



**Challenge and
Improvement Committee**

Tuesday 22nd May 2018

Customer Complaints Handling Report

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To update Members on the current status of customer complaints and the new complaints handling process. Member request for Challenge and Improvement Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members note the content of this Customer Complaints Handling report.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:
None arising directly from this report.

Financial: FIN/29/19
None arising directly from this report.

Staffing: HR055-4-18
None arising directly from this report.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:
N/A

Risk Assessment:
N/A

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:
N/A

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:
Customer Experience Policy 2018/19 – located on the WLDC website.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman) **Yes** **No**

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications **Yes** **No**

Executive Summary

To provide an update to Members on the current state of customer complaints and the new complaints handling process contained within the Customer Experience Policy 2018/19. Request made by Members of the Challenge and Improvement Committee.

Historically complaints have been the main focus of customer feedback. However, as an authority we have recognised that all feedback from customers including compliments and comments is important, not just complaints.

1. A brief explanation of the complaints process, prior to 2018

Prior to 2018, the Councils complaints process consisted of three different stages.

Stage 1	Informal complaint resolved by the service.
Stage 2	Formal complaint investigated and responded to by the service Team Manager.
Stage 3	Escalated complaint investigated and responded to by an independent Senior Officer.

This complaints process was time consuming and confusing for customers as several people may have dealt with the complaint at the different stages, and sometimes have expressed different views. Standards and consistency in complaint responses were variable and there was no evidence of learning from the feedback to implement changes and improve our services. The target response time under that policy was 10 working days for each stage, although this was not always met.

Historically two different IT systems were used for the different stages of a complaint. This made reporting difficult and the system had been set up in such a way that it related to departments rather than service and transaction specifics making accurate reporting and learning difficult. This system also calculated response times in 'actual days' as opposed to the policy target of 10 working days, which meant that target reporting was not robust.

2. A brief overview of the new Customer Feedback Policy and system (Implemented 1st Jan 2018)

The new Customer Experience Policy covers all types of feedback from customers including complaints, compliments and comments.

The Customer Experience Officer is the main contact for all customer feedback ensuring consistency in how feedback is handled, responded to, recorded and reported on.

Complaints

The complaints process has been revised to a one stage process for dealing with all complaints. Complaints are investigated and responded to by the Customer Experience Officer who is independent to all services.

Customers are kept informed and up to date at all times throughout the process whilst their feedback is being dealt with. The new process has extended the target response time for complaints to 21 days, which enables time for thorough investigation and helps to manage customer expectations.

A Quality Monitoring Board has also been established for complex complaints or complaints where the council is at fault, comprising of Mark Sturgess (Chief Operating Officer), Michelle Carrington (Customer First Strategic Lead), Lyn Marlow (Customer Strategy and Services Team Manager) and Natalie Kostiuk (Customer Experience Officer).

Compliments and Comments

Under the new policy Compliments and Comments are also recorded and responded to within set timescales. Compliments will receive an acknowledgement or response within 5 days and comments will receive a response within 14 days, if required.

Feedback gathered from different sources including customer satisfaction surveys are now being recorded as compliments and comments and reported on.

IT System

A new IT system has been built to capture all complaints and customer feedback. This means they are now all recorded and managed in one central place making reporting more efficient and accurate.

The new system allows feedback and complaints to be categorised not only into departments but also into services and specific transaction types. This detailed reporting and analysis allows us to identify and pin point issues, and makes it easier to learn from feedback and make improvements to the way we work and services we provide.

This system reports response times in 'actual days', and therefore the policy response time has been altered to reflect this to allow more accurate reporting of how long it takes for complaints to be responded to.

The new system also allows easier identification and reporting of every upheld complaint where the council is at fault. Learning and improvement actions are reported for each of these upheld complaints that are fed back into the services and teams for implementation.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys are being sent to complainants following the complaint investigation and response to measure satisfaction of complaint handling.

Surveys carried out under the previous complaints policy indicated that customers felt that there were too many stages in the process and that it took too long to deal with complaints.

A number of surveys have been sent to complainants that have been through the new complaints process and early indications show that customers are more satisfied with the time taken to investigate their issues and respond to their complaint. There is an increased satisfaction rate with the process in general.

3. Customer Feedback Statistics from the 2016/2017 period

Complaints 182
Compliments 169
Comments 35

See appendix for month by month breakdown.

4. Customer Feedback Statistics from the latest 2017/2018 period

Complaints 168 (14 less than previous year)
Compliments 402 (233 more than previous year)
Comments 79 (44 more than last year)

See appendix 1 for month by month breakdown.

Complaints where the council were at fault = 84
(50% of all complaints received)

See appendix 2 for more detailed information on upheld complaints.

Average number of days to respond = 8.7days
(Across the whole year April 2017 to March 2018)

Average number of days to respond = 9.8 days
(Under the previous policy April 2017 to December 2017)

Average number of days to respond = 5.8 days
(Under the new policy January 2018 to March 2018)

5. Local Government Ombudsmen Complaints

There has been a total of 15 enquiries to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) which is double the amount of referred complaints in 2016/17. Eleven of the cases have been investigated and closed with four still under investigation.

Below shows the outcome of the 15 referred complaints.

Not investigated	4
Not found to be at fault	4
Found to be at fault	3
Still under investigation	4

The complaints referred to the LGO were raised against the following service areas:

Planning & Development Management	8
Revenues	3
Property Services	1
Tree Conservation	1
Anti-Social Behaviour	1
Planning Enforcement	1

It should be noted that a number of complaints escalated to the LGO for Planning and Development Management relate to historical decisions on planning applications that were decided prior to improvements being made and the Peer Review that took place in 2016.

The outstanding investigations with the LGO are in relation to Property Services (sale of land), Revenues and two for Planning.

When a complaint is escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman there is no cost to West Lindsey.

Appendix 1

Customer Feedback Statistics April 2016 – March 2017

	April 2016	May 2016	June 2016	July 2016	Aug 2016	Sept 2016	Oct 2016	Nov 2016	Dec 2016	Jan 2017	Feb 2017	March 2017	Totals
Complaints	17	20	21	11	11	12	11	14	5	8	21	31	182
Compliments	9	12	17	12	8	8	15	10	14	8	20	36	169
Comments	5	6	7	5	1	2	2	1	2	3	1	0	35

Customer Feedback Statistics April 2017 – March 2018

	April 2017	May 2017	June 2017	July 2017	Aug 2017	Sept 2017	Oct 2017	Nov 2017	Dec 2017	Jan 2018	Feb 2018	March 2018	Totals
Complaints	11	13	19	10	14	10	13	18	5	15	20	20	168
WLDC at Fault	7	9	11	3	9	5	6	8	2	8	9	7	84
Days to respond	9.4	8.6	6.9	12.2	12.4	11.5	6.0	7.2	13.6	6.8	4.6	6.0	-
Compliments	21	29	29	22	15	19	31	19	15	55	66	81	402
Comments	3	3	9	1	8	5	2	2	3	10	20	13	79

*April 2017 to December 2017 – complaints dealt with under the previous policy (Average days to respond = **9.8** days)

*January 2018 to March 2018 – complaints dealt with under the new policy (Average days to respond = **5.8** days)

Appendix 2

Upheld complaints per Service

Upheld Complaints	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Total	
Waste Services	4	4	6	1	5	3	3	3	1	3	5	4	42	50 %
Home Choices		1											1	1 %
Planning Enforcement	1	2	1		3	1	1		1	2		1	13	15 %
Electoral Registration	1	1	1										3	4 %
Environmental Protection			1										1	1 %
Council Tax	1							1			1		3	4 %
Anti Social Behaviour			1										1	1 %
Customer Services							1	2		1	1	1	6	7 %
Trinity Arts		1											1	1 %
Development Management			1		1					1		1	4	5 %
Housing				1		1							2	2 %
Food Health and Safety				1							1		2	2 %
Benefits							1	2		1			4	5 %
Leisure											1		1	1 %
													84	100 %