

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL**

**County Council  
16<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

**REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Garry Banks, Portfolio Holder for  
Customer Services**

**SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor Russell George**

**Does the cabinet Member believe that the local authority responds adequately and within its own timeframes to complaints made by the public?**

The council has a formal complaints system which is used to record, manage and respond to complaints submitted to the council. Whilst the service provides an efficient service for the vast majority of complaints we are aware of cases where performance has fallen below the standards we demand. Management Team have discussed how the council handles complaints and are initiating a review of our complaints procedures to improve overall performance.

Attached is a report considered by Management Team on 30<sup>th</sup> June.

30<sup>th</sup> June 2014

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**REPORT AUTHOR: Julie Nicholas-Humphreys**

**SUBJECT: Corporate Charter**

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**REPORT FOR: Information**

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**1.0 Summary**

The standards as documented in the Corporate Charter for dealing with Members of the Public are as follows:

**Powys County Council aims to provide high quality services. We try our best to ensure not only that the service is adequate and appropriate but also that you are dealt with as promptly as possible and with courtesy and efficiency. We have set standards which should be met in all but exceptional circumstances. We are making this Charter widely available so that people know what to expect in terms of services.**

**1. Responding to Telephones**

We aim to answer telephones within six rings. A greeting in English and Welsh will be used by all staff on main reception points. Staff will help a member of the public to talk to a Welsh-speaking officer if he or she should so wish. With the exception of calls made through the switchboard, staff will always give their name when answering the phone.

**2. Responding to Telephone Messages**

If the officer you are trying to contact is not available you will be invited to leave a message. You will normally receive a response within twenty four hours. If there is a delay you will receive an explanation and an indication of when your query will be dealt with.

**3. Responding to Letters, E-mails, Faxes and Requests for Service via the Internet**

When you write to the County Council we will reply in the language and medium of the original correspondence within ten working days of the receipt. Where a fuller, more complex reply is needed then the target is twenty days but we will send an acknowledgement within five days. Exceptions to this will only apply

where there is a different statutory time limit for a specific service. If there are any delays then an explanation will be given. You will be kept informed of the progress with any request which is made.

#### **4. Responding to Enquiries**

Members of staff will deal with enquiries at the first point of call wherever possible. Where this is not possible you should be referred to the correct person, either by telephone or in person. Where this person is not available then a message will be passed on to the appropriate member of staff who will try to respond within twenty four hours. Welsh speaking staff have been designated to serve as part of a service team to deal with enquiries through the medium of Welsh.

#### **5. Courtesy and Helpfulness**

The County Council will deal courteously with all requests from members of the public.

#### **6. Contact Points and Services**

Wherever we provide a service we will publish the opening hours and where appropriate, an out-of-hours emergency telephone number. When you visit our offices we will try our best not to keep you waiting more than ten minutes for a routine service. Where you are kept or likely to be kept waiting longer than this you will be given an explanation and offered an alternative time to meet with a member of staff. For more specialist advice you may be asked to make an appointment.

#### **7. Standards of Communication**

All reports and letters that are sent to you will be in plain language, using clear font and available in large print, audio tape or Braille on request.

#### **8. Information and Openness**

We try our best to keep you informed about our services and important events and changes which may affect you. This is done in a variety of ways through the Authority's Improvement Plan and the local media. In addition, there is a range of Development Plans and other information for each service which may be seen by contacting the relevant Directorate. All major publications will be bi-lingual in line with the County Council's Welsh Language Scheme. In addition to complying with legal requirements the County Council will seek comments on service provision through a Citizen Panel and established links with user groups, community groups and voluntary organisations.

#### **9. Equal Opportunities**

Powys County Council has an Equalities Strategy and Equal Opportunities Policy. We endeavour to provide the same standards of service and the same access to services for all members of the irrespective of ethnic background, race, gender, age, disability, religion/belief or sexual orientation. We have a Welsh Language Scheme and members of the public may use either Welsh or English in dealing with the Council and every effort will be made to provide a service in both languages. We have an Access Policy which aims to improve the accessibility of our buildings, our services and information for all members of the public.

## **10. And if things go wrong?**

If you are unhappy about a service you receive then we would like to hear from you. Powys County Council has a code of practice for dealing with complaints which outlines ways to make a complaint or comment, the measures we will take to redress the problem and any further action that can be taken if you are still not satisfied.

### **2.0 Present Position on certain Points of the Charter not being delivered**

**Point 1 of the Charter** – although calls to the contact centre will be answered automatically by messaging within 6 rings, calls that go direct to service areas either from numbers quoted on correspondence, via Auto Attendant or while attempting to transfer from the contact centre are often not answered within 6 rings and sadly on occasion, not at all. Every phone has a provision to route a call to another colleague but this ‘call forwarding’ is often not activated. Instructions on how to operate this function is available to all staff on intranet page 2635 or via link <http://intranet.powys.gov.uk/index.php?id=2635&L=0> In addition, employees are not responding with the Corporate Greeting ‘Cyngor Sir Powys, County Council – X speaking, how can I help?’

**Point 2 of the Charter** – there is no method of monitoring whether messages are being responded to within 24 hrs. Based on anecdotal evidence, for example, the contact centre will often take calls where a member of the public has been trying to contact an officer many times, which naturally increases the volumes of calls into the first point of contact, and it is therefore highly unlikely that this is occurring within the workplace.

**Point 3 & 10 of the Charter** – The Council’s Key performance Indicator on correspondence, complaints, FOI & EIR is 95% within 20 working days, maximum with DPA requests 40 days. Our current performance within these areas are falling short of our own standards.

The Council has a Corporate Correspondence Log where every letter should be logged by the service as it is received. It is evident that this system is not being used by all services, as the figures for last financial year show a total of 1208 items received, with 227 of those responded to outside of 20 working days and 133 showing ‘not responded to as yet’ (please see Appendix A). I am not aware of who is responsible for the system, but can only assume that it will be Business Services, if they handle the post on behalf of the service areas?

In relation to Corporate Complaints, their Administration is undertaken by Customer Services, via Civica, although each service area is responsible for their own investigations and responses. Customer Service will receive the Complaint, and determine whether it is a Complaint or a Request for Service. A request for service will be processed in the appropriate manner, whereby the correspondence will be forwarded to the service area to action and the citizen informed accordingly. If the correspondence received via ‘have your say’ is a complaint, then it will be determined whether it’s a Stage 1 or Stage 2 depending on the history or nature of the complaint, and the customer will receive acknowledgement within 5 working days, confirming who the investigative officer will be and the date that they can expect a response. The

complaint will be forwarded to the investigative officer to respond, and a copy of the response, once completed will be passed back to Customer Services to complete the file. The investigative officer names have been provided by the Heads of Service or Director. The complaints below are those that have been registered on the system in 13/14.

### **Complaints Completed Financial year 13/14**

PE	TOTAL	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
Corporate Complaint (Stage 1)	<b>356</b>	11	32	41	48	24	44	42	19	24	34	17	20
Corporate Complaint (Stage 2)	<b>42</b>	0	2	5	2	4	9	4	4	4	4	1	3
Ombudsman Request	<b>2</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

### **Complaints Completed Financial year 13/14 within (83%) and outside (17%) of KPI at Stage 1**

SERVICE AREA	TOTAL COMPLETED	TOTAL LESS THAN 20 WD	TOTAL MORE THAN 20 WD
	TOTAL		
Adult Social Services	0		
Benefits	7	7	
Business	0		
Car parks	1	1	
Carers	1	1	
Catering and Cleaning Services	4	4	
Children and Young People	1	1	
Communications Unit	1	1	
Council Land and Property	1		1
Council tax	7	6	1
Countryside	2	1	1
Customer Services	20	20	
Democratic Services & Info About the Council	3	1	2
Disabled people	2	2	
Education and Schools	1	1	
Environmental Health	11	10	1

Environmental services	3	3	
Grants	0		
Highways	49	44	5
Homelessness	1	1	
Housing	30	21	9
Housing Repairs	27	18	9
HR	5	4	1
ICT	4	4	
Land and property	2	2	
Law	1		1
Leisure and Sport	6	5	1
Overview and scrutiny of Council decisions	1	1	
Parks and open spaces	1	1	
Pest Advice and Public Health Risk	1	1	
Planning	46	31	15
Public rights of way	1	1	
Public Toilets	12	9	3
Recycling	9	8	1
Refuse	60	56	4
Regeneration, Property and Commissioning	2	2	
Roads	2	2	
Schools and Education	14	8	6
Staff	1	1	
Street Lighting	1	1	
Town centres	1		1
Trading standards	3	3	
Transport	10	10	
Travelling people	1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>62</b>

**Complaints Completed Financial year 13/14 within (74%) and outside (26%) of KPI at Stage 2**

SERVICE AREA	TOTAL COMPLETED	TOTAL LESS THAN 20 WD	TOTAL MORE THAN 20 WD
	TOTAL		
Children and Young People	1	1	
Council Procurement	1	1	
Council tax	1	1	
Environmental Health	3	3	
Highways	5	5	

Housing	4	1	3
Housing Repairs	1	1	
HR	2	1	1
Land and property	1	1	
Law	1	1	
Parks and open spaces	1	1	
Planning	13	11	2
Pollution control	1		1
Public rights of way	1	1	
Refuse	1	1	
Roads	1		1
Schools and Education	2	1	1
Trading standards	1		1
Transport	1		1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11</b>

***The above complaints should be taken into context in comparison to the demand that the service has received. Our actual complain numbers are very low, for example, the Corporate Contact Centre has answered 335,000 calls in 13/14, and of those 19,738 were Benefits, 34,945 Council Tax, 24,351 Housing Repairs, 45,149 Transport, Highways & Refuse, to name but a few. In addition, in one of the more contentious areas of the Council, the Planning Service have confirmed that they have undertaken 3122 – applications (including all notifications, screening opinions and preliminary enquiries) and 284 enforcement action requests.***

Other areas where compliance to statutory timescales should be met, are Freedom of Information (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and requests under the Data protection Act (DPA).

The figures registered for 13/14 are:

#### Received

Regime	Apr 13	May 13	Jun 13	Jul 13	Aug 13	Sep 13	Oct 13	Nov 13	Dec 13	Jan 14	Feb 14	Mar 14	Total
DPA	1	5	8	3	2	1	4	3	1	2	2	1	33
EIR	3	2	10	5	14	16	14	19	9	14	17	9	132
FOI	72	63	58	63	76	64	54	79	50	89	80	70	818
<b>Total</b>	76	70	76	71	92	81	72	101	60	105	99	80	<b>983</b>
	<b>222</b>			<b>244</b>			<b>233</b>			<b>284</b>			

#### Completed

Regime	Apr 13	May 13	Jun 13	Jul 13	Aug 13	Sep 13	Oct 13	Nov 13	Dec 13	Jan 14	Feb 14	Mar 14	Total
DPA		2	5	6	3	1	3	1	3	1	1	2	28
EIR		3	4	7	14	8	15	14	19	14	13	13	124

<b>FOI</b>	18	86	46	69	70	58	59	66	63	79	75	78	<b>767</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>919</b>
	<b>164</b>			<b>236</b>			<b>243</b>			<b>276</b>			

Completed before due date (20 working days for FOI/EIR and 40 days for DPA)

<b>Regime</b>	<b>Apr 13</b>	<b>May 13</b>	<b>Jun 13</b>	<b>Jul 13</b>	<b>Aug 13</b>	<b>Sep 13</b>	<b>Oct 13</b>	<b>Nov 13</b>	<b>Dec 13</b>	<b>Jan 14</b>	<b>Feb 14</b>	<b>Mar 14</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>DPA</b>		1	5	5	3		3	1	2		1	1	<b>22 (79%)</b>
<b>EIR</b>		3	4	6	11	7	12	13	12	10	12	12	<b>102 (82%)</b>
<b>FOI</b>	18	78	39	59	63	51	40	57	52	64	67	71	<b>659 (86%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>783</b>
	<b>148</b>			<b>205</b>			<b>192</b>			<b>238</b>			

### **3.0 Conclusion**

The restructures that commenced last financial year with Senior Management and the recent and ongoing reductions in staffing levels across the board are no doubt having an impact on our ability to process and respond to our Complaints & Compliance in an effective and efficient manner.

There are a few services that are finding it more difficult than others to respond within timescales to Complaints ie. Planning, Housing, and Schools & Education where the three areas can be contentious and complex. In relation to Planning it should be noted that the Planning Service used to employ an officer whose remit was to co-ordinate and assist with the Customer Service liaison within this service. When the post holder moved to a new role, the post was not replaced due to the efficiency agenda, which has ultimately been difficult for the service.

In relation to FOI and EIR, the service areas where compliance is lower as per the databases in the main are, Highways, Finance, Procurement, HR, Planning, Schools & Education and Social Services.