



**EVERY CUSTOMER, EVERY TIME -  
“Everybody Matters”**

**Making Experiences Count**

**Quarterly Customer Service Report**

**REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**1st January 2013 - 31st March 2013**



## 1. Introduction

This report provides some of the key customer service information for the organisation, including:-

- Analysis of the complaints and compliments received during this quarter and any other relevant feedback.
- Customer Service Centre management information, including transactional statistics for information; and
- An update in relation to the Customer Experience Strategy action plan.

## 2. Customer Feedback Analysis

**44** complaints were received during this quarter because we did not meet the customer's expectations, or failed to meet our own standards, or the customer was unhappy with an outcome.

**33** complaints (75%) were answered in 15 working days or less.

**11** complaints took longer than 15 working days to respond to and details of 7 of these complaints are detailed below. **4** of these cases were still open at the time of writing the report, and therefore not reported on.

We also received **70 compliments**.

These figures compare with last quarter and the same quarter last year as follows:-

| Quarter 4 11/12 |             | Quarter 3 12/13 |             | Quarter 4 12/13 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Complaints      | Compliments | Complaints      | Compliments | Complaints      | Compliments |
| 56              | 41          | 46              | 74          | 44              | 70          |

The number of complaints and compliments is reasonably consistent with last quarter. There has been an improvement in the time we are taking to respond to them. This is partly due to a trial we are undertaking with the Repairs and Maintenance Team to improve the complaint process through consistent communication with the customer.

The common themes in the complaints received this quarter were:

- Not acting on information we received;
- Not doing what we promised;
- Staff not having any empathy or understanding of customer's needs;
- Not responding to customers calls and queries; and
- Unacceptable delays in taking action

The following table shows the totals for 2012/13 and how these compare with 2011/12.

|         | Total compliments | Total complaints | Dealt with in target time |
|---------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 2011/12 | 177               | 204              | 145(71%)                  |
| 2012/13 | 316               | 219              | 162 (74%)                 |

Although there has been a small rise in complaints compared to 2011/12 the numbers are not significant overall.

We have seen an increase in complaints in services when they start transformation as staff have a better understanding of the need for accurate data. We have then seen a drop in complaints in those same services once they are trialing a more customer focused way of working.

Increasingly there is no clear trend in the reason for complaints. Sometimes we have made a mistake, or not done what we had previously agreed to do. Occasionally staff have not met the customer expectations in terms of customer care. There is no evidence to suggest that any service is failing and individuals who fail to meet customer expectation are worked with on a one to one basis to help them develop their customer care skills.

We have now put in place a systems thinking driven trial to handle complaints differently, with Managers talking directly to the customer in an attempt to resolve the problem. At this stage the trial has only included two services (Repairs and Maintenance and Housing Options). So far the trial has shown that we can resolve the majority of complaints more quickly by taking a personal approach and gaining a greater understanding of what the real problems are.

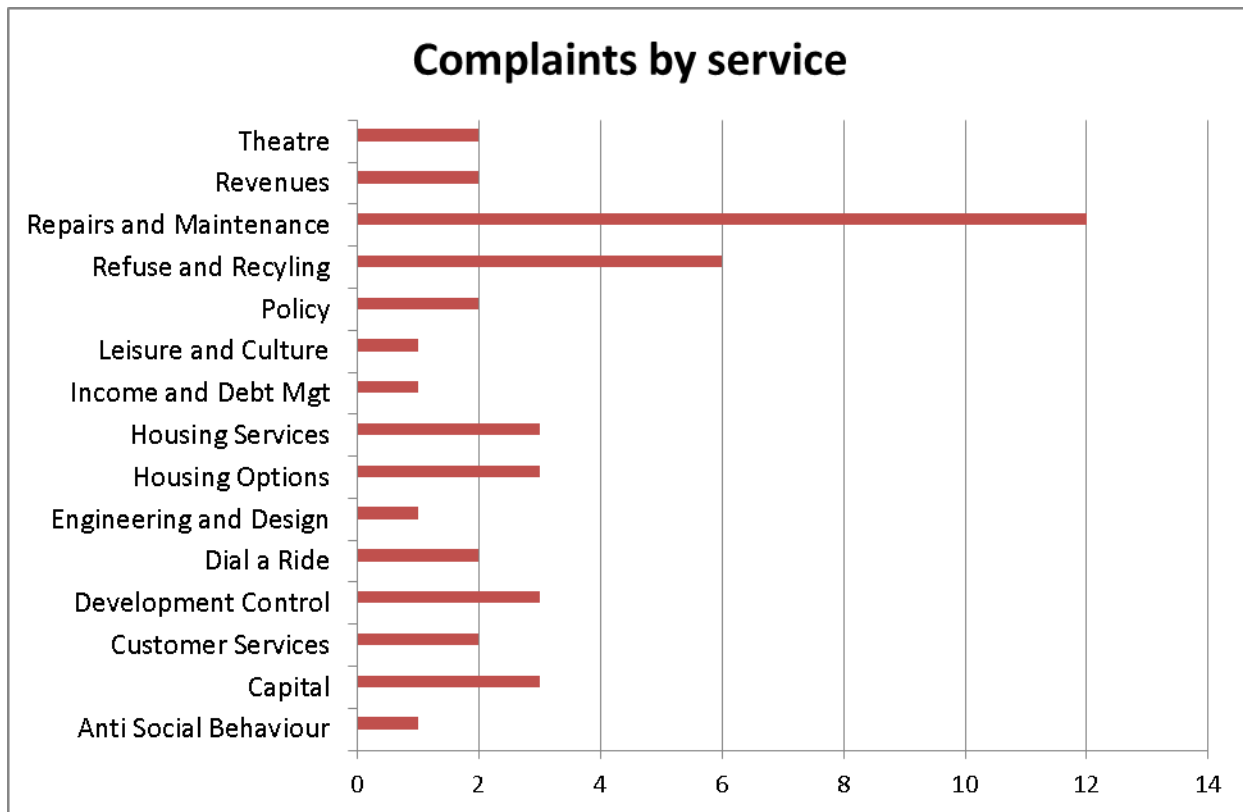
### Complaints and compliments by department

The following table shows the total of the complaints and compliments received by department. Those departments with the highest demand inevitably have higher number of complaints but compared with the total demand the numbers are low.

| Dept                             | Compliments | Complaints | Responded to within 15 working days | Still open |
|----------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Community Services</b>        | 19          | 3          | 3                                   | 0          |
| <b>Customer Services</b>         | 12          | 2          | 1                                   | 0          |
| <b>Environmental Services</b>    | 13          | 7          | 6                                   | 1          |
| <b>Housing</b>                   | 9           | 21         | 15                                  | 1          |
| <b>Legal and Democratic</b>      | 1           | 0          | 0                                   | 0          |
| <b>Leisure and Culture</b>       | 12          | 3          | 3                                   | 0          |
| <b>Planning and Regeneration</b> | 1           | 3          | 1                                   | 1          |
| <b>Policy</b>                    | 1           | 2          | 2                                   | 0          |
| <b>Resources</b>                 | 2           | 3          | 2                                   | 1          |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>70</b>   | <b>44</b>  | <b>33</b>                           | <b>4</b>   |

## Number of complaints by service (detailed)

The following table provides a more detailed breakdown of complaints by service.



## Time taken to respond to complaints

We aim to respond to customer complaints within 15 working days and 75% of complaints received during this quarter were dealt with within that timeframe. Where it has taken us longer to respond than expected, (11 cases) customers were informed that there would be a delay, except where the delay was only 1 day (1 case).

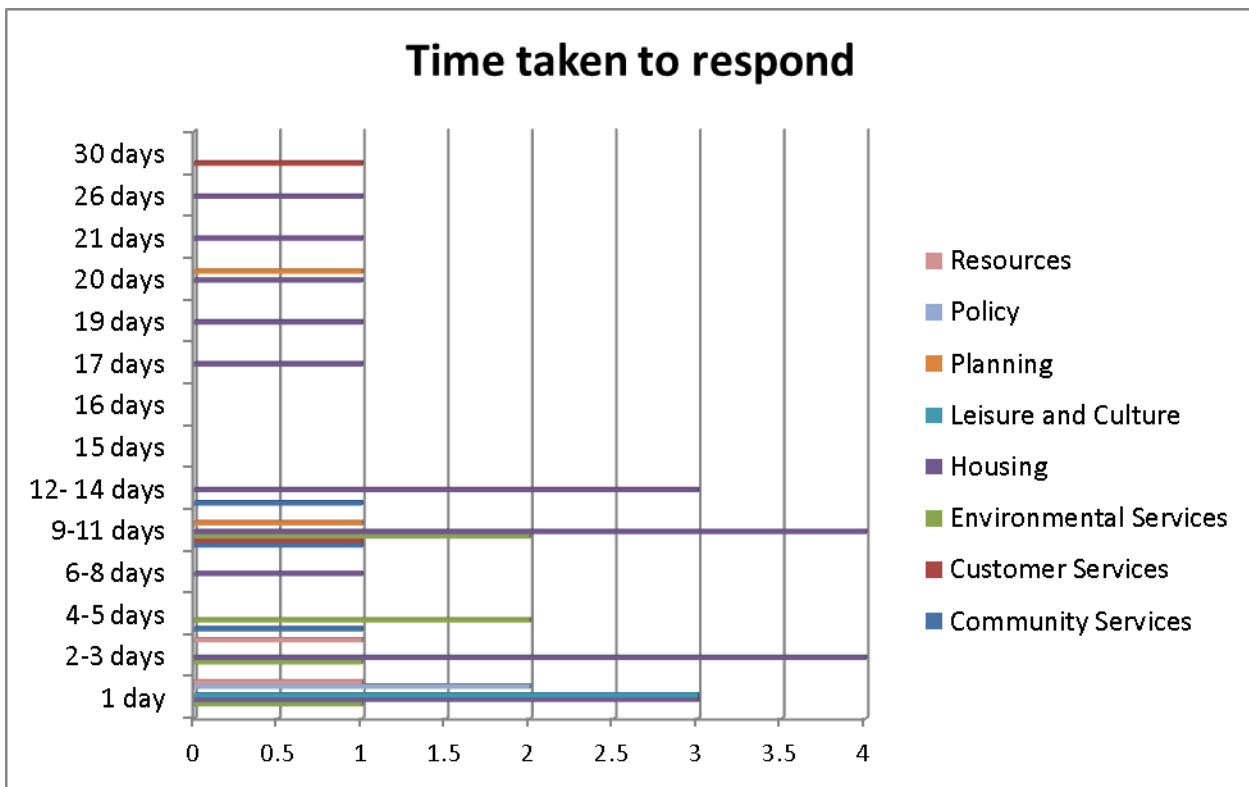
The following table details 7 of those complaints which took longer than 15 working days to deal with and the reasons why. 4 cases remained open at the time of writing and are therefore not included as the investigations have not been concluded.

| Complaint details   | Outcome of investigation   | Action taken   | Days taken to respond and reason for delay         |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Customer Services</b>  |  |  |  |
| Customer unhappy that she couldn't apply for her bus pass as the leaflet she had printed from our website had said she could. She would like recompense for the cost of her photos. | It was found that the customer had printed the leaflet 2 years before the regulations had changed. | Explanation given and customer can apply later this year so photos can be used then. | 30<br>Several messages were left for the customer. |

| <b>Housing</b>  |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| Customer unhappy about the attitude of a repair operative who was parked across his drive even though his is not a Council property.  | Member of staff concerned advised about attitude and customer care.  | Apology given to customer.   | <b>20</b><br>Member of staff on leave.                    |
| Customer unhappy that she requested a repair to garage roof over 12 months ago and despite several more requests, nothing has happened.   | Contractor reported that roof need replacing due to asbestos but this was not picked up.   | Apology given to customer and compensation given for goods damaged by leak in roof.                                    | <b>26</b><br>Complex investigation involving contractors. |
| Customer unhappy about the attitude of a Housing Officer when he visited the Town Hall because he felt belittled and uncomfortable.   | Member of staff advised about our customer care standards and further training has been given.                                       | Apology given to customer and situation will be monitored.   | <b>21</b><br>Complex investigation.                       |
| Customer unhappy with the attitude of a Housing team member after she asked for help when given notice to quit private rented property. Customer feels that she hasn't been given any help and her calls have been ignored.   | Mistakes had been made and member of staff advised about customer care standards.  | Apology given to customer and homeless application is being processed. This will be monitored.                         | <b>17</b>   |
| Customer unhappy that when her boiler broke down she called Ableflame who gave another number to call as it wasn't them that dealt with it. She rang and they promised to visit that day but didn't so she rang Ableflame back as she was worried and they were very rude to her. | Contractor was not aware that it was their responsibility to arrange this repair.  | Apology given to customer and repair done. Contractor advised about our customer care standards and service agreement. | <b>19</b><br>Complex investigation involving contractor.  |
| <b>Planning and Regeneration</b>  |  |  |   |
| Customer is unhappy that his 17 year old daughter received a letter about her planning consultation comments when she hadn't made any.  | Comments had been received in this name and it has not been possible to find out who entered these details under his daughters name. | Apology given and gift voucher sent as compensation.   | <b>16</b>   |

### **Time taken to respond to complaints by service.**

This chart shows the breakdown of all complaints by response time. This suggests that the end to end time for responding to complaints is generally based on the nature of the service and/or complaint rather than any one service dealing with complaints in an unsatisfactory way.



The nature of Leisure and Culture complaints is such that they can usually be dealt with either on the spot or within a few days. Complaints for Housing and Planning Services are more variable because investigations can be quite complex and time consuming. A high proportion of Environmental Services complaints are dealt with within 2 to 3 days.

### “You said - we listened” - what did we change as a result of complaints?

Some of the changes made as a result of complaints include:-

- Customer care training refreshed where necessary for housing teams;
- Contractors reminded of our customer care standards; and
- Use feedback from Council tenants when amending service contracts with contractors.

### Number of complaints escalated to Head of Customer Services

There were no complaints escalated to the Head of Customer Services for further investigation or action.

## Happy Customers!

From the **70** compliments received we can see that customers appreciate the range of services the Council provides, especially when we deal with their requests in a timely and professional manner. Here are some of the compliments we have received for information.

| Team                          | Compliment Detail  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Lifeline                      | Customer wished to thank Lifeline for all the help they have given him.  |
| Lifeline                      | Customer thanked us for calling back following incident and remarked 'that is what makes our service complete'.  |
| ASB                           | Compliment to Lynn Barnes for taking their complaints seriously. Appreciate that she is busy with other cases but pleased with the response time.  |
| Legal and Democratic Services | Customer was happy with service supplied and said, "Much obliged for your several very speedy responses . Much appreciated. Thanks again".   |
| Community Safety              | Thank you to Lee Pitchford for his time and contribution at PACT meeting that helped to keep everyone up to date on the aspects of Community Safety. After the meeting we had excellent feedback from the residents in attendance who really appreciated being kept in the picture.  |
| Dial a Ride                   | Customer very happy with service received from Dial-a-Ride drivers Mike Pilkington and Jenny Snell for escorting her in the snow to and from Dial-a-ride bus so that she was able to attend her breathing exercise class.  |
| Customer Services             | I had no heating or hot water for the last three days and have made quite a few phone calls to Able Flame. Hilary was amazing and helped me so much, thank you. Hilary made several phone calls, sorted it all out and made an appointment for tomorrow and also a promise from the company to call me between 8am - 9am tomorrow to arrange a time. |
| Customer Services             | Karen Jukes dealt with my Blue Badge application over the phone and I wanted to say what a lovely manner she had, she was most obliging, very helpful indeed.  |
| Customer Services             | I would like to say that I am very impressed with the service that I have received from Beverley and Neil, Reception, RBC. It doesn't matter what my enquiry is they always point me in the right direction or contact someone and my enquiry is resolved.   |
| Landscaping                   | Thank you to Colin Pitts, Andrew Walker, Gavin Boyes and the team for the excellent job done in dealing with a fallen tree.  |

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Landscaping              | The landscape team that attended a fallen tree did an excellent job and because the road was not accessible due to icy conditions the team had to bring equipment by hand to move the tree. I would like this noted that I am extremely happy with the great service I received.   |
| Refuse                   | My wife and I would like to express our thanks to your team for persevering in this extreme weather and finally being able to empty the waste bins. It is always pleasing to see that the local Council and its employees take their responsibilities seriously even when conditions are against them.   |
| Street Cleaning          | I would like to say thank you for the quick response and I am very pleased with the service I received.  |
| Housing Services/Capital | Customer would like to pass on her happiness with the service she received on her new boiler. The three gentlemen that came to her house were very good and she is over the moon. A big thank you for an excellent job and service.  |
| Housing Options          | Compliment for Stephanie Nall, Estate Tenancy Officer, Housing Services - thank you very much for all your help the past few weeks it's very appreciated.  |
| Repairs                  | I feel that I have to write to you about Darren that called to repair my porch door. He was very helpful, polite, and punctual and cleaned up the mess. He made a good job of the door, now shuts properly.  |
| Theatre                  | A massive thank you to your staff for all their help on Saturday night, especially Carl who stood in at the last moment as our lampy couldn't make it, and also Martin front of house who helped me tremendously regarding the filming and seat allocation, and Paul in marketing too.   |
| Theatre                  | Thank you to Tim and his team for assisting us with our production at the Palace Theatre to ensure it was a successful show. The expertise of the theatre stage staff makes all the difference. The fantastic lighting effects and the excellent work by Robert with the sound meant that the audience could see the full effect of the set with its black and white theme and could clearly hear both singing and dialogue. Everyone is always so willing to assist whatever the problem. |
| Benefits                 | The Customer came over to the desk after seeing a Benefit Officer to say how pleased he was with the service. Very happy. He was very useful and really good.  |



### 3. Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

There were no complaints referred from the Ombudsman this quarter.

There have been a total of four complaints referred from the Ombudsman during 2012/13, for investigation.

| Team                   | Complaint  | Decision  |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Housing Options        | The customer felt that the Council failed to properly consider her housing needs since losing her home.  | After investigation the Ombudsman found no evidence of maladministration.                                     |
| Housing Repairs        | The customer felt that there has been unacceptable delays and poor quality of repairs to her property.   | There was evidence of some delays. Ombudsman proposed and agreed a local settlement of some additional works. |
| Engineering and Design | Customer feels that the Council has not done anything to stop tree roots causing damage to a water pipe, affecting the water supply to his private home. | After investigation the Ombudsman found no evidence of maladministration.                                     |
| Landscaping            | Customer felt that the Council has failed to properly maintain the trees at the back of his house causing an adverse impact on his property and amenity. | The LG decided not to investigate as they could not find any evidence of maladministration by the Council.    |

The nature and outcome of the LGO Complaints indicates that there are no major underlying problems within the Council's services and that our complaints process works to resolve the majority of issues with individuals.

It is recognised that customers are not always happy with the outcome of complaints. Our redesigned system is evidencing that better outcomes can be achieved more quickly if Officers have an 'in person' and direct relationship with the customer, and agree outcomes early in the process.

## 4. Customer Service Centre Information

This section provides some statistical information in respect of the service provided at the Customer Service Centres (CSC) and One Stop Shops (OSS).

The operational purpose of the Customer Services team is 'Help me get the support I need with my issue or problem'.

### Customer numbers

The following table shows the numbers of customer transactions recorded by the Customer Service Team:

|  | <b>Totals for 2011/12</b>                      | <b>4th quarter 2011/12</b> | <b>1st quarter 2012/13</b> | <b>2nd quarter 2012/13</b> | <b>3rd quarter 2012/13</b> | <b>4th quarter 2012/13</b> | <b>Totals for 2012/13</b> |
|--|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Face to face (enquiries)                         | 72,785   | 18,266                     | 14,130                     | 15,080                     | 16,285                     | <b>14,699</b>              | <b>60,194</b>             |
| Telephone (enquiries)                            | 76,813   | 14,422                     | 12,579                     | 13,007                     | 15,439                     | <b>14,487</b>              | <b>55,512</b>             |
| Switchboard calls (handled by operator)          | 77,017   | 27,497                     | 26,299                     | 27,817                     | 30,416                     | <b>24,151</b>              | <b>108,683</b>            |
| Switchboard calls (handled by automated system)* | 118,586 (figures only available from 17/07/11) | 41,783                     | 39,125                     | 41,170                     | 39,283                     | <b>34,434</b>              | <b>154,012</b>            |
| Email (enquiries handled by CS team)             | 3,270  | 1,014                      | 825                        | 770                        | 1,159                      | <b>1,159</b>               | <b>3,913</b>              |
| Payments (through cash offices)                  | 118,576  | 23,781                     | 28,031                     | 28,867                     | 28,094                     | <b>20,093</b>              | <b>105,085</b>            |
| Payments (online)                                | 16,786   | 3,636                      | 5,202                      | 4,173                      | 5,534                      | <b>4,519</b>               | <b>19,428</b>             |
| Payments (automated telephone service)           | 9,921  | 1,844                      | 2,447                      | 1,828                      | 2,134                      | <b>1,642</b>               | <b>8,051</b>              |
| Payments (assisted telephone service)            | 4,676 **                                       | 2,433                      | 3,693                      | 2,619                      | 3,321                      | <b>2,756</b>               | <b>12,389</b>             |
| <b>Total customer contacts</b>                   | <b>498,310</b>                                 | <b>134,676</b>             | <b>132,331</b>             | <b>135,331</b>             | <b>141,665</b>             | <b>117,940</b>             | <b>527,267</b>            |

\* It is not known how many of these calls were unsuccessful and resulted in a repeat call which the operator then had to handle but the proportion is expected to be quite high.

\*\* Service not available until Q2 2011

After a peak in quarter 3 we have seen contact numbers drop back to the expected levels, suggesting that the peak was mainly flood related in late 2012.

There has been an overall drop in customers handled by the Customer Service team and an increase of calls handled by the switchboard and passed through to another service. This is as expected as service delivery changed in Revenues and Benefits.

The trend for increased online payments is continuing and there has been a corresponding drop in face to face and automated telephone payments. Our automated telephone payments demand has never fully recovered following the failure of the service in Summer 2012.

Resources in the Customer Services and Cashiers team have reduced to reflect this reduction in demand.

78% of all calls were answered in less than 8 seconds during this quarter. The average wait time on switchboard was 0.06 seconds and for a Customer Service Advisor in the Contact Centre is was 18.3 seconds.

The new call handling system (implemented March 2013) has proven successful and we are able to provide a more responsive service as a result.

## 5. 'Every Customer, Every Time - Everybody Matters' - Action Plan

The Every Customer, Every Time - Everybody Matters' Customer Experience Strategy set out a clear vision in respect of customer service.

### Our vision is to:-

- **make it easy to access services, joining up with other organisations where possible;**
- **provide a high quality customer experience for all customers who make contact with us, regardless of when or how they make contact;**
- **ensure customers get the information and advice they need in a way that suits their needs and is easy to understand.**

This was supported by an action plan, focusing on 4 key themes intended to focus on delivering the best quality services that meet the needs of individuals for the lowest possible costs. These 4 themes are:

- **Customer experience** - going back to basics to ensure that the customer's experience of contacting us is always positive - even when we can't give the answer the customer wants.
- **Transform** - reviewing, and changing, service delivery based on what customers actually want and need and building the processes around the customer rather than to meet organisational needs.

- **Understanding the customer (including internal customers or partners)** - through feedback, complaints, compliments, surveys, forums, and using customer insight tools such as Mosaic and the information held on our own systems.
- **Our Staff** - ensuring all our staff are truly customer focused, and share the values and behaviours necessary to ensure we exceed our standards and our customer's expectations.

By implementing the Strategy we were also mindful of Redditch Borough Council's priorities specifically to have a **Well Managed Organisation**.

In the last two years there has been considerable progress with much of the action plan having been completed. Many of the actions have now become normal business and our approach to service transformation has customer service at its core thus ensuring a customer focused approach to all service development.

Some of the successes include:-

- Customer Focused 'behaviours' and expectations are embedded in our recruitment and performance development processes, ensuring that all staff are clear about how we will interact with customers and colleagues . Managers have received training to help them work with members of their team using coaching methods to help improve customer care provisions.
- We have held regular training events in a variety of formats ranging from in-house short awareness sessions such as the Customer Services pantomime, and 'handling complaints' training tailored to meet individual team needs, to formal training sessions on:
  - Customer focused written communications;
  - Customer Care Excellence;
  - Dealing with Difficult Customers; and
  - Coaching for Excellence.

Customer service focused training forms part of the annual training plan.

- A range of guidance has been provided to staff and is available on the Customer Service pages of the staff intranet. These include:
  - Staff customer care handbook;
  - Complaints - handling and recording;
  - Key behaviours;
  - Telephone techniques;
  - Dealing with Difficult Customers.
- Considerable work has been done on improving the content and accessibility of the Council's website, including a feedback mechanism to enable users to highlight problems or poor content. This work is ongoing with each service managing their own content but working with the Web Development experts to ensure consistency and a high standard.

- An in house Mystery Shopping regime has been developed and is used annually. This is the subject of further development as it is important to ensure this fits with the changing face of service delivery as a result of transformation. This is supported by the 'call back' system, where Customer Service staff make contact with customer a few weeks after their contact with the Council to find out whether they were happy with the service and if their issue was resolved.
- The customer feedback system was overhauled and new software introduced to enable improved management of responses and reporting. This is now being reviewed again using systems thinking principles, specifically that the managers should speak directly to the customer about their concerns and agree a suitable resolution, wherever possible. This is showing that complaints can be handled more quickly and also more effectively to the customers satisfaction. Although it is recognised that sometimes we are unable to satisfy the customer evidence so far suggests that the personal interaction is helpful in breaking down misconceptions and poor communication.
- The work of the Customer Service team has changed dramatically over the last two years and so is under constant review, but changes made to the front of house service, cashiering service and structure, and the telephone software have resulted in a more responsive service, as well as reducing the resources required.
- To support the established and well recognised staff awards scheme, we have introduced an ongoing Customer Heroes Award which enable staff and customer to nominate a member of staff at any time of year in recognition of being a customer hero. This has highlighted excellent customer care across the authority.

There are 3 actions currently in development. These are:

- Providing guidance/opportunities for people to get involved at the Council;
- Staff surveys; and a
- Rolling communications/consultation plan.

6 actions out of a total of 57 have not been completed. These have all been reviewed and no further action taken as the systems thinking approach has superseded the need. The actions not completed are:

- Action - CMT Walking the Wards.
  - System Thinking requires system leaders to understand their systems in much greater depth, including the impact on the locality. Work in Housing, Planning and Environmental Services has resulted in CMT and other managers working in specific areas and 'out in the work'.
- Action - Use of Customer Insight tools to inform decision making.
  - Although we carried out a pilot we found that the customer insight data did not take account of true customer demand. Again, as systems thinking places the customer's needs at the heart of service delivery we found that there was little or no advantage in using such tools.

- Action - Working with partners across Worcestershire to implement a joint self-service strategy.
  - We are developing self-service mechanism in line with systems thinking principles, based on needs identified within each service and where it adds value to our customers.
- Action - Achieve Customer Service Excellence Accreditation.
  - An internal review of the organisation against the CSE criteria showed that we met the majority. The decision was taken to not pursue the costly accreditation and focus our resources instead on system thinking transformation which looks at customer service in the context of the whole system.
- Action - Ensure customer service features in action plans of all services, as part of our business planning process.
  - The formal business planning process has been discontinued as a result of our move towards the systems thinking approach. This sees customer service as an integral part of all service transformation reviews.
- Action - Implement GovMetric to capture real time customer feedback on their experience.
  - This has been deferred due to changing priorities. We will continue to monitor customer feedback through complaints, comments and compliments received as well as real time discussions with customers as they do business with us.

The Head of Customer Services will continue to identify areas for improvement and any actions necessary to support the vision to ensure that **every customer** has an excellent experience when dealing with the Council, **every time**.

Amanda de Warr  
Head of Customer Services  
April 2013