SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Communities Select Committee

26 Sept 2013

Customer Services Overview and Performance Report

Purpose of the report:

The purpose of this report is to give the Communities Select Committee an overview of Customer Services' role, performance and future plans.

1. Introduction

Customer Services aims to provide convenient, high quality and efficient access to council services, which continually improve customer satisfaction and reduce the cost of service delivery.

The Service consists of the following teams:

- Contact Centre
- Web and Digital Team (including the public and staff websites)
- Customer Relations Team (comments, compliments and complaints)
- Blue Badge Team (parking permits for people with disabilities)

2. Contact Centre

The Contact Centre manages incoming contact on behalf of the council and, on an average working day, manages approximately 2,300 calls and emails. A single point of contact for the customer helps to improve quality and efficiency.

Figure 1 below shows the volume and type of calls received on an annual basis (the period shown is from August 2012 to July 2013).

Fig 1. Total annual contacts by type and volume
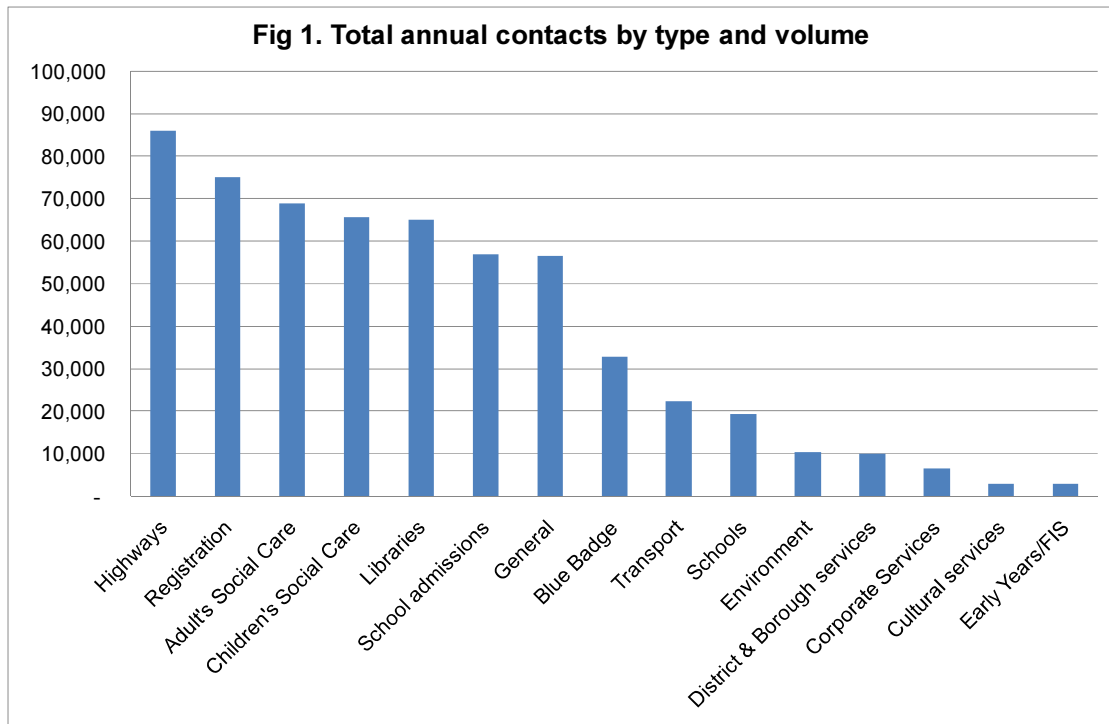
The Contact Centre measures quality in a number of ways. Figure 2 shows the average 'speed of answer'. Note that the peak in July 2011 was caused by a change to the school's admissions process and the peak during summer 2012 was caused by the Olympics and a particularly high level of rainfall which generated a high demand on Highways' Services.
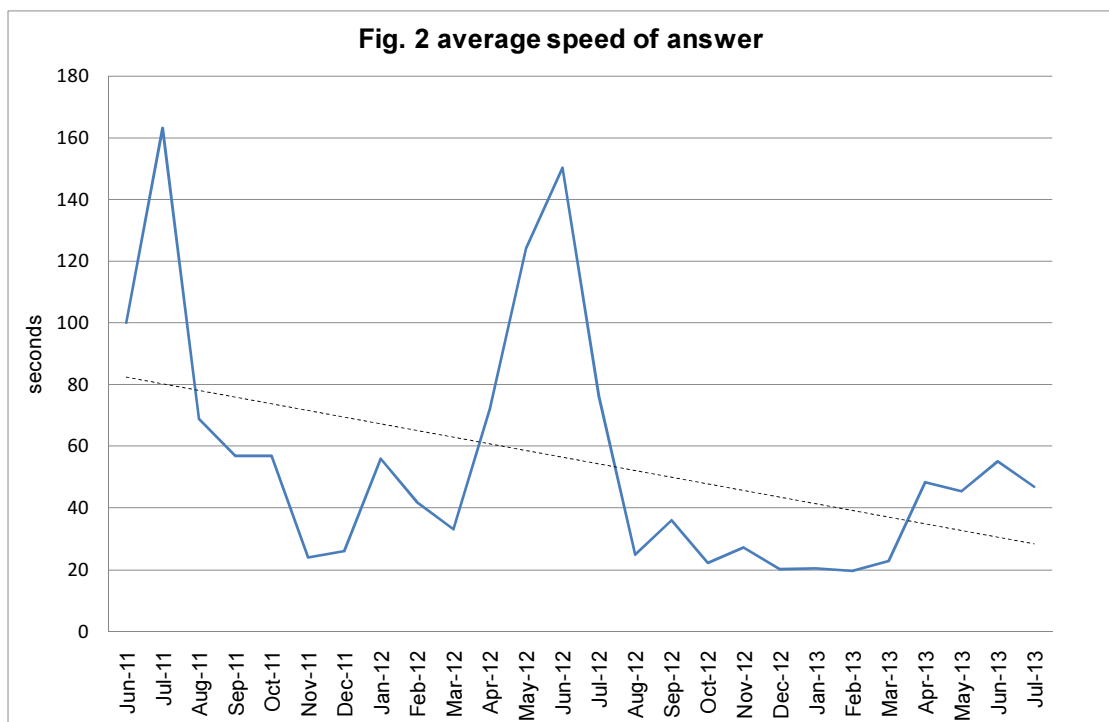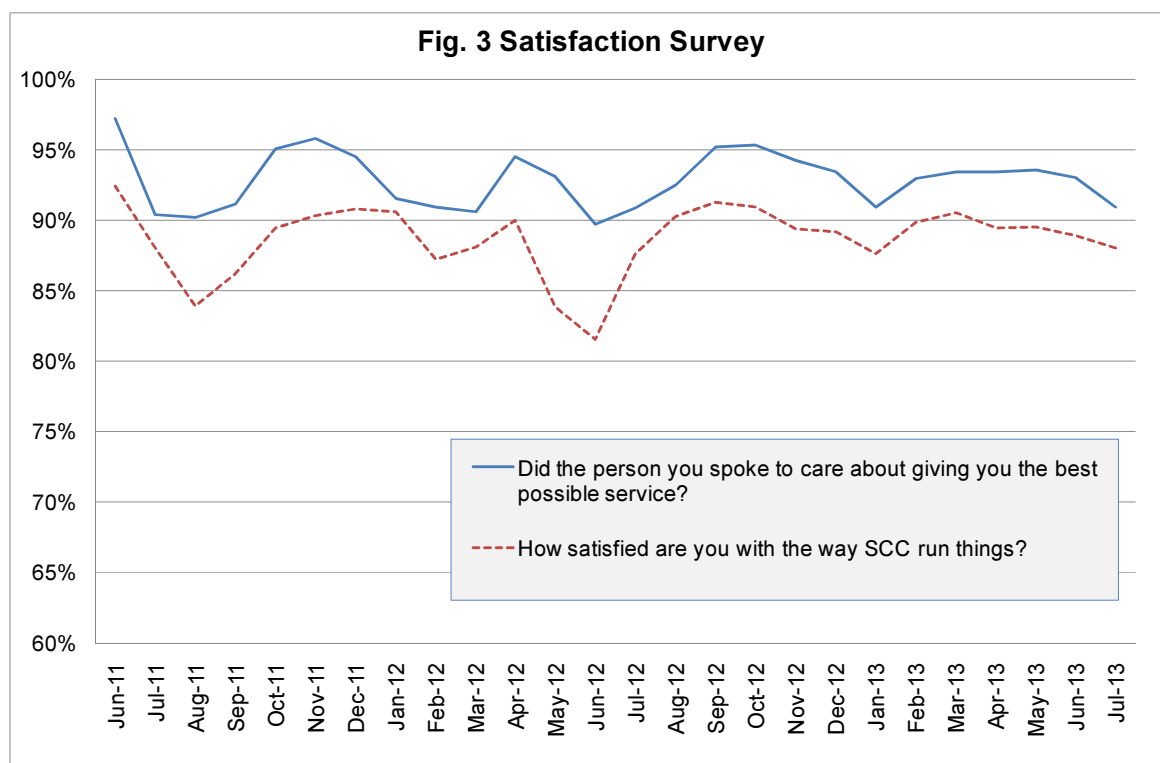
Fig. 2 average speed of answer

Figure 3 shows caller satisfaction. Caller satisfaction is captured by a post-call survey. Approximately 1,000 responses are captured each month.

Fig. 3 Satisfaction Survey

Customer Services reviews call volumes and feedback to prioritise improvements and to reduce the cost of contact. This can involve a simple change, such as making online information clearer, or may involve a more complicated change in process and the introduction of new technology. For example in January 2013 the Blue Badge Team introduced Online Payments for Blue Badges. The uptake of this option has been positive and 68% of people who apply online also choose to pay online. The ability to pay online is convenient for customers, is more secure than sending a cheque by post, speeds up the process and also reduces administration costs.

Customer Services is currently investigating the potential benefit of a customer relationship management (CRM) system. This would have several advantages:

- **End-to-end query management**. This means customer enquires could be tracked more efficiently until resolution and the customer would be kept better informed. This would also help ensure customer enquiries are resolved within agreed timescales.

- **Multi-channel management**. This would enable the contact centre to more effectively manage current and newly emerging contact channels such as social media and SMS. This would enable a consistent response to customers no matter how they chose to contact the council.

- **Single view of the customer**. This would help improve and join up services. For example, if someone was already known to the council, appropriate services could be offered to them. This would also help us improve reporting and build a better understanding of different customers' needs.

- **A shared technology platform.** This would reduce duplication and provide a consistent way for customers to access council services for common tasks (e.g. query management, payment, appointment booking).

- **Back office integration.** A common platform that integrated with back office systems would mean contact centre officers would only need to login to one system. This would shorten call duration and training time, increasing customer satisfaction and reducing costs.

3. Web and Digital:

The Web and Digital Team play an important role in providing convenient and cost effective access to information and services.

The development of straightforward and convenient digital services (such as websites, mobile web, mobile applications (apps), and electronic forms (eforms)) is often referred to as developing services that are 'digital by default' or 'digital by design'. Whilst it is important to increase the use of digital services it is essential to ensure people who can't use them are not excluded and other appropriate channels are provided.

A study in 2012 by the Society for Information Technology Management (SOCITM) across 120 councils estimated the average cost per transaction as £8.62 for face-to-face contact, £2.83 for phone contact, but only 15 pence for web contact.

Surrey County Council's website attracts approximately 7 million visits per year. Figure 4 below shows the monthly visits in 2012/13.

Fig. 4 Web Visits 2012/13
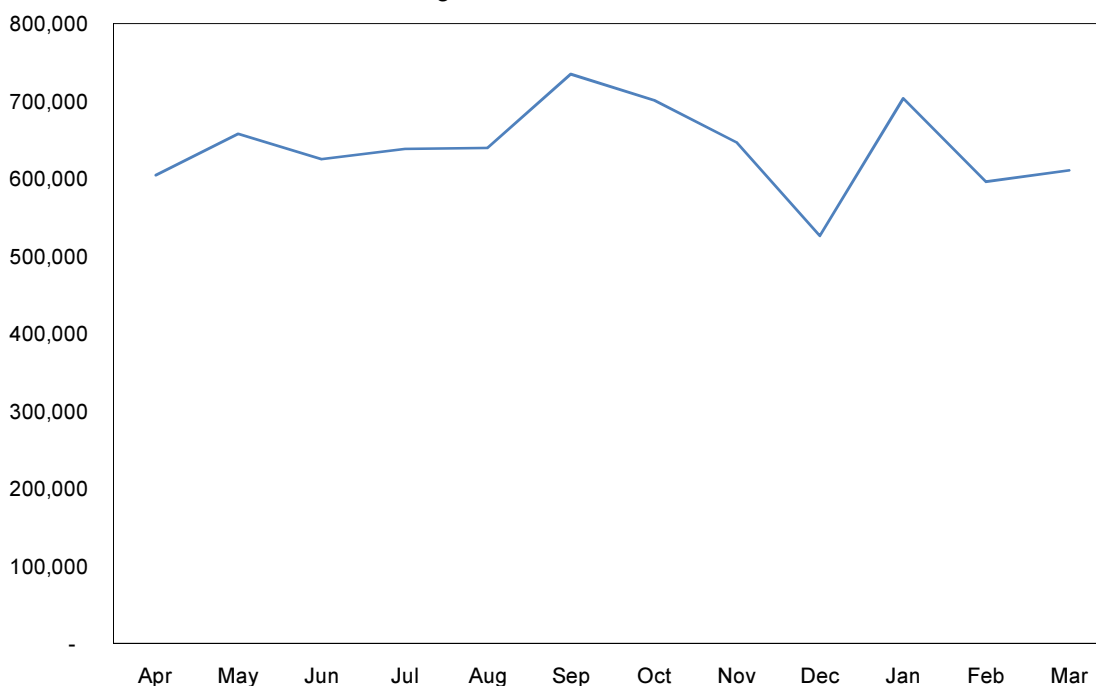
The website is continually being improved. Capturing user feedback is an extremely important part of this. Satisfaction is currently measured by a 'pop up' survey that presents to every twentieth visitor. The survey shows that 80% of visitors found what they were looking for.

The current feedback mechanism is limited and will be replaced in September 2013. The new system will capture more usable feedback as it will link to individual webpages. It will be accessible to all users via a visible 'happy, neutral, sad face' feedback button at the edge of all web pages rather than the current, sometimes unwelcome, pop up survey.

The Web and Digital team are also currently improving the website for use on mobile phones and browsers (such as smart phones and tablet computers) because access to the website via such devices is rapidly increasing and now accounts for about a quarter of all traffic to the site.

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4. Customer Relations:

Customer Relations are responsible for ensuring services comply with the council's Complaints Policy and follow the corporate complaints procedure. Customer Relations also provide advice to other services on managing customer relationships.

Complaints are useful for discovering what is not going well, and putting things right; particularly, non-compliance with the statutory framework, policy, guidance or standards. Where these are out of step with customer expectations, or simply out of date, complaints can prompt a review. A single complaint can be as useful as an observed trend.

The council has a simple 2 stage complaints procedure which is based on best practice advice from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Complaints at stage 1 are directed to the service being complained about for response. Customer Relations provide training, advice and support to services to respond effectively at this stage.

Table 1 gives an overview of the number of complaints received and the response performance in 2012/13 compared to the previous year. Complaints about children's and adult's social care are governed by statutory procedures and managed independently by the respective service.

Table 1: SCC's complaint handling performance in 2011/12 - 2012/13

Area	Response target	2011/12		2012/13	
		Complaints received	Performance against response target	Complaints received	Performance against response target
Change & Efficiency	90% within 10 working days	36	86%	24	88%
Chief Executives		5	100%	2	100%
Customer & Communities		168	94%	199	95%
Environment &		428	95%	463	95%

Infrastructure					
Adults social care	90% in 20 working days	233	92%	213	94%
Schools & Learning and Services for Young People	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	42	67% (within 10 working days) Not recorded	54	86% (within 10 working days) 94% (within 20 working days)
Children's social care	80% in 10 working days (extendable to 20 if necessary)	281	59% (within 10 working days) 80% (within 20 working days)	274	47% (within 10 working days) 71% (within 20 working days)
Total		1,193		1,229	

If complainants are dissatisfied with the response they receive from the service they can ask Customer Relations to review it at stage 2. Customer Relations assess the quality and accuracy of the response given at stage 1 and if appropriate conduct an independent investigation. The purpose of investigation is to identify failure and if appropriate remedy any injustice caused to the complainant, this can vary from an apology to compensation. Most complaints investigated at stage 2 are followed up with a Corrective Action Plan signed off by the respective Head of Service, as invariably improvement opportunities are found, irrespective of the outcome of the complaint.

The team undertake robust and in depth investigations and the LGO rarely finds fault in the investigations carried out in the council. The quality of investigations at this stage is critical in minimising the risk of any negative findings by the LGO which may lead to a statutory public report.

Table 2 shows the escalation of complaints and where fault was identified at the final stage by the LGO.

Table 2: SCC's complaint escalation in 2012/13

Area	Complaints received at stage 1	Complaints escalated to:			Fault found by LGO with investigation
		Stage 2	Stage 3	LGO	
Change & Efficiency	24	4		3	0
Chief Executives	2	0		0	0
Customer & Communities	199	11	N/A	0	0
Environment & Infrastructure	463	151		16	0

Adults social care	213	N/A		10	2
Schools and Learning	54	10		20	0
Children's social care	274	13	0	13	2

4. Blue Badge:

The Blue Badge team is responsible for reviewing and issuing disabled parking Blue Badges, in accordance with the Department for Transport's guidelines. The number of applications varies, however the team process an average of 1,300 applications per month.

In January 2012 the new national Blue Badge Improvement Scheme (BBIS) was introduced. This Department for Transport initiative has added many advantages to the scheme. The badges have been redesigned to make them harder to alter, copy or forge and to make it easier to crack down on fraud. The introduction of the online application process enables applicants to find out if they are eligible for a badge using the online eligibility checker and online applicants can also track the progress of their application. The Blue Badge team have also made it possible for customers to email attachments for a fully electronic process.

From May 2013, and as a response to our customers, the Blue Badge team have worked with the Library Service to trial a Blue Badge checking service at some of our libraries for some of our most elderly Blue Badge applicants.

The Blue Badge team are working with the Registration Service and using "Tell us once" to identify where Blue Badge holders are deceased so badges are promptly cancelled.

The Blue Badge team are about to launch a short four minute video to guide customers through the application process, answering our customers' top ten most frequently asked questions. The video was made by the team in-house and is designed to reduce the number of calls the Contact Centre receive. The video will shortly be uploaded to the website and, if successful in reducing calls, this strategy could be applied more widely.

5. Customer Service Excellence:

As well as managing the above mentioned services, Customer Services aims to improve customer service levels across the council and has recently launched the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) programme.

The CSE programme is based on the government's best practise CSE framework which is a practical tool to help drive continuous improvement. The CSE framework has five key areas:

a) Customer insight
b) Culture of the organisation
c) Information and access

d) Delivery
e) Timeliness and quality of service

Highways Service, Business Services and Customer Services are currently using the CSE framework to review service delivery. Customer Services and HR and Organisational Development are also currently reviewing the customer service training strategy to improve the standard of customer service across the organisation.

Financial and value for money implications

n/a

Equalities Implications

n/a

Risk Management Implications

n/a

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy

n/a

Recommendations:

The Communities Select Committee is asked to note the role of Customer Services and its current performance and to endorse the future plans described in this report.

Next steps:

The Communities Select Committee to receive information on operation of the council's complaints procedures on an annual basis.

Report contact: Mark Irons, Head of Customer Services
Contact details: 0208 541 8567

Sources/background papers: Government Digital Strategy