



Monmouthshire County Council

Service User Perspective Review, Customer contact – Monmouthshire
County Council

1277A2019-20

May 2019

We sought to answer the following questions?

Do the needs, experiences and aspirations of service users inform the design and delivery of the Council's arrangements for communicating with citizens to more closely meet their needs?

In particular we sought to answer:

1. Are the Council's arrangements to enable members of the public to enquire about local services and **compliment, complain** or provide **comments** on council services designed with the needs, views and aspirations of service users in mind?
2. Are service users satisfied with the quality of service they receive when they enquire about local services and **compliment, complain** or provide **comments** on council services?
3. Does the Council have effective two-way communication with service users?

Focus

This review focuses on three key ways that the Council engages with local residents as follows:

- Community hubs
- My Monmouthshire App
- Complaints, Comments and Compliments

What we did

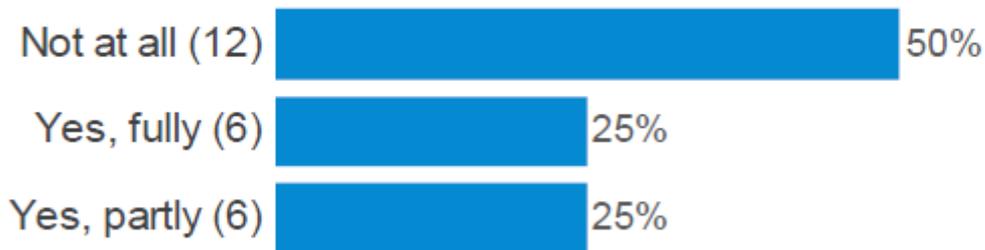
- VISITED each of the five **Hubs** at different time of the day and invited 134 people to comment on their experiences of using the **Hub** facilities and the **My Monmouthshire App** by completing a short survey;
- Held FOCUS GROUPS with two user groups (Knit & Natter and Baby & Child sing along group), to discuss their experiences of using **Community hubs**;
- INTERVIEWED Heads of Services and staff at the **Community Hubs** to understand their perspective on how the council engages with service users via the **Community Hubs** and **My Monmouthshire App**;
- INTERVIEWED the Customer Relations Manager to understand the **complaints, comments** and **compliments** process;
- CONTACTED people who had **complained** to the Council in 2017-18; and
- REVIEWED a sample of **complaints, comments** and **compliments** files.

Who we engaged with over compliments, comments and complaints

- The Council reported that it had received 189 compliments, 123 comments and 87 complaints
- We aimed to contact the 399 people during our review
- We weren't able to access the 312 people who complimented or passed comment on Council services because the Council told us that these people would be unlikely to know that they had entered this formal process
- Of the 87 people who had complained, we were asked not to contact 10 of these people either because the complaint was still being dealt with or because of ongoing sensitivities
- Of the 77 complainants we contacted, we were able to speak to 24 (31%)
- Of the 24 complaints – 8 were informal complaints, 16 were formal complaints, and 2 progressed to the Local Government Ombudsman

To provide some context for subsequent responses we asked:

Were you happy with the outcome from your complaint?



- Our survey showed that three quarter of people were either not happy at all or only partly happy with the outcome of their complaint
- This is important because some people may have reflected their feeling about the outcome following their **complaint** when responding to our questions.

We concluded that:

Citizens are mostly satisfied with the access and quality of customer contact arrangements but the Council could do more to take users needs into account in their design and effectiveness

In particular:

1. Local people are mostly happy with the ease of contacting the Council although there are ways that the access could be improved
2. Service users are mostly satisfied with the quality of service they receive at the **Community Hubs** but are less satisfied with the Council's handling of **complaints**
3. The Council has arrangements in place to engage with local residents but this does not always result in effective two-way communication or lead to changes in contact arrangements that better meet users needs

Question 1

Are the Council's arrangements to enable members of the public to enquire about local services and compliment, complain or provide comments on council services designed with the needs, views and aspirations of service users in mind?

We concluded:

Local people are mostly happy with the ease of contacting the Council although there are ways that the access could be improved

We concluded this because.....

Q1. Of the 134 responses to our survey at **Community Hubs**, most people visited to access the library or to collect waste and recycling bags although many came for other reasons

62 visits were to collect waste and recycling bags. 51 visits were to the library. Other reasons were:

- Customer enquiry
- Bus pass
- Blue badge
- Council tax/housing benefit
- Markets
- Free Wi-Fi
- Rhyme Time
- Councillor meeting
- Internet access
- Computer access
- Computer learning course
- Returning and loaning books
- Photocopier
- Meeting
- Read newspaper
- Ask for information

Q1. Most people were pleased with accessibility of services at the Hubs although some would prefer changes to opening times

Local people told us about the **Community Hubs**:

- Service users are on the whole happy with the services at hubs
- Generally, staff were said to be friendly
- People do not understand why libraries became **Community Hubs**
- Convenient - 'Fought hard to keep services'
- Opening times sometimes do not meet local needs although some said the service was convenient
- **Hubs** don't do enough to monitor, promote or improve the services
- Examples of issues and concerns not addressed include temperature of the facilities, size of the group's area in the library, and the provision of more/better toilet/changing facilities for parents and children

Q1. Most people we asked knew about the **My Monmouthshire App** and one in five people said they used it

Do you use the Online Community Hub - My Monmouthshire App?



Comments about the App:

'The council provides many services and information to the public online, but this excludes a proportion of the local population who cannot or do not access services online'

'Don't like the app very confusing. Can't get what you want on the library tab'

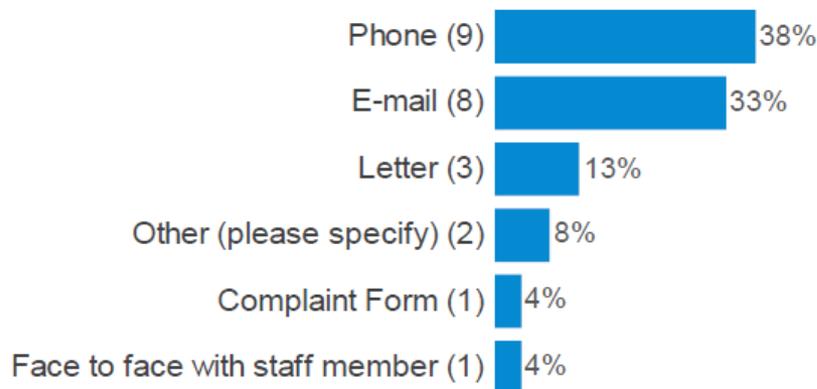
Q1. The **complaints** process is well understood by staff

Staff told us about **compliments, comments and complaints** that:

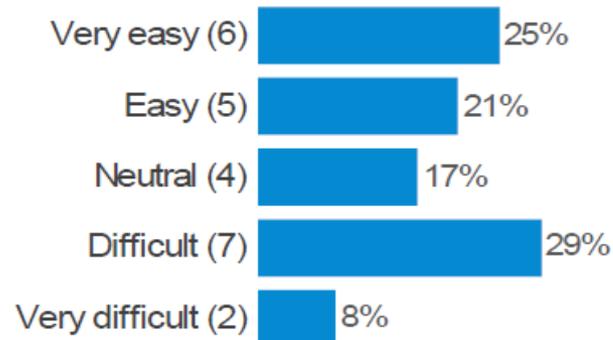
- It encourages people who **complaint, comment and compliment** to complete an on-line form, email, telephone or write in. If they verbally **complain, comment** or **compliment** they are asked to contact the council formally.
- the **Complaints** Policy and Procedure is available on the Council's website. This is based on the ombudsman model.
- the **Complaints** Policy and Procedure is due for review in April 2019.
- the Council's aim is to deal with **complaints** straight away. Where this is not possible it will:
 - send the **complainant** an acknowledgement within five working days;
 - inform the **complainant** of who is looking into the **complaint**; and
 - inform the **complainant** when the Council will reply to the **complaint**
- In categorising complaints and comments, a judgement is made based on the Customer Relations Manager/Support Officers experience.

Q1. Most people who **commented, complimented or complained** did so by phone or email and found access easy

How did you make your complaint to the Council? (Option to select more than one)



How easy was it to make a complaint to the Council?



Q1. Although over half of the people we asked said they found it easy to access the **complaints** procedure – many were disappointed by the way their **complaint** was received

Local people told us about **complaints**:

- most people **complained** by phone or email;
- half of those we asked said it was easy to make a **complaint**; and
- general concerns about **complaining** to the Council were:
 - lack of an acknowledgement
 - lack of a timely response – one said ‘It took so long that I gave up’
 - lack of a response at all
 - **complaints** are not always received seriously or with genuine concern
 - difficult to find the right person to raise concerns with
 - understanding of the issue – one said ‘dealt with numerous people some understood points raised and some didn’t’.

Question 2

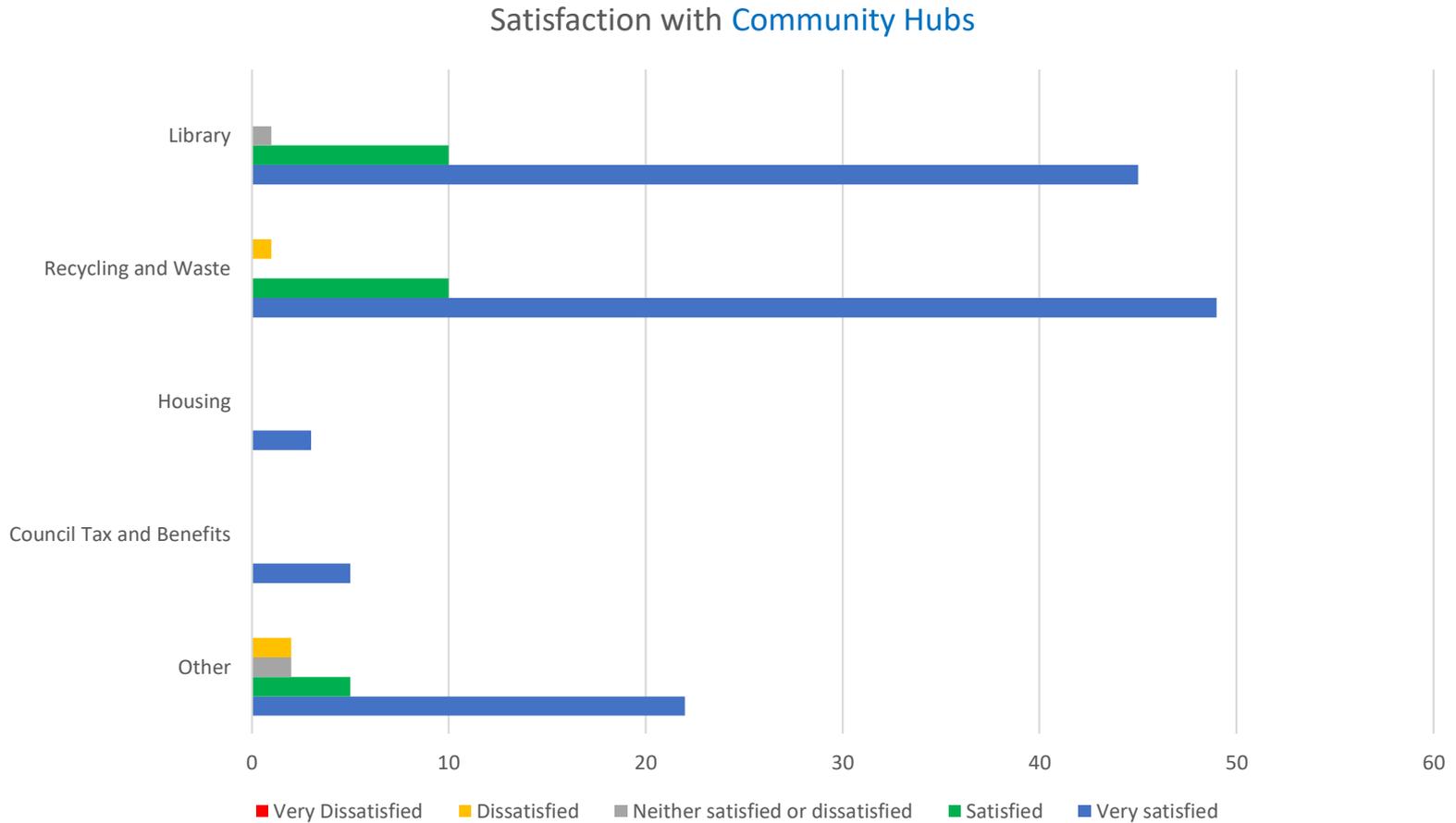
Are service users satisfied with the quality of service they receive when they enquire about local services and compliment, complain or provide comments on council services?

We concluded:

Service users are mostly satisfied with the quality of service they receive at the Community Hubs but are less satisfied with the Council's handling of complaints

We concluded this because...

Q2. People were mostly very satisfied with the services they received at the **Community Hubs**



Q2. We asked people if they could change about the **Community Hubs** one thing what would it be?

- ‘Nothing’ – 55 people said this
- Opening times – 7 people said this
- ‘Staff member not that friendly’ – ‘Staff should be more knowledgeable – bring back the library as it was – staff are brilliant’
- ‘Make the library bigger – better books – more paperbacks’
- ‘Make it a bit more private’/ ‘More privacy’
- ‘Need to tidy up – boxes everywhere’
- ‘More up to date computers’
- ‘Building gets too hot/aircon’
- ‘Electric doors by the toilets for disabled access’
- ‘Delighted that it’s still open’

Q2. Of the people we contacted over the **complaints** procedure there were mixed views of how well the Council dealt with their **complaint**

- Of the 77 people we contacted – only 24 opted to feed into our review;
- 17 out of 24 (who answered that question) said the Council did not contact them to discuss their **complaint** within an acceptable timescale;
- 19 said their **complaint** was not resolved within 30 working days – almost double the number reported by the Council in its annual report;
- 7 out of 11 said that although the Council did advise them that their **complaint** was complex, it was not resolved when the Council said it would be;
- 14 out of 24 were told by the person dealing with their **complaint** how they intended to investigate the points raised in the **complaint**; and
- 13 out of 24 people said the person dealing with their **complaint** asked them what outcome they were hoping for

Q2. Of the people we contacted over the **complaints** procedure

- 10 out of 22 people said the person dealing with their **complaint** explained what they could do if they were unhappy with the Council's response to their **complaint**
- 12 out of 21 people said the Council informed them of the outcome by their preferred method of communication, e.g. letter, email, phone or in person
- 14 out of 24 people said they thought that the Council treated them fairly and with respect throughout the process

Q2. The Council has maintained potentially vulnerable services through the creation of the **Community Hubs** but has not yet assessed their success from a service user perspective

Staff told us:

- Council staff suggested that library services have suffered since the creation of the **Community Hubs** and the quality of customer service provided is not as good as that provided for other Council services via the One Stop Shop;
- the Council does not collect quality data on people accessing the Hubs or use what it does collect effectively;
- the **Hubs** collect comments/feedback cards daily and forward these to the **Compliments, Comments and Complaints** Team;
- the acoustics in some **Hubs** do not enable private discussions with staff, although rooms are available for private discussion on request; and
- the Council can demonstrate changes in the **Hubs** in response to local needs/feedback

Question 3

Does the Council have effective two-way communication with service users?

We concluded:

The Council has arrangements in place to engage with local residents but this does not always result in effective two-way communication or lead to changes in contact arrangements that better meet users needs

We concluded this because...

Q3. The Council has some arrangements to ensure two-way communication but there is scope to improve these

Staff told us:

- There is no formal mechanism in place to monitor, record and respond to **complaints, comments and compliments** on social media. This is due to the lack of capacity/resource within the Customer Relations Department
- There are arrangements for service users to provide feedback to the **Community Hubs** either written or via discussion. This may result in local changes to aspects of the **Community Hub** to improve customer experience. However, there are limited arrangements in place to share good practice / lessons learned

Q3. The Council has implemented IT as an effective means of communicating with citizens and there is scope to use IT better to promote two way communication

Staff told us:

- the Council implemented the **My Monmouthshire App** in 2016 following positive feedback from a neighbouring council;
- a My Council user group engages with users. Membership is around 22;
- scope to develop the **My Monmouthshire App** further – eg Licensing services hope to use the **My Monmouthshire App** to streamline its processes;
- at the time of our review the Council estimated 35,000 registered users of **My Monmouthshire App** but some had registered several times. The Council now estimates it has 45,000 single registrations; and
- the Council promotes the **My Monmouthshire App** in the **Community Hubs** and assesses satisfaction with the app using an App feedback form

Q3. **Complainants** described a mixed level of two way communication with the person dealing with their **complaint**

- **Complainants** described a mixed level of engagement with the person dealing with their complaint
- 18 out of 24 said they felt that the person dealing with their **complaint** understood what they were complaining about
- 16 out of 24 said the person dealing with their **complaint** told them their understanding of the points raised in the **complaint**
- 10 of these 16 people said the Council told them their understanding of the point raised, and asked them to confirm this was correct

Complainants described a mixed level of two way communication with the person dealing with their **complaint**

Some quotes by complainants on the handling of their complaint:

- ‘I found the report to be comprehensive and felt that the investigating officer had taken the time to investigate it as she had promised’
- ‘The investigation officer was very professional and explained what she expected to happen. We had a face to face interview and then a final report was sent to me. I then wrote to the chief officer outlining my concerns about certain points within the report but heard nothing further’
- ‘Received nothing - had to relog at local centre’
- ‘Dealt with numerous people some understood points raised and some didn’t’
- ‘Dealt with numerous people so needed to confirm points raised on multiple occasions’

Q3. The Council does not engage well in two way communication with **Hub** users about opportunities to improve

Local people told us that:

- The Council does not pro-actively seek the views of local people who use services at the **hubs**
- When local people suggest improvements to **Hub** services these are rarely acted upon

What we observed:

- One **Community Hub** is based on the same site as the registry office – potential issue around sensitivity

Q3. The Council has some arrangements to ensure two-way communication but these could be improved

Staff told us:

- Many service user queries are resolved by **Community Hub** staff, however there are some where staff seek advice from relevant departments.
- Service users would prefer to deal with someone face to face so **Community Hub** staff would help to identify the need and liaise with other staff on behalf of the service user.
- The Council does not follow up user satisfaction following **complaints** handling.

What we think the Council should do (1) – proposals for improvement:

- Improve customer contact arrangements taking into account user feedback
- Routinely seek feedback from people who use the **Community Hubs**, **My Monmouthshire App** and the **Compliments, Comments** and **Complaints** arrangements to identify improvements to customer contact arrangements;
- Seek feedback from people who do not currently use the **Community Hubs**, **My Monmouthshire App** or **Compliments, Comments** and **Complaints** arrangements to understand why;

What we think the Council should do (2) – proposals for improvement:

- Ensure that the Council meets the standards it sets such as in **complaints**;
- Share learning about improvements made to individual **Community Hubs** with other **Community Hub** staff; and
- Improve customer care in the customer contact arrangements to ensure citizens views are genuinely acknowledged and addressed.