

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder 23 July 2009  
**AUTHOR/S:** Chief Executive / Customer Service Coordinator

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### **CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

#### **Purpose**

1. To review first quarter (April 1 – June 30 2009) performance against the Council's Customer Service Standards.
2. Identify any areas of poor performance and incorporate corrective measures into the Service First work programme.
3. To consider the outcome of the Customer Service Excellence Desktop Self-Assessment and note next steps.

#### **Executive Summary**

4. Analysis of the first quarter shows the Council has consistently met its agreed service standards in respect of call handling and responding to complaints. In particular the Council has made a noted improvement in the number of days taken to respond to Local Government Ombudsman complaints. Whilst performing well, areas for improvement include the need to communicate corrective measures made as a result of customer feedback to our customers. This topic will be discussed within the Service First Steering Group and has been added to this years work plan. The group recognises the importance of promoting our successes and providing feedback on improvements we have made, particularly in response to complaints.
5. The Council commissioned CELLO MRUK Research, an independent market research organisation, to conduct an exit survey of visitors to the Council offices in Cambourne. 68% of respondents rated the service as excellent with a further 30% rating the service as good and 2% as fair. Zero respondents rated the service as poor. CELLO MRUK Research has been commissioned to repeat this survey each quarter for the current financial year. Findings will continue to be monitored and reported to the Service First steering group and the Portfolio Holder.
6. Results of the first quarter National Indicator 14 data capture show avoidable contact at 38%. 3,000 contacts were recorded over a two week period. 1,122 contacts were deemed avoidable, the two largest classifications were seeking clarification 34% and progress chasing 31%. Individual comments regarding each contact marked avoidable will be made available to those services involved in the data capture exercise. Services will be encouraged to use this information to improve service and reduce unnecessary contact.
7. During the first quarter the Council undertook a self-assessment against the National Customer Service Excellence Standard. The Service First Steering Group set out to assess how the Council measures against the standard and

identify key areas in need of improvement. This information will be used to inform the update of the Customer Service Strategy and accompanying work plan.

8. The results of the self-assessment suggest the level of meeting the criteria differs from service to service. For 50 of the 51 criteria at least one service area reports meeting the criteria in full. To achieve the standard all service areas must meet all criteria in full. The Council scored itself well on areas such as leadership, policy and culture but not so well on dealing effectively with problems and timely delivery.
9. The Service First Steering Group has discussed the findings and is considering how the Council could best use the Customer Service Excellence Standard as a driver for continuous improvement and a skills development tool.

### Considerations

#### Telephone Performance

10. Telephone performance at South Cambridgeshire Hall has remained strong throughout the quarter as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Cambourne telephone performance**

| Measure           | Target  | Apr-Jun 09 |
|-------------------|---------|------------|
| Calls abandoned   | <5%     | 4%         |
| Average wait time | <30secs | 7secs      |

11. Performance at the Contact Centre has consistently met the Service Level Agreement.

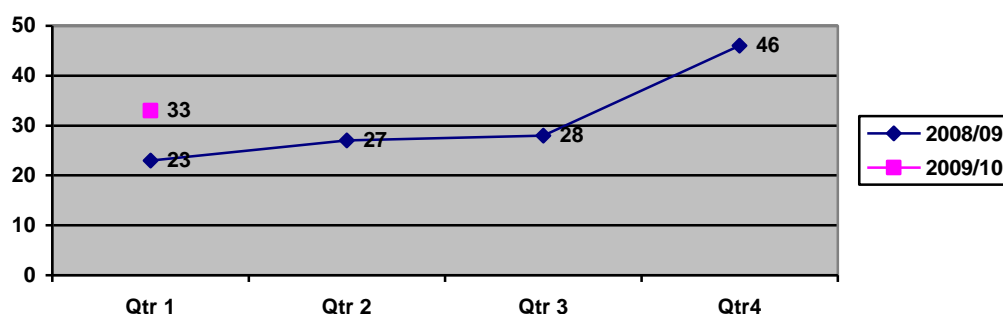
**Table 2 Contact Centre telephone performance**

| Measure               | SLA target        | Apr-Jun 09 |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Calls abandoned       | <5%               | 3%         |
| Response times        | <30secs           | 13secs     |
| Call answering        | 80% within 20secs | 84%        |
| Switchboard answering | 80% within 10secs | 89%        |

#### Complaints Performance

12. In the first quarter the Council registered 29 complaints at stage one and four complaints at stage two of the formal process. Chart one details the number of complaints (stage one & two combined) per quarter in comparison to last year.

**Chart 1 – No. complaints (stage one & two combined) per quarter**



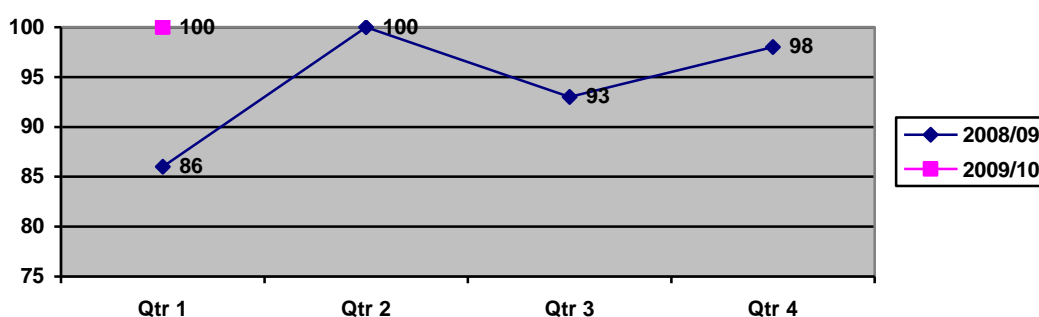
13. Table three shows that Planning and Sustainable Communities with Affordable Housing continue to generate the highest percentage of complaint.

**Table 3 – % complaints (stage one & two combined) per corporate area**

|                                    | Qtr 1<br>09 / 10 | End of year<br>08 / 09 |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Planning & Sustainable Communities | 29%              | 31%                    |
| Health & Environmental Services    | 13%              | 22%                    |
| Affordable Homes                   | 50%              | 30%                    |
| Finance & Support Services         | 8%               | 16%                    |
| New Communities                    | 0%               | 0%                     |
| Community & Customer Services      | 0%               | 1%                     |

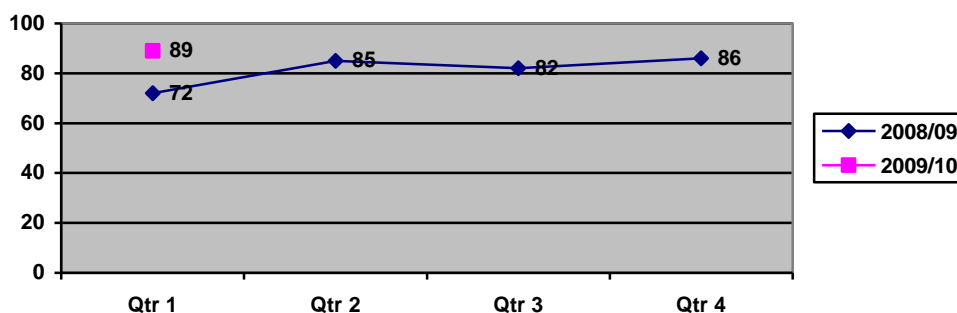
14. During the first quarter 100% of registered complaints were acknowledged within three working days. This is an improvement on the same period last year (86%) and an improvement on last years average (94%).

**Chart 2 – % complaints (stage one & two combined) acknowledged within target**



15. During the first quarter 89% of registered complaints were responded to within 10 days for stage one, and 20 days for stage two. This is an improvement on the same period last year (72%) and an improvement on lasts years average (81%). In the event a response is anticipated to exceed the publicised timescale, officers are asked to contact complaints to advise them when a response can be expected.

**Chart 3 - % complaints (stage one & two combined) responded to within target**



16. Complaints in the first quarter continue the trends identified in 2008/09. The predominant themes of complaints continue to be; failure to communicate, service delivery and processes and / or procedures.

**Table 4 – Complaint breakdown by broad theme**

| Theme                       | Qtr 1<br>09 / 10 | End of year<br>08 / 09 |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Failure to communicate      | 16%              | 23%                    |
| Failure to act              | 11%              | 3%                     |
| Misinformation              | 8%               | 4%                     |
| Council Charges             | 8%               | 3%                     |
| Service Delivery            | 18%              | 32%                    |
| Staff Conduct               | 8%               | 5%                     |
| Processes and/or procedures | 31%              | 30%                    |

17. Satisfaction surveys have been sent to all registered complainants within the first quarter, with the exception of complaints that are still open. At present only one completed satisfaction survey has been returned. The respondent noted he was very dissatisfied with the complaints handling survey. As a result of the poor response rate the Customer Service Coordinator will be drafting a new letter to accompany the survey. The letter will detail the benefits and value of providing this information.

**Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints**

18. South Cambridgeshire District Council has received five complaints submitted by the Local Government Ombudsman during the first quarter. Table five breaks down the complaints by corporate area.

**Table 5 Breakdown of LGO contacts by service area**

|                                    | Apr – Jun 09 |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Affordable Housing                 | 2            |
| Planning & Sustainable Communities | 3            |
| Total                              | 5            |

19. The Local Government Ombudsman continues to investigate the five complaints and has not communicated any decisions.
20. Table six shows an improvement on last years average response time. The Council are currently ahead of the 28-day target set by the Local Government Ombudsman.

**Table 6 Average response time for LGO complaints**

|                       | <b>Apr – Jun 09</b> | <b>2008/09</b> | <b>LGO Target</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Average Response Time | 23 days             | 37.5 days      | 28 days           |

**Learning from complaints**

21. It has been previously highlighted that the Council does not formally record improvements made as a result of complaints. In the event the Council makes a mistake, the complaints process commits to informing the customer of the corrective measures being taken. Analysis of complaint responses indicated that we are not recording or communicating our improvements / corrective measures to the customer.
22. To ensure effective communication of the improvements made as a result of customer feedback the corporate template for responding to complaints has been amended. The template now includes a section to communicate actions taken as a result of the complaint. There has been a marked improvement from service areas informing the customer of corrective measures taken as a result of a complaint.
23. The Service First Steering Group have agreed and produced a short 'Learning from complaints' form. The Customer Service Coordinator will attach this form to all complaints when sending to the relevant service area. The completed form will be requested with a copy of the complaint response. 'Learning from complaints' will be reported on a quarterly basis to Service First and Senior Management Team.
24. The value of sharing this information within the organisation and with our residents is recognised. The Service First Steering Group will be looking at how the Council makes this information readily available as part of its work towards the Customer Service Excellence Standard.

**Customer Satisfaction**

25. The Council commissioned CELLO MRUK Research, an independent market research organisation, to conduct a survey with visitors to the Council offices in Cambourne. The main aim of the survey was to establish how satisfied visitors were with the reception and other front line services.
26. The project was undertaken using face-to-face exit interviews. CELLO MRUK Research used its own fieldwork teams of social interviewers all trained to Interviewer Quality Control Scheme Standards (IQCS) in accordance with the Market Research Society. Interviewers were present for two days in April – Monday 20 and Thursday 23, 60 customers were surveyed.
27. Respondents were asked a number of questions. The questions and results directly relating to our Customer Service Standards are detailed below. A comprehensive analysis of the data is available separately.
28. Respondents were asked how long they had to wait to be seen by a receptionist. 83% of respondents did not have to wait to be seen by a receptionist. A further 10% said they had to wait one-two minutes. Relatively few visitors (7%) had to wait over two minutes with the longest waiting time recorded at 10 minutes (one respondent).

**Table 7 Length of time customer waited to be seen by a receptionist**

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Did not have to wait | 83% |
| 1-2 minutes          | 10% |
| 3-5 Minutes          | 3%  |
| 6-10 minutes         | 3%  |

29. Table eight details the percentage of customers offered a private interview room if requested. 15 % of customers surveyed requested a private interview room and 100% said a room was made available to them.

**Table 8 Percentage of customers offered a private room if requested**

|  |      |
|--|------|
| % of customers offered a private interview room if requested | 100% |
|--|------|

30. Table nine details the percentage of customers seen within 10 minutes of their appointment time. 22% of customers had a prearranged appointment and 100 % were seen within 10 minutes of the appointment time.

**Table 9 Percentage of customers seen within 10 minutes of appointment**

|   |      |
|---|------|
| % of customers seen within 10 minutes of appointment time | 100% |
|---|------|

31. Respondents were asked to rate the overall service by reception. The majority of customers surveyed were happy with the reception service – 68% rated it as excellent and 30% rated it as good. The remaining 2% said the service was fair.

**Table 10 Overall rating of reception service**

|           |     |
|-----------|-----|
| Excellent | 68% |
| Good      | 30% |
| Fair      | 2%  |
| Poor      | 0%  |

**National Indicator 14**

32. NI14: Reducing avoidable contact. By identifying customer contact that is 'avoidable', the Council and its partners are better placed to redesign the way services are delivered and information communicated. NI14 aims to assist the Council in reducing unnecessary, valueless contacts which are frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the provider.
33. Data will be collected over a two-week period each quarter. First quarter data capture took place on weeks commencing 15 and 22 June 2009. Services collecting data include:
- Benefits
  - Non-Domestic Rates
  - Council Tax
  - Planning Services
  - Building Control
  - Licensing
  - Food Safety
  - Pollution
  - Pest Control
  - Street Cleaning
  - Waste Collection
  - Property Services
  - Options & Allocations

- Electoral Register

34. Tables 11 and 12 detail the percentage of contact deemed avoidable and their classification. 1,122 of contacts were recorded as avoidable. A comprehensive analysis of NI14 data is available separately.

**Table 11 – Percentage of avoidable & unavoidable contact**

| <b>Avoidable Contact</b> |
|--------------------------|
| 38%                      |

**Table 12 – Avoidable contact categories**

| Unnecessary Clarification | Poor Signposting | Repeat Notification | Progress Chasing | Repeat Contact |
|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 34%                       | 23%              | 8%                  | 31%              | 4%             |

**Customer Service Excellence Self Assessment**

35. During May and June 2009 the Council undertook a desktop self-assessment against the National Customer Service Excellence Standard. The Service First Steering Group set out to assess the Council against the standard and to identify areas in need of improvement. A large section of services took part in the assessment including services from New Communities, Health and Environmental Services, Planning & Sustainable Communities and Affordable Homes.
36. Services were asked to rate how their services met the criteria of the standard. Four options were available: 100%, >50%. <50%, 0%. Results indicate the level of meeting the criteria differs from service to service.
37. The Customer Service Excellence Standard is made up of 51 criteria and results show that whilst no single service meets all criteria in full, at least one service meets 50 of the 51 criteria in full. To gain formal accreditation the Council must meet all criteria in full and be able to provide evidence of doing so.
38. The Service First Steering Group have reviewed the results of the self-assessment and are considering how best to use the Customer Service Excellence Standard as a driver for continuous improvement and a skills development tool.

**Implications**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 39. Financial   | A dedicated budget of £8,500 has been included within the Estimates for 2009/10 for Service First initiatives.   |
| Legal           | None   |
| Staffing        | The Service First Team has been tasked to improve, monitor and develop customer service throughout the Council, enabling services to work towards the annual vision and values.  |
| Risk Management | Lack of progress on the embedding of Council values.<br>Poor perception of local services/ Council, leading to low NI scores on satisfaction ratings, resulting in lowered CAA performance and poor reputation.<br>Improving customer service within the financial constraints faced by the Council, particularly in the current economic downturn |

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Equal Opportunities | <p>Our customer service strategy will need to take into account our statutory duties in relation to equalities and ensure that our services are open to, and, accessible by all our residents and reflect the diversity of our rural district.</p> <p>A new Customer Service Strategy will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to ensure that it is able to deliver against the above requirements.</p> |
|---------------------|--|

**Effect on Strategic Aims**

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 40. | <p><b>Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.</b><br/>The Customer Service Strategy sets out how the Council will meet its short- and longer-term objectives to provide first class and accessible services to its customers.</p> <p><b>Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.</b><br/>None specific.</p> <p><b>Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.</b><br/>None specific.</p> <p><b>Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.</b><br/>None specific.</p> <p><b>Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.</b><br/>None specific.</p> |
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**Recommendation**

41. That the Portfolio Holder note the performance against the customer service standard.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

South Cambridgeshire District Council Reception Survey Wave 1

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