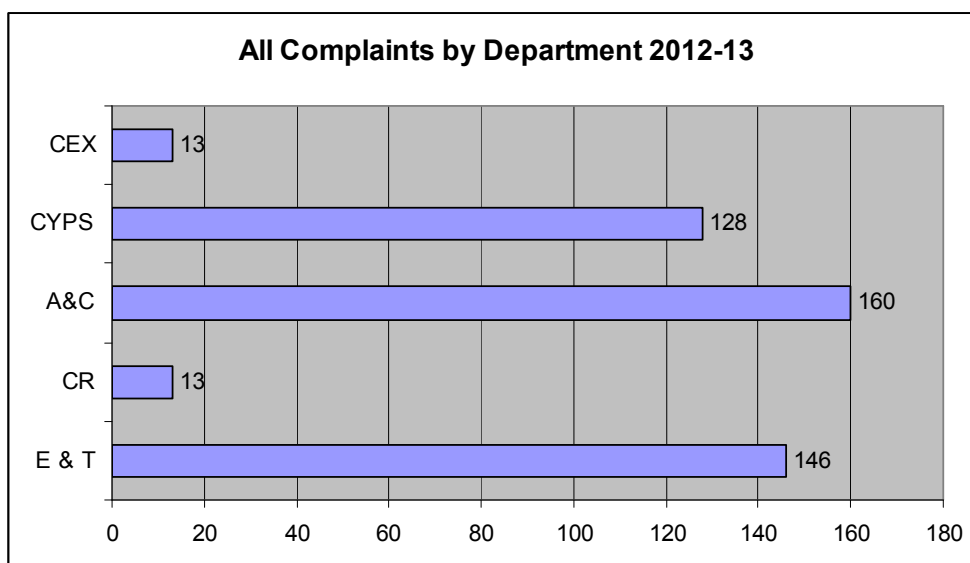
Both Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care complaints are governed by statutory regulations and are therefore not considered in this report. Separate annual reports are created for both areas and will be posted on our website once completed.

Table 2: Corporate Complaints by Department



The above table shows the departmental contributions to corporate complaints across the previous 3 years. As mentioned already, It is important to note that for both Children's and Young People (CYPS) and Adults and Communities (A & C) the bulk of their complaints are social care related and therefore are not presented here. With this in mind it is unsurprising that by far the largest contribution comes from the Environment & Transport department which has no separate statutory process.

To illustrate this better, the graphic below shows the total volume of all complaints (both social care & corporate) by department and shows the big 3 customer facing departments to be quite closely aligned in terms of overall volume. Both Corporate Resources and Chief Executives are predominantly inward facing and as such it is unsurprising these levels are low



For all departments except Environment & Transport, there has been a reduction in numbers of corporate complaints recorded. The E & T department has however seen a sharp rise in numbers (58%) The key themes behind this will be considered later.

## Complaint Causes

All complaints are mapped against a number of high level categories which are detailed in Table 3 below.

**Table 3 – What were complaints about?**

| Issues Raised in Complaints |     | Issues Upheld |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Communication               | 73  | 31            | 42% |
| - Appropriateness           | 19  | 5             | 26% |
| - Contact Problems          | 25  | 13            | 52% |
| - Co-ordination             | 19  | 3             | 16% |
| - Information Provision     | 43  | 18            | 42% |
| - Understanding             | 5   | 3             | 60% |
| Staff Conduct               | 44  | 15            | 34% |
| Practice & Procedure        | 45  | 7             | 16% |
| Service Delivery            | 108 | 34            | 31% |
| Confidentiality             | 2   | 1             | 50% |
| Plans/assessment            | 19  | 1             | 5%  |
| Other                       | 6   | 2             | 33% |

As can be seen from the table above, the issue most commonly raised is Service Delivery, which typically relate to process failings, such as maintenance schedules not being adhered to, poor work being carried out or incorrect information being generated.

The second highest category is communication, and within this sub-set, Information Provision and Contact problems feature highly. Typically this relates to complaints that the authority has not kept complainants up to date with affairs, or calls not being returned promptly. This is also the area that has seen the most number of complaints upheld.

Whilst the numbers of staff conduct complaints have increased from prior year, it is worth noting that only 34% (15 cases) of these were upheld. These cases all related to attitude and tone of staff either in telephone or face to face conversations.

Often complaints are about more than 1 aspect, and as such the totals do not balance with overall numbers. This is considered a weakness and with effect from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, an assessment will be made by the Customer Relations team as to what was the dominant cause for the complaint. This classification will be made using “root cause analysis” techniques which is a recognised best practice approach.

A review of the categorisation is also been undertaken to make them more specific than at present. For example Service Delivery can cover a multitude of topics and does not make it easy to pick out any key learning points.

## Accessibility

Once again the vast majority of complainants describe themselves as White British at 91%, however when set against the local area breakdown as supplied by the Research & Information unit (89% White British) this would not appear to indicate any adverse impact.

51% of complaints were raised by Males and 49% by females

A review of the website content has been carried out which has simplified the content and it is encouraging that e-contact (web-forms or e-mail) remains on the up representing 64% of corporate complaints received

## Compliments

101 compliments were recorded across all services (excluding social care) during 2012/13 which marks an increase on prior year (66). In particular the Libraries teams have seen a large rise in recorded compliments, with 31 coming for this area alone. It is encouraging to see greater visibility of the good work that is being delivered by the department which has been a key objective of the Customer Relations team this year. It is however accepted that there is more we can do here and this will remain a key priority for the year ahead. A small selection of the comments received appear below.

- The library has made such a difference to my life by being able to borrow talking books since being ill and registered disabled
- I'd like to thank you, your colleagues and the Job Club for all your help. You've been great and I've now got a job
- Modern society sadly means there is a lack of community, leading to loneliness and even depression. Groups like this (knitting group) are vital so that young and old can mix and give support and share skills and advice at times. It is essential that these projects are supported and encouraged
- Very impressed by the welcome I received from Reception, who communicated with me using sign language and gave me a very warm reception warmest welcome I have received from any of the councils I work with.

- Just like to congratulate you on gritting during current snow. all I hear on local radio are moaners and wingers, I think your efforts have been outstanding!!! keep up the good work, many thanks
- 'Marshals were very calm and polite despite abuse from motorists - they did a sterling job re marshalling the marathon
- I am sure I speak for those in our immediate neighbourhood in thanking you, and other members of your department, for listening to our fears of increased flooding risks and moving the tables from their original positions
- All way mark posts & signs on my route were in position and as is customary with Leicestershire, clearly visible. Well done!
- I have special needs and every time I come to the Library they make me welcome and when I cannot find my books they help me. With all the help of the staff I learned how to read and how to use the computer. The staff are all very special to me
- I received such excellent service from the customer service centre that I felt I had to contact you to congratulate your team. Your operator was attentive, efficient, polite, thoughtful, knowledgeable and caring to the issues I raised. All-in-all extremely helpful and demonstrated excellent customer care skills

The Customer Relations Team will continue to work closely with departments to try to reflect all the positive feedback received across the teams.

Performance against timescales: How responsive have we been?

Table 4: Corporate Complaints Performance

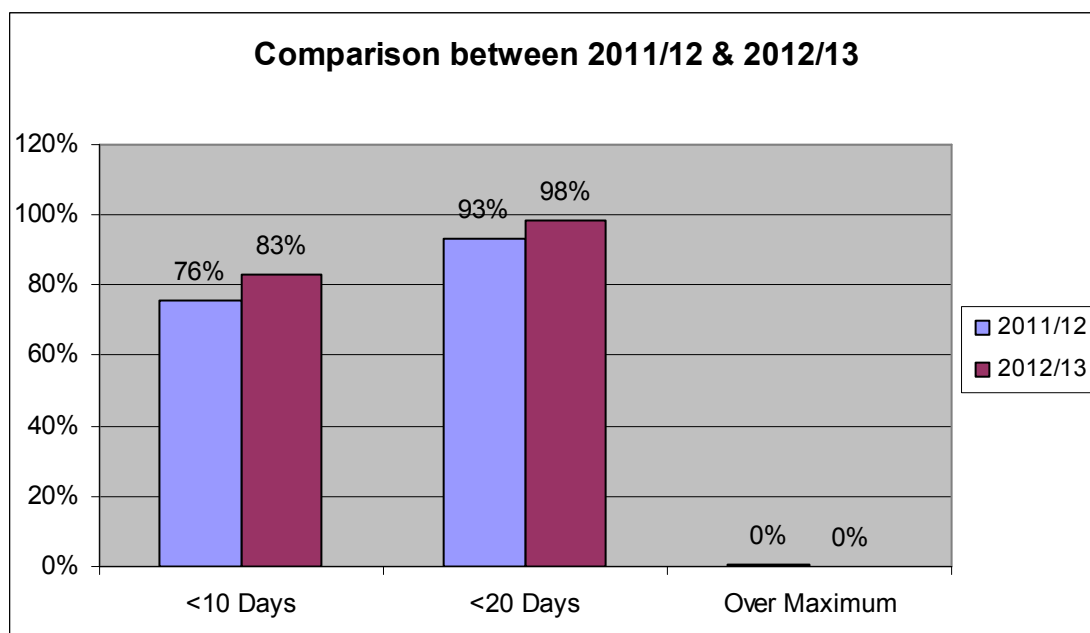


Table 4 above shows the detail of time taken to respond to complaints, providing a comparison between the current reporting year and the previous one. The table shows an improved compliance with our internal best practice target of 10 working days, with 83% now achieving this target. Performance has also improved in terms of compliance with the 20 day timescale at an impressive 98%. These are pleasing figures and reflect the strong collaborative working with service managers.

No complaints were recorded as outside of the maximum 60 working days, which continues the strong progress made since 2010-11 when an unacceptable 14 complaints exceeded this mark.



## Complaints Outcomes & Resolutions

Table 5: Corporate complaints recorded by outcome.

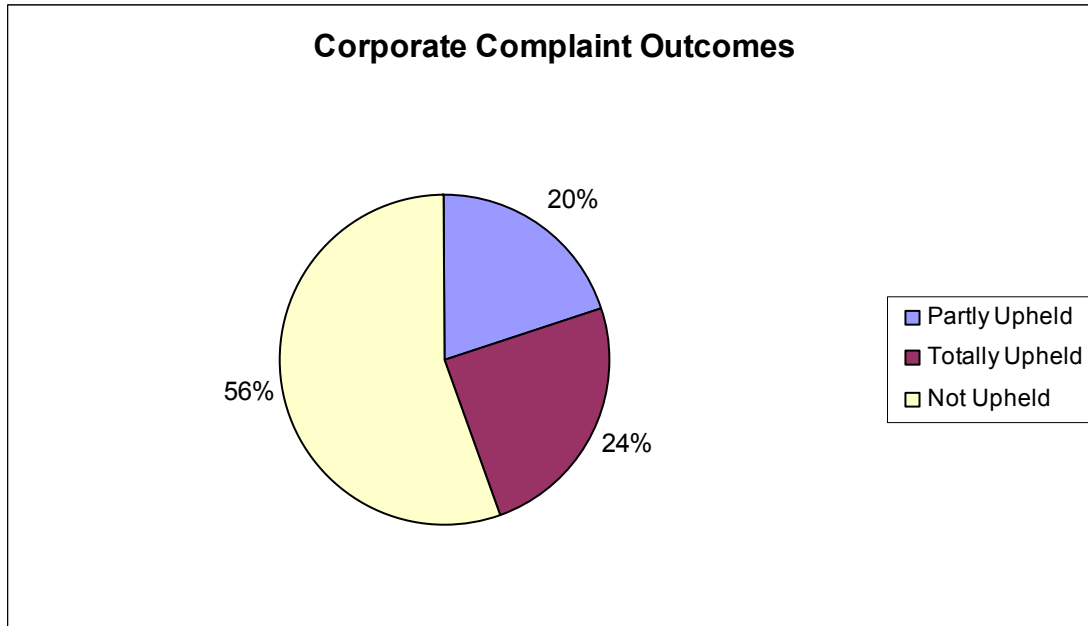


Table 5 above shows that a majority (56%) of complaints responded to were “not upheld”. 24% were fully upheld, with a further 20% of complaints having some element of the complaint upheld.

The fact that only 24% of complaints are recorded as “fully upheld” does not necessarily mean that complaints received are not reasonable or have no value. It is always important to listen to what we are being told about our service in order to put matters right at the earliest opportunity, and to learn and improve.

It should also be noted that some of the complaints classified as “not upheld” concern matters which are outside of our jurisdiction to respond to, for example those about actions or decisions made by other organisations. It is proposed with effect from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 to record these under a separate category of “Not Applicable” which better reflects the decisions reached.

### Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

The Local Government Ombudsman investigated 23 cases during 2012/13, of which 2 remain open. Of the 21 that have been resolved, the following outcomes were seen

- 3 cases were subject to an Ombudsman report finding maladministration relating to our approach to carrying out School Transport walking route assessments<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There were 5 complaints settled as part of this report, but 2 cases were referred to Ombudsman in 2011-12

The Ombudsman report asked the authority to revise its policy to take account of national guidance and then carry out fresh assessments for each of the complainants. Time and trouble payments were also made to each of the parties involved.

The Council has reviewed the policy in this area and the Ombudsman has confirmed it is now compliant.

- A further 2 cases were settled locally under the same terms.
- All of the remaining 16 cases were discontinued at the Ombudsman discretion as no or insufficient evidence of maladministration could be found.

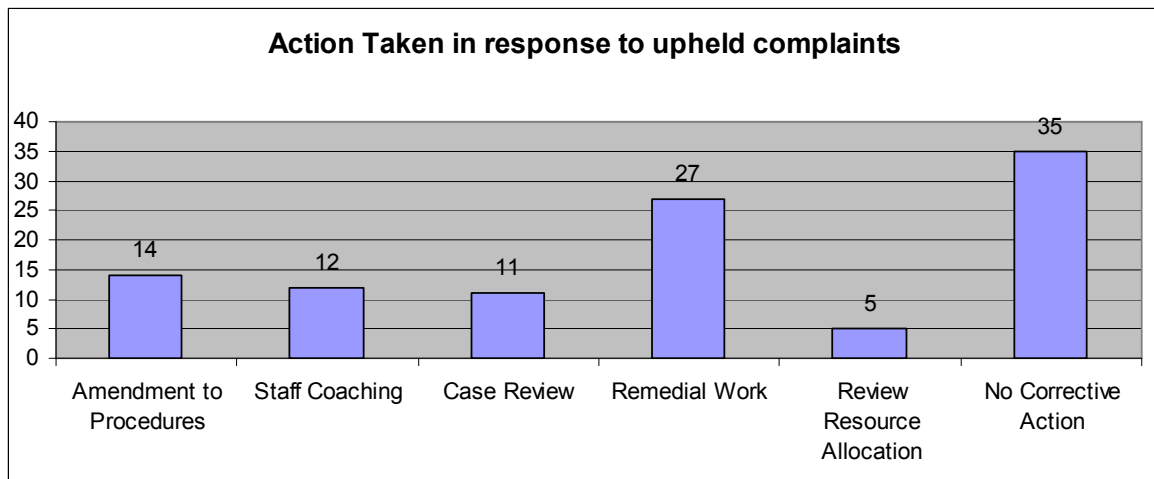
At time of writing the Ombudsman has not released her annual report on the Council's performance, but it is not anticipated that this will cite any concerns with complaints administration.

## Learning from Complaints

### Corrective action taken

Each of the 104 complaints either partly or fully upheld have been reviewed to ascertain what action the department has taken to learn from the complaints and avoid such issues occurring in the future.

Table 6 below provides a breakdown of the action taken.



The results indicate that in many cases there is no specific action to be taken aside from fixing the immediate problem. Indeed the combined figure of remedial work and No Corrective action equates to 60% of the cases. In this light, in just 40% of upheld complaints has the Council been able to identify a learning point from the situation.

It should be noted that some initiatives have been implemented as part of wider feedback rather than as a direct result of a complaint. An example of this is the

decision to review the way we manage drain maintenance. Whilst this review was not commissioned solely on the back of complaints, they have clearly played a part in this decision. Notwithstanding this, it is felt that more work is needed to show the link between complaints and service improvements.

Specific actions taken include the following

- Instigate a review of how LHO work with the Highways Management Group
- Further roll-out of automated e-mail updates to customers reporting Highway defects
- Introduce a system whereby Blue Badge renewals are prioritised by expiry dates
- Team Manager has adopted a formal discipline of reviewing case-loads of Senior Engineers before periods of annual leave.
- Involve Facilities Management team to look at options around parking barriers at Watermead CP
- Review how we communicate with utility companies regarding working on our Highways.
- Terminated contract for SEN taxi operation following investigation of complaint

### **Summary: What have we done well and where can we improve?**

#### **What are we doing well?**

- Response timescales have improved further to a very strong position
- Continued low numbers of complaints seeking escalation to the Ombudsman
- Customer Relations and Departmental Managers continue to work well in partnership building on the relationship developed in previous years

#### **What do we need to improve?**

- Implement an effective mechanism for assessing satisfaction rates with complaints handling.
- Improve identification and recording of learning from complaints.
- Establish clearer visibility of interactions not classified as complaints but where the Customer Relations team has been involved.

### 3. Departmental Details

#### Environment and Transport

The table below shows a monthly breakdown of complaints received within the Environment & Transport department, along with detailed information around response times.

|              | Received   | Outstanding | Complaints completed in the month |                   |                              |                   |                |                        |              |              |              |              |
|--------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|              |            |             | Responses                         |                   |                              | Complaints Upheld |                | Investigation Duration |              |              |              |              |
|              |            |             | On time                           | Late <sup>2</sup> | Late & Over Max <sup>3</sup> | Number            | % of Responses | Up to 10 days          | 11 - 20 days | 21 - 35 days | 36 - 60 days | Over 60 days |
| April        | 8          |             | 7                                 |                   |                              | 3                 | 42.9%          | 7                      |              |              |              |              |
| May          | 13         |             | 11                                |                   |                              | 2                 | 18.2%          | 8                      | 3            |              |              |              |
| June         | 9          |             | 8                                 |                   |                              | 4                 | 50.0%          | 5                      | 3            |              |              |              |
| July         | 7          |             | 8                                 |                   |                              | 5                 | 62.5%          | 6                      | 2            |              |              |              |
| August       | 16         |             | 10                                | 1                 |                              | 5                 | 45.5%          | 10                     | 1            |              |              |              |
| September    | 15         |             | 15                                | 2                 |                              | 12                | 70.6%          | 15                     | 2            |              |              |              |
| October      | 11         |             | 14                                | 1                 |                              | 9                 | 60.0%          | 13                     | 2            |              |              |              |
| November     | 13         |             | 6                                 |                   |                              | 3                 | 50.0%          | 6                      |              |              |              |              |
| December     | 22         |             | 27                                | 2                 |                              | 3                 | 10.3%          | 26                     | 3            |              |              |              |
| January      | 10         |             | 9                                 |                   |                              | 3                 | 33.3%          | 9                      |              |              |              |              |
| February     | 9          |             | 7                                 |                   |                              | 2                 | 28.6%          | 7                      |              |              |              |              |
| March        | 13         |             | 12                                | 1                 |                              | 6                 | 46.2%          | 12                     | 1            |              |              |              |
| April on     |            |             | 5                                 |                   |                              | 3                 | 60.0%          | 2                      | 3            |              |              |              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>146</b> |             | <b>139</b>                        | <b>7</b>          |                              | <b>60</b>         | <b>41.1%</b>   | <b>126</b>             | <b>20</b>    |              |              |              |
|              |            |             | 95.2%                             | 4.8%              |                              |                   |                | 86.3%                  | 13.7%        |              |              |              |

The key areas of note is that the department has performed strongly in terms of response timescales, with an impressive 86% responded to within 10 days (3% higher than overall performance)

The bulk of the complaints were recorded against the Highways branch with 110. 28 Complaints were about Transport matters with just 8 relating to the Environment services.

Information is not currently segmented at a lower level, though from April 1st 2013, all complaints are now mapped at a third category (service area) which will enhance reporting of trends.

Whilst there are no major seasonal spikes, in December 22 complaints were recorded. This figure was heavily impacted by an organised chain complaint regarding concerns over a lack of action to support flooding problems. A total of 11 households wrote in separately about this issue which largely explains this uplift.

Heavily influenced by the weather conditions, the most common areas complained about over the year were Flooding (16) & Drain / Gulley maintenance (13)

Roadwork co-ordination (11) and Street lighting (7) also featured prominently

Areas which saw a significant decrease from prior year were Gritting (just 5 complaints) & Grass cutting (7)

The major complaint theme was around information provision, specifically around the department's ability to provide timescales for work to be carried out and completed. This is an area which is being progressed jointly by the Service Centre and Highways teams.

### Corporate Resources

With 38 corporate complaints recorded, the Corporate Resources department has the second largest contribution.

Property Services received the most with 19 - almost exclusively relating to parking management issues at County Hall.

The next highest area is Customer Services & Operations with the majority linked to the Customer Service Centres. Principally these were around call wait times or customer service skills of the Operator. These account for a further 15 complaints.

### Children's and Young Peoples

With the majority of social care complaints considered under statutory complaints procedures, this department saw just 22 complaints considered under the corporate framework.

10 complaints related to Social Care, but were made by individuals falling outside of the eligibility criteria for the statutory complaints procedure.

Other areas seeing multiple complaints were Special Educational Needs with 4 and Admissions with 4.

### Adults and Communities

Again the majority of social care complaints have been considered under statutory regulations.

With 16 of the 22 complaints, Libraries services received the highest number of complaints. There was no dominant theme here though, with complaints ranging from noise levels, reservation charges, availability of computers and staff attitude. All were resolved promptly at a local level.

### Chief Executives

Just 7 complaints were recorded against the Chief Executives department.

Legal Services were the only service which saw more than 1 complaint, all related to decisions reached by staff members.

## **4. Monitoring the Process**

The Customer Relations team continue to support services to manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered are

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Production of Performance Reports
3. Liaison with Local Government Ombudsman
4. Quality Assurance of complaint responses
5. Complaint handling training for Operational Managers
6. Scrutiny and challenge to complaint responses.
7. Support with persistent and unreasonable complainants.

During this reporting period, no complaints handling workshops have been run for non social care managers. The Customer Relations team are keen to promote this facility further over the next year.

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to managers in drafting responses to complaint investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response and that due process is followed.

Quarterly performance reports are created and presented to Departmental Management Teams (DMT) as appropriate. The Customer Relations Manager also regularly meets with each department's Intelligent Client each quarter to talk through complaints matters.

During the year the Customer Relations Manager used the Council's vexatious complainant policy on 3 occasions, implementing restricted communications protocols. This has proved an effective way of controlling difficult and complex complaints.

During 2013/14, the Customer Relations team will focus on:

- Improving the learning from complaints considered. This will be helped by more detailed root cause analysis by the Customer Relations unit.
- Continuing to increase the visibility of compliments across the departments
- Maintaining the strong track record of timely complaint responses.

- Implementation of a revised approach to monitoring satisfaction levels of complainants.

## **5. Final Comments**

Overall this has been another positive year for complaints management across the board. During the year, there has been a change of the designated complaints manager, but this has been a smooth transition, and a number of positive developments have been made in terms of ability to record and track complaints.

The Customer Relations Team continue to get strong support and commitment from Service Managers and Heads of Service, emphasised by the excellent response timescales achieved.

This page is intentionally left blank