

# Business Improvement & Performance Team

## Business Improvement Summary Report

### Customer Feedback Management

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## 1. Executive Summary

### 1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to make recommendations on the future management of all forms of customer feedback such as complaints and enquiries to the authority. It is intended for presentation to Senior Management and Members. Included in the report are suggested project activities that are deemed to be required to implement and manage an effective customer feedback management process. For the purposes of this report customer feedback is referred to as those contacts that are either received directly from residents of the community or via their local ward Councillor. The activities detailed include the identification and definition of complaints as well as the recording, monitoring, resolution and reporting processes which are essential elements of successful complaint and enquiry management.

### 1.2. Introduction and background

Prior to joining the Business Improvement Team, Victoria Borges and Paula Evans were assigned to a project which had an objective of investigating current complaints management processes within the authority and how these could be improved by them becoming 'joined-up' and managed at a corporate level. The project was progressed through to a stage where new processes, both system and operational, were defined, documented and a 'pilot' of the process commenced.

With their move into the Business Improvement Team, both Victoria and Paula's priorities changed and any further progression of the project was limited. However, with some of the investigations carried out as part of the organisational reviews that have been conducted, it has become apparent that there is a need to progress the implementation of a corporate customer feedback management process. This would resolve a number of issues such as a lack of a uniform approach to complaints and enquiry receipt, recording and monitoring. Adherence to any relevant performance indicators at national, corporate and service levels would also be easier to manage as data would be readily available for reporting to service areas within the authority, Members and the general public.

### 1.3 References

During the development of this report references to the following documents has been made:

- LGO Annual Letter 2008 Local Government Ombudsman
- Running a Complaints System –  
Guidance on Good Practice Local Government Ombudsman
- Remedies for Justified Complaints Local Government Ombudsman

- How to Deal with Complaints Cabinet Office
- UDC Customer Care Standards
- UDC Customer Contact Strategy (February 2005)
- UDCP001 – UDC Corporate Complaints Management Policy – DRAFT

**1.4 Summary of Business Improvement Recommendations**

1. Corporate Customer Feedback Management Project approved and instigated
2. Customer Feedback management process implemented
3. Corporately used system and controls introduced
4. Key Performance Indicators introduced to manage process
5. Assign dedicated resource(s) to oversee process
6. Introduce series of procedural documents to support process
7. Implement reporting process that identifies root cause analysis and preventative action

**2. The Benefits**

**2.1 The Benefits of implementing a Customer Feedback Management Process**

The council recognises that a good customer feedback system is an opportunity for it to show that it wants to be open and honest with the community that it serves. It would also show that it cares about providing excellent services that are driven by listening to customers’ requirements. The implementation of a corporate customer feedback management process would show that the authority values feedback on all aspects of its service provision and actively seeks mutually acceptable resolutions.

A customer feedback management process and supporting system would also enable the authority to meet the requirements of a Community Call for Action mechanism whereby local residents can register, in the case of local authorities through a ward member, where they have concerns about persistent or serious problems in their area or want to influence policies. Although this process is still in development and seemingly only being considered in a small number of local services, it has been recommended in the Local Government White Paper to aid involvement of the community with the authority’s service delivery objectives.

**2.2 The Benefits of a Co-ordinated approach**

A co-ordinated approach to customer feedback reporting and monitoring would give us an understanding of the nature and volume of the majority of complaints and enquiries received by the authority at a corporate level. Outstanding issues would be more easily identified and managed through to a satisfactory conclusion. The regular analysis of complaint, as well as enquiry, data would help to identify areas for improvement within the authority.

During our investigations and subsequent development of this report, it has become apparent that although services within the authority register, monitor and resolve complaints and enquiries from the community, there is a lack of co-ordination for the following key aspects of the process:

- the level of data recorded

- the distinction between what should or should not be captured and reported as a 'complaint' or an 'enquiry'
- escalation criteria and process
- resolution targets
- customer satisfaction levels
- reporting format
- which system is used to record data

Whilst services continue to manage their complaints and enquiries in isolation there will always be a lack of understanding of a number of vital statistics that could be used to determine the effectiveness of a customer feedback management process at a corporate level. Of course these can be used at a service level to identify potential 'problem areas' and monitor the effectiveness of the services provided, but if this data is not at the very least fed into a higher level reporting process, there will not be a complete understanding of the issues affecting the authority.

Key statistics to report would include:

- total number of complaints and enquiries received
- complaint and enquiry types (top 5 and other)
- status of a complaint or enquiry
- average resolution times
- % customers satisfied with resolution outcome

The authority is currently monitoring the level of satisfaction with its service provision via the indicator CI 09 (Satisfaction with Customer Services) as part of the corporate indicator set for 2008/09. However, this monitoring is limited to contact through the Customer Service Centre, rather than authority-wide.

### 2.3 Key objectives of a Complaints Management Process

When implementing an authority-wide customer feedback management process it would be essential to establish some key objectives. These would provide both a clear directive for the process and an understanding of the desired outcomes that the process would provide. These aims may include:

- To ensure that all complaints and enquiries are dealt with in a consistent and timely manner
- To provide clear procedures and defined responsibilities
- To regularly analyse the system to identify complaint and enquiry trends and opportunities for improvement
- To implement and manage a system that is well publicised and easy to use
- To implement and manage a system that is receptive and non-adversarial
- To ensure it is sensitive to specific needs and circumstances of the customer

## 3. Current Situation

### 3.1 Process

As stated above, the current process for collating complaints and enquiry data within the authority is disjointed in that each service area uses either a different system or method to collect complaint and enquiry details and then monitor these through to a satisfactory resolution. In some cases there is no checking to ensure an amicable resolution has been reached.

Although there is centralised collation of complaints statistics through the PA team, it seems unlikely the information they are being sent represents a complete picture of all the complaints received across the authority.

In addition, there is no clear documented definition of what a complaint and an enquiry are and, conversely, what they aren't, which again leads to inconsistency in the data that is logged and subsequently reported. Also, the authority does not currently have a clearly identified Officer that has responsibility for the co-ordination of customer feedback management across the authority.

A number of customer standards relating to enquiries and complaints have been identified, and are indeed published for public viewing, but following investigation these are generally not applied, or even aspired to, by the majority of services within the authority.

These standards include:

- Aiming to answer telephone calls within 15 seconds
- Use voicemail so that a response can still be made within 24 hours
- Fully answer telephone enquiries immediately or within 3 working days
- Fully respond to most general enquiries within 10 working days from the date of receipt

There are also no 'official' documents that have been published within the authority that relate directly to either a complaints or enquiries process. Most service area complaints are dealt with by certain individuals that have always managed them in a particular way. There is a complaints, comments and suggestions form that can either be obtained from the front desks of the Customer Service Centre (CSC) or downloaded from the website. Once completed, these are then submitted to the authority and the data recorded by the PA group. The relevant PA would then either note the suggestion or compliment or monitor the complaint through to resolution.

In addition any complaints that are escalated to the Ombudsman are currently overseen by the Committee and Electoral Services Manager. However, they are only made aware of any escalation to the Ombudsman by notice from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and then act purely as a co-ordinator to ensure that any necessary investigation or corrective action is undertaken in a timely manner. The role has been allocated to the current post holder purely through job succession and is generally not believed to be the most suitable area for the duty but there is currently no other logical alternative.

### **3.2 System**

Some of the systems being used to either log or track complaint and enquiry data have not been purchased and/or developed for the management of such information and are therefore not 'fit for purpose'. A large amount of data is also recorded and tracked manually, i.e. on Excel spreadsheets. There is currently no overall centrally co-ordinated system that manages the authority's complaint and enquiry data.

### **3.3 Reporting**

The PA group play a key role in collating and reporting complaint data as part of the current process, however there is evidence that they do not have access to all data being monitored at a service level. Some complaints and enquiries are received and dealt with directly by an officer with no interaction with the PA group. In this instance the subsequent statistics may not be reported back to the group for inclusion in any corporate reports. Any complaints or enquiries they receive directly, either into the Chief Executive's office or the relevant Director, would be recorded and tracked on a shared spreadsheet. When relevant, the PA will delegate the complaint or enquiry to a specific officer and then track progress of its resolution through to a satisfactory conclusion.

It should be noted that where a contact may detail several requests and/or complaints in one letter/email/telephone call, these items will all be logged as 'one' and then the issue either reported as "upheld" (all issues confirmed as being a valid complaint against the authority) or "part upheld" (some of the issues confirmed, others dismissed).

Another key issue is that, although data is being recorded and monitored, there are currently no identified performance indicators that relate to either complaint or enquiry management.

Following recent Performance Select Committee report submissions, the Environmental Health Division is now reporting its requests for service regularly in a comprehensive manner via bespoke reports that are produced by their mainframe system, Ocella. This includes volumes, request types and resolution times. However,

these requests for service are not deemed to be complaints, and any subsequent complaint they may receive as a result of a service request not being completed to the satisfaction of the originator, would be sent on to the relevant PA for inclusion in their statistics. This service has not however received any complaints in the last 12 months.

### 3.4 Service Area processes

As part of the investigations undertaken to establish current practice, each of the service areas that are known to receive either enquiries or complaints were interviewed so that an understanding of their process actions could be established. A template was developed which was then used to ensure continuity in the data gathered. The findings were as follows:

#### **Housing Services**

Within the Housing Services group there is a need to record, monitor and track Tenants' complaints. However, these complaints relate to when an individual who has a complaint about a Tenant (e.g. noise, disturbance etc) that a Housing Officer would then need to investigate. A comprehensive set of procedures and data capture forms is in place that supports this process. Any complaints received regarding the service that the Housing group give would be sent straight on to the relevant PA to be logged and tracked.

#### **Waste Management**

Like Environmental Health, the Waste Management team record and track their complaints on Ocella. However, as per the Environment group they are aware that the system treats every request for service received as a 'complaint'. It is then the responsibility of the administration team to identify those entries that are true complaints and escalate them to the Head of Division (HoD) accordingly. There are recognised response times for the completion of requests, however there is no reporting facility within the system at present. Therefore this data is not used to monitor service levels.

Positive points of the process include the fact that most actual complaints are dealt with within a couple of working days and that where necessary, the HoD will delegate resolution responsibilities to a relevant officer.

#### **Building Control**

Building Control already has a well-established and controlled complaint recording and reporting process due to their accreditation to ISO 9000. All complaints received are logged and copies of all supporting documentation held on file. Each complaint is initially assessed by the HoD and then delegated to the relevant officer for completion. Response times are monitored and satisfaction surveys sent for every complaint that has been, in the view of the service area, resolved.

The only negative aspect of this process is that it is paper-based and manually controlled rather than being managed electronically. Therefore none of the complaint or satisfaction data captured is forwarded for inclusion in any corporately-reported figures.

#### **Planning**

All enquiries and complaints relating to Planning are managed by the Customer Care team. They manually record and track the progression of all complaints and will report any statistics directly to the PA group. The process they adopt is similar to that of other service areas in that, when necessary, complaints are delegated to the relevant officers for resolution. However the Customer Care group play a key part in ensuring that officers respond to the complaints and give feed-back for inclusion in any published reports.

#### **Environmental Health**

See comments in section 3.3 – Reporting above.

#### **Customer Service Centre**

If a complainant contacts the Customer Service Centre they are advised to complete the Complaints, Comments and Suggestions form and to then return it to the authority. The Customer Service Advisors would then pass any of these completed forms they receive to the PA's group.

#### 4. Scenarios for consideration

There are several scenarios relating to the management of enquiries and complaints within the authority that were considered when developing this report. These were:

- Remain as is
- Consideration of Partnership working (with another local authority)
- Develop a new local corporate process and support system

There are positive and negative points for each of these situations. These are highlighted as follows:

##### Remain as is:

###### *Positive*

- established processes
- customer satisfaction levels appear to be good

###### *Negative*

- disjointed approach
- each service area working in isolation
- very limited awareness of complaints at a corporate level
- various systems/methods of data capture
- inaccurate complaint data

##### Partnership Working:

###### *Positive*

- opportunity to adopt tried and tested processes
- shared resources may be available
- implementation costs kept to a minimum
- supports authority's objective of partnership working

###### *Negative*

- process may not be able to be UDC 'branded'
- may create unnecessary hierarchical reporting
- communication difficulties

##### Develop Local Process

###### *Positive*

- process developed to fit UDC culture
- in-house resources used to develop processes
- opportunity to utilise currently used system(s)
- accurate results to enable effective service level monitoring

###### *Negative*

- significant project to undertake
- identifying ownership

It should be noted at this stage that the last two of the above scenarios (partnership working and development of new process) have been considered when formulating the recommendations in this report.

#### 5. Business Improvement Recommendations

##### **5.1 Corporate Customer Feedback Management Project approved and instigated**

It is recommended that a project team be identified to develop and then implement a Customer Feedback Management system. The team should comprise of officers that are currently involved with complaints and enquiries management in their respective service areas as well as Business Improvement officers. The project should be led by the Strategic Management Board to ensure corporate focus. It is recommended that

the project should be managed as per current BI reviews with all supporting documentation developed to ensure the successful implementation of all key objectives. The project should also use the PRINCE2 project methodology to ensure a structured approach to its management.

Initially further investigation would be required to establish the more feasible of the two scenarios identified above. Once approved the team would be responsible for the effective transition to any new processes and system use. Any processes adopted should ensure that not only complaints, but also compliments and comments could be captured and monitored. Any systems should also be able to manage the progress of general enquiries from either Members and/or the community, through to a successful conclusion.

## **5.2 Customer Feedback management process implemented**

It is recommended that a corporate Customer Feedback process and system be implemented within the authority. This will help to gain an understanding of the issues/and or complaints received and the subsequent identified opportunities for service and performance improvement. The process should focus on the capture and ensuring satisfactory resolution of complaints but should also enable the authority to record, and where necessary track/monitor the progress, of any enquiries, comments and compliments. Wherever possible, best practice should be established through benchmarking activities and reference to central government guidelines.

The process adopted should be managed and monitored at a corporate level to ensure the following:

- Accurate and timely data recording
- Distinction between complaints and requests for service
- Numbers received both corporately and at service level
- Types and categories of enquiries and complaints received
- Procedures and criteria for escalation and resolution
- Accurate and appropriate targets
- Resolution satisfaction levels
- Uniform reporting formats
- Consistency

One of the primary objectives of the process would be to enable the distinction between each type of contact by clearly defining complaints, enquiries, compliments and comments. These definitions may need to be determined by service area due to differences in the services provided and what is considered to be a service request and what is not. However, ultimately this should allow the accurate reporting of all customer contacts that are deemed to be complaints at a corporate level.

There should be a protocol determined and applied for each type of contact received. This should include always recording the date of receipt and the dates of any subsequent action(s) taken. When necessary, notes should be made to confirm and support any action which, can then be used for audit or review purposes. Response times should be determined; this may differ for each type of contact but should be clearly documented and, where possible, performance be monitored against them. They should be broken down to initial response and ultimate resolution of the enquiry and publicised to create customer expectation. Where telephone or email enquiries are received officers should ensure that an anticipated response time is advised and, when relevant, an alternative contact given to ensure that the enquiry can be recorded and progressed in prescribed timescales.

Where a contact is received that could be regarded as several enquiries, each 'part' should be logged as an individual issue. This avoids the need to clarify complaints as being "part-upheld" and gives a true reflection of the numbers being received.

When logging any contact data, wherever possible all equalities related information should be captured and used to support any demographic and equalities projects.

If possible, the process should also enable Freedom of Information (FOI) enquires to be captured and managed.

Finally the process should include the management of complaints that are escalated to an Ombudsman level. There should be corporate awareness of these complaints and the actions required to bring them to a satisfactory resolution.

### **5.3 *Corporately used system and controls introduced***

It is recommended that a specialised system be implemented and used to record, track, monitor and report all customer feedback data. There are various options to consider in the selection of such a system: developing an already established one within the authority (such as Ocella), utilising customer feedback modules from already used external systems (such as Covalent), adopting a partners system or the purchase of an independent software package (various).

Any system adopted should have the ability to be used for the monitoring of various existing customer contact functions such as the Tenants complaint process.

### **5.4 *Key Performance Indicators introduced to manage process***

A series of corporate and service level indicators should be introduced to manage the effectiveness of the customer feedback process. They should also ensure that all key objectives of the process are being met. Where relevant they should be developed and introduced to support any National Indicators relating to service delivery such as NI14 – Avoidable Contact – the average number of customer contacts per resolved requests.

So that the relevance of these indicators is clarified and their performance monitored regularly, they should be linked with any appropriate Corporate and Divisional Plan actions.

### **5.5 *Assign dedicated resource(s) to oversee process***

It is recommended that an officer within the authority be assigned responsibility to oversee the customer feedback management process. Their role would include having responsibility for ensuring that all complaints, enquiries, comments and compliments are logged in a uniform manner, that resolution targets and objectives are being met through constant monitoring activities as well as ensuring that appropriate follow-up action is taken when dissatisfaction with a service is identified. The role should ideally have a corporate focus and for this reason it is recommended that it have a direct reporting line to a member of SMB.

Regardless of the system and process adopted, they should proactively work with each service area to ensure the timely resolution of all customer contacts made to the authority.

### **5.6 *Introduce series of procedural documents to support process***

It is recommended that a series of official documents are produced and published to support the implementation of the customer feedback process. These should be used by all officers in the authority with responsibility for customer contacts in any form.

The documents should include a policy determining the key objectives of the process, a procedure which details the steps to be taken within the process (including any service area variances) and, where necessary, system and/or process work instructions.

### **5.7 *Implement reporting process that identifies root cause analysis and preventative action***

It is recommended that a comprehensive series of reports is developed to the help measure the effectiveness of the customer feedback process. These ideally can be produced via any IT system that is adopted to manage the process.