

WIRRAL COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
4 JULY 2011

SUBJECT:	CUSTOMER FEEDBACK – ANNUAL REPORT 2010/2011
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR JEAN STAPLETON
KEY DECISION?	NO.

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is the annual update on dealing with customer feedback. It provides analysis of contacts received over the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 (referred to as 2010/11), highlights trends and describes some of the challenges faced in ensuring all feedback is recorded and responded to consistently. The focus for customer feedback is to *'put things right and learn from it'* which recognises that complaints should not be dealt with in isolation and instead should be used to inform future improved service delivery.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. That Members note the report.

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Complaints and wider customer feedback should be seen as an opportunity for 'free' market research with customers who are actively engaged with services provided by the Council. Monitoring the effectiveness of procedures in dealing with these contacts and most importantly what is learnt from the interaction provides a key indicator of how successfully the Council is meeting the needs of local people.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Customer feedback includes the following types of contact, with the figure in brackets indicating volume received and percentage of total customer feedback in 2010/11:

- Corporate complaints (1211/18%)
 - Statutory complaints received by Adult Social Services and Children's Social Care (322/5%)
 - Councillor/MP contacts (4144/63%)
 - Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) contacts (63/1%)
 - Contacts made directly to the Chief Executive (74/1%)
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- Customer Suggestions (66/1%)
 - Customer Compliments (745/11%)
- 4.2 Customer feedback is reported quarterly through the corporate performance report and contributes to performance indicators PI 2004 (annual number of corporate complaints received) and PI 2015a (percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timescale).
- 4.3. Feedback is primarily recorded through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system although a separate application (Respond) is used to support the distinct statutory complaints process.
- 4.4. Each department has a designated coordinator to record; assign; progress chase and update contacts with resolution details. Coordinators meet regularly to raise issues with escalation to the cross departmental Customer Services Group (CSG) and to Chief Officers as appropriate, share best practice and communicate departmental changes. Where feedback is received outside of the generic customer access channels (One Stop Shops; Call Centre; generic email and web), the effectiveness of these coordinators is dependent on clear and consistent communication within departments.
- 4.5. To support best practice and promote a consistent approach to how customer feedback is dealt with across the Council, Customer Care Standards were created and promoted corporately. These guidelines focus on the commitment made to ensuring the expected standards of customer service are met across the Council. It allows customers to identify the minimum level of service expected and measure how their contact experience compared. Intranet guidance supports this and stresses customer service is a responsibility for all staff members, not just staff dealing directly with customers.
- 4.6 The approach to customer feedback has improved since the corporate process was implemented and the customer care guidelines adopted. Departments recognise a standard definition of 'what is a complaint' and commit to a standard process for dealing with customer feedback contacts. Comparison between service areas and departments can be undertaken, providing vital information on what customers are contacting the Council about and identifying best practice. The challenge is to maintain this consistency and drive service improvements.
- 4.7 The analysis between departments takes into account the re-assignment of service areas previously reported under the Regeneration Department remit and includes several service areas attracting high volumes of customer contact such as Re-housing services; Libraries and Halls and Sports and Recreation. The new departmental location of transferred services is as follows:
- Corporate Services - Community Services
 - Corporate Services - HMRI
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- Corporate Services - Housing Strategy and Regeneration
- Corporate Services - Re-Housing Services
- Corporate Services - Strategy and Implementation
- Corporate Services - Supported Housing
- Finance - Libraries and Halls
- LHRAM-Community Safety
- LHRAM-Environmental Health
- LHRAM-Licensing
- LHRAM-Trading Standards
- Technical Services - Arts and Museums
- Technical Services - Parks and Countryside
- Technical Services - Sports and Recreation

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

Corporate and Statutory Complaints

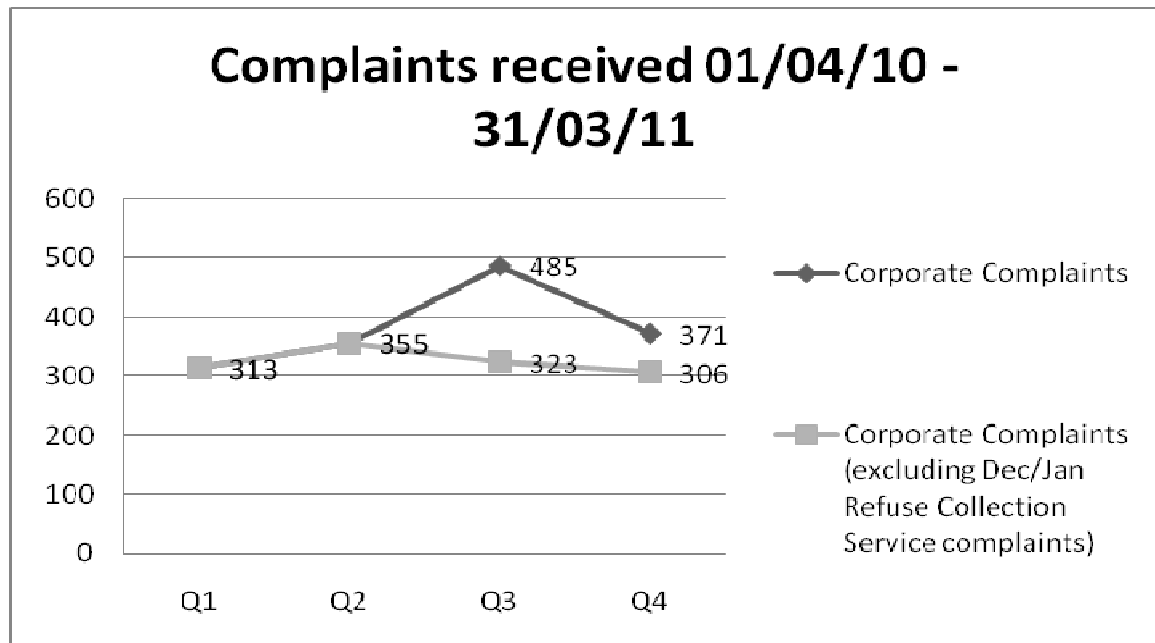
4.8. The 1211 corporate complaints received in 2010/11 showed a 9% decrease from 2009/10 (1332). Statutory complaints displayed a minimal decrease between 2010/11 (322) and 2009/10 (327). The departmental splits were as follows, with the figure in brackets indicating percentage of total complaints 2010/11:

- CYPD (25 corporate complaints; 70 statutory complaints) 95 (6%)
- Corporate Services 38 (3%)
- DASS (statutory complaints) 252 (16%)
- Finance 281(18%)
- LHRAM 37 (3%)
- Technical Services 830 (54%)

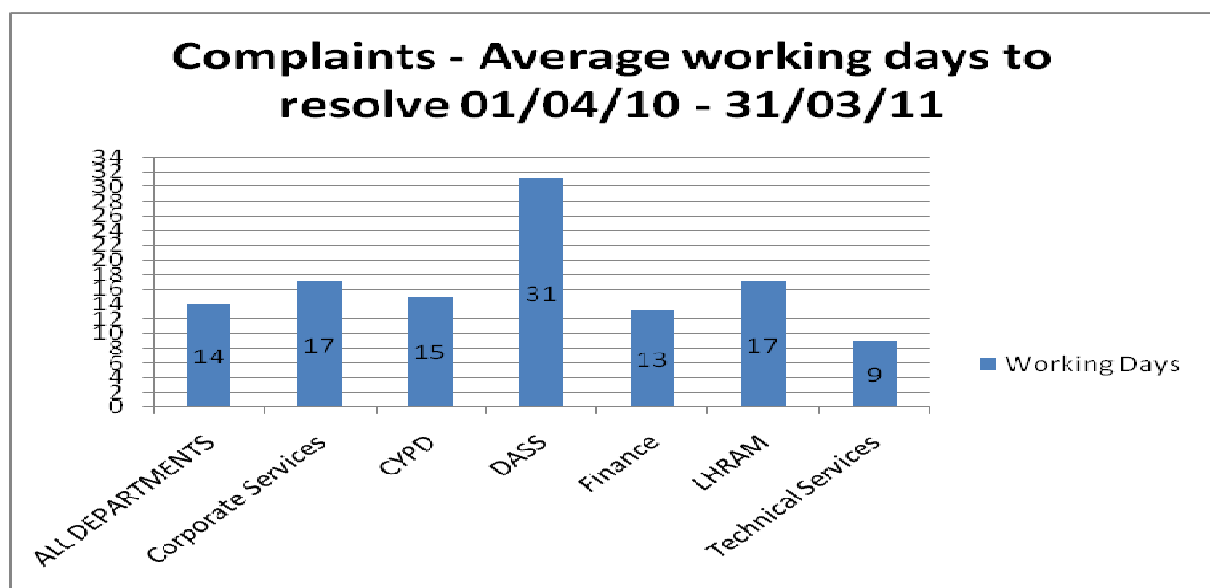
4.9. The Adult Social Services (DASS), Finance and Technical Services departments accounted for the largest proportion of complaints (combined total representing 88% of all complaints received). Key service areas within these departments attracting complaint feedback included:

- Refuse collection (Technical Services) received 325 corporate complaints, with issues caused by the adverse weather conditions in December/January (227 complaints received for the service during these two months) again dominating volumes, a repeat of 2009/10.
 - Sports and Recreation (Technical Services) received 190 corporate complaints with dissatisfaction expressed over quality of facilities accounting for 36% of these complaints
 - Access and Assessment (DASS) received 132 statutory complaints
 - Revenues and Benefits (Finance) received 108 corporate complaints with disagreement with a decision made or dissatisfaction expressed with the effects of a decision accounting for 48% of these complaints
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- 4.10. Excluding the complaint feedback generated by the winter adverse weather conditions affecting service delivery, quarterly corporate complaint totals displayed a decreasing trend through the latter half of the year:



- 4.11. The percentage of corporate complaints resolved within 15 working days improved for the third year in succession from 87% reported in 2008/09 to 90% in 2009/10 and 92% in 2010/11. This compares to the corporate target of 90% for 2010/11. The improved performance is driven by customer feedback coordinators efforts in progress chasing responses, supported by prioritisation through the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM). The average number of working days to respond to corporate and statutory complaints by department is as follows:

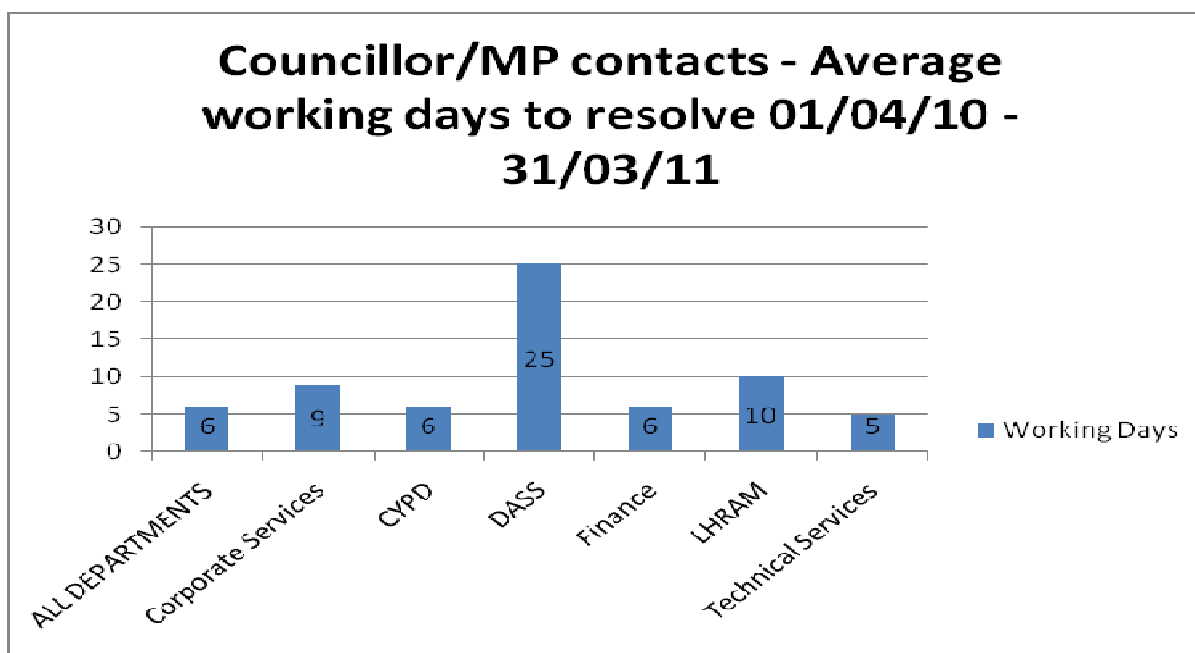


*Statutory complaints (Children's Social Care and DASS) are not subject to the 15 working day corporate target

- 4.12. Split between the three corporate complaint stage, stages 1 took an average of 10 working days to be resolved, followed by 11 working days for stage 2 and 15 working days for stage 3. The use of an independent review by a chief officer of an alternate department can partly explain the longer time taken to resolve these stage 3 complaints.
- 4.13. As a proportion of total corporate complaints received, 8% of complainants expressed dissatisfaction with stage 1 resolution and raised either a stage 2 or stage 3 complaint.
- 4.14. Statutory complaints received by DASS and Children’s Social Care (CYPD) are dealt with in a statutory framework, outside of the corporate process and were resolved on average in 24 working days.

Councillor/MP Contacts

- 4.15. A total of 4,144 formal Councillor or MP contacts were received in 2010/11, compared to 3,846 contacts for the previous year, a 7% increase. Unlike complaints no single issue dominated councillor/MP contacts although Technical Services continues to receive the highest number of contacts with 82% of the total for all departments. This continues an increasing trend with this department contributing 75% in 2009/10 and 70% in 2008/09 of recorded contacts.
- 4.16 The corporate standard for resolution of these contacts is 10 working days and the average number of days taken for resolution in 2010/11 was 6 working days (no change from 2009/10). The average number of working days to respond to these contacts by department is as follows:



4.17. The number of Councillor and MP contacts by department was as follows with the figure in brackets indicating percentage of total contacts received in 2010/11:

- CYPD 189 (5%)
- Corporate Services 257 (6%)
- DASS 141 (3%)
- Finance 84 (2%)
- LHRAM 75 (2%)
- Technical Services 3398 (82%)

4.18 The Council responded to 94% of all councillor/MP contacts within 10 working days, compared to 91% in 2009/10 and 79% in 2008/09.

4.19 Within the departmental totals key areas of enquiry were as follows, with all areas being within Technical Services department unless stated otherwise, with the figure in brackets indicating percentage of total *departmental* contacts received in 2010/11:

- Road defect 553 (16%)
- Pavement defect 480 (14%)
- Traffic conditions 312 (9%)
- Street lighting 284 (8%)
- Street cleansing 243 (7%)
- Re-housing issues 194 (Corporate Services) (75%)
- Domestic bin collection 178 (5%)
- Fly-tipping 147 (4%)
- Winter maintenance 132 (4%)
- Access and Assessment 97 (DASS) (69%)

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) contacts

4.20 During 2009/10 significant changes were made to both the external LGO process for dealing with complaints, with an emphasis on preliminary enquiries rather than instigating full investigations along with an internal re-structure to support the recording of such contacts within customer feedback.

4.21 A total of 63 contacts were recorded (48 preliminary requests for information; 10 follow-up enquiries and 5 full investigations) covering 52 individual LGO cases. This compares to 79 contacts in 2009/10.

4.22 The number of LGO contacts by department was as follows with the figure in brackets indicating percentage of total contacts received in 2010/11:

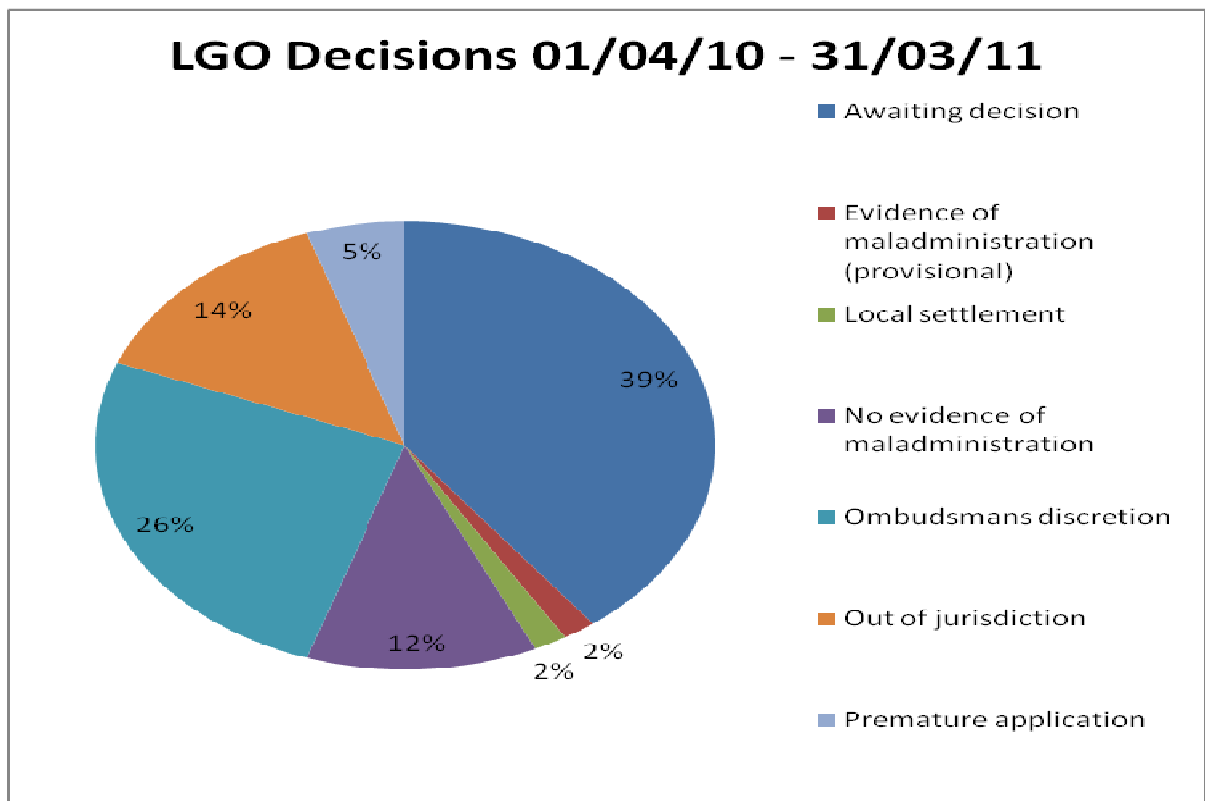
- CYPD 14 (22%)
 - Corporate Services 5 (8%)
 - DASS 23 (37%)
 - Finance 4 (6%)
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- LHRAM 3 (5%)
- Technical Services 14 (22%)

4.23 Within the departmental totals key areas of enquiry were as follows, with the figure in brackets indicating percentage of total *departmental* contacts received in 2010/11:

- DASS Care Services 22 (96%)
- CYPD Schools 7 (50%)
- Technical Services Planning 5 (36%)
- CYPD Children’s Social Care 4 (29%)
- Finance Revenues and Benefits 3 (75%)
- CYPD Anti Social Behaviour 3 (21%)

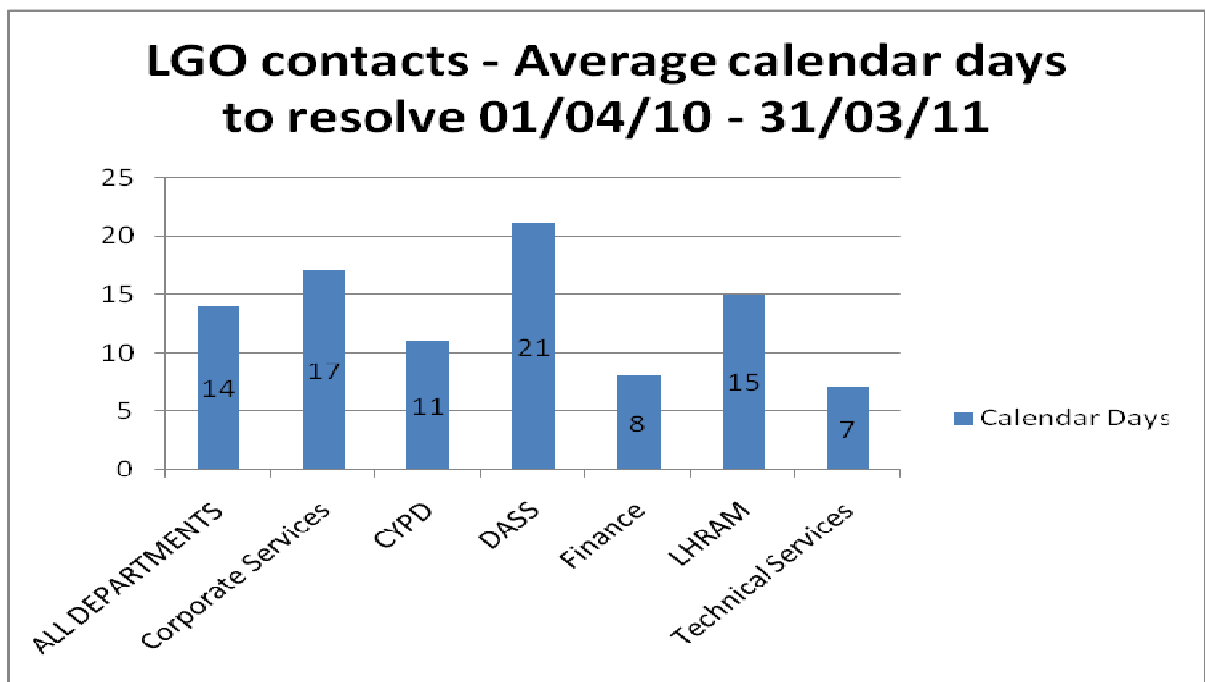
4.24 The LGO provides a decision category on all cases considered and the breakdown for 2010/11 is as follows:



- Awaiting Decision: enquiry responded to and awaiting evaluation from LGO
- Evidence of Maladministration: LGO can find evidence of wrong-doing
- Local Settlement: the Council has come to a satisfactory arrangement with the complainant to resolve issue(s)
- No Evidence of Maladministration: LGO can find no evidence of wrong-doing
- Ombudsman’s Discretion: LGO has decided not to investigate further, usually due to insufficient evidence of injustice caused

- Out of Jurisdiction: case is outside the LGO's remit to investigate
- Premature Application: Council has not had the opportunity to investigate the complaint fully before referral to the LGO; reconsidered as corporate/statutory complaint

4.25 The standard by which the Council is measured is 28 calendar days to respond to LGO contacts, excluding complaints about schools (14 calendar days) or if the LGO provides specific target dates. Across all the contacts recorded, the Council responded on average in 14 calendar days for 2010/11, compared to 22.7 days for 2009/10. The average number of calendar days to respond to these contacts by department is as follows:



4.26 The LGO is currently preparing a formal annual performance report for all councils in England which has a provisional figure of 20.2 calendar days for Wirral. The disparity between the Wirral and LGO figures is due to differences in the method of calculation, specifically that Wirral uses all contacts resolved to produce an average whereas the LGO assesses only what they categorise as 'first enquiries'. The LGO's reported figure would still place Wirral in the top 64% of Metropolitan Authorities with an average of 28 calendar days or less. A formal response will be provided to the LGO's annual letter to Wirral once received from the LGO and this will be reported to this Committee.

Other Feedback

4.27 There were 74 contacts recorded via the Chief Executive's office (compared to 88 in 2009/10) with Technical Services enquiries accounting for 97% of this total. Contacts regarding Highway maintenance (26%); Parks and Countryside (15%) and Refuse collection (11%) featured prominently. Contacts were dealt with on average within 7 working days against a corporate target of 5 working days.

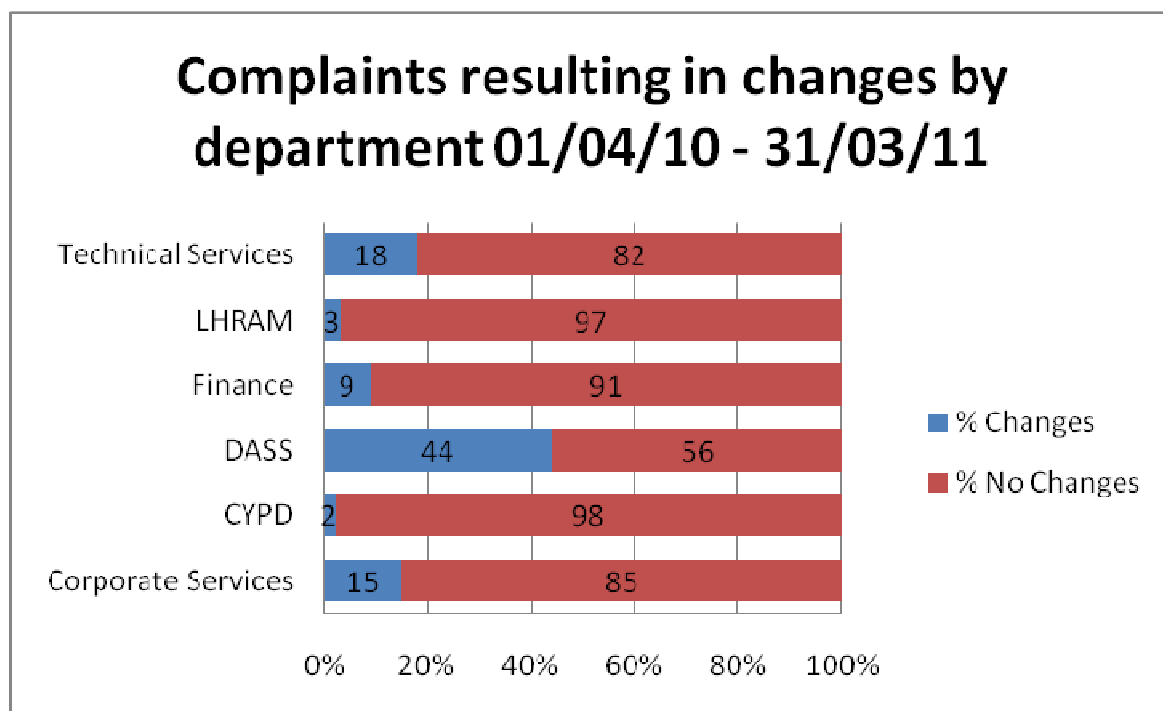
4.28 Customer feedback coordinators recorded 66 customer suggestions, with the Technical Services department contributing 70% of these contacts. Sports and Recreation was most popular with 39% of all suggestions received, unchanged from 2009/10. The majority of suggestions within this service area relate to the availability of activities and classes; standard of facilities and opening times.

4.29 The Council officially recorded 745 compliments in 2010/11, although the expectation is that many more expressions of satisfaction with services provided were received in the numerous interactions with customers across all departments and delivery channels. Typical comments include “excellent service received”; “praise for officers involved”; “appreciation of the level of service provided”; “extremely impressed with work” and a “pleasure to deal with Council”. Services attracting particularly high levels of praise were as follows, with the figure in brackets indicating percentage of total compliments received in 2010/11:

- One Stop Shops and Cashiers 95 (13%)
- Corporate Call Centre 46 (6%)
- Refuse Collection 44 (6%)

Customer feedback resulting in changes

4.30 From 2009/10 there has been a focus on customer feedback and complaints specifically resulting in positive changes made to service delivery. There were a total of 345 changes to process/procedure or improvements made to service delivery as a result of customer feedback received. Comparative analysis between departments reveals the following levels of organisational learning from complaints received:



4.31 Examples of changes implemented in 2010/11 include the following:

- Improved clarity of Streetscene email responses
- Improved disabled access to a Council building
- New guidelines implemented for Council contractors to ensure minimal disturbance for local residents
- Revised Council Tax/Benefit notifications to ensure accuracy/clarity of information
- Amendments to refuse collection information displayed to improve service communication
- Improved information displayed on the website for the sports and recreation service
- Increased capacity of exercise classes in response to demand
- Improved safety features for a children's play area
- Improved information available for Wirral visitors
- Improved working procedures for Council bailiffs to ensure standards of customer service adhered to
- Additional gym equipment ordered, informed by customer feedback received
- New guidelines introduced to ensure accuracy of benefits correspondence
- Promotion of Polish support group services through One Stop Shops
- Improved research capabilities available at local library
- Enhanced street lighting provision
- Revised assessment framework for personal budgets to ensure fairness
- Coordinated approach taken to anti-social behaviour reported to ensure improved environment for all residents in a local area
- Enhanced on-line leisure booking system, in response to initial feedback received
- Improved record management procedures adopted by Council contractor to ensure consistency of service
- Introduction of regular monitoring in cemetery to ensure required standards met and disrepair issues addressed

Customer feedback by channel

4.32 Customer feedback contacts were recorded across the following channels with the percentage proportion of total feedback received:

- e-mail (37%)
 - web (23%)
 - letter (22%)
 - telephone (14%)
 - in person (4%).
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FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS FOR 2011/12

Improved reporting

- 4.33 From 1 April 2010 all customer feedback recorded on the CRM system has been entered in a consistent format to support more effective analysis during 2010/11. A new range of reporting tools were provided for departmental coordinators to both scrutinise trends in feedback and assist progress chasing throughout the reporting period. The improving resolution rate, measured in average working or calendar days, for corporate complaints, Councillor/MP contacts and LGO contacts suggests that the efforts of departmental coordinators, backed up by improved CRM functionality have been effective. The intention is to maintain and improve the effectiveness of the corporate approach to handling customer feedback during 2011/12.

Customer feedback resulting in changes

- 4.34 A new indicator will be introduced for 2011/12 which will set a target for a minimum number of feedback contacts resulting in change to highlight the importance of organisational learning throughout the Council.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- 4.35 Originally planned for 2010/11 but now in place for 2011/12, a proportion of complainants will be asked for their opinions on the complaint process itself, focusing on timeliness; quality of response and confidence in an impartial review undertaken of the issue. Results will be reported quarterly.

Customer Care Standards Review

- 4.36 Launched in 2008, these standards set out the Council commitment to delivering high quality service across all departments in a consistent and measurable manner, clearly defined for both staff and customers.
- 4.37 In 2010 an independent review took place using dedicated resources to benchmark customer service across departments to ensure that the standards are being consistently applied in all service areas. Supplementing this is a rolling exercise of mystery shopping across departments which focuses on the customer care standards.

Customer Focus

- 4.38 This area of work underpins the Customer Access Strategy (CAS) and incorporates customer feedback; customer care standards and liaison with the LGO. In addition there are on-going projects which aim to promote customer access to Council services. Improved customer consultation is being achieved through focus groups, questionnaires, exit surveys and feedback analysis.
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Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

- 4.39 The intention was to incorporate FOI's into the CRM customer feedback module during 2010/11, but due to resource constraints this was not achievable. There is recognition that the inclusion of FOI requests will offer greater insight into what customers are contacting the council for and identifying what measures can be taken to make such information more accessible and so it remains a target for 2011/12. Cabinet on 23 June 2011 approved the extension and enhancement of the CRM system.

Performance Objectives 2011/12

- 4.40. Key aims for this year will be to recognise organisational changes made in response to customer feedback through specific performance monitoring; sustain the improving consistency between departments; maintain and improve upon the working/calendar days resolution rate for customer feedback; incorporate FOI requests and objectively measure the customer experience of contacting the Council. All of the above support the aspiration for greater customer insight to shape future delivery of services and create an excellent Council.

5.0. RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1. By not using comment and complaint information effectively the authority would lose the opportunity to improve both service delivery and the quality of its public contact.

6.0. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1. None

7.0. CONSULTATION

- 7.1. Voluntary, community and faith groups will be consulted as part of the wider customer focus work as well as through the links with the customer access strategy.

8.0. IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 These groups will be consulted as part of the wider Customer Focus work (see point 6.5) as well as the linkages with the Customer Access Strategy.

9.0. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are none arising directly from this report.
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11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required specifically as part of this report though one has been developed for the updated Customer Access Strategy which informs the approach taken for customer feedback.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None.

FNCE/152/11

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APPENDICES

None

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Standards Committee	21 June 2010