

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder

4 September 2015

AUTHOR/S: Policy and Performance Manager

CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE: 2015-16 QUARTER ONE

Purpose

1. To present Customer Service performance in respect of complaints handling and learning, web usage and feedback and customer satisfaction. This is not a key decision item: it is for the Portfolio Holder's information and comment.

Recommendation

2. That the Portfolio Holder note the content of this report and appendices.

Background

Complaints Procedure: Corporate Services, Planning and New Communities, Health and Environmental Services

3. The Council's Handling of Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy sets out a three-stage process, under which an initial complaint response is provided by the Head of Service, within ten working days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with this response, then a second stage response is sent from the Service Director, within a further 20 working days. The third stage invites the complainant to refer their case directly to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Complaints Procedure: Affordable Homes

4. Since 1 April 2013, the Housing Ombudsman has assumed responsibility for dealing with complaints against local authority housing departments. For this reason, Affordable Homes has put in place its own complaints handling policy. The policy retains the three-stage process for the purpose of registration and performance monitoring, but includes statutory provision for the complainant to request a 'designated person' to help resolve the complaint. The designated person can refer the case to the Housing Ombudsman at any stage.

Complaints Volume and Response Performance – 2015-2016 Quarter One

5. During quarter one (1 April – 30 June 2015), the Council logged 28 complaints, a substantial decrease on the 54 logged during the previous quarter. The breakdown of complaints by service and stage is as follows; 11 complaints have been upheld (20%), compared to 11 (24%) during the previous quarter:

Service	Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three	Total	No. / % upheld
AH	11	1	0	12	2 / 18.2%*
COR**	2	1	0	3	0 / 0
HES	0	0	2	2	0 / 0

PNC	7	2	2	11	0 / 0
Total	20	4	4	28	2 / 9.1%*

*Complaints which are still open are excluded from this calculation

**Complaints relating to specific contact centre-related issues e.g. call waiting times, are included under Corporate Services. In other cases, the complaint will be logged under the directorate to which the service related.

***The LGO is treating a complaint by a group of complainants as three separate complaints; each relate to the same case, however.

6. The decrease in complaints volume is welcome and can be partly attributed to major service changes which have become embedded, specifically within:
 - Health and Environmental Services, where a higher proportion of enquiries are resolved by the new resource team without needing to be escalated into the formal complaints procedure; in addition, customers are encouraged to use the missed bin e-form rather than the formal complaints form.
 - The Customer Contact Service, whose improvement plan, with the ongoing support of back offices services, has led to reduced call waiting times and a lower call abandonment rate.

7. 57% of registered complaints were responded to within timescale, compared to 61% during the previous quarter. Overall performance remains substantially below the 80% target. The lowest response rate within target timescale was in Planning and New Communities, which has undergone restructuring and continues to experience difficulties in recruiting staff. The improvement programme described in the quarterly Position report (received on 12 August) should generate improved complaints response performance.

8. In cases where it becomes apparent that lengthier and more detailed responses will be required, services should send holding replies providing an update and estimated timescale to completion. Such communication provides reassurance that the issues they have raised are subject to detailed investigation.

9. EMT considered this report on 26 August 2015 and agreed to nominate a complaints coordinator in each department to ensure that a consistent approach to complaints is maintained.

Response rates within target by Directorate, April - June 2015

Directorate	Total no. received	Total responded to within target	Response within target
Affordable Homes	12	8	67%
Corporate Services	3	2	67%
Health & Environmental Services	2	2	100%
Planning & New Communities	11	4	36%
TOTAL	28	16	57%

10. At the time of writing this report, 13 complaints from 2014-15 were still open, nine in Health and Environmental Services and four in Corporate Services. It is likely that, in a number of cases, responses have been dispatched and issues satisfactorily resolved without notification to the Corporate Complaints Co-ordinator (Laura Poulter). Details of these cases have been advised to complaint co-ordinators in each directorate/service area, and it is hoped that the database will shortly be brought up to date.

Considerations - Compliments

11. **35 compliments** have been received between 1 April – 30 June 2015. This compares to 26 received in the previous quarter, and 34 during the corresponding period of 2014-15; the breakdown by directorate is as follows:

Affordable Homes	19
Corporate Services	12 (all Customer Contact Service)
Health and Environmental Services	2
Planning and New Communities	2

Compliments often form the basis for 'Going the Extra Mile' scheme nominations, in order to recognise and celebrate excellent customer service by individuals and teams.

Considerations - Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints

12. During April - June 2015, there have been four new complaints to the LGO. Summaries have been included below:
- Comp124 – complaint about a decision to approve a planning application for a neighbouring property. Complainant believed this was inconsistent with other decisions made by the Council. Investigator found due process was and that there was no fault in the way the Council reached its decision.
 - Comp158 – complaint about how the Council dealt with earlier complaint about a pet shop application in 2013. Investigator found this to be out of the Ombudsman's remit because more than 12 months had elapsed. Concluded that there was insufficient injustice caused to the complainant to warrant involvement.
 - Comp180 – complaint that the Council failed to take action around a contaminated site since 2000, causing contamination to land. Investigator advises that this falls outside of their jurisdiction, and complaint could have been raised sooner. There is no evidence to suggest Ombudsman should now investigate.
 - Comp186 – complaint that the Council failed to take action to protect against a noise disturbance. Investigator found no evidence of fault in the way the Council investigate this issue.

Considerations – Trends and Learning from Complaints (LFC)

13. Learning from complaints forms are sent to service representatives with the initial complaints, with subsequent reminders. The purpose of the LFC form is to ensure services identify and act upon constructive feedback, to prevent a complaint from recurring and to improve the customer's journey by making and implementing service improvements.

14. The low number of complaints upheld during quarter one has meant that opportunities for learning have been limited. The return rate for learning forms remains sporadic however, with three having been received in quarter one.

Customer Contact Service Performance – Periods 30-32, 20 April – 10 July 2015

15. **Call volumes** were above previous year levels during period 30, coinciding with a peak demand around the General Election, but were below 2013 and 2014 levels during periods 31 and 32. Between 1 April – 30 June 2015, the number of web forms submitted for general contact, Council Tax house moves and missed bin reports increased by 16.5%, suggesting channel shift towards self-service through the website.
16. The increased call volume during period 30 contributed to **call handling** performance remaining below the target of 85%; however, performance improved during periods 31-32, with 85% and 90% of all calls handled respectively. We also reduced **average call waiting time** to one minute 32 seconds during period 32, two minutes per call faster than the equivalent period in 2013. The service maintained a high proportion of **first time call resolutions**, above 80% throughout this period. Further statistics relating to periodic and year-on-year performance is set out in **Appendix A** attached.
17. A number of service improvements have been put in place to enhance customer service, handle a higher percentage of calls and answer them quickly, including a new staffing rota providing more flexible capacity to manage weekly peak demand, a dedicated payment line to reduce the volume of calls requiring to be dealt with by handling agents, and the addition of three generic posts to provide flexible support in the Contact Centre, Revenues and Benefits teams. These posts in particular should enable call handling and answering performance to be maintained during future periods of peak demand.
18. The next phase of the Customer Contact Service Improvement Plan will include further new initiatives to maintain and enhance performance, including a dedicated rents line (training additional back office staff to assist during peak demand periods), increasing the range of automated payment options available (linked to the Digital by Default project), and provision to put in place automatic messages notifying customers of key service information without requiring them to speak to agents.
19. Customers visiting the Cambourne Reception are invited to complete satisfaction questionnaires. 56 customers completed surveys during periods 30-32, of which 55 (98%) rated the overall service they had received as excellent or good.

Website: Usage, Self-Service and Feedback

20. Web usage figures, including e-form take-up, are set out in **Appendix B** attached. They show continuing increases in website and e-form usage. We are continuing work to improve the website and hope shortly to launch e-forms for Benefits claims and changes of circumstances. Going forward, qualitative customer feedback on the effectiveness of the Council's website will also be required.

Customer Satisfaction - Key Performance Indicators

21. **Business Satisfaction with Regulation Service (ES401)** - Businesses with which the Council has contact receive a satisfaction survey asking a number of questions about their experience. This indicator is based on their overall satisfaction with the way SCDC handled the request, visit or inspection. Results are analysed on a quarterly

basis. Businesses are not contacted more than once in any nine-month period to avoid consultation fatigue. Satisfaction for the third and fourth quarters of 2014-2015 was 81% and 87% respectively, against a 90% target. The full-year satisfaction figure was 86%. Satisfaction during the first quarter of 2015-2016 was 90%, matching the target that has been set.

22. *Resident satisfaction with Waste Services (SE267) and Local Environmental Quality (SE270)* – The trial of an online survey in 2015 resulted in a lower response rate of lower statistical significance than in previous years. Satisfaction rates remained high, at 81% and 73% respectively, although these figures are not directly comparable to previous year's performance. Policy and Performance officers have undertaken to work with colleagues in Health and Environmental Services to address response rate issues in time for the 2016 survey.
23. *Development Control (SP944)* – Satisfaction forms are distributed with all decision notices. Monthly satisfaction between April - June 2015 was 62%, 76% and 63% respectively, against a target of 70%.
24. *Responsive Repairs (SH302)* - SCDC contractors MEARS survey a minimum of 25% of all repairs carried out over a monthly period. The quarterly satisfaction figure for April - June 2015 was 97% against a 95% target.

Options

25. The Portfolio Holder is invited to note the report. Alternatively, in noting the report the Portfolio Holder might identify areas of particular concern for action by officers as required.

Implications

26. There are no direct financial, staffing, legal, equality and diversity or climate change implications arising from this information report.
27. *Risk management:* There are no direct implications relating to Strategic Risks; however, failure to maintain high standards of customer service exposes the Council to reputational damage and greater recourse to Ombudsmen.

Consultation

28. There has been no formal consultation on this report as it is largely for information. The report was considered by EMT on 26 August 2015.

Effect on Strategic Aims

29. Regular reporting of qualitative and quantitative performance information relating to feedback and complaints can inform service planning and reviews, and identify improvements to service delivery that will contribute to the continuing provision of first class services to all, encourage learning and innovation and protect residents' quality of life.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: None

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