

**INTERNAL
AUDIT REPORT

COMPLAINTS**

Lynda Baker – Audit Manager

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Complaints are received across the Council directly by individual services in verbal, written and electronic form. The React database has been introduced in order for the services to manage these complaints efficiently.

This audit is part of the agreed audit plan for the year 2005/2006.

1.2 Objectives and Scope

The objectives of the audit were to ensure that:

- The Service effectively delivers to its clients (**Service Delivery**).
- Income and expenditure is controlled (**Income & Expenditure**).
- The Service is aware of potential risks (**Potential Risks**).
- The Service complies with legal obligations (**Compliance with Legislation**).
- The React database is efficiently used (**React System**).

Observations of the complaint procedure were made only within Housing and Learning & Development (L&D). Information used for this audit was taken from the period July-November 2005.

The Information & Customer Liaison Manager informed that there is a separate complaints system in place for Social Services, which was not included in this audit.

1.3 Volume Indicators

The budget for Corporate Complaints and Freedom of Information requests this year is £42,717 and the current expenditure against that budget at December 2005 is £16,059.

The React system reported the following complaint figures for the year 2004/2005.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Total
Adult Social Care	49	0	0	49
Chief Executive	7	1	1	9
Children's Services	58	10	1	69
Environment	222	13	6	241
Learning & Development	93	3	1	97
Neighbourhood Services	538	55	14	607
Resources	138	16	6	160
Total				1,232

There have been a total of 623 complaints recorded in the Services above between 1st April 2005 and 12th January 2006.

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2. CONCLUSIONS

2.1 **The audit findings demonstrate weaknesses in the system of controls which place the system objectives at risk.**

2.2 The complaints system is robust, fully catering for the requirements of the public, however the controls are undermined by the following weaknesses: -

Information on the React database is not consistent and complaint investigations are not consistently completed within agreed timescales, therefore problems may not be identified and addressed in a timely manner.

2.3 All 'Good Internal Controls' identified are recorded (Section 4) and all 'Risks and Control Weaknesses' identified that give rise to a recommendation are summarised in a table (Section 5).

3. WAY FORWARD

3.1 The recommendations made in this report should be implemented by every service across the Council. An internal memo will be sent to all Complaints Officers to raise awareness of the issues identified.

3.2 All the recommendations identified are included in the [Management Action Plan \(Page 8\)](#). However, the key recommendations are set out below to provide a summary of those areas where management are required to focus their attention:

3.2.1 The React system should record all complaints received by the Council and should be consistently updated.

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FINDINGS SUMMARY

4. GOOD INTERNAL CONTROLS

The following areas were tested and confirmed as having good internal controls with no problems to report: -

4.1 Service Delivery

- 4.1.1 The public can easily find the procedure for making a complaint. Information is displayed on the MK Web and leaflets are available at Civic Offices and Saxon Court
- 4.1.2 The Complaints Guidance Manual is easy to access. It is available to staff via the staff portal and a link to the document is located on the home page of the React database.
- 4.1.3 The Information & Customer Liaison Manager informs that closed complaint records on React are archived annually.

4.2 Income and Expenditure

- 4.2.1 The Information & Customer Liaison Manager creates recharging statistics for the Legal Services Division each year, which are reported to the Finance and Performance section.
- 4.2.2 The budget for Corporate Complaints is regularly monitored and discussed with the relevant senior members of staff.

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FINDINGS SUMMARY (continued)

5. RISKS AND CONTROL WEAKNESSES

Ref	Theme	Findings	Risks (Implications)	Recommendation
1	Service Delivery	Missed deadlines are an issue in both Housing and L&D Early Years. More importantly reasons for missing the deadline are not consistently recorded onto React.	The public may not receive the level of service promised.	The standard deadlines set for complaints should be met. In cases where they cannot be met, an explanation should be recorded on React for management to see as well as sending notification to the complainant. Missed deadlines should be monitored monthly.
2	Service Delivery	Information is not consistently updated onto React. This includes procedure dates, investigation information and lessons learnt in particular.	Complaints may not be dealt with according to the procedure.	React should be consistently updated with every field on each tab where applicable. If fields are not applicable state "not applicable". This should be reviewed by management teams on a regular basis (i.e. monthly).
3	Service Delivery	L&D complaints have only been logged within the departments of Community & Economic Development and Education.	Complaints may not be dealt with.	An investigation should be carried out to establish why complaints have not been logged in other areas of L&D (see Finding for detail).

Ref	Theme	Findings	Risks (Implications)	Recommendation
4	React System	A number of Complaints Officers within Housing have been provided with access to the React system without having attended the training course provided by the IT Training & Support Officer (they were trained by another method).	The database could be incorrectly updated with information	From the date of this report all nominated Customer Care Officers and Investigating Officers should attend the React training course provided by the IT Training & Support Officer before receiving access to the system. The IT Analyst/Programmer should check the React training schedule before granting access to these users. Internal Audit notes that in exceptional circumstances Officers may need to be given access and interim training pending attendance on the official React training course.
5	Potential Risks	A risk workshop has not been undertaken to identify the potential risks arising with regard to Corporate Complaints.	The service may not be aware of risks.	A risk workshop should be carried out to identify the potential risks arising with regard to the Corporate Complaints procedure.
6	Service Delivery	The categories of records (comments, compliments and complaints) are not consistently correct. The system automatically defaults a new record to a complaint and this is not always changed to suit.	The true number of complaints cannot be calculated easily.	The category of new records should be changed when they are not a complaint (i.e. to comment or compliment).

NB Any cost implications arising from implementation of the recommendations by HBS must be agreed in advance with the appropriate Client Officer and the Partnership Delivery Manager.

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FINDINGS SUMMARY (continued)

6. MINOR CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Service Delivery

The information held at the switchboard regarding corporate complaints is not fully accurate and effective. It may cause aggravation to customers if they are not transferred to the correct employee in the first instance.

It is suggested that the Information & Customer Liaison Manager meets with the Operations Manager to check the information held at the switchboard and to identify the key officers to contact in each service.

6.2 React System

A field is available on the "Findings & Outcomes" tab on React for Investigators/Complaints Officers to upload documents such as letters of correspondence to the complainant. The use of this field is optional, however the aim of it is to provide management with relevant information on the progress of the complaint.

It is suggested that all system users use the "Findings and Outcomes" field in order to gain full effectiveness of the system.

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MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

The recommendations are categorised on the following basis:

Essential - Implementation is required with immediate effect to address a weakness that fundamentally undermines the control of that system.

Important - Implementation is required within a short period of time to address weaknesses that seriously undermine the control of that system.

Standard - Management need to take recommended action within a reasonable period to address weaknesses that may undermine system control.

Ref	Recommendation	Categorisation	Management Comments	Manager Responsible	Target Date
1	<p>Service Delivery - Missed Deadlines</p> <p>The standard deadlines set for complaints should be met. In cases where they cannot be met, an explanation should be recorded on React for management to see as well as sending notification to the complainant.</p> <p>Missed deadlines should be monitored monthly.</p>	Important	Agreed by the Information & Customer Liaison Manager. It is essential for system users to effectively record information in order that accurate management information is available.	Complaints/Service Improvements Officer (Housing) & Performance Officer (L&D)	28/02/2006
2	<p>Service Delivery - Information on React</p> <p>React should be consistently updated with every field on each tab where applicable. If fields are not applicable state "not applicable".</p> <p>This should be reviewed by management teams on a regular basis (i.e. monthly).</p>	Important	Agreed by the Information & Customer Liaison Manager. It is essential for system users to effectively record information in order that accurate management information is available.	Complaints/Service Improvements Officer (Housing) & Performance Officer (L&D)	28/02/2006

Ref	Recommendation	Categorisation	Management Comments	Manager Responsible	Target Date
3	<p>Service Delivery - Logging Complaints</p> <p>An investigation should be carried out to establish why complaints have not been logged in other areas of L&D (see Finding for detail).</p>	Important		Performance Officer, L&D	30/06/2006
4	<p>React System - Training</p> <p>From the date of this report all nominated Customer Care Officers and Investigating Officers should attend the React training course provided by the IT Training & Support Officer before receiving access to the system.</p> <p>The IT Analyst/Programmer should check the React training schedule before granting access to these users.</p> <p>Internal Audit notes that in exceptional circumstances Officers may need to be given access and interim training pending attendance on the official React training course.</p>	Standard	<p>Agreed by the Information & Customer Liaison Manager. It is essential for system users to effectively record information in order that accurate management information is available.</p> <p>Agreed by the Strategy and Performance Manager (Housing).</p>	Strategy and Performance Manager (Housing) & IT Analyst / Programmer	28/02/2006
5	<p>Potential Risks - Risk Evaluation</p> <p>A risk workshop should be booked and carried out to identify the potential risks arising with regard to the Corporate Complaints procedure.</p>	Standard	Agreed.	Information & Customer Liaison Manager	31/07/2006

Ref	Recommendation	Categorisation	Management Comments	Manager Responsible	Target Date
6	Service Delivery - Categorising records The category of new records should be changed when they are not a complaint (i.e. to comment or compliment).	Standard	Agreed by the Information & Customer Liaison Manager. It is essential for system users to effectively record information in order that accurate management information is available.	Performance Officer, L&D	28/02/2006

NB Any cost implications arising from implementation of the recommendations by HBS must be agreed in advance with the appropriate Client Officer and the Partnership Delivery Manager.