

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder's Meeting 16 November 2010  
**AUTHOR/S:** Chief Executive / Corporate Manager for Community and Customer Services

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### **CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS PERFORMANCE, INCORPORATING COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS – Q2 (JULY-SEPTEMBER 2010)**

#### **Purpose**

1. To review performance against the Council's Customer Service Standards during quarter two, July to September 2010, incorporating complaints and compliments, which have previously been the subject of separate reports.
2. To identify areas of poor performance and explore corrective measures, linking to the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) project.
3. This is not a key decision. It is for the Portfolio Holder's information and comment.

#### **Recommendation**

4. That the Portfolio Holder notes the content of this report, highlighting any recurring themes and identifying areas for further investigation, as required.

#### **Executive Summary**

5. Contact Centre performance continues to meet the service level agreement targets although with a slight decrease on first quarter figures.
6. Within the second quarter of 2010/11 the Council registered 63 complaints. This is a significant increase on same periods for 2009/10 of 35 and 31 in 2008/09, and is due to a change to the reporting process (explanation follows in main body of report).
7. Affordable Homes continue to generate the highest percentage of complaints in quarter two, followed in descending order by Corporate Services, Health & Environmental Services and Planning & New Communities.
8. 82% of complaints were registered and acknowledged within three working days, a decrease on last year's performance figure for the same period of 100%.
9. 75% of registered complaints were responded to within 10 working days, representing a decrease on the same periods in 2009/10 of 85% and 90% in 2008/09.
10. Corporate Services achieved an impressive 93% response rate to complaints within target.
11. The majority of complaints have concerned failure to act, service processes and/or procedures and staff issues/conduct.

12. To encourage customers to engage and to suggest service improvements, the Customer Service Coordinator (CSC) is forwarding customer satisfaction questionnaires only to complainants for completion who have had their complaints upheld by the Council.
13. There is concern that the Council will not meet its 28 days average response time set by the LGO for 2010/11.
14. Proactive performance monitoring attempts to maximise the completion rate for learning from complaints forms.
15. 38 compliments were received during quarter two.
16. The Customer Service Coordinator is leading the implementation of a corporate work plan as part of the Customer Service Excellence accreditation project, within which a number of new initiatives to improve customer service are under development.

### Considerations

#### Telephone Performance

17. Telephone performance at South Cambridgeshire Hall has remained strong throughout the quarter as shown in Table A below.

**Table A - Cambourne telephone performance**

Measure	SLA target	Apr-June 2010 (Qtr 1)	Jul-Sept 2010 (Qtr 2)
Calls abandoned	<5%	1%	1.5%
Average wait time	<30 secs	3 secs	3 secs
Calls answered <20 seconds	80%	99%	98%

*Total no. of answered calls = 62174, total no. of missed calls = 953, making an overall total of 63127 calls. This showed an increase on total no. of answered calls in quarter one = 61186 plus, total no. of missed calls = 603, making an overall total of 61789 calls. Difference of overall calls = 1338.*

18. Table B details Contact Centre performance including calls abandoned, average call waiting times, calls answered within 20 seconds and switchboard calls answered within 10 seconds. The table shows that the Contact Centre continues to meet the targets set out in the service level agreement although with a slight decrease on first quarter figures.
19. The reasons for this are:
  - The Implementation of new blue bins scheme by Health and Environmental Services has caused an increase in call volumes as customers have general enquiries relating to the scheme.
  - Two members of staff leaving the Contact Centre, leading to recruitment, selection and training needs.
  - Introduction and implementation of new tenants handbook highlighting housing repairs which are still to be carried out, and those no longer provided.

Numerous enquiries have been received on this subject and training needs have been identified to support customer liaison officers when answering customer calls. A training programme is underway to meet this need.

**Table B – Contact Centre telephone performance**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>SLA target</b>	<b>Apr-June 2010 (Qtr 1)</b>	<b>Jul-Sept 2010 (Qtr 2)</b>
Calls abandoned	<5%	2%	3%
Average wait time	<30 secs	10 secs	17
Calls answered <20 secs	80%	86%	79%
Switchboard calls answered <10 secs	80%	92%	87%

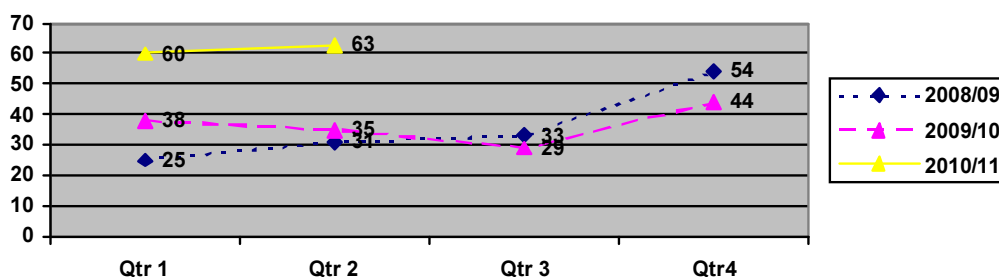
### **Complaint Handling Satisfaction**

20. There are three stages to the Council's complaints handling process:
- a) **Stage one complaints**  
All new complaints are logged at stage one. The complaint is passed to the relevant Corporate Manager to respond or nominate an appropriate Service Manager to respond on their behalf. Stage one complaints require a response within 10 working days.
  - b) **Stage two complaints**  
Complainants who are dissatisfied with outcome of stage one can request that the complaint be passed to the Chief Executive or Executive Director. Stage two complaints require a response within 20 working days.
  - c) **Stage three complaints**  
Complainants who remain dissatisfied with outcome of stage two are entitled to complain directly to the Local Government Ombudsman. These complaints are registered at stage 3 of the formal process. Response rate set by LGO for last financial year was 28 days.

### **Complaints Performance**

21. The following tables and charts set out the number of stage one and two complaints and our performance in meeting the acknowledgement and response targets.
22. In the second quarter of 2010/11, the Council registered a total of 63 complaints, 56 at stage one, 5 at stage two and 2 at stage three. These totals are similar to those reported in quarter one. Chart one details the number of complaints (stage one, two and three combined) per quarter in comparison to previous financial years. The increase in the number of complaints registered, when compared to 35 in 2009/10 and 31 in 2008/09, is largely due to amended procedures under which complaints to the Contact Centre are now treated as corporate complaints, whereas previously the service area concerned dealt with them informally.

### **Chart 1 – no. complaints (stage one, two and three combined) per quarter**



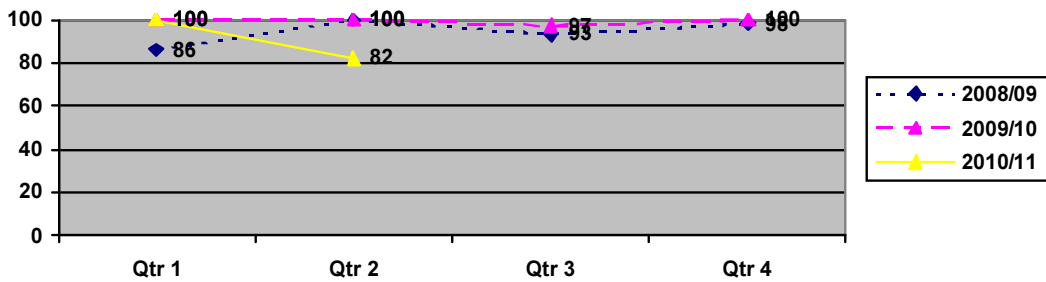
23. Table C details the number and percentage of complaints received by each corporate area, providing a comparison between quarter one and quarter two figures. Affordable Homes continues to generate the highest percentage of complaints followed by Corporate Services, Health & Environmental Services and Planning & New Communities.
24. An increased number of complaints have related to change of circumstances procedures operated by the Benefits Section within Corporate Services. In many cases, these complaints have arisen due to lack of understanding of procedures (e.g. the time required to assess an application following initial contact) and processes, many of which are prescribed in legislation. The majority of complaints received do not concern matters which the Council can directly influence, therefore work is underway to manage customer expectations more effectively to reduce the volume of complaints received.
25. Health & Environmental Services have also seen an increase in complaints. This has been due to lack of customer knowledge and understanding of the processes put into place to clear and decontaminate the former Bayer Crop Science site in Hauxton prior to development.

**Table C – % complaints (stage one, two & three combined) per corporate area**

Corporate Area	Apr-June 2010 (Qtr 1)		July-Sept 2010 (Qtr 2)	
Planning & New Communities	15	25%	9	14%
Health & Environmental Services	13	22%	15	24%
Affordable Homes	27	45%	22	35%
Corporate Services	5	8%	15	24%
Community & Customer Services	0	0%	2	3%

26. During the second quarter, 82% of complaints were registered and acknowledged within three working days. The reason for this has been due to a combination of other key customer services priorities and an increase in the number of complaints being received and logged. Measures are being introduced to improve this figure for reporting progress in quarter three.

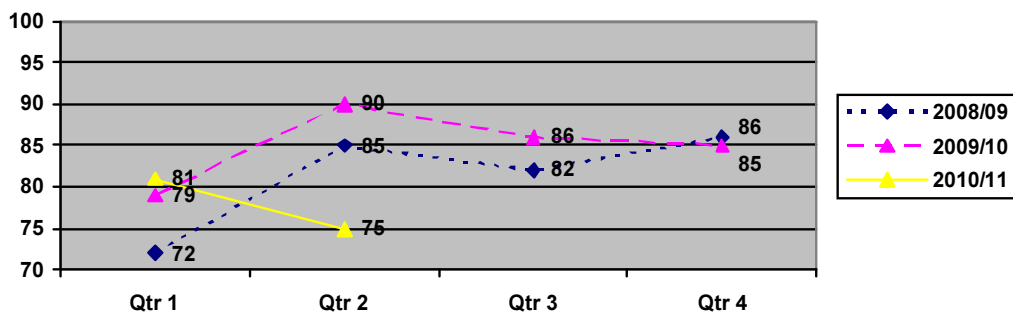
**Chart 2 – % of complaints (stage one, two & three combined) acknowledged within target**



27. Chart 3 details the percentage of complaints responded to within target. Taking stages one and two together, 75% of registered complaints were responded to within timescale.

28. It is considered that these response times are unacceptably slow. SMT has been requested to remind staff of the importance of addressing complaints in a timely manner in order to demonstrate the Council's commitment to customer services and continuous improvement.

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



29. Table D details the percentage of responses meeting target by corporate area. Corporate Services performed impressively during this quarter.

**Table D – Corporate area performance - Complaints responded to within target**

July-Sept 2010 (Qtr 2)	Total no. received	Total responded to within target	Response within target
Planning & New Communities	9	3	33%
Health & Environmental Services	15	8	53%
Affordable Homes	22	10	45%
Corporate Services	15	14	93%
Community & Customer Services	2	1	50%

30. Table E details the broad theme of complaints by both total number and percentage for quarter one and quarter two in 2010/11. The predominant themes recorded in the second quarter were failure to act, service processes and/or procedures and staff issues/conduct. Analysing complainant information shows we are not managing customer expectations and are therefore over promising and under performing in some areas.

**Table E - Complaint breakdown by broad theme**

Theme	Qtr 1 No.	Qtr 1 %		Qtr 2 No.	Qtr 2 %
Failure to communicate	5	8%		9	14%
Failure to act	7	12%		16	25%
Misinformation	0	0%		2	3%
Council Charges	0	0%		1	2%
Service Delivery	25	42%		8	13%
Staff Issues/conduct	8	13%		12	19%
Processes and/or procedures	15	25%		15	24%

31. The CSE Standard recognises that measuring complainant satisfaction with those whose complaint is not upheld will not provide an accurate picture of satisfaction with the process. The standard states:

*'We (the Council) ensure that the outcome of the complaints process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them'.*

32. In quarter two, customer satisfaction surveys were only sent to complainants whose complaint had been upheld by the Council, a total of 24 out of 63. This decision was taken to try and encourage customers to engage with the Council and provide positive suggestions for improvements and/or actions for the Council to take forward. To date, no responses have been returned.
33. Results suggest that some respondents to the satisfaction survey may have been unable to distinguish between the outcome of their complaints (i.e. upheld or dismissed), and the process under which it was dealt with, therefore making it difficult to assess the process with the right degree of objectivity. Discussion with other authorities suggest this is a common issue when attempting to provide meaningful complaint satisfaction feedback.
34. Two complainants were so dissatisfied with the response received from the corporate area that their comments were escalated to stage two of the complaints process and replied to accordingly.

#### **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints**

35. South Cambridgeshire District Council has received two complaints submitted by the LGO during the second quarter in 2010/11.
36. Table F breaks down the complaints by corporate area.

**Table F – Breakdown of LGO complaints by corporate area**

Corporate Area	Qtr 2	Average response time
Planning & New Communities	1	Response still outstanding at 57

		days
Health & Environmental Services	1	29 days

37. The LGO continues to investigate the two complaints and has not communicated any decisions.
38. From the information in the above Chart F, the Council will not meet its 28 days average response time set by the LGO in 2009/10 for 2010/11.

### Learning from complaints

39. Learning from complaints forms continue to accompany complaints when forwarded to officers to respond. A number of forms have been completed and response targets have risen considerably but significant improvement is needed to increase the number completed and returned.
40. Performance monitoring at the beginning of the second quarter of 2010/11 has shown an improvement in the completion rate for learning from complaints forms. Maintaining a high completion rate relies upon proactive progress chasing by the CSC; where the pressure of other priorities means the CSC is unable to fulfil this role, the completion rate has reduced.
41. Completed forms will be analysed, with a view to identifying specific improvement actions, for consideration by the Customer Services project group and publication on the Council's website and via future updates reports to SMT and the Portfolio Holder.

**Table H - Completed Learning From Complaints Forms**

July – Sept 2010 (Qtr 2)	Total no. of complaints	Forms completed and returned	Response within target
Corporate Area			
Planning & New Communities	9	7	78%
Health & Environmental Services	15	12	80%
Affordable Homes	22	12	55%
Corporate Services	15	12	80%
Community & Customer Services	2	1	50%

*Response within target for quarter one (April-June 2010); Planning & New Communities 47%, Health & Environmental Services 23%, Affordable Homes 44%, Corporate Services 80%, Community & Customer Services N/A.*

### Compliments

42. The CSC registered 38 compliments during the second quarter in 2010/11. Notable comments included:

“I would like to express my Company's thanks and appreciation for the assistance we received in the form of your letters... we were grateful for your guidance on this subject.”

“Please pass on my deep appreciation for the grand job you have done to my home.”  
 “I find it difficult to express my wonder at the efficiency and help provided by your department... something I’ve not had the pleasure of experiencing before.”  
 “A huge thank you for all your help... you have been absolutely brilliant, you have been an absolute star and that things wouldn’t be working as well as they are without you, so once again a BIG THANK YOU.”  
 “Many thanks for your prompt assistance... it is most appreciated.”

43. Table I shows the number and percentage of compliments registered in quarter one and quarter two of 2010/11 for comparisons. The table indicates that whilst Planning & New Communities and Affordable Homes generate a significant proportion of complaints, they continue to register the majority of compliments too.

**Table I - Compliments (Qtr 2) by Corporate Area**

<b>Corporate Area</b>	<b>Qtr 1</b>		<b>Qtr 2</b>	
Planning & Sustainable Communities	9	32%	17	44%
Health & Environmental Services	5	18%	4	11%
Affordable Homes	6	21%	7	18%
Corporate Services	3	11%	4	11%
Community & Customer Services	1	4%	6	14%

**Customer Service Excellence project**

44. The CSC is leading the implementation of a Corporate Work Plan in order to assist the Council in achieving Customer Service Excellence accreditation during 2011. The plan contains a number of new and revised initiatives to improve customer service, which are underway or proposed. These include customer satisfaction and insight surveys for visitors to the Cambourne offices, dedicated customer service web pages and a Staff Recognition scheme with an emphasis on recognition for outstanding customer service. Details of these and other initiatives are available in the update reports provided to the Assurance Group, chaired by the Executive Director (Operational Services) on a monthly basis.

**Consultation**

45. This information will be reported formally to Senior Management Team (SMT) at its meeting on 10 November 2010. Any additional issues not already covered in this report will be reported verbally to the Portfolio Holder.

**Implications**

46. Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	Relevant projects are being taken forward using existing staffing resources.



Risk Management	Failure to maintain high standards of complaint handling exposes the Council to the risk of more recourse to the Ombudsman. This brings a reputational risk.
Equality and Diversity	An Equality Impact Assessment of the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Procedure was completed on 28 October 2010. No adverse impacts were identified.
Equality Impact Assessment completed Opportunities	No Information detailed in this report is for monitoring purposes only and an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.
Climate Change	None

### Effect on Strategic Aims

47.	<b>Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.</b>
	The complaints and compliment process provides a vital channel for customers to feedback information relating to their experience of our services. This information should inform service planning and reviews and identify improvements to service delivery that will contribute to proving first class services accessible to all.
	The Council has a strategic aim to achieve Customer Services Excellence (CSE) accreditation during 2011.
	<b>Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.</b>
	Improving service design and delivery will result in increased customer satisfaction and further improve the Council's reputation.
	<b>Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.</b>
	Increasing community engagement and consultation will provide residents further opportunity to communicate with the authority and in turn will assist the Council in providing a voice for rural life.

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

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