

Policy and Resources Committee

23 September 2015

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Quarter 1 Customer Feedback Briefing

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Policy and Communications
Lead Officer and Report Author	Anna Collier Policy and Information Manager Sam Bailey Research and Information Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To note the Quarter 1 Customer Feedback Briefing.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Complaints were received for many different service areas across the council so this report affects all of our corporate priorities.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	23 September 2015

Quarter 1 Customer Feedback Briefing

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The attached report provides a summary of complaints and compliments received by the Council for quarter 1 of 2014/15 (Appendix A).
- 1.2 The following points should be noted as of particular interest for quarter 1:
- The proportion of complaints responded to on time (75.8%);
 - The high number of complaints received for Electoral Registration and Development Management;
 - The increased proportion of complaints made by email; and
 - The low percentage of stage 2 complaints that have been upheld.
- 1.3 The Policy and Information Team are near the end of their review of complaints at the council. The main finding of the review is that we process more complaints than any of the other councils we surveyed. However on further investigation it appears that we are not receiving more complaints, but we are being more open and transparent in dealing with them as complaints and logging them through the complaints process. Other councils either significantly restrict what they will take as a complaint, or tend not to consistently follow their complaints processes and deal with complaints outside their formal process. This means that it is possible that the learning from complaints may be lost within these organisations. However we have come up with a list of recommendations to improve the process and reduce the impact on staff in dealing with complaints. These recommendations include:
- Improving (or replacing) the complaints IT system;
 - Creating a new 'informal resolution' stage in the complaints process, allowing minor problems to be resolved by customer facing staff without requiring a formal response;
 - Better training and guidance for Customer Service Assistants (CSAs) in the contact centre to empower them to deal with complaints in the first instance;
 - Reviewing the complaints policy;
 - Improving the online complaints form; and
 - Better training, information and guidance across the council on dealing with complaints to improve responses and resolutions at stage 1.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council has a 2 stage process for dealing with complaints. At the first stage, the relevant Head of Service investigates and responds to the complaint. At the second stage the Head of Policy and Communications investigates the complaint. Once the complainant has exhausted this two stage process they may take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

- 2.2 Complaints are recorded on a complaints system which is administered by the Policy and Information Team. Reports from this system form the basis of the Customer Feedback Report attached as an appendix to this report.
- 2.3 The Policy and Information Team are also forwarded details of compliments received by other departments.
- 2.4 These elements are brought together in the Customer Feedback report to give an overall view of feedback received by the Council.
- 2.5 For the context of the report, it is important to distinguish between a complaint and a service request. The complaints policy states:

‘A complaint is not a request for service or an enquiry about a service. A request for service may become a complaint if the council fails to meet our service standards after receiving the initial enquiry.’

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Policy and Resources could choose not to receive a regular update on customer feedback. However these updates offer CLT the opportunity to have an ongoing view of the customer experience, emerging issues and areas for improvement.
- 3.2 Policy and Resources could choose not to monitor complaints and compliments at all. However this would mean that learning from complaints would not be captured, and an understanding of the customer experience would be lost.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 For Policy and Resources to continue receiving Customer Feedback Reports.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 None.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 The Policy and Information Team will communicate any decisions taken by Policy and Resources to the relevant department for implementation and/or incorporate into future reports.
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7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Complaints were received for nearly all areas of service delivery so will have an impact on all corporate priorities.	Paul Riley
Risk Management	None	N/A
Financial	There are no significant financial implications arising from this report. At least £20 was offered as a financial remedy, although some of the other remedies would have had a financial cost, e.g. replanting areas that have been cut down.	Paul Holland
Staffing	Receiving a high number of complaints has an impact on staffing as staff have to dedicate more time to responding to them.	Dena Smart
Legal	Some of the complaints received may have future legal implications.	John Scarborough
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	There were three complaints received about discrimination. Two of these complaints were unjustified. One justified complaint was complaining about a homeless resident not being able to find where their polling station was which was upheld. However housing status is not a protected characteristic.	Anna Collier
Environmental/Sustainable Development	None	N/A
Community Safety	None	N/A
Human Rights Act	None	N/A
Procurement	None	N/A
Asset Management	None	N/A

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Quarter 1 Customer Feedback Briefing
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None