

COUNCIL SEMINAR 11th November, 2014

Present:- Councillor Currie (in the Chair); Councillors Cutts, J. Hamilton, N. Hamilton, Pitchley, Reeder, Sansome, Sharman, Steele, Turner, Watson and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Buckley, Clark, Cowles, Dalton, Jepson, McNeely and Read.

COUNCILLOR SURGERIES AND E-CASEWORK.

Councillor S. Currie, Chairperson of the Self-Regulation Select Commission, opened the Seminar and thanked attendees for their attendance. Stuart Purcell (Performance and Quality Officer) and Jean Tracey (HR Consultant) had been invited to the Seminar to provide an update on the issues around Councillor surgeries and e-casework that the Self-Regulation Select Commission regularly considered regarding customer contacts and complaints and the resolution of issues that were raised, including via council surgeries.

Stuart explained the joint responsibility of the Performance and Quality Team and the Human Resources Learning and Development Team around the issues raised at Councillor surgeries and the use of the e-casework system.

The e-casework system had been used for around 5 years. The system was interactive and emailed the Councillor who had opened a case every time anything happened towards resolving the issue.

During 2013/2014, 714 cases had been raised on e-casework (this had increased from 572 raised during 2012/2013). The true picture of issues raised via Councillor surgeries was likely to be a lot higher; the 714 cases were the ones that were recorded and could be audited. Each year a 30% increase in e-casework cases was expected.

The 714 cases input into e-casework fell into the following Directorates: -

- Economic Development Services – 361: -
 - Network Management - 87;
 - Leisure and Community Services - 95;
 - Highway Design and Transportation Service - 32.

- Housing and Neighbourhood Services – 324: -
 - Contract & Service Development – 122;
 - Housing & Communities – 100;
 - Housing Options – 58;
 - Safer Neighbourhoods - 28.

- Adult Social Services - 16;
- Former Resources – 8;
- Children's and Young Peoples Services - 5.

The process of what happens when an e-casework was input by a Councillor was outlined. The Performance and Quality Team received the issue and ensured that it was sent on to the correct service/officer for a response to be sent back within ten working days to either the Councillor or directly to the member of the public.

Discussion followed on the initial information presented: -

Q: - Currie: - Entering into e-casework could be done by the Secretariat team if Councillors were unable to do this themselves.

Q: - Wyatt: - I have-used e-casework a lot and like the updates it provides. The low numbers for Resources are surprising – I have entered a number about Council Tax and Housing Benefits issues and would have assumed that other Councillors would have too. It is annoying when a case is closed down but I have not had a resolution. Who closed it down without my say so?

Q: - Watson: - There needs to be a response to the customer and an email to the Councillor informing them of the outcome/s.

A: - S. Purcell: - Currently different Directorates were taking different approaches. This was being worked through. Eventually, all Services will respond directly to customers. In the interim, responses to Councillors will make it clear to Councillors that no response has gone to the member of the public and that they are required to pass the response on.

Q: - Watson: - Cases are being closed and they should not be until we say so. Where this has happened and the customer is not satisfied it has been necessary to start again from scratch.

Q: - N Hamilton: - I am surprised by the low numbers as I use it all of the time. I am also surprised on the numbers sent to each Directorate, some seem too low. Are automatic responses used? Do passwords time out if e-casework is not used regularly?

A: - J. Tracey: - Yes, to ensure good security, passwords will need to be periodically updated.

Q: - J. Hamilton: - Who decides where casework issues should be treated as a complaint?

A: - S. Purcell: - If they are specifically badged up as a complaint we would deal with it that way. Otherwise, it would get dealt with as a casework issue.

Q: - Currie: - I want e-casework to filter out the complaints and for them to be treated as such. The addition of a tick box for Councillors to signify a complaint would enable this.

Q: - J. Hamilton – Outlined a Ward-specific issue that was reported via e-casework and did not seem to progress. It should have been treated as a complaint.

A: - S. Purcell: - Even if no action appeared to be taken you should have still received a response within 10 working days to show that the expression of dissatisfaction had been noted.

Q: - Watson: - In some cases if an issue is dealt with as a casework matter and the constituent remains unhappy they have to go through the process again from scratch to start a complaint.

Q: - Steele: – There should be a consistent approach with Officers giving responses across the whole organisation. How do you ensure that there is not one person making the same contact/complaint repeatedly through a variety of methods?

A: - S. Purcell: - We log and track all contacts and we would notice if the same issue kept on reappearing. The same issue would also be forwarded on to the same Officer for a response, so they would be aware and prevent any duplication. Even if a customer raised multiple issues, they would receive one response.

Jean Tracey spoke through the process of logging an issue via the e-casework homepage using the options displayed on the grey tabs. It was possible to add constituents' details onto the system so you did not have to re-add their address details.

Only Councillors could close cases when they were satisfied, and a small number of administrators who would only close the case when told to by the Councillor who opened it. The issues of cases being closed without Councillors' knowledge of the outcome or say so would be addressed.

Q: - Reeder – What is the box 'siebel job id' for?

A: - J. Tracey: - That is a reference to the old system, we will remove it.

The box stating 'Assigned to' gave 5 Directorates to select based on the issues. It defaulted to the top option 'CYPS'. The CYPS statistics had seen an increase due to Councillors not choosing the appropriate Directorate and using the default option of CYPS.

Stuart Purcell oversaw the issues coming in and ensured that all notifications of issues reported by Councillors were acted on swiftly.

Councillors should use the 'Actions' box to write about what the incident/issue involved.

Use the email address Support@e-casework.org for suggestions and feedback about the e-casework system. This email address was maintained by the external company that operated the e-casework system. They responded quickly and were happy to accept feedback and ideas.

The November 2013 – November 2014 e-casework closure statistics were considered: -

- Cases complete in 0-5 days - 61;
- Cases complete in 6-10 days - 25;
- Cases complete in 11-15 days – 43;
- Cases complete in 15+ days - 508.

Cases going beyond 11+ days were due to Councillors not closing cases promptly.

Q: - Steele: - Councillors are not always the reason, we need to be made aware when cases were going to take longer.

Q: - Reeder: – Boxes that are not used are confusing.

A: - J. Tracey: - E-casework are going to develop the system further and will remove the boxes that are out of date.

A: - S. Purcell: - My team does not have the access to close-down. Only people who can close are those who opened it. We add information to the system, but cannot close anything.

Q: - N. Hamilton – I have never closed one myself but I have lots closed on my account.

A: - Currie – An email prompt to close would be useful.

Q: - Watson: - Is the data referring to first response times? I have experienced complex cases that need to go beyond 10 working days.

A: - S. Purcell: - 90% of cases opened were closed within 10 working days. The graph relates to when they are physically put on the system.

Q: - Currie – A simple guide on e-casework and training sessions would be useful.

A: - J. Tracey: - It would be possible to change the dates for urgent cases.

S. Purcell: - An increase in use by this time next year is expected. The aspiration would be for all Councillors to use the system as e-casework enables recording all in one place, creation of reference numbers and enables auditing. A keyword search facility is available. The system is simple to use and fast.

Support and training contact details were shared.

Q: - Currie – The system allows audit and good governance. When I use it I get responses that constituents are happy and feel they are being listened to.

Q: - Turner – I have always worked outside of the scheme as it takes away individuals and identification; I like to know who I am talking to. The system does not give immediate human feedback. I like to know who is doing the work so that I can thank the Officers involved.

A: - Currie – saying thank you to the responsible Officer is good. However, an audit of the system would suggest that you had not reported or had not held any Councillor surgeries.

Q: - Reeder – I do thank the responsible Officer, there is a way on e-casework. I use my laptop, rather than an iPad. Unfortunately the laptop takes a long time to load.

A: - J. Tracey: – I will ask IT about this, it might be an internet connection issue.

Stuart Purcell spoke about moving towards emailing responses to constituents to save time and costs. Could Councillors ask whether this would be an acceptable method of communication during their surgeries?

A: - Currie: – please add this as a stage on the simple guide.

Q: - Sansome: – Can the presentation be emailed to all Councillors?

A: - Yes.

Councillor Currie thanked the Officers for their presentation and contribution to the discussion. He asked Stuart and Jean to progress the simple guide and training sessions on e-casework.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.