

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 26 APRIL 2010

REPORT ON: CUSTOMER CARE OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2009

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 222-2010

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The Annual Report (Appendix 1) seeks to inform members on the operation of the Customer Care policy including the workings of the statutory Social Work Complaints Procedure during the year 2009.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

2.1 approve the content of this report and;

2.2 instruct the Director of Social Work to undertake revisions necessary to the management and operation of the current Customer Care Policies and the Complaints Procedure to meet the challenges identified in this report for the coming year.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications arising from this report will be minimal and will be contained within existing resources.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 Good customer care is the key to customer satisfaction. The Social Work Department's customer care philosophy is based on "Listen, Learn and Improve". For a number of years the Department has adopted a comprehensive approach towards customer care. This includes the Customer Charter, Customer Care Standards, Service User Involvement Policy, Public Information, Customer Care Training for staff and working towards the Customer Service Excellence Standard.

4.2 The Customer Charter and Customer Care Standards

The Customer Charter "Getting it Right for Social Work Customers" informs service users about various aspects of social work services and the standards they can expect. The Charter is issued to service users following assessment of their needs and arrangement of services. The content will be reviewed in 2010.

The Customer Care Standards were adopted in 2004. These were developed with the involvement of service users and describe standards of service in more specific terms, covering a number of measurable performance indicators.

4.3 Complaints Procedure

The statutory social work complaints procedure deals with complaints and representations made directly by service users or made on their behalf by their representatives, whether communicated verbally or in writing or anonymously.

The principle of local resolution is central to the complaints procedure and complaints should be resolved as quickly and as close to point of service delivery as possible. Most of social work complaints therefore are resolved locally at the point of service delivery to the satisfaction of the service users. These complaints sometimes referred to as "informal complaints" form the bulk of all the complaints received by the Department.

The unresolved informal complaints or where the complainant does not wish the matter to be dealt with informally or such complaints which require formal investigation and detailed written responses are formally recorded and investigated according to the formal complaints procedure. These are Level One complaints and should be acknowledged within 5 days and resolved within 14 days unless this 14-day period is extended by mutual agreement.

If the complainants are not satisfied with the outcome of the Level One complaints, they can ask for the complaint findings to be reviewed. These escalated complaints are known as Level Two complaints and are reviewed by a senior member of staff, the Director of Social Work or the Chief Executive of the Council. Serious complaints are always dealt with at Level Two. These complaints have to be acknowledged within 5 days and resolved within 28 days unless this 28-day period is extended by mutual agreement.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can ask for their complaint to be reviewed by the Complaints Review Committee of Dundee City Council. If still not happy with the outcome the complaint can be referred to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman.

4.4 Summary of Complaints

During the calendar year 2009, a total of 45 formal complaints were recorded. This number is higher than the previous year's total of 38. However, this increase is in line with the general trend observed over the three year period. This is in part due to the increased publicity of the social work complaints procedure and an increased awareness of service users.

Of these complaints 40 were Level One while 5 were Level Two. Comparison of three years' figures indicates that the number of Level Two complaints is decreasing. This is an indication of a more thorough and detailed investigation that is carried out by the Department at the first stage of the complaint and the improved communication with the complainants throughout the process.

Acknowledgement targets for these complaints were achieved in 73 % of the cases. This needs improvement. Steps have been taken and an action plan is being progressed. Completion targets for these complaints within the specified or the agreed period were achieved in 91 % of the cases. This compares well with the previous year's figures.

During this period no complaint was referred to the Complaints Review Committee or the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman.

The analysis of these complaints indicate that whereas the Department has continued to improve its performance in this area of customer care it also faces challenges in relation to the acknowledgment targets.

The information from complaints and from the complainants themselves is invaluable and is used by the Department to inform continuous improvement in service planning and service delivery. Remedial action as a result of these complaints include; changing and improving the complaints monitoring process, issuing an apology or looking at training needs.

4.5 Compliments

Increasingly more and more service users, their carers and relatives are showing their appreciation about the quality of service received and the approach and professionalism of the staff providing the service. These comments are extremely important for staff morale. The Department is encouraging staff to pass on these compliments to the Customer Care Officer to be collated centrally. Discussions are taking place with the IT Section to develop a facility which would allow compliments to be incorporated into the complaints recording system. The analysis of compliments and complaints will then become even more meaningful. During 2009, 122 compliments were recorded centrally, compared to 119 in 2008.

4.6 Customer Service Excellence Standard

The Department is pursuing Customer Service Excellence Standard which is the replacement of the previous Charter Mark. A three year Customer Service Excellence Standard Framework 2008-2011 was developed for putting in place improvements necessary for achieving this Standard. A number of key improvements are already in place and work on the remaining actions is continuing.

4.7 Future Priorities and Challenges

- Customer Care Training for frontline staff (Customer Services Professional Award)
- Electronic recording and monitoring of complaints, Compliments and suggestions
- Review and update of the Customer Charter and the Customer Care Standards
- Review of Public Information
- Performance monitoring of Customer Care Standards

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 None.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

Date: 2 April 2010

**DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL
SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT**

**STRATEGY PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT
SERVICE**

CUSTOMER CARE SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2009

INDEX

1.	WHAT THIS REPORT COVERS	3
2.	CUSTOMER CHARTER	3
3.	CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS	3
4.	CUSTOMER CARE TRAINING	4
5.	PUBLIC INFORMATION	4
6.	SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT	4
7.	CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE STANDARD	5
8.	CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS	5
9.	CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS	8
10.	PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR	8
11.	CONCLUSION	9

1. WHAT THIS REPORT COVERS

This report provides an overview of customer care activity over the period January - December 2009 in relation to key areas of this work. It highlights the main actions taken in these areas and details some of the priorities for the coming year.

The key elements of Social Work Customer Care Strategy include Customer Charter, Customer Care Standards, Public Information, Service User Involvement Policy and Customer Complaints and Compliments.

The Department is also working towards achieving the Customer Service Excellence Standard that is the replacement for the previous Customer Care Charter Mark.

All of these underline the Department's commitment to customers and is a further expression of the Department's customer care philosophy of 'Listen, Learn and Improve.'

2. CUSTOMER CHARTER

The Customer Charter "Getting it Right for Social Work Customers" informs service users about:

- the services we offer
- the standards they can expect when using our services
- how to contact our services
- how to let us know what they think about the services they receive
- how they can make a complaint if they believe we have not met our standards
- how they can pay a compliment or make a suggestion

The Charter underlines the Department's commitment to customers through principles of accessibility, respect, effective communication, involvement and partnership. It is a further expression of the Department's customer care philosophy of 'Listen, Learn and Improve.'

The Charter is issued to service users following assessment of their needs and arrangement of services. The document will be reviewed and updated during 2010.

3. CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS

These Standards were introduced in 2004 as a means of setting working standards for contact with customers. The Social Work Department has reported its performance against these standards on two previous occasions and during 2010 will be looking to improve on the method of collecting this information. The standards include:

- Not leaving telephone calls unanswered
- Avoiding any delay in passing on telephone messages left for staff
- Acting promptly to respond to written enquiries and keeping individuals informed of progress, where a delay is likely
- Showing patience and respect in listening to service users, regardless of their personal circumstances
- Dealing professionally with any communication needs of service users

- Being always helpful in giving information to direct individuals to the most appropriate agencies where social work is not involved

4. CUSTOMER CARE TRAINING

With regard to the Customer Care Standards good quality training is one of the priorities of the Department.

Customer care techniques are continually improving and it is important to keep pace with these developments. Two such developments have taken place recently. The office of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has developed specific training courses that also involve a course specifically designed for the complaints investigating officers. Similarly customer care training leading to multi-level qualification has also become available through the Improvement Service. The Department is currently exploring these options and further targeted customer care training for relevant social work staff will be a priority for the coming years. This will begin with the Department being involved in a pilot for staff to obtain the Improvement Service *Customer Services Professional Award*.

5. PUBLIC INFORMATION

Social Work Department produces a range of information for the benefit of service users, potential service users, carers etc. Access to this information is provided through a variety of means. These include:

- Display of information leaflets in all key social work establishments.
- Availability of these information leaflets at libraries, GP surgeries and other partner agencies.
- Information on the Web that includes an electronic version of these leaflets. In addition fairly comprehensive information on other social work services is also accessible on the web.
- This Webpage encourages the public to email comments to a special inbox to enable a faster response time.
- Social work customers are issued with a personal copy of the Customer Charter and the complaints leaflet "Your Right to be Heard".

The Department is continually improving the quality and accessibility of its public information and is currently concentrating on more effective ways of disseminating targeted information.

6. SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT

Involving service users and stakeholders and gathering their views is an essential part of developing and maintaining high quality services. Much work has been done to improve standards of information gathering and to use this information to inform planning and evaluation. This can be evidenced in the surveys, questionnaires and interviews that have been conducted over the last one year throughout Social Work Department. Service users

and their carers and relatives are actively involved in the planning and development of social work services.

7. CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE STANDARD

Social Work Department is working towards achieving the Customer Service Excellence Standard. (The previous Charter Mark has been replaced by the Excellence Standard). For this purpose the Department developed a three year Customer Service Excellence Standard Framework 2008-2011. A number of actions from this framework have been completed. Work is continuing on the remaining targets and it is hoped that this framework will form the basis for future annual reports.

8. CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Section 5B of Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 provides for complaints made by or on behalf of:

- a person for whom the local authority provides a service either directly or indirectly
- a person whose request for such a service has been refused by the authority
- other persons whose need or possible need for service, which the local authority has a power or a duty to provide, has come to the authority's attention

The statutory social work complaints procedure deals with complaints and representations made by service users directly, or on their behalf by their representatives, whether communicated verbally or in writing or anonymously.

Handling complaints properly and thoroughly is an important part of good customer care. It demonstrates that staff are putting in practice the philosophy of "Listen, Learn and Improve". Complaint investigations are undertaken confidentially, without prejudice to complainers' rights to raise the matter through other routes, or for fear of discrimination in their right to services.

It is well known that most of the service users, in the first instance, want to highlight their issues, bring these to the attention of the relevant people with a view to reaching a local resolution. Most of social work complaints, therefore, are resolved locally at the point of service delivery to the satisfaction of the service users. These complaints sometimes referred to as "informal complaints" form the bulk of all the complaints received by the Department over any specified period.

Those whose complaints remain unresolved to their satisfaction locally and those whose complaints require formal investigation, and detailed written responses, are dealt with through the Social Work Department's formal complaints procedure.

Dealing with complaints within the formal complaints procedure involves the following stages:

1. The first stage: Unresolved complaints or where the complainant does not wish the matter to be dealt with informally, the complaint is formally recorded and investigated according to the formal complaints procedure. These are Level One complaints. These complaints have to be acknowledged within 5 days and resolved within 14 days unless this 14-day period is extended by mutual agreement.
2. The second stage: If the complainants are not satisfied they can ask for the complaint findings to be reviewed at the next stage when it becomes a Level Two complaint. These complaints are reviewed by a senior member of staff, the Director of Social Work or the Chief Executive of the Council. Such complaints have to be acknowledged within 5 days and resolved within 28 days unless this 28-day period is extended by mutual agreement.
3. The third stage: If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the result of the investigation they can ask to be heard by the Complaints Review Committee of the Council.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

This is the final stage of the process. If the complainants remain unsatisfied with the findings of the above three stages, they have the right to approach the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman for a review.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS

Below is a detailed summary of the complaints recorded from January 2009 to December 2009. The tables show the Total Number of Formal Complaints Received by Service, the Number of Formal Complaints Received by Service and Level of Complaint, the Issues Raised through Complaints, and the Outcome of Complaints.

Table 1: Total Number of Formal Complaints Received by Service

SECTION	2007	2008	2009
Children	15	20	25
Adults	3	3	16
Criminal Justice	8	9	4
Other	1	6	0
TOTAL	27	38	45

The table shows an increase in the number of recorded complaints compared with the last year's figures. This increase is in line with the general trend of the previous years. For a number of years now, the Department's has promoted its complaints procedure through a variety of means. In addition all social work customers are issued with a personal copy of the Customer Charter and the complaints leaflet "Your Right to be Heard". These are intended to raise awareness of the complaints procedure and to encourage users to report back when services are not up to the described standards.

Table 2: Number of Formal Complaints Received by Service and Level

SECTION	Level 1			Level 2		
	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009
Children	9	16	22	6	4	3
Adults	1	3	14	2	0	2
Criminal Justice	8	9	4	0	0	0
Other	1	5	0	0	1	0
TOTAL	19	33	40	8	5	5

This table clearly indicates that the number of Level Two complaints has decreased considerably over the last three years. This is an indication that a much detailed and thorough investigation is carried out at the stage of Level One complaints. In addition the complainants are kept informed about the progress of their complaints throughout the complaint process.

Table 3: Issues Raised through Complaints

CATEGORY	2007	2008	2009
Disputed Assessment /Decision	14	17	16
Service Provision	5	11	18
Staff Conduct	8	10	23
Other	0	0	1
TOTAL	27	38	58

NB: Number of issues raised through complaints is greater than the actual number of complaints received since some complaints will have more than one issue.

Table 4: Outcome of Complaints

2009						
Category	Upheld	Part upheld	Not upheld	Not substantiated	Withdrawn	In progress
Disputed Assessment/ Decision	1	2	7	4	0	1
Service Provision	3	2	5	6	1	1
Staff Conduct	7	0	5	6	4	1
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	11	4	17	17	5	4

Action Taken in Response to the Complaints

As part of the performance management framework, based on the Best Value principles, the findings of complaints that have been upheld following investigation are passed on to the Head of Service responsible for that particular service. The Head of Service addresses any recommendations arising from the investigation.

The outcome of all complaints that were fully or partially upheld, have been used as an opportunity for further learning, improving professional practice, communication with service users and their representatives and for improving standards of customer care.

The previous Customer Care Officer retired during the spring of 2009 and a new officer was appointed to the post a few months later. Since this time the Customer Care Officer has undertaken an audit of existing complaints and the arrangements for monitoring departmental performance. A report on options for improving the recording and monitoring arrangements has been submitted to the Social Work Directorate for approval. As part of learning from this audit the Department has reached an agreement with IT Division of the Council to improve the recording and monitoring arrangements for our complaints procedure. These changes will be an adaptation to the corporate system and give senior managers immediate access to the performance of the complaints procedure.

9. CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS

Throughout the year a number of service users, relatives, carers and representatives show their appreciation and satisfaction on the quality of service received and the approach and professionalism of the staff providing the service. People are increasingly showing their appreciation both verbally and by sending cards and writing letters. These compliments play an important role in raising staff morale.

It is not always possible to collate these compliments centrally. The Department is encouraging staff to pass on these comments and compliments to the Customer Care Officer. Even when these are collated centrally it is not always easy to record and present these in a meaningful way. Discussions are taking place with the IT Division of the Council to develop a template for this purpose. If the pilot is successful the facility will be incorporated into the complaints recording system. An analysis of compliments will then be much easier and more meaningful. During 2009, 122 compliments were recorded centrally, compared to 119 in 2008.

10. PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR

There is a need for staff to ensure that best customer care practice is maintained. It is particularly important to demonstrate that the Department is meeting the expectations laid down in the Customer Charter and the Customer Care Standards.

In order to meet the challenges highlighted in this report, the Department will be pursuing the following identified priorities:

- Customer Care Training for frontline staff (Customer Services Professional Award)
- Electronic recording and monitoring of complaints, compliments and suggestions
- Review and update of Customer Charter and the Customer Care Standards
- Review of Public Information

- Performance monitoring of Customer Care Standards
- Completion of a major survey of approximately 900 service users and carers

11. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the number of service users known to the Department at any one time exceeds 8500. This involves many thousands of hours customer contact. It is a positive reflection on the approach of our staff that our levels of formal complaints are very small and tend to be exceeded on a 3 to 1 ratio by compliments.

During late spring and early summer the results of the major service user and carer survey currently in progress will be analysed and used to inform the Department's self-evaluation and improvement processes. The survey will subsequently be repeated to give trend over time information on progress.