

## INFORMATION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
CORPORATE SERVICES	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	30 JANUARY 2023	18
<b>CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING</b>			

### PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

### SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

A progress update on processes and procedures being re-introduced post pandemic relating to customer engagement and feedback including the management of reporting on complaints handling.

### SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Corporate service teams including customer service specialists, communications, administration and facilities and the corporate support team.

### LINK TO INFORMATION

[Contacting the Council](#)

[Complaints](#)

[The Residents Survey](#)

### WHY IS THIS INFORMATION BEING GIVEN TO THE COMMITTEE?

General progress update.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

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### Context

1. During the pandemic several council activities were ceased in response to new higher priorities, service delivery changes and resource allocation. The procedures in place for gathering direct service feedback from end users together with the process for analysing and reporting on complaints were amongst the activities ceased with the resources redirected elsewhere.
2. Post pandemic the culture and behaviours of society and the workplace have changed, the proliferation of hybrid (at home, remote, mobile, flexible) working and a cautious return to the work environment have resulted in changes to processes and procedures in parallel with the return to a new 'normal'.

3. At Fylde there has been significant employee turnover alongside a corporate review and restructure of service arrangements, a process that is ongoing with the introduction of a continuously flexible workforce. The changes led to the appointment of a new Head of Corporate Services, Gemma Broadley, who is in the process of reviewing corporate support arrangements which include customer service feedback and complaints management reporting.

### **Customer Feedback**

4. Customer service, care and / or engagement have been cornerstones of the culture at Fylde for many years. The principle of continuously improving service based on feedback from the customer remains embedded however, formalisation of the processes along with corporate co-ordination and support was not a priority during or immediately post pandemic. Throughout this period though service areas were taking the opportunity to obtain feedback whenever possible with digital online platforms promoted and used extensively, the Residents Survey, that canvasses a view on all front-end services always remained available, with online campaigns to push awareness whenever possible.
5. The Head of Corporate Services has had the opportunity to engage with service managers and other stakeholders, to examine best practice as well as call on her own experience and expertise to revive the formal processes and support to capture customer feedback. Several service areas will be (some already are) sending a user-friendly short questionnaire to every customer that engages with the service based on the principle of 'How Did We Do'. Officers who visit customers in person at home, on site or place of business will offer the opportunity for immediate online feedback and bespoke campaigns will be planned to gather feedback that can contribute to service improvement.
6. In addition to the 'How Did We Do' questionnaire which has been designed as a generic set of questions aimed at capturing feedback from a specific service; a further generic campaign has been launched. A 'We're Here for You' campaign has been launched with the aim of allowing the customer a simple and accessible platform to submit any questions, queries, or quibbles. This campaign promotes the use of the council's generic email, [listening@fylde.gov.uk](mailto:listening@fylde.gov.uk) managed centrally by the Customer Service Specialists.
7. The corporate service teams will facilitate direct service-based customer feedback providing the platform for the customer to easily have their say as well as the analysis and summary of what the cumulative feedback means for the service. Service managers will identify what actions have been taken in response to the feedback with the communications team supporting the message back to the customer, in most cases direct contact details will be available to provide a response to the customers who engaged in the survey. Where additional customer engagement is required in response to generic feedback or as part of a dedicated service improvement review, advice and support will be available to obtain customer feedback through the most effective means possible i.e. more in-depth questionnaire, focus group, interviews etc.
8. The corporate service teams are working with other service areas where the generic content of the 'How Did We Do Survey' requires amendments/additions bespoke to the individual service. However, the basics of the generic survey will remain consistent to allow for benchmarking and reporting purposes.

### **Complaints Reporting**

9. The council has an established complaints procedure with a clear definition that is consistent with the guidance published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and has worked effectively for many years. The formal complaints procedure was operated and used throughout the pandemic with no cases of maladministration recorded. However, it is possible to access the council by multiple methods with an explosion of digital platforms, the customer is encouraged to engage with the council by their preferred method therefore it is easy to write, email, phone, message, call in person etc. Whilst almost all correspondences are service requests for information or to report something, complaints are made through any of the multitude of contact methods.
10. Complaints can be made and are made; they are captured, and they are addressed almost always within the five working days with an initial or full response. The process that had been ceased during the pandemic was a monthly review, reporting and publishing of the number of complaints submitted across the authority (according to the definition published) and the percentage that were responded to within the five working days target.

11. The process required resources to collate contacts from all the possible channels that are badged as complaints and review them to determine if the definition applies as a complaint against the council. For example, a resident will inform the council that there is a noise nuisance or dog fouling, these are complaints 'to' the council as opposed to 'against' the council. Equally, a report to carry out street cleansing or remove fly tipping is a service request not a complaint (unless we promise to clean it and we don't, then it is a complaint against the council). It was then possible to report performance corporately against complaints and identify any trends, patterns, or issues in particular services or at times to target support, advice, and improvement. This process is being reintroduced and at the same time will be reviewed to consider improvements that can speed up the process by reducing the time required to review the data sets each month.
12. Similar to the collation of customer feedback mentioned earlier, and in addition to streamlining the complaint channels, we are reviewing ways in which make it easier for customers to make a complaint, redirecting those with service requests to streamline the process and improve the overall customer journey.
13. The approach to customer engagement including the handling and reporting of complaints is important to continuous improvement based on identified customer need. Members of the committee can be reassured that activities which support this culture are being both reintroduced and improved post pandemic.