



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

**Making Experiences Count  
Quarterly Customer Service Report**

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**1<sup>st</sup> January 2013 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council

[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://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
- An update on the improving the customer experience action plan.

## 2. Customer Feedback Analysis

**24** complaints were received during this quarter because we did not meet the customer expectations, or failed to meet our own standards, or the customer was unhappy with an outcome.

**12** Complaints (50%) were answered in 15 working days or less.

**12** Complaints took longer than 15 working days to respond to. This shows an increase in the percentage dealt with within our agreed timescales, but is still lower than we would hope for.

We also received **37 compliments**.

These figures compare with last quarter and last year's totals as follows:-

Quarter 4 11/12		Total 11/12		Quarter 3 12/13		Quarter 4 12/13	
Complaints	Compliments	Complaints	Compliments	Complaints	Compliments	Complaints	Compliments
28	28	146	109	47	29	24	37

This quarter we have seen a significant decrease in the number of complaints received particularly for the Refuse and Recycling service. At the beginning of this year a dedicated call centre was set up at Bromsgrove Depot staffed by experienced team members to deal with queries for Environmental Services. Armed with local and current knowledge of their service area, this team has been able to deal with requests for missed collections as they come in. This has resulted in a much lower number of complaints being recorded for this service.

We can see that many of the complaints we receive have several factors in common and this quarter they were:

- Not doing what we promised
- Poor communication
- Staff not having any empathy or understanding of customer's needs
- Not responding to customers calls or emails
- Unacceptable delays in taking action

These are issues that we are addressing by:

- Developing new guidance for staff about how they can best use the functionality of their telephones to make sure calls are answered in their absence.

- Trialing a new complaint process where the customer is contacted as soon as the complaint is received to discuss our understanding and what we can do to put it right as soon as possible.
- Providing refresher training for staff using our customer feedback system.

The total figures for last year compared with 2011/12 are as follows:

	Total compliments	Total complaints	Dealt with in target time
2011/12	109	146	111(76%)
2012/13	124	151	95 (63%)

Over the year there has been an increase in the number of complaints that haven't been responded to within our 15 day standard. Customers were kept informed of delays unless they were of just a couple of days. The data does not show that complaints are being ignored, nor is there any evidence that complaints are not being properly processed.

We are also aware that because of organisational changes there is a need to provide training on our customer feedback system to new staff or staff that have changed roles. This is currently taking place.

### Complaints and compliments by department

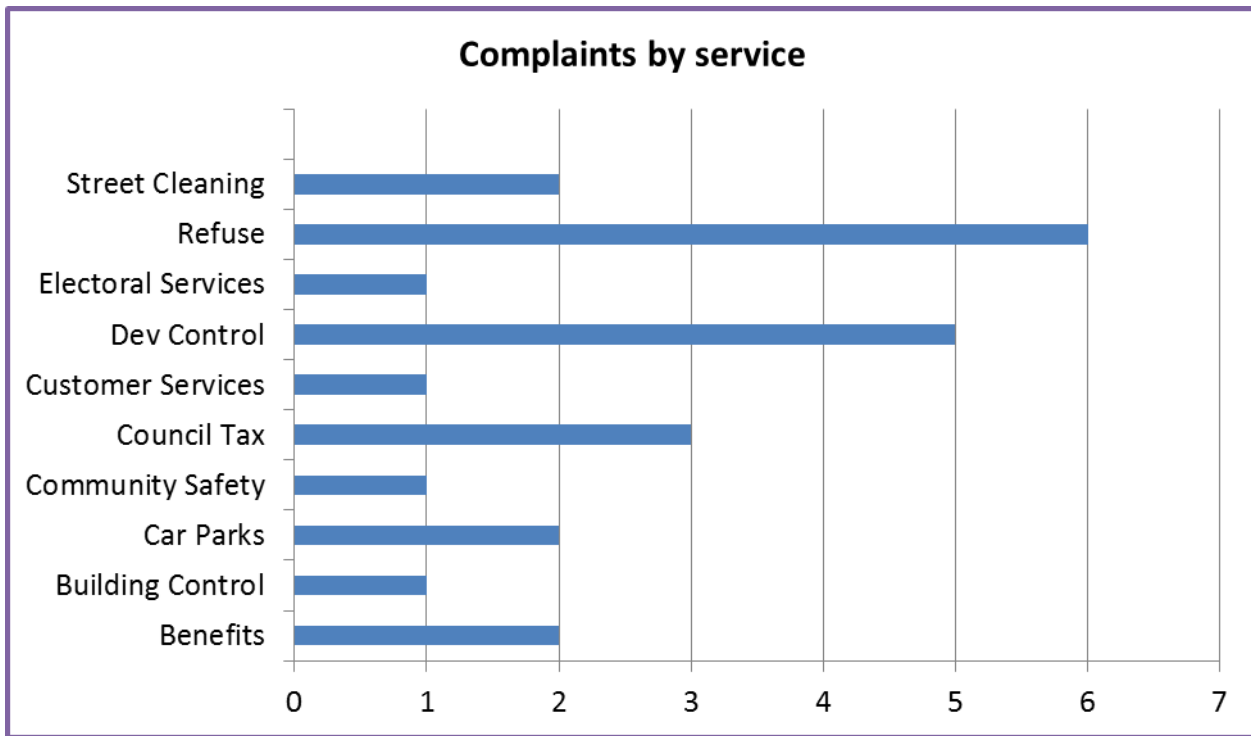
The following table shows the total of the complaints and compliments received by department.

Those departments with the highest demand inevitably have higher number of complaints but compared with the total demand the numbers are low.

Department	Compliments	Complaints	Responded to within 15 working days	Still open
<b>Community Services</b>	12	1	1	0
<b>Customer Services</b>	3	1	1	0
<b>Environmental Services</b>	12	10	8	0
<b>Legal and Democratic Services</b>	0	1	0	0
<b>Leisure and Culture</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>Planning and Regeneration</b>	8	6	1	0
<b>Resources</b>	1	5	1	1
	<b>37</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>

## Number of complaints by service (detailed)

The following table provides a more detailed breakdown of complaints by service.



## Time taken to respond to complaints

We aim to respond to customer complaints within 15 working days and 50% of complaints received during this quarter were dealt with within that timeframe.

Where it has taken us longer to respond than expected, (12 cases) customers were informed that there would be a delay, except where the delay was only 1 day (3 cases), or where the customer could not be contacted (1 case).

The reasons for delay are detailed below, along with details of the complaint and the outcome.

Complaint details	Outcome of investigation	Action taken	Days taken to respond and reason for delay
<b>Community Services</b>			
Customer unhappy that we did not respond to his email informing us of a an illegal sale of a vehicle on a highway	Team did not respond in time to email	Apology given and investigation into alleged illegal sale undertaken	4

<b>Customer Services</b>			
Customer unhappy that they had to wait over 35 minutes to be seen at the Customer Service Centre.	Customer did not give name or contact details, and it has not been possible to identify who they were waiting to see (queues for some enquiries are longer than others by their nature).	Queue management will be improved and checked, to ensure reasonably accurate information about possible wait times are provided.	<b>1</b>
<b>Environmental Services</b>			
Customer unhappy that the car park machine wouldn't accept the coins he was putting in.		Apology given and machine inspected and serviced.	<b>13</b>
Customer unhappy that she has no response to her car parking appeal yet has had a letter from a debt collection agency regarding the fine.	Error in process identified.	Apology given, debt collection cancelled and appeal process underway.	<b>10</b>
Customer unhappy that her bins are still being left in a dangerous position despite her complaint four months ago	This round has had some problems which have been resolved.	Apology given and collection will be monitored.	<b>14</b>
Customer unhappy that his recycling wasn't collected and this is the fourth time in 12 months.	No obvious problems with this collection.	Apology given and collection will be monitored	<b>1</b>
Customer unhappy that the message on telephone number for the bulky waste service kept prompting him for an extension number and kept repeating.	Our error as out dated web pages could still be found by a Google search	Apology given and pages deleted	<b>1</b>
Customer unhappy with the Xmas Refuse collections and that the black bags she left outside were attacked by animals.	Information was published in the local press and our website	Explanation given.	<b>11</b>
Customer unhappy with the questions he was asked about his disability for an assisted collection	No evidence found that staff were rude	Customer visited and explanation given about why we need to ask such questions	<b>17</b> Delay in being able to speak to customer

Customer unhappy that a member of the street cleaning staff has been seen visiting shops when he should be working.	No evidence found but this will be monitored	Customer informed.	<b>16</b> Complex investigation
Customer unhappy that alarms went off in disabled toilet.	Alarm system checked and will be monitored	Apology given and customer given advice on what to do if it happens again.	<b>3</b>
Customer unhappy that although she was recently granted an assisted collection it hasn't happened.	Crews reminded.	Apology given and collection will be monitored.	<b>7</b>
<b>Legal and Democratic Services</b>			
Customer is unhappy about the wrong details being on the register for her and her husband and suspects that they have fraudulently entered.	No evidence found and all possible checks made to signatures. Customer had been provided with the necessary guidance relating to anonymous registration but has not completed the process.	Explanation given of how the process works.	<b>32</b> Complex and lengthy investigation.  HOCS carried out independent investigation in this case.
<b>Planning and Regeneration</b>			
Customer claims that the roof tiles on her house are not the right type and were signed off by Building Control with the previous owner	Customer given incorrect information by builder.	Explanation given to customer	<b>24</b> Complex investigation involving external contractors
Customer unhappy that a planning application was accepted but a similar one was refused.	Application followed all correct procedures	Explanation given	<b>1</b>
Customer unhappy about a planning application for new houses and the procedure at the planning meeting	Members did consider all objections in the officer's report.  The developer's consultation process is out of Council's control.	Explanation given	<b>21</b> Complex investigation
Customer unhappy about an approved planning application	The loss of privacy was considered and has been addressed.	Explanation given	<b>13</b>

Customer is unhappy about the decision to allow both their neighbour's application as they consider the proposal breaches the 45 degree code, invades their privacy and has resulted in a loss of light.	The 45 degree code was applied correctly and consultation is not required for a non-material amendment.	Explanation given	<b>16</b>
Customer unhappy that her neighbours planning proposal will affect her light and is being built into her garage wall	Application followed all correct procedures	Explanation given and advised that concern about the garage wall is a civil matter.	<b>16</b>
<b>Resources</b>			
Customer unhappy with the way that his benefits claim was assessed.	Officer made mistake with calculation. This has since been rectified.	Apology given and officer advised.	<b>16</b>
Customer unhappy that when he rang to inform us that he was moving out he was asked for details of who was moving in.	This is a general power we have to request information from him as the owner of the property which could be used to identify who is the liable person for any period specified in the notice.	Explanation given	<b>21</b>
Customer unhappy that the Council Tax leaflet does not explain how the Council spends the funds generated.	There is a significant amount of information in the leaflet but it did not meet this customer's expectations.	More detailed information sent as requested.	<b>17</b>
Customer unhappy that his Council Tax has been increased.		Customer called and explanation given	<b>1</b>

## Time taken to respond to complaints by service.

This chart shows the breakdown of all complaints by response time.



We can see that there are several complaints that have taken longer to respond to than our standard of 15 days. This is in part due to the complexity of some cases but we are also aware that because of staff changes and restructures, some teams may need some refresher training on our customer feedback process.

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

Some of the changes made as a result of complaints include:-

- Checks are being made on our web pages to make we have deleted out of date information for refuse collections
- Alarm system in disabled toilet will be monitored to ensure efficiency.

## Number of complaints escalated to Head of Customer Services

There was one complaint escalated to the Head of Customer Services, for further investigation or action.

A customer was unhappy that his application for a storage site for caravans was rejected. He also complained that his complaint was not handled properly and we hadn't followed the proper process.



After investigation, the Head of Customer Services found no evidence of failure to follow proper planning process. However we had failed to provide a written response when requested. An apology was given to the customer for this.

## Happy Customers!

From the **37** compliments received we can see that customers appreciate the range of services the Council provides, especially when we deal with their requests in a timely and professional manner. Here are some of the compliments we have received for information.

Team	Compliment Detail
Lifeline	Customer wished to thank Lifeline for all the help they have given him.
Lifeline	Customer thanked us for all our help and said that the service is marvellous.
Lifeline	Customer wanted to thank Lifeline for all our help during a recent incident.
Customer Services	Customer says she recently visited the CSC twice over two separate days in Bromsgrove's' Dolphin Centre and had occasion to talk to "Andy" on the front desk. On both occasions he went above and beyond the level of service expected and was an absolute credit to the organisation, and himself. Customer stated that they do not leave compliments lightly but would like to advise of his excellent customer care friendly approach. Requested that thanks be passed on and that we ensure that his supervisor is aware of just how good a job he is doing.
Refuse	Customer would like to pass her thanks onto the crew who came and collected her bins, on time like they normally would.
Refuse	Customer reported some fly tipping and wanted to compliment the men in acting so quickly as it was removed the next day.
Street Cleaning	Customer says she would like to comment on the Road Sweeping which took place on her road. The person driving the Road Sweeper carried out an excellent job in clearing leaves and debris from the road and pavements. We have lived in this road for 7 years and the road cleaning has never achieved the standard of the past 2 days. Please pass on our congratulations for a job well done.
Planning	Thank you to you and your colleagues for all the work you have put into achieving this rightful and, regarding environmental preservation, important decision
Planning	Customer sent in comment card to say that Ruth Lambert is extremely helpful and gave her some good advice.

### 3. Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

During this quarter there were three complaints referred from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), for investigation. One is still under investigation and therefore not reported in detail. Those investigated are detailed below – cases 3 and 4.

There were a total of six complaints referred from the Ombudsman during 2012/13. Two are still under investigation and no outcome can be reported. Details of all those investigated are as follows:

	Team	Complaint	Decision
1	Legal Services	Customer claimed that the Council wrongly handled a parish councillor's appeal about a standards committee decision.	The LGO decided not to investigate as there was no evidence to substantiate the complaint.
2	Parking	The customer complained that ticket machine was only accepting certain coins and when he called into the Dolphin Centre just before his ticket was about to run out the receptionist was taking a phone call and he was kept waiting, resulting in him being late back to his car and receiving an ECN	The LGO rejected his complaint without a formal investigation and found that there had been no maladministration and no injustice to the customer.
3	Refuse and Recycling	The customer complained that the Council regularly fails to ensure wheelie bins are returned to a safe place after being emptied. He was concerned that by allowing bins to cause an obstruction, the Council is not complying with its stated policy. His wing mirror was damaged as he passed an overhanging wheelie bin at the side of the road. He would like the Council to reimburse the repair costs.	The LGO decided that this case was outside their jurisdiction and that the customer could pursue a civil case
4	Dog Warden-WRS	The complaint related to the awarding of contracts for dog warden services and was made by an ex-employee who had hoped to be awarded one of the contracts but was not successful. She also complained that after the new service was set up the Council had not notified interested parties who used the service sufficiently well and she had been disturbed by numerous callers who still thought that she was acting as the dog warden.	LGO felt that customer should have been notified in writing of process for contract re-tender rather than only being notified verbally. It was also recognised that hand over arrangements could have been better dealt with. The LGO recommended local settlement to resolve the complaint. The Council/WRS agreed compensation payment of £250 to reflect the time and trouble taken by the customer to make the complaint. The customer also asked for a letter of apology and one was sent by WRS.

## 4. Customer Service Centre Information

This section provides some statistical information in respect of the service provided at the Customer Service Centre (CSC).

The operational purpose of the Customer Services team is **'Help me get the support I need with my issue or problem'**

### Customer numbers

The following table shows the numbers of customer transactions recorded by the Customer Service Team:

	<b>Totals for 2011/12</b>	<b>4th quarter 2011/12</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2012/13</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 2012/13</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2012/13</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2012/13</b>	<b>Totals for 2012/13</b>
Face to face (enquiries)	14,121	3,774	3,478	3,546	2,549	<b>3,289</b>	<b>12,862</b>
Telephone (enquiries)	110,036	23,416	20,176	21,422	17,850	<b>25,839</b>	<b>85,287</b>
Email (enquiries handled by CS team)	3,496	257	322	904	923	<b>765</b>	<b>2,914</b>
Payments (through cash office)	26,100	5,372	6,073	5393	6,207	<b>5,328</b>	<b>23,001</b>
Payments (online)	8,814	2,792	1,458	1,315	2,851	<b>3,733</b>	<b>9,357</b>
Payments (automated telephone service)	6,280	1,810	1,037	1,008	1,897	<b>2,653</b>	<b>6,595</b>
Payments (assisted telephone service)	10,144	3,355	2,455	2,237	2,558	<b>3,194</b>	<b>10,444</b>
<b>Total customer contacts</b>	<b>178,991</b>	<b>46,735</b>	<b>34,999</b>	<b>35,825</b>	<b>34,835</b>	<b>44,801</b>	<b>150,460</b>

The trend for increasing use of on line and automated payment options continues although there are still a significant number of customers who continue to call the CSC to make a payment. Once the cash receipting system has been upgrade we will carry out a publicity campaign to encourage use of the automated 24/7 service.

Overall we have seen a reduction in business for the Customer Services team during 2012/13 as expected due to changes in service delivery. Resources have reduced in parallel with some customer service advisors transferring in to other roles within the organisations and making

excellent use of their customer care skills to support the shift of customer demand to expert teams.

Telephone answering performance cannot be assessed accurately for this period due to the change in call handling system, however we do know that we saw an increase in abandoned calls in January 2013 due to weather related surge in demand. Additionally system failure in March will have impacted on performance.

Overall, answering times have improved compared to 2011/12. On average wait times are 10% better than in 2011/12 and 10% more calls are being answered in less than 30 seconds. The percentage of abandoned calls has also reduced by over 3%. However, with the majority of calls now being handled by expert teams we are unable to provide performance data for those teams at present but work is ongoing to address this issue.

The new call handling system is working well and early indications suggest another improvement in call answering times as a result of the change. We are also able to use our resources more flexibly which will help to maintain service levels despite reducing resources.

A significant peak in Benefits and Council Tax customers at the end of March and early April has put strain on the resources available to deal with the demand. The Customer Service Manager, whilst not responsible for these services, works closely with the relevant managers to try to ensure the best possible service for customers. However, there have been lengthy wait times, and a need to call a number of times, for some customers. The Head of Finance is currently assessing the customer demand experienced during this period in order to identify ways in which we can reduce the need for so many customers to make contact at this time of year

## 5. 'Every Customer, Every Time – Everybody Matters' – Action Plan

The Every Customer, Every Time – Everybody Matters' Customer Experience Strategy set out a clear vision in respect of customer service.

### Our vision is to:-

- **make it easy to access services, joining up with other organisations where possible;**
- **provide a high quality customer experience for all customers who make contact with us, regardless of when or how they make contact;**
- **ensure customers get the information and advice they need in a way that suits their needs and is easy to understand.**

This was supported by an action plan, focusing on 4 key themes intended to focus on delivering the best quality services that meet the needs of individuals for the lowest possible costs. These 4 themes are:

- **Customer experience** - going back to basics to ensure that the customer's experience of contacting us is always positive – even when we can't give the answer the customer wants.
- **Transform** – reviewing, and changing, service delivery based on what customers actually want and need and building the processes around the customer rather than to meet organisational needs.

- **Understanding the customer (including internal customers or partners)** – through feedback, complaints, compliments, surveys, forums, and using customer insight tools such as Mosaic and the information held on our own systems.
- **Our Staff** – ensuring all our staff are truly customer focused, and share the values and behaviours necessary to ensure we exceed our standards and our customer's expectations.

By implementing the Strategy we were also mindful of Bromsgrove District Council's priorities, specifically to provide **Value for Money**.

In the last two years there has been considerable progress with much of the action plan having been completed. Many of the actions have now become normal business and our approach to service transformation has customer service at its core thus ensuring a customer focused approach to all service development.

Some of the successes include:-

- Customer Focused 'behaviours' and expectations are embedded in our recruitment and performance development processes, ensuring that all staff are clear about how we will interact with customers and colleagues . Managers have received training to help them work with members of their team using coaching methods to help improve customer care provisions
- We have held regular training events in a variety of formats ranging from in-house short awareness sessions such as the Customer Services pantomime, and 'handling complaints' training tailored to meet individual team needs, to formal training sessions on:
  - Customer focused written communications;
  - Customer Care Excellence;
  - Dealing with Difficult Customers; and
  - Coaching for Excellence,

Customer service focused training forms part of the annual training plan.

- A range of guidance has been provided to staff and is available on the customer service pages of the staff intranet. These include:
  - Staff customer care handbook;
  - Complaints - handling and recording;
  - Key behaviours
  - Telephone techniques
  - Dealing with Difficult Customers.
- Considerable work has been done on improving the content and accessibility of the Council's website, including a feedback mechanism to enable users to highlight problems or poor content. This work is ongoing with each service managing their own content but working with the Web Development experts to ensure consistency and a high standard.
- An in house Mystery Shopping regime has been developed and is used annually. This is the subject of further development as it is important to ensure this fits with the changing face of service delivery as a result of transformation. This is supported by the 'call back'

system, where Customer Service staff make contact with customers a few weeks after their contact with the Council to find out whether they were happy with the service and if their issue was resolved.

- The customer feedback system was reviewed and simplified. This is now being reviewed again using systems thinking principles, specifically that the managers should speak directly to the customer about their concerns and agree a suitable resolution, wherever possible. This is showing that complaints can be handled more quickly and also more effectively to the customers satisfaction. Although it is recognised that sometimes we are unable to satisfy the customer, evidence so far suggests that the personal interaction is helpful in breaking down misconceptions and poor communication.
- The work of the Customer Service team has changed dramatically over the last two years and so is under constant review, but changes made to the front of house service, cashiering service and structure, and the telephone software have resulted in a more responsive service, as well as reducing the resources required.
- To support the established and well recognised staff awards scheme, we have introduced an ongoing Customer Heroes Award which enable staff and customer to nominate a member of staff at any time of year in recognition of being a customer hero. This has highlighted excellent customer care across the authority.

There are 3 actions currently in development. These are:

- Providing guidance/opportunities for people to get involved at the Council;
- Staff surveys; and a
- Rolling communications/consultation plan.

6 actions out of a total of 57 have not been completed. These have all been reviewed and no further action taken as the systems thinking approach has superseded the need. The actions not completed are:

1. Action - CMT Walking the Wards.
  - System Thinking requires system leaders to understand their systems in much greater depth, including the impact on the locality. Work in Housing, Planning and Environmental Services has resulted in CMT and other managers working in specific areas and 'out in the work'.
2. Action - Use of Customer Insight tools to inform decision making.
  - Although we carried out a pilot we found that the customer insight data did not take account of true customer demand. Again, as systems thinking places the customer's needs at the heart of service delivery we found that there was little or no advantage in using such tools.
3. Action – Working with partners across Worcestershire to implement a joint self-service strategy.
  - We are developing self-service mechanism in line with systems thinking principles, based on needs identified within each service and where it adds value to our customers.

4. Action - Achieve Customer Service Excellence Accreditation.
  - An internal review of the organisation against the CSE criteria showed that we met the majority. The decision was taken to not pursue the costly accreditation and focus our resources instead on system thinking transformation which looks at customer service in the context of the whole system.
  
5. Action – Ensure customer service features in action plans of all services, as part of our business planning process.
  - The formal business planning process has been discontinued as a result of our move towards the systems thinking approach. This sees customer service as an integral part of all service transformation reviews.
  
6. Action – Implement GovMetric to capture real time customer feedback on their experience.
  - This has been deferred due to changing priorities. We will continue to monitor customer feedback through complaints, comments and compliments received as well as real time discussions with customers as they do business with us.

The Head of Customer Services will continue to identify areas for improvement and any actions necessary to support the vision to ensure that **every customer** has an excellent experience when dealing with the Council, **every time**.

Amanda de Warr  
Head of Customer Services  
May 2013