



**EVERY CUSTOMER, EVERY TIME -  
“Everybody Matters”**

**Making Experiences Count  
Quarterly Customer Service Report to  
Overview and Scrutiny**

**1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council

[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

## Introduction

This report provides Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information regarding the complaints and compliments received during this quarter and any other relevant feedback. We do not have targets in place to reduce complaints or increase compliments, but instead encourage all staff to ensure that all complaints and compliments are properly recorded as they are a valuable source of insight into how organisations are meeting customers needs.

## Customer Feedback Analysis

### Compliments and Complaints Received

The following table sets out the numbers of complaints and compliments received during the fourth quarter of 2011/12.

Dept	Compliments	Complaints	Complaint target met	Complaint upheld or partially upheld	Complaint not upheld	Still open
Community Services	5	0	0	0	0	
Customer Services	0	1	1	1	0	
Environmental Services	7	21	19	11	10	
Leisure and Culture	9	1	0	1	0	
Planning and Regeneration	6	2	2	0	2	
Resources	1	3	1	1	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	

These compare with the following statistics from last year:

	Total compliments	Total complaints	Dealt with in target time	Total complaints upheld as the Council made a mistake or could have done better
2010/11	123	186	133(71.5%)	82 (44%)
2011/12	109	146	111 (76%)	58 (39%)

This shows that there were less complaints in 2011/12. This was mainly due to problems with the garden waste service, which had resulted in an increase in complaints in 2010/11.

Work is continuing to support staff and managers to create a culture where complaints are used for positive effect and reporting complaints is not seen as detrimental.

### What did we learn from the Complaints received?

The majority of complaints received this quarter had several factors in common which were:

- not keeping the customer informed;
- delays to services;
- not providing the service expected; and
- not treating the customer with respect.

These are all issues which we are addressing with staff through customer service training and the introduction of key behaviours for all staff which are monitored by managers through personal development reviews. The Systems Thinking reviews of service delivery will also bring positive change and will tackle most of these issues.

### Time taken to respond to complaints

We aim to respond to customer complaints within 15 working days. 82% of complaints received during this quarter were dealt with within that timeframe. Where it has taken us longer to respond than expected, most customers were informed that there would be a delay. Staff have been reminded to keep the customer informed if the investigation is taking longer than expected and there will be a delay in responding.

An average of 76% of cases were responded to within the target time over the whole of 2011/12. Although this is a slightly higher than last year the actual number of complaints dealt with within this time has dropped. There does not appear to be a reason for this other than the nature of the complaints are variable and sometimes complex, and it can be difficult to predict the investigation time. Additionally failure to complete the necessary steps to close down the case can result in the case appearing to take longer than it might have.

Complaints Received	Number handled within target	1-2 days after target	3- 10 days after target	11- 21 After target
28	23	2	1	1
Reason		This is due to a user of the recording system not entering the correct date when closing cases. Further guidance has been provided to that person.	Complex and varied investigations- Benefits	Complex and varied investigations- Spadesbourne heating

### Details of complaints and actions taken

It is important that we understand the scope of complaints received and what action was taken to address the issue.

We categorise complaints as:-

- ‘upheld’, where we are totally in the wrong, have made a mistake or could have done something better;
- ‘partially upheld’ where we can see that we were partly in the wrong but that there are also issues over which we either had no control or could not have acted differently; and
- ‘not upheld’ where our investigation shows that we have acted appropriately, or could not have done anything more.

The following table provides some detail on upheld or partially upheld complaints.

Service	Nature of Complaint	Action Taken/Improvement Action
<b>Customer Services</b>	Customer unhappy about the length of time it took to get through to CSC, very expensive, would have liked if there was a call back system, he wants a free system where he can call, should have been able to be transferred to other council numbers.	Apology given and advice given on what to do if line is busy.
<b>Landscaping</b>	Customer unhappy that the Tree Officer came onto her property, without introducing himself or stating his purpose why he was there. He did not speak to customer or leave a card at all. She saw a man arrive and talk to the tree surgeons.	Apology given – tree officer was checking the work of the tree surgeons.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer unhappy about the attitude of waste collector when she asked for help with her bins.	Apology given, waste collector advised about behaviour and performance to be monitored.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer rang to say that she is 91 and we keep missing her assisted collection.	Apology given, crew reminded to ensure this collection is made correctly.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer not happy bins are being left over driveway after collections, which is extremely dangerous, as her house is on a	Apology given and crew will monitor this situation.

	busy dual carriage way.	
<b>Waste</b>	Customer unhappy that the crew is leaving his bin at the next block of flats and he has to keep looking for them.	Apology given and crew will monitor this situation.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer originally contacted us to request a reduction in her Council tax bill as her bins are never emptied.	Apology given and arrangements made as to where she should put her bins for future collections.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer has an assisted collection and is unhappy that she has contacted us several times about the bin not being put back at side gate where they collect it from.	Customer visited and apology given, this collection will be monitored.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer unhappy that because a car was partially blocking access for the refuse vehicle, the crew purposely arranged the bins around the parked car so the driver would have to move them to drive away. She feels the behaviour was unnecessary and unprofessional.	Apology given and collection will be monitored as there are space problems on this road.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer has an assisted collection and is unhappy the last two weeks we have collected the bin but then left it on the kerbside.	Supervisor visited customer to apologise. This was due to an agency crew and will be monitored.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer told that bin would be emptied even if sticker had not arrived because they were allowing for cross over of people paying late. Then when advisor checked her details it was found that her payment had been entered in wrong - which meant she had not received a sticker.	Apology given and arrangement to collect waste.

<b>Street Cleaning</b>	Customer visited the toilets at 4.35pm with her 3 year old son. The toilets where closed and she pleaded with the attendant inside for her son to be able to use the toilet. The attendant advised that the toilets were closed! Customer explained that her son has only just been potty trained and he ended up wetting himself. The weather was extremely cold and he cried due to being cold and upset.	Apology given and the operatives will be told to keep toilets open to 5pm.
<b>Street Cleansing</b>	Customer unhappy that he has phoned service centre twice before about litter along the A38. He says the problem is still there and as far as he can see the litter has not been cleared.	Apology and explanation given about cleaning rotas.
<b>Leisure</b>	Dance & Bingo Club unhappy about the lack of heating in the Spadesbourne Suite for their dance sessions.	Apology given and heating will be monitored for these sessions.
<b>Benefits</b>	Customer unhappy that her confidential details regarding pensions and payments has been sent to someone else.	Apology given, this was a one off error but checks will be made in future.

Complaints recorded as not upheld are generally those where no error was found on the part of the Council, or there was nothing more that could have been done. Nonetheless the issue is still important to the customer which is why we record them and they can result in a change in practice where a trend can be identified.

In future we are planning to categorise complaints in greater detail. Here are details of some of the complaints reported as not upheld by the investigating officer.

<b>Service</b>	<b>Nature of Complaint</b>	<b>Action Taken/Improvement Action</b>
<b>Waste</b>	Customer not happy with rubbish collection over Christmas period had extra rubbish outside bin i.e.	Apology given and waste collected but no mistake made.

	4 bags and they were not taken away. Last year the extra bags left outside bin were collected.	
<b>Waste</b>	Customer paid by cheque for her garden waste collection two months ago, cheque has been cashed but she has now received a reminder. It would appear that the incorrect invoice number was entered when processing her cheque.	It would appear that the incorrect invoice number was entered when processing her cheque.  <i>* This complaint should have been recorded as upheld and extra guidance has been provided to staff.</i>
<b>Waste</b>	Refuse sacks have been promised on two occasions and have never materialised. No call back from the depot when requested on Monday, and customer had to chase this herself again today.	Customer contacted and trade refuse collection explained. <i>* This complaint should probably have been recorded as upheld and extra guidance has been provided to staff.</i>
<b>Waste</b>	Customer unhappy that refuse vehicle was going at high speed and the driver completely cut the corner. She was able to brake and missed vehicle by a few centimeters Someone could have been crossing the road.	Waste supervisor has twice tried to speak to customer but she works away so he spoke to her husband. He apologised if the driving of the vehicle did not seem safe but the evidence from the on board camera does not support this claim.
<b>Waste</b>	Customer unhappy that we have changed the vehicles for waste collection and that this means a change to the weight of the bin.	Letter sent to explain why vehicles have changed after two home visits were not answered.  <i>* This Complaint went to Stage 2 and was re-investigated</i>
<b>Street Cleansing</b>	Customer complained that the town centre toilets were closed at 430 last Thursday and this has happened several times now, They should be open until 5pm.	Problem with toilets so they had to be closed.  <i>* This complaint should have been recorded as upheld and extra guidance has been provided to staff.</i>
<b>Street Cleaning</b>	Customer unhappy that the opening between Blunts and Card Shop in High Street - heavily splattered with pigeon	This is on private land but we have swept down the high street and jet washed the gate on the high street side.

	droppings.	<i>* Recorded as not upheld as BDC not responsible.</i>
<b>Street Cleaning</b>	Customer unhappy about the graffiti in his area.	Team have removed as much as possible and have now passed it on to Highways for further action.  <i>* Recorded as not upheld as BDC as passed to another organisation for action but complaint should probably have been recorded as upheld and extra guidance has been provided to staff.</i>
<b>Waste</b>	Customer unhappy about change of vehicle collecting garden waste.	Explanation given about why changes have been made. No error on part of the Council.
<b>Development Control</b>	Customer concerned that we published all of their e-mails when we asked them not to after they discussed our concerns over application for planning on a plot next to them.	Customer was made aware that all comments made would be put on the public record, but chose to send comment anyway.
<b>Development Control</b>	Customer unhappy with behaviour of planning enforcement officer in connection with compliance of planning permission.	There was an error in the decision dates but it clearly shows that it refers to the amended plans.  <i>* This Complaint went to Stage 2 and was re-investigated</i>
<b>Council Tax</b>	Customer unhappy that he has received a threatening letter despite doing everything he can to pay his arrears.	The customer owes three years of arrears and the team have tried to help making several payment arrangements. They have responded to this complaint twice asking the customer to meet with them to discuss what they can do to help but no response has been received.

*\* Comments of Head of Customer Services added after the complaint had been dealt with.*



### **“You said – we listened” – what did we change as a result of complaints?**

We aim to use complaints to improve service delivery. They are also used in Systems Thinking transformation to inform the service of customer demand. Here are examples of how the service has adjusted service delivery as a result of complaints.

**Waste Service** - Communication with crews has been improved to ensure continuity and quality of service.

**Town Toilets** – Checks will be made to ensure that the toilets are available at the stated times.

### **Number of complaint escalated to Head of Customer Services**

There were 2 complaints escalated to the Head of Customer Services, for further investigation or action.

**Waste Collection** – The customer was unhappy that we have changed the vehicles for waste collection and that this result in instructions to customers regarding the weight of the bin. After investigation it was found that the Council has not done anything wrong nor had we failed to meet agreed standards but the customer's expectations exceed what is possible

**Development Control** – The customer complained about the behaviour of a planning enforcement officer in connection with compliance of planning permission. After investigation no evidence was found to suggest that the initial complaint was not properly dealt with. A mistake made on the decisions notice was accepted and apologised for and there was no evidence that the Council had made further mistakes or not acted appropriately.

### **What did we learn from the compliments received?**

From the compliments received we can see that customers appreciate the range of services the Council provides and when we deal with their requests in a timely and professional manner. Here are some of the compliments we have received.

<b>Team</b>	<b>Compliment Detail</b>
Shop Mobility	Thank you for your continued support and kindness, the help you gave us both in the past was very much appreciated. I'm sure without your help, my husband and I would have been housebound. You all make such a difference to people.
Leisure	Customer very happy with the way his event was organised in the Spadesbourne Suite.
Sports Development	Customer very happy with Paralympics clubs that have formed in Bromsgrove.
Sports Development	Disabled organisation phoned to say how happy they are with disabled sports facilities in Bromsgrove.

Leisure	Customer very happy about the range of activities available at the Spadesbourne for elderly people.
Landscaping	Thank you to the Tree Officer, following our site meeting. He was thoroughly calm and professional.
Waste	Customer very happy with way the Refuse supervisor sorted out his collection problems.
Development Control	Customer emailed to say that Bromsgrove's Planning Histories search is exemplary thanks to employees efforts.
Development Control	Customer very pleased with the prompt service he received.

## Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints

There were no complaints referred from the Ombudsman this quarter.

A total of 24 complaints were made to the LGO during 2011/12. Of these 9 were considered to be premature complaints and referred back to the customer to contact the Council. In 7 cases the LGO gave advice but the complaint was outside their jurisdiction.

There were only 8 new matters received for formal investigation in the 12 months to 31<sup>st</sup> March and based on the 5 occasions first enquiry letters were sent the average response time was 19.8 days.

Of the cases passed to the Investigation Team, it was found that in 1 case the LGO had no powers to investigate and 1 was not taken any further because the LGO found that it was not justified.

The LGO made the decision in 4 cases there was some injustice but these were remedied during the course of the investigation. These related to Council Tax (1 case), Planning matters (2 cases), and Private Housing grants (1 case).

Case 1 related to Council Tax. The complainant had a long history of arrears and non payment dating back over several financial years. On one matter the customer had made an arrangement and was paying by installments. The customer moved away from the area and although continued to pay on the arrangement the customer failed to notify the Council of the change of address. The Council had instructed bailiffs on an earlier debt and the bailiffs traced the customer to his new address. The complaint to the ombudsman was that the Council was pursuing when payment was being made.

The Council put any further collection of the earlier debt on hold and investigated the matter. As a result of the investigations the Council agreed to write off part of the earlier debts on the basis

that the Council had provided confused information about what he owed and also re-referred the debts when it shouldn't have done.

Case 2 related to a home improvement grant administered by the strategic housing team in conjunction with care and repair ( now replaced by Festival Housing). The home owners were dissatisfied over the length of the process to apply for a grant and have the work done, and the actual standard of workmanship carried out on behalf of the Council through Care and Repair. The LGO ultimately found that the work itself was of a satisfactory standard once remedial works had been done by care and repair to improve the original job but that the customer had been affected by delays. Care and Repair refunded their fees to the Council and as a local settlement the Council agreed to pass this back to the customer.

Cases 3 and 4 both related to the notification policy in respect of planning applications and the Council agreed to update the policy on neighbour notification, to have clearer processes in Development Control for dealing with our own applications and to meet with the residents to discuss any matters we can include in the build to address their concerns.

### **Customer feedback in respect of complaint handling**

Since April 2011 we have been asking customers for feedback on how their complaint was handled. The response this quarter tells us that **50%** of customers that responded are satisfied with way we are handling their complaint.

Those were happy made the following comments:-

- I am satisfied but think it's quite poor that no one has actually spoke to me directly;
- Well handled, officer visited me at home to sort out problem; and
- Handled very well

Comments received from those who were unhappy about how their complaint had been handled include:-

- I was passed to two different departments before I could get a satisfactory response;
- The Council should deal with complaints more speedily and effectively; and
- The officer concerned didn't answer my questions - that is why I had to complain.

There are plans in place for further training and support for officers dealing with complaints, in light of the recommendations from the Planning Policy Task Group.

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Head of Customer Services  
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