



## **Customer Feedback Annual Report 2008 – 2009**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to provide members with statistical information in relation to Customer Feedback received for the financial year 08/09.

The report provides statistical data and comparisons to the previous financial year. It highlights improvements made and actions planned to ensure continuous improvement.

### **2. INTRODUCTION**

Feedback from our customers offers the Council a chance to gain a picture of the level of service provided within each service area. The Council is committed to providing excellent customer service and uses feedback whether negative or positive to review performance and take steps to address issues for customers as part of our commitment to continuous improvement across the organisation.

All feedback received is reported on including Stage 1 which is an informal process.

### **3. DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT:**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our services, staff or policies. The procedure at present is:

Stage 1 - Local Resolution / Informal – 10 working days maximum

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation – 20 working days maximum

Stage 3 – Review – 20 working days maximum

The next stage would be to contact the Local Government Ombudsman, who can independently investigate the way the complaint has been handled at each stage.

#### 4. SUMMARY OF TOTAL FEEDBACK RECEIVED:

**FIGURE 1: Table of Total Feedback Received 2008/9:**

	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Stage 3 Complaint	LGO	MP Enquiry	Councillor Enquiry	Comments	Compliments	Total
1st Quarter	438	26	6	7	119	131	189	125	<b>1045</b>
2nd Quarter	499	30	12	7	85	129	133	127	<b>1029</b>
3rd Quarter	322	8	4	6	86	83	97	74	<b>684</b>
4th Quarter	264	10	2	5	94	92	134	166	<b>781</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1523</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>3539</b>

Figure 1 provides an overview of the total feedback received into the Council during 2008/9.

**Figure 2: Yearly Comparison of Stage 1,2 and 3 2007/8 and 2008/9:**

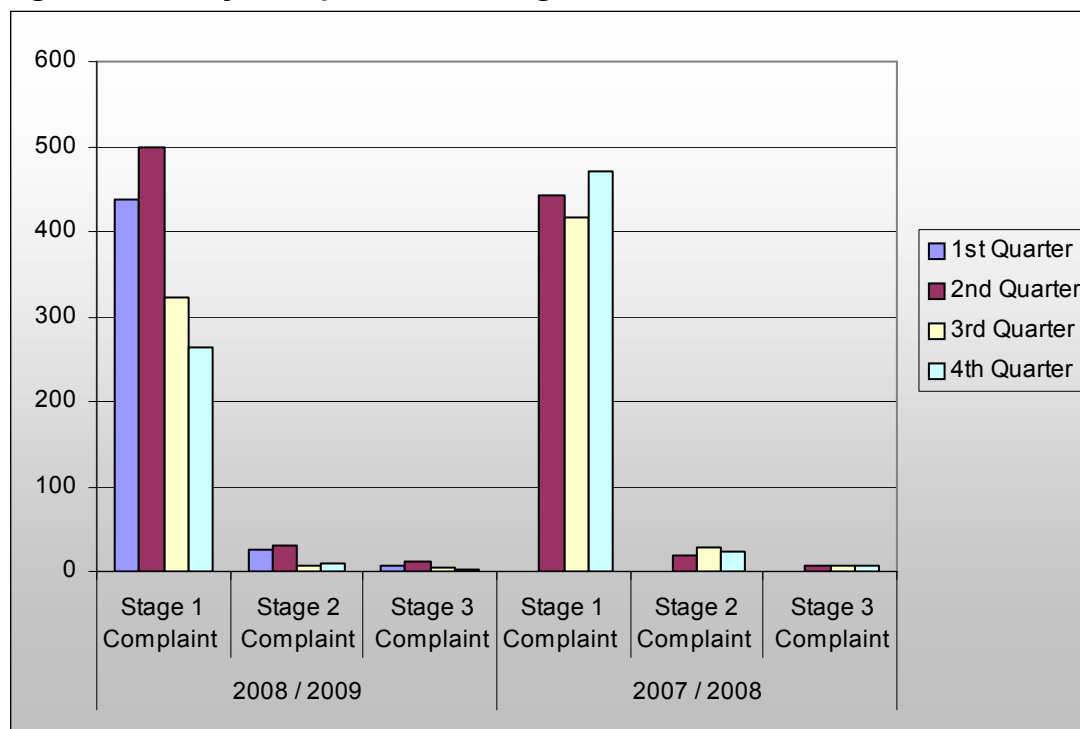


Figure 2 above shows a comparison of all complaints from July 2007 when the Customer Relationship Management system was introduced.

We have seen a reduction within all three stages of complaints; informal complaints have reduced by 22% and Stage 2 complaints have reduced by 48%.

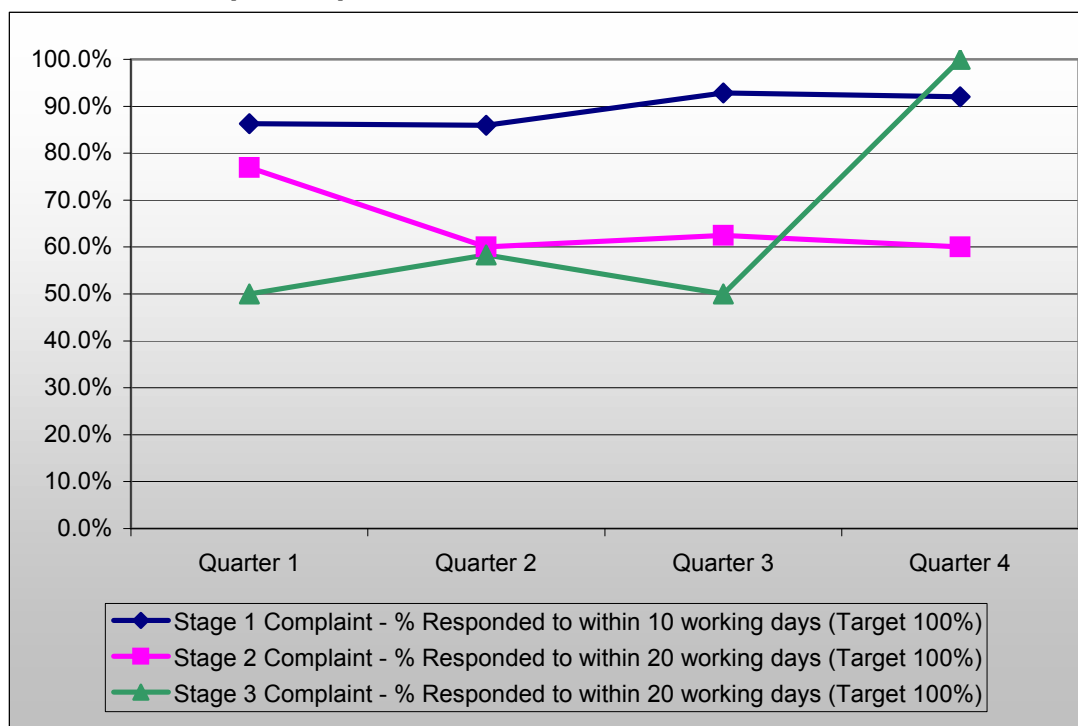
Reasons for the reduction include:

- Requests for service being correctly identified.
- Immediate resolution taking place upon contact by the customer.
- A training programme to promote the ownership of cases and improve communication and teamwork.

- Learning from complaints and implementing improvements to avoid re-occurrence.

## 5. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

**FIGURE 3: Corporate performance 2008/9:**



The following corporate performance targets are in operation:

- 100% of Stage 1 complaints responded to within 10 working days
- 100% of Stage 2 complaints responded to within 20 working days
- 100% of Stage 3 complaints responded to within 20 working days

The percentage of cases responded to in target have consistently improved over the last six months.

There has been a marked improvement in responses within target. For stage 1 and 2 complaints an increase from 80% in 07/08 to 91.3% in 08/09.

In the last quarter of 08/09 100% of Stage 3 complaints were responded to within target. (a 100% increase from 07/08)

## 6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

The LGO received 76 complaints and enquires during 2008/9.

31 regarding Housing  
19 regarding Council Tax

11 regarding Benefits  
5 regarding Planning

During 07/08 69 complaints were investigated by the LGO. This reduced to 25 in 08/09 which is a significant 64% decrease and illustrates that the improvements to our services have been effective.

Our response times to the LGO have also significantly improved from 48.2 days in 07/08 to 34.4 days in 08/09.

We have recently introduced further measures to continue to improve our response times.

Customers are contacting the LGO for advice prior to asking for a review (stage 3) in which case the LGO are referring the customers back to us so we have identified this as an area for improvement – publicising the availability of the review process more widely.

## **7. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT & LEARNING**

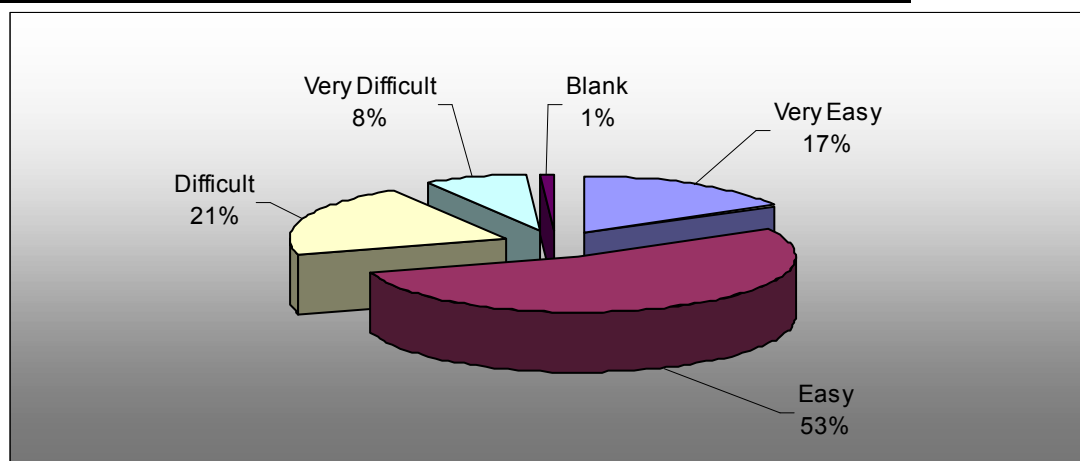
The Council has ambitions to become one of the best councils in terms of public service delivery and to assist in achieving this ambition has used data from customers to gain an increased understanding of where we have satisfied our customers and where improvements are required.

Measuring how customers feel about the way their complaints is handled is key to ensuring that our Customer Feedback Procedure meets customer requirements. A survey was sent out in March 2009 to all customers who had made a complaint to us in the six months from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2008 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008. The feedback from that survey has been used to develop an improved customer feedback procedure.

43% of customers were satisfied with how their complaint was handled. (The national average is 50%).

In some service areas satisfaction with complaint handling was as high as 62%. Shared learning is taking place to ensure that best practise in those areas (such as contacting customers very quickly in the early stages) is adopted by all service areas.

**FIGURE 4 How easy did you find it to make your complaint?**



70% of our customers found the process to complain either very easy or easy. In some areas the percentage was lower and again we are looking at disseminating best practise across areas.

55% of customers felt that they received a timely response to their complaints and measures have been put in place to ensure that our customers are being kept informed throughout the process and as confirmed previously there has already been a marked improvement in the turnaround timescales within the last six months.

The feedback received from our customers from the survey included some of the following comments:

- More communication with customers and other departments.
- Taking more responsibility
- Staff Training
- Improved Customer Service
- "I was kept informed regularly and the matter was dealt with".
- "Happy with the service, no need for improvements".

## **8. ACTION UNDERTAKEN TO IMPROVE**

Complaints provide the council with valuable feedback in respect of the way that services are delivered. Work is in progress to develop and implement a corporate cultural change programme to further improve our ability to manage and learn from customer feedback.

A summary of improvements from the learning from complaints is below:

- **Training** - Continuous customer service training is in place to improve the level of Customer Service delivered to our customers at all points of contact. The training is delivered at all levels of the organisation and has been developed with particular regard to the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation.
- **Ownership** – Increased ownership at the first point of contact, using service experts to contact customers and find a solution before the complaint reaches the formal stages of the procedure. Customer satisfaction is higher in areas where proactive ‘verbal’ contact is encouraged. Increased ownership within service areas – Directorate Management Teams are acting on complaints data on a monthly basis.
- **Offering the right to escalate** - Improved use of standard letters to ensure that customers are offered the opportunity to escalate their complaint (thereby preventing premature contact to the Local Government Ombudsman). However, proactive verbal contact is still encouraged in the informal stages. Letters should be a confirmation of what was discussed and agreed where appropriate.
- **Learning identified** –learning is identified monthly through Directorate Management Teams ensuring that ongoing measures to improve are put in place and can be fed back to customers.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

There has been significant improvement in the Council’s handling of complaints in the financial year 2008/9. Customers are more satisfied with how we handle their complaint although it is recognised that more needs to be done. In particular customer feedback shows that satisfaction is higher where informal complaints are dealt with swiftly and when open communication is started to resolve the complaint or issue straight away.

Performance has also improved on response times, and the volume of complaints going to the Ombudsman has reduced. Ongoing plans to improve complaints handling will ensure that current weaknesses are addressed and that customers are kept informed of the progress of any complaint they make throughout the process. By monitoring the learning from complaints, the Council can identify where it has responded to the views of its customers in developing and improving its services. Reporting to service areas is under development to ensure that learning from complaints can be captured to show how we have made improvements to prevent the same complaints from recurring.

## **10. FUTURE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE SERVICE**

Whilst it can be acknowledged that improvements have been made to the way that the Council handles complaints and uses customer feedback to improve its services, there is still work to be done to ensure the Council is in a position to realise its ambition to be one of the best councils in terms of public service delivery by 2012. The following shows the actions that are planned as part of the delivery of our Customer Excellence Strategy.

- Changes to the Customer Feedback Procedure to reduce the number of stages to ensure a swifter and more proactive response at all stages.
- Agreed definition of a complaint across the whole organisation
- Further publicity of the agreed complaints procedure.
- Ability to resolve complaints by mediating and negotiating with customers where appropriate.
- Better communication to customers of how to make a complaint, how to contact the Council generally and what service standards to expect.
- Reporting of learning points from customer feedback.
- Complaint statistics published on a regular basis.
- Publishing the annual report on the website along with what has been done to improve
- Continuation of the training programme to ensure that staff are equipped to deal effectively with customer service issues and complaints at all levels in the organisation.