

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 22 APRIL 2010

SATISFACTION SURVEY ON THE LOCAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Report of the: Monitoring Officer

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Elaine Bracken – Portfolio Holder for Safe Community

Head of Service Head of Legal and Democratic Services – Mrs. Christine Nuttall

Recommendation: It be RESOLVED that the report be noted and that Members provide comments for the future.

Introduction

- 1 A Feedback form was sent to all complainants and subject Members who had been involved in the Standards Assessment process between 25 February 2009 and 28 February 2010. In total, 5 responses were received from 16 questionnaires, which is a response rate of just under a third. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix A and a table setting out the main findings is attached at Appendix B.

Findings

- 2 Most respondents to the survey were happy with the way the result was communicated to them and the one who was not was referring to the manner in which Standards for England communicated the results of its investigations. Most were also happy with the information that was provided to them on how the process worked and with the time taken to consider the complaint.

Concerns About the Process

- 3 Four of the five respondents wanted to see improvements to the process. One complainant was disappointed with the way in which Standards for England had investigated a complaint referred to them by the Local Assessment Sub-Committee, although they were satisfied with Sevenoaks' role in the process. The specific concerns related to the time taken by Standards for England to investigate and to the outcome of the investigation.
- 4 Two other respondents had concerns about aspects of the local assessment process. One, a subject member, was unhappy that he/she could not be told what complaint had been made against them until after the Assessment Sub-Committee had met. The other, a complainant, was unhappy that he/she could

not address the Assessment Sub-Committee in person and that the whole process was handled by written submissions, behind closed doors. He/she stated that this made the process seem like “the old boys at the Council sweeping the complaint under the carpet”.

Action Proposed

- 5 Under the local assessment framework introduced in 2008, the Monitoring Officer has no discretion to provide a summary of a complaint to the subject Member – this is a decision which can only be taken by the Assessment Sub-Committee. Similarly, the Council also has no discretion to handle the assessment process, other than by way of considering a written complaint in private. Although respondents to the survey were generally content with the information they received from the Council, understanding of the process might be increased if complainants/subject members were sent a copy of the Council’s Procedure for Local Assessment of Complaints about Allegations of Member Misconduct. It is suggested that from now on, the Monitoring Officer should enclose a copy of this procedure when acknowledging the receipt of complaints and when notifying Members that a complaint has been made against them.

Key Implications

Financial

- 6 None arising from this report.

Community Impact and Outcomes

- 7 The community expects the Council to operate to the highest ethical standards. It is important that people feel able to make a complaint if they are concerned that a Councillor is in breach of any part of the Code of Conduct.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

- 8 The manner in which the Council must operate the local assessment of complaints against Councillors is prescribed by legislation and the Council must have regard to Standards for England guidance.

Conclusions

- 9 It is notable from the responses that people were generally content with the levels of customer service provided. This might also be suggested by the low response rate, as people with specific concerns may be more likely to reply. The Council is unable to respond directly to the two specific concerns raised, as it must operate within the prescribed local assessment framework. However, promoting better understanding of the process from an early stage may help to reduce these concerns in future.

Risk Assessment Statement

No specific risks identified arising directly from this report.

Sources of Information: None.

Contact Officer(s): Ally Round – Ext. 7241

**Christine Nuttall
Monitoring Officer**

QUESTIONNAIRE

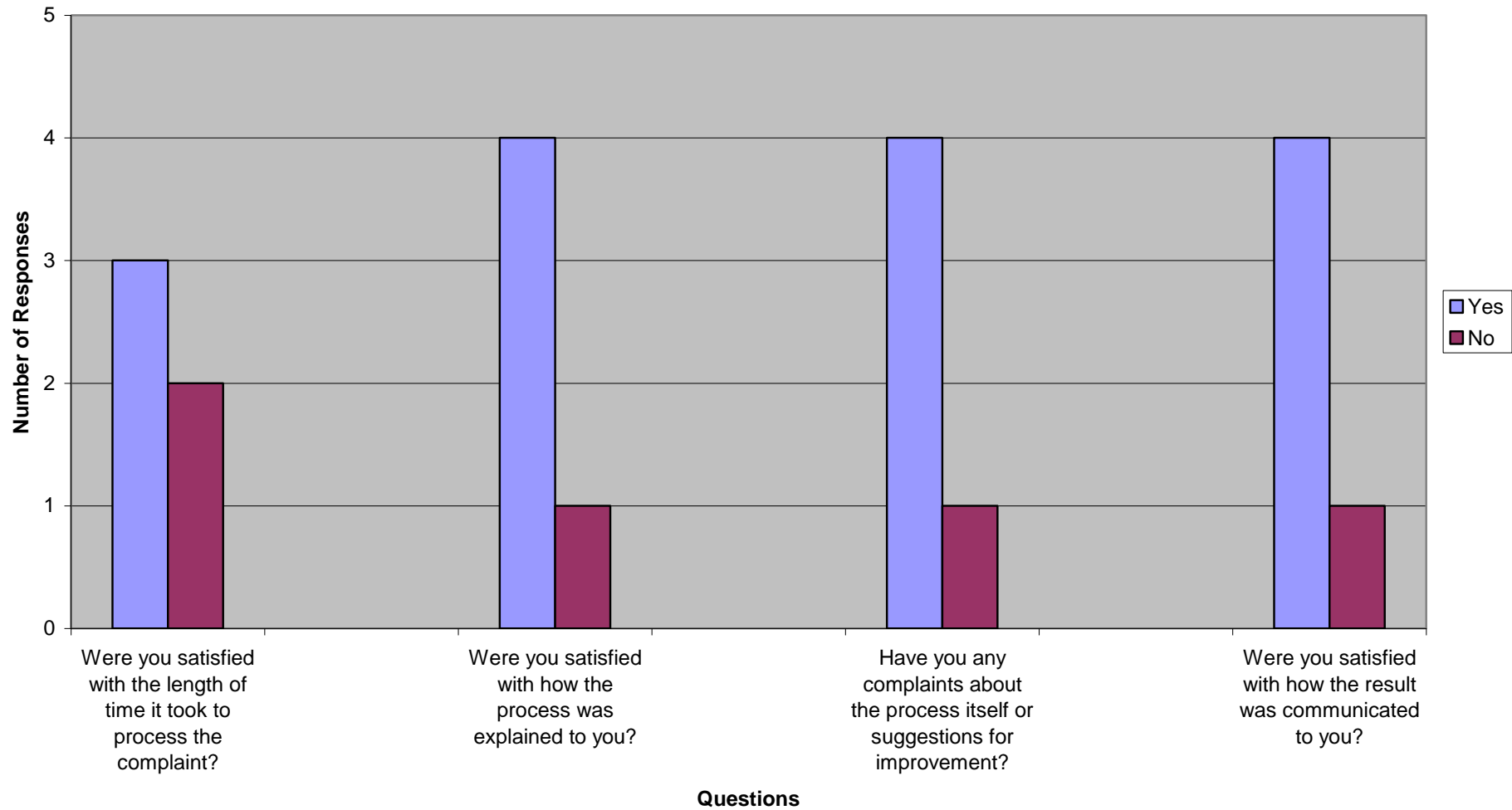
The following four questions are designed to help us improve our level of service. Could you please answer the questions and add any further comments you feel could help us in achieving our goal. Thank you.

No.	Question
1.	How many times have you been involved in the process?
	Once <input type="checkbox"/> Twice <input type="checkbox"/> More Than Twice <input type="checkbox"/>
	<u>Comments:</u>
2.	Were you satisfied with the length of time it took to process the complaint?
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<u>Comments:</u>
3.	Were you satisfied with how the process was explained to you?
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<u>Comments:</u>
4.	Have you any complaints about the process itself or suggestions for improvement?
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Item No. 3 – Appendix A

	<u>Comments:</u>
5.	Were you satisfied with how the result was communicated to you?
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<u>Comments:</u>

Satisfaction Yes/No Results



This covers the period between 25 February 2009 and 28 February 2010. 16 surveys were sent out and 5 responses were received.