

From: Michael Dawson <daw50nmdj@hotmail.co.uk>
Sent: 09 January 2017 07:31
To: Cllr John Anglin
Cc: Customer Advocates
Subject: Complaints about the Council and UK Docks: Sunday working and Noise

Dear Councillor Anglin,

My recent correspondence with Customer Advocacy (please see trail below) throws up some questions regarding the handling of complaints by South Tyneside Council.

Relabelling of Complaints as Allegations

I think this is a worrying trend by the Council. The use of 'allegation' rather than 'complaint' is, by implication, suggesting that our complaints are ill founded. The first use appeared in 2015 when Corporate Lead, Mrs H Johnson, wrote to my MP on behalf of the Chief Executive. She says she manages the process and staff that support customer complaints and compliments and under her this new attitude to complaints appears to be becoming the rule rather than the exception. Fortunately another resident had taken a photograph a couple of hours before I got involved and I have attached it.

Conflation of Complaints

You will notice that my complaint, at first, was solely about Sunday working and that whoever received it did not register it but added the piece about allegations of noise nuisance from UK Docks. They then asked Customer Advocacy to respond to my complaint.

Non registration of Complaints(1)

This actually is not a new device, Mr Cunningham employed it when I first made a formal complaint about the enclosure on 10-Jan-2014. That was about non-compliance with Condition 2 of the grant in 1996.

The complaint I made on 20-Dec-2016 concerned Condition 5 and relates to working hours (7am to 7pm but not Sundays or Bank holidays). Considering the location of the boatyard one would have to agree that a responsible Council should take more care with our complaints in this respect. As far as I know Condition 5 still stands.

When the Environmental Health Team registers my complaint we can bring this issue into the open and discuss a way forward. At the time of the grant 1996 the Council were planning to de-industrialise this area and I believe consent was given for an enclosure, or shed, on condition that there was no further expansion of the boatyard.

Non registration of Complaints(2)

The noise issue is a bit more complicated and this is why I have asked the Environmental Health Team to register a complaint. I'll use an example from last year:

1. At a Planning Committee meeting, 01-Feb2016, public assurances were given by Mr Ian Rutherford, Principal Environmental Health Officer, STC, that complaints re noise, pollutants and any issues the public have from the work at UK Dock's site would be thoroughly investigated and enforcements would be put in place wherever they were needed.
2. An official complaint was made to STC near midday, Tuesday 2 Feb, re: unacceptable noise from yard:- "Since 08:00 today, sudden and reverberating loud bangs of what sounds like metal being dropped; constant grinding of metal; loud hammering; and rumbling of a forklift truck shifting stuff around the open yard. Exactly the reasons we gave to – and were ignored by – the planning committee yesterday."
3. The Environmental Health Team closed their last complaint in respect of the site in February 2016 – see email 21-Dec below.
4. In view of the 28 day diary sheets that the Environmental Health Team oblige us to use, should they not check them before closing a complaint. It does not appear to have been done as this would have taken them into March .

It appears that the Environmental Health Team are operating a system that unfairly disadvantages the complainant and labelling 'complaints' as 'allegations' appears to be doing the same thing.

This sort of thing lends weight to our suspicions that the Council's complaints procedure is being run for the benefit of the Council (the Establishment) and not for the people.

A political issue and I would appreciate your views on this.

Yours sincerely
Michael Dawson