



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

**Making Experiences Count
Quarterly Customer Service Report**

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

1st April 2012 – 30th June 2012



Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

1. Introduction

This report provides some of the key customer service information for the organisation, including:-

- analysis of the complaints and compliments received during this quarter and any other relevant feedback.
- Customer Service Centre management information, including transactional statistics for information; and
- customer satisfaction.

It also includes feedback on a recent mystery shopping exercise and customer care training.

2. Customer Feedback Analysis

43 complaints were received during this quarter, with 26 of them (60%) answered in 15 working days or less. 15 complaints took longer than 15 working days to respond to and details of these complaints are detailed below. Sometimes it is possible to resolve a complaint on the spot and that happened in 4 cases this quarter. 2 cases are still outstanding. These are being addressed but are lengthy and complex, ongoing cases. We also received 21 compliments.

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.

22 (51%) complaints were considered to be upheld or partial upheld as we could have done better.

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

- Not doing what we have said we will do.
- Giving customers incorrect or confusing information.
- Not responding to customers calls and queries.
- Delays in taking action.
- Not having any empathy or respect for customers.

These are issues that we are addressing by:

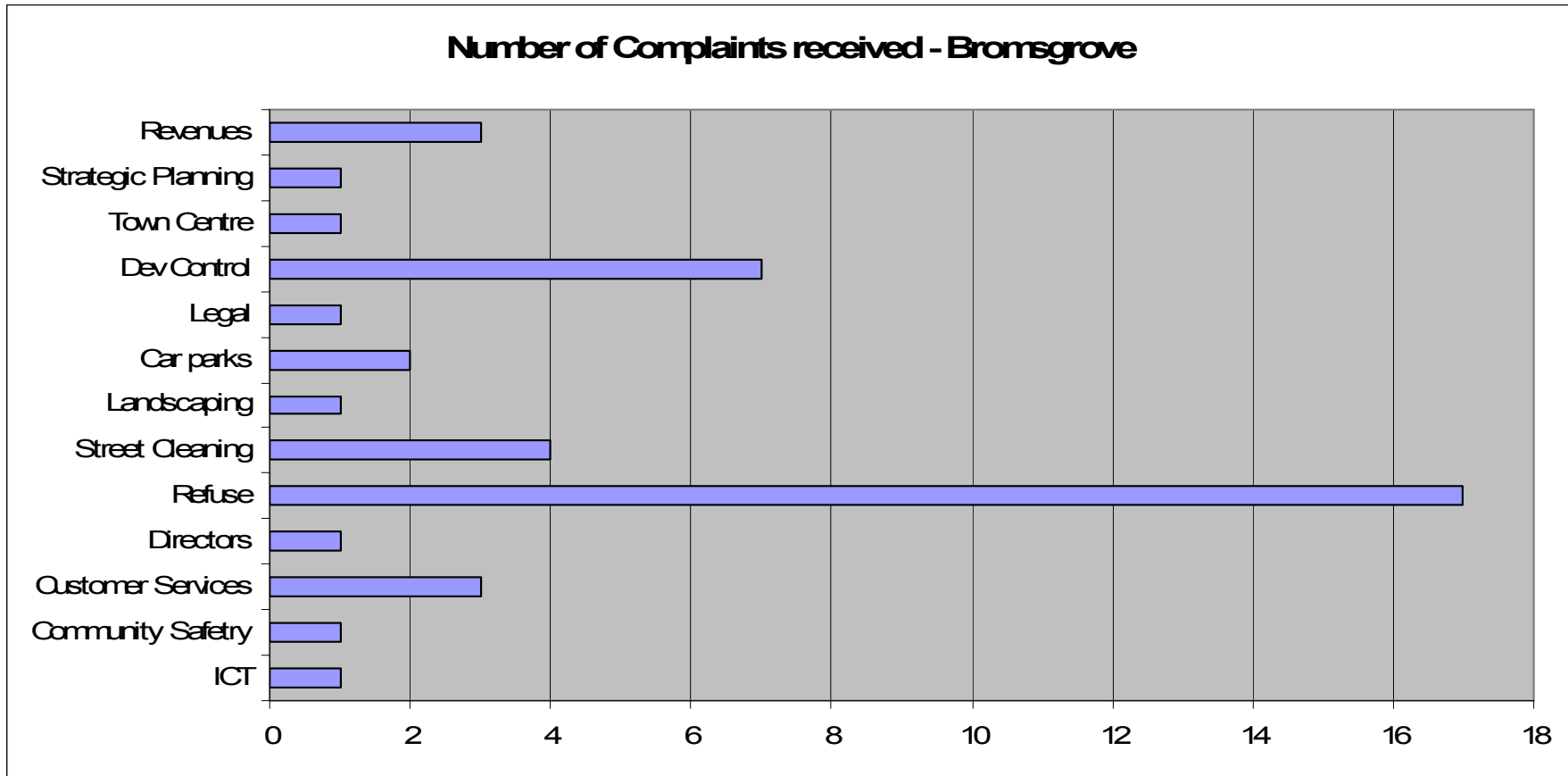
- arranging small workshops with teams to discuss customer service issues and then delivering training tailored to their needs.
- Staff briefings have been held to highlight common causes of complaint and how we can improve our customer care.
- Later this year we have arranged a series of courses for managers designed to develop their coaching and communications skills in customer care.

The main trend identified relates to waste collection and the return of bins to the place expected by the customer. The relevant Managers are addressing this matter directly with the crews, and it is an issue that has been picked up by the transformation team as it drives in failure demand.

The following table shows a breakdown of the complaints and compliments received by department.

Department	Compliments	Complaints	Responded to within 15 working days	Complaint upheld or partially upheld	Complaint not upheld	Still open
Business Transformation	0	1	1	1	0	0
Community Services	2	1	0	1	0	0
Customer Services	7	3	3	1	2	0
Directors	0	1	1	0	1	0
Environmental Services	7	24	16	14	9	1
Legal and Democratic Services	0	1	1	0	1	0
Leisure and Culture	2	0	0	0	0	0
Planning and Regeneration	3	9	3	3	5	1
Resources	0	3	1	3	0	0
Totals	21	43	26	23	18	2

Number of Complaints by service (detailed)



Time taken to respond to complaints

We aim to respond to customer complaints within 15 working days. 26 (60%) of complaints received during this quarter were dealt with within that timeframe. Where it has taken us longer to respond than expected (15 cases), customers were informed that there would be a delay in responding.

Where delays have occurred this tended to be due to the case being complex, or involving various parties. On a number of occasions the case was not properly closed down on the system and staff have been given further guidance on the use of the recording software. There are no obvious trends within any department of failure to address complaints. The following table provides details of all complaints received and closed during last quarter.

Complaint details	Outcome of investigation	Action taken	Days taken to respond
Business Transformation			
Customer unhappy that the planning portal keeps going off line.	Upheld	Apology given and customer updated on planned works to portal.	6 days
Community Services			
Complaint about inaction by the Council relating to illegal sale of cars on the public highway.	Partially Upheld	Although the matter in question had been properly dealt with and information provided to the customer, some emails from the customer were not responded to in a timely fashion and deadlines given for a response was missed.	18 days Complex investigation, involving various officers
Customer Services			
Customer concerned about numerous issues regarding the Council performance.	Not upheld	Head of Customer Services had lengthy conversation with the customer to explain situation. The customer did not understand various processes and made various requests which were unachievable.	Day received
Customer had an accident when a Market Traders A blew over, and had wanted the insurance information for the stall holder. Customer felt that the CSC were being unhelpful as they couldn't provide the information and advised that this was a matter the customer	Not upheld	Head of Customer Services rang the customer to explain our situation. Customer had already been provided with the relevant information and the CSC were correct in that there was nothing more that the Council could do. Customer	Day received

must take up directly with the stallholder via own legal advisor.		accepted that it was a private matter for her to resolve with the stallholder's insurance company.	
Customer unhappy with blue badge process and the way her father was treated.	Partially upheld	Apology given. Although the member of staff had followed the proper process the customer could have been given clearer information about the process and changes made, and helped to understand those changes. This will be addressed in training sessions.	7 days
Directors			
Customer very unhappy that the Directors at BDC have been given pay rises when others have had pay cuts	Not upheld	Customer contacted and informed that this was untrue and situation explained.	11 days
Environmental Services			
Complaint about Council van parked outside toilets and litter bins in High Street.	Partially Upheld	Customer was contacted and situation and cleaning programme explained. Van will be parked in a safer place in future.	17 days Case not closed down on correct date
Customer unhappy that bins keep being left in her drive after collections.	Upheld	Apology given, crews instructed, and this will be monitored.	10 days
Customer rang to say that she had witnessed a female refuse collector driving whilst on her mobile telephone.	Partially Upheld	Apology given and staff member given instructions about taking calls whilst driving.	26 days Staff member involved on leave
Customer unhappy about the quality of grass cutting.	Not upheld	Customer visited and grass cutting programme explained.	2 days
Customer emailed to complain about having to pay for two car parking tickets as the machine didn't register her money.	Upheld	Apology given and money refunded. Machine has been checked and repaired.	20 days Error on complaint assignment

Customer unhappy that her bin collections keeps being missed.	Not upheld	After investigation it was found that she was not placing the bin at the kerbside so this was explained to the customer.	5 days
Customer unhappy about the amount of litter in Wythall and that it doesn't seem to have been cleaned in the last two years.	Not upheld	No evidence to support the customers views but the team will be working with the Enforcement Team to monitor this situation	16 days Officer on leave
Customer unhappy that her bin hadn't been emptied properly.	Upheld	Apology given and bin emptied 30 minutes after complaint was received.	2 days
Customer unhappy that bins are not replaced properly after collection.	Upheld	Apology given and crews instructed to monitor this.	15 days
Customer complained that his wheelie bin has again been left in the middle of his drive stopping him from pulling onto it when he got home. He lives on a very busy road and it is dangerous not being able to just drive in off the road.	Upheld	Apology given and crew have been reminded to leave the bin a safe position. This will be monitored.	26 days Case not closed down on correct date
Customer unhappy that his bin is not being returned to his property even though he has reported this several times.	Not upheld	Apology given although the customer was putting his bin out in a strange position.	14 days
Customer unhappy that his brown bin keeps being missed even though he had paid for it.	Not upheld	After investigation it was found that the customer had not placed the sticker on the bin so this was explained to him.	11 days
Customer unhappy that Euro bin belonging to company next door is not being placed back properly and causing problems when he tries to access his office.	Upheld	Apology given and crews instructed to replace bin to the proper place.	10 days

Customer unhappy that her bins keep being missed.	Upheld	Apology given. Access problems to flat discussed and new bin collection place agreed.	8 days
Customer unhappy that his car park fine was rejected and the delay in response to his letter.	Partially upheld	Apology given, although parking fines are not a matter that can be addressed through the corporate complaints system.	11 days
Customer unhappy that his recycling bin was rejected for no reason.	Not upheld	Customer put the wrong bin out – this was explained to him.	2 days
Customer unhappy that refuse crews were causing access problems on his road.	Upheld	Apology given and crews instructed to make sure this doesn't happen again.	Day received
Customer unhappy that he has requested his road to be cleaned 4 times without success.	Not upheld	Roads were cleaned but on investigation it was found that dirt and debris were being caused by the customer's business so it has been passed to Enforcement.	14 days
Customer unhappy that her assisted collection keeps being missed.	Upheld	Crew returned immediately to collect.	Same day
Customer unhappy that her bin was missed.	Not upheld	Crews reported that it was not out at time of collection.	2 days
Customer unhappy about lack of response from Street Cleaning Supervisor.	Upheld	This was due to staff changes and the customer has now been contacted and apology given.	10 days
Customer unhappy that his bin is being used to empty other peoples bins.	Not upheld	This is normal process but customer is upset by it so crew will change their method.	18 days Reason for delay unclear
Customer unhappy that her bins are not being replaced to the proper place	Upheld	Apology given and crews instructed to replace bin to the proper place.	20 days Reason for delay unclear

Legal and Democratic Services			
Customer unhappy with the way his complaint to the Standards Committee was handled.	Not upheld	Customer misunderstood the process- this was explained to him in depth.	1 day
Planning and Regeneration			
Customer wishes to make a formal complaint about the planning meeting where the application for Banner Homes to build on Fiery Hill Road, Barnt Green was discussed.	Not upheld	Customer did not fully understand the planning process. This was explained to him.	29 days Complex issue involving several teams.
Customer unhappy with the attitude of a planning officer and the way his application was handled	Upheld	Some aspects could have been handled better and these will be addressed in ongoing training- Apology given.	15 days
Agent feels he has been given inconsistent advice by the planners.	Not upheld	No evidence to justify this	13 days
Customer unhappy that he was not consulted about planned telecoms application.	Not upheld	Appropriate consultation had taken place so no evidence to justify this.	4 days
Customer unhappy about opening hours of a local take-away and lack of action to enforce planning conditions.	Upheld	Investigation was already ongoing. Apology was given for the delay in responding to his complaint and update given.	19 days Reason for delay unclear
Customer feels that he has not been given either a fair or reasonable opportunity to comment on a planning application and may have been disadvantaged. Customer requested clarification as to why he was not directly notified of an application of this type and magnitude. Customer feels the application has been obtained inappropriately due to misleading information being provided to the Council.	Not upheld	After investigation it was found that due process had been followed in all aspects of this application and a detailed letter was sent to the customer.	17 days Complex case requiring input from several teams

Customer feels that he has had a shambolic and appalling service from the planning team.	Not upheld	Letter sent to customer explaining the application process	21 days Reason for delay unclear
Customer unhappy that market trader may be affecting spouse's business.	Upheld	Apology given – new policy to be established	40 days Complex investigation
Resources			
Customer unhappy with the way a Council Tax team member spoke to him and his mother.	Upheld	Apology given to customer and member of staff concerned will be advised about customer care	16 days Case had been dealt with in time but wrong date entered
Customer unhappy that correspondence to his partner from the Council assumed that she was married and had moved address	Partially upheld	Council Tax had received an anonymous report saying that this customer was not declaring her new circumstances. This was not investigated until a couple of months later which led to the mistake. Apology and explanation given	16 days Case had been dealt with in time but wrong date entered
Customer unhappy with calculations for his benefit claim	Partially upheld	Apology given - this will be discussed at staff meetings and training given where required	12 days

Time taken to respond to complaints by service.

The following chart shows the breakdown of all complaints by response time. This suggests that the end to end time for responding to complaints is generally based on the nature of the service rather than any one service dealing with complaints in an unsatisfactory way.

Some complaints can usually be dealt with either on the spot or within a couple of days. The vast majority of Environmental Services complaints are dealt with within 6 to 8 days. Complaints for the Planning and Resources Services (Planning Applications, Council Tax and Benefits included) can be more complex and as a result often take longer to address.

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

Some of the changes made as a result of complaints received this quarter include:

- Benefits staff to be provided with further updates about changes in benefit calculations.
- Refuse supervisor looking at ways to improve continuity of information to crews
- Additional training has been delivered to CSA's to update/remind them on processes and procedures

Number of complaint escalated to Head of Customer Services

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

Case 1 related to Refuse and Recycling. The customer was unhappy with the response to his complaint about the new vehicle for collecting garden waste, and the advise provide with regard to weight restrictions. After investigation it was felt that we could not meet the customer's expectations. The guidance and reason for this was fully explained and the complaint was not upheld.

Case 2 related to Planning. The customer was unhappy about the response he received to his complaint about a member of staff dealing with his planning application. This has been reinvestigated by the Head of Customer Services, and a meeting arranged to discuss the customers concerns further.

Happy Customers!

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.

Team	Compliment Detail
Shop Mobility	Thank you for arranging the van for the scooter to be delivered .Many thanks for your helpfulness. If there were more people like you, the world would be a nicer place
Customer Services	Thank you for the service provided when coming in for her Blue Badge and finding her hearing aid.
Customer Services	Customer was very impressed with the efficient service he received whilst contacting Customer Services. He stated what a good service we provided, he had been able to deal with all his enquiries/requests all in one go over the phone.
Refuse	Thank you for the quick service after I reported a lost brown bin 2 days ago and was pleasantly surprised that it was delivered today alongside the blue sticker.
Street Cleansing	Customer wants to thank the street cleansing team for a speedy response to his request for a small sweeper.

Arts Events	Customer very happy about the party in Sanders Park. She had a really wonderful time, the children loved making crowns and dancing to the music, even trying some of games. It was a real success.
Sports Development	Customer would like to thank instructors for all the motivation and knowledge they gave her during the 12 week course, and catch up sessions.
Development Control	Very impressed with the speed and quality of service provided by Land Charges.
Revenues	Very helpful service received from Council Tax officer.

3 Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

There was one complaint referred from the Ombudsman this quarter. This related to a disabled facility grant issue. The customer felt that the Council had unfairly delayed making a decision and have no proper process to verify claims for this grant. The Council is awaiting the decision from the Ombudsman investigator on this matter.

4. Customer Service Centre Information

The section provides some statistical data in respect of the service provided at the Customer Service Centres (CSC) for information only. The purpose of the Customer Services team is **to help resolve customer's problems or requests**. We use measures rather than targets to assess what is happening in the service and this section includes some transactional data.

Customer numbers

The following table shows the numbers of customer enquiries dealt with by the Customer Service Team:

	1 st quarter 2011/12	4 th quarter 2011/12	Totals for 2011/12	1 st Quarter 2012/13
Face to face enquiries	3,528	3,774	14,121	3,478
Telephone enquiries	27,601	23,416	104,068	20,176
Email enquiries	1,005	257	3,496	322
Payments	6,923	5,372	26,100	6,073
Total customer contacts	39,057	32,819	147,785	30,049

5. Customer Satisfaction

The majority of problems or requests received by customer service staff are handed over to someone else within the organisation to resolve. We have established a scheme to gain feedback from customers, who have recently made contact with us, on how well the organisation (or a part of it) responded to customer's problems. During this quarter we made contact with 38 customers, who had made contact with us with issues relating to Council Tax. We received the following responses to our questions:

How was your enquiry handled by the customer services adviser?

Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
0	0	1	7	30

Was your enquiry resolved to your satisfaction by the council?

Yes	No
38	

6. Mystery Shopping

A mystery shopping exercise was carried out recently to assess how well services were responding to contact from customer via the telephone and email. This was carried out at no cost other than some staff time. Members of our customer focus group along with four external customers carried out the exercise. Due to the limit on resources available the exercise focused on telephone calls and emails for three service areas – Revenues, Benefits and Planning. Our 'shoppers' were given scenarios and checklists for the exercise. The scenarios were general queries which should be quick and easy to answer. The results for each service are given below.

Revenues Results

Telephone Calls	Number of Calls	Number Answered	Number of callers treated with respect/friendly attitude	Information given easy to understand	How many customers had to contact more than once
	10	10	10	9	0

Telephone calls to Revenues were answered by Customer Service Advisors and Revenues Officers. The mystery shoppers reported that all calls were handled in a professional manner, and no customers had to make a repeat call to get the information they wanted. They made the following comments:

- Could have provided more information, especially about how to access information on the website.
- I was made to feel comfortable.

Emails	Number of Emails	Number of Replies	Response friendly/respectful	Information- was it was requested/easy to understand	How many customers made contact more than once about the same email
	8	7	7	7	1 (2 times)

Emails were sent direct to the service area via revenues@bromsgrove.gov.uk. The mystery shoppers reported that:

- On one occasion no response was received and they had to chase for one twice before a responses was received;
- On all other occasions the responses was received promptly, and provided the information required in a respectful and friendly manner.

Benefits Results

Telephone Calls	Number of Calls	Number Answered	Number of callers treated with respect/friendly attitude	Information given easy to understand	How many customers had to contact more than once
	10	10	10	10	0

Telephone calls to Benefits were answered by Customer Service Advisors. The way that phone calls are answered has not yet changed significantly through transformation, other than that the calls are not taken by all staff but handled by one or two up-skilled members of the team.

Our shoppers were happy that they were handled in a professional manner and commented as follows:

- Very clear information and a very nice lady.
- I had to wait for nearly 2 minutes but I got the information I needed.
- Friendly efficient handling of call.

Emails	Number of Emails	Number of Replies	Response friendly/respectful	Information- was it was requested/easy to understand	How many customers made contact more than Once about the same email
	8	7	5	5	0

Emails were sent direct to service area via benefits@bromsgrove.gov.uk. One email was not responded to, and in a number of cases the reply was not as courteous as the mystery shopper would have expected and they did not answer their enquiries. The mystery shoppers made the following comments:

- I was supplied with a web link and a form but no other help was offered even though I had asked for it.
- Told me where I could get the info I needed but there was no personal touch and my names was not used.
- Still waiting for a response after 3 weeks.

The transformation of the revenues and benefits systems is taking into account how customer demand is handled, and the mystery shopping exercise will be repeated later in the year to review whether there has been any change in the level of service provided.

Planning Results

Telephone Calls	Number of Calls	Number Answered	Number of callers treated with respect/friendly attitude	Information given easy to understand	How many customers had to contact more than once
	10	8	8	8	2 (4 times and 2 times)

Mystery Shoppers were given names or numbers for the back office staff in the planning department to contact. The results show that making contact can be difficult but when through to an officer the Mystery Shoppers found staff to be helpful and professional. The comments received from the mystery shoppers were:

- I tried 4 times to contact them but gave up in the end. Once it was picked up after 3 rings but it was put back down again.
- My call went to voicemail, I left a message and the officer rang back next day and gave me lots of advice.
- I spoke to an officer who was very helpful even though my call wasn't for his team.
- My first call wasn't answered, it went to voicemail but I called later in the day and spoke to a very friendly lady.

Emails	Number of Emails	Number of Replies	Response friendly/respectful	Information- was it was requested/easy to understand	How many customers had to contact more than once
	8	7	5	5	0

Emails were sent to pec@bromsgrove.gov.uk. The mystery shoppers reported a lack of customer care in some cases. Their comments were as follows:

- I received a quick reply but it wasn't personal and didn't even give the name, number and organisation of the person responding.
- I got what looked like an automatic response but it didn't really answer my query.
- The response was very helpful and clear.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration has asked the Head of Customer Services to provide some officer support to help change the approach to customer care within the planning team. This will include support for a wide range of issues, from practical help to ensure phones are used to their full potential (e.g. group pick up of calls rather than phones left ringing), to assisting with how best to deal with complaints and other correspondence.

Conclusion

We can see from the results that the level of customer service is variable, depending on the channel used to make contact, or the service being contacted. Transformation work in all three services will be addressing such issues and the exercise will be repeated later this year to establish whether performance has changed at all.

7. Strategy Action Plan Progress

The Every Customer, Every Time Action Plan was updated to include recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny, specifically around further training for staff.

This section provides an update in respect of these, as well as information on training provided by the Customer Service team over the last 12 months.



Guidance and training

Customer Service guidance and training has been provided for all staff. A Customer Service handbook was produced and published early in 2011. This was launched through staff briefings with all staff in March/April 2011, led by the Head of Customer Services and highlighting all the key issues for staff. These were well received and supported.

This was then followed up with customer care training for all staff in the form of 90 minute training sessions which focused on providing excellent customer care, and gave tips and techniques for staff to help them meet our expectations. The trainer held 3 sessions for office staff and then tailored a specific session for depot staff to address specific needs for those staff who are not office based. The training for depot staff built on previous work done with the supervisors.

To complement this training and act as refresher staff briefings were held in July 2012. Run by the Customer Services Team these focused on some areas that still needed some improvement and were a light hearted way of getting the message across. These reminded staff of the expectations placed on them in respect of customer care provision as well as guidance on complaints handling, especially how to determine when and issue is a complaint and not just a request for service. These will be backed up by Customer Service staff attending Departmental Management and team meetings in the service to further discuss customer care and complaint handling.

Guidance has also been provided to managers to help them manage performance in respect of customer care. These skills will be further developed through a Leading and Coaching for Excellent Customer Services course to be held in August to October this year to help managers develop and manage customer service within their teams.

Customer centric writing courses were delivered with over 40 staff attending courses designed to improve how we communicate with customers.

All managers will also be required to attend non-discretionary advanced training designed to support them in producing customer-centric letters and other written communication, as well as identifying the issues to be addressed in letters/emails of complaint and how best to respond to those issue. This will be delivered in September/October 2012.

The Customer Services team has worked directly with a number of services to help them develop solutions to specific issues. These include:

- Bespoke complaints handling training;
- One to one training on the complaints tracking system;
- Advising on standard letter content;
- Working within transformation teams to develop customer focused service methods.

Amanda de Warr
Head of Customer Services
July 2012