

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder 15 February 2011
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive/Corporate Manager for Community and Customer Services

CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE – 2010-11 QUARTER THREE (OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2010)

Purpose

1. To review performance against the Council's Customer Service Standards incorporating complaints and compliments during quarter three, October to December 2010.
2. To identify areas of strong and under-performance and note actions, planned and underway, to address these.
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. **67 compliments** were received during quarter three, a 57% increase on quarter two figures of 38.
6. Contact Centre performance continues to meet the service level agreement targets.
7. Reception Customer Satisfaction Surveys were launched in November 2010. The overall feedback from this survey was **positive**; the Council is meeting its performance targets for greeting customers promptly; providing a friendly and efficient service and making sure customers are seen within 10 minutes of them visiting the Council or attending a pre-arranged appointment.
8. Customer Insight Satisfaction Survey interviews took place between 6-7 January 2011. Overall feedback was **very positive** with 89% of respondents being 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the service we provide.
9. Within the third quarter of 2010/11 the Council registered 55 complaints, this figure is **lower** than the figure reported in quarter two of 63. Affordable Homes continue to generate the highest percentage of complaints followed in descending order by Planning & New Communities and Health & Environmental Services.
10. During the third quarter, 89% of complaints were registered and acknowledged within three working days, an **increase** from 82% in quarter two.
11. 71% of registered complaints were responded to within timescale, representing a **decrease** from quarter two of 75%. Corporate Services and Community & Customer

Services performed strongly, whilst noticeable improvement has been made by Planning & New Communities.

12. The majority of complaints have concerned service processes and/or procedures, failure to act and staff issues/conduct.
13. 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. In quarter three, a total of 22 questionnaires were sent, to-date we have not received any completed and returned. Comparison data for quarter two, 21 questionnaires were sent to complainants and only 6 were returned.
14. During the third quarter, the Council received no complaints submitted by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).
15. Information analysed from completed learning from complaints forms shows the Council is actively learning from complaints and is making changes to policy and procedures where necessary to improve service efficiency. The completion rate for Learning from Complaints forms was 58%.

Compliments

16. 67 compliments were registered during quarter three, a 57% increase on the previous quarter. Tables 1-2 in the **attached** appendix provide a full breakdown of compliments received by service area.

17. Notable comments included:

"Within three hours from logging the call a plumber was on site fixing the leak and it was Christmas Day night. Pass this to the relevant department for some praise and would like to thank you again. Well done!"

"This morning we had the green and blue bin collections and my neighbours' bin was overlooked. We happened to see your collection team and told them. They returned at the end of their round and emptied the bin. They were polite and cheerful in the extremely cold conditions and I would like to applaud them. Please let them know that their work is valued and thank them."

"I would like to put on record our appreciation of the South Cambs Councils refuse and recycling crews attempts to maintain a near normal collection service during this last month of adverse weather. Your operatives have maintained a friendly, polite, efficient service during very testing times. Well done to all concerned."

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your involvement, help and assistance."

"Many thanks for all your help. It is really very appreciated."

"We would all like to thank and show appreciation of HR for their support and guidance."

"To personally thank you for your input and support in the success of our recent application for planning permission. We have found the professional advice we have received invaluable and cannot imagine how we would have achieved this positive result without such guidance."

"Yesterday morning I phoned for help and was told that someone would be round within 4 hours. Barely 1 hour 30 mins later, help arrived - friendly and efficient. Please pass on my real appreciation to the department concerned. I am most grateful to South Cambs District Council for the rapid response to my need."

Telephone Performance

18. Telephone performance at Cambourne HQ remains strong and consistent during quarter three meeting all service level agreement target figures. 0.5% of calls were abandoned, average wait time for a call to be answered was 3 seconds and 98% of calls answered within 20 seconds. (See Table 3 in Appendix).
19. The Contact Centre continues to meet targets set out in their service level agreement. Call abandonment rate was 2%; average wait time for a call to be answered was 8 seconds, 89% of calls answered within 20 seconds and 91% of calls answered by Switchboard within 10 seconds. (See Table 4 in Appendix).
20. Quarter three figures show an impressive improvement on figures published in the previous quarter, which can be largely attributed to specific training and development programmes for all staff, new starters and existing, on a quarterly basis, combined with an overall reduction in call volumes.

Reception Customer Satisfaction Survey

21. Launched in November 2010, this survey is designed to establish how satisfied visitors and/or customers are with the service provided by the Council's reception and explore what improvements can be made. All visitors to the Council offices are invited by the Customer Service Officers to complete a questionnaire before leaving the building.
22. 40 respondents completed the survey since its launch in November 2010. A summary highlighting satisfaction ratings of the report is as follows. A full report is available upon request from the Customer Service Co-ordinator.
 - 80% of respondents rated accessibility to these offices as 'good' or 'excellent'.
 - The majority of customers visit our offices because they need to see a member of staff (39%); or to deliver or collect a form (20%).
 - 97.5% rated the cleanliness of the reception area as 'excellent' or 'good'.
 - 89% rated our facilities provided as 'excellent' or 'good'.
 - The Council commits to 'welcoming visitors promptly' and the results were positive in that 97% did not have to wait more than 5 minutes to be seen by a member of the reception staff and/or a case officer.
 - All respondents considered their waiting time to be acceptable.
 - 95% rated overall satisfaction with reception service as 'excellent' or 'good'.
 - 74% of respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the office staff as 'excellent' or 'good'.
23. Overall, feedback from the survey was very positive, demonstrating that the Council is meeting its targets for greeting customers promptly and seeing all customers within 10 minutes of their appointments. Key development areas related to the increasing the provision of private rooms for customers discussing sensitive personal matters and increased access to ICT in Reception, which will be taken up by the CSC and will inform the on-going Customer Contact review.

Customer Insight Survey

24. Customer insight surveys were carried out on 6-7 January 2011, involving interviews with customers to explore in more depth their reasons for visiting the Council and the speed and quality with which their enquiries were dealt with. As with the satisfaction

survey, the emphasis was on ways in which their experience could be improved. A total of 59 visitors to the Council were approached upon leaving the building and agreed to take part in the completion of a survey.

25. A full report is available upon request from the CSC analysing the responses gathered from the interviews. Headline results are as follows:
- 89% visited the Council less than once a month.
 - 21% visited for general planning enquiries, 17% for housing enquiries and 16% to attend pre-arranged meetings.
 - **91% had their enquiry resolved during their visit.**
 - Only 4 out of the 57 surveyed did not resolve their enquiry fully on their visit due to additional evidence needed relating to their personal circumstances.
 - Respondents felt that the main things, which defined excellent customer service to them, were a good knowledge of services available, courteous and polite staff and speedy service.
 - When asked 'what did you like about our offices', 30% said our friendly staff.
 - 87% thought it was important for the Council to consult with its customers.
 - Preferred methods of consultation with customers; 27% by questionnaire in person and 20% by the South Cambs. Magazine.
 - Customers expressed they would like the Council to communicate with its customers by face-to-face methods or by the telephone, 30% and 27% respectively.
 - 43% of our customers prefer to communicate with the Council face-to-face and 31% prefer by telephone.
 - 89% of those surveyed rated overall satisfaction with us was 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied'.
26. In summary, the insight surveys revealed pleasingly high levels of satisfaction by customers with the speed and quality of service received, and with the facilities they encountered. Full analysis has revealed some interesting development areas in terms of customers' preferred means of being consulted with, and with the quality and accessibility of relevant service information; the Policy and Performance Team will take these issues forward in the immediate future and these will again inform the on-going Customer Contact review to develop an integrated, holistic framework for the future.

Complaints Performance

27. In quarter three, 55 complaints were registered, 52 of which were resolved at stage 1 and 3 at stage 2. Chart 1 and Table 5 in the **attached** Appendix provide full details of complaints received by service, and a year-on-year comparison of total complaints received per quarter.
28. As would be expected, the larger front-line customer-facing services receive the highest proportion of complaints. Analysis of complaints received, and from the receipt of completed Learning from Complaints forms (see paragraphs 36-38 below) had identified a general trend in terms of complaints arising from customers' expectations not being met. Whilst it will not be possible to meet customers' full expectations in every case (especially when many processes are governed by statutory timescales), there is work for the services concerned, with support from the Policy and Performance Team and Corporate Services, to provide greater clarity in respect of processes and service levels, in order to manage customer expectations

more effectively. Where recurring issues have been raised in relation to the conduct of staff, these matters are being addressed by appropriate managerial interventions.

29. During the third quarter, 89% of complaints were registered and acknowledged within three working days, an increase from 82% in quarter two. Reduced performance is attributable to three complaints being sent to the service area and not directly to CSC to be logged and acknowledged quickly. In addition, the CSC has been required to prioritise key customer service priorities linked to working towards CSE accreditation; national customer service week, planning and preparation for documentary review day and on-site pre-assessment. Temporary support has been provided in the Policy and Performance team until March 2011 which will enable improvement to be reported in quarter four. (See Chart 2 in Appendix).
30. In quarter three, combining stage one and stage two complaints, 71% of registered complaints were responded to within timescale, a slight decrease on quarter two of 75%. (See Chart 3 and Table 6 in Appendix).
31. The CSC proactively works with all service areas to try and improve their response rates by sending weekly reminders to designated persons highlighting any complaints that are nearing their due date or any that are outstanding.
32. Complaints are broken down into seven broad themes; failure to communicate, failure to act, misinformation, Council charges, service delivery, staff issues/conduct and processes. The predominant themes recorded in the third quarter in descending order were processes and/or procedures, failure to act and staff conduct. (See Table 7 in Appendix).
33. 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, the decision was taken that all complainants whose complaint had been upheld would receive a customer satisfaction survey.
34. In quarter three, a total of 22 questionnaires were sent to complaints whose complaint had been upheld, to-date we have not received any completed and returned. In comparison with quarter two, 21 questionnaires were sent to complainants and only 6 were returned.

Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

35. This Council did not receive any complaints submitted by the LGO during the third quarter in 2010/11.

Learning from complaints

36. The purpose of the learning from complaints form is to ensure services have the opportunity to identify and act upon constructive feedback, to try and encourage corporate areas to prevent a complaint from recurring and to improve the customer's journey by making and implementing service improvements. In quarter three, 32 completed forms were returned out of 55, representing a 58% response rate. (See Table 8 in Appendix).
37. Completed forms have been analysed by each corporate area and reveal positive examples in which processes have been adapted in response to feedback (e.g. within Corporate Services, the time taken to provide updates to customers has been reduced as a direct result of feedback from a complaint), and provide reassurance

that, where things have gone wrong, appropriate management intervention and training has been put in place to put things right.

38. The content of this report has been discussed at CSE PAG on 28 January 2011. Actions have been noted and taken forward through the CSE corporate work plan. A full copy is available upon request.

Implications

39. 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 in October 2010. No adverse impacts were identified. Respondents to the Customer Insight survey were asked to complete Equalities Monitoring forms; however, only 12 out of 59 customers agreed to do so. Officers are investigating possible reasons for this, with a view to generating an increased response rate to future surveys.
Equality Impact Assessment completed?	No Information detailed in this report is for monitoring purposes only and an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.
Climate Change	None specific arising from this report and recommendations.

Effect on Strategic Aims

40.	Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.
	The compliments, comments and complaints 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.
	Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.
	Improving service design and delivery will result in increased customer satisfaction and further improve the Council's reputation.
	Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.
	Increasing community engagement and consultation will provide residents further opportunity to communicate with the authority and in turn will assist the Council provide a voice for rural life.

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

- Reception Customer Satisfaction Survey report, Customer Insight Survey report and Learning from Complaints reports are available from CSC.

Contact Officer: Rachael Fox – Customer Service Coordinator
Telephone: (01954) 713017