

Report to:	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	28 June 2012
Lead Officer:	Head of Customers and Education Support
Report Author:	Corporate Complaints Officer
Title:	Performance standards revealed through the complaints process

1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 To present analysis of the feedback received via Denbighshire County Council's customer feedback policy 'Your Voice' during Quarters 3 and 4 of 2011/12. The report will also highlight areas where the policy and process can be improved.

2 What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To provide information regarding any performance issues identified by 'Your Voice', and to make recommendations to address these accordingly.

3 What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 The Corporate Complaints Officer to review the current customer feedback policy in the context of the Authority's performance in complaints handling, and work with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to improve performance. This will include, but not exclusively focus on, those issues identified in section 4.6.
- 3.2 The Corporate Complaints Officer report back to Committee at the next appropriate meeting detailing the changes made following the review outlined in 3.1.
- 3.3 Members consider any information they wish to be included in future reports.

4 Report details

4.1 Summary of performance

- 4.1.1 Appendix C shows that the number of complaints recorded by the Council fell significantly during Quarter 3 to 121. There was subsequently little change in recorded complaints in Quarter 4 – 126.
- 4.1.2 The Council's overall response times to complaints according to the 'Your Voice' timescales have dropped significantly during Quarter 3 to only 69% of complaints responded to within timescale. A further drop is noted in Quarter 4 to 64%.

4.1.3 The proportion of complaints that were either Upheld or Upheld in Part remains around 40%: 38% in Quarter 3 and 40% in Quarter 4.

4.1.4 'Service' remains the highest proportion of complaints – accounting for over 66% of all recorded complaints in each quarter.

4.2 Complaint volumes

4.2.1 Complaints in themselves are not necessarily indicative of poor performance. They need to be placed in the context of what 'services' the Service area delivers and is responsible for.

4.2.2 The volume of recorded complaints fell across all service areas in Quarter 3, with the exception of Housing (Appendix B). Overall, it increased slightly during Quarter 4 (Appendix C).

4.2.3 The data includes complaints that are recorded on the central CRM system. It is possible that not all complaints are being recorded on this system. This could be for a number of reasons such as a reluctance to use the system; training need – both in identifying a complaint and how to record a complaint on the system.

4.2.4 Further work is required to establish and ensure that all complaints are recorded centrally.

4.3 Complaint response times

4.3.1 There has been a clear decline in the overall performance of the council in responding to complaints within the 'Your Voice' timescales – down from 91% in Quarter 2 to only 64% in Quarter 4.

4.3.2 The overall figure hides the fact that there are some service areas that perform exceptionally well i.e. Environmental Services and Regeneration, Planning and Public Protection.

4.3.3 Some services have had additional pressures that may have impacted on performance. One possible reason for the decline in overall performance is that the recording system may not have been updated due to other factors – meaning the output is not accurate and does not necessarily reflect the true position.

4.3.4 Further work needs to be undertaken to better understand the reason(s) why there is such a contrasting range of performance throughout the Authority. This work needs to examine the cause(s) of the seeming decline in performance and develop and implement appropriate measures to address any that are identified.

4.4 Complaint category

- 4.4.1 The Council primarily delivers services to the residents, businesses and visitors of Denbighshire. It can therefore be presumed that complaints about 'service' would feature prominently in any statistics.
- 4.4.2 This term, or category, is broad and what isn't clear is what types of service issues there are – i.e what are the reasons for an individual to complain to the council.
- 4.4.3 Each service area delivers a different type of service, and the category needs to be tailored to each area to ensure the data can be better interrogated and any issues identified.
- 4.5 Complaint outcome
- 4.5.1 Around 40% of complaints in the final two Quarters of 2011/12 were either 'Upheld' or 'Upheld in part'. This effectively means that the Authority is at fault or has made a mistake.
- 4.5.2 Mistakes do happen, and the Council needs to accept this. How we deal with these and what lessons we take from them are key to improving services and performance.
- 4.5.3 All complaints can be useful in helping the Council improve. Reducing complaints may *suggest* that lessons are being learnt but further work is required in order to establish whether this is the case, and ultimately to ensure it does.
- 4.5.4 It should be noted that Environmental Services do undertake analysis of the complaints for their service area and they have made changes to some processes as a result. It is notable that their volumes of complaints have reduced during 2011/12. Working with services to explore this and to identify 'best practice' needs to be undertaken.
- 4.6 Summary
- 4.6.1 Denbighshire County Council is recognised as a high performing council, and is seeking to continually improve and ensure that it maintains this reputation. Complaints can be fundamental to supporting this, provided they are dealt with effectively and the council learns from them.
- 4.6.2 The Welsh Government has published a 'Model Complaints Process' that applies to all public service organisations in Wales. The aim of this is to ensure that the 'customer' receives a consistent and good standard of service regardless of which service provider they complain to. Denbighshire County Council has not yet adopted this Model.
- 4.6.3 There is an opportunity therefore and also a need, to review 'Your Voice' and ensure that the complaints process supports the Council's

own ambitions and delivers the Welsh Government's aim. This review will include, but not be exclusively focussed on:

- Assisting Officers (and Members) in identifying a complaint.
- Examine how the current recording software is used in order to ensure the data is accurate.
- Review the categories currently assigned to a complaint in order to make them more relevant and meaningful.
- Review the performance of each service area to determine the reason(s) for the contrasting service performance and introduce measures to address these.
- A quarterly performance report about complaint handling be issued to all Heads of Service and presented to SLT.

5 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1 An excellent Council, close to its community.

6 What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 None – existing role of Corporate Complaints Officer.

7 What consultations have been carried out?

7.1 None.

8 Chief Finance Officer Statement

8.1 Not applicable.

9 What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

9.1 By not dealing with complaints effectively, the reputation of the Council may suffer.

10 Power to make the Decision

10.1 Article 6.3.4 of the Council's Constitution stipulates that scrutiny committees when exercising their functions may review and scrutinise the Council's performance in relation to policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas.

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