

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

Audit Committee – 17th September

Customer Feedback Performance 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013

REPORT OF: Angie Astley, Assistant Director – Customers and People

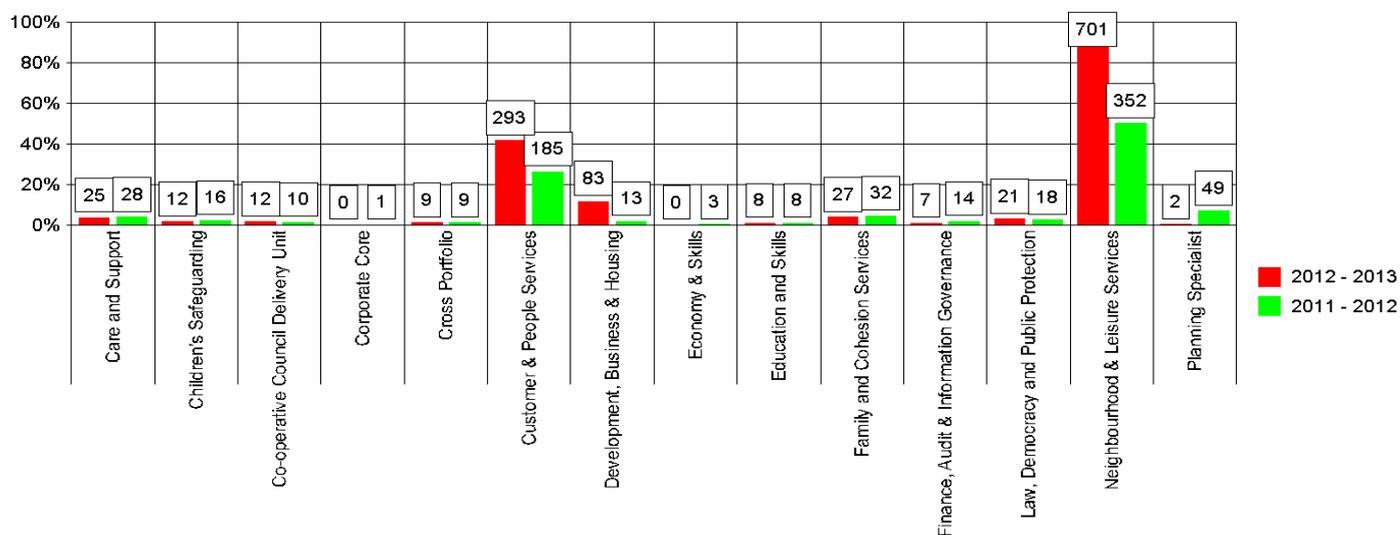
Please note figures in brackets below relate to the previous years performance 2011/12

1. Summary for the Period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013

- 1.1 Detailed below are the main areas of customer compliments and complaints for this period. It should be acknowledged that there are relatively small numbers of complaints registered when compared to the number of services provided by the Council on a daily basis and against a backdrop of having delivered £42m in savings over the last 3 years. Complaints continue to be viewed as a good form of customer feedback and the council already has a culture of embracing and learning from complaints over a number of years and this will continue in order to help continually improve service delivery.
- 1.2 The majority of the **506** (411) compliments were addressed to our front line services, particularly those in Neighbourhood and Leisure Services 213, Customer and People Services 119 and Care and Support 59.
- 1.3 For this period we received 1116 (738) corporate complaints an increase of 51% with the detail outlined in Section 2 of this report. However the main reasons for an increase in complaints were in respect of our refuse provider TWS who saw an increase in complaints from 73 last year to 262 for this period. As part of monitoring this contract robust discussions are being held with the provider to secure improvements in service delivery. The other main area of increase was in relation to our Revenues and Benefits Service both of which have been impacted by the current economic climate and have seen a major increase in workload. This in turn has impacted on the speed of our decision making and has resulted in increased calls to our contact centre with some delays being experienced before answering calls. Additional resources have since been moved into both Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services to cope with this increase in demand following the launch of the Governments Welfare Reforms, which has resulted in an overall improvement in customer services for the first part of this new monitoring period. The final reason for the increase was a small number of complaints from Leisure customers as a result of ‘teething problems’ following the opening of our new Leisure Centres at Abraham Darby and Wellington Civic which have now been redressed.

Of the 1116 complaints a number contained more than one concern and therefore the chart overleaf outlines the 1200 ‘concerns’ registered by our customers. The Development, Business and Housing new service did not exist in the same format in 2011 and so comparisons for previous years should not be made in this particular area which has seen a major change following a restructure in 2012.

Comparison of Corporate Complaints Received



year V year comparison based on Primary Issue

697 – 62% (61%) of these complaints had elements of the concerns partly or fully upheld. **78%** of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days against a target of 83%. The target has been increased to 15 days from 1st April 2013 following consultation with customers in advance of the redesign of our customer service charter.

1.4 Stage 2 – Independent Investigations of Corporate Complaints

Of the 1116 customer complaints received only 23 requests were made for an independent 'Stage 2' investigation where the customer is stating they remained dissatisfied with the council's initial response. 3 of these requests were not taken forward as it was felt no further value could be added by another investigation, 11 were investigated independently but had no additional elements upheld, 4 had some additional new elements upheld, 3 were withdrawn by the customer and 2 are still under investigation.

1.5 Adult & Children's Statutory Complaints

For this period we received **105** (134) statutory complaints made up of:

- **45** (63) Adult Statutory
- **60** (71) Child Statutory

Both areas have seen a decrease from the previous year.

54% (69%) of Adult statutory complaints had elements upheld and **31%** were responded to within the timescale. The average time taken overall to respond to a complaint was 39.5 days.

55% (53%) of Child statutory complaints had elements upheld and **22%** were responded to within 10 working days, 25% were responded to within 20 working days. The average time taken overall to respond was 17.5 days.

Children's Services have had 3 complaints investigated at stage 2 of the statutory complaints procedure by an independent investigator, 1 had elements upheld and 2 did not.

1.6 Freedom of Information & Data Protection

- **862** (909) Freedom of Information (FOI) requests
- **65** (95) Data Protection (DP) requests

There has been a decrease across all requests.

- **90%** of FOI's were responded to within 20 working days against a target of 80%.
- **82%** of data protection requests were responded to within 40 days.

Performance across all areas above is within targets set

1.7 Member/MP & Parish Enquiries

For this period we received:-

- **239** (319) Member enquiries,
- **146** (133) MP enquiries
- **1538** (1271) Parish enquiries.

We responded within deadline to:-

- **79%** (87%) of Member enquiries;
- **57%** (71%) of MP enquiries
- **73%** (80%) of Parish enquires

1.8 Ombudsman Enquiries

1.9 The Local Government Ombudsman received a total of 24 (45) enquiries/complaints relating to Telford & Wrekin Council, of which they formally reviewed 17, the remaining 7 being premature complaints. In this instance the customer was either provided with advice from the LGO or referred back to the council's complaints procedure.

The Ombudsman has therefore investigated 17, the results of which are;

- Not enough evidence to Investigate 9
- Local Authority not at fault 6
- Injustice remedied during enquiry 1 (Time and Trouble payment £750)
- Decision yet made 1

There were no findings of maladministration served on the authority in this period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.10 To note the information within this report and for Assistant Directors to continue to identify areas for improvement following the receipt of customer feedback and look to improve response times where they are not currently being met, See Appendix B.

Summary & Impact Assessment

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	The information within this report impacts on all of the Council's Priorities.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	The Corporate and Statutory feedback procedure is open to all our customers. Appropriate support is available to meet the diverse needs of our customers to enable them to make representation to the council.
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	Not applicable	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	No	The costs associated with administering the complaints process is in the form of officer time. This is met from within existing budgets across the Council
LEGAL ISSUES	No	There are no direct legal implications arising from this report, however compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 , the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Statutory complaints procedure are legal requirements
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	The council's robust feedback mechanisms support the council to maintain its reputation by being responsive to our customers concerns and implementing service improvements as appropriate.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	

2 INFORMATION

- 2.4 **Refuse & Kerbside** received 262 (73) complaints from approximately 70,288 properties, which equates to over 3.6m collections. Of the 262 complaints most of which were in respect of our refuse provider TWS, 173 were fully upheld and a further 52 were partly upheld. The upheld complaints were mainly about missed collections, items being spilt and bins/boxes not being put back correctly.
- 2.5 **Council Tax** received 116 (78) complaints out of 70,288 properties. Of the 116 complaints only 24 were fully upheld and a further 28 were partly upheld. The complaints were mainly about the Council Tax recovery process where waiting times and processing delays had resulted in a summons being sent out inappropriately. All fees and summonses were withdrawn where complaints were upheld along with a formal apology.

- 2.6 **Leisure Centres** received 102 (54) complaints out of 1.2m visitors each year. Of the 102 complaints, 53 were fully upheld and a further 27 were partly upheld. Wellington Leisure Centre received 41 complaints that were either fully or partly upheld. The Ice Rink received 7, Oakengates Leisure received 10 and Abraham Darby Leisure Centre received 12 complaints that were either fully or partly upheld. The main reasons for complaints centred around the new Abraham Darby and Wellington Leisure Centres which opened with brand new facilities however some aspects of the new build were not quite ready e.g. sauna not working and a lack of air conditioning in the gym at Ab Dab resulting in high temperatures. 26 complaints related to poor service, 17 complaints regarding the standard/quality of the facility and 10 related to the cleanliness of the facility.
- 2.7 **Traffic Management** received 51 (32) complaints. Of those 51 complaints 3 were fully upheld and a further 20 were partly upheld. Most of these related to road works, road closures, traffic calming measures/road safety and signage/road markings. where there were lessons to be learned in terms of customer consultation and communication.
- 2.8 **Benefit Service** received 50 (34) complaints, from a possible 1.1 million customer payments. Of those 50 complaints, 12 were fully upheld and a further 8 were partly upheld. The main reason for complaints related to processing delays for benefit claims (which have dramatically increased over the last 3 years due to the economic situation).
- 2.9 **Customer Contact Centre - Environmental Maintenance** received 43 (7) complaints from the 87,129 calls received per annum. Of those 43 complaints 24 were fully upheld and a further 17 were partly upheld. Most of these related to prolonged waiting times on the telephone and 6 instances of incorrect advice being given.
- 2.10 **Planning –** - received 37 (25) complaints. Of the 37 received only 2 were upheld and a further 8 were partly upheld. The main areas of dissatisfaction centred around a lack of consultation and delay in response to enquiries.
- 2.11 **Shrub/Hedges & Trees** received 33 (18) complaints, of which 13 of these were upheld and a further 9 were partly upheld. 13 of these were down to a lack or delay of response or action in pruning.
- 2.12 **CRC's** received 35 (12) complaints, of which 8 of these were upheld and a further 9 were partly upheld. The majority (16) related to the closure of the Newport CRC however these were not upheld as due process and policy had been correctly followed.
- 2.13 **Winter Maintenance** - received 28 (9) complaints of which only 1 was fully upheld with a further 4 were partly upheld. The main issue related to winter gritting.
- 2.14 **Litter** - received 21 (7) complaints about litter of which 10 were upheld and 3 partly upheld. The majority of the upheld complaints related to litter not being removed after it had been reported.
- 2.15 **Footpaths** – received 15 (13) complaints about the state of the boroughs footpaths, of which 5 were fully upheld and 5 partially upheld.

3.0 **SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS FOLLOWING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK**

The majority of customer feedback received during this period was responded to on an individual basis, with limited trends to implement service wide improvements. However detailed below are some of the improvements made as a result of customer feedback;

3.1 **Neighbourhood & Leisure Services**

Waste & Enforcement Services

- 3.1.1 Following complaints made as a result of the change of opening times of the Community Recycling Centres (CRC) specifically that customers didn't feel that the current signage was prominent or sufficient. New signs have been erected to be more visible on approach to the sites when they are closed. Further work has also been carried out to promote the days that sites are open on all publicity materials and media releases that are put out.
- 3.1.2 Cabinet will be reviewing the winter maintenance budget during the autumn and may decide to increase the winter maintenance budget as per customer feedback.

Leisure Services

- 3.1.3 Following feedback from parents regarding the swimming lessons at Wellington Leisure Centre we have placed an additional swimming teacher into the Friday 4pm Stage 1 & 2 swimming lesson. This will assist the swimming teacher with the mixed ability of the group and help all the children to progress in the lesson.
- 3.1.4 Following feedback from customers regarding the limited menu at the new soft play at the Ice Rink, we have developed the cafe menu and also welcome any thoughts as to what customers might like to see included.
- 3.1.5 The teething problems in the new Leisure centres have largely been addressed.

3.2 **Customer & People Service**

Benefits (Blue Badge Scheme)

- 3.2.1 We are reviewing procedures to improve the service in instances where a customer has difficulties in travelling to Council offices to have their photograph taken for a blue badge renewal.
- 3.2.2 Details of the changes to the new scheme are now outlined in the covering letter that is issued with the blue badge renewal forms.
- 3.2.3 Additional staff have been employed in the Benefits Service on a fixed term basis from the Capacity Fund to help manage the 20% increase in the benefit caseload over the last 3 years and address delays in processing times.

Revenues

- 3.2.4 We are exploring the option of adding some information to the council tax bills advising customers when their account number has changed and also advising and reminding customers that plastic payment cards are no longer used and that they should be using the barcode on the

council tax bill to make payments. Additional resources have also been provided to address delays in processing.

Contact Centre

- 3.2.5 The capacity fund has been used to employ additional staff in the contact centre to cope with increased demand following the launch of the Governments welfare reforms and we are starting to see improvements in call waiting times. In addition new contact centre technology is being procured to help improve the customers experience when calling the contact centre. The new specification includes the opportunity for customers to register their place in the queue and the phone system will call them back when a customer service advisor is free to take their call. The system will be implemented early in 2014.

Development, Business & Housing

- 3.2.6 A neighbour notification letter has been amended as part of the Council's continued progress towards implementing the e-planning system on the Council's Website. This is to advise residents that they will no longer receive a routine reply to comments that are made on applications and to confirm that we no longer write to inform them of the decision as this can all now be found on the council's website.

3.3 Care and Support

Assessment & Case Management/ Adult Safeguarding

- 3.3.1 As part of the service restructure, adult services are bring together reporting of customer information to ensure that service user generated data, such as assessments, reviews, complaints and vulnerable adult investigations, are properly fed into the wider inspection regimes.
- 3.3.2 A recommendation was made to consider introducing a separate protocol with tighter interventions for those cases that do not require formal MAAPP action but demonstrate extraordinary circumstances This will be taken forward to the representative body of the sector.
- 3.3.3 The financial case management team will now be checking when care is cancelled so that no further letters are sent out to service user.

3.4 Children's Safeguarding

- 3.4.1 In order to ensure that Core Group meetings are held within statutory timescales the Service Delivery Manager is reviewing the monitoring arrangements and has brought the matter to the attention of those managers who have direct oversight of workers undertaking this task.
- 3.4.2 Service Delivery Manager reviewing processes in relation to advising families when case management has transferred to another social worker, this is to ensure that families are advised with immediate effect.
- 3.4.3 A recommendation has been made for The Local Children's Safeguarding Board to review the practice of removing a child from a Child Protection Plan at the first review where the child

becomes subject to a Plan under the category of neglect. This will be put forward to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.

- 3.4.4 We are developing a single assessment template and process that will include the child's wishes and feelings

Report prepared by Sarah-Jane Ballantyne, Customer Quality Team, 01952 382507 and Rob Montgomery, Information Governance, 01952 383103

Top Service Areas – Number Of Complaints

Service	No. Of Complaints Received (Including those withdrawn)	Numbers with elements upheld	Numbers of Partly upheld
Refuse & Kerbside	262	173	52
Council Tax	116	24	28
Leisure Centres	102	53	27
Traffic Management	51	3	20
Benefits Service	50	12	8
Customer Contact Centre – Env Maintenance	43	24	17
Shrub/Hedge/Tree's	40	13	9
Planning – Decision Making	37	2	8
CRC'S	35	8	9
Winter Maintenance	28	1	4
Litter	21	10	3
Footpaths	15	5	5

Complaints Response Performance for Each Service Area

Service Delivery Unit	Stage 1 Corporate Complaints responded to in 10 working days (Target 83%)
Care & Support	72% 18 of 25
Children's Services	33% 4 of 12
Co-operative Council Delivery Unit	76% 9 of 12
Customer & People Services	90% 264 of 293
Development, Business & Housing	57% 48 of 84
Education & Skills	100% 8 of 8
Family & Cohesion Services	80% 21 of 26
Finance, Audit & IG	100% 7 of 7
Law, Democracy & Public Protection	52% 11 of 21
Neighbourhood & Leisure Services	77% 540 of 701
Planning Specialist	50% 1 of 2
Cross Service areas	67% 6 of 9
Overall	78% 938 of 1200