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To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 27
September 2011

Subject: EHW Annual Complaints, Comments & Compliments Report 2011

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report informs the POSC of the operation of the complaints, comments and compliments procedure by Enterprise & Environment, formally Environment, Highways and Waste (EHW) between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As the expectations of customers increase and they demand the same levels of service from KCC that they expect and receive from the private sector, Enterprise & Environment, formally Environment, Highways and Waste (EHW) need to actively seek ways to enhance customer service delivery and raise levels of customer satisfaction when they interact with the Directorate.
- 1.2 One mechanism used to review feedback from customers is through complaints, compliments and comments monitoring. This is an important source of 'unsolicited' customer feedback that we have used to demonstrate that we actually listen to and learn from our customers and are striving to continuously improve our customer service delivery whilst maintaining a focus on achieving 'value for money' for our citizens through local government expenditure.
- 1.3 This report provides information on complaints, comments and compliments received during 2010/11 and gives examples of where analysis of the feedback has led to service change across the Directorate. The report also outlines complaint trends, the source of complaints, overall performance on handling complaints, diversity data and an update on Local Government Ombudsman complaints.

2. The number of Complaints received

- 2.1 Across EHW, we received 2272 complaints from April 2010 to March 2011 compared to the same time period in the previous year when we received 1641 complaints.
- 2.2 As our two frontline services, Kent Highway Services (KHS) and Environment & Waste (E&W) received the majority of the complaints with KHS receiving 1959 complaints (86%) in 2010/11 and E&W receiving 313 complaints (14%). No complaints were received within Integrated Strategy & Planning (ISP.)
- 2.3 A number of factors have contributed to the increase in complaint volumes including high numbers of pothole and insurance complaints in April/May 2010 and the severe weather conditions experienced across the county in December 2010.

- 2.4 We have also continued to refine how complaints have been captured and this, coupled with increasing customer expectations as they become more aware of what information they are entitled to access, has contributed to an increasing trend in our recorded complaints data.
- 2.5 Although these factors have been largely outside of our control, we have also seen an increase in complaint volumes due to the standard of work completed or where staff have been perceived by our customers as being rude or unhelpful and this is something that we have looked to address in our aim to put our customers at the centre of everything that we do. This is summarised under sections 6 – 7 of this report.
- 2.6 Comments from complaint snippets are outlined in Appendix A.

3. KHS Complaints

- 3.1 During 2010/11, KHS received 1959 complaints compared to the same time period in the previous year when 1259 complaints were received. This represents a 56% increase in complaint volumes compared to 2009/10.
- 3.2 1066 of the complaints (54%) were received between April and September 2010 and several of these concerned potholes – either related to the number of potholes on Kent roads that had not been repaired followed the extraordinary weather conditions (which lasted from December 2009 to February 2010) or linked into the quality of the resurfacing works carried out. In some cases customers were unaware of the actions that had been taken to move this forward.
- 3.3 Of the 646 complaints received in Q3, 269 (42%) were received in December 2010 during the severe weather and related to the winter service. The majority of these complaints were about the perceived lack of action around clearing ice and snow from pavements and side roads.
- 3.4 The Contact Centre answered 291,953 Highways calls in 2010/11 of which less than 1% were complaint related. (0.7%) 13,210 of the calls concerned potholes, 6177 were about drainage/flooding issues and 1994 were related to the winter service.
- 3.5 893 complaints were received from October 2010 to March 2011 of which 175 (20%) were upheld and 101 (11%) were partially upheld. The remaining 617 complaints (69%) were not upheld. (This data was not captured until October 2010 so is not available prior to this date.)

4. E&W Complaints and Comments

- 4.1 During 2010/11, E&W received 313 complaints compared to the same time period in the previous year when 380 complaints were received. This represents an 18% decrease in complaint volumes compared to 2009/10. The Country Parks also received 119 comments, predominately through comment cards or books.
- 4.2 Of the 313 complaints received in E&W, the majority came from two main service areas – Country Parks which received 102 complaints and the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) which received 201 complaints.

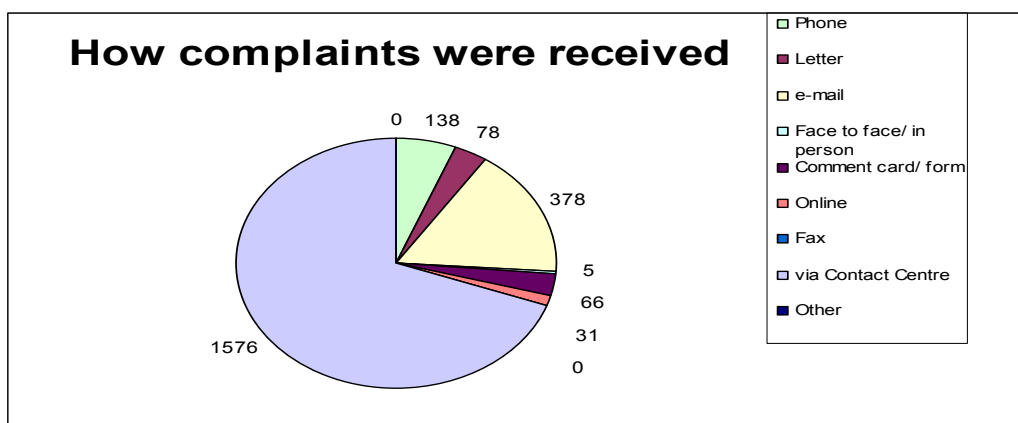
- 4.3 The key issues highlighted through the HWRC complaints related to height barriers/the twin axle policy, walking waste onto the sites, service delivery (staff behaviour, site opening/closing times) or poor communication (incorrect information being given to customers or the policy on removing waste items from HWRCs.)
- 4.4 Although the twin axle policy was introduced more than 18 months ago, it has still generated a number of complaints. Whilst some of these have been received from members of the public who are potentially trying to dispose of their domestic waste, there have also been a number of complaints from traders who have tried to dispose of their trade waste incorrectly.
- 4.5 Across the Country Parks, the key issues highlighted by customers through complaints were similar to last year and related to café queues/prices, car parking charges and litter (including dog fouling.)

5. Complaint Handling Performance

- 5.1 Across EHW, we received 2272 complaints from April 2010 to March 2011 compared to the same time period in the previous year when we received 1641 complaints.
- 5.2 2263 complaints (99.6%) were acknowledged within the corporate standard of 3 working days and 2094 complainants (92%) received a full response within 20 working days.)
- 5.3 Complaint response times were as follows:

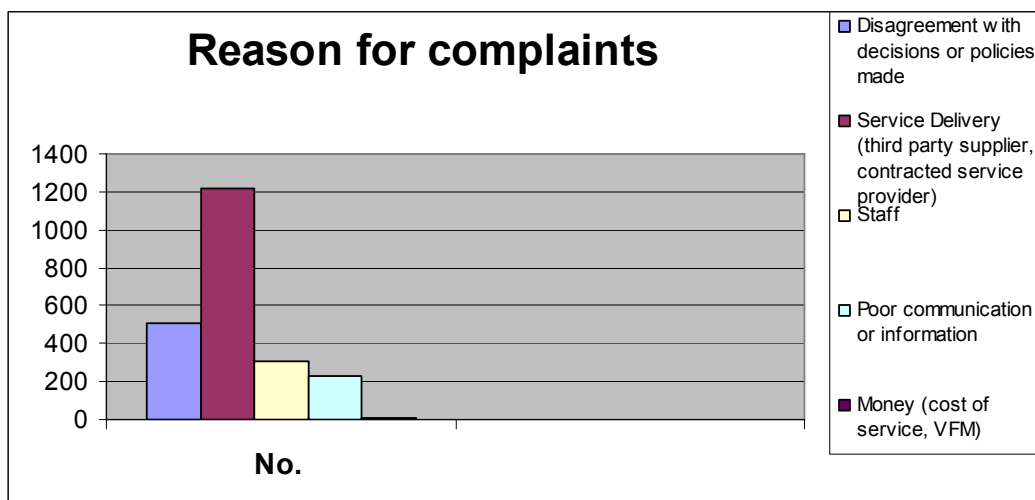
Complaint Response Times	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Complaints acknowledged within 3 working days	411 (96%)	1559 (95%)	2263 (99.6%)
Full response to complaints within 20 working days	416 (97%)	1601 (98%)	2094 (92%)

- 5.4 Complaints were received as follows:



- 5.5 1576 (69%) of the complaints were initially received through the Contact Centre and a further 378 complaints (16%) were received via email.

5.6 The reasons for these complaints were as follows:



6. Customer Service Improvements implemented across KHS following complaints

- 6.1 The complaints received across KHS throughout 2010/11 have provided valuable customer feedback and coupled with other sources of feedback obtained through monthly customer satisfaction surveys have enabled KHS to implement several service improvements. These have resulted in an improved focus on meeting customer expectations.
- 6.2 A number of the complaints received during the first quarter of the year concerned potholes – either related to the number of potholes on Kent roads that had not been repaired or linked into the quality of the resurfacing works carried out. In some cases customers complained because they were unaware of the actions that had been undertaken to move this forward. Lessons were learnt from the same situation last year and a new ‘Find and Fix’ repair programme of work was implemented throughout 2010 to enable these issues to be rectified quickly.
- 6.3 As part of the ‘Find and Fix’ campaign, 122,000 square metres of road was repaired and 31,000 potholes filled.
- 6.4 Improved (real time) information on pothole repairs was added to the KCC website to show what was being done and where/when this was taking place. The Contact Centre also received regular updates on the schedules of work which enabled them to provide the most up to date response to customer queries.
- 6.5 The KCC website has also been regularly updated on other current issues such as summer vegetation and street-lighting.
- 6.6 Ongoing complaints about Insurance claims were received so improved information was issued to customers via the Contact Centre and the KCC Website. The online claim form was removed as the process was much better with customers going through the Contact Centre (that way forms were sent out and any faults reported at the same time.)
- 6.7 A number of complaints were about lack of action so in addition to the 2 day call backs already offered to customers requiring further information, KHS introduced 5 day call

backs that staff must make if standard 28 day repairs turned into programmed works or works were not going to be carried out for any reason. That way customers were kept updated and provided with reasons why there may have been delays to fix faults or KHS were unable to do something.

- 6.8 There was a continued focus on communication between the Contact Centre and all KHS teams across the year to ensure the availability of correct information to resolve enquiries at the first point of contact wherever possible. This included giving the Contact Centre improved information for all KHS service areas on a new Intranet system (iWay) which enabled them to provide the most up to date information to answer customer queries and provide more realistic timescales when customers reported issues to KHS.
- 6.9 For every complaint received and logged on the KHS CSM system, the complainant was contacted to enable KHS staff to talk through the complaint and confirm what would happen next. In many cases complaints have been resolved at this stage by providing additional information to the customer.
- 6.10 To improve communication about the KHS winter policy, all customers were advised at first point of contact what the published policy was and then directed to the website to enable them to view this rather than logging the requests as enquiries. KHS staff adopted a very transparent approach with customers letting them know what could and couldn't be implemented under the policy. This led to a significant reduction (around 50%) in the number of enquiries passed to the back office and reduced the situation of customers being given the same message by another member of staff at a later date.

7. Customer Service Improvements implemented across E&W following complaints and comments

- 7.1 The complaints received across E&W throughout 2010/11 have provided valuable customer feedback and have all been reviewed to see what service improvements could be put in place to increase customer satisfaction.
- 7.2 A number of visitors at the Country Parks complained via the comment cards that the queues were too long at the café and prices were too expensive. To help alleviate these issues, the following initiatives have been implemented:
- The menu in the café at Shorne Wood Country Park has been reviewed to ensure prices remain affordable to customers and in doing so a number of the regular suppliers have been changed.
 - To start to address queue times within the café, some of the items that take longest to prepare have been removed from the menu and children's lunch boxes have been added.
 - The café has been refurbished with a self service counter in order to serve customers quicker during peak times.
- 7.3 At Teston Bridge Country Park, there are two wardens who patrol in the morning and at the end of the day to collect litter. They also patrol more frequently on busy days to help reduce the amount of litter left in the park.

- 7.4 A number of the complaints and comments made at the Country Parks related to car parking charges. These charges are carefully considered to offer good value for money with all the money collected being used to help towards the cost of running the parks overall. Discount vouchers have been introduced for loyal customers as well as a season ticket for regular visitors which is then valid for use at all of the country parks.
- 7.5 To help alleviate the problem of dogs fouling at the Country Parks, several notices and posters have been put up around the car park asking dog owners to clear up after their dogs. Increased links have also been made with local district and borough dog wardens to encourage them to patrol more at the country park sites.
- 7.6 In April 2010, E&W successfully passed a Charter Mark health check review of progress which demonstrated their strong customer focus. The review was carried out by an independent external assessor who was very complimentary of the high standards of customer service and progress made by E&W since the last review.
- 7.7 All complaints received by the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) have been monitored and any patterns in complaints addressed directly with the appropriate site managers.
- 7.8 An online customer survey has been implemented on the Kent Website as part of the new electronic performance programme. Customers are also provided with the opportunity to feedback directly on contract performance through customer surveys taken by Waste Services Officers on site.
- 7.9 A brand new Household Waste Recycling Centre opened in New Romney, giving customers the opportunity to recycle more household items throughout the week.
- 7.10 Managing complaints workshops were delivered to front line staff at HWRC's to improve staff awareness of the complaint process overall and to enhance their customer service skills to prevent complaints from occurring in the first place. A guide was also produced for staff to use as a reference for details of complaint timescales and procedures.
- 7.11 In addition to speaking to Waste Management staff face to face and by telephone, customers are able to send in email enquiries to the Kentwaste mailbox. A standard response has been set up which gives the customer a timescale for response and a named person who has ownership of their enquiry. The mailbox response is tailored so that on Bank Holiday weekends customer expectations are managed with an out-of-office type response giving the timescales for a complete response.
- 7.12 Although the twin axle policy was introduced some time ago, it has still generated a number of complaints. To provide further information on the policy, the KCC website has been updated and the days and locations at which the height barriers are raised to enable bigger vehicles carrying domestic waste to enter the sites are clearly outlined.
- 7.13 A number of complaints were received on the policy of removing waste items from the Waste sites. To make this clearer to members of the public, the policy pages on the KCC website have been updated.

8. The number of compliments received

- 8.1 Across EHW, we received 1694 compliments from April 2010 to March 2011 compared to the same time period in the previous year when we received 1655 compliments. This represents a 2% increase in the number of compliments received compared to the previous year.
- 8.2 Compliments have provided a valuable source of learning and can be a good indicator of best practice or areas where we are getting things right across the Directorate. An example of this has been compliments received on the availability of trampers at the Country Parks.
- 8.3 597 compliments were received by KHS (25% increase on 2009/10 volumes.) Areas complimented on included the way KHS staff managed the winter service, pothole repairs, the speed of response to requests for service, overall road maintenance and the calibre of staff (hardworking, going the extra mile.)
- 8.4 Of the 1071 compliments received by E&W, the majority came from two main service areas – Country Parks which received 325 compliments and Countryside Access which received 588 compliments. Areas complimented on included the quality/content of the Explore Kent magazine and website, improvements to the café facilities at Shorne Wood Country Park, and the friendliness/helpfulness of staff (particularly at the Household Waste Recycling Centres and Country Parks.)
- 8.5 26 compliments were received by Integrated Strategy & Planning.
- 8.5 Compliments were received across EHW as follows:

Service Area	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Kent Highway Services	359	479	597
Environment & Waste	576	1163	1071
Integrated Strategy & Planning	6	13	26
Total	941	1655	1694

- 8.6 Comments from compliment snippets are outlined in Appendix B

9. Valuing Diversity

- 9.1 Throughout 2010/11, an Equalities Monitoring Form was issued to every complainant with the acknowledgement letter to ensure that our complaints procedures are open and accessible to everyone.
- 9.2 In 2010/11, only 9 forms were returned and it has therefore not been feasible to set specific objectives from the feedback received.

10. Compensation

- 10.1 No compensation was paid to complainants across EHW during 2010/11 under the complaints procedure.

11. Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

- 11.1 In 2010/11 the Local Government Ombudsman handled 194 enquiries and complaints about KCC overall and made decisions on 111 complaints against the Council. There were 47 complaints where the Ombudsman found no or insufficient evidence of fault by KCC, 24 complaints which the Ombudsman chose not to pursue investigations and 9 complaints which were outside of his jurisdiction.
- 11.2 In 2010/11 the Ombudsman agreed 29 local settlements with KCC. (A 'local settlement' is a complaint where, during the course of the investigation, KCC have taken or agreed to take some action that the Ombudsman considers to be a satisfactory response to the complainant.) None of these concerned highways matters.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 In 2010/11, EHW continued to adopt a robust and effective approach to the ongoing management of complaints. All complaints have been reviewed across the service areas and customer feedback has been used to improve our customer service delivery.
- 12.2 Several customer focused improvements have been implemented across EHW in 2010/11 and these are making a difference to the customer experience when they interact with Environment and Enterprise and KCC overall.

13. Recommendations

- 13.1 Members of the EHW POSC are asked to:
- Note the content of this report.

Contact detail

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Background documents: Annual letter from the Local Government Ombudsman

E&E complaint snippets from 2010/11 complaints

Seats are required round the play area for parents and disabled. (Received by one of the Country Parks)

The car parking fee is excessive. (Received by one of the Country Parks)

The café menu is being reduced almost on a weekly basis. Some weekends the queue to order food is half an hour. There is not enough outside seating. (Received by one of the Country Parks)

Not enough variety of food in the café, requested that we bring back toasted tea cakes and crumpets. (Received by one of the Country Parks)

My husband and I, both senior citizens are keen walkers and enjoy visiting the Country Parks in the area, mainly on Sundays. We recently purchased a yearly parking permit and were given a book of vouchers to use in the centres. We were therefore rather annoyed today to be told that we couldn't use the 10% discount on a Sunday. Surely this is the most popular day for walkers. It seems rather mean to be unable to obtain this discount especially as money, for many people, is 'tight', especially for senior citizens. (Received by one of the Country Parks)

Customer complained that she was unable to take her disabled vehicle into Sundridge and had to use the Tunbridge Wells site instead. She also said that the staff were not very helpful and they were rude. (Received by one of the HWRCs)

Customer went to the Swanley site on 19th April and was not helped when the site staff saw her struggling with her bags. The green waste container was also full and she wanted to know why the site was not like Dartford Heath. (Received by one of the HWRCs)

Mr Chandler hired a van to move some stuff and could not get into the HWRC because it was over height. He wanted to complain as this policy was not suitable for people who have hired vehicles to enable them to dispose of their waste. (Received by one of the HWRCs)

Pothole has been filled in within the last 3-4 days and it has not been done properly. It is very rough and untidy. It will be out within days so it is a waste of time and money. (Received by KHS)

The new Traffic lights at this location are causing a lot of traffic. Lights were installed because motorists were having problems getting out of Cripple Street but they are causing a lot of problem. (Received by KHS)

"Where are all the gritting lorries? I live in Springhead Road opposite Sainsbury's. I have not seen a gritting lorry since the snow began on Tuesday. As this road is a major trunk road into Gravesend, I would have expected regular gritting. (Received by KHS)

Once again I am contacting you to complain that our road has not been gritted once this year. We are in an extremely dangerous position now as our road is a solid ice pack and we are still experiencing sliding into cars at no speed what so ever. (Received by KHS)

Caller is not happy as whenever the grass is cut it is not tidied up it is just blown away. He said there is no footpath to his house just grass. In the winter when it is wet it becomes very muddy and it all gets walked into his house. (Received by KHS)

The temporary traffic lights are not working properly and the workmen are messing about and talking - not working and not sorting out the lights to flow traffic properly. (Received by KHS)

E&E compliment snippets from 2010/11 compliments

Being able to go off road and explore the park with a tramper is a priceless joy. (Received by one of the Country Parks)

Kent County Council's team have done an excellent job and made a really smart footpath. Now we see as many people walking down Forge Lane in one day as we used to see in a whole year. (Received by Countryside Access)

Explore Kent Magazine - I found this copy and I can't believe how interesting and helpful this magazine is. I will be looking out for it in the future. My family and I have just got into camping so it is especially helpful. (Received by Countryside Access)

I want to compliment the Hawkinge waste site staff, particularly a young member of staff who rushed to help me. It's really refreshing. (Received by one of the HWRCs)

I want to commend the Tovil waste site staff for being helpful and courteous. They are a credit to the borough. The staff even offered my husband to wash his hands after they became contaminated with pungent grass cuttings. (Mrs Jacobs)

The Tramper was great to be able to take my family on the bunny hunt and where I had to leave my family at the fairy steps, I was able to meet them on the Ancher route. (Received by one of the Country Parks)

Thank you very much for organising and facilitating a superb day at Shorne Woods today. We have all arrived back to school a little sun kissed, a little weary and with a few bites and most importantly with big grins on our faces! The activities were just fantastic.

I wanted to say thanks for doing such a good job in repairing the road. It is easy to complain but when a good job is done it's often not mentioned. (Received by KHS)

"I would just like to say a big thank you and congratulations to all the teams that have been working on the Thanet Way doing the re-surfacing, the way they kept the traffic moving was brilliant. (Received by KHS)

I want to compliment you on how well KHS staff kept the roads clear of snow during the bad weather. (Received by KHS)

I would like to thank the contractors for all the hard work filling the potholes along this road; they have done a really good job. Thank You. (Received by KHS)

I've been meaning to do this for ages.....I just wanted to thank all of the men and women who helped keep our roads gritted and salted during the winter months and who are now up to their eyes in pothole repairs. I know how hard your teams work, often with little thanks. (Received by KHS)

Please would you pass on my compliments to the Highways department. I rang to let them know that a street lamp wasn't working in Effingham Crescent and by 9.30 the next morning the light was replaced. ((Received by KHS)

I have lived on the estate for 30 years. Today I have seen 2 young men working on the road. All day they have worked almost non stop. Not only have they worked extremely hard and "got on with it", the quality of their work is excellent. (Received by KHS)