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**To:** Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee

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**Subject:** Customer Service Policy

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** This paper updates Policy and Resources Committee on the operation of the Customer Service Policy which was agreed by the Committee in September 2015.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 On 10 September 2015 the Policy and Resources Committee formally agreed to adopt a new Customer Service Policy and its principles within KCC including the recommendations arising from the public consultation which had been conducted.
- 1.2 The Committee agreed that a further report on the operation of the policy should be reviewed by the Committee in September 2016.
- 1.3 The Customer Service Policy outlines KCC's commitment to customers and is described in three core principles which should be applied when delivering services to customers.
- 1.4 Everyone employed by KCC has a role to play in the delivery of these principles and it is important that all staff in the council are clear on their specific responsibilities relating to each of the principles as set out below:
  - **Principle 1: Delivering Quality** KCC values and owns the customer relationship regardless of how services are delivered
  - **Principle 2: Customer Focused Services** KCC will ensure that customers can access services in a range of ways, ensuring that value for money and flexibility are prioritised across all services
  - **Principle 3: Intelligent Commissioning** KCC will strive to improve services continuously through engaging and learning from our customers.
- 1.5 The policy also stipulates that commissioners must ensure that this policy and its principles are adopted throughout the supply chain. The

Customer Service Policy works with and supports the Commissioning Framework, allowing KCC to hold all service providers to account for ensuring our customers have a good customer experience.

- 1.6 This paper reports on the operation of the Policy against each of the three Principles.

## **2 Principle One: Delivering Quality**

KCC values and owns the customer relationship regardless of how services are delivered.

- 2.1 Progress has been made over the last year to improve how the Council captures and learns from the feedback our customers give us. This year the focus has been on how to use feedback to learn collectively across the whole organisation.
- 2.2 A Customer Feedback Forum has been set up and meets bi-monthly to discuss best practice and share learning from complaints and compliments. This forum has representation from those key services across each of the directorates that receive the most customer feedback annually. It has also been shaping the new format of the annual complaints report that is due to be presented to Governance and Audit in October 2016.
- 2.3 Over the last year work has been done on capturing complaint performance more widely across the organisation. This may account for some of the increase in volumes of complaints received, and this is expected to continue into the 2016/17 figures. The focus for complaint handlers is on achieving positive outcomes for our customers and reducing the number of upheld complaints received by the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 2.4 Early adopters of the policy in the Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate have seen a reduction in the number of complaints received. Their customer service programme has encouraged staff to have positive conversations with their customers, even when it might not be possible to say yes to their requests. To support this, bespoke customer feedback training has been designed and delivered to staff members of Waste Management and Highways. This training has explored understanding our customers, how to carry out an investigation and how to respond to customers particularly through letter/email correspondence. Customer Feedback Training has now also been requested by Special Educational Needs (SEN) Department.
- 2.5 Links have also been made with Procurement to explore the role customer feedback has to play in contracts that are awarded to suppliers who have contact with our customers. This is to add clarity for customers in how and who to complain to when services are not directly provided by the council.

- 2.6 The Organisational Development team is currently revisiting customer service training including the customer feedback element, to bring the training up to date so it can be rolled out and be made available to all staff.
- 2.7 The council is currently working towards procuring a corporate system to enable the capture of feedback including complaints, freedom of information requests and comments. By implementing a common, centralised way of handling complaints, KCC will ensure that there is a common standard and that it is adhered to across the organisation and by our commissioned services, ensuring our customers receive a response to their enquiry in a timely manner and that there is a robust mechanism which captures how that conclusion was reached. It is anticipated that a system will be in place and capturing feedback across the whole organisation by April 2017.

### **3 Principle 2: Customer Focused Services**

KCC will ensure that customers can access its services in a range of ways, ensuring that value for money and flexibility are prioritised across all services

#### **3.1 Digital Transformation**

The programme of transformational digital activity now underway with our strategic partner Agilisys will create a joined up approach to online council services. It will improve customer experience through the redesign and digitisation of KCC's services across the County, and will provide a single point of access for all KCC contact, interaction and some service delivery.

- 3.2 This will help us be more efficient in the management of customer contact, providing better insight, enabling a more consistent customer journey, and improved information management. By April 2017 a suite of tools will be installed and used by the Council.

#### **3.3 Digital tools**

As part of the partnership contract, Agilisys offer the following core tools:

- 3.3.1 **Engage**: An analytics and insight tool that captures data and insight from every online journey. It tracks which pages people visit, how long they take, where they click on the page and when they leave the site. It also uses analytics from previous visits to begin predicting how to make customer journeys easier. Tools include signposts that pop up and divert customers quickly to relevant content, and webchat, where an advisor can help a customer online rather than on the phone.
- 3.3.2 **Netcall**: An automatic voice recognition system. When a customer calls KCC's phone number they can choose to say the name of the person they are calling, and Netcall will look up the name on KNet and connect

them straight away. This system went live on 10 August and initial assessment show that it is working well.

3.3.3 **Agilisys Digital My Account**: Customers can create an account with KCC, which gives them one single access point to all KCC services and transactions.

3.3.4 **Knowledge Base**: An enhanced information and search facility that offers better and more accurate search functionality. It learns from the words people use when they are searching, and the search organically starts to predict what people might be searching for. It also offers a feedback option if the information appears to be wrong.

3.3.5 These will all help us be more efficient in the management of customer contact; providing better insight, enabling a more consistent customer journey, and improved information management. By April 2017 all these tools will be installed and used by the Customer Service Operations and Digital Services teams.

3.4 The contract also includes two service-specific digital tools:

3.4.1 **Love Clean Streets**: Services in Growth Environment and Transport (GET) are joining together to address customer needs for fault reporting in Flooding, Public Rights of Way and Highways. Driven by the GET Customer Service outcomes, the directorate is working to provide better and more consistent access to reporting services through this user-friendly platform, as well as helping streamline back office processes at the same time. LCS is a business product name only and will not feature in any customer facing communications. It will be clear that the tool is not for reporting street cleansing issues which remain a District responsibility.

3.4.2 **Agilisys Care (Quickheart)**: An online tool that allows customers to carry out a self-assessment of care needs they may have. As Social Care embark on their new transformation programme we are exploring how we might offer customers access to information, advice and support online, and the impact that can have on KCC front line services.

3.5 **Working with services**

The new Kent Communications structure includes staff in service partnership & Intelligent Client roles. These are key roles working with service areas to ensure that customer needs are considered and customer experience is at the heart of service redesign. In the autumn a bi-monthly networking group on service redesign will be initiated within the Engagement Organisation Design and Development Division embedding customer service principles around designing for fair access and efficient use of resources.

### 3.6 Case Study: Sorting out Kent's Potholes

Roads are a universal service and we receive many calls about road problems each year. With this in mind, it is important for the council to let the public know that an additional £3million has been allocated this year to blitz as many potholes and make as many larger road surface repairs as possible. To get the information to our customers as quickly and in as much depth as we can, we have published information on our website about how much road surface we have repaired across the county since 1 June and are encouraging people to report problems on their roads to us online. This will help Kent residents and visitors stay up to date with an issue that concerns them, and to allow them to keep in touch with our progress.

### 3.7 Insight

A new monthly insight report provides a rounded picture of customer experience through our telephone and digital channels, which enables us to inform the GET customer service programme. The report will be available to the partnership governance teams and to others at the discretion of the relevant Board.

## 4 Principle Three: Intelligent Commissioning

KCC will strive to continuously improve services through engaging and learning from our customers.

4.1 KCC is working hard to make it easier for customers to feedback their experiences. The Council recognises the valuable insight this gives and the opportunity to use this to improve services for all its customers.

4.2 Table 1 gives an overview of the feedback received by KCC as a whole compared with the previous year. Whilst we have seen an increase of 4% of complaints compared with the previous year, some of this can be accounted for by the increase in the number of services now reporting back their figures. In some areas we have seen a significant decrease in volumes such as Highways, Transportation and Waste (33% decrease on previous year). This service has put significant effort in improving and changing the way in which it communicates with its customers.

**Table 1**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Complaints</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Compliments</b>	<b>Local Government Ombudsman complaints</b>
2014/2015	2,944	1,561	2,345	205
2015/2016	3,070	1,490	2,079	185
% increase/ Decrease	4%	-5%	-11%	-10%

- 4.3 During 2015/16 KCC received a total of 185 complaints and enquiries from the Local Government Ombudsman, including 74 in which the customer was directed back to the Council to seek initial resolution. This is a decrease of 10% on 2014/15, when the Council received 205 complaints and enquiries, including 75 in which the customer was directed back to the Council to seek initial resolution. The authority did not receive any Maladministration Reports in this year.
- 4.4 The level of complaints received by KCC for the volume of services and interaction is low but each complaint is an opportunity to learn from our customers and improve our systems.
- 4.5 The Ombudsman's report noted that the national average that the Ombudsman upheld is 51% of complaints they investigated, this is up nationally from 46% last year. Kent County Council's average is 55%, this is an increase on 48.5% in 2014/15. KCC's performance, along with all other Local Government Councils in the UK, is published annually. The full Local Government Ombudsman annual report can be accessed at the following link <http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/local-government-complaint-reviews>
- 4.6 Whilst the trend nationally and locally is for the average number of complaints being upheld to rise, the Authority is responding positively by improving complaint management. Through the Customer Feedback Forum staff are sharing lessons learned to help service improvement across all directorates and training is being reviewed and devised, successful sessions have been rolled out to some services already.
- 4.7 The new format of the annual customer feedback report, which is presented to Governance and Audit Committee, focuses more on the substance of complaints that were escalated to the Ombudsman and their outcome. Where the Ombudsman has made a decision against the Council, steps are taken by the service to ensure that any lessons learned are applied across the service to improve the customer experience and avoid any further complaints of a similar nature.

## **5. RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 Policy and Resources Committee is asked to note and endorse the steps being taken to embed the Customer Service Policy across Kent County Council and improve customer service to our residents and service users.

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