



Environment & Transport Select Committee
12 December 2013

Surrey Highways Customer Service & Resident Satisfaction

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services

To update the Select Committee on the customer service within, and resident satisfaction relating to, Surrey Highways and the work being undertaken to improve customer service through the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Standard.

Introduction:

1. Early in 2013 the Committee Chairman requested that a report be brought to Members highlighting current performance against customer facing processes including how we handle enquiries, complaints and freedom of information requests, together with resident feedback concerning Surrey Highways via surveys.
2. This report provides an overview of current performance handling for the types of customer contact listed above, summarises current resident satisfaction levels with the service and outlines the work being undertaken within Surrey Highways to improve customer service.

Enquiry Handling

3. The Local Highway Service (LHS) is one of four groups within Surrey Highways and takes the lead in handling customer engagement, enquiries, complaints and freedom of information requests. The LHS comprises the four Area teams, Parking and a Customer Service & Improvement Team (CSIT).
4. The LHS is the front door for Surrey Highways which receives approximately 8000 enquiries per month via numerous channels. Customers are able to report issues to Highways or request information using mediated access via the Contact Centre or directly via e mail, phone, online reporting, and letter.

5. Enquiries cover a very broad range of issues including potholes, vegetation, flooding, parking and licence requests. All enquiries are filtered, either by CSIT Customer Care Team or in the case of pothole reports through the automated system. If the Customer Care team are unable to deal with these they will be passed to the Community Highway Officers to carry out an onsite inspection and update the customer accordingly. Out target response time for dealing with enquiries is 20 days.
6. Between January and October this year we have received almost 82000 enquiries of which 91.6% have been responded to within 20 days. This compares to 2012 where 75000 enquiries were received with 81.6% dealt with within timescale. A breakdown of types of enquiry is attached at annex 1.
7. The increase in enquires this calendar year can be partly attributed to the weather conditions at the start of the year, the two episodes of snow followed by heavy rainfall lead to an increase in pothole reports and follow up enquiries. In addition the busy programme of work being carried out on the network this year, for example Operation Horizon, has lead to an increase in customer contact concerning date changes, general information requests and accessibility to sites. To help address these issues and improve information flow a Planned Works Desk has been introduced to act as a link between the contractors and Local Highway Service staff. This will assist the Contact Centre to provide a first time enquiry fix for customers and ensure all Local Highway Service Officers have easy access to this important information concerning changes to planned works on the network.
8. Highways work closely with SCC Customer Services with the aim of managing enquiries at the first point of contact. Both services have signed up to a Working Together Agreement (WoTA). This sets out how the two parties will work in partnership to provide the best possible service to the customer. To further improve relationships and understanding an ongoing programme of training and job swaps is taking place.
9. When reporting highway issues Members are requested to use the dedicated phone number 0300 200 1014 or email address councillors@surreycc.gov.uk. This ensures all enquiries are logged and dealt with appropriately.

Complaints

10. Staff within Surrey Highways are encouraged to direct customers to use the county's complaints process if they are unhappy with the service they have received. As a service that is used by all residents and visitors to the county it is no surprise that a large number of complaints are received compared to some other services. However in comparison to the volume of enquiries this is a very small percentage, less than 1%.

- 11. In 2012/13 financial year 406 stage 1 complaints were received of which 96% were dealt with within the SCC standard of 10 days. 140 of these escalated to stage 2 of the complaints procedure of which only 21 were upheld in full or part. None of the 16 complaints referred to the Ombudsman were upheld. In comparison from April to October 2013 we have seen a slight pro rata increase in the number of stage 1 complaints received at 302 but the corresponding response rate has remained high at 95%. Those escalated to stage 2 have dropped slightly pro rata to 76. Again the Ombudsman has not upheld any of the 12 complaints she has received since April.
- 12. LHS carries out a quarterly analysis of all stage 1 complaints, the most recent has shown that the main areas customers complain about are vegetation, resurfacing and roadworks and lack of contact (this includes enquiries not responded to within 20 days), a breakdown of complaints for April to October is attached at annex 2.
- 13. Examples of how the analysis has been used to improve the service are; the Planned Works Desk (paragraph 7), additional complaints training for customer care staff and a revised complaints process for vehicle crossovers.
- 14. Seasonal trends such as vegetation or winter maintenance can be identified and help inform our communication strategy.

Freedom of Information Requests

- 15. Under the Freedom of Information Act customers have the right to request all recorded information held on any subject. These must be responded to within 20 days.
- 16. Volumes of FOI requests are maintained centrally by the Corporate Information Governance Team and are monitored at a Directorate rather than service level. During 2013 Environment & Infrastructure have received the highest volume of requests at 448 (29% of the county total). This is already an increase on 2012 where E & I received 340. As an authority our response rate is 92% for January to August 2013. Annex 3 gives a comparison by directorate.
- 17. This calendar year has seen an increase in the number of requests for highway inspection records under FOI. It is believed members of the public are sourcing information prior to submitting an insurance claim.
- 18. As with complaints, FOI requests are processed by the Highways Customer Care Team. They will either respond directly or coordinate this on behalf of the service.

Survey Data

- 19. For a number of years now E&I has subscribed to the annual National Highways and Transport (NHT) Survey in order to assess resident satisfaction with service provision. Typically 4,500 residents receive a

postal questionnaire with an approximate 20% response rate. Resident satisfaction with various aspects of highway maintenance are summarised in a table in annex 4. The table shows satisfaction levels over the last five years from 2009-2013 inclusive, but also provides county council averages and rankings for 2013 to show how SCC compares to other counties taking part in the survey

20. Surrey County Council also regularly checks public satisfaction with its services via the quarterly Surrey Residents Survey (SRS). Typically 1,650 residents are surveyed by telephone interview each quarter. Resident satisfaction for pavement maintenance and road maintenance are two of the services included in the survey and results for the last two years are summarised in annex 5.
21. Survey data will be used more widely in future as part of the Customer Service Excellence project to inform service provision and drive improvements.

Customer Service Excellence

22. As an organisation providing a service we need to put customers at the heart of everything we do. Highways are using the national Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Standard, previously Charter Mark, to help us achieve this goal.
23. The standard has a focus on who our customers are, how we inform and interact with them, how we deliver our services and deal with problems, and how committed we are to customer service. Currently no other County Council Highways services hold the award.

The Shared Service Centre became the first service within Surrey County Council to be awarded the CSE Standard in 2010, creating a culture of continuous improvement. Business Services have recently commenced work to secure the CSE Standard but Highways have taken the lead as the most complex operational service.

24. This programme, which commenced in May 2013, forms one strand of the new Highways for the Future: People Strategy and by achieving accreditation will:
 - drive customer-focused change and culture
 - improve the accuracy and detail of the information we provide
 - put the customer at the heart of everything we do
 - consult with customers in a meaningful way
 - increase our internal and external customer focus to improve handling of customer queries/complaints
 - demonstrate our commitment and professionalism in the way we provide our services
25. Improvements in customer service will increase satisfaction and lead to a reduction in enquiries and complaints for officers and Members, allowing resources to be more focussed on the core service. Additional

benefits include highlighting customer service successes and areas for improvement; allowing individuals and teams to acquire new customer focused skills; and achieving formal, external recognition of excellent customer service by accreditation of the CSE Standard.

26. We have created a team of volunteer Customer Service Champions (CSCs) to support the collation of evidence and to share the message of customer service excellence throughout Highways. These champions, who are from all levels of the service, are carrying out the role in addition to their day to day work as they have a desire to make real improvements for the service for the benefit of the customer. Although this places additional pressure on these staff improvements made within the workstreams will deliver more efficient processes.
27. A self assessment has recently been carried out that is informing detailed action plans to drive forward improvements. A series of focus groups are in progress to gather evidence and identify areas of best practice. This will be followed by a pre-assessment on 10 December undertaken by the accreditation body. The outcome of which will help determine when the service will seek to submit a formal request for assessment, however we expect this to be early in 2014.
28. The project has helped influence a number of improvements including the Planned Works Desk and vehicle crossover complaints process already mentioned. Other areas currently being worked on are improved feedback procedures to better understand our customers, internal Service Level Agreements to improve information flow and introduction of a customer service charter.
29. We would welcome the opportunity to work with representatives of the select committee to develop member engagement with the Highway Service as part of Customer Service Excellence.

Conclusions:

30. The service receives a high volume of enquiries, complaints and FOI requests and has developed processes to ensure performance has increased in relation to these. However it is also recognised that there is room for improvement and work is being undertaken to achieve this through the CSE, Highways for the Future projects and an ongoing review of roles and responsibilities.
31. There are a range of measures in place to manage customer enquiries and performance. These include an internal quality assurance process that checks the quality and timeliness of responses, monitors feedback from customers, audits correspondence where areas for improvement are identified and an agreed process with the Contact Centre to escalate outstanding issues.
32. The CSE programme puts customers at the heart of what we do. Feedback and survey data will be used more intelligently to drive service improvement and set challenging targets to increase performance.

Recommendations:

33. That the Select Committee
- a) Notes the contents of this report
 - b) Supports the Customer Service Excellence project
 - c) Advise on Member involvement to the CSE project

Next steps:

A further progress report will be brought to the committee following the outcome of the CSE accreditation process

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Sources/background papers:

National Highway and Transport Survey
Surrey Resident Survey
SCC Feedback database
SCC FOI Database
Maximo Highway Enquiry Database