

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| CABINET REPORT | 30 March 2021 |
| SUBJECT | Complaints and Service Improvement Annual Report 2019/20 |
| CABINET MEMBER | CLlr Nia Jeffreys, Cabinet Member for Corporate Support |
| OFFICER | Geraint Owen, Head of Corporate Support Department |
| AUTHORS | Service Improvement and Complaints Coordination Team, Service Improvement Officer (SIO) |

1 Purpose of the report

The Report summarises developments in Complaints and Service Improvement during 2019-20.

The report emphasises the response to Complaints in order to Improve Service, and the successes are demonstrated in the narrative of the report. Obstacles to overcome are also highlighted in order to continue to improve and develop, along with the proposed steps.

The Cabinet receives this report as part of the Council's Complaints and Concerns Policy.

Main Messages

Since 2018/19, the number of formal complaints have dropped from 49 to 44. There was a small increase in Complaints to the Ombudsman from 32 to 36, although the Ombudsman did not think that 35 of these needed to be investigated. On the whole it was seen that there was a change in culture, with Services receiving complaints in a more positive manner in order to learn from them.

2 Decision sought

To accept the Report.

3 Background

3.1 The procedure adopted by the Council is in accordance with the Model Concerns and Complaints Policy and the Guidance published by Welsh Government, and produced under the supervision of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. This is advantageous as it is consistent with the complaints procedures of other public bodies, making it easier for members of the public to submit complaints across public organisations.

3.2 The procedure was adopted by the Cabinet with the following aims:

- Providing a specific benefit for the citizen by focusing on the solution rather than the process. It will allow for complaints to be dealt with more swiftly, by removing one step of the current process, which is fairly laborious and lengthy.
- Allow complaints which involve more than one department to be better coordinated, and will enable the coordination of complaints which involve external agencies or partners.
- By establishing a central, comprehensive database, it will be possible to keep an overview of the pattern of complaints and to learn lessons as an organisation.

- It is anticipated that the procedure will be better aligned with the Council's new culture of empowering staff to make decisions and to deliver one of the work streams of the "Ffordd Gwynedd" project.

The Procedure

3.3 A complaint is defined as follows:

- an expression of dissatisfaction or concern
- either made in writing or verbally or by any other means of communication
- made by one or more members of the public
- it is in relation to how the Council has acted or failed to act
- or it is in relation to the standard of service provided
- and there is a need to respond to it.

A complaint is not:

- an initial request for service, such as informing about a faulty street light
- an appeal against a decision that has been 'made appropriately'
- a way of seeking a change in legislation or a policy decision that 'has been made appropriately'
- a way for lobbying groups/organisations to promote their case.

This procedure is not relevant to users of social services as there is a statutory procedure for them. Schools also operate their own complaints arrangements.

There are two steps to the procedure:

Informal Resolution

3.4 This step offers the complainant an opportunity for informal contact at the place where the service is provided in order to seek a resolution to complaints either as the concern arises or very soon thereafter. Dealing with complaints should be an integral part of service provision and staff are encouraged to consider whether the complaint can be resolved 'there and then'.

3.5 The aim of the procedure is to provide a system that is simple, flexible and places an emphasis on reaching the most appropriate outcome for individuals and services. The arrangements allow the Council to deal with concerns in a far more proactive way by focusing on people's needs. This means solving the problem rather than focusing on the complaints procedure itself.

Formal investigation

3.6 If it is not possible to resolve the complaint informally, the complainant can refer it for a formal investigation. "*Investigate once, investigate well*" is the principle for this step of the process. The emphasis is placed on one investigation to thoroughly address the concerns raised. Usually, an officer within the department who is sufficiently senior and who is independent from the source of the complaint will carry out the investigation. From time to time, this will not be appropriate and the complaint will be investigated by an officer who is independent from the

department in question. Unlike informal resolutions, all formal complaints are centrally recorded.

3.7 The complainant may take the complaint to the Ombudsman if dissatisfied with the Council's formal response.

3.8 Overview of the steps:

- Complaints come in from various directions - on-line Praise and Complaints form; via e-mail or letter; over the phone; through workplace visits or through a message from a colleague;
- The Complaints Box is monitored throughout the day and every effort is made not to have leave complaints in it without passing them on for attention;
- Every complaint that is submitted through the Complaints Box is recorded under its relevant category, as follows: Informal, Formal or Ombudsman. The name and address of the complainant, if known, and the date the complaint was received and the category to which it belongs are noted;
- Every effort is made to acknowledge a complaint on the day it comes in, wherever possible, if this is a normal working day. An e-mail or letter is sent to confirm receipt. The complaint will then be passed on to the relevant service for attention;
- The SIO, or a colleague in his/her absence, monitors the date of response to the complaint and will remind the Service of the requirement to respond promptly where possible. They are also asked to inform the customer if it is likely that they will not be able to respond in time;
- A report is presented to the Corporate Management Team every six months explaining the way services could be improved as a result of the complaints that are received. Also, in accordance with the procedure, an annual report must be submitted to the Cabinet.

The emphasis is now on Service Improvement after complaints are received, in order to avoid such complaints in future.

We aim to discover whether any patterns or trends are emerging.

By now, the report focuses on Valid Formal Complaints and Ombudsman Complaints, as Services deal with informal complaints themselves.

A 'valid complaint' means that there are valid grounds for the complaint, and if it is not satisfactorily resolved it could then become a complaint for the Ombudsman.

| Type of Complaints | Numbers 2018/19 | Numbers 2019/20 |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| | Total | Total |
| Formal Complaints (Valid) | 49 | 44 |
| Complaints for the Ombudsman | 32 16 No Investigation 9 No Investigation (Premature) 0 No response 5 Settlement 0 Open investigation 0 Investigation closed 2 Reports | 36 22 No Investigation 11 No Investigation (Premature) 0 No response received 1 Settlement 0 Open investigation 1 Investigation closed 0 Report 1 Complaint withdrawn by customer |

| | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| | 0 Complaint withdrawn by customer | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|

No Investigation means that the Ombudsman, following initial consideration, is satisfied with the means the authority has dealt with the matter and no further investigation is required. It could also be a matter beyond its jurisdiction.

Premature means that the Ombudsman is of the opinion that the authority has not yet had an opportunity to consider the matter. These would usually be referred to the Council for consideration under the complaints procedure.

4 Service Improvement

As previously reported, overall, the Services' have cooperated well with the procedure, and in fact several have mentioned that they have found the procedure to be very valuable.

Section 1 contains examples of the complaints received and provides detail about:

- The way services try to satisfy those who have submitted complaints
- Consequent steps taken to improve services.

Before introducing the procedure in 2015, we did not measure the length of time for which the complaints were open. Since then, we have developed a procedure to measure the average length of time that complaints are open. The figure for 2019/20 is 7 days, which has dropped in comparison to 8.6 days in 2018/19. Our intention for the future is to use this as a baseline for comparison and to provide an additional performance measure.

It must be noted that the number of complaints received by a service does not necessarily reflect the standard of service provided and these results cannot be considered in isolation. The nature of the services provided heavily influence results. Among the factors that could have an impact on the figures are the rate of direct contact with customers, the service's public profile, or whether an individual has other formal ways of rectifying issues or submitting an appeal. In order to illustrate the context, please bear in mind the number of times each day the Council's Services and the public have contact in order to provide a service, compared with the number of complaints received.

5 Looking to the Future/Next Steps

Services will be informed, when attending Management Team meetings that the Team is able to provide customer care training by using complaints as a learning tool. Services will be told about the type of training held with the Leisure Service. Some Services have shown an initial interest but have not come back with numbers/dates etc.

The Successes Wall is now live, and it is very good to see that a large number of Thanks/Compliments have come in from the public during the time of the 'virus'. Seeing the public's

appreciation is of great assistance to raise staff morale, especially front-line staff, at such a difficult time.

The comments on this wall have come from the praise received by customers on the praise form on our website. Via e-mail or letters, or over the telephone. Positive feedback is also received following a complaint, and the feeling is that it is very important to celebrate and share this positive feedback/praise among the services. A large number of the public now send their messages via Facebook/Twitter etc. as well. The document is on the Intranet and also on "Wordpress" to be available for field staff as well via a link to the Council staff Facebook page. Much of the praise is about our field staff and we believe it is important to celebrate this and ensure they are seen. This is certainly a way of raising staff morale, when they feel appreciated. Discussions are still in the pipeline with the Internal Communications Team about how to use the successes wall to coincide with the Council at its Best Awards.

The SIO and the Organisational Learning and Development Manager have mentioned the *Successes Wall* when meeting the Service Management Teams, and consequently the many examples of comments received by the Services directly praising them are forwarded to the SIO's attention.

The Management Team has seen many examples in the past where we have experienced problems with some Services' responses to the procedure and some elements still persist in these Services. If things do not change we will seek the support of the Management Team in an attempt to move things on further.

Section 1

Examples of some complaints received in 2019-20

1. Complaints

1.1. Waste and Recycling Service

1.1.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer had to phone (on behalf of his mother) regularly due to missed waste and recycling collections.

1.1.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

Following an investigation into the matter, and the history of previous complaints, it was realised that a back door collection would be useful for the customer. The customer appreciated this very much.

Unfortunately, further complaints were received about missed collections after putting a back door collection in place. There were a few complaints because there were different workers on the lorry and they had not realised that there was a back door collection in place. The iPad on the lorry was not working on one specific date. However, there were a few failures as the back door was not open for the workers to collect the bins. The customer had noted this and had apologised when drawing our attention to the failures.

1.1.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The relevant crews have received notes with regard to this property and we regularly remind them that this is for a back door collection. A Recycling Officer visited the property on the collection day approximately a month ago to do a spot check, and everything had been collected at the time.

Obviously, this situation is unacceptable and it can be seen that the officers are making a great deal of effort to attempt to implement an appropriate procedure here. Due to the shift pattern, keeping on top of special collections for whatever reason is difficult. We will monitor this in order to ensure that this specific issue is resolved.

Further resolution - The service is changing from a 12 hour shift pattern (two shifts) to working regular days with the same crew on the same circuit. A difference can already be seen since the introduction of this in the Dwyfor area.

Note - Complaints were received about missed collections again in October and November. Two officers from the Waste and Recycling Service have been very good, as they went to empty the bins at the first opportunity following the Complaints, and apologised to the customer for the failures once again. The latest failures derived from staff sickness, and the new crew did not understand that this was a back door collection.

The SIO has thanked the customer for their patience with the situation and has noted that they now have a case to take to the Ombudsman. The customer did not wish to do so, but appreciated the information. The SIO has mentioned to the Service that he/she would encourage the customer to refer the matter to the Ombudsman unless the matter is permanently resolved soon.

1.2 Waste and Recycling Service

1.2.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer had been in touch to state his disappointment in having to complain numerous times about the waste and recycling collection service.

Unfortunately, the customer now feels that the failures to return his bins to the correct place, namely the place they are picked up, is intentional. As he notes, this only happens to his bins, his neighbours' bins are all returned neatly to the places they were picked up.

1.2.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service has investigated the number of times the customer has complained about the problem, and has been speaking to the workforce about the matter, emphasising the importance of returning the bins to the place they were picked up. In addition, the Recycling Officer has asked the customer to inform her directly of any problem arising again.

1.2.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

I refer to this complaint and also our investigation and further response from the customer. The service drew the collection team's attention to the situation, and the matter has since been resolved.

We will also monitor the service.

1.3 Waste and Recycling Service

1.3.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer has had to complain many times about failures to collect in a property.

1.3.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service has investigated the problem, and has realised that there have been regular failures. On a few occasions, the problems have arisen due to the road being closed. But this is not the case for all failures. The Recycling Officer has offered herself as a direct point of contact for the customer in order to be able to keep an eye on the situation.

1.3.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

There have been considerable problems recently with the Collection Team in the Arfon area. We have referred an officer from the back office team to the workforce in order to follow up on missed collection issues, and this has had a positive impact. A change in the collection system to 5 days will also see a further improvement.

1.4 Waste and Recycling Service

1.4.1. Nature of the Complaint

A complaint came in through the Ombudsman, as - No Investigation - Premature, as the customer had not followed the Council's complaints procedure to attempt an initial resolution. The grounds for the complaint was that the customer was unhappy with the fact that collections take place so early in the morning, at 5.30am outside his property.

He was unhappy that it was an officer from Galw Gwynedd answering the phone to him, and not someone from the Waste and Recycling Service. He felt that the Service was ignoring his messages.

1.4.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service looked into the situation, and it was seen that many other customers had complained about this, namely that collections were happening so early in the morning.

1.4.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

Following an investigation into this complaint and others of a similar nature, the Service has changed the waste and recycling collections system in the area. The new system came into force on 1 July 2019, and lorries will not leave the depot until 6.00am. This means that all collections therefore take place later on.

Following this change, no similar complaint has been received by the Service in this area.

1.5. Highways and Municipal Service

1.5.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer had contacted the Service about a case of fly-tipping that had happened near her property. She reported the issue many times, but it was not resolved swiftly, as nobody went to pick up the rubbish/mess. The complaint had been made by the customer at the same time as another complaint to the Environment Service.

1.5.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

In order to be able to offer a single response on behalf of both Services, the Head of Environment Department decided to lead on this case. A response was arranged for the customer, apologising for any failures etc.

1.5.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

I refer to this complaint and I note that the time between receiving the complaint and clearing up the rubbish from the site was unacceptable; however, unfortunately there were no resources available at the time to carry out the work sooner.

We acknowledge that better communication is required with our customers in order to keep them in the loop.

1.6 Highways and Municipal Service

1.6.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer had drawn the Service's attention over three months ago to graffiti that had been written on the subway path in Caernarfon. Also, about litter/bottles etc. that were strewn about the place in general. The customer said that he had asked for an update when he contacted the second time, but has received nothing to date.

1.6.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The matter was investigated, and it was explained to the customer that the three matters he reported to the Council fell under different Services. An Officer in the Municipal Service co-ordinated a resolution as this case was relevant to Municipal, CCG and NMWTRA. Between them, it was arranged to clean the graffiti and the rubbish in question was collected as soon as was possible. The locations were problematic, and therefore it was arranged to monitor the situation to attempt to ensure improvement. The Officer sent the customer an apology for the delay in sending an update, and the Officer also attempted to explain to the customer the responsibilities etc.

The Head of Department also offered a further apology to the customer for the lack of a prompt update. The customer was offered a meeting on the site with an Officer from the Service if he so wished, so that he could understand the complexity of the situation.

1.6.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The customer had reported three problems to Galw Gwynedd (the requests had been directly forwarded to the Highways Service and the Cleaning Team). Due to claims of a lack of action and feedback, the customer had contacted Complaints. After the relevant Officers received the details from Complaints, the matters received priority and very prompt attention; however, unfortunately, the customer did not receive a written response to confirm the action - which is an error.

The fact that two out of the three complaints were relevant to other agencies have complicated and contributed to the response problem. From now on, we will ensure that the Department sends a prompt letter or e-mail to provide an update on any progress or to explain the situation if the matter is relevant to another agency.

These are the specific complaints, and it must be noted that these are matters that need recurring/regular attention:

- a. Graffiti on the A487 subway (NMWTRA has taken action), and overgrowth on the land which created an obstacle which prevented it from being cleared. Contractors went out to deal with these problems following our request to NMWTRA. This has then enabled the Council to clear the areas that could not be accessed previously.
- b. Rubbish on the abutment of A487 (Gwynedd Council is responsible for cleaning and has taken action). A litter pick was arranged there, as it was realised that a large volume of rubbish with dog foul bags had been thrown there. The work was undertaken the following week, and the site is now clear and tidy. In order to try to prevent the rubbish from being thrown there again, it was arranged to install a new bin by the path.

- c. Mess and rubbish on the former site of the Maesincla garages which are the property of CCG (Gwynedd Council is partially responsible for cleaning and has taken action).

It is quite clear that antisocial behaviour has been taking place on the site, therefore it was also arranged for an Enforcement Officer to regularly monitor the site. If the problem persists, we will consider monitoring the situation with cameras and work with the Police on the matter.

The customer gave very positive feedback, he truly appreciated the work that had been carried out and was happy for his complaint to be closed.

1.7. Highways and Municipal Service

1.7.1. Nature of the Complaint

A complaint was received from a customer as her green bin was not being emptied as it should. Also, she was still awaiting new equipment, for another property. She was told that she would receive them within 6-8 weeks, but six months had gone by, and she was still waiting for them. She has to take her own rubbish to the nearby tip regularly, and of course this involves costs for her.

1.7.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service investigated the case, and following a discussion over the phone with the customer, it was realised that the customer had been using the incorrect calendar, which caused the missed collections. This meant that she was therefore waiting for the collections on the wrong days, unfortunately. The recycling collections were ongoing without any difficulties. The customer was provided with the correct calendar, but unfortunately she then mixed up the dates on occasions.

1.7.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The importance of speaking to the customer to see what exactly was creating the problem was realised. The importance of forwarding the correct information to the customer in the first instance was noted, i.e. the right calendar in this case.

In order to attempt to monitor the situation following the complaint, the officers kept an eye on this property for some time. A Recycling Officer had also checked with the customer over the phone, to see whether things were now working properly, and received confirmation of this. The Officer has also told the customer to get in touch with her directly if the problem arises again.

1.8. Planning Service

1.8.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer has been in contact to complain that confidential details between her and a customer i.e. a valuation for work, has been revealed on the Council's website in relation to a Planning Application.

1.8.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service investigated the case immediately. An apology was sent to the customer, as well as a confirmation that the details had been removed from the website. It was explained to the customer that any information the person making the Planning application submits as part of his/her application is usually revealed. It was noted that, unfortunately, the customer making the Planning application had not noted that he/she did not have the right to reveal any such information.

1.8.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

This complaint was odd to deal with, and it may have revealed a few things that need to be tightened, or that needs corporate consistency.

In terms of the Planning Service, here are the main points that I would propose:

- The case involved the details of a company and a quote from the company to the applicant. The quote had been signed by the company's Director. The complaint asked for compensation.
- There is not much available nationally to help with such matters. It would be useful to have clear guidelines for each Local Planning Authority or similar service, but this does not exist yet. PARSOL (a national body) has started, but it does not go far enough. Clear guidance that ensures consistency between Local Planning Authorities would be welcomed.
- In response, the Senior Data Protection Officer and I discussed the GDPR statement of other Local Planning Authorities in North Wales - there was an incredible variety in the arrangements and information.
- It is clear what we need to do with the information of applicants, sensitive information and objectors, however it is not information being presented by the applicant as part of the application - which is the case here.
- The bulk and nature of the information being received by the Service makes it impractical and unreasonable to be checking through every type of work, but I cannot see that that this is officially acknowledged.
- Since then, the Senior Data Protection Officer has worked with us on our statement, and I am satisfied that this puts us in a better position, although it will never respond to everything due to the nature of our work. Compared with other Local Planning Authorities in North Wales, our statement now goes way beyond the others.
- If the Council received a number of this type of complaint, it may be worth considering providing examples of complaints and responses on-line as guidance/good practice.
- As this is not my expertise, I appreciated the support of the Senior Data Protection Officer and an Officer from Legal, and the next time I will be more confident to resolve the complaint myself.

1.9. Legal Service

1.9.1. Nature of the Complaint

A complaint was received from the Ombudsman as No Investigation - Premature, from a customer who was having difficulties in receiving a response from the Council with regard to a decision to be able to sell his property, which was listed with S157, to someone who was not local. He felt that he was not being updated on the situation whatsoever, and the lack of response from the Council was creating extreme stress for him, and was making him lose potential customers who wanted to buy the property.

1.9.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The matter was investigated by the Service, however the customer was not happy with the response, therefore the complaint was escalated to the attention of the Monitoring Officer. Unfortunately, there was a delay before a full response was offered to the customer. The Monitoring Officer conducted a further investigation, and a response was arranged for the customer with an explanation on how the process worked and the delay. The customer had since received a decision on the application from the Council. A number of factors had led to the delay, matters that were outside the direct control of the Legal Service on the whole.

1.9.3. Lessons Learnt

Here are the actions for the procedure. For information, we are in the process of seeking advice on reviewing the procedure that could lead to changes, e.g. nature of the decision, responsible Department.

1-4 to be implemented immediately, 5 to be established as a priority.

1. Every application will receive a standard acknowledgement letter within 5 working days which also sets out the usual steps to award. It should note the type of period the application takes to process usually, and when the next contact will be.
2. Then, regular updates are provided to applicants during the process in order to ensure that they are kept in the loop on the progress of their application, although no live correspondence is in the pipeline.
3. When seeking the view of the local member, the objective of the consultation and what is expected if an observation wants to be submitted is explained.
4. The timescale of the response is set with the local members, and one reminder that it will be no more than one month in total.
5. A review of the Section 157 procedure is in the pipeline and we will work with the Cabinet Member on the determination arrangements during the interim period.

1.10 Maritime Service

1.10.1 Nature of the Complaint

A complaint came through from a customer who was unhappy with the decision of the Council to install boulders in an area near his home. The land in question is not the property of the customer, but he was used to parking his car in the adjacent area. He also noted in his complaint that he had discussed the matter with an Officer from the Maritime Service, and in the opinion of the customer, the officer had been disrespectful towards him. He was also unhappy with the response he received from the relevant Manager when he had a word with him about the matter.

1.10.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The matter was investigated very thoroughly by the Service, the grounds for the decision, legal rights of the location, etc. An apology was issued to the customer for the lack of communication prior to placing the boulders. The Service believes that informing the customers why the boulders are needed could have potentially avoided the complaint. From this complaint, the Service has learnt the importance of engaging with our customers.

1.10.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

Essentially, I believe that the grounds for this complaint is a dispute in land ownership. Legal matters are not likely to be considered valid formal complaints usually - however, in this case, we have attempted to explain the situation by dealing with the complaint. The complainant was not satisfied with the steps taken to protect the site / Council's interests. In terms of response, the Department apologised for a lack of communication - but mainly to be courteous / reasonable. In reality, if the Service had provided an advanced warning, the circumstances might have been worse. In terms of lessons - some Council sites need to be formally registered with the Land Registry - and I have forwarded the details to the Property Department.

1.11 Revenue Service

1.11.1 Nature of the Complaint

A customer had sent in a complaint about a lack of response/action to his correspondence. A final note for a fixed sum had been sent to the customer, when he had a Tax Exemption on a property. He also complained about an officer's conduct within the Service.

He was very unhappy with the situation, and insisted that he have an apology and an explanation about the blunder.

1.11.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service investigated the case, and the Manager wrote to the customer to apologise for the series of failures involving the situation, as well as the conduct of the officer in question. It was noted that an error by the Service had created the situation, and an apology was given for this. The customer was assured that the situation had now been rectified, and that he had no outstanding debts on the property until the Tax Exemption expires.

1.11.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

A combination of the backlog following annual billing and an executive error by a new staff member. Rather than implementing the exemption when the correspondence was opened, an enquiry to prove whether the property was vacant was launched. The exemption should have been approved based on the taxpayer's statement.

I have discussed such cases with the team and I am confident that no such case will arise again.

1.12 Waste and Recycling Service

1.12.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer got in touch to complain that one of the Council's Waste and Recycling lorries had driven over grass that was his property. Unfortunately, this had caused some damage. This is the third time for this to happen.

1.12.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The customer discussed the matter with the driver following the incident, and the driver reported the matter to his Team Leader. The Team Leader called to see the customer to discuss the damage, and it was arranged for the matter to be resolved immediately. A worker dropped by the property to restore the land the same afternoon. Unfortunately, by the time he had finished the work, it had darkened therefore it was not possible to see the result properly on that night.

The following morning, the customer had to get in touch with the SIO once again as he was unhappy with the standard of the work that had been done. The SIO apologised to the customer and contacted the Service to explain the situation, and asked them to go back to the customer to discuss.

It was explained that the restoration was temporary work due to the weather etc., and it was noted that someone would return in the spring to better restore the land, when the weather was better, and the land had dried.

The SIO asked the Service to explain this to the customer, because this had clearly not been done, and to provide him with assurance that they would return to restore things in the near future, when the weather etc. permits. The possibility of sending a smaller lorry to the area was discussed, however the Service was not willing to do this as it was not cost effective/efficient. As there was no clear resolution available, the Head of Department was asked to intervene in the situation.

The Head of Department arranged to meet the customer on site. The customer says that he had appreciated this when the SIO went back to ask him. He agreed that he was now happier, as he had received assurance that things would be restored properly when the weather is better, etc.

1.12.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

As discussed, we will implement the below as actions to resolve the recent problems.

1. The Collections Manager and the Collections Senior Team Leader for the Meirionnydd area will remind the collection crew once again not to go on the green area near the property.
2. They will also highlight the matter to other teams in the Department - such as Distribution of Bins, Bulk and Highways)
3. In the short term, and if possible, we will look at the type of vehicle that calls in the area to see whether it is possible to exchange it for a smaller vehicle.
4. In the long term, with changes to the collection system and when arranging new routes, we will ensure that this area is part of a route with a smaller vehicle.

1.13. Waste and Recycling Service

1.13.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer had been in direct contact with the Head of Department to complain that the recycling collectors were not putting the bins back in the correct place, where they were picked up following collections. The customer would accept if there was an obstruction there, but she had photographs to prove that there was no obstruction to return them. She said that she has had to contact many times in the past about the same problem. Her husband usually walks their child to the school bus every day. Luckily on this day, it was a bank holiday so there was no school, otherwise they both would have been prevented from being able to reach the bus.

1.13.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The SIO also forwarded the matter to the attention of the Equality Officer. The Head of Department got back in touch with the customer to apologise for the problem, and agreed that the situation was not acceptable at all. He noted that he would investigate the matter and report back following his investigation.

The Team Leader noted that he had reminded the collection crew not to leave the bins across the driveway. He had dropped by following a collection, and agreed, although the bins were tidier, that the situation was unacceptable. He had arranged a monitoring programme on the area's routes, and this site had actually been monitored the previous week and no problems had been reported.

1.13.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

We have apologised to the customer for these failures and are monitoring the situation.

1.14 Waste and Recycling Service

1.14.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer had used the on-line form to get in touch to thank a Waste and Recycling collection staff member for dropping by to resolve her problem, namely that her collections had been missed again. In the correspondence, she pointed out that someone should be investigating all the problems with failures that she was having. The matter was flagged up with the Service. Unfortunately, following this praise, the customer then got in touch with the SIO every week for at least four consecutive weeks to complain about failures. The customer felt that the Service was ignoring her, and not taking her complaints seriously. The customer contacted the Cabinet Member during the following month to complain about the Service.

1.14.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Recycling Officer contacted the customer and arranged for workers to drop by to collect the waste/recycling. The following weeks, the customer got in touch again. The Recycling Officer has offered herself as a direct point of contact for the customer. The customer reported that the workers had noted that they did not have a fob to go through the gates to fetch the Waste/Recycling in the collection vehicle.

It seems that the fob was broken and nobody had asked for a new one. A new one was arranged with the property owner.

Following a phone conversation with the SIO, the customer agreed to give the Service another opportunity to resolve the problem before taking the matter to the Ombudsman.

The Head of Department responded to the customer by offering a personal apology for the failures and providing an explanation of what had caused all the problems. The fob had broken, no response in the building so nobody was there to open the gates for the workers, the workers had not reported back on the problems to the Team Leader, etc.

1.14.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

To improve the situation, consideration must be given to the following:

There is a need to revisit the reporting arrangements. And when discussing, remember to give priority to updating the customer of the situation/problems.

A discussion needs to be held with the owner of the Property to see whether a resolution is possible, i.e. a better way of gaining access to the site compared to the fobs.

Unfortunately, a further complaint was received from the customer within around a month, but it was sorted quite swiftly and the customer was grateful of the speedy attention to the matter.

1.15 Social Services (Children)

1.15.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer had complained via a phone call to the Customer Care Officer, who forwarded it to the attention of the SIO. The customer used to work in a local nursery until it closed in July 2019. The customer then went on to open her own nursery. She was eager to join the 30 hour scheme, and had contacted the relevant officer some months ago to discuss the matter. However, she received a response from the officer to say that she would not be able to join the Scheme as matters involving the former nursery she worked at were still open. The customer believes that this is completely unfair, and she had actually lost customers as she was unable to be part of the Scheme. She also wanted to complain about the attitude of the officer in question.

1.1.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service investigated the matter. Confirmation was received that it would be appropriate for the customer's business to be part of the Scheme. An apology was issued to the customer for the time taken to make the decision.

1.15.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

Staff names were offered to the customer in order to use them as points of contact to move the matter forward.

1.16. Education

1.16.1 Nature of the Complaint

A complaint was received over the phone from a customer who was unhappy to receive a letter noting that she needed to pay a fixed sum as her son had been absent from School on certain dates. The customer states that the School is aware of the reason he was away on the dates in question. The SIO explained to the customer that the complaint was under the School's system, however the customer noted that she also wanted to complain about officers in the Education Department. She had contacted the Department but nobody was available to speak with her, and she also said that the person who answered the phone to her was very unpleasant with her.

1.16.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

An Officer got back in touch with this parent as soon as possible following her phone call. It was clearly a case relating to the Welfare Team - the parent had received a penalty charge notice following her son's lack of attendance. This is a legal process which is encouraged by the Government in order to attempt to prevent cases of a lack of attendance from reaching the Court to prosecute the parents. I received a message from the Officer following this discussion, and then I contacted the relevant Team.

Subsequently, the Welfare Officer called the parent in order to discuss with her. This was the most appropriate officer to call as she had the background of the case. She discussed the evidence behind the penalty. All processes had been followed by the school and the officer before this step, therefore it was completely timely to send the notice. The notice itself is also self-explanatory. The parent was very threatening over the phone, however the Welfare Officer felt that she had presented all the facts and had conveyed the message under difficult circumstances.

I feel that the contact with the parent had taken place within a completely acceptable timeframe. A response was received to her calls within a short timeframe on all occasions. The contact had been ongoing for a few days before it ended with the phone call of the Welfare Officer.

1.18.3 Lessons Learnt

One thing we have done following this case is update the FPN pamphlet in order to issue it on the service's website.

Section 2

Successes Wall - Examples of observations received from the Public

The internal Successes Wall is still growing - see below examples of the observations that have come in during the lockdown, which proves the appreciation of the public towards Council staff.

During this very strange virus lockdown I would like to thank all the front-line council staff for a job well done, particularly the refuse collection personnel who have continued to work on the front-line. I am of the opinion that all workers at this time deserve praise. Thank you. **Mr E - no area details** (all Council Staff, especially Waste and Recycling staff)

Mae **Mrs C from Barmouth** has called to say thank you very much to us all for continuing to work during this time. Wanted to thank everyone, especially the bins and highways workers. (all Council Staff, especially the Bins and Highways workers)

Mrs W from Arthog commented I am so grateful for the upkeep of the roads that make driving a safer experience. Being a disabled driver I know that when there are potholes the pain in my joints is unbearable and it's not good for anyone's vehicles. Please spread the word to all the hard working crews who go out in all weathers. (Highways)

Excellent. Thank you very much to everyone who has worked so hard to do this. The first supply was very much welcomed at the Arfon Food Bank on Friday. **Mr and Mrs J, Penygroes**. (Catering staff who were out helping with the Local Food Bank)

Well done Gwynedd Council. Thank you for rectifying the faulty street light (No 6) that I reported to you as not working only a couple of days ago. This has made my evening walks along the seafront so much safer which is greatly appreciated. At such a difficult time with so many other commitments, Gwynedd Council staff have demonstrated a caring and professional approach. Thank you. **Mrs A from Tywyn**. (Street Lighting)

I am sending this e-mail to say thank you very much to you for your help and response in relation to my Benefits and Council Tax. I have been so worried, but you have done miracles, and during such a difficult time. So I want to say thank you, thank you, thank you. I suffer from depression and anxiety, and of course this situation doesn't help that. But thanks to you, some weight has been lifted off me now. Once again, thank you very much. **Ms B, Pwllheli** (Benefits)

I hope you and your team are all safe and well. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your team (Llinos and Lydia) from my parents and myself, for your professionalism, care and quick response in sorting out a chair lift at their home, especially in these weird and dangerous times making my parents life a little safer and easier. Many thanks (stay safe) **J, J and M - no area details** (Housing and Property)

Thank you very much... I appreciate your work on our behalf x Regards S **Mrs S Penygroes** (Service Improvement Officer, a thank you from a Local Business)

Take my hat off to the binmen and all the other Council workers still working and adapting in such unsure times. Whilst I appreciate skips may be abused it's just an idea to stop the fly tipping. I, like others, have sorted out sheds etc. but have just made a nice neat pile ready for whenever it is possible to dispose of properly. It's not hard! Well done Gwynedd Council for all efforts so far. The binmen are always singing in Tregarth. **Message on Facebook.** (Council Staff, especially Waste and Recycling workers)

Gwynedd Council - thank you so much to everyone who works hard to keep our services going. **D via Facebook** (all Council staff)

Hats off to Gwynedd Council - applied for my son's blue badge renewal at 11ish this morning. Email before 1pm to say it's on its way J Great service in these "interesting times" **Mrs M Pwllheli** (Customer Contact - Corporate Support)

This message is to Olwen and Sioned who were Registrars at our wedding in the Pwllheli office today. We would like to thank you very much for making our day such a wonderful experience. Your warmth and professionalism really suited us. We apologise for being there for quite some time, we hope this didn't create a problem for you today. But we were so happy and we can't thank you enough. Once again, thank you very much. **Mr and Mrs J, Pwllheli** (Registration Staff, Corporate Support)

Revenue Dept. The lady that I spoke with at roughly 11.20am this morning was absolutely brilliant. Her manners etc. brilliant a credit to the council tax department. Made my experience much easier. **Ms D - no area details** (Council Tax)

An excellent Mapping System, especially with rights of way/public footpaths. GC need to congratulate the staff that have established the system - 10 out of 10. **David - no details.** (Countryside and IT)

We have no idea of how many, or how few staff perchance, will be on duty over the festive period, so we wish to say thank you, in fair time, to all of you. The times we have written to you with request of one sort of another, plus the times you have been in touch with us. We thank you for for-bearance, patience and the many ways on which you do add to our lives; through the highs and the lows. We wish all of you..... and your dear ones all you wish yourselves, over the festive period; and as, we say, a sincere thank you. God bless your afternoon. **Mrs B Abergynolwyn** (all Council staff)

Council lads! Thank you for emptying our waste/recycling. Please help yourselves to the duck eggs here. Xx **Ms J via Facebook (Waste and Recycling)**

Thank you Gwynedd Council. It's a shame when things are out of your control people still complain about the service. The binmen work throughout the year, only 2 days off (Christmas and Boxing Day) come rain or shine. I salute you all. As with regards to Council Tax- a small % goes towards refuse and recycling. Stay safe and thank you. **Ms C via Facebook** (Council Staff, especially Waste and Recycling).