



Annual Complaints Report 2010-11

Cambridge City Council

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL'S ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2010-11

Every year we publish an Annual Complaints Report, which gives an overview of all the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them (we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained). We now also include information about the Freedom of Information requests we have received.

Why we produce this report

We want to learn from our mistakes so that we can improve our services

We want to encourage people who have cause to complain to make comments and suggestions to help us make these improvements.

We want to show you how we've responded to complaints and what we've done to try and put things right.

We want to publicise and explain our complaints process.

Standards Committee

Each year, the Council's Standards Committee considers our Annual Complaints Report. The committee is made up of elected councillors and two members of the public. The committee can make recommendations to the Council on any changes that it considers may be necessary as a result of the complaints received during the previous year.

Our Complaints Procedure

When should I make a complaint?

You should complain to us if:

- You are unhappy about something we have or haven't done.
- You are not satisfied with the way a member of staff has treated you.
- You are not happy with the way a councillor has treated you.
- You want to complain for any other reason.

How do I make a complaint?

We publish a 'How to Complain Leaflet' which is available on our website at <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/complaints> or you can ask for a paper copy from our reception points.

Details of how to make a complaint and how the Council will put things right for you are also published in our service guarantees.

You can make a complaint by letter or email, telephone or face-to-face, or you can use our on-line complaints form.

We keep a book for complaints and suggestions at our reception points so that we can record customers' complaints and suggestions.

We aim to deal with your complaint quickly and efficiently. Our target response time is seven working days. If we need longer to respond, we will tell you why and keep you informed of progress during our investigation. We will also tell you who is dealing with your complaint.

We will apologise when we have made mistakes, try and put things right as soon as possible and make sure we do better next time.

If you are not happy with the response to your complaint you can ask for your complaint to be passed to a service manager.

There are some things we can't change because we are legally required to do them or because they concern services provided by other organisations. In these cases we will always explain why we can't change things and tell you who else you can contact if you are still unhappy.

Each of our departments has a complaints co-coordinator who keeps details of all complaints for their service areas. Managers review the complaints regularly and decide whether they need to change things to prevent any problems from happening again.

If you have any questions about how to complain, please contact our Customer Service Centre, phone 01223 457000, fax 01223 457982, Tynetalk 18001 01223 45700 or e-mail enquiries@cambridge.gov.uk

The Independent Complaints Investigator

If you have not received a reply to your complaint within seven days or you are not satisfied with the way we have dealt with your complaint, you can ask for it to be referred to the Head of the relevant service. If you are still dissatisfied with the reply you can refer the complaint to the Independent Complaints Investigator who will investigate your complaint for you.

The Independent Complaints Investigator is not an employee of the Council but is paid by the Council on a contract to investigate complaints. This ensures that the role can be independent of the Council's departments.

The Independent Complaints Investigator investigates complaints to see if they are justified and acts on the complainant's behalf to try and find a

way of resolving the issues raised. They aim to acknowledge each complaint within seven days and let the complainant know a date by which they can expect a full response. They will also arrange a confidential interview at a convenient time and place if it is required.

The Independent Complaints Investigator's role is not intended to be a substitute for handling complaints effectively within departments. It is intended to complement our complaints procedures and ensure consistency throughout the Council. Cambridge City Council is one of the few councils to operate this service.

The Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still not satisfied with the way your complaint has been handled you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman's office. The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and certain other bodies. The Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted on 0300 0610614 or by visiting www.lgo.org.uk.

Complaints to the City Council in 2010-11

How many complaints were received?

We received 576 complaints in 2010-11. This was a 30% decrease over the 827 received in 2009-10. The target for this year was set at 800 and this was comfortably achieved. The increased use of email has allowed greater distinction between requests for service and genuine complaints over the year and this has been reflected in the final totals.

	Chief Exec's	Central Services	Customer & Democratic Services ¹	City Services	Finance	Community Services	Env & Planning	TOTAL
2004-2005	5	260		165	76	196	130	832
2005-2006	2	353		149	57	278	108	947
2006-2007	3	410		116	43	352	53	977
2007-2008	8		17	94	40	483	105	747
2008-2009	8		26	117	36	550	52	789
2009-2010	21		33	136	61	544	32	827

¹ The council restructured its departments during 2010/11. 3 main directorates, Customer & Community Services, Environment and Resources were created. The Annual Complaints reporting for 2011/12 will reflect this change.

2010-11	8		13	23	56	418	58	576
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A list showing which department is responsible for which service can be found on the back page of this report and in the Council's 'How to Complain' leaflet.

How did we receive your complaints?

In 2003 the Council's Standards Committee asked officers to start recording how complaints are received. In 2009 -2010 more complaints were received via email than by letter, with 47% of complaints received by e-mail and 34% by letter. This trend has continued into 2010 -11 with 56% of complaints received by e-mail and 24% by letter.

The CCC online complaints form went live this year and has proved a popular method of reporting of complaints. This allows for complaints to be actioned immediately through the customer service centre.

	% 2010-11	% 2009-10	% 2008-09	% 2007/08	% 2006/07
Face to Face	1%	4%	5%	2%	7%
Letter	24%	34%	37%	56%	57%
E-mail	56%	47%	40%	29%	22%
Telephone	4%	11%	14%	10%	11%
Other, Comment Cards	15%	4%	4%	3%	4%
TOTAL	100%				

What were the complaints about?

City Services

For City Services the largest number of complaints related to missed bin collections .

Community Services

In Community Services neighbour nuisance and anti social behaviour is an issue for City Homes. Complaints were received about new tenants leaving cycles in hallways which caused a health and safety issue for residents and via a District Nurse that a tenant of Ditchburn Extra Care was socially isolating himself resulting in him becoming bored.

Complaints about wanting to be housed, the lack of available housing and the lettings policy not being fair were most frequent for Housing Strategy.

Resources

For Resources the majority of complaints were about general housing repairs but there was also complaints regarding the proposed relocation of Lion Year

toilets.

Arts & Entertainments

For Arts and Entertainments there were complaints about the Johann Strauss concert where the Corn Exchange venue was too cold.

Community Development

For Community Development there were complaints from young people about the cancellation of sessions at Brown's Field, the layout of Chypps Summerdaze brochure and the location of where the Dec is parked.

Customer and Democratic Services

In Customer Services complaints occurred where they had waited a long time when in fact it had only been 5 minutes, had called in to see someone from housing options and had been given the wrong operating hours and had complained about the amount of cycle spaces at the front of the building.

Finance

In Revenues and Benefits the majority of complaints this year have been in relation to Council Tax with a number of complaints relating to student status and student tenancies. A number of complaints were also made concerning the time taken for refunds to be paid.

Environment and Planning

In Environment and Planning the majority of complaints related to planning portal system errors and the lack of a response to enquiries from the tree team.

Additionally there were complaints surrounding the decisions made by planning officers and the amount of time taken to make decisions and where people who were not consulted on a planning application felt that they should have been.

What have we done as a result of your complaints?

Each council department reviews the complaints and compliments that it receives on at least a quarterly basis.

This enables services to identify if there are any trends in the types of complaints being made or the services that complaints are being made about. As a result changes may be made to services and how they are provided. Examples of the sorts of changes arising from complaints made over the past year are shown below:

City Services

Crews were spoken with to make sure that there is no repetition of the problem. Letters of apology were sent to complainants.

Community Services

In response to the complaint received about new tenants leaving cycles in hallways which caused a health and safety issue for residents, cycle racks were installed at Ainsdale and Tweedale.

The bicycle racks are well used and are keeping the bicycles out of the communal areas, in addition to providing a safer, more secure place for them. The racks were funded by the Cycle Cambridge project. Article in Autumn Open Door. Estate Champion would help other residents with applying for funding for this type of project to improve their neighbourhood.

In reply to the complaint received via a District Nurse that a tenant of Ditchburn Extra Care was socially isolating himself resulting in him becoming bored, a meeting took place between all parties and as a result of that meeting a coffee morning was introduced each day which is run by a member of the care staff and also an afternoon tea event also run by the care staff. Staff were advised to encourage tenants to attend these events and a calendar was also produced on major events and sporting events throughout the year, such as mothers day, fathers day, harvest festival etc. All of the above is extra to the current social events that normally take place.

Resources

Complaints regarding repairs such as roofing, fencing, lighting etc have been investigated with the contractors and followed up with a letter or phone call to the resident in response / conclusion.

Colleagues working on the relocation of Lion Yard toilets were asked to include the complainant in the group of consultees that will be used to inform the completion of the EqlA. Comments that had been made were passed on regarding accessibility issues.

Arts & Entertainments

Issues have been addressed and a 50% refund or ticket vouchers were given.

Community Development

Following complaints from young people about the cancellation of sessions at Brown's Field, the staff will now try to let regular users know in advance of any cancellations.

The Chypps Summerdaze brochure is now set out differently - in response to a complaint regarding the layout of the brochure.

The Dec is no longer parked for sessions in residential areas - in response to

a resident complaining about noise.

Customer and Democratic Services

In response to complaint around wait times a letter of apology was sent explaining that sometimes, because of the complexity of enquiries some people can take longer than others and that it was unfortunate that her visit coincided with customers needing more assistance than normal.

A letter of apology was sent advising of the operating hours of the housing options team.

With regard to the amount of cycle spaces at the front of the building, a letter of apology was sent explaining that we have to leave access at the front for disabled customers and mothers with prams and pointing out where there are extra spaces close to the building.

Finance

As a result of a number of appeals from students and in discussion with Cambridge University, the status of PhD students for Council Tax purposes has been reviewed and student status for a 4th year and for a further year in exceptional circumstances have been awarded.

We have reviewed our departmental procedures for processing notifications of a change of address and repayment of any resulting overpayments following a complaint about the length of time that it takes to close an account.

Environment and Planning

We have introduced a system which makes planning documents and plans available on-line via the Council's website. This system also now supports self-monitoring of applications by allowing customers to create a personalized account that sends automatic notifications of new applications within their area and changes in status to applications. We hope that this will reduce complaints from applicants about the delay in or lack of communication about progress on planning applications.

How many complaints did we respond to on time?

In January 2007 we reduced our target time to answer 100% of complaints from ten working days to seven working days. This is a challenging target, particularly where complaints are complex and need input from several departments or external agencies, and the figures for 2010-11 show a fall in performance against the previous year to 49% from 90%.

During this year the organisation went through a major restructure exercise that may have resulted in extra time being needed to process some complaints over the transition period. Where we are unable to respond fully within seven days we acknowledge receipt of the complaint and tell the

complainant when they can expect a full response.

The use of the corporate Customer Relationship Management system to record all Complaints centrally in 2011-12, should allow for an increase in the percentage of complaints being dealt with within 7 days. Complaints officers will receive warning reminder/s via email as the complaint target date becomes closer.

	Chief Executive	Customer & Democratic Services	City Services	Finance	Community Services	Env & Planning	TOTAL
2007-2008	50%	76%	77%	73%	83%	81%	81%
2008-2009	100%	96%	97%	92%	95%	73%	93%
2009-2010	62%	91%	90%	90%	92%	63%	90%
2010-11	38%	92%	96%	43%	44%	62%	49%

We receive compliments too!

As an organisation we get many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide. Knowing where things are working well and are appreciated is as important as knowing where things are not working, so we keep a record of the compliments we receive as well as the complaints.

The number of compliments is continuing to rise year on year with 461 compliments for 2010-11 up 7% on the 2009-10 total of 431.

Customer Services received 47% of the compliments total followed by City Homes and Arts & Recreation on 19% and 13% respectively.

How many compliments were received?

	Chief Exec's	Central Services	Customer & Democratic Services	City Services	Finance	Community Services	Env & Planning	TOTAL
2004-2005	2	98		78	28	113	109	428
2005-2006	0	51		55	102	150	121	479
2006-2007	2	51		63	131	137	108	492
2007-2008	1		12	56	28	141	93	331
2008-2009	0		82	40	Not recorded	239	46	407
2009-2010	2		74	71	Not recorded	234	50	431
2010-2011	6		28	9	12	380	26	461

Here are examples of some compliments we have received:

Community Services

- City Homes *“Thank you very much for the meeting at Mansel Court yesterday. It brought residents from the north and south together through a mutual interest. It has given the HRP members a clear vision and encouragement, with the emphasis on citywide issues. The meeting encouraged residents in the north and south to work together. The meeting gave an excellent overall impression of Resident Involvement and what it can achieve. More of the same, please.”*

Finance

- Benefits *“ Thank you to the staff member for help in claiming single person discount on her council tax. Her claim was backdated for four years and she is so grateful.”*

Environment and Planning

- Environmental Services *“The Dog Warden came out to rescue and deal with a stray dog we had found, with such kindness and efficiency. This service is so needed during the recession when feckless or thoughtless owners abandon their animals in the streets knowing that someone else will have to deal with the problem.”*
- Housing Standards *“ We would like to thank you again for helping us in convincing our landlord to replace our molded single glaze windows with new double glaze windows and additional ventilation. Thanks to your efforts our living conditions have significantly improved”*

Customer and Democratic Services

- Customer Services *“Customer commented on how smart, helpful and knowledgeable member of staff had been”*
- Customer Services *“The advisor made me feel very welcome which helped me to be open and honest with what I came in to discuss”*

Freedom of Information Requests

Since January 2005 the Council has been obliged, under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, to provide information to anyone who requests it, unless an exemption applies. Requests must be in writing, but this includes emails or fax, and if you want to make an FOI request you must give a name and address for correspondence. The council has twenty working days to reply. There may be a fee for copying, printing and postage of information. For more information about making a Freedom of Information request please go to: <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/foi>

The number and complexity of FOI requests the Council receives continues to rise, as can be seen in the table below:

Department	2010-11	2009-10	2008-9	2007-8	2006-7
Chief Executive	13	26	23	10	6
Corporate Strategy	20				
City Services		30	24	26	24
Customer and Community Services	81	47	64	8	11
Customer and Democratic Services		50	50	34	
Central Services					35
Environment and Planning	122	79	81	51	49
Finance	135	85	63	4	0
More than one department	19	24	16	nr	nr
Other agencies/No response possible	48	40	10	nr	nr
TOTAL	438	381	331	133	125

*not recorded

We responded to 96% of the requests within the government's 20-day target, and the average time taken to process a request was 11.8 days

There are a number of reasons why a request may take longer than 20 working days to respond to. Firstly, a request may need to be clarified because it is unclear what information is being asked for. Secondly a request may need to be revised. If the request is too broad or complex and it will take the Council more than 2.5 working days to compile the information, this exceeds what is reasonable under the legislation so we will work with the requester to help them revise their request down to a reasonable limit. Finally the response time may be extended to allow time to consider the public interest test.

As in previous years, requests received by the Council reflect national and local media interests, with a number of requests for senior staff remuneration, use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act legislation, electoral arrangements and housing benefit payments. Details of the requests received

by the Council are made available online at <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/foi>. From May 2010 details of the requests received and the responses to the requests have been published in a disclosure log.

In January 2011 we updated our Publication Scheme. This explains what information about the organisation is freely available without making a Freedom of Information request. The publication scheme is available online at <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/foi> or at the Council reception points.

Role of the Independent Complaints Investigator

Your right to have a complaint reviewed by an independent person is an essential part of our complaints procedure.

If you are not satisfied with the way any of our departments deal with your complaint, you can ask the Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI) to review your concerns. Because the ICI operates independently of our departments, they can give an objective overview of a department's handling of your complaint.

Sometimes a department will refer a complaint to the ICI. This happens when they feel that an impartial review will help them to resolve a problem.

The ICI will not always carry out a formal investigation of a complaint. Sometimes they will find a solution by talking to the complainant and the departments.

The ICI reviews each complaint to find out whether we did anything wrong, such as:

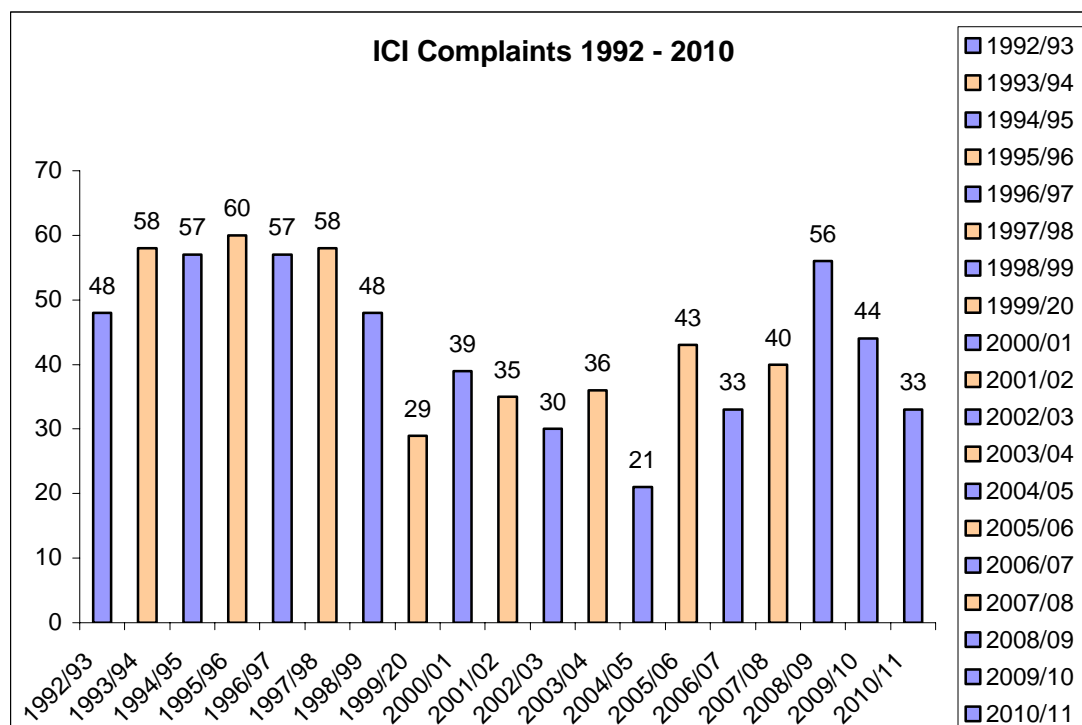
- We took a long time to do something
- We did not follow our own rules or the law
- We broke a promise to do something
- We treated someone unfairly
- We gave someone wrong or misleading information; or
- We did not make a decision in the correct way.

Sometimes, the ICI will look at a complaint about several issues. They might find that they agree with some parts of the complaint but not others. In these circumstances they will report that they have partly agreed with the complaint.

How many complaints were dealt with by the Independent Complaints Investigator in 2010-11?

During 2010/11 20 complaints were fully investigated by the ICI. We received 33 complaints in total, however 13 were not taken forward due to the complainant having not been through the departments complaints procedure first. 11 were for the C&CS department, 6 for Environment, 2 for Chief Executives and 1 for Resources.

Complaints to the ICI are recorded against the department that has taken the lead in dealing with the complaint, but they often involve more than one department or service.



Outcome of Investigations in 2010-11

	CEX	Customer & Community Services	Environment	Resources	Total
Complaints received by ICI	2	17	13	1	33
Agreed with complainant	1	2	3		5
Not agreed	1	7	3	1	12
Partly agreed		2			2
Not suitable for the ICI		6	7		13

If you would like more details about the Independent Complaints Investigation Service please see our web page www.cambridge.gov.uk/complaints, call 01223 457000 or pick up a leaflet at the Customer Services Centre at Mandela House.

The Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still not satisfied with the way your complaint has been handled you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman's office. The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints and determines if there has been any injustice arising from maladministration. The Local Government Ombudsman issues a letter to all councils by the end of June each year stating how many complaints they have received and the decisions they have made about them.

How many complaints were dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman in 2010-11?

	Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation	Corporate and Other Services	Benefits	Housing	Other	Planning and Building Control	Public Finance	Transport and Highways	Total
2005-06			2	4	5	4	3	0	18
2006-07			1	9	5	8	0	2	25
2007-08			2	5	2	6	0	3	18
2008-09			2	6	2	4	2	2	18
2009-10			0	15	4	10	2	1	32
2010-11	4	4	2	2	1	4		2	19

Since April 2008 the LGO Advice Team has been the single point of contact for all enquiries and new complaints. The advisors provide comprehensive information and advice to callers at the first point of contact with a full explanation of the process and possible outcomes. This enables callers to make a more informed decision about whether putting their complaint to the LGO Investigative Team is the right course of action.

Complaints Decisions

	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06
Maladministration causing injustice	0	0	0	1	0	0
Local Settlements	5	3	6	4	2	1
Maladministration but no injustice	0	0	0	0	0	0
No maladministration or insufficient evidence	5	8	4	8	10	6
Discontinued investigation	4	6	0	4	3	3
No jurisdiction	1	3	2	2	1	1
Premature	3	6	6	1	6	7
Total excluding premature	16	20	12	19	16	11

Total	19	26	18	20	22	18
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Although in 2010-11 the Local Government Ombudsman received 19 enquiries and complaints, only 12 decisions were made. In 3 cases the LGO considered that a complaint had been sent prematurely, in 4 cases the LGO Advice Team gave informal advice, and in 1 case the complaint was considered to be outside of the LGO's jurisdiction. The LGO does not normally consider a complaint unless a council has first had an opportunity to deal with the complaint itself. In this case the complaint would be sent back to the council to see if the matter could be resolved.

In 2010-11 the average number of days taken to respond to the LGO's first enquiry was 33.8 days which is outside of the Ombudsman's Office's target response time of 28 days and is a decline on our average response time of 24.5 days in 2009-10.

Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct

Councillors must adhere to a specific Code of Conduct whenever they are conducting Council business, representing the Council or conducting the business of the office to which they were elected. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure high standards of ethics and conduct are maintained and that Councillors treat everybody in an equal capacity and with respect, ensuring at all times that the integrity of the Council is not compromised in any way.

Before 8 May 2008, complaints about breaches of the Code of Conduct were made to the Standards Board for England, an independent national body.

From the 8 May 2008, the system for considering complaints about councillors changed. From that date complaints about councillors are usually considered locally by the Council's own Standards Committee rather than by the Standards Board for England. The Council's Standards Committee is made up of six councillors and three independent members of the public.

During 2010-11, the Council received three complaints that councillors had breached the Code of Conduct. The complaints and outcomes were as follows:

1. Complaint that a councillor

- had failed to declare a personal or prejudicial interest in a planning application;
- had failed to withdraw from a meeting that considered the planning application, despite having a prejudicial interest;
- had failed to treat others with respect at the meeting;
- had acted in a way which could reasonably be regarded as bringing

one's office or authority into disrepute.

The Independent Complaints Investigator carried out an investigation into the complaint and concluded that the councillor did not have a personal or a prejudicial interest in the planning application. There was therefore no interest to declare and no reason for the councillor to withdraw from the meeting. The Independent Complaints Investigator also concluded that the Councillor had not failed to treat others with respect and had not acted in a way that could reasonably be regarded as bringing one's office or authority into disrepute. (These allegations related to the way in which an area committee meeting considering a planning application had been conducted.) The Investigators' finding that the Councillor had not breached the Code was accepted by a sub-committee of the Standards Committee, with the result that the complaint was not upheld.

2. Complaint that a Councillor had forwarded a confidential email from a member of the public to a third party in breach of confidence.

An assessment sub-committee of the Standards Committee considered whether the complaint should be investigated. On the basis of the material submitted by the complainant, the sub-committee concluded that there was no indication on the face of the email, or in any other information supplied by the complainant, that it should have been treated as confidential. The sub-committee therefore decided that the complaint should not be referred for investigation.

3. Complaint that a councillor should not have asked for a planning application to be decided by an area committee, in the light of an alleged personal interest in the application.

An assessment sub-committee of the Standards Committee referred the complaint for investigation by the Independent Complaints Investigator. The investigation has been completed and a sub-committee of the Standards Committee will meet shortly to consider the report.

To find out more about the Council's Code of Conduct and how to make a complaint about a councilor go to <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/content/contact-us/how-to-complain-about-a-councillor.en> or contact the Council's Monitoring Officer.

The Council's Whistle blowing Policy

The Council sets equally high standards of conduct for its own employees. The Council will not tolerate malpractice or wrongdoing in the provision of its services. All officers have a responsibility to report any serious concerns about bad practice or behaviour, in any aspect of the Council's work. This is encouraged through the 'Whistleblowing' policy that aims to provide a sensitive and confidential route for officers to step forward and voice their concerns without fear of reprisal.

An overview of the actions and results from 'Whistleblowing' is presented to the Council's Standards Committee in an Annual Report on our Prevention of Fraud and Corruption policy.

Departments 2010-11

Chief Executive's Department

- Corporate Strategy

Resources Department

- Accounting Services
- Human Resources
- Internal Audit
- Repairs and Maintenance
- ICT Client and Information Management
- Property Services
- Legal Services

Environment Department

- Planning
- Refuse and Environment
- Specialist Services
- Tourism and City Centre Management
- Streets and Open Spaces

Customer and Community Services Department

- Arts and Recreation
- City Homes
- Community Development
- Customer Services
- Strategic Housing
- Revenue and Benefits