

Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview & Scrutiny Committee

12 December 2018

Corporate Customer Feedback Annual Report 2017-2018

Recommendation

Members consider and comment on this report

1.0 Key Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to explain briefly how customer feedback has been handled, and how we use that feedback to improve our services.
- 1.2 The report covers these questions:
- What is the framework for handling customer feedback?
 - How do customers share their feedback?
 - What do they tell us and what do we do about it?
 - What do we learn, and how do we use their feedback?
 - How do we monitor and raise the standards of complaints handling?
- 1.3 It also confirms the action plan now in place for further developing how the Council responds to customer feedback.
- 1.4 The Summary of the Annual Report is attached as Appendix 1, and the Action Plan as Appendix 2.

2.0 Supporting Documents

- 2.1 Customer Feedback Annual Report 2017-18

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): None

Other members: None

**Customer Feedback in
Warwickshire County Council:
Annual Report
April 2017 – March 2018**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council has a well-established and comprehensive customer feedback handling process, which was reviewed and strengthened by the Corporate Services Framework Review Board in 2014, and re-endorsed by Corporate Board in September 2015. The systems in place confirm that we want to hear from people when we get things right, and when we could do things better. This helps us to:

- Understand what services people value and why;
- Share best practice;
- Make sure we learn and continually improve how we provide a good service to our customers;
- Recognise and reward when our staff “go the extra mile”.

We encourage all staff to respond quickly and clearly to any concerns that are raised by individuals or groups. We want all our customers to feel confident that their views will be taken seriously, and that there will be no “repercussions” if they need to raise genuine concerns.

Our procedures are designed to:

- Protect vulnerable people from abuse and lack of care
- Confirm the right of customers to make a complaint and to disagree
- Enable those denied a service to challenge that decision
- Allow customers or their representatives to complain about the quality of service
- Ensure that complaints or suggestions are acted upon
- Provide extra feedback from our customers on the quality and appropriateness of our services
- Inform planning, resource allocation and quality assurance mechanisms.

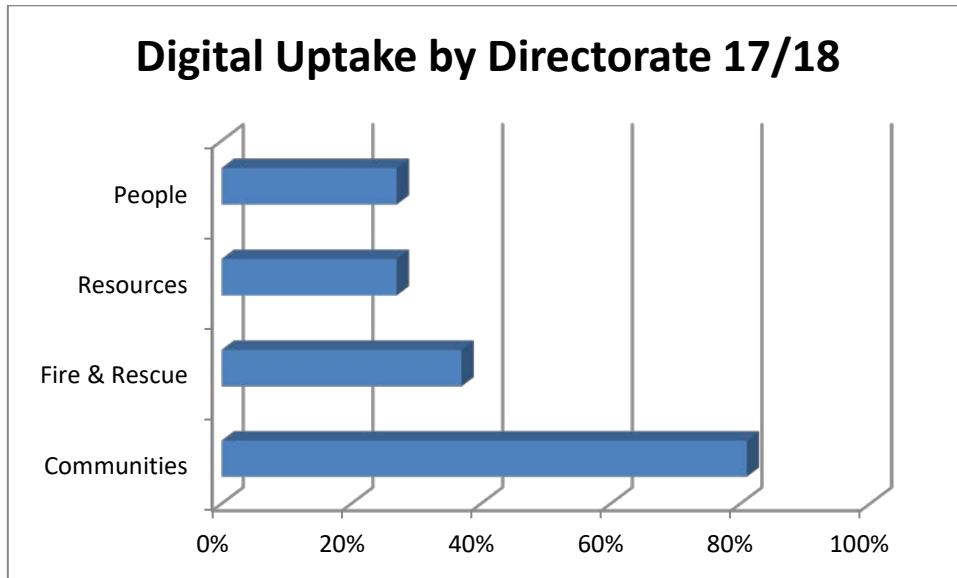
This Council has committed itself to the 2 key principles of “shared accountability” and “no wrong door” for effective dispute resolution across all the organisations it works with to provide services for customers:

- all partner organisations provide clear navigation for their customers to the right organisation/person to deal with other aspects of their feedback
- wherever it is possible, there should be co-ordination and co-operation between organisations to ensure customers get joined up responses to their concerns

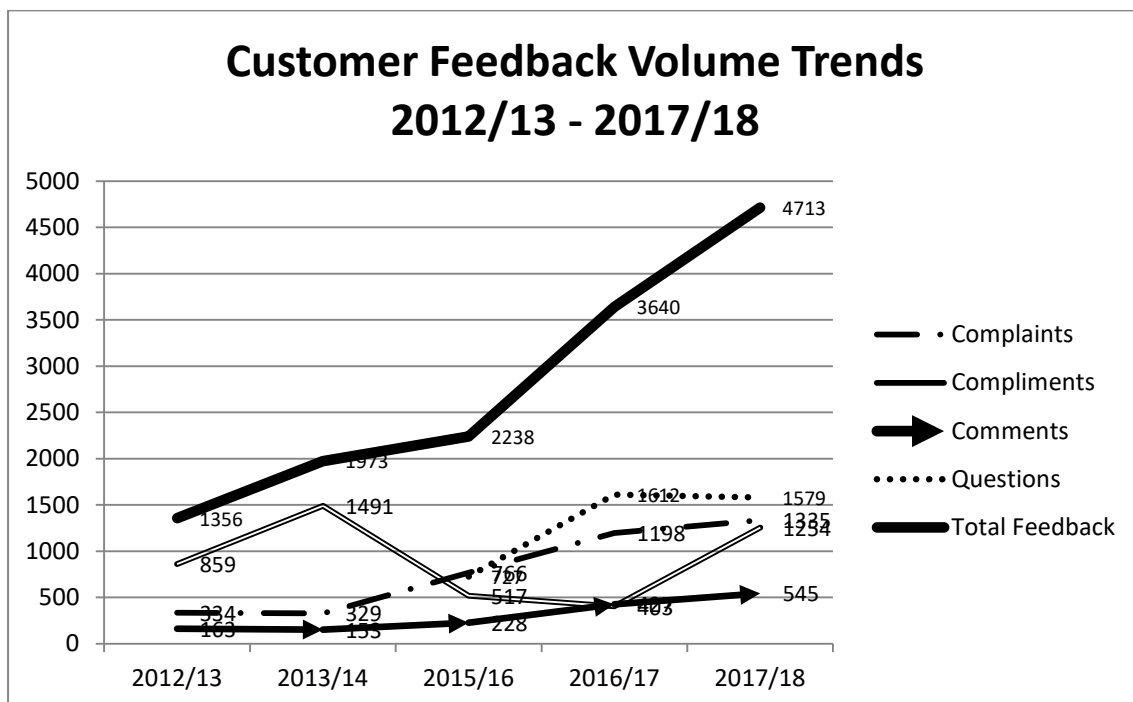
Details about how customer feedback is handled are kept within a specialist ICT customer feedback management system called Contact Us. This is intended to enable “real time” electronic recording of actions taken to resolve customer feedback, enable customers themselves to track progress, ensure more effective and secure information sharing and governance, and ensure effective escalation and intervention to ensure delays in dealing with feedback are quickly noticed and acted upon. This system was updated in December 2017 and the bedding down of the new system has been a major activity for the remainder of this financial year for all services.

KEY RESULTS SUMMARY:

- 60% (2846) of all customer feedback (ie, Questions, Compliments, Comments and Complaints) handled in the period April 2017 – March 2018 (4713) has come via the digital web channel.



- Trend analysis shows that over the last 5 years customer feedback has increased in total by 247%, primarily because the figures now include Questions coming in through the digital channel, and also consistent growth in Complaints being registered each year.



- 34% of all the 2017/18 data collected relates to the Question customer feedback option. 48% of all Questions are for Communities Directorate. 96% of all Questions registered came via the digital web channel, and 95% are answered within the 5 day target timescale.
- Compliments dipped in the previous 2 financial years. Analysis has confirmed this was due to poor registration processes for Compliments. As these processes have improved Compliment levels have now increased to close to previous much higher 2013/14 levels – 27% of customer feedback received in 2017/18 were Compliments. 60% of the Compliments registered relate to Resources Directorate, largely due to the positive feedback about Registrars and Library services.
- 28% of all customer feedback in 2017/18 was Complaints. Year on year Complaints have increased slightly by 3%. However, over the 5 year period the trend is steady increase, with an overall percentage increase of 269%. 37% of Complaints registered were handled by Communities Directorate, the highest volume of complaint activity in the Council, with 22% in People Directorate, 13% in Resources Directorate, and 27% filtered out as Complaints which could not be looked at by this Authority.
- The primary focus of Complaints for all Directorates is around service issues, and in Communities Directorate there are also higher levels of disagreement with policy. There is a high overall level of compliance with the Council's Complaints timescale targets for the corporate complaints procedures, which met the 80% compliance target. Compliance with statutory targets for adult and children's social care Complaints remains at significant variance from the 60% timescale compliance target, 34% for adult social care, and 40% for children's social care.
- There have been 11 adverse Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman decisions in the period, 8 of which are for People Directorate, and 3 for Communities. 1 children's social care case about fostering and school transport resulted in a published report which they also highlighted to other specific Authorities where they became aware they were taking a similar approach.
- There was a major change in the current customer feedback IT system used across the Authority in December 2017. This resulted in changes to functionality and some level of disruption whilst the transfer to the upgraded system happened.
- A key focus of service improvement activity in 2017/18 was collation of views from both customers and staff across all council services on their experience of complaints handling. We undertook a survey of customers' views about how we handle complaints, a survey of staff views about how it feels for them when they handle customer complaints, and a series of workshops to complete a complaints journey-map, and identify "pain points" where there are gaps between the desired customer /staff experience and the one actually received.

Where there are opportunities for learning and change beyond the individual case, we look carefully at how best to use this new knowledge and understanding for us to:

- Improve training and support for staff
- Review local guidance and custom and practice
- Review policies, procedures and processes

The upgrade to the Contact Us system in December 2017 now allows us to collect more systematically information about how services have learnt from complaints. Some examples of wider learning is shown in the table below:

Problem	Learning Improvement
Complaints that the Minerals Plan Consultation Form was misleading	In future consultations, include in the 'Guidance Note on Making a Representation' information about adding name and address details to any submission a consultee may make as the downloaded form doesn't provide a box to capture this information.
Libraries: Complaint regarding the system used to "cleanse" library card database when cards remain unused for a long period of time.	The complaint highlighted the lack of clear guidance for customers about what happens when a card is not used. Improved information and advice was made available on the Council's libraries web pages, and staff were reminded about how the system works so that they can explain this clearly to customers who ask about this.
Registrars: Complaint about charges for cancellation of a marriage booking.	The complaint showed that the current information on the web pages needed to be clearer and more easily understood. Changes were made to make sure that customers could be clear about the costs of cancellation.
Complaint was about reinstatement of the highway after work by utility companies.	The Council had, as a gesture of good will, agreed to some remedial works with a customer who was unhappy about the state the highway had been left in. However it hadn't explained clearly why the remedial works requested by the customer were not appropriate, and what was actually being offered was a good will gesture only. As a consequence, Highways now ensure that any goodwill gestures are clearly explained in writing and the limits of these clearly understood by the customer.
Complaint from a prospective tenant about how they responded to his application as a disabled person who was ex-armed services.	The Council identified that there were low levels of awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant across the Council. A significant awareness-raising campaign has been undertaken to promote the Council's commitment to the Covenant, and to ensure staff are aware of and engage with the Communities Directorate Localities and Partnerships

	Team, where there is a specific Armed Forces Covenant Project Officer, and the Equality and Diversity Team in Resources Directorate.
Complaint about financial information on assessment and charges for residential care.	The Council identified some areas for improvement in the proper identification and explanation of funding thresholds by front line staff. It reviewed staff training in this area as part of the Learning and Development Plan for 2017/18.
Complaint about how the breakdown of an adoption arrangement was managed.	The Council recognised that part of the difficulty was that the different roles of the Post Adoption Team and the Children's Social Care Team were not clear enough for parents. Written information is now provided to parents about this, and staff are better prepared to explain the differences in their roles.
Complaint about charges made to customer for disposal of a number of fluorescent tubes.	The Council recognised that the current guidance to customers on its web pages regarding the disposal of household waste and any discretionary charges was not clear. The web pages have been updated to make clearer the charging policy for disposal of waste, and listing the conditions and factors that will inform any discretionary charging decisions. Front line staff have also been supported to understand the discretionary factors and their role in determining charges.
Complaint about level of local response by Trading Standards to concerns raised about a product and the way it is being marketed.	The Council recognised that Trading Standards could improve the way it explained to customers the choices it makes about how best to use information given to them by customers, including if they need to refer an issue to a more appropriate alternative investigating Agency. Improved guidance for staff has been issued, and how to improve information to customers is being explored further.
Complaint about how fostercarers were dealt with when concerns were raised about their practice.	The Council asked the customers to be part of a learning event for staff to look at how to manage information-giving in very sensitive situations, and to enable staff to reflect on the consequences of delays and miscommunication in such sensitive situations.
Complaint about respite care and provision for young person with SEND	The complaint highlighted an issue in the Council's current provision relating to Direct Payments to help parents/carers to identify and purchase overnight respite care for their children. This is now an aspect of specific focus in a review of Direct Payments being undertaken by the Warwickshire Commissioning service.

Complaint about young adult with learning disability sharing accommodation re increasing support hours and rates.	Trying to unpick existing support arrangements for people who are sharing accommodation and support can be complex and confusing. In future we will reassess from the start of our involvement, so that each person's current needs are established, and proposed funding for support is clear and unambiguous. This should result in more timely decisions and better outcomes for our customers
Complaint from grandparent about how she was treated by the service when she stepped up to help with his care.	We are reviewing ways to support families and friends who "step up" when needed in urgent situations. We are currently undertaking a review of our Connected Persons Service and the issues raised within this complaint are being considered by the group working on this process.

Data on customer feedback goes to key decision-making and endorsement bodies such as Directorate Leadership Teams, Corporate Board, and relevant Committees. We also use local mechanisms to ensure that changes that have been made as a consequence of customer feedback are logged and shared, for example discussion at team meetings, in supervision sessions, etc.

A key element of any quality assurance process is customer feedback on the service they have received. In 2017 we conducted:

- A survey of customer's views about how we handle complaints
- A survey of staff views about how we handle complaints
- A Complaint Journey Mapping process through a series of workshops with staff from all Directorates

As a result of analysing these:

- "Pain points" have been identified where there is a gap between the desired customer and/or staff experience and the one actually received
- A thematic framework for addressing the gaps has been developed which will focus on the following areas for improvement in 2018/19:
 - Culture shift to encourage proactive dispute resolution at local level
 - Better leadership to give staff confidence about their accountability, the support and empowerment they should get, and the priority and resources they should commit to this
 - Better staff access to skills-based training, such as root cause analysis, effective communications, managing conflict, etc

- Better staff support to improve the way Contact Us system can be used to manage complaints handling process
- Better access to and use of performance data and analysis to drive proactive learning from complaints
- More effective and consistent quality assurance to ensure a more uniform standard of customer service, and ensure that there is regular consideration of customer and staff perspectives on how complaints handling is working across the Council

It has also confirmed again the following key basic satisfaction drivers for customers:

- Ease of contact
- Effective communication during the process
- Confidence in the fairness and openness of the process
- Timeliness of response
- Confidence in the quality of the review and those undertaking it

Future Plans:

- **Future functionality of key IT system:** In 2017 the current Contact Us system was upgraded. Whilst the new system was implemented December 2017 – March 2018 there is a need for a full evaluation of the new system, reflecting on both areas of new functionality and areas where functionality has changed or reduced.
- **The 6 key corporate themes above:** Taking forward the thematic framework for addressing the gaps identified in the customer journey work in 2017/18
- **Reviewing the current operating model for complaints handling:** Ensuring the operating model is fit for the future in Warwickshire County Council, reflective of the new Transformation Design Principles, and effectively incorporated within the Transformation New Operating Model.

APPENDIX 2

Action Plan Key Activities 2018/19

Corporate Desired Outcome	Planned Activities to Achieve Outcome
Culture shift to encourage proactive dispute resolution	<p>Develop and deliver staff development events to address cultural barriers identified with proactive problem solving at a local level</p> <p>Develop Advice Notes and support material to address staff uncertainties and concerns about how to address problems BEFORE they come into formal complaints procedures</p>
Better leadership to give staff confidence about their accountability, empowerment and priority	<p>Corporate and Directorate level endorse and proactively support the actions taken as part of this approach, are personally involved in shaping activities within their Directorates, and actively encourage their staff's involvement</p> <p>Delegate normal complaint handling to the lowest appropriate service level, leaving senior officers free to provide objective consideration if complaints escalate, and managers clearer about their expected level of accountability</p>
Better staff access to skills-based training, such as root cause analysis	<p>Link complaint handling skills to the 6 Key Behaviours model, review current training and development tools and agree a "skills toolkit" approach to upgrading the current staff support available.</p> <p>Legal and CRT develop improved guidance and support for staff struggling to manage difficult customer behaviour, whether or not it directly relates to complaints or day to day working</p>
Better staff support to use Contact Us system	<p>Contact Us is reviewed to identify opportunities for system optimisation and benefits realisation</p> <p>Put in place a communication programme to encourage all those involved in handling customer feedback across WCC to use the system in a way that supports and enables</p>
Better access to and use of performance data	<p>Develop and deliver a more integrated customer feedback programme for understanding how complaint handling is experienced by both customers and staff, with quarterly data analysis and report production</p> <p>Deliver a more reliable, regular and comprehensive performance reporting framework</p> <p>Ensure effective distribution and usage of reports to all services</p>
More effective and consistent quality assurance	<p>Develop a more structured systematic organisational approach to quality assurance of complaint handling</p> <p>Regularise and formalise mechanisms to keep learning from customer feedback on the agenda for staff</p> <p>Provide a more systematic approach between CRT and Legal Services to ensuring relevant senior officers are involved in considerations of escalated complaints early enough, opportunities to resolve cases without formal LGSCO investigation are taken advantage of, and follow up to ensure promised action on any recommendations happen in a timely way</p>