

Governance Committee

30 September 2021

Appendix 1 Key customer experience developments in 2020/21

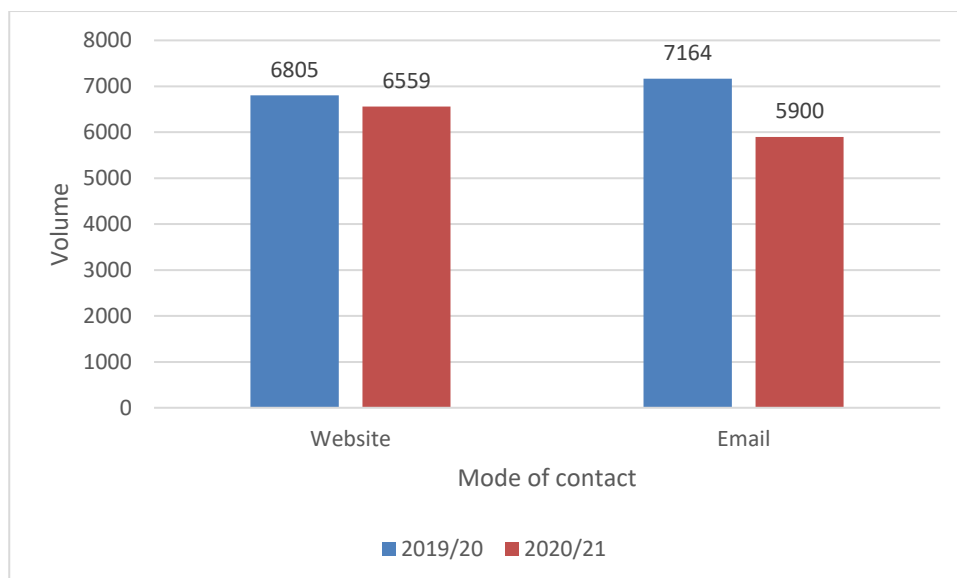
1.0 Customer Feedback in 2020/21

1.1 The collection of feedback from customers using our website and receiving email correspondence has continued to assist structured monitoring of customer satisfaction across the Council and to provide valuable data which informs service improvements. The feedback collected relating to our website continues to add value to the Council's ambition for customers to self-serve as much as possible, while striving for a high level of customer service. It also assisted the Council's operational response to the pandemic and informed edits made to content during 2020/21.

1.2 Headlines for customer feedback in 2020/21:

- We received just under 12,500 ratings across all feedback surveys.
- We also received over 3,350 verbatim comments from customers.

Graph 1 – Volume of customer feedback and comments, 2020/21

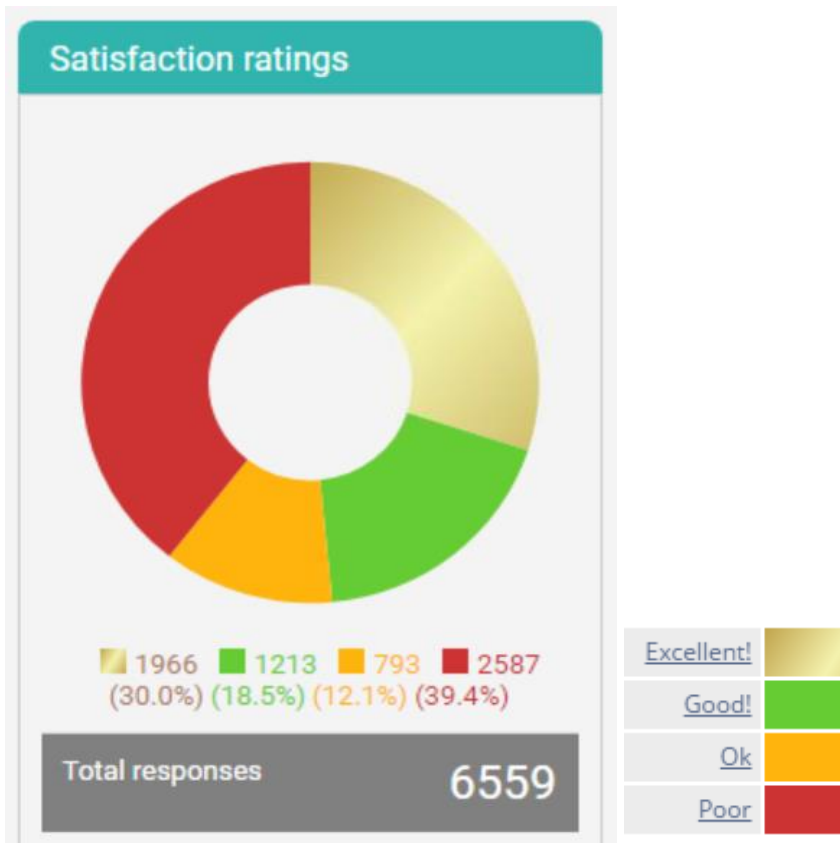


2.0 Website feedback 2020/21

2.1 Key takeaways:

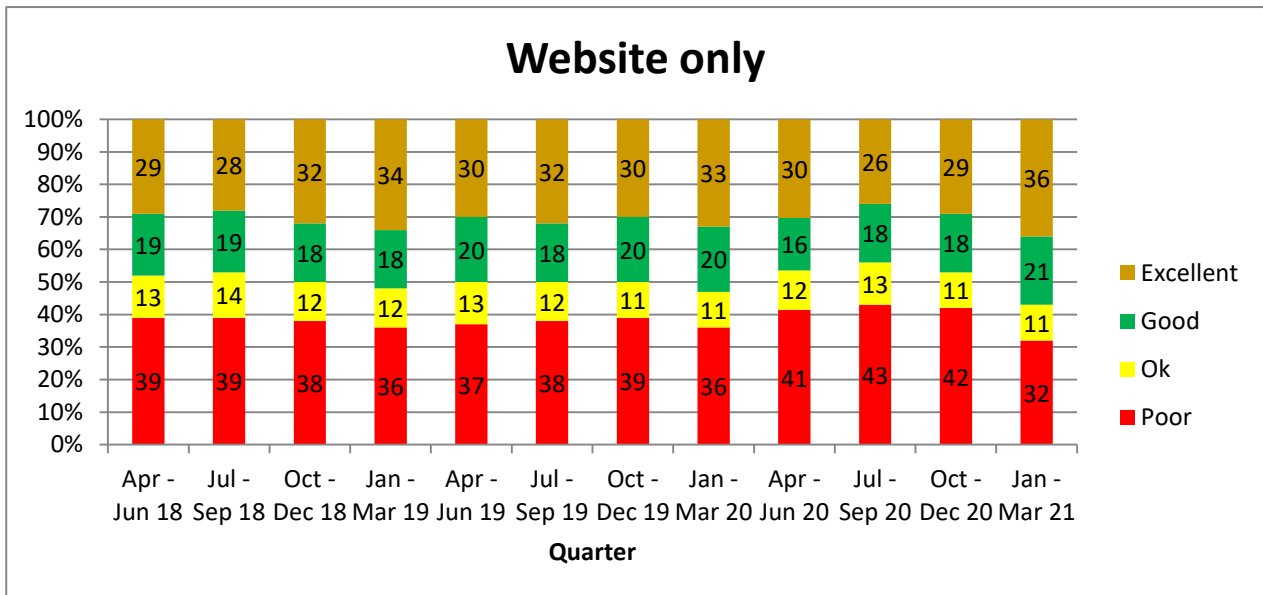
- The website feedback is well used, despite being a fixture for users for almost four years.
- Our website feedback decreased by 3.5% but we still received over 6,500 pieces of feedback.
- There was a reduced volume of feedback due to some webpages being unpublished due to operational changes due to lockdowns and customers not engaging as frequently with services due to lockdowns.
- Customer satisfaction rating was 61%, which is a drop of one per cent compared to 2019/20.
- Feedback surveys are available on around a quarter of the Council's published pages and were added to the Public Health and Waste sections of the site in 2020/21.
- Some website content is not appropriate for feedback surveys, such as landing pages.
- Customer comments are especially useful in highlighting where to make improvements.

Graph 2 – Customer satisfaction ratings: Website, 2020/21



2.2 Having three full years of customer feedback, the graphic below indicates, that despite the pandemic, feedback trends were in line with the feedback of the last two years.

Graph 3 - Website satisfaction ratings: Three-year comparison, 2018/19 – 2020/21



2.3 During 2020/21, the Customer Services Team continued to assess where content consistently performs below the average for overall customer web satisfaction. The reasons customers visit our website are vast and it has been accepted that it will include visits related to a certain level of dissatisfaction due to the services we are able to provide in the context of many years

of reductions in government funding and based on policy, particularly enforcement decisions we take. However, we continue to look where improvements can be made.

2.4 The following points provide information on developments to the ESCC website in 2020/21 that are relevant for improving customer experience.

2.4.1 We achieved compliance of the Accessibility Regulations 2018 by 23 September 2020 on ESCC website, microsites and web applications.

2.4.2 Further efforts to meet accessibility standards continue with the focus for staff on accessibility requirements of documents published on the ESCC website and microsites. This major review, led by Digital Services, will improve the customer experience by making content accessible, simplifying customer journeys and improving our digital offer.

2.4.3 Digital Services has made document accessibility training and guidance available, as well as a course for ESCC managers covering the Council's web content management policies, web accessibility and best practices in digital content.

2.4.4 Digital Services, and in collaboration with content owners across the Council, continue to migrate the ESCC website onto the new gov.uk style framework. This improves our customers' experience providing a more up-to-date, clearer look and feel and will remove any accessibility issues that remain. The migration continues until the end of 2021.

2.4.5 In 2020/21, we carried out an improvement project on Communities, Economy, and Transport (CET) website content which received consistently lower ratings (approx. 40% of CET website feedback rated 'poor') and an overabundance of content (over 900+ webpages). Working with team managers and web authors, we successfully improved the content 'readability' grade from B to A, reduced word content by 21% and reduced the number of pages by 13%. We formed a CET web author forum which has proven an effective way of gaining staff engagement and improving skills and knowledge. The forum has become permanent.

2.4.6 We started an exciting new area of development where a satisfaction survey is being presented on submission of a webform. The first is Highways being used on the 'report a problem' webform. It is proven successful in use and providing valuable feedback. In quarter one 2021/22 there have been 1,017 results. We will investigate further roll out to other webforms that have high volume.

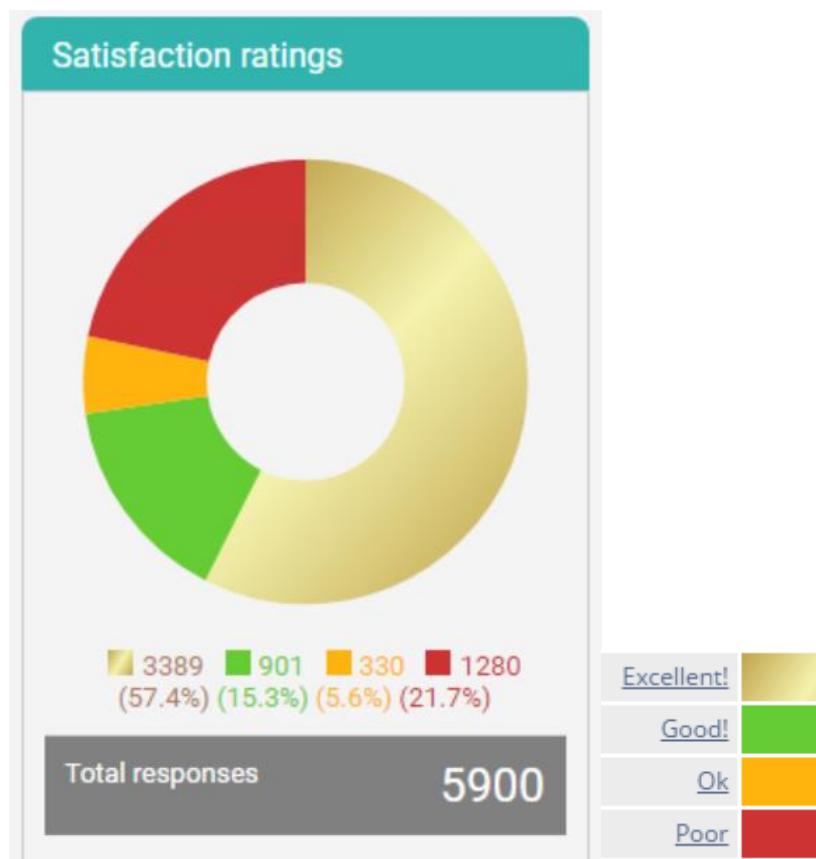
2.4.7 We carried out a benchmarking exercise for our website satisfaction rating with similar authorities (including our partnered councils), in order to get a sense of where feedback satisfaction levels typically fall for local authorities. Attention can now focus upon internal analysis of web content in view of ensuring further improvements for our customers' experience.

3.0 **Email feedback 2020/21**

3.1 Key takeaways:

- We received over 5,900 pieces of feedback, that is a 17% decrease compared to 2019/20.
- This notable decrease relates to the service use by our customers reduced significantly at points of 2020/21 compared to the year before.
 - An example is the volume of contact to East Sussex Highways during Q1 of 2020/21 dropped due to the national lockdown which reduced traffic rates across the county.
- 14 teams are currently using the email feedback surveys, an increase of one from last year.
- Overall customer satisfaction rating for emails was 78%, one per cent higher than in 2019/20.
- The predominant bulk of negative ratings regarding email correspondence are in relation to services that engage with a more challenging customer base and subject matter than other services.
- Comments left with 'poor' ratings continue to mostly relate to a decision made rather than the customer service received.
- However, comments provided with 'excellent' ratings regularly provide compliments about staff, congratulating them on their good customer service.

Graph 4 – Customer satisfaction ratings: Email, 2020/21



3.2 Managers continue to advise that having access to a tool that provides real-time customer insight adds great value to their assessment of the quality of email correspondence. Comments left by customers provide management with intelligence in relation to possible amendments to their service offer but also, critically, specific praise of a response and/or member of staff. This type of feedback has been especially welcomed during what has been a turbulent year for our services.

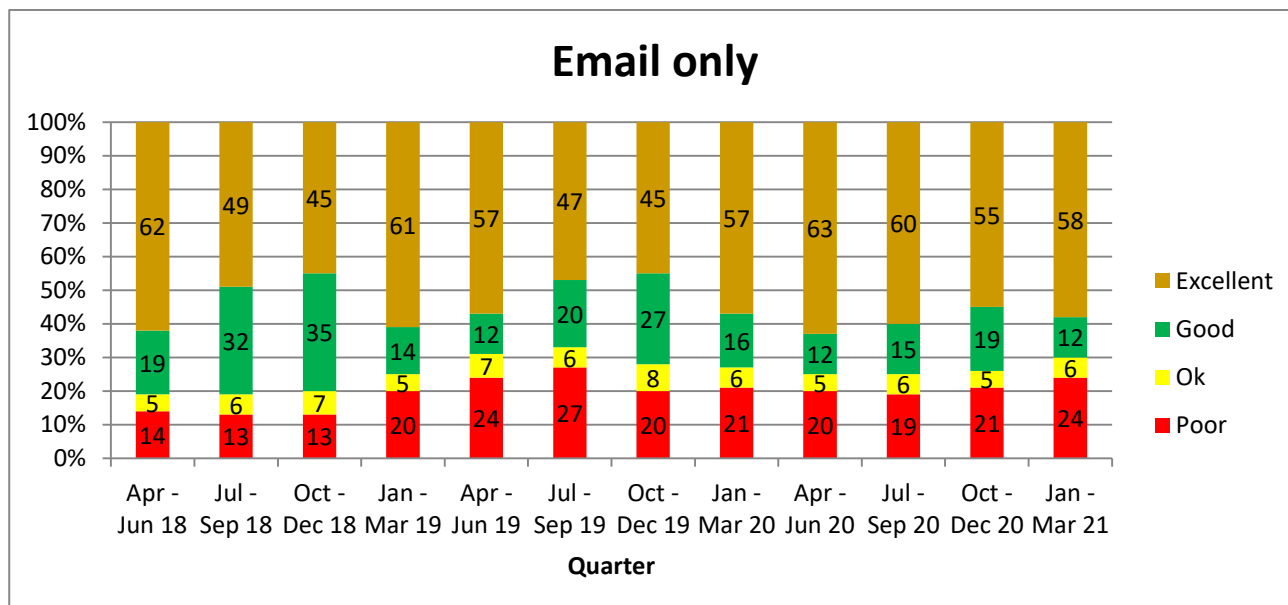
3.3 Examples of some feedback provided from managers includes:

- The feedback contributes to a quarterly summary report which is shared with departmental management and all comments related to business processes are considered for business development.
- Data collected is used to identify issues with training and performance of staff as well as areas where services and systems could be improved.
- As a team, little positive feedback is provided by customers, but Thermometer (feedback) provides a valuable source getting this and reminds the team that the majority of customers are happy with the service they have received.
- The feedback assists us to keep track of the performance of our service offer and has been used as evidence of the high standards of the service.
- Helps identify areas of web content or standardised correspondence that require reviewing.

3.4 Satisfaction levels for email correspondence remain higher than those for our website, as has been the trend since collection of feedback started in 2017.

3.5 Email satisfaction ratings have fluctuated more than their website equivalents since we began using feedback surveys, as highlighted in the table below. However, given the consistent collection of feedback during 2019/20 and 2020/21 and 'Poor' ratings altering by just one per cent, we can be assured of our customers' satisfaction when in receipt of email correspondence.

Graph 5 - Email satisfaction ratings: Three-year comparison, 2018/19 – 2020/21



4.0 Face to face feedback 2020/21

4.1 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we removed the feedback devices from each of the five locations they were previously installed (Eastbourne and Hastings libraries, County Hall, Ocean House and St Mary’s). In September 2021 we will consider if it would be safe to re-install these devices. We will also assess if any other sites may be viable for collecting customer feedback.

5.0 Telephone feedback

5.1 During 2020/21, East Sussex Highways remained the only service to continue collecting feedback by telephone. They use the telephone surveys as part of a suite of measures that make up the customer satisfaction performance indicator for Highways Contract.

5.2 There were 480 customers who provided feedback during 2020/21, and 70% of customers who completed the survey were satisfied with the service they had received. The table below highlights customers satisfaction with different elements of their experience.

Table 3 – Telephone survey statistics: East Sussex Highways, 2020/21

Services	No. surveys answered	Overall satisfaction	Satisfaction with:			
			Time taken to respond	Helpfulness and politeness of staff	Fully understood your needs	Quality of information and advice given
Highways (CET)	480	70%	72%	83%	79%	72%

5.3 In early 2020/21, Highways were able to automate the surveys, so all customers had an option to complete the survey if they continue to hold at the end of their calls. This removed staff asking customers to complete it. This was anticipated to reduce the ratings as removed prospect of

callers being selected to provide feedback and upon analysis of 2020/21's data, this has proven to be the case with reductions of between 12% and 22% for each of questions asked during the survey.

6.0 Customer Service Network

6.1 The Customer Services Network sessions in 2020/21 have been especially helpful to colleagues during the pandemic and the group has shared issues that have developed as the pandemic presented different customer needs and behaviours. We used it to share experiences and talk through changes to communicating with our customers due to lockdowns. While teams were presented with challenges at different points of the year, some aspects of our customer service provision improved because of greater flexibility working virtually, with quick virtual meetings to provide support and problem solving quickly via MS Teams.

6.2 However, the biggest benefit of the meetings during the response to the pandemic was the ability for the members to share issues they and their teams were facing. One theme that emerged was that customers became more anxious and sometimes abusive as the year progressed. Some customers were unwilling to accept the need for ESCC to alter the service provision in response to the pandemic as months passed as and they became fed up with lockdowns; and they compared our delivery of services to the commercial sector who appeared to be able to lift restrictions. These discussions provided realisation that individual services were not alone in facing such a challenge and that many colleagues also were. As such, the discussions provided support for each other and members were advised to share the common feedback with their teams.

6.3 The meetings have also provided opportunity for council-wide developments to be highlighted to a broad spectrum of services. The most notable was Digital Services highlighting the new ESCC website including improvements to accessibility. The group continues to provide a valuable forum to update colleagues about developments related to customer experience. The feedback from members also remains very useful for feedback to the Board for the Council's Customer Experience development.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 During the pandemic, gathering customer feedback, across different modes of engagement with our customers, has provided us and colleagues across Council services with valuable insight into customers' opinions and their needs during a very challenging time. We were fortunate that teams across the council were familiar with receiving such feedback so we could maximise the value of the feedback to aid colleagues and customers, where possible.

7.2 The quantity of customer feedback we have now gathered provides a useful benchmark that can help us to understand how customers view their interaction with the Council. Additionally, it continues to assist us identify improvements we may need to consider for our customers' experience, whichever service they are accessing.

7.3 We will continue to increase the number of places where customers can complete a survey, where possible, for existing feedback surveys (website, email, face to face), in order to continue to provide valuable information for evaluating and improving our services for customers.