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To: Communities Cabinet Committee

Date: 14 November 2012

Subject: Customer & Communities Annual Complaints, Comments & Compliments Report 2011 - 2012

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides details of complaints, comments and compliments dealt with by the Customer & Communities Directorate between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The expectations of customers are increasing and they demand the same levels of service from KCC that they expect and receive from the private sector. The Customer Service Strategy is intended to enhance customer service delivery and raise levels of customer satisfaction.
- 1.2 Complaints, compliments and comments form a very valuable and important source of customer feedback and give us the opportunity to demonstrate we take their views seriously, listen to and learn from what they are telling us and are striving to continuously improve our customer service delivery whilst maintaining a focus on achieving 'value for money' in the delivery of our services.
- 1.3 This report provides information on complaints, comments and compliments received during 2011/12, outlines complaint trends, the way people choose to contact us and the directorate's overall performance on handling complaints.

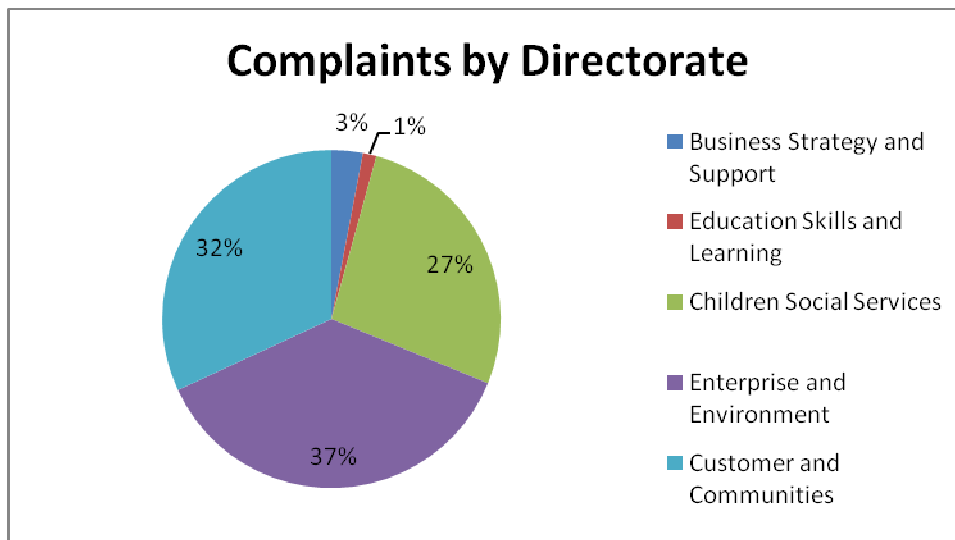
2. The number of complaints received

- 2.1 The KCC Complaints, Comments & Compliments policy defines a complaint as:

"any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of, or the delivery of services, the action or lack of action by the Council or its staff which affects an individual service user or group of users."

This is in line with the thinking from the Local Government Ombudsman and British Standards Institute.

- 2.2 The Customer & Communities Directorate received 1,083 complaints between April 2011 and March 2012. These are broken down in the table at Appendix 1. Direct comparisons are hampered by changes in units and movement between directorates of certain services, however there has been an overall increase in the number of complaints received during this year. The graph below breaks down the percentage of complaints received by the council by directorate.



The percentages are not surprising as both Customer & Communities and Enterprise & Environment Directorates provide a significant proportion of KCC's front facing service delivery. In Customer & Communities these include Libraries, Gateway, Kent.gov and the Contact Centre where the majority of KCC's customers make their first point of contact.

- 2.3 There has been a considerable increase in the number of complaints about library services against the previous year. This is not altogether surprising considered against the volume of transactions undertaken by a very large, front facing, universal service.
- 2.4 During 2011/12, Libraries received 676 complaints as a result of key changes in service delivery. This included concerns about stock availability as several libraries were refurbished and new ones were opened. For example following the opening of Ashford Gateway stock levels were low as Mosaic profiling of the area informed the choice of stock and type of books made available. On opening the choice proved extremely popular, the stock was depleted very quickly and to begin with fresh deliveries were unable to keep up, however, this has been rectified.
- 2.5 Other library complaints related to the introduction of the self-serve library machines offering customers the opportunity to return books more quickly and efficiently in larger libraries. Initially, there were issues with software and some customers were concerned the machines were impersonal. In response, libraries increased staff floor-walking which enabled improved support to customers. Despite initial concerns there has been an 83.6% take up of the service and numerous compliments have been received from customers.
- 2.6 Complaints concerning the Service Improvement Division related mostly to the standard and quality of service provision from contracted providers for both KDAAT and Supporting People. Feedback is always sent to the providers so they can make the necessary changes to service delivery. Supporting People include requirements about complaint handling as part of the tendering process when awarding contracts to provider organisations.
- 2.7 Complaints concerning the Communications & Engagement Division related primarily to the accuracy of website content and broken links.

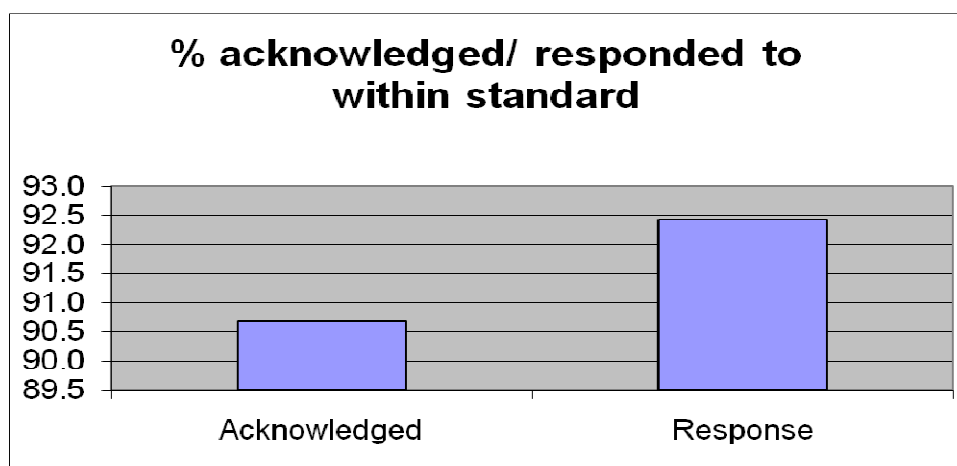
Improvements made due to feedback received

2.8 Feedback is vital to help us understand what our customers think and feel about our services. Over the course of the year the feedback we received has helped to improve our customers' experiences of our services and below are some examples of improvements made as a result of their feedback :

- Countryside Access received complaints about cafe facilities at country parks. Customer suggestions to improve visits to the cafe were fed back to park staff and discussed at team meetings. One comment highlighted problems with wheelchair access to wooden picnic tables - until then it had not been appreciated the tables could not be accessed by visitors with additional needs. As a result, in the summer months lighter tables and chairs are used and practice has changed to ensure there are at least two suitable tables and chairs put out every day. If they are in use park staff provide extra tables. In addition, an extensive programme has been put in place in the Country Parks to train all café staff in the best way to respond to customer needs.
- In January 2012 the Registration service moved into Libraries. Customers were unhappy at the lack of suitable facilities available during the transition period and work has been carried out to address these issues. The majority of complaints concerned facilities in Maidstone, which have been resolved by the move to the new Kent Library and History Centre where there is a dedicated pod for registration services.

3. Complaint handling performance

3.1 The KCC standard is to acknowledge complaints within 3 days and to provide a response within 20 days. During 2011/12, 90.7% of complaints were acknowledged within the standard and 92.4% were responded to within the standard.

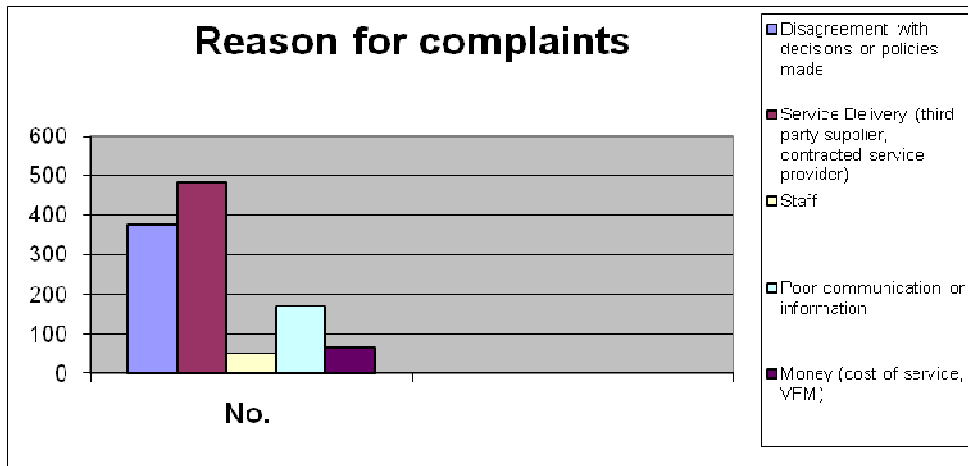


4. How complaints were received

4.1 The largest number of complaints were received via comment cards (521), followed by email (249) and letter (173), the remainder of complaints (140) were received by a variety of methods including email, phone and face-to-face.

5. Reasons for complaints, outcomes and remedies

5.1 For recording purposes, complaints are currently broken down into five categories, disagreement with decisions or policies; service delivery; staff; poor communication or information; money – cost of service or value for money. The great majority of complaints fell into the first two categories with relatively few complaints about either staff or money matters.



5.2 Outcomes are recorded as either “Upheld”, “Partially upheld” or “Not Upheld. Overall 43.8% of complaints were not upheld; 41.2% were partially upheld and 15% were upheld. The remedies applied are recorded in the following categories: formal apology; explanation; financial settlement; providing the service desired by the complainant and changing procedures to prevent future difficulties of a similar kind. In this year, 11% resulted in a formal apology; 70% resulted in an explanation being provided; 2% resulted in a financial settlement; 11% resulted in the desired service being provided and 6% resulted in changed procedures.

5.3 Four complaints were escalated to Corporate Director level.

6. Compliments and comments

6.1 In addition to the complaints, the Directorate received 2,497 compliments and benefited from 582 comments about services that led to further insight into what people are looking for and how they view the services they receive.



6.2 The overwhelming majority of compliments were received by letter, followed by comment cards. A significant number of compliments were about the helpfulness, professionalism and polite manner of our frontline staff. The Library Service received compliments about the RFID machines and activities held in the library. Other compliments concerned the new spaces at Gravesend and Ashford, events and the general level of service given.

- 6.3 The Countryside Access Service received 236 compliments and examples include:
- The walk was just fabulous and I could not have asked for a more lovely day, the paths could not have been more well sign posted and attended to and for Kent County Council a whole 10/10 for the work done to make the walk lovely for everyone. (Saxon Shore/Stour Valley walk).
 - Many thanks for the excellent website and clear instructions, particularly for the circular walks. All of the walks have been excellent and the persons responsible for maintaining, mapping and describing the walks should be commended.
- 6.4 Sport, Leisure & Olympics received 44 compliments which included praise for taking the time to reply to information requests; sending out good and useful information, making school visits with sport involvement fun for young people with disabilities; website and social media input.
- 6.5 Communications & Engagement received 53 compliments particularly focused on Community Engagement Managers who helped community groups obtain grants and for their helpfulness at community meetings. The Events team also received feedback regarding their work with regards to the Kent County Show and Open Golf events.
- 6.6 Service Improvement received compliments thanking KDAAT (7) and Supporting People (25) for their support with service provision from both customers and partner organisations.
- 6.7 The Registration Service recorded 115 compliments relating to the professional way in which ceremonies and services are delivered.
- 6.8 Country Parks received 442 compliments about their Easter activities (Easter Bunny Hunt), the speed of response to queries, maintenance of pathways, Explore Kent (website), cafe staff and the quality of food. Examples include:
- What a gem! Here on holiday with our dog and found this lovely Country Park with the added bonus of a café that caters for all of us. Delicious snacks and reasonable prices. Thank you Kent Country Parks!
 - People are very quick to criticise public resources these days, but having visited the country parks at Shorne and Brockhill Park in the last couple of weeks can I just say what great places they are and how much we have enjoyed the visits.

7. Local Government Ombudsman complaints

- 7.1 There were no complaints about the Directorate's services escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman in 2011/12

8. Developments in KCC complaints, comments & compliments management (customer feedback)

- 8.1 KCC is committed to operating an effective complaints and customer feedback system that demonstrates to the public we are:
- putting our customers first;
 - listening to what residents have to say;
 - open, honest and transparent;
 - responsive and fair.
- 8.2 Our current arrangements for customers who want to complain can be confusing. There is a range of different addresses and telephone numbers and feedback from the public on our existing process is it is not easy to find their way around the system. By streamlining processes and improving our responses as a whole Council we will

improve customer satisfaction and reduce costs by minimising the need for repeat or escalated complaints and the costs associated with failure to deal effectively with them at the earliest stage.

- 8.3 Customer & Communities is leading on the introduction of a centralised complaint handling process for KCC. The purpose of this is to:
- make access easier for customers who wish to complain through the introduction of a single contact point
 - achieve consistency across the Council in terms of timescales, definition and the quality of our responses
 - gain a corporate view of what people are thinking about our services at any particular time and enable us to be more responsive
 - ensure the lessons learnt inform improved practice, processes and behaviours and are spread across the whole Council
 - provide a 24/7 service with greater resilience and flexibility

We are looking at how to make the KCC customer feedback handling approach more responsive to customer needs. This will include:

- One contact telephone number, address and e-form
 - One leaflet for the council informing the public how to contact us regarding their feedback
 - One initial complaints response team based in the Contact Centre; this team will:
 - Log complaints arriving via the three central points (mail, web and phone)
 - Acknowledge receipt of complaints meeting the 3-day requirement
 - Answer 'simple' enquiries at first point of contact
 - Divert complex complaints to 'specialist' directorate leads to answer within 20 days (with exception of statutory children's complaints which require an earlier response)
- 8.4 Work over the next 6 months (September – March 12/13) will focus on making a corporate customer feedback system a reality. This system will enable all staff to log customer feedback on one system; the data will then be available for directorates to pull off reports to assess performance, reducing the need for manual reporting which currently takes place. This means we will be able to understand how we are performing in real time as opposed to three months behind. For the first time we will have the ability to have an organisation overview which can be used to understand the customer experience of our services.
- 8.5 The model is based on using Contact Point (the contact centre) and establishing a centralised complaints process quality assured by the Customer Relationship Team. At the front end there will be a team of Contact Point advisers trained to capture consistent information, however received, from all complainants on the single system. The team will acknowledge the complaint immediately on receipt, ensuring the corporate requirement to acknowledge a complaint within three days is met; that the complainant is aware that we have received their complaint and what are the next steps for complaint resolution.
- 8.6 As far as possible the process will be automated for the customer so they can track the progress of their complaint. At this level it will be possible to deal with basic problem solving and simple resolution and undertake progress chasing where necessary. The team will have their own performance measures to ensure consistent standards are

applied. The resources of the Contact Centre will add value through increased resilience and flexibility to deal with peaks and troughs of demand as well as offering 24/7 availability.

8.7 This year work has been focused on understanding the customer journey and capturing the experience of customers with the intention of improving services and reducing complaints. By improving reporting we can help the authority to take action earlier and put in changes that can make a difference.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The new system is intended to come into operation in the new financial year. It is expected it will make it simpler for customers to contact us and lead to improvements in our overall acknowledgement and response rates. It will also assist reporting and mean that current information can be pulled from the system in a much more timely and responsive manner.

10. Recommendation

10.1 Members of the Communities Cabinet Committee are asked to:

- **NOTE** the content of this report.

Background Documents

N/A

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Appendix 1

CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES

Service	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Arts Development	3	0	0
Community Engagement Managers	13	7	-
Community Learning & Skills *	118	151	117
Community Safety	8	2	8
Emergency Planning	0	0	0
KDAAT	11	4	0
Contact Centre & Gateways	38	61	66
Communication & Media Centre	12	34	4
Kent Scientific Services	31	22	10
Key Training	0	-	-
Libraries & Archives	542	116	676
Registration (& Coroners)	11	17	46
Sport, Leisure & Olympics	-	5	2
SIP *	2	4	4
Supporting People	19	32	17
Trading Standards	22	11	11
Turner Contemporary	7	-	-
Youth Offending Service	2	8	3
Youth Service	87	43	16
Country Parks	109	102	96
Countryside Access	9	8	9
TOTAL	1,044	627	1083

* New unit for Kent Adult Education and Key Training

** Transferred from Chief Executives Dept 2008/09