

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Customer Services (Complaints/Improvement to Delivery of Services)

Committee: Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview Scrutiny

Date: 20 March 2019

Cabinet Member: Councillor Sally Haydon

CMT Member: Andy Ralphs
(Strategic Director of Customer and Corporate Services)

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Ref:

Key Decision: No

Part: I

Purpose of the report:

To provide the Committee with an update on customer feedback, the work undertaken by Customer Services in relation to complaints and the improvement to the delivery of services.

This report provides an analysis of the feedback received from Customers using the Customer Feedback Policy and digital process in the year to date 2018/19. It also provides details of the interventions and improvements made as a result of customer feedback.

The Corporate Plan:

The customer feedback data contained within this paper has already been contributing to the quarterly Corporate Plan Performance Report in the following ways;

Listening to our customers and communities; using customer feedback for service improvement.

Providing quality public services; customer complaints resolved at first and second stage.

New performance indicators for monitoring complaints sit within the 'How we will deliver' theme, supporting the council to provide quality public services and listening to our customers and communities.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land:

No specific financial implications result from this report.

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

None

Equality and Diversity

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

1. Note the analysis of customer feedback data
 2. Note the interventions and improvements made as a result of complaints
 3. Endorse the continued use of digital processes for managing customer feedback to enable trend analysis, lessons learned and action to be taken to support continuous improvement of the customer experience.
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Alternative options considered and rejected:

N/A

Published work / information:

[Customer Feedback Policy](#)

Background papers:

None

Sign off:

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Originating SMT Member Andy Ralphs, Strategic Director of Customer and Corporate Services													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the contents of the report? Yes													

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In April 2018 the Council launched a new Customer Feedback Policy which included a two stage complaints process. The introduction of a two stage process was a recommendation from the Annual Local Government Ombudsman Report 2017 endorsed by the Council's Audit Committee.

In addition to the new Policy, process improvements were made in the following respects;

- moving complaints handling for all complaints, excluding social care statutory complaints, onto our digital platform Firmstep
- identifying and formalising the role of Feedback Coordinators for all departments.

These changes were implemented with the aim of improving the customer experience and to achieve benefits such as;

- a consistent practice for handling customer feedback across the Council
- improved quality and timeliness of responses to complaints
- improved data quality (for developing customer insight) and reporting
- opportunities to learn lessons as a result of customer feedback
- a reduction in the number of complaints escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

Customer feedback is reviewed regularly by the Customer Liaison Manager and data is now available for all staff to review online in a real-time, interactive report accessible internally. Quarterly performance is reviewed by the Customer Liaison Manager with Strategic Directors and Service Directors through DMT meetings and monthly performance data is shared with the Corporate Performance Team. Monthly, departmental balanced scorecards now include measures of the;

- number of complaints received
- percentage of complaints upheld
- percentage of complaints closed within timeframe
- number of LGO complaints received
- number of LGO decisions made.

Whilst measures are important to understand our performance, a key focus has been placed on how services use customer feedback to resolve issues. Lessons learned from upheld complaints and customer feedback are monitored regularly with departments and Corporate Plan Quarterly Reports now include complaints and any specific lessons learned from departments.

Customer feedback data is also being considered for development into an open data set as part of Data Plymouth in the future.

An annual report analysing complaints to the LGSCO is provided to CMT and Audit Committee. Analysis of LGSCO data to date shows that signs are positive for a reduction in complaints being escalated this year. This position will continue to be monitored throughout the remainder of the year and be formalised in the annual report. A digital process is also being developed to support monitoring and reporting in future.

The LGSCO suggests that high volumes of complaints can be a sign of an open, learning organisation, as well as sometimes being an early warning of wider problems. They also suggest that low complaint volumes can be a worrying sign that an organisation is not alive to user feedback, rather than always being an indicator that all is well. Care is required in interpreting the data information in this report as the volume of complaints against an authority do not prove that it is a 'poor' or 'good' performing council.

1.2 Key Messages

The customer feedback data provided in this report has been extracted from the Customer Feedback process in Firmstep and covers the year to date, 1 April 2018 to 31 January 2019, following the implementation of the new two stage complaints process.

Adult and Children Services Statutory Complaints are currently dealt with in a separate statutory processes. Work is already being undertaken to align complaints processes wherever possible to enable comparisons.

The data does not include other customer feedback received via Councillors or MPs; both of which now have a digital process in place for capturing data and developing customer insight.

The key messages from the analysis contained within this report are as follows;

- Over 6000 complaints have been received in the time period. This is a large increase in comparison to complaints received in 2017/18 which totalled 4040 for the same time period. This can be partly attributed to the fact that all complaints are now being recorded digitally whereas in previous years emails, letters and phone calls were dealt with outside the digital channel with no central record
- 24% of the complaints received were then escalated to Stage 2 (meaning an additional 1482 complaint investigations were required to be undertaken)
- Council average compliance with the 10 day response deadline is 83%
 - Further detail available in Section 2.1
- The Place Directorate receive the majority of complaints (88% of Stage 1 complaints – 5323 complaints)
- 49% of the complaints closed at Stage 1 were upheld (2915 complaints)
 - Further detail available in Section 2.2 and 2.3
- 353 compliments have been received in the time period
 - Place receive the majority of compliments (65%).

2. COMPLAINT STATISTICS

2.1 Complaints received 2018/19 year to date (1.04.2018 – 31.01.2019)

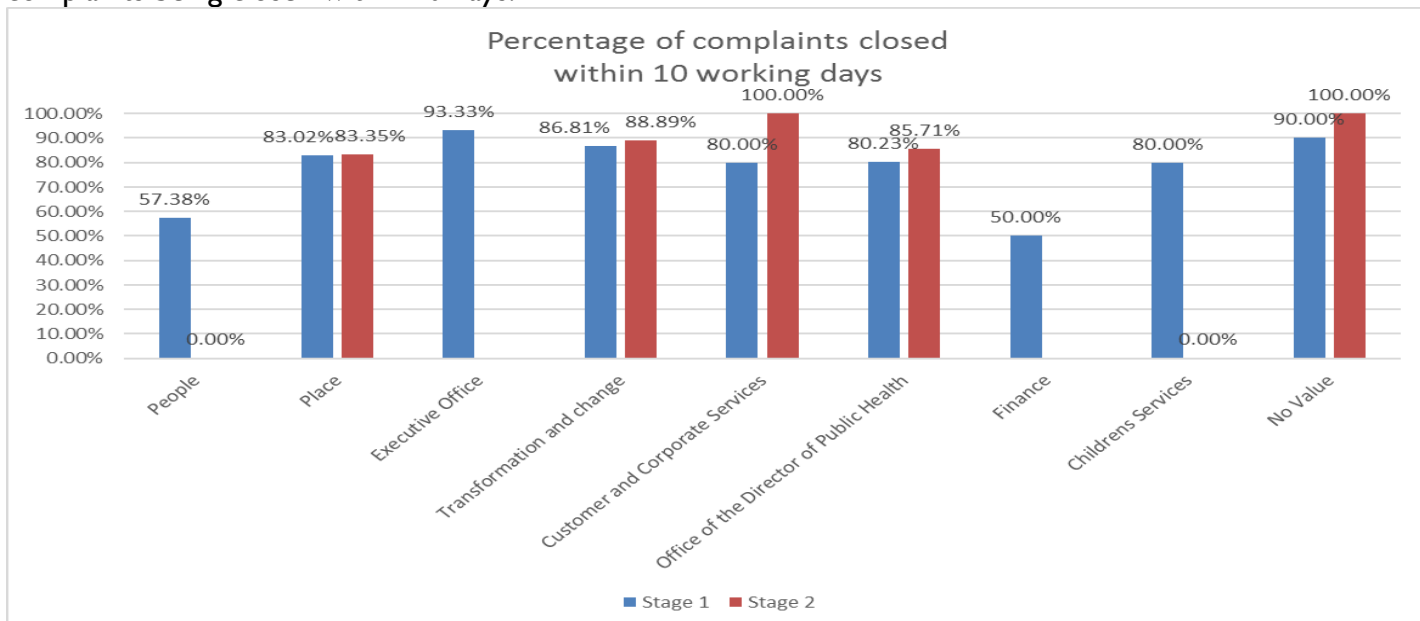
Table 1 below shows the total number of complaints received by Directorate. The data is split by Directorate and by Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.

Directorate	Stage 1	Stage 2
People	62	4
Place	5391	1411
Executive Office	15	0
Transformation and Change	475	49
Customer and Corporate Services	10	1
Office of the Director of Public Health	86	14
Finance	2	0
Childrens Services	25	2
No Value*	10	1
Total	6076	1482

*No value captures complaints where customers have logged a complaint that covers more than one service area so cannot be attributed to a Directorate.

The Customer Feedback Policy includes a service standard of 10 days for responding to customer feedback. Council average compliance with the 10 day response deadline in respect of complaints is 83%.

The graph below shows the compliance by Directorate with the 10 day service standard for responding to customer feedback. It shows that the Finance Directorate are the least compliant at Stage 1, with only 50% of their complaints being closed within 10 days, and that the People and Children’s Services Directorates are the least compliant at Stage 2 with none of their Stage 2 complaints being closed within 10 days.



2.1.1 Interventions and Service Improvements re: compliance

Finance Directorate

The majority of complaints for the Finance Directorate relate to maintenance of Council Land / Property. Such complaints often require input from the Street Services department to support the investigation of the issue therefore a review of the allocation of complaints has taken place to support improving timescales for responses. Feedback Coordinators across both service areas are working to ensure allocation happens as quickly as possible and in Street Services particularly to ensure that SLAs for providing services to the Property and Terrier Team.

People and Children's Services Directorates

Both the LGSCO Annual Report 2017/18 and the Corporate Plan Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 detail compliance with timescales for responding to complaints, particularly focusing on statutory complaint timescales but similar issues apply across the People and Children's Services teams with customer feedback in general. Recommendations for action from these reports and actions already in progress include;

- the Customer Liaison Manager working more closely with the Statutory Complaints Team, currently based in Finance but due to move into Customer Services, to ensure monitoring and reporting processes are in place and can be joined up with corporate complaints monitoring
- the Statutory Complaints Team providing training to new managers and to cover undertaking investigations and providing responses to complaints
- the Statutory Complaints Team leading a review to stream line process
- an external review (launched in Q3) to ensure all staff are fully aware of regulations and legislation in relation to complaint handling
- the Customer Liaison Manager working with the Statutory Complaints Team and Head of Service to review current processes. A meeting has also been undertaken with the Livewell Southwest Complaints and Litigation Manager. This resulted in the design of a 'to be' process for managing Adult Social Care complaints, the role of the triage process on receipt of complaints, reporting requirements to ensure compliance with timescales, and an agreed regular meeting schedule for reviewing the process across the organisations.

Place Directorate - Street Services

The majority of complaints received for the Place Directorate are for the Street Services department. Both the LGSCO Annual Report and the Corporate Plan Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 include detail on Street Services. Recommendations for action from these reports and actions already in progress include;

- a Street Services Modernisation Board meeting monthly, this including Customer Services staff to provide a key link between the service and customer services
- a focussed effort on setting customer expectations through consistency of messaging across the website, the contact centre/first stop shop and digital systems as well as updating policy wording, service standards and associated performance measures as the service modernises
- customer feedback, including complaints, being monitored on a monthly basis. Street Services using feedback to create hotspot mapping to help identify and realign issues as well as using learning from complaints

- changes to back office processes enabling better understanding of exactly what any complaints are about and data captured being visualised for team members and used at weekly performance meetings.

Following these interventions, significant improvements have been seen in terms of compliance across quarterly monitoring as highlighted in the table below in green;

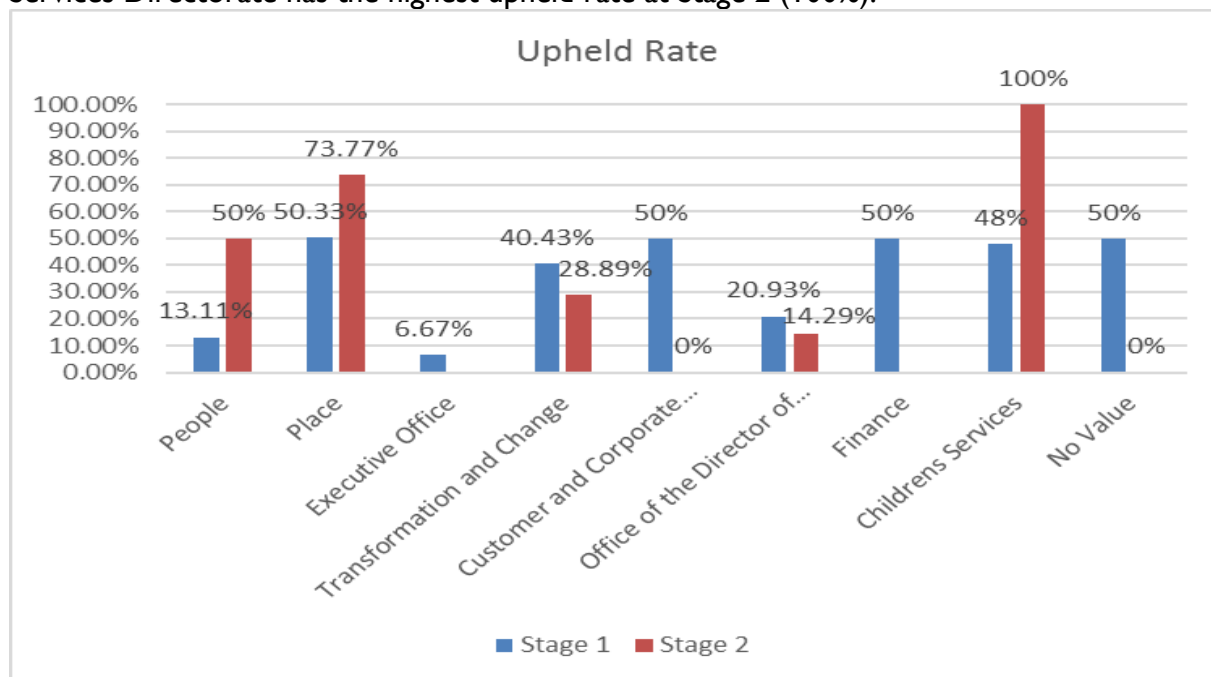
	Q1 baseline compliance data	Q2 compliance	Q3 compliance
Highways Compliance Rate - Stage 1	24%	74%	66%
Highways Compliance Rate - Stage 2	4%	59%	72%
Waste Compliance Rate - Stage 1	76%	94%	97%
Waste Compliance Rate - Stage 2	79%	96%	97%
Parking Compliance Rate - Stage 1	46%	71%	82%
Parking Compliance Rate - Stage 2	100%	46%	43%
Street Services Compliance Rate - Stage 1	8%	61%	79%
Street Services Compliance Rate - Stage 2	11%	69%	88%

2.2 Complaint Decisions

The Customer Feedback Policy includes definitions and criteria for complaints and complaint outcomes. In the year to date, 49% (2915) of Corporate Stage 1 complaints have been upheld; meaning the customer’s complaint is valid.

If customers are not satisfied with the response they receive to their Stage 1 complaint, they have the option to submit their complaint again for review by a senior manager. 72% (1049) of the complaints escalated to Stage 2 have been upheld in the year to date.

The graph below shows the upheld rates for each stage of the complaints process by Directorate. It shows that the Executive Office has the lowest upheld rate at Stage 1 (6.67%) and the Place Directorate has the highest upheld rate at Stage 1 (50.33%). It also shows that the Customer and Corporate Services directorate has the lowest upheld rate at Stage 2 (0%) and the Children’s Services Directorate has the highest upheld rate at Stage 2 (100%).



2.2.1 Interventions and Service Improvements re: upheld rate

Place Directorate - Street Services

As part of the interventions already noted in section 2.1.1, following a review of the Quarter 2 data with the DMT, effort was focused on reducing the upheld rate for Stage 2 complaints by reviewing the Investigating Officer roles. Waste Services had seen the highest upheld rate in Quarter 2 and the interventions undertaken across the back office team, including formalising processes and prioritising casework against service standards, supported a reduction in upheld rate from 86% in Quarter 2 to 72% in Quarter 3. Overall, the Street Services department reduced the upheld rate from 75.05% Quarter 2 to 66.56% Quarter 3.

The Street Services Modernisation Board approved a proposal to add a further classification layer to the Investigation process to enable clearer identification of the issues being reported by customers. A focused review of the outcomes will be reviewed with year-end reporting.

Following Quarter 3 reporting, Street Services DMT agreed a deep dive of Stage 2 complaints to review the situation in more detail. This resulted in the production of guidance notes for Investigating Officers in respect of the specifics of the investigation process for Stage 2 complaints and an update to the guidance detailed within the digital process for customers.

The Customer Feedback Policy clearly defines the criteria for a Stage 2 complaint and this has been reiterated to all departmental Feedback Coordinators to ensure the process is being managed as effectively as possible.

Children's Services Directorate

Only 1 complaint has been closed at Stage 2 and upheld which means the upheld rate is 100%. This case was particularly complex relating to the home education of a child; lessons learned have been identified and actioned by the Education, Participation and Skills team.

2. 3 Decision outcomes

When an investigating officer determines a complaint valid, they must specify the reason why it has been upheld by selecting from one of four options defined in the Customer Feedback Policy;

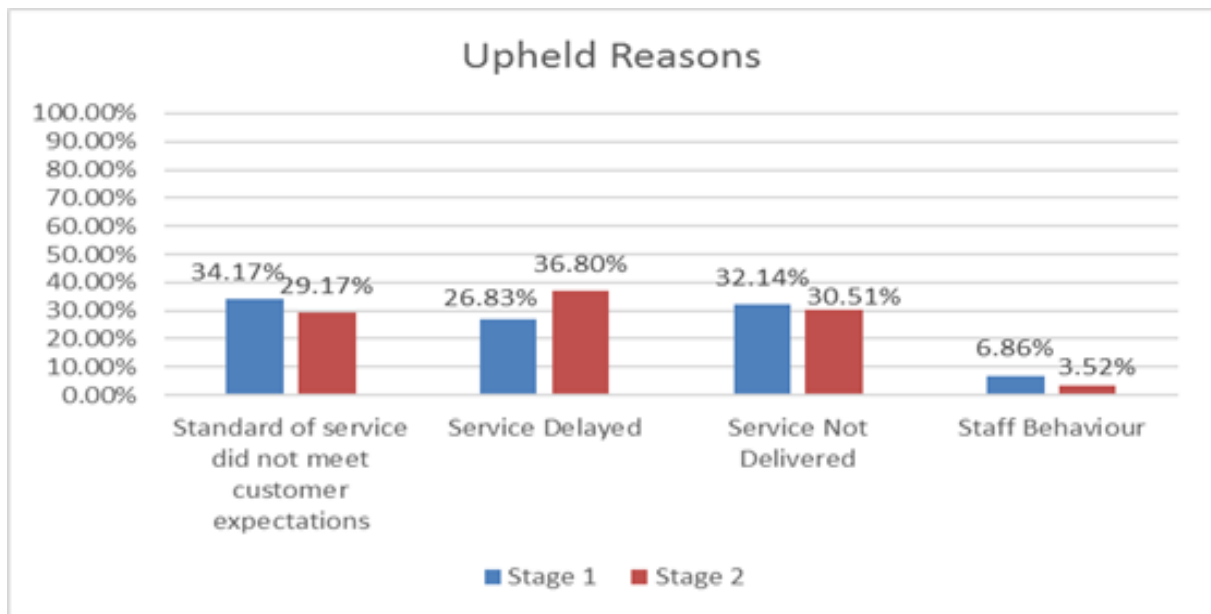
Service not delivered – the customer did not receive the service they should have received

Service delayed – there was an unacceptable delay in us providing the service to the customer

Standard of service did not meet customer expectations – the customer received the service but elements of it did not meet the professional standard expected from Plymouth City Council

Staff behaviour – the customer did not receive the professional standard of service expected from staff at Plymouth City Council.

The graph below shows the reasons why complaints have been upheld at Stage 1 and Stage 2 across the Council.



The table below shows the number (combined Stage 1 and Stage 2) of upheld complaint reasons by Directorate.

Directorate	Standard of service did not meet customer expectations	Service Delayed	Service Not Delivered	Staff Behaviour
People	6	3		
Place	1180	1138	1194	199
Executive Office				1
Transformation and Change	89	26	56	32
Customer and Corporate Services	2		2	1
Office of the Director of Public Health	13		4	3
Finance		1		
Children's Services	12			1
No Value			1	

Since Quarter 1 reporting showed the majority of complaints related to Street Services, regular monitoring of their upheld complaints has taken place. As the majority of complaints are upheld due to service delivery timescales (over 2500 complaints), the department's service standards have also been regularly monitored in attempt to better understand the cause of complaints.

Service standards were introduced as part of the 2018/19 business planning cycle; service areas are required to identify timescales for the delivery of key services. These timescales are published to the customer automatically when logging a digital request for a service to better manage customer expectations.

2.3.1 Interventions and Service Improvements re: upheld reason

Place Directorate - Street Services

As part of the interventions already mentioned in section 2.2.1, a strong focus has been put on the delivery to service standards. Average cycle times are reported monthly to the Street Services

Modernisation Board and closely monitored across the DMT, liaison meetings with the Customer Services team and with the Portfolio Holder. Significant improvements have been seen in terms of reducing complaints being upheld for services not being delivered as highlighted in the table below in green;

	Q2	Q3
Service Not Delivered at Stage 1	46% (333 complaints)	35% (172 complaints)
Service Not Delivered at Stage 2	34% (144 complaints)	28% (40 complaints)

Quarter 3 reporting was discussed at the Street Services DMT in February and actions, including the outcomes from the deep dive noted above in section 2.2.1, are already underway to support further improvements within the next quarter.