



**COMPLAINTS
MONITORING REPORT TO
CUSTOMER OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY
April 2004 - March 2005**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report details those complaints referred to the Chief Executive during 2004/2005 financial year. These complaints are investigated, on behalf of the Chief Executive, by Corporate and Policy Services.

Complaints, Comments and Compliments are important to the authority, as the information that they provide can serve as a useful feedback on our services and how they impact on the community we serve. By using this information we can improve our services and become more responsive to customers needs and concerns. By handling complaints in line with best practice we can demonstrate our commitment to customer care, and to continuous improvement.

As a Council we utilise the following definition of a complaint:

'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the Council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council'.

Generally, and for the purposes of this report, a complaint is distinguished from a request for service such as pest control or reporting a defect such as faulty street lighting.

2. NOTES OF CLARIFICATION

In those instances where a complainant has referred to the activity of more than one Unit or Service area in their complaint, each separate aspect of the complaint against separate units or service areas will be recorded as a complaint, for monitoring purposes. The purpose of this is to ensure that the information provided about each distinct service area by complainants can be used to inform service improvements.

The response date recorded for the purpose of this report is the date on which a full response was sent. Reference is not made to any contact informing the complainant of progress made in the investigation of their complaint, or of requests for additional information, which can, on occasions, delay responses. When such delays occur we endeavour to keep complainants updated regarding progress made.

Those units against which no complaints have been referred to the Chief Executive, are not included in this report.

Corporate Complaints

The Chief Executive deals with three types of complaints:

Stage 1: Complaints formally registered for the first time:

This type of complaint should be referred to the Service Unit concerned; however, on occasion these are referred directly to the Chief Executive's Office.

If a complaint is referred to the Chief Executive at this stage, it may be passed directly to the Unit concerned to respond, or the Chief Executive may respond in liaison with the Unit.

Those Stage 1 complaints recorded below are just the ones received and investigated by the Chief Executive's Office, not those referred directly to units.

Stage 2: If the customer is not satisfied with the response received from the Unit concerned, they are offered the opportunity to complain to the Chief Executive's Office.

Stage 3: Complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. Those complainants, who remain dissatisfied with the response received from the Chief Executive's Office, may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman for investigation. Complaints of this nature are handled by Corporate and Policy Services on behalf of the Chief Executive.

Timescales:

The investigating officer should ensure that all complaints are acknowledged in writing within five working days of the complaint being made. The complaint should be investigated and a response should be sent within ten working days of receipt. Where it is clear that investigation of a complaint will take longer than ten working days a letter of explanation should be sent, within ten days, and the complainant should be kept informed of progress at regular stages whilst the investigation is ongoing.

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response received from the Chief Executive they will be informed that the Council's complaints procedure has been exhausted. The complainant will be informed of their right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. Those complaints referred to and investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman will form part of a separate report.

When dealing with those complaints directed to the Chief Executive by the Local Government Ombudsman, responses are scheduled according to the timescales set out by the Local Government Ombudsman, in some instances these may differ from those set out in the Council's complaints policy.

3. TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED, BROKEN DOWN BY SERVICE AREA

UNIT	TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS	AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME (WORKING DAYS)
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	7	8 Days
FINANCE	6	11 Days
HOUSING SERVICES	2	25 Days
PLANNING SERVICES	10	11 Days
PROPERTY SERVICES	3	11 Days
PUBLIC SPACE SERVICES	15	10 Days

Note: The length of time taken to send a full response to a complaint can vary according to the nature of the complaint. Those complaints that are complex in nature tend to involve ongoing contact with the complainant and various bodies and may elicit a longer period of time before a final response can be sent, this, along with the relatively small number of complaints relating to particular units may account for some of the variations in average response times between different units.

As those complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman are not detailed in this report the total number of complaints recorded above does not account for all of those complaints that pass stage two of the Council's complaints procedure. For details of those complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman please see the Ombudsman's report under a separate cover.

Average Response Time for all Service Areas:

12 Days

4. DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

Environmental Services

DATE RECEIVED	DATE OF REPOSE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOME/ ACTION TAKEN
25/04/2004	06/05/2004	Failure to effectively deal with Motorcycle nuisance.	Request to Lancashire County Council that post and rail fence around the site is extended. Proposed erection of landscaping and stock fence. Possibility of initiating a grazing license to protect land and prevent access explored. Vandal proof signage issued. Continue to pursue possibility of provision of two legitimate sites for 'off road' motorcycling
02/06/2004	21/06/2004	Failure to collect compost bin and dissatisfaction with response received from Service Head	Complaint not upheld as proper practice had been followed. Visit by Environmental Services to complainant to discuss brown bin recycling scheme. Advice issued to complainant regarding how best to deal with missed collections.
08/07/2004	21/07/2004	Complaint regarding the inappropriate use of a letter warning of enforcement action regarding additional waste citing the inappropriate and offensive wording of letter.	Withdrawal of offending letter from circulation, warning letters no longer to be issued. Apology issued.
07/03/2005	10/03/2005	Failure to take proper enforcement action regarding noise nuisance from adjoining property	Complaint not upheld as proper procedure had been followed and no nuisance identified. Ongoing contact with complainant regarding various welfare issues identified. Environmental Services and Corporate and Policy Services liaising with complainant, GP and Age Concern to address welfare issues.
04/03/2005	16/03/2005	Failure to take appropriate preventative and	Special patrols instigated in area. Offer to meet with

	5	enforcement action regarding fouling of the public highway.	complainant to discuss problem issued. Explanation of enforcement policy issued.
27/10/2004	05/11/2004	Complaint regarding perception that Environmental Services had recommended a contractor to work with asbestos who subsequently failed to meet requirements.	Complaint not upheld. Explanation issued that although the Service had provided contact details of those contractors in the area who held an asbestos license this did not constitute a recommendation. Clean up of area undertaken as a gesture of goodwill.
TOTAL: 6			

Finance

DATE RECEIVED	DATE OF REPOSE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOME/ACTION TAKEN
10/11/2004	26/11/2004	Allegation of inaccurate record keeping regarding Housing Benefits and ensuing stress caused to complainant.	Complaint not upheld as best practice and national guidelines had been followed. Full explanation of record keeping requirements issued to complainant. Complaint referred to District Auditor and Local Government Ombudsman by complainant.
26/10/2004	12/11/2004	Dissatisfaction regarding action taken to recover outstanding Council Tax Payments. Inappropriate referral of an attachment to earnings order to employers and failure subsequent failure to mark attachment to earnings order as private or confidential or to mark for specified person's attention.	Complaint regarding enforcement action not upheld. All future attachment to earnings orders to be referred to Payroll manager and marked as confidential
10/12/2004	14/01/2005	Dissatisfaction regarding action taken to recover outstanding Council Tax Payments.	Complaint not upheld, action taken in line with National Requirements. Explanation issued regarding criteria for recovery action.
21/02/2005	07/03/2005	Action taken to refer outstanding debts to a	Complaint not upheld, action taken in line with National

	5	firm of bailiffs	Requirements. Explanation issued regarding criteria for recovery action.
12/02/2005	12/02/2005	Dissatisfaction regarding action taken to recover outstanding Council Tax Payments.	Complaint not upheld. Detailed explanation of action provided. Outstanding amount subsequently paid in full.
08/03/2005	14/03/2005	Dissatisfaction with the Housing Benefits Service individual case review arrangements. Complaint regarding customer service.	Drafting of clearer explanation of the criteria for review selection to be provided to staff. Detailed explanation of selection process issued to complainant.
TOTAL: 6			

Housing Services

DATE RECIEVED	DATE OF REPONSE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOME/ACTION TAKEN
08/03/2005	01/04/2005	Dissatisfaction regarding previous Housing Maintenance operative Staff Bonus Scheme	Details of bonus scheme provided in line with requirements of the Freedom of Information act.
30/06/2004	16/08/2004	Inappropriate enforcement action regarding smoke nuisance complaints. Ongoing contact with complainant before final response issued.	Complaint not upheld. Tri-Party meeting held with interested parties and independent advisory body, advice issued to bring a resolution to issue.
TOTAL: 2			

Planning

DATE RECIEVED	DATE OF REPONSE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOME/ACTION TAKEN
29/06/2004	08/07/2004	Complaint regarding decision to refuse a planning application, allegation of differential treatment, unjustified change in land use allocation	Complaint not upheld. Detailed explanation of planning regulations issued. Complainant informed of right to appeal to the secretary of state with regards to the refusal of a planning application
09/08/2004	15/09/2004	Objection to a grant of Planning Permission, Complaint regarding staff conduct.	Complaint not upheld procedures correctly followed. Complainant offered opportunity to refer complaint to Local Government Ombudsman.
20/08/2004	03/09/2004	Objection to grant of Planning Permission	Complaint not upheld. Complainant offered opportunity to refer complaint to Local Government Ombudsman.
15/11/2004	25/11/2004	Failure to take appropriate Planning Enforcement action	Complaint not upheld. Complainant offered opportunity to refer complaint to Local Government Ombudsman
17/09/2004	04/10/2004	Planning Permission regarding a telecommunications development. Dissatisfaction with response from Planning Services.	Explanation to complainant regarding the planning rules for telecommunications developments, ongoing lobbying of Central Government to amend legislation with regard to telecommunications developments. Apology issued for any lack of clarity in previous explanations of the system and process.
30/11/2004	23/12/2004	Objection to planning permission, inadequate enforcement of planning controls and failure to respond to correspondence.	Ongoing monitoring of site in question, apology for failure to respond to correspondence.
06/12/2004	23/12/2004	Objection to planning decision, lack of response to correspondence	Explanation of planning regulations issued. Apology issued to complainant with regards to the failure to respond to correspondence. Complainant provided with details of the Local Government Ombudsman.

17/12/2004	23/12/2004 4	Planning Enforcement	Ongoing monitoring of site and materials referred to by complainant. Complainant offered opportunity to refer complaint to Local Government Ombudsman.
11/01/2005	17/01/2005 5	Failure to properly enforce planning conditions for new development.	Detailed explanation issued to complainant regarding ongoing development of the site and those issues, which are being resolved in order to meet planning requirements.
16/03/2005	04/05/2005 5	Objection to a Planning decision	Complaint not upheld, complainant issued with advice regarding planning guidelines.
TOTAL: 10			

Property Services

DATE RECIEVED	DATE OF REPOSE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOME/ACTION TAKEN
21/04/2004	13/05/2004	Complaint that an excessive amount of time was taken to reach a conclusion regarding the exercise of a Compulsory Purchase Order. Failure to respond to correspondence.	Change to future property transactions to ensure that interested parties are kept better informed of progress made in negotiations with regard to Compulsory Purchase Orders.
26/04/2004	10/05/2004	Failure to respond effectively to reports of Motorcycle Nuisance on Council Property.	Request to LCC that post and rail fence around the site is extended. Proposed erection of landscaping and stock fence. Possibility of initiating a grazing license to protect land and prevent access. Vandal proof signs issued. Continue to pursue possibility of provision of two legitimate sites for 'off road' motorcycling
15/11/2004	25/11/2004	Complaint regarding the failure to consult residents over the potential to license a site and regarding previous advice issued stating that covenants prevented the fencing of land.	Apology issued, along with a commitment to consult fully with residents on future land use.

TOTAL: 2

Public Space Services

DATE RECEIVED	DATE OF RESPONSE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOME/ACTION TAKEN
26/05/2004	09/06/2004	Complaint regarding the quality of the Grass Cutting Service.	Details from complainant used to inform Overview and Scrutiny enquiry into the grass cutting service, which was launched as a result of a high number of complaints received. Recommendations of Scrutiny panel implemented. Full response sent to complaint.
02/06/2004	21/06/2004	Missing signage on residential street, Inadequate maintenance of Public Highway, failure to take effective action to tackle congestion, excessive traffic calming measures.	Complainant advised of ongoing activity to tackle problems with congestion in cited area. Apology issued regarding missing signage and order placed to replace. Repairs instigated on damaged stretch of highway. Explanation issued regarding traffic calming measures, offer issued to meet complainant to discuss issued further.
15/07/2004	16/07/2004	Failure to take effective action regarding Tree Maintenance on the public highway, Inappropriate staff conduct.	Correspondence sent to those parties responsible for maintenance of trees threatening legal action if trees are not properly maintained. Staff member involved given guidance on the requirements of the customer charter.
18/06/2004	06/07/2004	Complaint that Arboricultural Maintenance Activity was excessive leading to removal of plants from Duxbury Park, which was not necessary.	Complaint not upheld, plants in question diseased. Detailed explanation issued to complainant regarding activity.
07/07/2004	21/07/2004	Complaint regarding the quality of the Grass Cutting Service, Lack of response to correspondence.	Details from complainant used to inform an Overview and Scrutiny enquiry into the grass cutting service, which was launched as a result of a high number of complaints received. Recommendations of Scrutiny

			panel implemented. Full response to complainant.
07/07/2004	21/07/2004	Gritting Service, Lack of Response to correspondence	Gritting Bin installed close to site in question. Apology issued for lack of response to correspondence, investigation into processes for dealing with complaints with in Public Space Services launched.
03/08/2004	05/08/2004	Objection to the removal of an A-Frame from the Public Highway	Complaint not upheld, Cost of removal fee waived, to enable matter to be brought to a close.
15/11/2004	25/11/2004	Complaint regarding the failure to consult residents over the potential to license a site and regarding previous advice issued stating that covenants prevented the fencing of land.	Apology issued, along with a commitment to consult fully with residents on future land use.
26/11/2004	03/12/2004	Delays incurred in undertaking repairs to a damaged gravestone	Apology issued for any distress caused to the complainant, works instigated as a matter of urgency.
29/11/2004	08/12/2004	Complaint that sufficient Street Lighting has not been installed on a new residential development.	Explanation offered to complainant regarding the process of adopting a site and the responsibility for street lighting at current stage of development.
03/12/2004	20/12/2004	Complaint regarding the quality of the Grass Cutting Service, Lack of response to correspondence.	Mail logging system implemented in Public Space Services to address problems regarding failures and delays incurred in responding to correspondence. Meeting arranged between complainant and representative from Public Space Services to bring about satisfactory conclusion to issue.
23/12/2004	08/02/2005	Damage to property caused by grease and oil deposits from a neighbouring business. Failure of Public Space Services to properly enforce regulations and to properly maintain gullies.	Ongoing contact between representative of Public Space Services and complainant to resolve issue. Letter sent to offending business threatening enforcement action if discharges onto public highway continue, ongoing legal action to be pursued.
10/02/2005	02/03/2005	Complaint regarding the development of	Complaint not upheld. Complainant issued with contact

		Brinscall Linear Park undertaken in partnership with Groundwork	details to discuss any ongoing concerns. Maintenance schedule issued to meet the concerns expressed by the complainant. Contact ongoing between complainant and Public Space Services
25/02/2005	10/03/2005	Failure to properly maintain the public highway resulting in damage to vehicle, Lack of response to correspondence (via email).	Complaint regarding maintenance of highway redirected to Lancashire Highways Partnership to be pursued as compensation claim. Investigation into handling of complaint received via email instigated. Agreement with Public Space Services that all complaints directed via the website in email and sent to the Lancashire Highways Partnership trigger a detailed explanation to complainants that email is sent to the Lancashire Highways partnership and are not acknowledge as a matter of course but rather action is generally instigated without contact.
17/11/2004	08/12/2004	Failure to take appropriate action regarding the flooding of residential property. Failure to respond to correspondence.	Enforcement action to be taken against those utilising unauthorised drainage connections to the surface water system. Piece of work initiated to consider the practicalities of increasing the capacity of drainage to the property in question. Apology issued for failure to respond to correspondence, to form part of ongoing review of the way in which such correspondence is dealt with.
25/02/2005	10/03/2004	Complaint regarding perceived failure to maintain the Public Highway to requires standards resulting in damage to a vehicle. Failure to respond to email correspondence.	Complaint regarding failure to maintain Public Highway not upheld. Apology issued for failure to respond to email correspondence, investigation of process for dealing with complaints received via email ongoing. Agreement reached that all emails sent to Lancashire Highways partnership via Chorley Borough Council's

			website will contain text explaining the process for dealing with complaint through the Highways Partnership.
15/11/2004	25/11/2004	Complaint regarding failure to consult residents over the potential to license a site and regarding previous advice issued stating the covenants prevented the fencing of Land.	Apology issued along with a commitment to consult fully with residents on future land use.
TOTAL: 17			