

**THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA****CABINET – 25 MARCH 2010****REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR FINANCE,  
INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND PROPERTY****IMPROVING THE ORGANISATION BY LEARNING FROM  
COMPLAINTS**

This report provides the annual commentary on learning points from complaints received by departments since January 2009. It also includes the annual report by the Ombudsman.

**FOR INFORMATION****1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 A report is presented to Cabinet every year on complaints received by the Council.
- 1.2 The information in **Appendix A** of the report sets out lessons learned by each Business Group and improvements made to service delivery where necessary.
- 1.3 The Council's corporate complaints process comprises: :
  - Informal Stage: users are advised to raise their concerns with a Council officer directly either face-to-face, by telephone, email or in writing. Most matters are resolved at this stage.
  - Stage One: if unhappy with the response to the informal complaint, users are advised to tell the officer they are dealing with that they wish to take the complaint further. An online complaints form can also be completed, and will be sent to the relevant department. The complainant should receive a reply within 15 working days.
  - Stage Two: if the Service User is unhappy with the response received after stage one. The complaint then escalates to the

head of the relevant section. The head of the section will investigate further and respond within 15 working days.

- Stage Three: the complaint can then be escalated to the Director or Executive Director for review, if the user remains unhappy. The complainant will receive a response within 15 days.
- Local Government Ombudsman: if the service user is unhappy with the response to the previous stage, the final part of the process involves referral to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will investigate complaints that fall within its remit which have been through the process outlined above but not yet reached a resolution.

- 1.4 The majority of Council services follow this process. However, statutory social care complaints processes are in place within both Families and Children's Services and Housing Health and Adult Social Care. These follow the same number of steps as the corporate process but involve different activities to those outlined above.
- 1.5 Within Family and Children's Services complainants are offered an interim stage between stage one and two, during which they will facilitate a resolution meeting where the complainant and council offers involved are invited to meet to discuss issues face to face. Figures for the number of complaints which are resolved at this stage are not monitored, and so are not available for this report. Stage two within this process is the investigation stage. This involves an independent investigation due to respond to the complainant within 25 working days. Stage three convenes a review panel which consists of three independent people who produce a recommendation and a written report which is sent to the complainant, those who have been involved in the complaints process and the relevant Director for review. The director then has 15 days to provide a written response to the complainant.
- 1.6 Prior to the end of 2009 the Adult Social Care complaints process entailed the same activities as those within Family and Children's Services, except that there is no interim stage between stages one and two. However, following new regulations issued by the Department of Health, complainants have the right to take their concerns to the Local Government Ombudsman after the first response provided by the service.



	<b>3</b>	1	<b>3</b>	2	<b>0</b>	2	<b>3</b>	0
<b>Families and Children's Services</b>								
Community Learning	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>95</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Family Services	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>26</b>	31	<b>0</b>	6	<b>1</b>	1	<b>1</b>	2
Schools Quality and Standards	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>2</b>	2	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0
<b>Housing Health and Adult Social Care</b>								
Adult Social Care	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>55</b>	60	<b>NA</b>	3	<b>NA</b>	4	<b>4</b>	0
Housing	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>60</b>	41	<b>12</b>	13	<b>6</b>	9	<b>4</b>	8
Environmental Health Private Housing Team	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>4</b>	4	<b>1</b>	1	<b>0</b>	0	<b>2</b>	0
Food Safety	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>1</b>	1	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0
Health and Safety	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	

	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>1</b>	1	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0
Noise and Nuisance Team	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>13</b>	6	<b>3</b>	2	<b>0</b>	1	<b>0</b>	1
Pest Control	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>0</b>	2	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0
Totals	Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
	<b>399</b>	399	<b>39</b>	55	<b>12</b>	20	<b>17</b>	12

1.9 The 2007/8 learning from complaints report recorded a total of 265 formal complaints received, with a further 12 Local Government Ombudsman investigations. This figure does not include complaints received by Environmental Health and Trading Standards or some services within Transport and Leisure Services, as the number of complaints in this area were not provided. Considering this, the number of complaints received annually seems to have been steady over the past three years, with no significant trends regarding an increase or decrease evident during this period.

1.10 Due to the new regulations regarding Adult Social Care complaints there are no figures for level two or three complaints in 2009. There are instances where the number of complaints investigated by the Ombudsman is greater than the number in the preceding stage of the council's process. This is either because a complaint meets one of the exception criteria discussed above, or that the progression through the council's complaints system happened during the previous reporting period.

## **2. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE OMBUDSMAN**

2.1 A copy of the annual report from the Ombudsman is attached as **Appendix B**.

### **3. RECOMMENDATION**

3.1 Members are asked to note and comment on the report.

Nicholas Holgate

**Executive Director for Finance, Information Systems and Property**

**Business Group: Transport Environment  
and Leisure Services**

Service(s): Across Business Group

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>62</b>	70	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	5

2008 and 2009 figures were not collected according to the new calendar year process and data has been cumulated from previous reporting structure, which was twice yearly from each financial year.

**Further information**

There are no significant trends across the business group. There are a higher number of complaints across Arts and Leisure Service in 2008/9. This is balanced by the volume of praise for the service in this year.

For Parking Services in 2008 the number of cases referred to the Ombudsman remained higher in numbers in comparison to figures over the previous years. Of the five complaints, the Ombudsman was unable to uphold cases where it was concluded there was no reason for the customer not to pursue fully the statutory penalty notice process available to them. They concluded that the appropriate representation and appeals process had not been exhausted under the legislation available. In one case to the Ombudsman, remuneration was paid as compensation for the trouble the customer had experienced in order to retrieve a refund of monies owed to him by the Council. The Ombudsman accepted this as a fair settlement.

It should be noted that complaints of parking tickets issued does not form part of this report as it is covered under a statutory process beyond the formal complaints scope

**Lessons Learned**

There were no significant trends regarding complaints over this period. One complaint highlighted a training issue which has been acted upon accordingly. Over the course of the two years, several complaints have been received regarding the tennis courts; this has resulted in a scheduled approach to repairs and resurfacing of the more severe

potholes in the short term, whilst refurbishment of all tennis courts will commence in autumn 2010.

## **Praise**

There were 67 recorded comments for 2008 for the business group. Highways and Construction Service had a high number.

In 2009 there were 55 instances of praise recorded in TELS.



## **Business Group: Development**

## **Planning and Borough**

Service(s):  
Services

Building Control and Planning

### **Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>55</b>	46	<b>12</b>	8	<b>5</b>	2	<b>7</b>	4

The method of recording complaints changed during late 2008 and more letters which had been dealt with as general correspondence previously were registered as Stage 1 complaints. This practice has continued throughout 2009.

The vast majority of complaints are dealt with at stage 1 and the response is drafted by the officer responsible and checked by a senior manager. Only a small number escalate to stage 2 or beyond.

### **Further information**

The nature of planning's work is that a number of complaints are received relating to decisions that have been made perfectly properly, but with which complainants disagree because it affects them or their property. Often complainants have disregarded or forgotten about consultations that were sent to them and which are logged on the system, and this distorts the data and puts an unfair skew on the figures – the number of complaints about improper process or dealings with officers is a relatively small percentage of the total, perhaps 25% at the most.

Several complaints in early 2009 were about the speed with which applications were being processed. It is true that the Department had a backlog at that time and these complaints were justified – this has now been corrected and application turnaround is achieving in excess of 90% within eight weeks.

### **Lessons Learned**

It is clear that speed of processing is important to customers and a great deal of effort has gone into improving this, with a subsequent reduction in the number of complaints relating to it.

We also know that we have been poor at responding to letters, e-mails or phone messages which has given rise to some complaints. To address this we will put into place a post scanning and monitoring system which will enable us to track where the problems are, evidence them and improve them. It is anticipated that this new system will be in place by spring 2010.

Complaints which relate to officer attitudes are fortunately few and far between, but where they do arise they have been dealt with by the senior manager responsible for the individual and the situation monitored in future.

The Interim Executive Director has noted that "customer care" is a key issue in the Royal Borough and has put under way a number of initiatives, including special staff sessions on customer care, and topic discussions with groups of planning agents and conservation bodies, in order to heighten staff perceptions and improve performance.

## **Praise**

Very few people bother to write giving praise. However we have received e-mail praising prompt action by enforcement officers, the new web layout and the helpfulness of some case officers. Unfortunately these are not logged – we will consider doing this in future. For staff morale, the recording of praise received from the public is important, and the Executive Director records most items in his weekly Newsletter which circulates to all staff.

## **Business Group:**

**Corporate Services**

## **Service:**

Registrars

### **Number of complaints received**

<b>Level One</b>		<b>Level Two</b>		<b>Level Three</b>		<b>Local Government Ombudsman</b>	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>2</b>	NA	<b>1</b>	NA	<b>0</b>	NA	<b>0</b>	NA

2008 figures are not applicable as this is the first year the Registration Service has been asked to complete such an exercise.

### **Further information**

The Registration Service is a "shop window" service for the Royal Borough and the nature of our day-to-day business involves dealing with people at emotional and stressful times of their lives (i.e. the joy of a new-born baby; the sorrow at the death of a relative or the excitement of a marriage, civil partnership or British Citizenship ceremony. There is plenty of scope for complaint if we "don't get it right" first time. Each couple attending to give Notice of Intent or marrying or forming a civil partnership are given a comment for to gain feedback on our service, likewise, new British Citizens. The formal complaints we receive are minimal and during January – December 2009 the written complaints have numbered just two.

### **Lessons Learned**

Of the two complaints received one was regarding ceremonial content and the other was following some unguarded comments by a part-time registrar.

The first complaint was as a result of misunderstanding between various people and families at the ceremony and gives no cause for concern as attending couples clearly state their ceremonial requirements on a pro-forma "Programme of Events" insert within the ceremony pack.

### **Praise**

Questionnaires Returned **284**

Overall Satisfaction:

**81% excellent**                      **17% Very Good**      **2% Good**      **0% Fair**      **0% Poor**

Unsolicited letters of thanks & E-mails received January – December 2009

*(N.B. These are letters of appreciation for all aspects of our service and are sometimes accompanied with the questionnaire or may relate to other events such as family history research, speed of service, etc.)*

## **Business Group:**

**Corporate Services**

Service(s):

Customer Services

### **Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>20</b>	25	<b>2</b>	12	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0

### **Further information**

Customer Service offers the first point of contact for a number of council services through managing the Customer Service Centre, Westway Information Centre and both corporate Contact Centres. As a result we are a high volume service, with over 200,000 face to face visitors and around 600,000 calls to our contact centres over the course of a year.

### **Lessons Learned**

Within the Customer Service Centre the majority of complaints received are in relation to waiting times. Although the average waiting times have reduced since the opening of the Customer Service Centre, a number of initiatives are in place which are hoped to reduce the waiting times experienced by residents. These include developing the Online Parking Permit Renewal scheme and the use of Smartpoint by advisors in order to shorten transaction times. The Contact Centre is undertaking a programme of cross training all of the Advisors in order to improve call handling rates and reduce pressure on high volume services such as Council Tax.

### **Praise**

Within Customer Service we have several feedback mechanisms in place which capture praise for our services. Since March 2009 this has included the use of GovMetric across the Customer Service Centre and two Contact Centres, this allows service users to rate the service they received on a three point scale of good, average and poor. During this time 74 percent of users of the Customer Service Centre users have rated the service they received as good, and 92 percent of customers calling the contact centre reported that the service they received was good.

A feedback card system operates alongside GovMetric within the Customer Service Centre. 309 positive comments have been received within 2009. A sample of these comments can be found below.

*'I came in very disgruntled but [you] calmed me and were very polite and helpful. Gave fantastic information'*

*'Hassel free, great service – all very pleasant - comfortable, calm ambiance.'*

The GovMetric system in place in the Contact Centres allows customers to leave general feedback as well as scoring the service on a three point scale.

*'Very pleased with service, waiting time was very short. The person who dealt with enquiry was extremely efficient, helpful and knowledgeable. I wish everybody's services were as professional as I got today.'*

*'I called this morning after losing my birth certificate, I didn't know which way to turn, its extremely important to everybody, the gentleman I spoke to was very courteous, dealt with it immediately and gave me all the information I needed straight away and it was an excellent service, it was very good, thank you very much indeed'*

*'The person I spoke to at the council tax office today was absolutely fantastic, in fact, every time I call the council tax office, they are always brilliant. Always well informed and very, very polite. Asking for Council Tax money is not the easiest job, but they are a really good team. I was having a refund which was even better, and they have done everything so quickly, far more quickly than I would have imagined and far more quickly than most people would normally do. A very good team, I'm very lucky to live in the borough'*

*'I'm just letting you know that I phoned today and the man that helped me was very very helpful, very clear spoken and was very polite and that's exactly what you need when you are phoning up about a housing situation, thank you very much'*

*'I would just like to say that I was making a call to the social services department and I really didn't know where I was going to go from and after speaking to a lady after a couple of minutes, she put my mind at ease and really assured me and I know the way to go now and how to deal with the problem I was asking about and I am very grateful'*

The Customer Service Centre has also received spontaneous praise on Twitter:

*'Renewing my parking permit at Kensington Town Hall took 10 minutes. Impressed!'*

## **Business Group:**

## **Corporate Services**

Service(s): Revenues (Council Tax, Benefits, Business Rates, Cashiers and Accounts Receivable)

### **Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>3</b>	1	<b>3</b>	2	<b>0</b>	2	<b>3</b>	0

Complaints at stages one, two and three continue to be few. Although the number of Ombudsman complaints increased this year from 0 to 3, all complaints were decided in the Council's favour.

### **Further information**

These are all high volume services with a capacity for upsetting residents. Debt collection is always going to generate some complaints. For example, our Council Tax unit is collecting tax in respect of 86,000 dwellings, issuing over 40,000 reminders and 11,000 summonses each year.

### **Lessons Learned**

We need to work quickly and accurately to meet our customers' reasonable expectations; our systems need to deal with the unexpected as well as the routine.

### **Praise**

Not all of these services record instances of praise, but 64 were formally recorded. Comments were about unexpected efficiency, friendly service and being understanding in difficult circumstances.

**Business Group:  
Services**

**Families and Children's**

Service(s):

Community Learning

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
95	109	5	8	0	1	0	0

Click here to enter reasons for variations. **Further information**

Service Area	Representations	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Local Government Ombudsman
Extended Services - Play	0	8	0	0	0
Adult and Family Learning	0	1	0	0	0
Libraries	0	86	5	0	0
Youth Service	0	0	0	0	0

The vast majority of complaints in Community Learning concern library services but this should be seen in the context of the very high level of use of the service with over **one million** visits to libraries per year.

Nine complaints were received by services other than libraries, The outcomes of these were:

Withdrawn	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Resolution Meeting
2	2	5	0	



### Extended Service - Play

The service provides a service for approximately 700 users throughout the year including holidays.

Most of the complaints received relate to the Play Service which is part of the Extended Services Section. This is largely due to the Play Service staff having direct contact with service users and the community. The number of complaints is relatively small considering there are 14 school based play centres, a transition centre, a community play centre and an adventure playground that provide play opportunities for a number of children aged 5 to 13 years across the borough. Only one complaint during the period was received from a resident.

### Adult Learning and Skills

The service is responsible for the provision of Adult and Family Learning (6054 learners in 2008-09), Student Support Services, and pre-employment training for the unemployed and Train to Gain skills programmes for employed individuals.

### Libraries

We received 600 customer comments or complaints in 2009 and 297 in 2008. Many comments on libraries are slightly negative in tone, but are borderline as complaints. The majority are comments with suggestions towards improvements and indeed on many occasions our users take the time to send us positive comments on both our services and staff. Whilst some of the feedback comes in the form of e-mails (especially when they have proved unsuccessful in using on-line facilities) by far the greatest volume comes from our charter comment forms. All comments are investigated promptly and dealt with appropriately.

### Comments received in 2008 and 2009.

Comments are categorised into positive, negative and comments coming as suggestions or requests. In both years comments about library staff, facilities and computer/People's network were the highest negative comments received

1. **Comments about staff:** There are times when there are probably justifiable complaints levelled against a few staff. However, a number of complaints which are ostensibly about staff are in fact where staff have become the butt of dissatisfaction with either the functioning of the libraries computer system or with availability of public PCs and printing facilities (People's Network) or almost anything to which a member of the public doesn't get a satisfactory answer (or rather the answer they want). Quite often something starts off as a complaint about say not having enough time left to print out work but it escalates into a complaint about staff.
2. **Comments about Facilities:** This category covers a number of different issues. (For instance there are 4 comments left anonymously requesting a public toilet at Brompton).
3. **Comments about Library Computer / People's Network:** A significant number of complaints are about booking and access to public PCs (which are over subscribed) or to problems with printing from them. We are exploring solutions

for the latter issue. Other complaints relate to difficulties with using other services such as the book renewals service. There are times when there are known problems with these and we do therefore receive a few complaints on the back of these glitches. Fortunately, we are usually aware of these and are able to explain the situation to Library users.

## **Lessons Learned**

### Play Service

Generally thorough investigations are carried out where necessary to ensure the facts of complaints are brought to light and dealt with in the appropriate manner in line with RBKC policy.

Learning actions are as follows:

- Noise levels looked at to ensure, where practicable, residents overlooking school premises are not unduly inconvenienced.
- childcare voucher scheme implemented and made clearer to parents.
- Ensuring persistent, difficult and challenging parents who make complaints about members of staff are dealt with calmly, patiently, respectfully and effectively.
- Clearer communication with partners/agencies/organisations to ensure 1:1 care for individual children is provided with as little disruption to the child's attendance at holiday play provision.

### Libraries

Where possible, we have tried to improve our facilities, for example we introduced a public toilet at Brompton Library following comments received. We improved the access to Kensal Library.

In 2009, we replaced all the People's Network computers throughout all the libraries as well as replacing all staff PC's.

We are constantly looking at improving customer care with our staff by sending them on the libraries' Customer Focus training and Enquiry Skills training. The Library Services' commitment to training has been rewarded with an improved score in the inter borough library unobtrusive testing.

## **Praise**

### Libraries

In both years, we received 163 comments as praise. Comments regarding the library service, staff and stock received the highest number of praise comments.

Other plaudits included:

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Nature of praise</b>	<b>Number Received</b>
<b>Play Service</b>	Quality of Service	6

	Level of Support provided	1
--	---------------------------	---

**Business Group: Families and Children's Services**

Service(s): Family Services

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
26	31	0	6	1	1	1	2

Since 2006 the Council is required to collect figures on Representations as set out in the Children's Act 2006. Representations may not always be complaints; they might also be positive remarks or ideas that require a response from the local authority. Therefore, enquiries or comments about the availability, delivery or nature of a service which are not criticisms are dealt with as representations. In 2009, nine representations were made and successfully resolved; in 2008 there were five, without the need to record them as formal complaints.

Complaints received by service area

Service Area	Representations	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Local Government Ombudsman
Care Resources	3	1	0	0	0
Locality A	2	11	0	1	1
Locality B	4	9	0	0	0
Children with Disabilities Team	0	3	0	0	0
LAC Support	0	2	0	0	0

and Review Team					
-----------------	--	--	--	--	--

Of the 26 Stage 1 complaints and 9 Representations received, the outcomes of these were:

<b>Withdrawn</b>	<b>Not Upheld</b>	<b>Partially Upheld</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Resolution Meeting</b>
1*	13	12	10	1*

\*This complaint was not upheld at Stage 1, a Resolution meeting was arranged, the parent then decided they no longer wished to pursue with their formal complaint and it was withdrawn.

Following the integration of Children’s Services, Family Services complaints have been directed to the Response Service, which is located within a new part of the Family and Children’s Services Business Group, the Public Information and Response Service (PIRS) which is within the Strategy, Commissioning and Performance Reporting Directorate. The service has now been in place for one full year.

There has been a decrease in the number of Stage One complaints received within Family Services in 2009. This could be a reflection of dealing with concerns or comments about a service as a representation and resolving the issue at this point without further need for escalation to a Stage 1. Similarly there has been a decrease in Stage Two complaints.

### **Further information**

This is certainly a service area where we might expect to receive complaints and to do so can be a healthy sign of our interaction and engagement with our service users where we often have to deliver unpalatable messages.

The Children in Need Census showed that 2088 children and young people accessed Family services during the six month period from 1 October 2008 – 31 March 2009. This figure covers all children and young people who have been assessed to be in need by Children’s Social Care Services and were being supported during some or all of the six month period. This includes children looked after, those supported in their families or independently, and children who are the subject of a child protection plan.

### **Lessons Learned**

As stated above, the Response Service has been responsible for monitoring and quality assuring complaints and Representations for Family Services since September 2008. In its first full year in operation, systems and procedures have been implemented to ensure all complaints are captured and responded to accordingly.

As part of the statutory requirements under the Children’s Act, there is an emphasis on learning from complaints and training. To meet this requirement, the Response Service sends out Complaint Learning forms to ascertain any factors or actions which can be used as a learning tool for future complaints and/or service improvements.

However, the difficulty is capturing this data in a timely fashion and this has highlighted the need to further raise staff awareness of the importance in learning from complaints. The Response Service is in the process of developing training on Effective Complaints Handling to be rolled out to staff who work to the Children's Act legislation.

Examples of service improvements made following complaints include:

- Foster carers to be included in consultations regarding contact
- Young people on arrival to the UK as unaccompanied asylum seekers should be placed in higher support accommodation for an initial assessment of their needs and abilities.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for emotional and mental health should be completed for all young people who come into care whatever their age.

## **Praise**

The following plaudits were received within these teams:

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Nature of praise</b>	<b>Number Received</b>
<b>Children With Disabilities Team</b>	Quality of Service	2
	Level of support provided	1
	Social Worker	1
<b>LAC Support and Review Team</b>	Level of support provided	1
<b>Locality A (N COTH Child Social Work Team</b>	Social Worker	1
<b>Adoption and Permanency Team</b>	Quality of service	1

**Business Group:  
Services**

**Families and Children's**

Service(s):

Schools Quality and Standards

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0

These figures relate to complaints about the Schools Quality and Standards Directorate, not about the Royal Boroughs schools. The later are dealt with by the schools themselves. Complaints received by Service Area

Service Area	Representations	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Local Government Ombudsman
Early Years	0	2	0	0	0
Inclusive School Services	0	0	0	0	0
School Improvement Services	0	0	0	0	0
Information Communication and Technological Development	0	0	0	0	0

Of the 2 complaints received, the outcome of these were:

Withdrawn	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Resolution Meeting

0	2	0	0	0
---	---	---	---	---

### **Further information**

Few complaints are received by the Response Service for Schools Quality and Standards. This reflects:

- The fact that schools have their own complaints processes; and
- The availability of statutory appeals procedures in the most controversial areas, namely admissions and Special Educational Needs

### **Praise**

No positive comments were formally recorded.

**Business Group:  
Social Care**

**Housing Health and Adult**

Service(s):

Adult Social Care

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
55	60	NA	3	NA	4	4	0

Regulations in relation to adult social care (ASC) complaints changed in 2009. The new regulations, introduced by the Department of Health, removed the requirement for a three stage complaint process. The new regulations give complainants the right to take their concerns to the Local Government Ombudsman after the first response provided. It is for this reason that we have not been able to provide data on level two and three complaints for 2009.

The number of complaints overall was very similar for 2008 and 2009. The one variation to note is that four complaints reached the Ombudsman stage in 2009 compared to none in 2008. Two of these went to the Ombudsman before the regulatory changes were made. One complaint was not upheld and another was partially upheld. We are awaiting decisions for two others. It is difficult to determine any systemic cause for the increase in LGO action.

**Further information**

The Adult Social Care Service provided services to around 5000 people. It carried out almost 2000 new assessments and 4400 reviews of care plans. This indicates that complaints were made by approximately 1% of people receiving a service. Given the nature of the work carried out by Social Care teams, this figure is not unexpected.

**Lessons Learned**

A sample of what the teams have learned through the complaints process are outlined below.

1. Learning Difficulties – recommendations made by the Ombudsman in relation to supporting people with Learning Difficulties with oral hygiene have been implemented. For example, the Health Action Plan has been updated to ensure oral hygiene care is included as a part of the plan.



2. Older People's team – a complaint highlighted the need for Social Work and Client Affairs teams to work more closely together on complex cases.
3. Occupational Therapy – a complaint made has highlighted the importance of Social Workers and Occupational Therapists working more closely together on complex cases.

## **Praise**

The Customer Care and Complaints Team for Adult Social Care received a total of 19 compliments in the form of letters or completed comments forms in 2009. This was in addition to many positive comments made by service users via the User Outcome Survey. Comments from service users and their carers, included the following:

From an older woman recently discharged from hospital regarding her social worker; "at all times, I felt secure in her care. Her skills were much appreciated."

From the mother of a young man with Learning Disabilities in relation to the support provided by the Royal Borough's Learning Disabilities team; "I found myself being wholeheartedly enthusiastic, so I felt I should write to tell you so as well...".

And from the family of an older man to his social worker; "we want to thank you for your help when we most needed help...you have been excellent at delivering your job. Thank you again for your kindness and care".

## **Business Group: Social Care**

## **Housing Health and Adult**

Service(s):

Housing

### **Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>60</b>	41	<b>12</b>	13	<b>6</b>	9	<b>4</b>	8

Following the implementation of a new Allocation Policy in July 2007, the Housing Department received a lot of complaints from applicants who felt they had been disadvantaged by the revised eligibility criteria. These were fielded in the second half of 2007 but gradually tailed off during 2008. The increase in Level One complaints during 2009 can be attributed, in part, to a revision of the criteria covering the Mobility Transfer Scheme, which has led to a number of applicants having had their priority points awards reduced. There has also been an increase in the number of complaints relating to missing documentation or to letters that have been sent to the Housing Department and have not received a response.

### **Further information**

Other than the fact that Housing operates in a sector where there is enormous demand and very limited supply, factors that contribute to the number of complaints made about the Housing service are:

- That very little self-contained temporary accommodation can be provided in-borough (applicants therefore feel they are disadvantaged having necessarily been placed in accommodation in other parts of London).
- The perception of some applicants that merely suffering from a medical condition automatically entitles them to an award of priority (medical) points.
- The increase in the number of problems that have been found with recording, tracking and responding to correspondence sent to the Housing Department.
- The need for the Council to meet government-set targets, which can sometimes lead to situations where certain client groups may be prioritised over others.

### **Lessons Learned**

Housing is currently looking at ways of tightening up the way in which it deals with incoming correspondence and documentation. There is also an awareness of the need to clarify to potential homeless applicants what can and cannot be reasonably provided to them by way of temporary and permanent housing. Housing may also look at ways of

making it clearer to applicants that the possibility exists that their points awards could be revised as the result of periodic reviews of the allocations policy (as happened with the changes made to the Mobility Transfer Scheme).

## **Praise**

While the Temporary Accommodation Team have had to field complaints from clients who have not been placed in areas they like, they have also received a number of positive comments from applicants who have been moved back into local temporary accommodation and have also received compliments for the levels of care and understanding individual officers have shown generally. An example of a compliment the service has received is as follows:

From the mother of a housing customer, "I cannot thank the team member enough for assisting my son. He is a lone parent with a disability (unable to read / write etc) and she has shown great understanding in helping him and his small son feel so much more secure knowing he has his only family members now so close at hand. I do not know if she would be nominated for any recognition or performance related award but if so it would be nice for her to receive a special thank you."

And this from an external partner organisation to an individual officer in the housing department:

I am writing to thank you for your efforts over the last year to enhance the quality of the response to survivors of domestic violence. Of your own volition, you recognised and acted on an opportunity to increase partnership working within the housing department ...you have worked tirelessly to improve staff awareness about domestic violence...your research and contribution has been excellent.

## **Business Group:      Housing Health and Adult Social Care**

Service(s):                      Environmental Health Private Housing  
Team

### **Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>4</b>	4	<b>1</b>	1	<b>0</b>	0	<b>2</b>	0

There were a low number of complaints and no variation.

### **Further information**

Two complaints went to the Ombudsman in 2009. In both cases the Ombudsman found in the Council's favour. In one case, the Housing Team is in the process of taking the landlord and managing agent of the property to court for not fulfilling their duties with regards to housing standards. In the second case the complainant is known to the council as a vexatious litigant and has now moved out of the borough.

To put into context, over a 12 month period from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009 the Housing Team carried out 1,444 inspections on properties. This information is taken from the CIPFA performance returns which gathers data for each financial year rather than calendar year.

### **Lessons Learned**

No learning has been identified by service.

### **Praise**

The Team received 5 pieces of praise in 2008 and 13 in 2009.

**Business Group:  
Social Care**

**Housing Health and Adult**

Service(s):

Food Safety Team

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

No significant numbers of complaints and so no significant variation.

**Lessons Learned**

No learning has been identified by the service.

**Praise**

The Team received 6 pieces of praise in 2008 and 2 in 2009.

**Business Group:  
Social Care**

**Housing Health and Adult**

Service(s):

Health and Safety Team

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0

No significant numbers of complaints and so no significant variation.

**Lessons Learned**

No learning has been identified by the service.

**Praise**

The Team received 1 piece of praise in 2009.

**Business Group:  
Social Care**

**Housing Health and Adult**

Service(s):

Noise and Nuisance Team

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
13	6	3	2	0	1	0	1

There is no obvious explanation as to why there has been an increase in Level 1 complaints form 2008 to 2009.

**Further information**

To put into context, over a 12 month period from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009 the Noise and Nuisance Team attended to 10549 complaints about noise or requests for service requiring a response. This information is taken from the CIPFA performance returns which gather data for each financial year rather than calendar year.

**Lessons Learned**

No learning has been identified by the service.

**Praise**

There were 25 instances of praise in 2008 and 20 in 2009.

**Business Group:**

**Housing Health and Adult  
Social Care**

Service(s):

Pest Control Team

**Number of complaints received**

Level One		Level Two		Level Three		Local Government Ombudsman	
<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
<b>0</b>	2	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0

No complaints in 2009 and so no significant variation.

**Further information**

No complaints were received during the reporting period.

**Praise**

The Team received 2 pieces of praise in 2008 and 4 in 2009.