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To: Governance and Audit Committee

Date: 2nd October 2015

Subject: KCC Annual Customer Feedback Report 2014/15

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides a summary of the compliments, comments and complaints recorded by the Council. The report includes Local Ombudsman Complaints, Members Complaints and reference to recent and future improvements in the administration of customer feedback.

Recommendation: Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is the Council's sixth annual report on compliments, comments and complaints. This report sets out:
- A summary of the compliments, comments and complaints received by the Council for the year April 1st 2014 to March 31st 2015
 - The Local Government Ombudsman Complaints Statistics for the year April 1st 2014 to March 31st 2015
 - Member Complaints for the year April 1st 2014 to March 31st 2015
 - The findings of the Kent County Council Audit of Customer Feedback and the actions to be taken.
- 1.2 During 2013, the Council launched 'Facing the Challenge' which sets the direction for KCC to become a Commissioning Authority, placing customers at the heart of everything we do. Building on the foundation of the existing Customer Service Strategy (2012), a new Customer Service Policy has been designed to support KCC and Commissioners to deliver on the Council's commitment to customers. This is due to be launched to both staff and public in later this year.

- 1.3 Customer feedback, whether it is a compliment, comment or complaint, provides invaluable insight to the experience of customers, service users and all who interact with the Council. Good quality insight builds intelligence and understanding of where the Council is meeting expectation and doing well and what needs to be done to improve service outcomes for all customers.
- 1.4 Managing the collation and analysis of customer feedback is challenging for an organisation operating on the scale of KCC. This activity becomes increasingly critical as more services are devolved and delivered through an extended and more complex supply chain.
- 1.5 KCC's new Customer Service Policy is linked to the Commissioning Framework and requires internal and external suppliers to comply with our procedures; provide data in a timely and appropriate format, evidence that that intended performance outcomes have been achieved. This will ensure that Members are able to discharge their responsibilities to Kent residents.
- 1.6 KCC Complaints Policy will be refreshed late 2015 to reflect a changing organisation. This Policy sets the common standard required for managing complaints to ensure that customers are assured through this process. Complainants will receive an acknowledgement to their complaint within 3 working days and a response within 20 working days, with the exception of Children Social Services and Adult Social Services statutory complaints.

2. MONITORING

- 2.1 The development of systems and mechanisms for recording all compliments, comments and complaints continues to be work in progress and opportunities to ensure the capture of all information from across KCC is ongoing. This report reflects current practice and the improvements that have been achieved. Officers currently involved in the local administration and reporting of customer feedback for their business areas are working very effectively. A best practice forum will be established to support further improvement and effective and more uniformed recording across KCC during 2015/16.
- 2.2 Throughout the year complaints monitoring has been reported in the Council's Quarterly Performance Report, highlighting any issues that have arisen during the previous three months.
- 2.3 Data for this report is currently gathered manually, and is reliant on a range of inputs from local services that reflect a variety of collation and reporting methods. The accuracy of the data in this report relies on the due care and attention of all staff to capture and submit feedback received; therefore whilst this report cannot be seen as definitive, it provides an overview of the trends in customer feedback activity.
- 2.4 Over the past two and a half years, the council has been dealing with a complaint from school governors. In this case, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) has refused to investigate the complaint and it has left the complainants with no further route for their complaint unless they sought to

issue legal proceedings. The complainants were particularly concerned about this given that they objected to the findings of the council at complaint investigation stage.

The complainants have established that there is a gap in relation to complaints of this type brought by governors. The council has now written to the LGO and government who are reviewing the role of the ombudsman generally, which provides an opportunity for change.

The council has also worked with the complainant to review their experience and this feedback will be reflected in changes to the complaints policy that will be forthcoming and is reflected in this paper. The work has included proposed changes to complaints procedures for governors, changes to decision-making processes and records and a procedure and process around exercise of statutory powers. These outputs are now with the Head of Law, Litigation and Social Welfare for implementation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Young People's Services.

3. PROFILE OF COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS TO KCC

- 3.1 A **compliment** is an expression of thanks or congratulations or any other positive remark. (Internal compliments are excluded from this process).
- 3.2 Compliments collected by services directly using traditional methods (email, letters, compliment cards etc.) across the council **decreased by 48%** with **2,358** recorded compliments from April 2014 to March 2015 compared to the previous year when 4,527 compliments were recorded. Compliments are equally important to record and have provided a valuable source of learning and can act as an indicator of best practice or highlight areas where we are getting things right across the Council. We are currently updating our recording procedure with clear guidelines to ensure all Compliments are captured.
- 3.3 A **comment** is a general statement about policies, practices or a service as a whole, which have an impact on everyone and not just one individual. A comment can be positive or negative in nature. Comments may question policies and practices, make suggestions for new services or for improving existing services.
- 3.4 This year we received **1,561** comments collected by services directly using traditional methods (email, letters, compliment cards etc.) compared with 2,250 last year. This is a **decrease of 31%** on the previous year. The council actively encourages customers to give opinions about services and we are exploring how best to present information on Kent.gov about actions taken in response to comments received from the public.

GovMetric feedback for 2014/15

- 3.5 Implemented during 2012, this is a fully automated system that provides KCC with a consistent opportunity to feedback across three primary service channels - Kent.gov, Contact Point and nine Gateway/Library face-to-face centres. This may account for the decrease in traditional feedback submissions as state above.
- 3.6 The table below provides a breakdown of the GovMetric feedback recorded across each channel by quality rating and volume. During 2014/15, KCC received 139,140 pieces of individual customer feedback with 28.5% recorded for Contact Point; 42.0% for Gateway/Library; and 29.4% for Kent.gov.

2014/15	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Rating Total	Overall Total
Telephone						
Good	5109	6310	6020	11197	28636	39713
Average	1669	2258	1816	3221	8964	
Poor	413	527	465	708	2113	
F2F						
Good	9773	13765	10137	9706	43381	58467
Average	1413	2069	1380	3221	8083	
Poor	2088	2398	1809	708	7003	
Web						
Good	3667	3097	4130	4601	15495	40960
Average	922	862	1025	1036	3845	
Poor	6916	5101	5137	4466	21620	

- 3.7 During 2014/15, customer satisfaction (when combining good and average ratings) with Kent County Council as recorded by Contact Point was at **94.7%**, with only 5.3% of comments rating their experience with KCC as poor.

88.0% had a positive experience of Gateway/Library transactions, with 12.0% recording a poor experience.

47.2% satisfaction with Kent.Gov. and 52.8% indicating a poor experience and recommending improvements. There is a gap in the customer expectation and user experience when compared to commercial websites such as online banking and shopping. KCC is currently updating and improving Kent.gov usability and transactions under KCC's transformation agenda.

- 3.8 In 2014/15, the questions to the telephone survey were amended to gauge customer satisfaction with the Advisor, satisfaction levels reached **99.4%**, with only 0.6% of comments rating the service received from their advisor as poor.

Contact Point Advisor Satisfaction	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Rating Total	Overall Total
Good	6480	7980	7329	13335	35124	36176
Average	147	228	167	290	832	
Poor	47	45	48	80	220	

- 3.9 Where the customer provides an explicit insight with a poor rating, this information is used and converted into a formal complaint or enquiry to ensure that appropriate responses and actions are taken, and monitored under the standard complaint response times and processes.

4. NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS TO KCC

- 4.1 A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not and however made, about the standard or the delivery of a service, the actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff which affects an individual service user or group of users. This is consistent with the definitions used by other local authorities.
- 4.2 The emphasis in the complaints procedure is to ensure that staff are equipped and empowered to act decisively to resolve complaints at a local level. The aim is that we work harder to resolve issues at the first point of contact. By recording accurately where things went wrong, we can use that information to improve service delivery and ensure that customers receive consistently good service regardless of how they choose to access them.
- 4.3 The 'Poor' GovMetric feedback is not counted towards the overall total for formal complaints. Customers are advised of the complaints procedure if they wish to make a formal complaint. However GovMetric feedback gives an immediate opportunities to problem solve.

- 4.4 The below table compares the number of complaints received in 2014/15 with those received in 2013/14 by service.

Service	2013/2014	2014/2015
Highways and Transportation	1069	1196
Adult Social Services	387	537
Finance and Procurement	54	373
Specialist Children's Services	327	228
Libraries, Registrations and Archives	205	199
Waste Management	211	118
Adult Education	103	76
Education Services	24	67
Country parks	23	49
Trading Standards	5	20
Schools Personnel Service	13	20
Property and Infrastructure	9	13
Community Safety	30	9
KSAS	30	9
Gateways and Contact Point	54	9
Kent Scientific Services	14	8
Grads Kent	1	4
Kent Sport	6	3
Communications and Engagement	3	3
Public Right of Way	7	1
Kent Drugs and Alcohol Team	3	1
Public Health	1	1
Information Technology	2	0
Legal	5	0
Other	1	0
Total Complaints	2,587	2,944

- 4.4 In 2014/15 **2,944** complaints were recorded compared with 2,587 for 2013/14, this equates to an **increase of 14%** in complaints recorded.
- 4.5 Appendix A gives an overview of the types of complaints received by the six services who have received the highest volumes of complaints during 2014/15. It should be noted that these services also have the highest number of customers.

5. REASONS FOR COMPLAINTS

5.1 Irrespective of service or business type, the main grounds for complaints during 2014/15 tend to fall under one of the following themes (not in order of prevalence):

- Poor communications
- Quality of service
- Delivery of service
- Availability of KCC services
- Changes to service delivery due to cost saving measures
- Policy decisions
- Staff behaviour
- Timeliness

6. COMPLIANCE WITH STANDARDS

6.1 **KCC** is committed to acknowledge any complaints received within 3 working days and to provide the customer with a response within 20 working days. As a whole KCC **acknowledged 91%** and **responded to 86%** of complaints within corporate timescales. This compares to last year's responses which are notably similar at 96% and 83% respectively.

6.2 Adult Social Services

There is only one statutory timescale for adult social care complaints and this is the acknowledgement of the complaint, which must be provided to the complainant within three working days of receipt. 86% of these complaints were acknowledged within the statutory timescale of three working days. 67% of complaints were responded to within a complaint plan timeframe of 20 working days. The average response time for statutory complaints within a 20 working day timeframe is 19 working days

Complex cases that require either an off-line/external investigation or a joint response with health colleagues are identified at the beginning of the complaint and a longer timeframe is negotiated. The period for responding to the complaint is agreed with the complainant on a case by case basis depending on the nature and complexity of the complaint and the desired outcome. This can be anything from 5 to 65 days

Within Adult Social Care there is no statutory response timeframe to be measured against as the legislation allows for the response timescales to be agreed with the complainant.

6.3 Children's Social Services

The Local Authority must consider and try to resolve Stage One complaints within 10 working days of the start date for Children's Social Services

complaints. This can be extended by a further 10 working days where the complaint is considered to be complex.

Timescales have been extended for particularly difficult or complex cases, for example when more than one agency or service is involved or when cases are involved in other processes such as court proceedings. Performance against timescales has continued to improve. In 2014/15, 79% of statutory complaints were completed within 20 working days, compared with 64% in 2012/13 and 75% in 2013/14.

The Local Authority should consider Stage Two complaints within 25 working days of the start date (the date upon which a written record of the complaints to be investigated has been agreed) but this can be extended to 65 working days where this is not possible.

7. CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS

7.1 Information on 'How to complain' is available on our website and on our Complaints, Comments and Compliments leaflets. The public can now provide KCC with feedback in a number of ways.

7.2 The breakdown below indicates by percentage which channel customers have chosen to communicate feedback (Compliments, comments & complaints excluding GovMetric) during 2014/15.

Comment cards count for 62% of all feedback received for libraries in this year, whereas 50% of health and social care customers opted to write letters.

The breakdown differs on previous years as this relates to the total of feedback received rather than focusing on complaints. This provides insight in to how customers currently prefer to communicate according to the type of feedback they are leaving. For example customers in general prefer to call with complaints but email compliments.

- 33% Email
- 27% Phone
- 21% Letter
- 12% Comment Card
- 5% Online
- 1% Face to face
- 1% Other

7.3 It is essential to ensure that all channels remain open and effective so that customers can choose how they contact us. It should be noted, however, that it can be more difficult for staff to record comments, compliments and complaints when they are given face-to-face, although it may be more possible to resolve the situation there and then with the complainant.

8. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS REVIEW 2014/15

8.1 Overview of Ombudsman

- 8.1.1 In cases where a customer is unhappy with the responses received about their complaint from the Council they can exercise their right to involve the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will investigate cases where a customer has exhausted the Council's own complaints policy and feel that their case has not been appropriately heard or resolved.
- 8.1.2 The Ombudsman can look at complaints about things that have gone wrong that has caused problems for the Customer, either,
- in the way in which a service has been delivered
 - when a service has not been delivered at all, or
 - in the way a decision has been made.
- 8.1.3 Each year, in June/July, the Local Government Ombudsman issues an annual review to each local authority. In her letter and the summary of statistics to accompany this, she sets out the number of complaints about that authority that her office has dealt with.
- 8.1.4 The annual review statistics are publically available, allowing councils to compare their performance on complaints against their peers; copies of the Annual Review letter as well as any published Ombudsman are issued to the Leader of the Council and Head of Paid Service/Chief Executive to encourage more democratic scrutiny of local complaint handling and local accountability of public services.

8.2 Local Ombudsman classification and reporting

- 8.2.1 The Local Government Ombudsman has introduced two classifications of query made to the council. The first is an 'enquiry' which they normally ask the Council to respond to within 5 days. This classification includes a question relating to whether a complainant has exhausted the Council's own complaints policy.
- 8.2.2 The rationale is that an early clarification will potentially reduce and number and time spent handling 'premature complaints' – when the complainant has not exhausted the Council's procedure or where fault is not likely to be found.
- 8.2.3 The second classification is a 'complaint' in which the Ombudsman has chosen to fully investigate the claim and will give the council 28 Calendar days or 20 working days to respond to its questions.
- 8.2.4 Decision statements made in 2014/15 will be published - website <http://www.lgo.org.uk/publications/annual-reviews/> - three months after the date of the final decision. The information published will not name the complainant or any individual involved with the complaint. Cases in which the

complainant, despite redaction of names, can be easily identified are not published.

8.2.5 This year's letter was accompanied by a report written by the Local Government Ombudsman reviewing how complaints are handled by Local Authorities. It was noted that 'More than 50% of councils publish data about their complaints for public consumption above the statutory requirement to report to cabinet annually. However, there were still 41% of councils that did not, and we would encourage more open access to information on how complaints are being managed so the public can make better informed decisions about public services.'

8.2.6 The Ombudsman, alongside the Local Government Association has created a workbook and e-learning package, as well as establishing a Councillors Forum. The forum aims to help Local Government Ombudsman to understand the needs of councillors and to help them to become champions for learning from complaints.

8.3 KCC Performance – Ombudsman complaints

8.3.1 It should be noted that there will be discrepancies between the volume recorded by the Local Government Ombudsman and the authority. This is due to the LGO recording complaints that it does not progress to Kent County Council, as it is able to resolve the issue at first point of contact, either through referral or it is identified as out of jurisdiction.

8.3.2 During 2014/15 KCC received a total of 205 complaints and enquiries, which includes 75 in which the customer was directed back to the Council to seek initial resolution. This is a slight increase on 2013/14, when Council received 194 complaints and enquiries, including 44 in which the customer was directed back to the Council to seek initial resolution.

For our population size the volume of complaints is not concerning. We need to focus on those complaints that are upheld to ensure that lessons are learned.

The authority did not receive any Maladministration Reports in this year, which is seen as a positive for the authority.

8.3.3 The Ombudsman's report noted that the national average that the Ombudsman up held is 46% of complaints they investigated, Kent County Council's average is 48.5%.

8.3.4 The average number of working days taken KCC to respond to a 'Complaint' was 9 days a reduction on last year's performance of 12 days.

8.3.5 The average number of working days to respond to a request for further information is 18, which is lower than last year's 21 working days. Conversely, the average number of calendar days taken to respond to an 'Enquiry' is within target at just 5 days. This difference is due to the fact that the

Ombudsman's office requires far less information when the Complaint is at their Enquiry stage.

8.3.6 The largest proportion of complaints received by the Ombudsman, 96 of the total 205 (47%) were under the category of Education & Children's Services. 29 related to Education & Home to School Transport appeals, the authority statistically has one of the largest volumes of appeals relating to schools admissions, however only 6 of these complaints were upheld in 2014/15.

Local authority report – Kent County Council

For further information on interpretation of statistics click on this link to go to <http://www.lgo.org.uk/publications/annual-report/note-interpretation-statistics/>

Complaints and enquiries received

Year	Adult care services	Benefits and tax	Corporate and other services	Education and children's services	Environmental services and public protection and regulation	Highways and transport	Housing	Planning and development	Total
2013/14	47	1	6	102	10	23	1	4	194
2014/15	60	0	8	96	14	25	1	1	205

Decisions made

Local authority	<u>Detailed Investigation Carried out</u>		Advice given	Closed after initial Enquiries	incomplete/Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld					
2013/14	36	41	1	57	12	44	191
2014/15	32	34	3	55	6	75	205

9. COMPENSATION

9.1 In 2014/15, £119,503 was paid in compensation, settlements, changes to the amount we charge and waived charges as a result of complaints to the organisation this includes;

- £58,984 adults which has been paid or waived as part of local resolution
- £33,819 children's which has been paid or waived as part of local resolution

- £2,765 has been paid out by other services including Libraries, Community Skills & Learning and Property & Infrastructure.
- £23,935 additional payments following Local Government Ombudsman Decisions found against KCC.

It is important to note that monies paid out during the 2014/15 financial year may relate to complaints recorded in previous years. This is due to the time that elapses between the date the complaint was lodged and achieving resolution.

9.2 This is an increase of £26,082 on 2013/14 when £93,421 was paid out.

10. LEARNING THE LESSONS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

10.1 Complaints are a valuable resource helping us to understand where improvements could be made to the customer experience. These improvements can be changes to procedures or processes, improvements in communications or improvements to the quality of service. The below outlines examples of where improvements have been made as a result of a complaint being received;

10.2 Improving communications

Following feedback received by our customers, Kent County Council revisited the wording of the Speed Awareness notice letter that enabled customers to sign up for a Driver Diversionary Course. The letter caused confusion and resulted in customers calling the Contact Centre for further clarification.

As a result of amending the letter to make it clearer for customers the contact centre has received an 86% reduction in the number of calls about the letter.

10.3 Improvements to service experience

Kent County Council ran a number of workshops to review the way childcare placements booked training services. We undertook customer journey mapping to document and understand the then current process and to inform how best to ensure we add value to the customer experience. As a result of feedback from customers who attended, more efficient and customer focused booking process was designed and implemented.

11. LEVELS OF COMPLAINTS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE (MEMBER COMPLAINTS)

Complaints recorded in 2014/15

- 11.1 During 2014/15 the Monitoring Officer has responded to 22 complaints of alleged misconduct of the breach of the Elected Member Code of Conduct. All of the complaints were dismissed.

Number of Complaints		Outcome
01/04/13 – 31/3/14	01/04/14 – 31/03/15	
13	22	No Action Dismissed by the Monitoring Officer

12. Kent County Council Audit of Customer Feedback

- 12.1 Kent County Council Internal Audit department carried out an audit 'to provide assurance that all customer feedback is recorded, reported and responded to appropriately, with lessons learnt used to improve services through demonstrable outcome.
- 12.2 The report 5 areas recommended for improvement, 1 high risk, 3 medium risks and 1 low risk.
- 12.3 An action plan has been drawn up to address the risks identified. This includes;
- Establishing a Customer Feedback Staff Forum who will share lessons learned from customer feedback, including Local Government Ombudsman complaints and use them to inform service improvements.
 - Creation of a 'Voice of the Customer' report which will be compiled and presented more regularly to management and members to highlight feedback more regularly.
 - Review the format of the annual feedback report, focusing more on lessons learnt and the nature of the feedback received. We will also explore alternative forums for the annual report before it reaches the Governance & Audit committee to maximise learning from the feedback received.
 - Review the Customer Feedback policy to reflect the organisation's ambition to become a commissioning authority. This will be in line with the

recent advice given by Local Government Ombudsman, National Audit Office and NHS England.

- Explore the potential for a common system to be deployed to support the management and reporting of Compliments, Comments and Complaints.
- Review how customer feedback information is reported internally to both management and members.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 The Governance & Audit Committee is asked to note the contents of this report for assurance.

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Useful information:

It is a statutory requirement under the following items of legislation for local authorities to have in place a complaints and representations procedure:

- Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006
- The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations were published in February 2009 and came into force with effect from 1 April 2009. This procedure introduced a single approach to dealing with complaints for both the National Health Service and Adult Social Care.
- NHS & Community Care Act 1990 (section 50)
- Health & Social Care Act 2000
- Local Government Act 2000

Appendix A - Complaints Summary by Service 2014/15

The following table looks at type of complaints received by the services who received the highest volume of complaints in 2014/15. It should be noted that these services

Transportation and Highways	1196	<p>Highways saw an increase in the number of complaints this due adverse weather experience at the beginning of the year that resulted in higher volume of calls and complaints relating to drainage.</p> <p>In addition, a number of high profile policy changes including the 'Safe and Sensible Street Lighting' scheme and Kent Freedom Pass attracted a large volume of feedback from customers.</p>
Adult Social Services	538	<p>Complaints to Adult Social Services have increased over the last year. Customer feedback focused on disputed decisions, funding for care and the way in which the organisation communicated with customers and their relatives.</p>
Finance and Procurement	373	<p>Finance and Procurement saw a significant increase in complaints this year. This is following a change in what is defined as a complaint within the service, the complaints received are largely relating to decisions relating to claims made following pothole damage to customers' cars.</p>
Children Social Services	228	<p>The majority of complaints received this year were relating to children in care. Customers' complaints were largely about decisions made or KCC Policy.</p>
Libraries, Registration and Archives	199	<p>Complaints this year were largely due to customer behaviour in libraries. A number of other issues raised throughout the year included heating not functioning in some locations in the winter and printers not working.</p>
Waste Management	118	<p>Waste Management complaints largely related to decisions made and disagreements with KCC policies.</p>