



Customer Excellence Panel

Complaints Review

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Written by

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Customer Excellence Officer

- Maintaining satisfaction - Improving 'Value for Money' -

Summary

Overall Helena are delivering a good customer focused complaints service.

The Panel being concerned with the on-going impact from Welfare Reform on the Company are keen to assess Complaints that relate just to this topic, they were however reassured that few complaints has been received to date.

Whilst the Panel acknowledged the importance of maintaining personal contact they felt that the customer has a role to play in co-operating with the investigating service manager which ensures a mutually positive outcome of the complaint.

On assessment of the efficiency of the service the Panel were keen to make some further improvements in order to save money and staff time. This resulted in an annual saving of £1690.32 (cashable and non-cashable)

The Panel were pleased that Propertycare were responding to complaints within the target, especially since they receive more than half of all complaints. The concern was with teams who receive few complaints but fail to respond within the required 5 days, which the Panel confirmed a hard stance should be taken.

On review of customer feedback the Panel confirmed that the service was maintaining a high level of satisfaction in most of the key elements of the service however from the Customer Inspectors mystery shopping activities there was evidence to suggest real improvements were needed in the way complaints are dealt with in Helena Office's.

The Panel requested an additional mystery shop takes place to identify if recommendations have led to service improvements.

Introduction

The Customer Excellence Panel aims to enable Helena tenants to have a greater say in decisions and have an influence on service delivery. The Panel provide an enhanced scrutiny role with the aim maintain customer satisfaction and provide efficient services focusing on value for money.

The group are *not* a consultation group and do not advise on policy and procedure, they conduct evidence based scrutiny activities which offer challenge and suggestion to a service. They also suggest targets and review and set service standards. Inline with current priorities the group now focus on how efficient a service is performing, making recommendations for savings.

Additional information including previous work and on-going monitoring feedback can be found on the Customer Excellence Website at www.excellenceathelena.co.uk

The Panel previously completed quarterly reviews of the Complaints service however during their March 2013 Planning Day, confirmed that the service had undergone a significant amount of improvements and changes over the past three years. Considering this the Panel considered that whilst it is necessary to review the service it does not need to be on such a frequent basis therefore amending the frequency of the review to every 12 months.

Aims of the Complaint Review

Specifically for this service area the Customer Excellence Panel service review aimed to:

- Consider if the service is providing good value for money and delivering an excellence service to tenants
- Identify where efficiencies can be made
- Scrutinise performance and customer feedback
- Confirm current service standards
- Check that previous recommendations have been implemented
- Agree Customer Excellence Performance Indicators
- Recommend areas of improvement and identify time bound actions

Method

A detailed presentation was conducted to the Panel providing information on the Complaints service, included within the presentation was costing's, performance information and Customer Inspectors findings. Breakout sessions were held throughout the presentation to give the Panel a chance to scrutinise and challenge the provided information. The review came to an end with the development of a set of recommendations to improve the service.

The activity is structured around the Panel's workbook which ensures decisions are based on evidence. Key themes include,

- Performance
- Efficiency
- Service Standards
- Customer Feedback
- Recommendations, Monitoring and Research

With the help from Complaints Service Manager, Graham Jones, an action plan for key changes to the service has been developed and can be found at the end of this report.

Performance

The Panel considered a wide variety of performance information in order to ascertain how the Complaints service was performing, following evidence was included within the review,

- Key Performance Indicators
- Benchmarking (via Housemark)
- Performance Management Triangle
- Complaints Commonality

Response within target

A response to a complaint must be completed within five working days, the Panel were clear that all complaints should be completed within this timescale. However current annual performance for 2012-13 was 94% had demonstrated a dip of 4% from 2011-12 (98%).

When compared with other similar organisations performance was within the top 50% (Quartile 2), the Panel did consider that Helena could perform some what better but did confirm that other organisations may have different response timescales.

The Panel did contemplate an increase in the service standard to seven working days response time however further breakdown demonstrated that the Propertycare department were responsible for more than half of all complaints were able to complete all complaints within the set timescale. Considering this the Panel confirmed that there was no reason why teams who receive only a few complaints couldn't response within the timescale.

It was confirmed by the Panel that timescales are not as important to customers as receiving a good quality service.

Response within target – by department

Propertycare received 173 complaints in 2013 which made up more than half of Helena's total number of Complaints, the Panel acknowledged that the service is the largest front line service delivering significant amounts of repairs which is the reason why the service makes up such a large amount of Helena's complaints. The Panel were impressed that Propertycare had responded to *all* their complaints within the five day target.

The Panel were concerned that some service areas who were received small numbers of complaints were not responding to them within the promised timescale. These areas are having an impact on the overall

number of complaints being responded to within target. Specifically, Tenancy Support received just 5 complaints during 2013 and responded to just 3 within target. Similarly Regeneration received 13 complaints and just 10 were completed within target.

Keen to improve this performance the Panel suggested that teams who demonstrate poor performance should attend a future Panel meeting to discuss their difficulties, they are keen to take a hard stance on teams not achieving the set target.

An increase in volume is likely to be seen within Neighbourhoods and Finance as a result of Welfare Reform, to identify the impact the Panel will review the number of complaints being received specifically around Welfare Reform.

Assets

In 2011-12 Assets received just 23 complaints, however in 2012-13 a large increase occurred to a total of 79 complaints. The Panel were not concerned with this as it was the result of the increased amounts of works Assets had commenced during the year therefore increasing the likeliness of a complaint being received. The team saw an increase in the number of complaints being received around condensation which on review was a direct result of a tenants lifestyle. This common problem was followed up with some communication to tenants around how to avoid condensation. This pleased the Panel who confirmed the Assets team had acted on the complaints they had received.

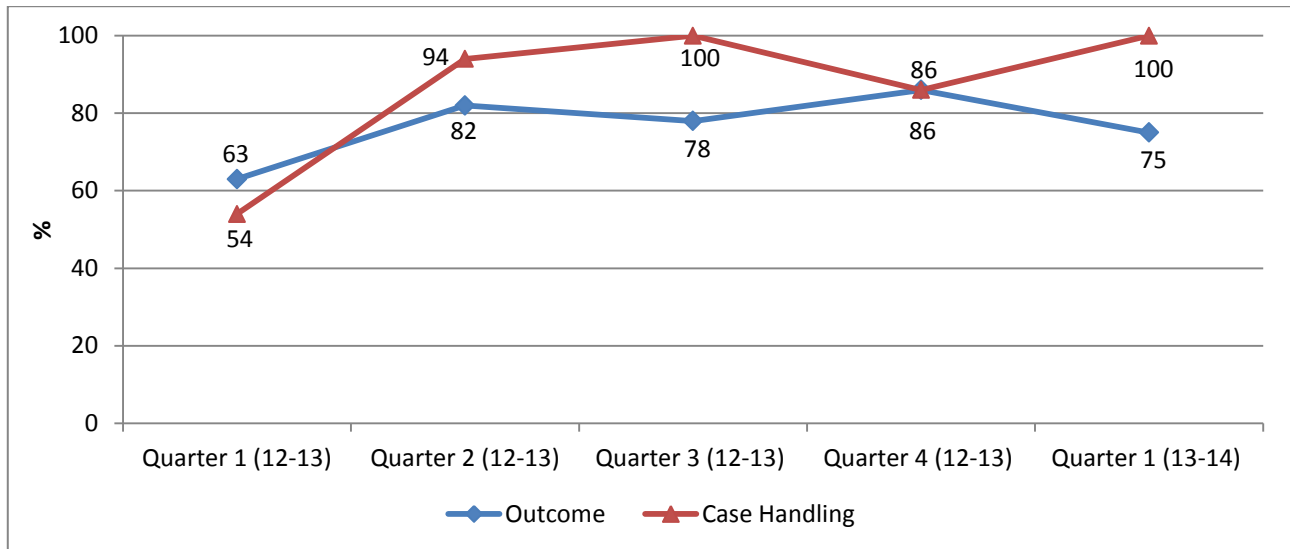
On another note 25% of the Assets complaints related to 'Quality of Work' when compared to Propertycare just 12% of complaints related to this element. The Panel were concerned that the Assets generally use contractors who may not carry out as high quality repairs as the in-house Propertycare team. The Panel suggested that Helena should carry out checks on a random sample of the works completed by a contractor specifically when a complaint has been received; the Panel were keen that Helena's reputation is not affected. It was highlighted about the importance of setting out expectations to contractors, to support this contractors should be provided with a copy of Helena's complaints procedures and service standards.

Satisfaction with outcome and case handling

The Panel were pleased that the satisfaction indicators had shown a consistent improvement throughout 2012-13, and from Quarter 2 to 4 had remained above the targets of 80% for outcome and 70% for case handling. This is displayed in the graph on the following page.

In addition when compared to other organisations performance since Quarter 2 2012-13 had remained consistently within the top fifty per cent of similar organisations (Quartile 2)

Part way through Quarter 2 the Complaints survey was brought in house with an aim to provide a more in-depth approach whilst completing any outstanding issues.



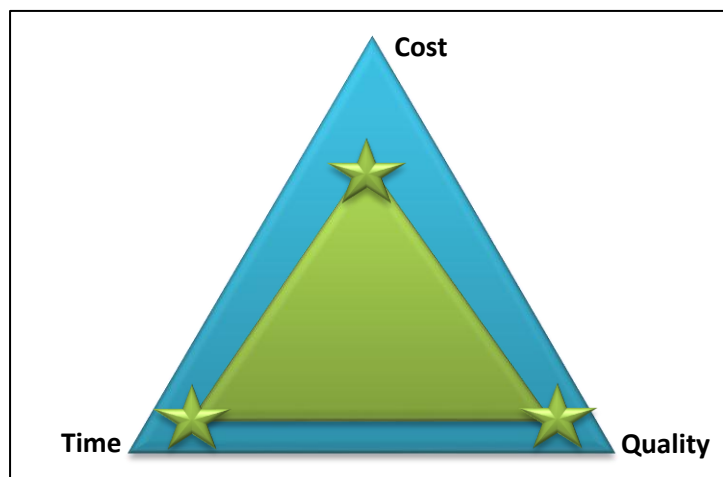
Overall the Panel were pleased with customer’s satisfaction with the service, it has continued to demonstrate improvements despite the difficult subject matter, the Panel acknowledged that satisfaction will never be as high as other key services.

Closing complaints prematurely

In 2011-12, 9 complaints were closed prematurely, this dropped to just 6 in 2012-13 which the Panel were pleased with, current performance demonstrates no cause for concern.

Cost, quality and time

The Panel assessed performance in terms of ‘Cost, Quality and Time’ they concluded that the element which has the most impact on overall performance was the ‘Cost’ element as the Quality of the service is high and the response times are quick. The Panel considered this element when making their recommendations for improvements.



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Welfare Reform

Keeping Welfare Reform at the front of their mind the Panel were keen to ascertain the impact that this was having on the number of Complaints Helena are receiving. Therefore they have requested a quarterly breakdown of the number of complaints being received as a direct result of Welfare Reform.

Targets

The Panel confirmed that current targets for Complaints are realistic and challenging, they will therefore continue as follows,

Performance Indicator	2013-14 Target	CEP
Response within target	95%	✓
Satisfaction with outcome of complaint	75%	✓
Satisfaction with case handling	75%	✓

Efficiency

The Panel assessed the following evidence to ascertain how efficient the Complaints processes are and where savings can be made,

- Resource Costs
- Process diagram
- Sample Complaints Letters
- Happy/Unhappy Customer Journeys

Reviewing the detailed process diagram the Panel considered ways in which it could operate more efficiently although keeping in mind how customers can receive a tailored and personal service delivery. The Panel identified a number of areas where savings could be made.

1. Customer's who report a complaint through email should receive all correspondence including their response by email, this would make a saving of £1.08 per letter which for amounts to an annual saving of £216.

2. One Call log a number of complaints over the telephone, these customers should be asked their preferred communication type, this not only saves money for those who prefer email but also ensure the service is tailored. For each customer who requests email a saving of £2.16 would be made.
3. The Panel felt that managers dealing with complaints should be responsible for closing down a complaint without the requirement of sending an additional letter to the customer. Reviewing the content of the closure letter it was noted as providing very similar information to that contained at the end of each response letter. Ceasing mail out of the closure letter would lead to an approximate annual saving of £409.32.
4. At a cost of £17 per hour (staff time) the Complaints satisfaction survey was considered to be of a relatively high cost, although the methodology is effective in gaining in-depth information it was not thought to be the best use of staff time. The Panel have requested that the key survey question be incorporated into the rolling STAR survey conducted by Customer Metrics, this is a more efficient way of gathering customer feedback. The Panel confirmed that more details of the service is already regularly obtained by the Customer Inspectors.

The Panel did also consider the cost of managers making personal visits to customers regarding their specific issue. Although they concluded it is costly they confirmed that it was worthwhile and demonstrated a personal service which in turn can prevent a complaint escalating any further. They did however suggest that staff are reminded that taking the time at the Stage 1 complaint level can prevent it moving to the Stage 2 level which becomes more costly.

Service Standards

The Panel reviewed the current Complaints service standards; they concluded that the standards reflected a customer focused approach. Therefore no amendments were required to the existing Complaints service standards which will continue.

As a result of the Panel's decision to streamline the service and remove the final closure letter, this element is now no longer required within the service standards. Customers will still be able to appeal against the Stage 1 decision up to 28 days after it was issued, details explaining this to a customer will continue to be noted at the end of the response letter.

Generally the Panel are pleased that the service is meeting its set service standards, it remains clear that staff are taking personal contact seriously and make use of it to effectively deal with complaints.

Responding to a complaint within 5 working days remains important to the Panel they see no reason as to why all customers cannot receive contact within the promised time period, even when a complaint is more complicated and requires more than 5 days investigations a detailed progress letter can be sent as promised. (Also known as a holding response).

Customer Feedback

The Panel considered following evidence to ascertain whether the Complaints service was maintaining customer satisfaction and experience,

- Quarterly Complaints Satisfaction Survey
- Customer Inspectors previous Mystery Shop
- Customer Inspectors Interviews with Staff
- Happy/Unhappy Customer Journeys

Complaints satisfaction survey

As previously noted within the performance section the Panel were pleased that the outcomes from the survey demonstrated the customers were happy with the service being delivered when they make a complaint.

Despite the nature of the service customers remain happy with satisfaction with the outcome of their complaint as well as the way it was handled remaining above set target of 75% from quarter 2 onwards. When compared performance of these indicators is within the top half of similar organisations which the Panel were pleased with. It was also confirmed that performance is meeting the aim to maintain customer's satisfaction.

The Panel will continue to assess satisfaction with the service through their quarterly suite of key performance indicators, although with changes to methodology accept that performance may demonstrate some initial changes.

Customers Inspectors

The work of the Customer Inspectors remains an important piece of evidence of the Panel, on this occasion the Inspectors had carried out a sample of mystery shopping activities in Helena's Office's and had supported this with interviews with a range of staff involved in the delivery of the complaints service.

During the Inspectors visits to office's very few leaflets, posters and complaints forms were obtained however this had no bearing on the overall satisfaction with the service. The Panel concluded that leaflets

and forms are expensive at an annual cost of £470, with little impact on customer's satisfaction they decided that the distribution and printing of these should cease, although the documents should be available for staff to print should a request be made.

It was recommended that the posters should remain in print and clearly displayed to ensure customers remain aware of their ability to make a complaint, this is a cheaper way of advertising the service at an approximate cost of £20 a year.

The Panel were quite concerned with the Inspectors overall satisfaction with the visits at just 50%, they would have expected this to be considerably higher. The low satisfaction suggests that the service being delivered in Helena offices requires much needed improvement. When broken down the Panel found the following areas to be negatively impacting on the Inspectors overall experiences these area therefore required improvement to boost overall satisfaction.

- Ease of reporting a complaint was at just 50% satisfaction
- Just 30% found staff to be knowledgeable on the topic
- 50% found that their complaint was understood
- 65% found staff to be supportive
- Being treated fairly was just over half at 60%
- Similarly, being taken seriously was at 60% satisfaction.

Considering these results the Panel were disappointed that despite large amounts of training being completed over the past three years staff knowledge and expertise of the service remained low. The Panel suggested that some much needed training was required for staff involved in handling complaints in Helena Office's. Considering all the time and efforts put into improving the service the Panel felt that a firmer approach must be taken with staff who are not delivering the expected service. Despite their lack of knowledge the Panel were pleased that staff were remaining 'polite and helpful' with a high 95% satisfaction.

On a more positive note the conducted staff interviews demonstrated a much more positive side to complaints. The Inspectors were particularly impressed with the amount of personal contact service managers were carrying out in order to effectively deal with a customers complaint.

The Panel also noted that during the interviews staff were pleased with the support available during complaints, however on the flip side staff are not necessarily making use of the support at the various Helena offices

Considering all the Customer Inspector feedback that Panel made the following suggestions,

- Additional training is required for staff, - this could be incorporated into staffs new ILearn system
- Staff need to be made aware of the importance of dealing with complaints effectively, including in relation to the increase of costs
- Reception staff should take responsibility when a customer chooses face to face to report a complaint, the customers should not be requested to make a telephone call. Staff should request training if they do not feel confident in what to do when a customer reports a complaint.
- To demonstrate to front line staff just how to deal with a complaint role play should be used
- Important messages should be put on staff's desk tops

Is satisfaction being maintained?

Although the satisfaction results of the survey confirm that the service is maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction there are parts of the service highlighted by the Customer Inspectors which are failing to meet a consistent and effective level when dealing with a complaint. Staff located in the office's are likely to pass the customer to the One Call team this is rather than dealing with the complaint themselves. One Call are currently under a high demand at the moment due to Welfare Reform therefore staff should attempt to deal with the complaint themselves.

Recommendations,

Following the service review the Panel suggested a number of recommendations to improve service delivery as well as save money and ensure customer satisfaction is maintained. Recommendations are as follows,

1. Make more use of email based correspondence for customers who prefer this communication type predicting at least £216 saving
2. One Call agents ask the customer preferred communication type during a complaints logging, followed by utilisation of the preference for the acknowledgement and response correspondence
3. Cease the sending of closure letters preventing postage of 340 letters
4. At a cost of £17 per hour current Complaints survey methodology is costly, key survey questions should be included in the rolling STAR survey and also supported by detailed customer feedback from the Customer Inspectors activities
5. Complaints Leaflets and Forms no longer requiring printing, they can be printed on request leading to a £470 annual saving
6. Complaints Posters should continue to be printed, at a small cost it is an efficient method of promoting access to the service

7. To assess the impact of Welfare Reform on the service, a breakdown of the related number of complaints should be monitored
8. Carry out random quality checks on Contractors when a complaint has been received
9. Contractors should all be provided with a copy of the Complaints procedure and standards to promote how important Customer Complaints are to Helena Partnerships
10. Continue encouraging Service Managers to make use of personal contact when dealing with a complaint, staff should all be aware that dealing with a complaint effectively at the initial stage can prevent escalation to the second more costly stage
11. Develop an online Complaints learning opportunity on ILearn
12. Promote effective Complaints service by demonstrating excellence through role play situations
13. Important Complaints messages should be placed on the desktop of all necessary staff

Savings

Based on the Panel's recommendations a number of savings have been made to the Complaints service these are identified in the infographics below.



Research

The Panel have requested that the Customer Inspectors conduct an annual mystery shop on the service, particularly within Helena Office's.

In addition the customer satisfaction survey will continue using the new methodology, results of this will be reported to the Panel during their quarterly review of Helena's performance.

Monitoring

The Panel are keen to keep an eye on Helena services and do this through their own suite of performance measures which they review on a three monthly basis. The Panel selected and confirmed which measures they would like to include within their suite, their decision was based around their current priorities. They will include the following measures ,

- % satisfied with complaint outcome
- % satisfied with case handling
- % of complaints responded to within target
- % of complaints relating to Welfare Reform

Next steps

An action plan has been developed with the help of Service Manager, Graham Jones who has responded with actions to the Panel's recommendations and suggestions. The outcomes and changes made as a result of the review will be shared with relevant members of staff. The Board of Directors will be informed of the key changes through the Customer Excellence Update. For customers, promotion will take place on the Customer Excellence website as well as in other suitable methods.

Update

The Panel have requested an update on this service in twelve months time, including the results of an additional mystery shop to identify whether the service has demonstrated improvements in areas where this is necessary.

Action Plan

	Recommendation	Evidence	Service Action	Who	When
1	Increase the use of email communication in response to complaints contact, this will streamline the service reducing time and cost of £216 a year.	The Panel made this decision based on the detailed process diagram.	Acknowledgement letters are sent to customer via email where possible. Service Managers will be encouraged to communicate by email when it is appropriate to do so. This message will be reinforced within the proposed ILearn Training set to go ahead in November.	Graham Jones	November 13
2	Customers who make their complaint over the telephone should be asked their preferred method of communication, this will save the cost of some complaints postage.	The Panel made this decision based on the detailed process diagram.	As above and in additional One Call will be requested to as customers their preferred method of contact and note it accordingly on the Complaints system.	Graham Jones	November 13
3	Complaints closure letters are not longer required, content is generally a duplication of the response letters and an additional cost of £409.32 a year.	The Panel made this decision based on the detailed process diagram and review of sample complaints letters	Service Managers will still be required to close a complaint and detail the final outcomes. The sending of the letter which is completed by the Complaints team will no longer take place.	Graham Jones	Complete
4	At a cost of £17 an hour carrying out the Complaints survey in-hour is an	The Panel made this decision based on the detailed process diagram.	Working with Andrew Powley, key questions of the Complaints survey	Graham Jones / Andrew	Complete

	Recommendation	Evidence	Service Action	Who	When
	expensive task. The survey should be incorporated into the existing rolling STAR survey and support with in-depth information from the Customer Inspectors. (Non cashable saving of £595 a year)		have been incorporated into the new STAR Survey. Results will be available quarterly.	Powley	
5	The availability of complaints leaflets and forms does not impact on customers experience therefore no real requirement to continue printing. (Not printing the documents will save £470 a year)	Through the Inspectors work the Panel confirmed that the availability of Complaints Leaflets and Forms had no bearing on overall customer satisfaction.	Additional Complaints Forms and Leaflets will no longer be printed. Staff working on the front line will be informed of the change and will be instructed to print out a electronic for copies should they require them.	Graham Jones	Complete
6	Posters should continue to be used in office's to ensure Helena's complaints service is promoted. (This is good value for money at only £20 a year)	As above, however the Panel considered the need to promote the service to customers in the event leaflets were not available. Posters are a cheaper alternative at just £20 a year.	Posters will continue to be available in office's. Checks will be carried out by the Customer Inspectors during their next series of mystery shops.	Graham Jones	Complete / November 13
7	To assess the impact of Welfare Reform on the service, a breakdown of the related number of complaints should be monitored.	It is important that the service can identify the impact of Welfare Reform, complaints on this topic are within the Rents or Neighbourhood services	This will now be monitored, quarter 2 details will be reported to CEP which will continue on a quarterly basis .	Graham Jones	On-going

	Recommendation	Evidence	Service Action	Who	When
8	Carry out random quality checks on Contractors when a complaint has been received.	From the breakdown of Assets complaints a larger proportion were related to the Quality of Work than with the Property care team	Awaiting details from Assets	Graham Jones / Assets	TBC
9	Contractors should all be provided with a copy of the Complaints procedure and standards to promote how important Customer Complaints are to Helena Partnerships	From the breakdown of Assets complaints a larger proportion were related to the Quality of Work than with the Property care team	Further investigations will take place to ascertain this. Contractors should sign up to our standards as part of the contract tendering exercise. Checks will take place to ensure this is the current practise. Outcomes will be provided to the Panel.	Graham Jones / Assets	October 13
10	Continue encouraging Service Managers to make use of personal contact when dealing with a complaint, staff should all be aware that dealing with a complaint effectively at the initial stage can be the escalation to the second more costly stage	The Panel did also consider the cost of managers making personal visits to customers regarding their specific issue. Although they concluded it is costly they confirmed that it was worthwhile and demonstrated a personal service which in turn can prevent a complaint escalating any further.	This is something that will continue to take place. To promote and further reinforce the message key messages will be incorporated into the new ILearn module.	Graham Jones / Learning and Development	November 13
11	Develop an online Complaints learning	The Customer Inspectors visits to office's suggested that staff's	Working with the Learning and Development team, a Complaints ILearn	Graham Jones / Learning and	November 13

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	Recommendation	Evidence	Service Action	Who	When
	opportunity on ILearn	knowledge and effectiveness of dealing with complaints requires improvements	module will be developed taking on board all the suggestions noted within the this service review.	Development	
12	Promote effective Complaints service by demonstrating excellence through role play situations	The Customer Inspectors visits to office's suggested that staff's knowledge and effectiveness of dealing with complaints requires improvements	The Inspectors outcomes are clear, although the impact of this solution is unknown. Team briefs are being carried out and complaints iLearn module will be rolled out shortly to all staff and to new staff as part of their induction. Suggested that the impact of the initiatives be assessed before this recommendation is considered which may com with a cost if it is to be don effectively.	Graham Jones	November 13
13	Important Complaints messages should be placed on the desktop of all necessary staff	The Customer Inspectors visits to office's suggested that staff's knowledge and effectiveness of dealing with complaints requires improvements	This will take place in combination with the ILearn module. Key messages will be promoted to staff and reminders of the importance of the contained information.	Graham Jones / Comms / Learning and Development	November 13