

**Report of the Director of Human Resources,
Performance & Communications and
the Interim Executive Director of Communities,
to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
on 6th October 2015**

**Corporate Plan Quarter 1 Performance Report
Customer Feedback and Improvement: Compliments, Complaints and Other
Representations**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) work programme it was agreed that it would consider the Council's Quarterly Corporate Plan Performance Reports. As part of this, it has been identified that within Quarter 1 (April-June 2015), performance in relation to complaints was below target.
- 1.2 This report outlines the performance as well as explains the recent changes that have taken place with regards to the handling of complaints and outlines the future plans of the service. This report is provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive comments and suggestions to support this area of work.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 April 2015 saw the introduction and cabinet approval of a new procedure (Management of Customer Feedback Procedure – cabinet ref. 20.5.2015/12) and process for the management of customer complaints, compliments, comments and enquiries across the Council. This procedure replaced the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy 2011 and the Adult Social Services Feedback and Improvement Procedures 2009.
- 2.2 The Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure remains in place and is a separate procedure. This is as a result of the there being separate legislation (The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006) for the management of children's social care complaints.
- 2.3 As of the 1st April 2015 as part of future council re-organisation a centralised service located within the Communities Directorate, Customer Services Business Unit was established. This service is known as the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team (CFIT) and is responsible for the management and facilitation of customer feedback for all Council services.
- 2.4 Through the provision of a single point of contact for customer feedback there are clear benefits to be gained for both our customers and operational services. An example of this is being able to learn as a Council from customer feedback and share improvements in service delivery.

2.5 As well as complaints and compliments the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team are also responsible for the facilitation of the following services:

- Information requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, Data Protection Act and Environmental Information Requests
- Members enquiry pilot (Highways Service)
- Tell us once

3.0 How do our customers tell us what they think and what will happen?

3.1 Customers can provide the Council with their feedback in a variety of ways, including online, over the telephone and face to face ensuring that this service is accessible to all.

3.2 Customers can contact the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team directly to raise their compliments or complaints or the services directly. It is acknowledged that customers will often raise operational dissatisfaction at source directly with the service and these matters are often resolved quickly, effectively and to the customer's satisfaction. It is accepted that it is not possible for all of these operational dissatisfactions to be captured and shared with the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team for registration. However, it is important that staff who receive a concern and are able to resolve at point of contact ensure that the customer is aware of their rights to complain to the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team and know how they can do this.

3.3 When a customer contacts the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team to make a complaint they can expect their contact to be acknowledged and a discussion with them will take place. The purpose of this discussion is to understand the nature of their contact and agree with the customer the details of their complaint, the outcome they are seeking and how their concerns could be resolved.

3.4 All complaints are assessed to determine their complexity and significance (impact) and the outcome of this assessment outlines the resolution method and timescale for resolution. Generally speaking the majority of complaints are given a 10 to 25 working day timescale however; complaint investigation may be extended or given a longer timeframe (up to 65 working days) as a result of factors such as complexity, breadth and availability.

3.5 The majority of complaints are investigated at Operational/Service Manager level but there are occasions when external investigators are appointed. The overriding principal in the appointment of an investigator is that they are impartial (not involved in the decision surrounding the complaint). Upon completion of the complaint investigation a written response is provided to the customer which is signed by the Service Director of the Business Unit with which the complaint is concerned. It is an essential part of any investigation that learning is identified, that corrective action is taken and that this is promoted throughout the resolution of a complaint.

3.6 There is some variation from the above in the management of Children's Social Care complaints due to separate legislation. However the overriding principle of early resolution, impartial investigation and learning from complaints remains the same.

4.0 What did our customers tell us in the first 3 months?

4.1 The information collected on customer feedback during 2015-16 will provide a baseline from which services can review their performance management in this area in the future. However, it is anticipated that 2015-16 may see a decrease in the number of complaints received and an increase in compliments based upon the previous year's figures. The reasons for this being that in the creation of a centralised team there will be tighter controls in place on the classification of customer feedback and the redirection of contacts which are not complaints but are requests for services.

4.2 Any customer contact that is identified as being a request for services is shared directly with the service it concerns for their attention and any necessary action required. An example of this would be a customer wanting to complain about their bin being missed. This would be shared with the waste management service for their attention. The Customer Feedback and Improvement Team inform the customer that their contact has been handled as a request for service rather than a formal complaint against the Council. However, we do advise the customer to contact the team to discuss this further should they be unhappy with this way forward. Any request for service which comes directly to the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team will be registered and is reported on quarterly.

4.3 Between 1st April 2015 and 30th June 2015 (quarter 1) the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team reported the following data.

- The number of compliments recorded is 50.
- The number of complaints recorded at the end of quarter 1 is 129.
- 32 comments have been recorded.
- 29 Councillor and MP enquiries have been recorded. Seven of these were processed through the members' pilot scheme.
- 326 additional contacts were recorded. These contacts were either a request for service, operational delivery matters (mild operational dissatisfactions) or not a Council service.
- A total of 803 Tell us Once notifications have been received by the team and distributed to services.

Analysis of the above data identified:

- The highest number of compliments were made to the Communities Directorate.
- The highest number of complaints were made to the Core Directorate (Finance, Assets and Information Services).
- Of the 129 complaints received 81% were resolved through early resolution (without the need for formal investigation).
- The majority of complaints made were about service provision.
- A total of 9 Local Government Ombudsman enquiries were received.

5.0 How quickly are we responding to complaints?

5.1 68% of the total number of complaints received in quarter 1 have met either the early resolution timescale of 2 working days or the agreed timescale of either 10, 25 or 65 working days. 34% of the complaints have not met the mentioned timescale and 6% of complaints are still in progress and awaiting an outcome.

5.2 Whilst the total percentage number of complaints meeting their agreed timescale is below our expected target (90%), the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team are working with services to ensure agreed timescales are met, it is acknowledged that a contributory factor to this drop in performance may be a result of:

- Complaint complexity, breadth and availability of investigator/customer.
- This being the first quarter that complaints and compliments have been managed centrally, both the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team and services have been establishing communication channels, working practices and are continuing to address any confusion/clarification on 'what is a complaint' and the distinction on what should be recorded and shared with the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team.
- Operational service capacity in the teams.

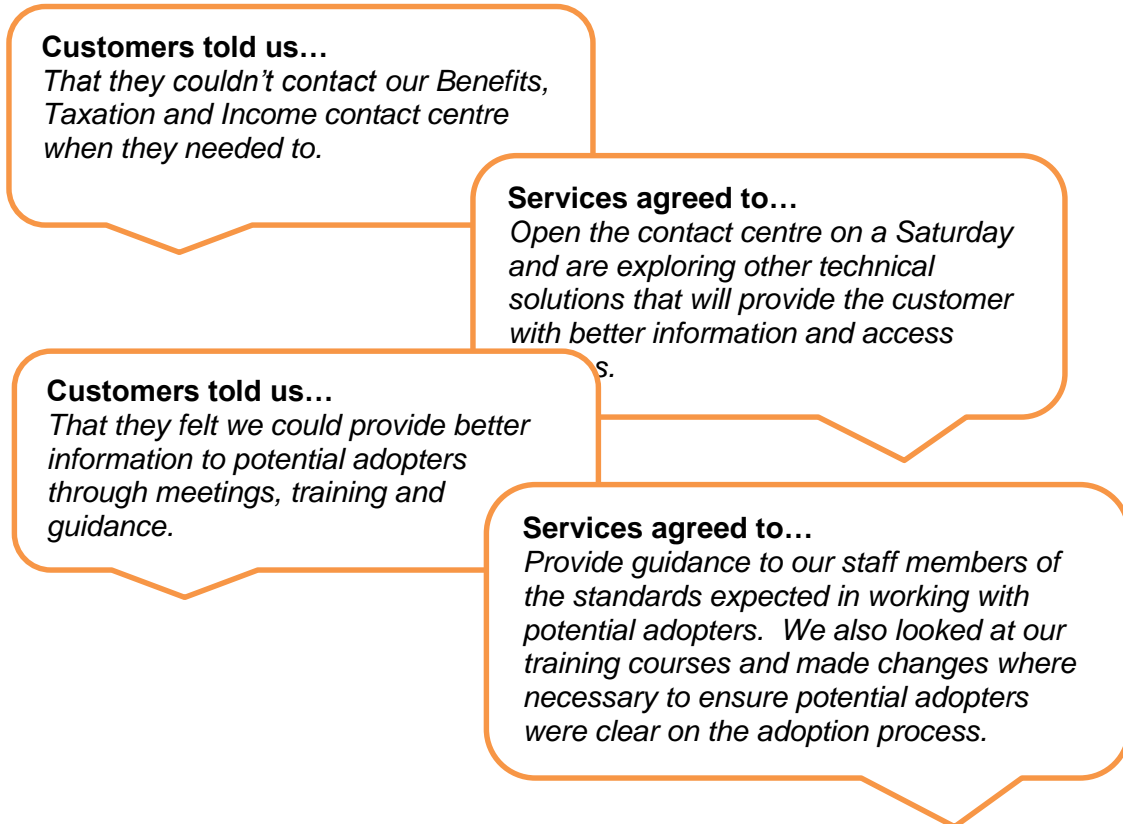
6.0 What have we learnt from complaints?

6.1 It is important that where services are upholding our customer complaints following the investigation, we look at what went wrong and why. This will provide an opportunity for services to make improvements with the aim of ensuring that we learn as an organisation and improve customer experience.

6.2 It is acknowledged that the recording and tracking of learning from complaints is new to most services. Therefore the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team is working with services in capturing and recording this information. Work is also

ongoing on strengthening the arrangements in place for the monitoring and sharing of the learning identified.

6.3 A sample of the learning identified in quarter 1 was:



7.0 Moving forward

7.1 Whilst there is a lot of positive work being undertaken by the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team there are still areas of development required. During 2015-16 the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team focus will be:

- Recruiting to all vacant posts within the team.
- To continue working with services to gain an understanding of their service delivery and management structure through attendance at meetings, workshops and daily working activity.
- To continue working with services to ensure there is a clear understanding of expectations in the management of customer complaints, compliments and requests.

- To commence work on integrating the Freedom of Information (FOI), Data Protection Act and Environmental Information Regulations service delivery into the customer feedback function focusing on process and service delivery.
- Work with services, specifically the contact centres, to reduce the number of contacts that reach our service that are not a complaint and can be addressed through operational services.
- The creation of an intranet page for Customer Feedback for staff to access.

8.0 Invited witnesses

8.1 The following witnesses have been invited to today's meeting to provide information and answer questions with regards to this area of work:

- Ann O'Flynn, Service Director of Customer Services, Communities Directorate
- Claire Dobby, Customer Feedback and Improvement Manager, Communities Directorate
- Councillor Jenny Platts, Cabinet Spokesperson for the Communities Directorate

9.0 Possible Areas for Investigation

9.1 Members may wish to ask questions around the following areas:

- Has feedback been sought from staff and customers with regards to the effectiveness of the new processes and where improvements could be made?
- To what extent are the new arrangements robust in handing complaints effectively?
- Have appropriate resources been allocated to the complaints service?
- How effective and reliable is the collection and use of data with regards to customer feedback?
- How will you ensure that performance/impact in relation to this work is monitored effectively?
- What has been done to ensure appropriate training for staff including awareness of the procedures and how to handle complaints?
- How effective has the Members enquiry pilot in Highways Services been? Is it likely to be extended to other Members and other Services?

- How do you track requests for service and how is this performance managed?
- What are the key actions which could be taken by Members to assist in the effectiveness of this service?

10.0 Background Papers and Links

- Link to the Council's Corporate Plan Performance Report Quarter 1 2015/16:
https://www2.barnsley.gov.uk/media/3773514/corporate_plan_performance_report_q1_2015-16.pdf
- Link to the Council's web page for complaints, compliments and suggestions:
<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/have-your-say/complaints-compliments-and-suggestions/>

11.0 Glossary

BMBC - Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
CFIT - Customer Feedback and Improvement Team
FOI - Freedom of Information

12.0 Report Authors and Officer Contacts

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