



## Resources And Community Services Scrutiny Panel

### Scrutiny Review Of The Corporate Complaints Process

#### - C o n t e n t s -

	Paragraph	Page
<u>Introduction by the Chair</u>	1	1
<u>Summary</u>	2	2
<u>Membership of the Panel</u>	3	2
<u>Terms of Reference</u>	4	2 – 3
<u>Methodology</u>	5	3 – 4
<u>Background Information</u>	6	4 – 5
<u>The Corporate Complaints Procedure and Online System</u>	7	6 – 15
<u>Procedure</u>	7.1	6
<u>Complaints, Service Requests And Failure Demand</u>	7.2	7 – 10
<u>Registering complaints onto the system</u>	7.3	10 – 11
<u>Allocating Complaints</u>	7.4	12 - 13
<u>Timescales</u>	7.5	13 – 14
<u>Closing Complaints</u>	7.6	15
<u>Performance Monitoring</u>	8	15 – 22
<u>Performance Indicators</u>	8.1	15 – 19
<u>Monitoring and Enforcing the System</u>	8.2	20 – 21

<u>Customer Feedback</u>	8.3	21 – 22
<u>The Statutory Social Services Complaints Procedure</u>	9	23 – 28
<u>Stages Timescales and Monitoring</u>	9.1	23 – 26
<u>Allocation of Complaints</u>	9.2	26 – 27
<u>Confidentiality</u>	9.3	27 – 28
<u>Social Services Complaints Procedure and Council Policy</u>	9.4	28
<u>Training and Support for Council Employees</u>	10	29 – 31
<u>The Complaints System</u>	11	32 – 33
<u>Borough Treasurer’s Observations</u>	12	34
<u>Borough Solicitor’s Observations</u>	13	34
<u>Recommendations</u>	14	34 – 35
<u>Appendix</u>		
<u>Project Plan</u>		36 – 38

## Resources And Community Services Scrutiny Panel

### Scrutiny Review of the Council's Corporate Complaints Process

#### 1. Introduction By The Chair

I am pleased to present the Scrutiny Panel's report following a review of the corporate complaints system.

This review was undertaken as a result of looking at the corporate complaints system as an indicator of areas of the Council's service delivery that had been the subject of significant complaints from members of the public or elected members. During discussions with officers supporting the corporate complaints system, it became evident that there were aspects of its operation that merited review. These particularly related to officer response times and how complaints were closed.



Members of the Scrutiny Panel have discovered much about the corporate complaints system that they did not previously know and it has encouraged them to make greater use of this facility. The Panel is also very much aware that the statutory social services complaints system has significantly different response timescales and stages that can eventually lead to a hearing before an independent panel. The statutory social services complaints system is also scheduled for review in the future and this will have consequences for the corporate system. These matters are addressed in the report.

The corporate complaints system is a useful tool and during the course of the review the Corporate Complaints Officers have introduced a number of initiatives to improve its effectiveness. I would encourage its use by all elected members.

Finally, I would like to thank panel members for their commitment to the review and officers who attended focus groups and of course the officers supporting both the corporate complaints and the social services complaints systems.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'B'.

**Councillor B Walsh**  
**Chair of Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel**

## **2. Summary**

The Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel undertook this review following consideration of the corporate complaints system as part of the formulation of the panel's work programme. This review focuses on the effectiveness of the system a year on from its introduction.

The review has highlighted the two separate complaints systems and the differences between the corporate process and the parallel statutory social services complaints process. The two complaints processes are contained on the same system and officers supporting both favoured this situation although it was agreed that adjustments could be made to reflect different timescales and stages that could otherwise distort performance measures. It was also noted that social services service failures could only be recorded on the system as complaints. There was no separate provision for compliments to be recorded unless they were placed on the corporate complaints system and it was felt that additional provision of the system should be made to record compliments.

Consultation indicated that the system for allocating complaints had improved and this reflected the Corporate Complaints Officer's desire to continually improve the system. It was felt that the performance indicators currently used could be improved to reflect a target for the number of complaints on the system and the need to send an interim response to complainants. It was recommended that the value of some performance indicators be reviewed.

The Panel noted that the Corporate Complaints Officer had tried to raise staff awareness of the system. A staff survey carried out by the panel indicated that although 90% of those responding were aware of the system, only a quarter stated that they had either used the system or felt comfortable using it. It was felt that a greater reference to the Corporate Complaints System in the officer and elected member induction process would be helpful.

The panel felt that maintaining the confidentiality of the system was very important (especially Social Services) and welcomed recent measures to help reinforce this.

## **3. Membership Of The Panel**

Councillor B Walsh (Chair), Councillor P Harrison (Deputy Chair),  
Councillors Hill, A Holland, MJ Smith, Wareing, Welsh and K Wright

## **4. Terms Of Reference**

The following Terms of Reference and objectives for the Review were approved by the Panel at its meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2004. (Appendix One)

### **Terms of Reference**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's corporate complaints process.

## **Objectives**

- A. To clarify the current corporate complaints process**
- B. To record the performance of the corporate complaints process**
- C. To assess the implementation and effectiveness of each stage of the process**
- D. To compare the complaints process at Tameside Council with those of other local authorities, and organisations in the public and private sector**
- E. To assess customer and user experience of the corporate complaints process.**

## **5. Methodology**

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Panel met with and received information from the Assistant Executive Director for Business and Performance, (formerly Service Unit Manager) on the Council's Complaints Policy and current Corporate Complaints Process.
- 5.2 The Panel met with the Communication and IT Services Manager to discuss the Corporate Complaints System.
- 5.3 The Panel met with the Assistant Executive Director for Community and Information Technology Services (formerly Head of IT Services) and the Communication and IT Services Manager with responsibility for the Corporate Complaints Process.
- 5.4 The Panel met with the Social Services Complaints Officer in order to discuss the use of the corporate complaints process and the statutory Social Services complaints process.
- 5.5 The Panel met with Service Unit Managers responsible for the handling of complaints to discuss the complaints process and use of the complaints process.
- 5.6 Panel members visited the Council's Call Centre to experience complaints handling.
- 5.7 The Scrutiny Panel undertook consultation with elected members of the Council and Council employees to ascertain awareness of the complaints process and use of the system.
- 5.8 The Scrutiny Panel received information about best practice in complaints handling in other local authorities.

5.9 The Scrutiny Panel met with the Cabinet Deputy for Personal Services and the Head of Strategy and Support, Social Services.

## **6.1 Background Information**

6.1.1 In May 2004, the Scrutiny Panel undertook the process of forming the Panel's Work Programme for 2004/05. To assist the Scrutiny Panel in identifying issues to include on the Programme, investigations were undertaken on issues identified through the Residents Opinion Survey 2001 and, through consultation with the Communication and IT Services Manager (Sustainable Communities), the Corporate Complaints System to investigate the nature of complaints logged by members of the public.

6.1.2 However, the Residents Opinion Survey 2001 found that 57% of those who had made a complaint to the Council were dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled (of these 41% were very dissatisfied).

6.1.3 A survey of complainants carried out in April 2004 by the Corporate Complaints Team found that two thirds of people had to chase up their complaint, half of the people had complained about the issue before and almost half were not happy with the explanation given.

6.1.4 In view of the above, the Panel agreed to include a review of the implementation of Corporate Complaints System on its Work Programme for 2004/05.

## **6.2 Policy Development**

6.2.1 In 2001/2 an examination of the complaints processes across the organisation was undertaken by a Continuous Improvement (CI) group.

6.2.2 The examination culminated in a report which was considered by the Strategic Directorate in July 2002 and laid foundations of new processes to deal with corporate complaints. The report included the appointment of one Corporate Complaints Officer in addition to the statutory required post of Social Services Complaints Officer.

6.2.3 Subsequently, a new 'Three Stage' in-house complaints system was developed and introduced. The new system went 'live' in July 2003.

6.2.4 During the development of the current complaints process the Council's Improvement Team researched the systems in place at a number of other 'excellent' local authorities and authorities with a good reputation for complaints. The research aimed to examine possibilities of revising the three-stage process. A total of 35 Council's were contacted for information.

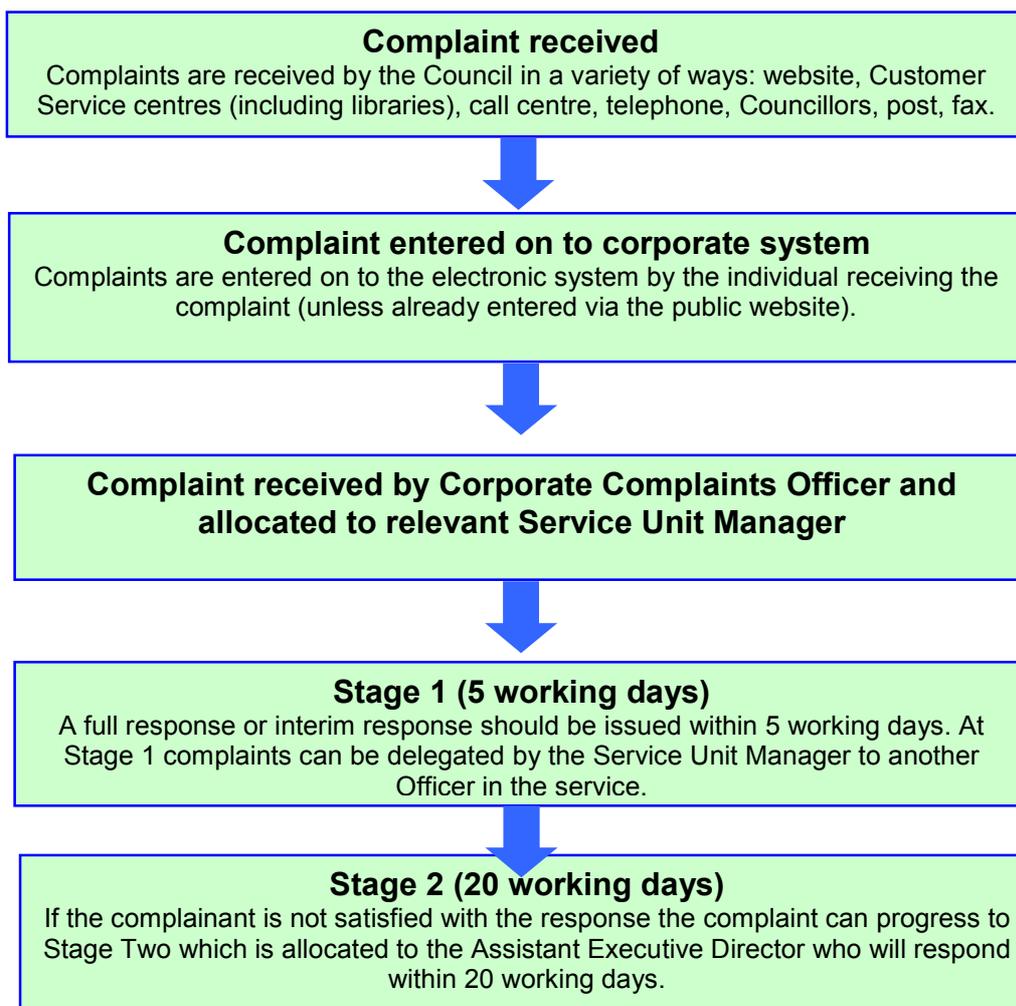
- 6.2.5 Information gathered through research found that although a three-stage process appeared to be standard, timescales were more generous than those of Tameside.
- 6.2.6 A progress report submitted to Directorate in December 2003 considered enhancements to the corporate complaints policy, complaints performance, the corporate complaints system and publicity. The report recommended that a revised 'Two Stage' process and that the Corporate Complaints Policy appended to this report as Appendix Two be adopted.
- 6.2.7 A performance monitoring report was submitted to the Executive Management Team in July 2004 that outlined complaints performance between 2<sup>nd</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 identifying how complaints were dealt with and made recommendations for further improvement in relation to response timescales, and the closure of complaints.
- 6.2.8 The Scrutiny Panel was informed that previously Tameside had a British Standards Institute accredited complaints system – of those researched only the London Borough of Camden is also accredited.

## 7. The Corporate Complaints Procedure And Online System

### 7.1 Procedure

7.1.1 Section 1 explained that the current system has been in place since July 2003.

7.1.2 The diagram below sets out the current corporate complaints procedure.



7.1.3 'Customer Complaints response systems' fall under the remit of the Cabinet Deputy for Community Services (Councillor Phillip Wilkinson).

7.1.4 The Corporate Complaints system is administered by the Customer Services Manager and Corporate Complaints Officer from Community & Information Technology Services which is part of the Sustainable Communities.

7.1.5 The Social Care and Health Directorate follow a statutory complaints procedure which is set out in section 4.1.

## 7.2 Complaints, Service Requests and Failure Demand

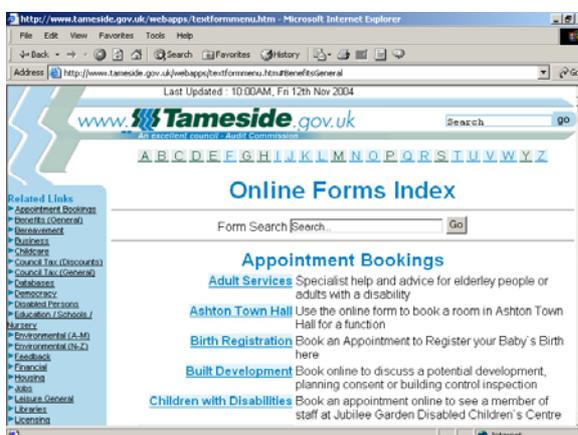
7.2.1 Members found it useful to be aware of the different ways in which the Council can record all types of residents' issues about council services including complaints. The Council can record and process:

- Complaints (dissatisfaction with a service e.g. resident is unhappy with the way a service has/has not been delivered)
- Request for service (usually the first time a service has been requested e.g. request for a kerb to be dropped)
- Failure demand (where a request for a service arises from the service failing initially e.g. street light not attended to).

7.2.2 The Corporate Complaints System is available on the Council's website and is available to residents and employees and Elected Members entering a complaint on behalf of a resident

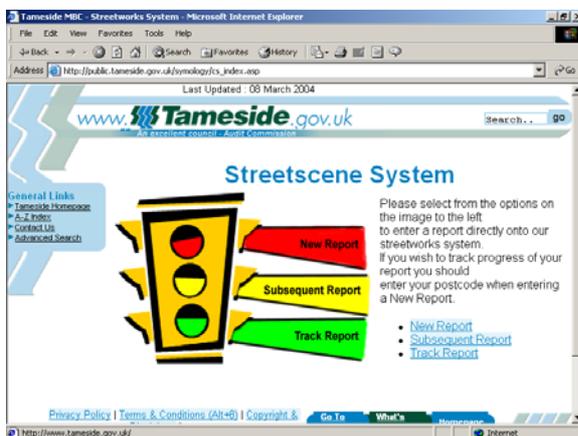


7.2.3 Requests for services can be made on the Council's website through the variety of online forms or 'e-forms' (electronic application forms) and 'Streetscene' (the system used by the Engineers service and District Assemblies to receive requests for services relating to highways in the borough).



7.2.4 The Customer First system available on the Council's 'Intranet' also enables employees to enter service requests on behalf of customers.

7.2.5 Customer First staff in the Customer First Centres (which includes libraries) and Call Centre can also log 'failure demand'.



7.2.6 Instances of 'failure demand' are not formal complaints but are used by the Council to record the number of requests for services

that are the result of a failed service. This helps the Council identify particular problem areas by analysing the number and type of these entries. The system used by customer service and call centre staff provides a list of the most common types of 'failure demand' services e.g. missed bins.

- 7.2.7 The Social Care and Health Service operates a client database called 'SWIFT'. The database is organised by client rather than service. If service delivery problems arise these are noted against the client's records.
- 7.2.8 Adult Services and Children's Services staff currently record failure demand in the form of complaints, as they do not have access to the Customer First system for recording failure demand. The Social Care and Health data collection system (SWIFT) is not programmed to record 'failure demand'.
- 7.2.9 Managers analyse the complaints manually and identify which complaints can be categorised as a failure demand e.g. complaints relating to home care and meal on wheels are most often complaints that would otherwise be recorded as failure demand. This enables the manager to identify problem areas. However this is an additional task that other managers in the Council do not have to do because they receive information about failure demand collected directly by Customer Services.
- 7.2.10 The list of most common types of failure demand used by Customer First staff includes 'Social Care and Health', but not a specific type of service.
- 7.2.11 However, Customer First staff would not always get to the stage of the enquiry where failure demand could be recorded because problems of service delivery relating to Social Care and Health tend to be immediately directed to Adult Services or Children's Services. This reduces the opportunity for failure demand to be recorded by the Customer First system.
- 7.2.12 For Social Services staff to begin to record failure demand the system currently operated by the Customer First staff would have to be introduced either alongside the SWIFT system or changes made to the SWIFT software to allow failure demand to be recorded. The Head of Service (Strategy and Support, Social Care and Health) feels that this would result in double entry and inefficient systems. There would also be a cost implication to making changes to the current system.
- 7.2.13 The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Panel met with the Principal Customer First Officer to discuss these three elements of recording customer's issues. The Officer felt that many people do not wish to register a complaint and merely want the issue to be resolved. This places greater importance on recording 'failure demand' so that the Council is aware of potential problem areas in services but which have not resulted in a formal complaint.

- 7.2.14 One of the strongest messages to come out of the consultation with Service Unit Managers was the need for greater definition of complaints and service requests.
- 7.2.15 Managers from the most public facing services feel that a large number of complaints received by the service are actually requests for services.
- 7.2.16 Once registered as a complaint the formal procedure should be followed. However, the service may also have its own service standards to follow which can complicate the issue. For example if a complaint is received about a missed bin, the service must respond within five working days. However, the service standard is to have the bin emptied within two working days. In extreme cases the complainant may receive an interim response to the complaint after the problem has been solved.
- 7.2.17 Simple requests for service such as the example given above do not need to be registered on the complaints system unless the customer is also dissatisfied with the service.
- 7.2.18 Managers were concerned that although customers should be able to register problems or request service in the most convenient way, the options available on the website in particular may cause some confusion. Customers may opt to register their request as a complaint because it is the option most familiar to them.
- 7.2.19 There is potential for conflict between the complaints process and the 'Streetscene' system used by the Engineers Service and District Assemblies to receive requests for services relating to highways in the borough.
- 7.2.20 There are instances when a request is logged on the Streetscene system for work to be carried out. The same issue can also appear on the complaints system. Managers and Officers have felt that this is a duplication of the same task. However, the fundamental difference between the two systems is that Streetscene is a request for a service whereas the complaints system deals with customer dissatisfaction. The procedure for processing a request through Streetscene does not deal with a customer's dissatisfaction. Streetscene will ensure the task is complete but the complaints procedure ensures that the Council acknowledges a customer's dissatisfaction.
- 7.2.21 Managers felt that if definitions were clearer and the public were given clear guidance on which system to register their particular problem, the number of complaints would fall.
- 7.2.22 Some other local authorities consulted for this review treat the first stage of a complaint as 'problem-solving' or 'informal'. Complaints that can be resolved quickly and are more akin to 'failure demand' are not recorded.

## Conclusions

1. **Customers, Elected Members and employees of the Council would benefit from clearer definitions of complaints and service requests.**

## Recommendations

1. **That the service should consider how it ensures all users are aware of the most appropriate system to register their issues.**

### 7.3 Registering complaints on to the system

7.3.1 As outlined in the diagram above, customers can register complaints with the Council in a variety of ways all of which result in the complaint being entered on to the corporate system.

7.3.2 Complaints can be entered directly by customers on the Council's website or by any staff at Customer First Centres across the borough which includes libraries.

7.3.3 Complaints are entered on to the online system and allocated by the Corporate Complaints Officer to the relevant Service Unit Manager. At Stage 1, Managers can in turn allocate this complaint to delegated officer(s) in the service.

7.3.4 Members were keen to find out how complaints received are entered on to the system (unless done so personally by the complainant through the website) and how the decision is made by staff to provide this facility to customers.



*Members of the Scrutiny Panel visited the Council's Call Centre to hear how customer requests are dealt with.*

7.3.5 The Head of Community & IT Services and the Customer Services Manager assured the Panel that all Customer First staff are trained to offer the facility of registering a formal complaint to customers who are dissatisfied with a service. It was the Head of Community & IT Service's view that complaints should be seen as an opportunity to improve services. However, it was acknowledged that culturally, this was a message that may not have been taken on board by all services who may prefer to handle complaints outside of the formal procedure.

- 7.3.6 Members were concerned in particular that complaints raised by Elected Members are sometimes not registered on the Corporate System.
- 7.3.7 In consultation with Elected Members, the Scrutiny Panel found that when councillors raise a formal complaint this is usually entered on to the corporate complaints system on their behalf by staff from Member Services.
- 7.3.8 However, Members of the Scrutiny Panel described how as local ward members they often raise complaints directly with the Officer or Manager responsible for a particular service. This was also found to be the experience of other Elected Members consulted by the Scrutiny Panel. There was a concern that these types of complaints are not registered on the formal system and are dealt with informally. This has disadvantages for tracking and identifying responsibility. It will also mean that it does not appear in the performance monitoring for that particular service and contribute to continual improvement.
- 7.3.9 Consultation with Service Unit Managers found that some prioritise complaints received from Elected Members, occasionally at the expense of other complaints they are currently handling. Moreover complaints received from Elected Members are dealt with quickly rather than allowing time for a more considered response.
- 7.3.10 Members of the Scrutiny Panel are hopeful that the new Members' Portal which gives all Elected Members access to Council's online systems would encourage Members' to register complaints formally.
- 7.3.11 Social Services complaints are registered on the corporate system in the same way as all other complaints. Section 9 below covers Social Services complaints handling in more detail.

## **Conclusions**

- 2. The Panel is concerned that complaints raised by Elected Members are sometimes not registered on the Corporate system.**

## **Recommendations**

- 2. That managers should be reminded that complaints received via Elected Members should be registered on the system as with all other complaints.**

## **7.4 Allocating complaints**

- 7.4.1 All complaints entered on to the online system are received by the Corporate Complaints Officer and allocated to the relevant Service Unit Manager within 24 hours.
- 7.4.2 The Scrutiny Panel was informed that complaints are 'back dated' to the date they were received not the date they are entered on to the system. For example a complaint received on a Friday but not entered on to the system until Monday are dated from Friday. This ensures the complainant receives a response within 5 working days from when the complaint was sent. This puts even more importance on correct allocation since the number of working days remaining has already reduced.
- 7.4.3 Managers receive an electronic 'alert' that a complaint has been allocated to them. The system then begins to track the number of days before a complaint is closed or an interim response is issued.
- 7.4.4 At the early stages of the new system there were some misallocations by the Corporate Complaints Officer and managers had to reallocate complaints which ate in to the time allowed for responding to complaints. It is felt on all sides (complaints administrators and Service Unit Mangers) that this has greatly improved.
- 7.4.5 Frontline staff are currently employed to cover the post of the Corporate Complaints Officer and administer the complaints system. Although this tends to be a rotation of the same members of staff it may be that some misallocations are made because some staff are more aware of the most appropriate manager to allocate certain requests to than others.
- 7.4.6 However it could be argued that an effective administrative system should not depend on personal knowledge.
- 7.4.7 Consultation with Service Unit Mangers showed that some felt that problems remained when allocating complaints which relate to more than one service area. Examples given were complaints relating to youths causing annoyance where both the Youth Service and Community Safety Service have an interest. This requires more joint working and can be time consuming.
- 7.4.8 Specific issues regarding the allocation of complaints relating to Social Care and Health are dealt with in section 4 below.

## Conclusions

- 3. The system of allocating complaints has greatly improved and has helped to ensure complaints are dealt with quickly and by the appropriate officer.**

## Recommendations

- 3. The Corporate Complaints Officer need to be kept informed by Heads of Service of any changes to structures that will affect the allocation system.**
- 4. That a recognised 'deputy' Corporate Complaints Officer be identified to provide continuity in the absence of the Corporate Complaints Officer.**

## 7.5 Timescales

- 7.5.1 The diagram above shows that at Stage 1, a response must be issued and a complaint closed within 5 working days. If a complaint requires further work, an interim response should be issued within 5 working days informing the complainant that the complaint is being dealt with but may take more time.
- 7.5.2 The Scrutiny Panel was informed that complaints are 'back dated' to the date they were received not the date they are entered on to the system. For example a complaint received on a Friday but not entered on to the system until Monday is dated from Friday. This ensures the complainant receives a response within 5 working days from when the complaint was received.
- 7.5.3 Comparison with other local authorities found that Tameside has one of the shortest timescales for handling complaints at Stage 1.
- 7.5.4 Some other Councils contacted issue an acknowledgement to all complaints within 2 to 5 working days. One Council issues automatic acknowledgements to complaints received by email.
- 7.5.5 Although the complaints policy states that the Council will keep complainants "regularly updated of progress until your complaint is fully resolved" there are no further timescales for responding to a complaint after an interim response has been issued.
- 7.5.6 A recent customer satisfaction survey appears to indicate that complainants are not always kept informed of the progress of their complaint.
- 7.5.7 Two councils contacted for this review have further timescales. At one council a full response or progress report is required after 10 working days

and a full response within a further 15 working days. At another council a full response or explanation of extended time is required within 14 working days and subsequent updates are issued every 14 working days until a full response has been issued.

- 7.5.8 In consultation with Service Unit Managers there were concerns over how much could be achieved within 5 working days, particularly for more complex complaints. A well-researched and informed response may take more than 5 working days particularly if this involves putting some actions in place to resolve the complaint. It is important that responses issued at Stage 1 are carefully considered to ensure the complainant understands and is satisfied with the resolution and does not need to progress the complaint to Stage 2.
- 7.5.9 The Head of Community & IT Services however, felt that extending the timescale at Stage 1 would not result in any improved level of service as it would be unlikely that officers would spend more time on dealing with a complaint and only extend the amount of time before a response is issued.
- 7.5.10 Performance monitoring data shows that very few complaints progress to Stage 2 this could suggest that initial responses are satisfactory despite the timescales allowed for responding to complaints.
- 7.5.11 However, customer consultation carried out by the service indicates that just under half of complainants were not happy with the explanation given but only a third of these took further action. The main reasons given for not taking any further action were “I was given the run around so I gave up” and “I was promised action but nothing happened”.
- 7.5.12 Of those consulted more than half said they had to wait 10 days or more for a response to their complaint. Current performance-monitoring data indicates that on average complaints are dealt with in 8 working days.
- 7.5.13 The statutory Social Services complaints procedure involves different timescales to those enforced under the corporate complaints procedure. These timescales are covered in detail in section 9 below.

## **Conclusions**

- 4. The Panel feels that the corporate timescales currently enforced are adequate and provide the best service to the customer.**

## **Recommendations**

- 5. That additional fixed timescales be introduced for updating the complainant of progress after an interim response has been issued until the complaint is closed.**

## **7.6 Closing complaints**

- 7.6.1 Managers should 'close' a complaint on the system when a response has been issued. The response can be written either by the manager or a delegated officer, although the manager must approve all responses before they are issued and the complaint closed. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response received at Stage 1 then the complaint can progress to Stage 2 which requires investigation solely by the Service Unit Manager.
- 7.6.2 Members were concerned about the definition of a 'closed complaint'. Some members of the Scrutiny Panel felt that complaints they had registered as ward members had been closed but had not been dealt with fully.
- 7.6.3 Some actions put in place as a result of a complaint are carried out over long periods. A complaint is felt to be closed once these actions have been put in place rather than when these actions are actually completed.
- 7.6.4 Some Service Unit Managers also admitted having concerns over the definition of a 'closed complaint'.
- 7.6.5 Some Managers felt that complainants would be more likely to be satisfied with the response if it meant an immediate action.
- 7.6.6 Customers may not full understand that a complaint is closed when an response is issued and an action put in place if necessary.
- 7.6.7 Some Managers question whether complaints were being closed according to the same timescales with some managers preferring to ensure that the action has been completed before closing the complaint.
- 7.6.8 This will have an adverse effect on performance monitoring and the number of open complaints being dealt with by a service.

## **8. Performance Monitoring**

### **8.1 Performance Indicators**

8.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel received information on performance indicators relating to the Corporate Complaints System that were introduced by the service in December 2003.

#### **8.1.2 Time taken from receipt to allocation**

This performance indicator relates to the time it takes the Corporate Complaints Officer to allocate a complaint to the relevant Service Unit Manager

The target for achieving this is one working day. The Panel found that currently 96% of complaints are allocated within this timescale.

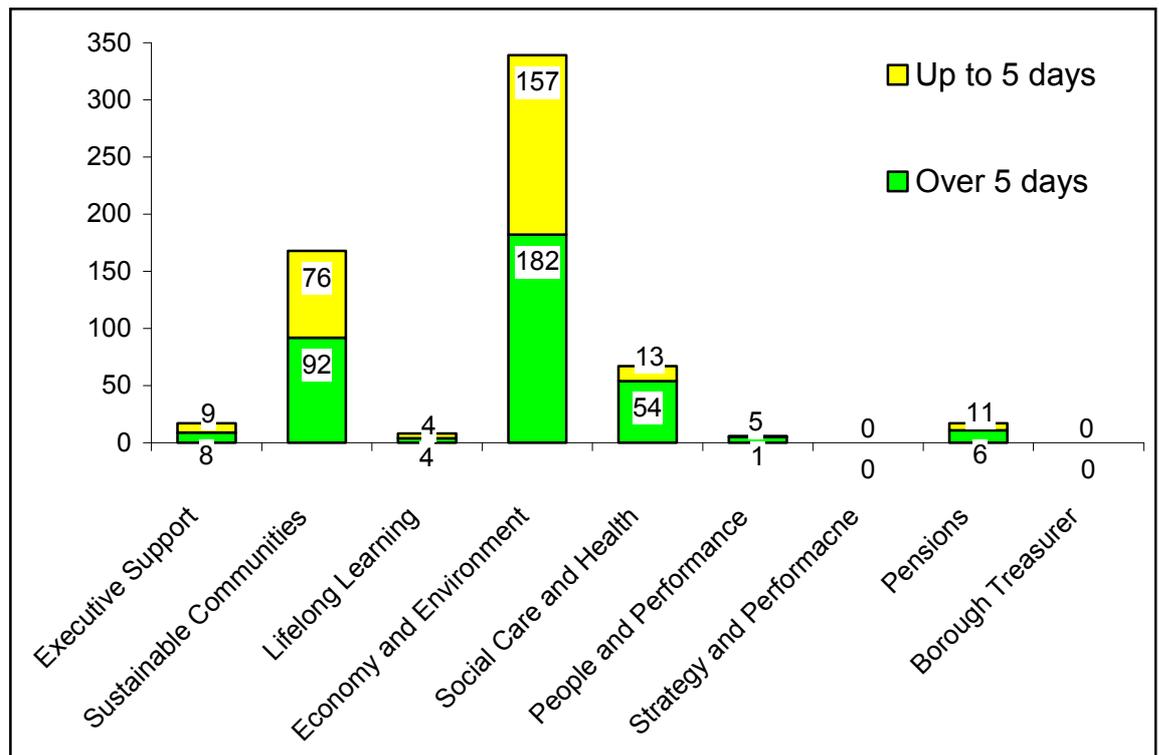
### 8.1.3 Time taken from allocation to closure

This performance indicator relates to the length of time it takes for a complaint to be dealt with once it has been received by the Service Unit Manager.

Although the target for this performance indicator at Stage 1 of the complaint process is five working days the Panel found that on average, complaints at Stage One are currently closed within 49 days. At Stage 2 of the process the target is 20 working days, however complaints appeared to be closed within twenty-one working day.

Graph 1 illustrates the length of time taken from allocation of complaints to closure from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 in each service area.

**Graph 1** Number of complaints dealt with in up to 5 working days and over 5 working days



The Panel heard from Service Unit Managers that some reasons for not responding within the timescales was due to multiple complaints where a response would be required from a number of service units and training needs (Section 10 refers).

### 8.1.4 Number of complaints received and closed

This performance indicator relates to the number of complaints on the system in a given month and the number closed in the same month.

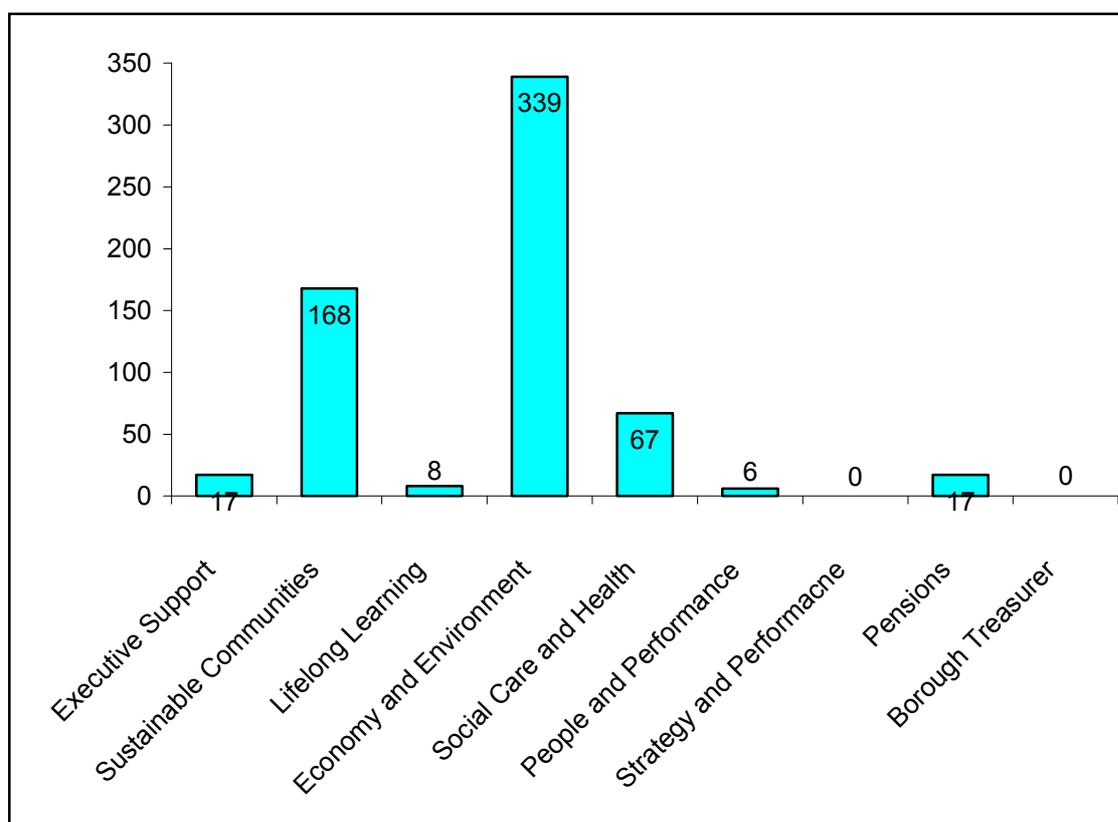
There was no target for this performance indicator. The Panel was informed of the number of complaints received and closed since April 2004 when the new structure for complaints was introduced.

	Received	Closed
<b>April</b>	284	269
<b>May</b>	291	260
<b>June</b>	324	274

At the commencement of this review, the Panel was informed that complaints closed within a given month were not necessarily received in the same month. However, the system has been improved more recently and can now illustrate the number of complaints closed in a given month and when those complaints were received.

Graph 2 below illustrates the number of closed complaints from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 for each council service area:-

**Graph 2** Number of closed complaints



#### 8.1.5 Number of open complaints

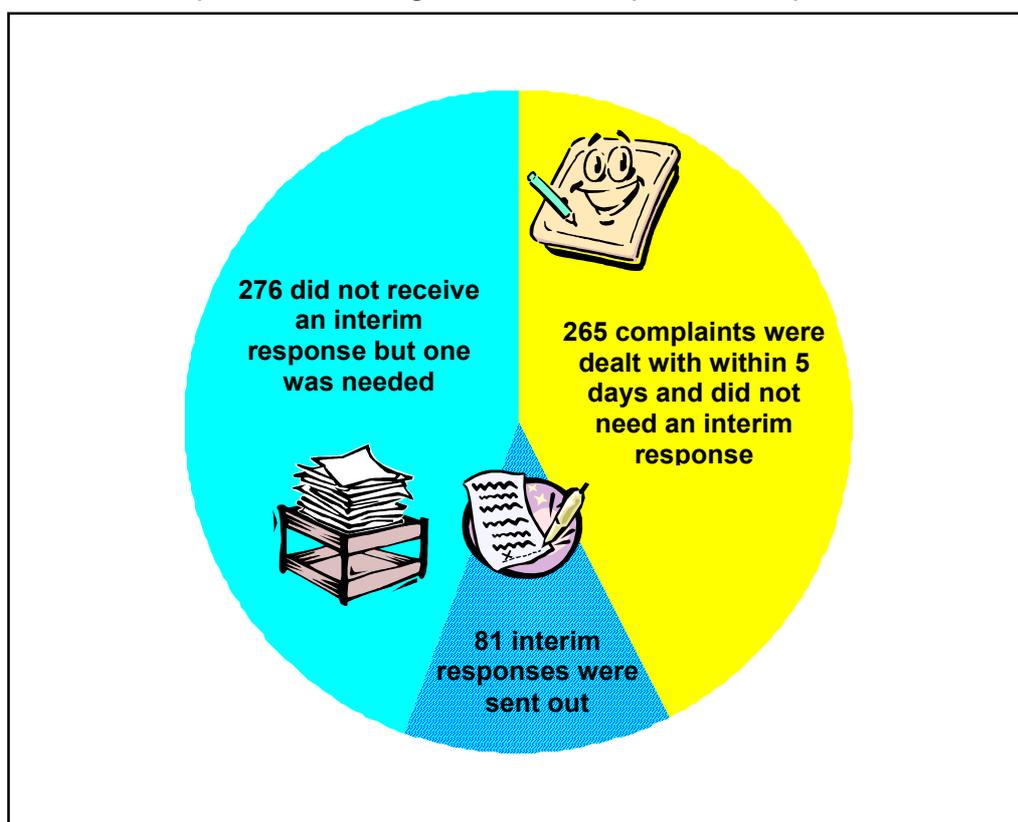
There is no target for this performance indicator, which relates to the number of complaints on the system that are currently being dealt with. In June 2004 there were 133 open complaints on the system.

### 8.1.6 Interim Responses

If it is not possible for a complaint to be dealt with within the 5 day timescale a complainant should receive an 'interim response' within the 5 working days to acknowledge that the complaint has been received and that action is being taken. However, this measure was not used as a performance indicator.

Chart 1 below illustrates the number of open complaints received between (1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004). The Chart shows the number of responses which took longer than 5 days to be dealt with and should therefore have received an interim response.

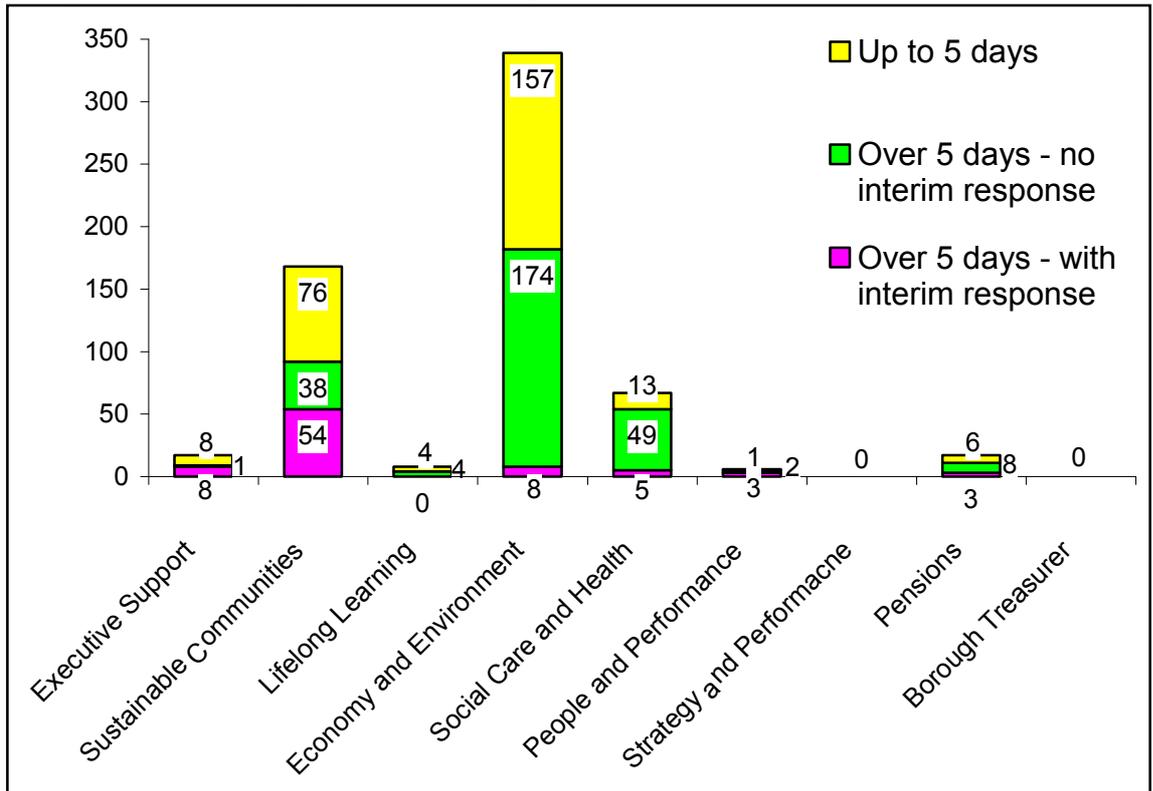
**Chart 1** Complaints receiving an interim response if required



8.1.7 Out of the 622 complaints which were closed from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004, 265 complaints were dealt with within 5 days, 357 took longer. However, only 81 complainants received an interim response.

Graph 4, below illustrates the number of interim responses issued for complaints taking longer than 5 days to deal with (1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004).

**Graph 4** Interim responses issued by service area



8.1.8 The Report to Directorate in December 2003 recommended that performance information be provided at quarterly intervals to the Strategic Directorate, commencing in January 2004.

8.1.9 At present there is no national benchmarking data collected to compare local authority complaints handling. However, Scrutiny Panel Members heard that Tameside has recently taken part in a National Complaints Survey conducted by the Institute of Customer Care.

### Conclusions

5. The value and purpose of some performance indicators is not always clear.
6. Interim responses are important for ensuring good customer service.

### Recommendations

6. That the Council evaluate the value and purpose of the performance indicators relating to corporate complaints.
7. That the Council consider introducing a performance indicator for monitoring the use of interim responses.

## 8.2 Monitoring and enforcing the system

- 8.2.1 In the meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> August, the Scrutiny Panel heard that in July 2003 the Complaints Officers in each directorate had been replaced by one Corporate Complaints Officer and a Social Service Complaints Officer and responsibility for complaints was delegated directly to Service Unit Managers.
- 8.2.2 A report to the Executive Management Team (EMT) in July 2004 stated that:
- “the Complaints Officer chases a significant number of outstanding complaints...This is particularly time consuming and not the best use of resources...Members of the public often complain again because they have not received a response to the first complaint”.*
- 8.2.3 The report describes one incidence when “the Corporate Complaints Officer has contacted the Service Unit Manager on three separate occasions to request closure”.
- 8.2.4 In an attempt to address this problem Panel Members were informed that a ‘name and shame’ list has recently been introduced. Every quarter the Executive Management Team (EMT) receives a list of all complaints (closed and open) that were on the system in that quarter. Each month the EMT receives a list of all open complaints on the system that have not yet been dealt with. Both lists include the names of Service Unit Managers responsible for each complaint. It is then the responsibility of the Executive Director to resolve the issue.
- 8.2.5 Although performance is reported by each service area and under performing services can be identified, there is no sanction for managers failing to deal with complaints within appropriate timescales.
- 8.2.6 One Council compared to Tameside as part of this review enforces a financial penalty on services that do not deal with the most serious complaints within the required timescales (complaints at stage 3 of that Council’s procedure).
- 8.2.7 A number of authorities contacted for this review are improving the monitoring of complaints by introducing recording systems along the line of that already in operation at Tameside.
- 8.2.8 Similarly with Tameside, where the system allows, senior managers can monitor complaints handling within their own service areas.
- 8.2.9 Issues relating to monitoring complaints handling in Social Care and Health are covered in section 9.
- 8.2.10 The Standards Committee has recently agreed to receive from the Assistant Executive Director (Sustainable Communities), quarterly reports

on the nature of the Corporate Complaints received and the action taken as a result.

### **Conclusions**

- 7. At the time of writing, monitoring information was not disseminated to Elected Members but will be considered by the Standards Committee on a quarterly basis. The Minutes of the meetings are considered at Council.**

### **Recommendations**

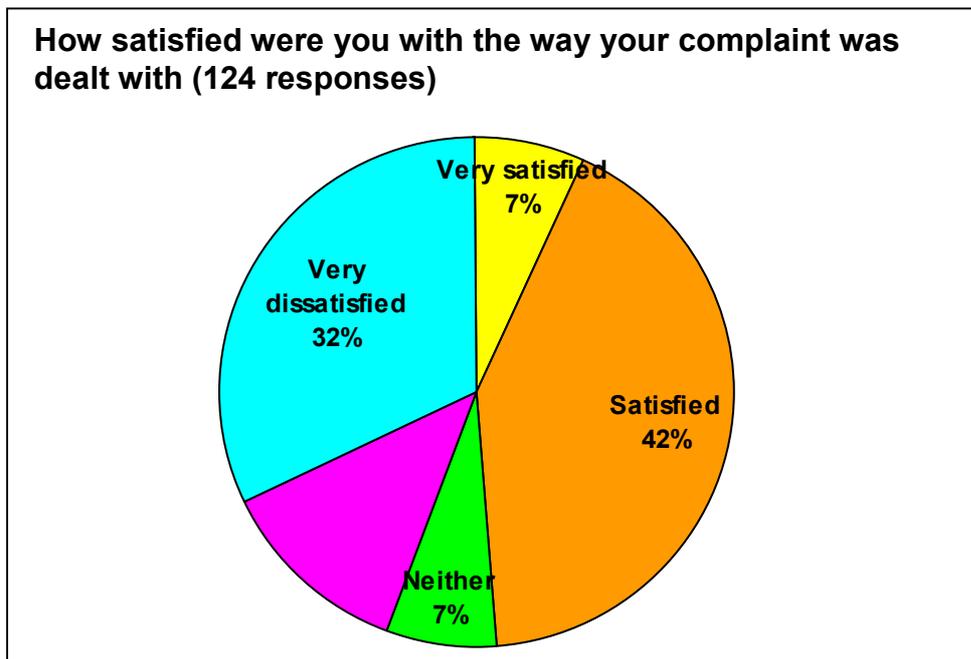
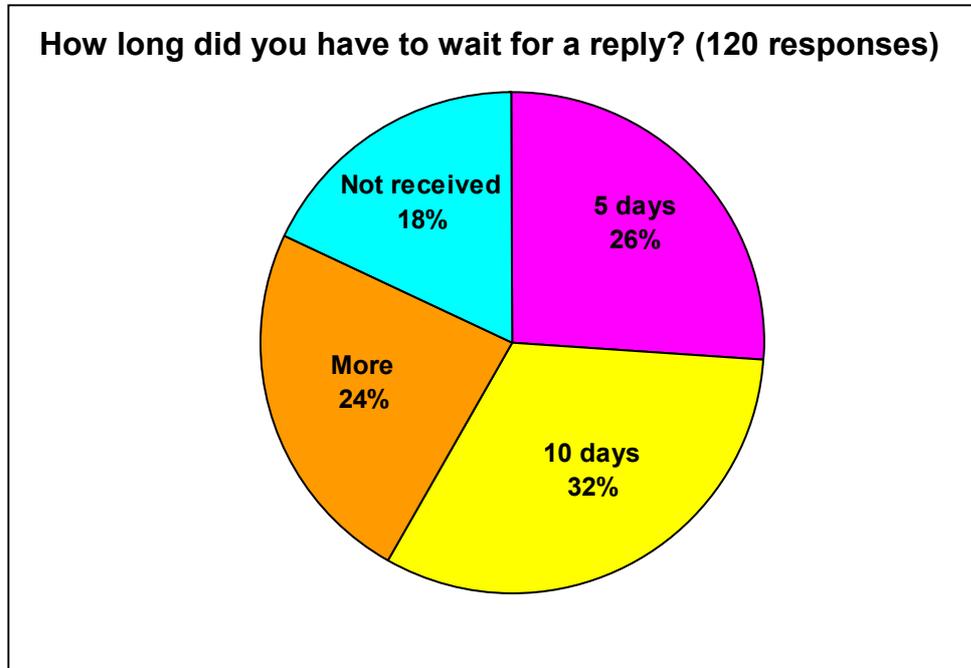
- 8. The Panel welcomes the recent decision to present monitoring information to the Standards Committee and recommends that this include monitoring of performance against timescales.**

## **8.3 Customer Feedback**

- 8.3.1 Communication and IT Services carried out a survey of customers, who at some point made a complaint to the Council on issues that had an impact on their day to day life. The survey was carried out over a four weeks period between April and May 2004.
- 8.3.2 120 customers were chosen at random from a sample of just over 2700 complaints that spanned one year. Interviewer did not have any prior knowledge of the type of customer or their complaints.
- 8.3.3 Local Government Ombudsman guidance stresses the importance of complainants being made aware of the stages of the complaints and which stage their complaint has reached
- 8.3.4 However, 59% of people interviewed had to chase up their complaint and 50% of people had complained before about the same issue.
- 8.3.5 The survey ascertained that the most popular method used by a customer to make a complaint is by telephone (61%), whilst only 27% personally called into council offices.
- 8.3.6 The survey also found that for 71% of complainants' the preferred method for receiving an acknowledgement for their complaint was by telephone, with only 22% expressing a preference for a letter.
- 8.3.7 58% of respondents who were dissatisfied with the way their complaint had been dealt with did not pursue the complaint further for reasons which included a lack of knowledge and understanding. 42% took their complaint up with senior management.

8.3.8

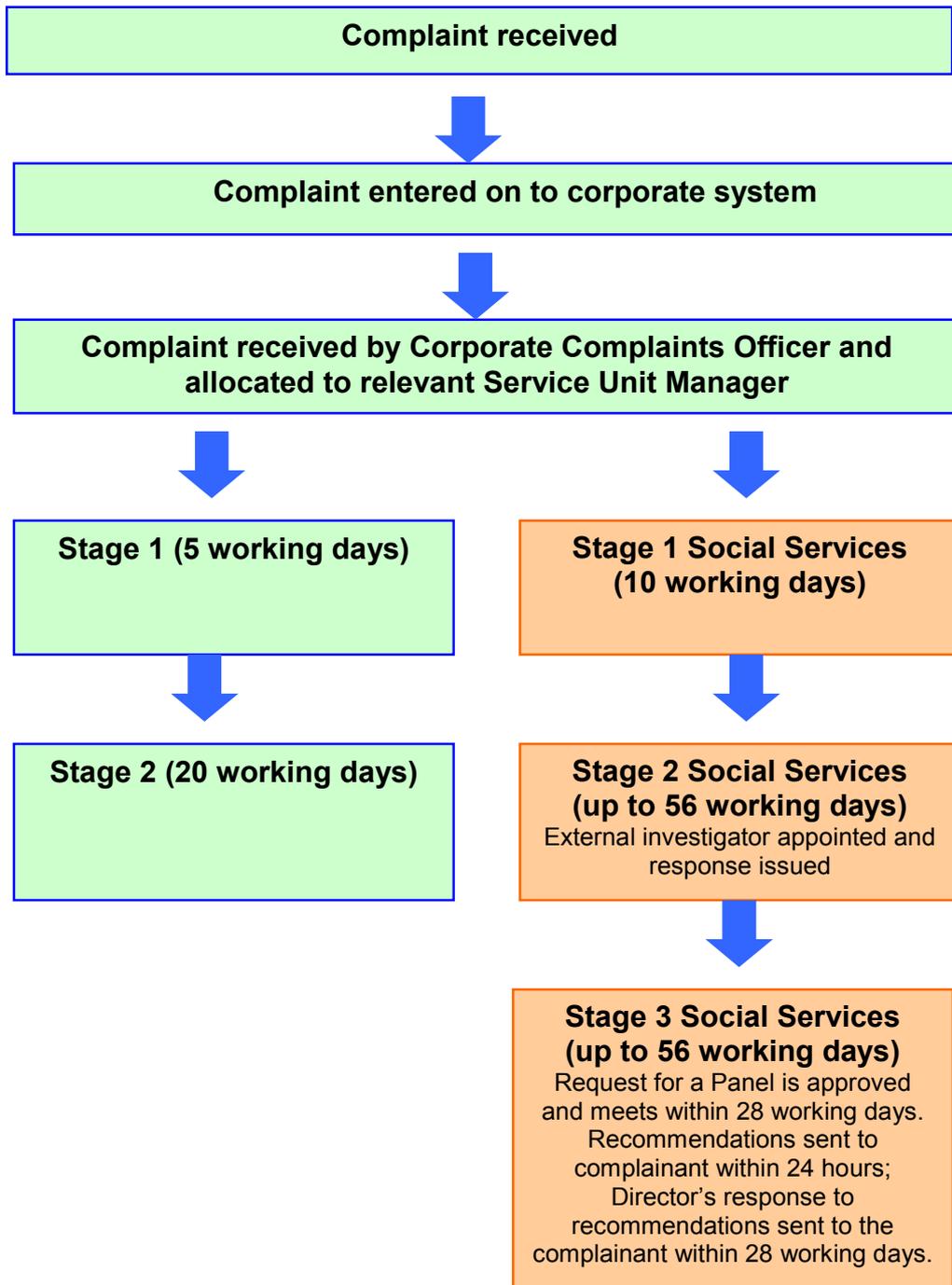
The charts below represent the length of time customers waited for a reply and the level of satisfaction that customers felt their complaints were dealt with.



**9. The Statutory Social Services Complaints Procedure**

**9.1 Stages, timescales and monitoring**

9.1.1 The diagram below sets out the current corporate complaints procedure alongside the statutory Social Services complaints procedure.



- 9.1.2 The Council is required to have a 'Representation and Complaints Procedure' in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which was updated by the NHS and Community Care Act 1990.
- 9.1.3 As shown in the diagram above there are three stages to the Social Services Complaints procedure (there are 2 in the corporate procedure). These are subject to different timescales and involve different mechanisms to those for the corporate complaints procedure. Social Services complaints are subject to timescales set down by the Council according to national guidelines i.e. Stage 1 complaints must be dealt with in 10 working days as opposed to 5 working days according to the Corporate Complaints Procedure. Legislation also dictates the individuals involved in handling complaints.
- 9.1.4 Complaints relating to Social Services received by the Call Centre or Customer Service staff are directed to Adult Services and Children's Services in the first instance.
- 9.1.5 All complaints at stage 1 relating to Social Services are entered on to the corporate complaints system like any other complaint and are sent to the Corporate Complaints Officer.
- 9.1.6 Complaints entered on to the Corporate Complaints System on the Council's website are received directly by the Corporate Complaints Officer.
- 9.1.7 These complaints are then allocated to the relevant Manager in Social Care and Health (section 4.2 contains more detail about the allocation of complaints in Social Care and Health).
- 9.1.8 Currently Social Care and Health are, in principle, subject to the same timescales at Stage 1 as other services i.e. complaints must be dealt with or an interim response issued within 5 working days.
- 9.1.9 The Chair has been informed that managers are encouraged to deal with complaints within 5 working days. This was confirmed by a meeting with three Service Unit Managers from the service. However, Managers felt that they are aiming for a complete solution within 10 working days.
- 9.1.10 Given the nature of Social Services complaints, Service Unit Managers feel that it is even more important to deal with Stage 1 complaints satisfactorily so that it does not progress to Stage 2.
- 9.1.11 Like all other managers on the system, Social Services managers receive 'alerts' when a complaint requires an interim response. However, given the different timescale at Stage 1, it is unclear whether the timescale for interim responses applies to Social Services complaints. This is the case for other alerts received after corporate timescales are reached.

- 9.1.12 In many cases contact has already been made with the complainant – to gather more information or explain the procedure – but this is not always recorded as an interim response.
- 9.1.13 Complaints that reach Stage 2 of the Corporate Complaints Process are to be dealt with in 20 working days by the Service Unit Manager responsible. Stage 2 of the Social Services complaints process is more extensive than Stage 2 of the Corporate Process and involves the appointment of an external Investigating Officer. A report is produced by the investigator within 28 working days and a further 28 working days is allowed for a response by the Service Unit Manager – potentially Stage 2 could take up to 56 working days. Additionally, legislation gives scope for some investigations to be extended up to a maximum of 3 months.
- 9.1.14 The Corporate Complaints System has no facility for recording the additional stage of the Social Services complaints procedure. At Stage 3 complaints are reviewed by an independent Panel which meets and produces recommendations within 56 working days.
- 9.1.15 Currently Social Care and Health Services managers produce performance-monitoring data from the Corporate Complaints System monthly, which is reported half yearly through the business planning process.
- 9.1.16 Managers felt that the new system enables them to be aware of all complaints because they now must receive all complaints and delegate these to other officers in the service area.
- 9.1.17 Although previously many complaints were dealt with immediately, managers felt that they may not have been aware of all complaints and so could not ensure that they were dealt with adequately or learn from patterns of complaints.
- 9.1.18 The system also allows managers to be responsible for delegating complaints directly; previously this was carried out by the Social Services Complaints Officer. Managers value this level of control.
- 9.1.19 Managers must approve responses to complaints produced by delegated officers before it is sent to the complainant. This helps managers ensure that responses are satisfactory and reduces the number of complaints progressing to Stage 2.
- 9.1.20 The system also allows managers to easily track the progress of a complaint and ensure it is being dealt with thoroughly and within the given timescales.
- 9.1.21 Service Unit Managers and the Head of Service interviewed for the Scrutiny Review did not feel that two separate systems are needed for corporate and Social Services complaints. The system itself is functioning well and is felt to have more advantages than disadvantages and improvements are being made all the time.

- 9.1.22 What needs to be resolved is how the data collected by these systems is used. Social Care and Health will continue to appear to be failing if it is measured against the corporate standards and not the standards required by legislation.

### Conclusions

- 8. The Service is increasingly satisfied that the corporate system is advantageous to Managers in Social Care and Health.**

### Recommendations

- 9. That the Council consider whether it is useful to the service, the Council or customers for the Social Care and Health Service to be included in the corporate monitoring of complaints or consider introducing caveats which acknowledge the different timescales.**

## 9.2 Allocation of complaints

- 9.2.1 The Social Services Statutory Complaints Officer is responsible for ensuring complaints are dealt with by the service. The Statutory Complaints Officer can also allocate complaints received by her to the relevant manager in Social Care and Health.

- 9.2.2 The Social Services Complaints Officer and Head of Service feel that this could lead to confusion over who is responsible for particular complaints since the Statutory Complaints Officer is no longer able to direct these complaints to the appropriate manager. This can be further complicated as some Unit Business Managers in Social Care and Health have similar roles to Service Unit Managers in other parts of the Council but are not always responsible for complaints handling. There may also be potential for delays in handling the complaint.

- 9.2.3 This view was also recorded in the report to Directorate in December 2003. The report described the findings of the Council's Continual Improvement Team which examined the process in 2001/02. With regard to Social Services Statutory Complaints the report states that:

*"Managers within Social Care and Health believe that the system of routing and allocating complaints through a central point...has extended the time taken to allocate and respond to complainants in a large service area with several layers of management".*

- 9.2.4 Social Care and Health Services Managers often have a larger number of officers to allocate complaints to than managers in other parts of the

Council. Initially managers in Social Care and Health could not always allocate complaints to the most appropriate officer in their service area as these were not registered on the system. The system has been improved to include all possible delegated officers for Social Services Managers.

9.2.5 The Head of Service also feels that the system has greatly improved since it was first launched and Service Unit Managers are increasingly positive about the system. Difficulties over allocating complaints to the relevant Service Unit Manager in the Social Care and Health Service have been largely overcome. A particular improvement has been for Service Unit Managers to be able to reallocate complaints to a wider range of other managers in the same service.

9.2.6 However managers agreed that the Social Services Complaints Officer could play a greater role in allocating complaints to help ensure complaints go to the most appropriate manager.

## **Conclusions**

**9. The allocation of complaints relating to Social Care and Health has greatly improved.**

## **Recommendations**

**10. That the Council consider whether the Social Services Complaints Officer can play a greater role in allocating complaints within a large and complex service.**

## **9.3 Confidentiality**

9.3.1 As Social Services complaints are entered on to the corporate system they can be monitored in the same way as other complaints. The Head of Service is keen for Social Services complaints to be monitored as with others and that members should have good information about complaints but there are issues about the level of access to sensitive information about clients.

9.3.2 Social Care and Health services are governed by the 'Caldicott Standard' for client confidentiality. The standard provides guidance for good practice in protecting information about individual clients particularly when being transferred to different agencies.

9.3.3 Managers interviewed by Members of the Scrutiny Panel were not fully aware that Elected Members can view complaints from constituents in their wards.

9.3.4 Managers were concerned that complainants were not asked to give consent for the details of their complaint to be viewed by other people. This

raised concerns that the service was not abiding by the Caldicott principles for handling client information, particularly when the client is identifiable.

- 9.3.5 The system has recently been amended and complainants are now asked if they wish their local Councillor to be notified of their complaint (see section 4.5.9).

#### **Conclusions**

- 10. The Panel welcomes the new alteration to the system which requests the complainant to agree that the complaint can be viewed by their Ward Councillor once it is on the system. This will increase confidentiality but may also detract from Members' role in monitoring complaints handling.**

#### **Recommendations**

- 11. That the Council consider how it can ensure Members are aware of complaints received by Social Care and Health which does not jeopardize confidentiality.**

### **9.4 Social Services Complaints Procedure and Council Policy**

- 9.4.1 The report to Directorate in December 2003 recommended that the Council adopt what is still the Council's Complaints Policy. The policy contains a list of 'matters that are outside the policy'. Social Services Statutory Complaints are included on this list.

- 9.4.2 New CSCI (Commission for Social Care Inspection) guidance to be issued in April 2005 may result in further changes to the statutory complaints procedure. The government intends that the CSCI and not local authorities will handle Stage 3.

#### **Conclusions**

- 11. It would be helpful if the Council clarify whether or not complaints relating to Social Care and Health Service are subject to the Corporate Policy.**

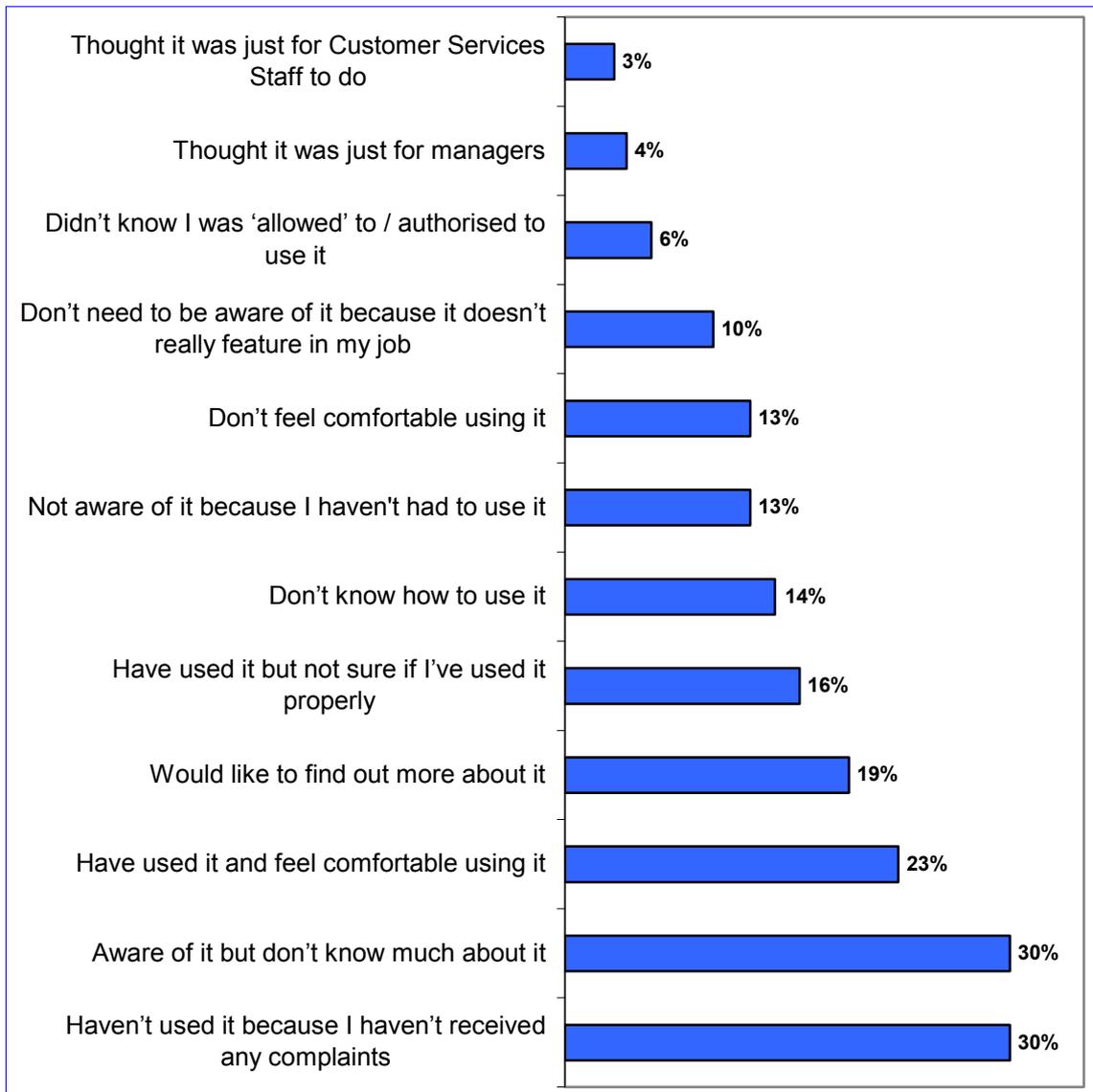
#### **Recommendations**

- 12. The Council should clarify whether or not complaints relating to Social Care and Health Service are subject to the Corporate Policy and therefore whether they should be included in the corporate monitoring information.**

## **10. Training And Support For Council Employees**

- 10.1 Service Unit Managers interviewed by members of the Scrutiny Panel identified training and support as a particular issue in need of some attention.
- 10.2 The Corporate Complaints Procedure is not included in new employees induction and no additional training is offered to new managers or officers with delegated responsibility.
- 10.3 Service Unit Managers felt that employees responsible for complaint handling often support each other in learning how to use the system and meet the requirements of the procedure.
- 10.4 New managers and nominated officers continually join the Council or move within the organisation.
- 10.5 Service Unit Managers noted that the system is constantly evolving but feel that the training does not always keep up with these changes.
- 10.6 Staff from the Community and IT Services responsible for the administration of the complaints process have in the past offered one-to-one support for managers requiring additional support.
- 10.7 A 'Frequently Asked Questions' sheet has been produced for those using the system.
- 10.8 In the lifetime of this Scrutiny Review, Community and IT Services have held a 'drop-in' session for managers and officers responsible for complaints handling.
- 10.9 The level of awareness and experience of other Council employees was measured by this Scrutiny Review.
- 10.10 Consultation was carried with non-management Council employees through on-line and postal surveys to ascertain the experience and attitudes toward the corporate complaints procedure and system.
- 10.11 120 responses to the survey were returned. Almost half of these were from 'support' staff, with the remaining mainly completed by purely frontline staff and a smaller proportion from partly frontline staff.
- 10.12 All service areas were represented in the responses although Sustainable Communities (which would include Customer Services Staff) and Social Care and Health represented just under half of responses.
- 10.13 Just under 90% said that they were aware of the corporate complaints system. Half of respondents said that they had never used the complaints system and a further quarter had only used it once or twice.

- 10.14 A very small proportion of respondents thought that it was not intended to be used by them. The majority reported that they had had no need to use the system.
- 10.15 A quarter reported that they had used the system and felt comfortable using it but many also indicated a lack of ability and a desire to learn more about the system.
- 10.16 The graph below groups the reply to a series of statements presented to respondents.



10.17

Comments received through the surveys reflect issues already raised in the review and demonstrate levels of awareness amongst Council employees.

*"I've no idea about it - haven't seen anything to tell me what to do either".*

*"Only been doing my job 4 weeks so never heard of it".*

*"Should be part of the induction process".*

*"I do not understand how it works. I have received 2 complaints erroneously and it took some time to re-lodge them with the correct person. Until I used it I didn't really think it was there for me to use"*

*Once that form is sent, it goes to the complaints officer who does the rest. I don't know what actually happens next.*

*Not sure what happens after the complaint is logged - don't know the managers role in the procedure".*

## **Conclusions**

- 12. The Panel found that employees may not be fully aware of the purpose and process involved in the Council's policy for handling complaints.**
- 13. The Scrutiny Panel was concerned that not all Managers and delegated officers are aware of how to use the system effectively.**

## **Recommendations**

- 13. A full explanation of the purpose of the Corporate Complaints Procedure and information about the processes involved should be included in the employee induction.**
- 14. All new Managers should be given specific training on the Corporate Complaints procedure and be shown how to use the system.**

## **11. The Complaints System**

- 11.1 The current procedure was launched along side a new electronic complaints system.
- 11.2 Employees have different levels of access to the different layers of the system depending on their level of responsibility and role in handling complaints.
- 11.3 All Council employees can access the system to enter and track the progress of complaints, as can all users of the Council websites.
- 11.4 Officers with delegated responsibility can view the details of complaints and update progress of the complaint.
- 11.5 Service Unit Managers can view, amend, close and reallocate complaints and monitor complaints within their service area.
- 11.6 The system administrators have full access to all levels of the system and to all complaints across the Council.
- 11.7 The system sends automatic alerts to Service Unit Managers when complaints are allocated to them and as timescales progress.
- 11.8 Although the system has advantages for managers in monitoring their service, a number of improvements were suggested by Managers during this review:
- Standard reports – to extract performance monitoring data managers must input requests on to the system to filter out the required information. It was felt that it would be helpful if a minimum, standard set of data could be produced.
  - Manager override – at the time of the review, only Service Unit Managers could access and update complaints for their service area. This caused delays if managers were on leave (this has been tackled recently, see 4.5.9).
  - Telephone numbers of complainants required as standard – it was felt that this would enable quicker and easier contact with the complainant to inform complaints of an interim response, to gather further information, or inform of progress.
- 11.9 The following changes have been made during the lifetime of this Scrutiny Review:
- Out of the Office – Managers can assign a deputy within the system to carry out complaints handling responsibilities in their absence. This gives the nominated officer the permission to respond and close a complaint in the absence of the Service Unit Manager.

- Categories – The way in which managers create new categories for recording the type of complaint received has been made easier.
- Councillor Alerts – Complainants are now asked if they would like their local Councillor to be notified of the complaint. If they choose ‘yes’ the relevant Councillor will be informed of the complaint through the Members Portal. If the complainant chooses ‘no’ then only the Service Unit Manager will be informed.

11.10 The issue of submitting ‘compliments’ as well as complaints on the system was also raised in the review as these comments received through the employee survey demonstrate:

*“The system does not distinguish clearly enough if at all between a “compliment ” and a complaint with the former having to be entered as a complaint.”*

*“We have used the system for putting in compliments as well as complaints. These go through the system in the same way as a complaint. It would be better if there was a tick box indicating that you are entering a compliment. Having to mess about opening and closing the entry makes you feel as if you are making unnecessary work for yourself and puts you off bothering to enter compliments”.*

*“Not enough emphasis that you can input thank yous as well”.*

11.11 At some of the councils contacted for this review, complaints are treated as one type of ‘feedback’ alongside comment, compliments and suggestions. At some councils these are all collected on the same form and customers are asked to identify it as a complaint.

### Conclusions

**14. The Scrutiny Panel welcomes the recent alterations to the system.**

### Recommendations

**15. That the Council consider adopting the remaining suggestions received by the Panel for improving the system as detailed in paragraph 11.6.8 above.**

## **12. Borough Treasurer's Observations**

The report does not show the cost of complaints nor does it compare with other Authorities and so we are unable to establish if the system is giving best value in both terms of costs and effectiveness as a system as well.

## **13. Borough Solicitor's Observations**

An effective and efficient Complaints System is one of the keystones of a Council's Corporate Governance. Council's have an implied statutory requirement to have a complaints system pursuant to Section 26(5) of the Local Government act which sets out the statutory framework for the Local Government Ombudsman:

*"Before proceeding to investigate a complaint, a Local Commissioner shall satisfy himself that the complaint has been brought, by or on behalf of the person aggrieved, to the notice of the authority to which the complaint relates and that authority has been afforded a reasonable opportunity to investigate, and reply to, the complaint."*

In addition it is an aspect of Corporate Governance that the Council's external Auditor and the Audit Commission consider as part of their annual review of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for discharging it duties. This is undertaken through the Council's Monitoring Officer who has a statutory duty in respect of good administrative practice and considering the annual report of the Local Government Ombudsman. The Audit Commission announced at the Standards Board for England Conference (September 2004) that they were of the view that each and every Authorities Standards Committee should undertake a monitoring and scrutiny role in respect of an Authority's complaints system. Accordingly this Authority's Statutory Standards Committee considered this recommendation at its meeting in December 2004 and resolved to undertake this role.

## **14. Recommendations**

- 14.1 That the service should consider how it ensures all users are aware of the most appropriate system to register their issues.**
- 14.2 That managers should be reminded that complaints received via Elected Members should be registered on the system as with all other complaints.**
- 14.3 The Corporate Complaints Officer need to be kept informed by Heads of Service of any changes to structures that will affect the allocation system.**
- 14.4 That a recognised 'deputy' Corporate Complaints Officer be identified to provide continuity in the absence of the Corporate Complaints Officer.**

- 14.5** That additional fixed timescales be introduced for updating the complainant of progress after an interim response has been issued until the complaint is closed.
- 14.6** That the Council evaluate the value and purpose of the performance indicators relating to corporate complaints.
- 14.7** That the Council consider introducing a performance indicator for monitoring the use of interim responses.
- 14.8** The Panel welcomes the recent decision to present monitoring information to the Standards Committee and recommends that this include monitoring of performance against timescales.
- 14.9** That the Council consider whether it is useful to the service, the Council or customers for the Social Care and Health Service to be included in the corporate monitoring of complaints or consider introducing caveats which acknowledge the different timescales.
- 14.10** That the Council consider whether the Social Services Complaints Officer can play a greater role in allocating complaints within a large and complex service.
- 14.11** That the Council consider how it can ensure Members are aware of complaints received by Social Care and Health which does not jeopardise confidentiality.
- 14.12** The Council should clarify whether or not complaints relating to Social Care and Health Service are subject to the Corporate Policy and therefore whether they should be included in the corporate monitoring information.
- 14.13** A full explanation of the purpose of the Corporate Complaints Procedure and information about the processes involved should be included in the employee induction.
- 14.14** All new Managers should be given specific training on the Corporate Complaints procedure and be shown how to use the system.
- 14.15** That the Council consider adopting the remaining suggestions received by the Panel for improving the system as detailed in paragraph 11.6.8 above.
- 14.16** That consideration be given to the creation of a simple system to record compliments for the Council.

**Resources And Community Services Scrutiny Panel**  
**Review of the Council's Corporate Complaints Process**

**Project Plan**

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2004**

**Aim Of The Scrutiny Review Exercise**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's corporate complaints process

**Objectives**

- A. To clarify the current corporate complaints process
- B. To record the performance of the corporate complaints process
- C. To assess the implementation and effectiveness of each stage of the process
- D. To compare the complaints process at Tameside Council with those of other local authorities, and organisations in the public and private sector
- E. To assess customer and user experience of the corporate complaints process

**Timescale**

It is anticipated that this review will be completed by November 2004 in time to contribute to Phase 3 of the Council's development of the corporate complaints process due to begin in December 2004.

## Action Plan

Action	Objective met	Timescale	Lead Scrutiny Panel member(s) and/or Scrutiny Support Officer(s)
(1) Briefing paper outlining the complaints process	A	Briefing paper for Scrutiny Panel Meeting 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(2) Briefing paper covering performance monitoring data	B	Briefing paper for Scrutiny Panel Meeting 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(3) Meet with Mandy Kinder (Communication and IT Services Manager) to discuss issues identified and potential improvements.	All	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	Scrutiny Panel
(4) Meet with Tim Rainey (Assistant Executive Director, Community and Information Technology Services) to discuss issues identified and potential improvements.	All	Informal meeting by Scrutiny Panel Meeting 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	Scrutiny Panel
(5) Meet with the Social Services Complaints Officer to discuss use of the corporate complaints process and the statutory Social Services complaints process	A, C	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	Scrutiny Panel
(6) Meet with temporary Complaints Officer(s) to discuss issues relating to their role	A, C	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	Scrutiny Panel
(7) Access the Council's complaints system	A	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	Scrutiny Panel
(8) Interview Managers and Officers responsible for handling complaints to discuss the complaints process and use of the complaints system	C, E	Informal Meeting(s) by Scrutiny Panel Meeting 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2004	Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(9) Test the use of the complaints process at a selection of Council 'service points' (e.g. Call Centre, libraries, customer service centres, website)	C	By Scrutiny Panel Meeting 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2004	Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(10) Visit the Council's Call Centre to experience complaints handling	C	Immediately prior to Scrutiny Panel Meeting 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2004	Scrutiny Panel
(11) Produce information about best practise in complaints handling in other local authorities, private sector and utilities providers, and other agencies	D	By Scrutiny Panel Meeting 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2004	Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(12) Visit a selection of local authorities, private sector and utilities providers, and other agencies to compare complaints handling processes	D	By Scrutiny Panel Meeting 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2004	Alison Davies (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(13) Consult Council employees through the staff portal about awareness of the complaints process and inputting complaints on to the system	C, E	By Scrutiny Panel Meeting 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2004	

Action	Objective met	Timescale	Lead Scrutiny Panel member(s) and/or Scrutiny Support Officer(s)
(14) Interview the District Assembly Advisory Groups about awareness of the complaints process and use of the complaints system	E	Informal Meeting by Scrutiny Panel Meeting 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2004	Alison Davies (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(15) Focus group with complainants	E	By Scrutiny Panel Meeting 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2004	Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(16) Consult Elected Members during Scrutiny Panel briefing meetings about awareness of the complaints process and use of the complaints system	E	By Scrutiny Panel Meeting 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2004 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services Scrutiny Panel (17.8.04)</li> <li>• Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel (26.8.04)</li> <li>• Personal and Health Services Scrutiny Panel (31.8.04)</li> <li>• Technical and Health Services Scrutiny Panel (6.9.04)</li> </ul>	Scrutiny Panel Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officer)
(17) Produce draft report and identify conclusions and recommendations	All	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2004	Scrutiny Panel Alison Davies and Sarah Challoner (Scrutiny Support Officers)
(18) Agree final report	All	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 11 <sup>th</sup> November 2004	Scrutiny Panel