# CITIZEN LED INSPECTION

**FEEDBACK REPORT FOR WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL**

# COMMUNICATIONS

## NOVEMBER 2014

**Data label: PUBLIC**

| INSPECTION TEAM: | REPORT SUBMITTED TO: |
|---|---|
| **MRS L LIDDELL**<br>LEAD INSPECTOR | **MRS J WHITELAW**<br>HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES |
| **MR A SLATER**<br>CITIZEN INSPECTOR | **MR S FIELD**<br>HEAD OF AREA SERVICES |
| **MRS M JOHNSTONE**<br>CITIZEN INSPECTOR | |

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## A. INTRODUCTION TO FEEDBACK

A.1. This feedback report has been produced following an inspection of "Communications" in West Lothian Council using the Citizen Led Inspection (CLI) framework. The terms of reference for this inspection were wider than normal. The project was strategic in focus, considering the overall impact of council-wide communication, but also, how the council interacts with its citizens and partners on a daily basis.

A.2. The standard report framework was not designed to accommodate council-wide inspections. Therefore when reading this report the reader should, unless told otherwise, interpret "service" as the council.

A.3. The inspection team had more than 21 meetings and the process took place on average a couple of days per week over a duration period spanning February to August 2014 and included the following steps:

- Services were identified that had the most significant type and volume of communication with customers on a regular basis
- Gathering and reviewing evidence of council and service approaches to communication
- Onsite observations with those selected council services and various council public offices
- Interviewing the general public about their experiences of council communications
- Achieving consensus on strengths and areas for improvement for the council and specific services
- Collating all information and providing a report

A.4. The inspection process was planned and completed by Citizen Inspectors who are residents and volunteers from the West Lothian community. The team comprised:

| **Mrs L Liddell**, | **Mr A Slater,** | **Mrs M Johnstone**, |
|---|---|---|
| Lead Inspector | Citizen Inspector | Citizen Inspector |

A.5. During the inspection process every effort has been made by the team to ensure that the conclusions and feedback are based on fact and are the result of consensus.

A.6. In the course of their work, the team have interviewed 12 employees of the council and 74 members of the public. The team also visited 8 frontline locations and the West Lothian Civic Centre (council headquarters).

## B. KEY STRENGTHS

The key strengths of communication are:

B.1.1. The council's senior management has a strong focus of intention towards ensuring the customers are given the correct information and in a format that suits them.

B.1.2. The team concluded through interview and observation that council employees were committed and motivated to ensuring the public were provided with the correct information on time and in a format that they considered appropriate for the customer.

B.1.3. Most members of the public interviewed by the CLI team in the one-stop-shops (Customer Information Service) and partnership centres think West Lothian Council does a good job with communication.

B.1.4. The members of the public interviewed by the CLI team thought that all frontline employees gave an excellent service.


## C. KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The key areas identified where communication should be improved have been grouped under themes, these are:

C.1. **THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER NEED**

C.1.1. The council should review their approach to consulting with the customer in order to:
- gain a better understanding of what the specific needs are, particularly targeting those who are "difficult to reach" or customers with complex needs
- ascertain customers' preferred method or channel of communication and regularly review
- rationalise surveys by producing "collective" surveys across services where there is a common customer group

C.1.2. The council should review the use and make-up of focus groups. They could be more productive if the make-up was demographically orientated, for example; age or gender could be used rather than focusing on subject orientation. Where possible, the make-up of a focus group should reflect the demographic profile of the local population.

C.1.3. Greater awareness of social profiling within the council may assist in identifying better and more cost effective communication.

C.2. **THEME 2: PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS**

C.2.1. It is important that the council in their journey to "channel-shift" the population of West Lothian does not lose sight of the hard to reach category of customer who may comprise as much as 20% of the total population of the county i.e. 34,500 citizens. *(Note: "Hard to reach" may not just relate to locational, economic or technology factors i.e. cultural, attitude and personality can also make people "hard to reach" or communications-resistant.)*

C.2.2. The council should prioritise the development of a "single view" of the customer to maximise the use of resources and joined-up services for the customer. For example; the systems integration work on the housing and revenues systems.

C.2.3. The council should ensure that communication standards are captured and monitored through the performance management system to help understand how effectively services communicate with customers.

C.3. **THEME 3: INFORMATION AND PUBLICATIONS**

C.3.1. The council should aim to ensure all customers can understand information that is provided to them and encourage the use of "plain English" in all letters and publications.

C.3.2. Evidence was found that some communications were not easily understood and that this can lead to customers not engaging properly with the service/council.

C.3.3. The council should ensure that there is regular and consistent updating of the council website and intranet content.

C.3.4. The council should continue to expand the use of new media, for example; Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and the council's weekly e-bulletin, and website.

C.3.5. The council should advertise more widely the general council telephone number and services provided for "hard to reach" groups in rural areas, for example; the existence of the mobile library service was not well known by those sampled in the survey. The actual mobile-library vehicles are very noticeable and self-explanatory, but the service-related information is not often prominently displayed in some local libraries.

C.4. **THEME 4: EMPLOYEES**

C.4.1. Line managers should ensure that their employees are familiar with the guidelines described in the "West Lothian Way" (council's communication guidelines).

C.4.2. The Chief Executive or Depute Chief Executives should introduce West Lothian Council's philosophy on communication as part of the corporate induction process. This should include;

the council's values and what is expected from employees, in terms of how they will communicate with customers. It is important that new employees understand these values and principles and see that top management demonstrate these behaviours themselves and are serious about their expectations for every employee.

C.4.3. A council-wide communication group, drawn from appropriate members from each service, should be set up.  This group would share ideas; what works and what doesn't and agree the best way forward to effective communication in the council.

C.4.4. As Customer Services receive the bulk of enquiries from the public, there should be better processes and procedures in place to ensure that this service is regularly updated with information to deal with customer enquiries.

C.4.5. The council should continue to monitor and review the standards of service received by customers of the CSC (call centre).  As part of the inspection process the CLI team found some evidence of what they considered to be unacceptable levels of service, for example:
- instances where they waited for a long time (one example of 20 minutes) to speak to an adviser
- instances where an enquiry was not resolved at first point of contact
- to achieve improvements in communication Customer Services should always provide constructive feedback to services if it is found that the communication by the service is unsatisfactory.

## D. RATING

The Inspection team have rated the service as follows:

| CRITERION | RATING (✓) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **E**<br>(Excellent) | **G**<br>(Good) | **A**<br>(Adequate) | **W**<br>(Weak) | **U**<br>(Unsatisfactory) |
| 1 LEADERSHIP | | ✓ | | | |
| 2 SERVICE PLANNING | | | ✓ | | |
| 3 PEOPLE RESOURCES | | ✓ | | | |
| 4 PARTNERS & OTHER RESOURCES | | ✓ | | | |
| 5 SERVICE PROCESSES | | | ✓ | | |
| 6 CUSTOMER RESULTS | | ✓ | | | |
| 7 KEY RESULTS | | ✓ | | | |

## E. OVERVIEW OF THE SERVICE

### BACKGROUND

West Lothian has a population of approximately 173,000 and is the fastest growing area in Scotland. The National Records Scotland predicts that the local area will see rapid growth in a number of key demographic areas, with older people in the area set to rise dramatically over the next 10 years.

West Lothian Council is responsible for providing a wide range of public services to the local community, including; education, social services, housing, environmental health, planning, economic development, highways and transport. The council also works in partnership with other public sector and voluntary organisations, such as Police Scotland, Fire Scotland, the NHS and Scottish Enterprise to deliver outcomes in health, community safety, economic growth, etc. for West Lothian. The council is also the county's biggest employer.

The council must evolve to meet the changing needs of the growing local community and continue to meet the local demand for high quality and cost effective services.

Key to success in these aims is effective communication with customers and the wider community. The Citizen Led Inspection team understands how important receiving the right information at the right time in the right way is to the customer and how it can shape their views of services and the council.

The team were also mindful of the wider impact that good communication and engagement can have in helping the council to reach those people in the community who are most in need and to ensure that they are engaged in the most positive way.

The purpose of this Citizen Led Inspection process was to help the council to review their overall approach to communication, the access and choices that the council offers customers, the tools, training and media that they use and how successfully they meet information needs in the local community.

In the course of the inspection process the team have evaluated the main methods of communication (website, face-to-face, telephone, Facebook, etc.) and interviewed both customers and employees of the council.

**LEADERSHIP**

E.1.1. The CLI team used the inspection framework to evaluate the effectiveness of Leaders in supporting communication, the criteria included:
**Criterion 1: Leadership**
Leaders:
- ✓ Identify a clear direction for the service
- ✓ Set long-term outcomes
- ✓ Are open, honest and accountable
- ✓ Put in place scrutiny to challenge performance

E.1.2. In order to understand Leaders role in council communication, the CLI team interviewed a number of senior officers and managers in the council. Interviewees included the Chief Executive, Head of Corporate Services and senior managers and representatives from Corporate Communications, Area Services, Social Policy and Housing, Construction and Building Services.

E.1.3. The vision of senior officers is to make sure that all services are as 'customer focused' as possible and ensure that the council communicates effectively, clearly and efficiently with all distinct groups in society, especially in times of crisis. The council's communication guideline, the "West Lothian Way', sets out this vision and practical communication advice for services and employees.

E.1.4. The CLI Team were unable to establish evidence i.e. geo and socio demographic statistics that the council had access to current and reliable market research/information of the kind that would enable them to appreciate the importance of the range and diversity of these distinct socio-demographic groups.

E.1.5. The team is aware that one service department in the council has taken practical steps towards developing such an appreciation of the range and diversity of these distinct groups but the information submitted by them to the CLI team was specific to environmental or recycling behaviour, not to communications behaviour.

E.1.6. Interviews with senior officers often contained reference to achieving a "single view" of the customer by integrating the data and information the council holds on customers across different systems and services. However, there does not seem to be a clear strategy or timescale for achieving this aim. This "single view" would support more joined up services for the customer at the frontline and also provide holistic profiling information on customers' interactions with multiple council services.

E.1.7. The demonstration of the new council website to the CLI team in May 2014, prior to go-live, had some technical problems. However, the potential could be seen that the new council website will go some way to achieving a more integrated view of a customer.

E.1.8. Until the sharing or integration of this information is given higher priority by Leaders then meaningful customer focus or "personalisation" of communications for the customer may remain elusive.

E.1.9. **Recommendations:**

- Leaders should encourage more cross-service consultation with the public to maximise the impact and reduce contact for the customer

- Leaders should encourage services to involve various customer groups in reviewing communication and general service decision making processes.

**Rating: GOOD**

E.2. **SERVICE PLANNING**

E.2.1. The CLI team used the inspection framework to evaluate the effectiveness of Service Planning in supporting communication, the criteria included:
**Criterion 2: Service Planning**
The service:
- ✓ Develop clear strategies
- ✓ Has effective annual planning that outlines the key activities
- ✓ Uses reliable tools and methods to engage and consult with customers
- ✓ Sets and meets targets for performance in all the key areas of activity

E.2.2. The team wanted to understand how the council has developed communication approaches and how it impacts on the design, delivery and review of services. In this aim the team interviewed officers from a selection of council services who had a role in developing the corporate approach, or had frequent high volume communications with customers.

E.2.3. The council has developed corporate strategies and approaches to achieve effective communication and these are all reviewed regularly with customers and other council services:
- Customer Service Strategy outlines the requirements for all services and employees for dealing with the public and has a significant focus on improving the quality and range of information that is available through all communication methods.
- "West Lothian Way" sets out the corporate communications guidelines for services
- The Branding Strategy establishes a consistent set of standards for council publications and communications (for example, design, format, look and feel).

E.2.4. The internal communication guidelines for services the West Lothian Way has been in place for a number of years and in the view of the team is in need of review – both in terms of the

content and the way that it is used by services.   It is essential that the guideline (and future versions) are better cascaded and more fully and consistently followed by council services.  The CLI team were given the impression that this document was not always as consistently or as well used as it should be by frontline employees in the course of their dealings with the public.

E.2.5.   The council has identified their main communication methods that are to be used as appropriate to the customer group, these include:

| Communication Approaches | Examples of Council Communication Approaches |
|---|---|
| Face-to-face | • The council tries to ensure the quality and consistency of face-to-face communications through dedicated customer services in local offices and partnership centres.<br>• Customer facing employees receive appropriate customer service training to help improve standards of service.<br>• Services set standards (commitments) relating to the quality and timeliness of information that will be provided to the customer. |
| Telephone | • The council has a customer contact centre that provides 24/7 access to services and public information.<br>• Customer Advisers in the contact centre receive customer service training to help improve standards of service.<br>• The council uses performance information relating to the time and success of call handling. |
| Email | • Some council services utilise email to provide e-billing, alerts, bulletins/newsletters and general service information to customers.<br>• Customers can email service requests to the contact centre. |
| Publications | • The council provides information through a range of leaflets and forms that are available online and in local offices.<br>• The council has a quarterly newsletter (WL Bulletin) that is provided to all homes and businesses in West Lothian.<br>• All council tenants receive a newsletter (Tenants News). |
| Website | • The council has a transactional website that is used to share information or contact and provide access to online services. |
| New Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Flickr) | • The council has a Facebook page that is used to provide service and community information (over 28,500 likes).<br>• The council has a Twitter account to provide service and communicate information (over 7,500 following).<br>• The council has a Flickr account to share photographs from the local community (over 15,000 photos). |

E.2.6.   In summary, most services in the council have the capabilities to devise appropriate, accurate communications for the majority of West Lothian citizens – who are fairly well educated, articulate, literate, and computer-aware.

E.2.7. There are significant sections of the West Lothian community who do not fall into these categories and these are habitually referred to as "hard to reach groups". This category usually is the most expensive and time-consuming group to deal with since they may not favour using, or have access to, a telephone or a computer or have their own transport. This group will typically require face-to-face contact with the council to access services and resolve problems. Previous studies (such as Scottish Borders Council Experian Report: "Using Customer Insight to Drive. Channel Shift", October 2011) have demonstrated the value of knowing the geo-demographic distribution of various groups within the community.

E.2.8. Some council services have regular engagement with focus groups or forums representing particular sections of the public. It was not clear that use of focus groups to evaluate service performance is practised consistently throughout the council.

**Examples of practice in council services:**

E.2.9. **Corporate Communications:** this team provides corporate support to council services on all aspects of communication and branding. The team are ultimately responsible for protecting the reputation of the council and ensuring a consistent and high quality standard of communication is achieved with all customers, partners and stakeholders. They have developed the West Lothian Way and Branding guidelines and policies are derived from the institute of Public Relations and National Union of Journalists.

The team develops an annual plan to ensure council communications are planned and prioritised and this is agreed with the council's Executive Management Team. This ensures that time and resource is allocated for all known activities and support is directed to those communication methods that have the biggest impact, such as the council's quarterly newsletter, website and new media such as Facebook.

E.2.10. **Customer and Community Services:** provides the frontline services of the council and will be the service through which most customers will come into contact. This incorporates the contact centre – through which all telephone and email traffic will flow – and the main points for face-to-face contact, the one-stop Customer Information Services (CIS) and partnership centres in Bathgate, Broxburn and Fauldhouse.

These services have been developed in accordance with the council's Customer Service Strategy and are the first point of contact for the public wishing to contact the council. As such, it is important that the service have a clear understanding of the needs of all customers and ensure that those needs are met.

The means to provide modern, responsive services with appropriate, easy access is a significant part of the service, as is the duty to get through to "difficult to reach" groups in the community. The service manager has been working with Corporate Communications and the Equalities Officer amongst others in pursuit of this aim. The service is closely monitoring the overall

performance, in relation to access and contact, and managers and advisors have regular meetings to discuss performance.

E.2.11. **Social Policy:**  the team interviewed one of four senior managers from Social Policy to discuss how the council manages communication with vulnerable people in the community.  The service relies on a combination of traditional and electronic communication methods, with additional support services provided to encourage the more vulnerable client groups to engage with the service.

The service also supports and engages with forums representing groups from the community.

The service trains and encourages young people (clients) on how to get their issues heard and also supports them in their engagement with other council services.

The service believes that people are generally happy with the methods and support that is available, but did concede difficulty in engaging with some people or encouraging participation in groups and forums. The service monitors customers' satisfaction with communications through surveys and the performance system.

E.2.12. **Housing, Construction and Building Services:**  the service covers many different aspects of 'Housing', including tenancy management and support, repairs and maintenance of houses and the planning and construction of new council houses.

E.2.13. The officer interviewed by the team from this service stressed the strong emphasis on "customer involvement" in the service and this is captured in the Tenant Participation Strategy. This strategy sets out the different ways tenants can engage with the service, including panels, residents groups and surveys.

E.2.14. Consultation and engagement with customers was a clear and ongoing commitment to improving the service and increasing access.  Recently, as a result of Benefit Changes, a significant face-to-face communication campaign was carried out by the service and some 3,000 housing tenants were contacted. Since the 2008 economic crisis many tenants have multiple support needs and for some tenants for whom English is not their first language and who may require additional assistance and/or translation services.

E.2.15. **Recommendations:**

■ The council should prioritise the development of a "single view" of the customer to maximise the use of resources and joined-up services for the customer.  For example; the systems integration work on the housing and revenues systems.

■ The council should review their approach to consulting with the customer in order to:

- o gain a better understanding of what the specific needs are, particularly targeting those who are "difficult to reach" or customers with complex needs
- o establish customers' preferred method or channel of communication
- o rationalise surveys and eliminate duplication by producing "collective" surveys across services where there is a common customer group

■ The council should review the use and make-up of focus groups. They could be more productive if the make-up was demographically orientated, for example; age or gender could be used rather than focusing on subject orientation.

■ Greater awareness of social profiling within the council may assist in identifying better and more cost effective communication.

■ The council should continue to expand the use of new media, for example; Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and the council's weekly e-bulletin, and website.

**Rating: ADEQUATE**

E.3. **PEOPLE RESOURCES**

E.3.1. The CLI team used the inspection framework to evaluate the effectiveness of People in supporting communication, the criteria included:
**Criterion 3: People Resources**
The service:
✓ Identifies the right people resources it needs to achieve outcomes
✓ Sets out desired qualities and acceptable behaviours for staff
✓ Reviews and improves individual people's performance
✓ Communicates effectively with people
✓ Involves people in reviewing and improving the service

E.3.2. Employees interviewed were positive and committed to ensuring the public were provided with the correct information on time and in a format that they considered appropriate for the customer.

E.3.3. Concern was expressed regarding the best way to communicate with various groups or segments of the population.

E.3.4. One manager spoke about the importance of ensuring that their service has the right mix of people and communication skills to help customers but also, to protect and enhance the reputation of the council. They were also quite clear as to the desired qualifications and acceptable behaviours for employees.

E.3.5. There were examples provided of frequent and ongoing review of employees' performance in relation to their communication capabilities. Managers address any shortfall of performance or job related problem personally.

**Examples of practice in council services:**

E.3.6. **Corporate Communications:** a number of people were interviewed by the team and as expected, the employees in this service have significant experience in the media or the press and were highly skilled in a variety of communication methods. However, most of their communications were internal to the council or with significant partners and not in relation to the public.

E.3.7. **Customer and Community Services:** a generic job description for Customer Service Advisers has been developed and implemented by the service. This outlines the skills and capabilities needed by employees in this role, such as; listening skills, empathy, good verbal presentation and written communication skills. At the recruitment stage successful candidates are required to demonstrate these skills.

The service has also established two dedicated trainers to ensure Customer Service Advisers have regular in-house training to improve the quality and overall effectiveness of customer services. Basic training is provided to all new advisers and in depth training enables increasing numbers of requests and enquiries to be completed at the first point of contact by the service (a key measure of performance).

Team meetings are used to update frontline employees on changes and to ensure they provide customers with correct information.

Employees are also encouraged to put forward suggestions at these meetings that they may have on delivering the service.

E.3.8. **Recommendations:**

■ The council should ensure that knowledge and capabilities in relation to communicating with the public is a key component of employees' performance review.

■ Employees should be made aware of the characteristics of the various "social groupings" that comprise the population of West Lothian and how these factors should influence their handling of enquiries and requests.

■ Line managers should ensure that their employees are familiar with the guidelines described in the "West Lothian Way" (council's communication guidelines).

■ The Chief Executive or Depute Chief Executives should introduce West Lothian Council's philosophy on communication as part of the corporate induction process. This should include; the council's values and what is expected from employees, in terms of how they will communicate with customers. It is important that new employees understand these values and principles and see that top management demonstrate these behaviours themselves and are serious about their expectations for every employee.

■ A council-wide communication group made up with appropriate members from each service should be set up. This group would share ideas; what works and what doesn't and agree the best way forward to effective communication in the council.

■ The council should continue to monitor and review the standards of service received by customers of the CSC (call centre). As part of the inspection process the CLI team found some evidence of what they considered to be unacceptable levels of service, for example;
   o instances where they waited for a long time (one example of 20 minutes) to speak to an adviser
   o instances where an enquiry was not resolved at first point of contact

**Rating: GOOD**


E.4. **PARTNERS AND OTHER RESOURCES**

E.4.1. The CLI team used the inspection framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the council's management of partnerships and resources in supporting communication, the criteria included:

**Criterion 4: Partners & Other Resources**
The service:
✓  Manages partnerships to add value for the customer
✓  Manages finances to deliver quality services sustainably
✓  Uses information and knowledge to support and enhance service delivery
✓  Uses assets (land, buildings, vehicles and equipment) to optimum effect

E.4.2. The team attempted to understand the role of partners in the council's communication approaches and processes and also, establish how the council is working with partners to improve communication.

E.4.3. The council works with a wide range of partners in the public, private and third sectors in the delivery of services. In relation to communication, part of this provision will require partners to share access to systems and information to:
   ■ Support the provision of joined-up services to the customer

- Make best use of data and intelligence about complex issues and challenges
- Enhance understanding of the customer needs and preferences
- Reduce contact for customer
- Reduce waste and cost of services

E.4.4. The interaction between the council and its "internal" or "external" partners is important since the various services and agencies can be recipients of, and contributors to, communications from the council. The council should ask all partners their preferred means, or channel, of communication.

E.4.5. The council also provides a number of key partner agencies with media and design services partners (Corporate Communications).

E.4.6. The nature of each involvement with a partner agency may be different depending on the purpose and scope of the issue and the type of information that is being communicated. For example; the council may work with the police to share information in order to help understand and address complex issues and problems of individuals. Conversely, on specific events and projects such as the Queen's Baton relay for the recent Commonwealth Games.

E.4.7. In each case the communication between these partners needs to be as relevant and effective as possible and may also indicate the need for face-to-face discussions between the parties involved to resolve complex issues.

**Examples of practice in council services:**

E.4.8. **Corporate Communications:** the focus of the team seemed mainly to be on managing the image of the council and a particular group of key partners, i.e. the Police, Fire, NHS, WL Leisure and WL College. The overall emphasis for Corporate Communications in working with partners seemed to be in ensuring good PR for the council and that they achieve technical efficiency and "value for money" in all communications.

E.4.9. **Customer and Community Services:** this service works closely with all other parts of the council that deliver services to the public. Monthly meetings are held with these services to ensure 'joined-up' communications.

In some cases, where members of the public do not understand the correspondence or are intimidated by the language used, they will visit a public office or contact the council by telephone. The close relationship between Customer and Community Services encourages regular contact and advance notice of services' correspondence and this helps Advisers respond to customer enquiries efficiently.

The council has also encouraged partner services to use the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to manage general enquiries and customer information centrally.

All frontline services use the system to manage customer contacts (telephone, email or face-to-face). There are additional service-specific systems – some of which are integrated with CRM – and these are also used by Customer and Community Services to ensure they can provide customers with the information they need at the first point of contact.

E.4.10. **Social Policy:** examples were provided of the service offering support and training for employees from other partner organisations to help collaborative working and ensure that they are all working towards the same shared outcomes.

E.4.11. **Recommendations:**

■ Partnership arrangements should be extended and revised as necessary to ensure that they are working to gain better insight into the community and customers' needs. There should be sufficient systems and protocols established amongst partners to increase the quality of information available to customers and the data held about customers.

■ The council and partners should continue to focus on "hard to reach" citizens and recognise that some of the less efficient, time-consuming and labour intensive methods of communication e.g. face-to-face home visits, are the only practical methods of communication that are likely to be effective in some of the more difficult or problematic "council-to-citizen" situations. As one service officer commented, "Since the 2008 Economic Crisis, Housing Officers have become more like Social Workers due to many citizens having multiple support needs".

■ There is a need to review some aspects of the Corporate Communications function. This may have already begun with the appointment of the new manager and a direct reporting responsibility to the Head of Corporate Services. More emphasis needs to be given by the service to "personalised" communications with the council's various partners and the general public or ordinary citizens of West Lothian.

**Rating: GOOD**

E.5. **SERVICE PROCESSES**

E.5.1. The CLI team used the inspection framework to evaluate the effectiveness of Service Processes in communication, the criteria included:

**Criterion 5: Service Processes**
The service:
✓ Designs processes to meet the needs of customers
✓ Ensures processes are efficient and effective
✓ Delivers services to customers in the way they want

✓ Reviews the efficiency and effectiveness of processes
✓ Uses customer feedback as part of the review process

E.5.2. Corporate Communications' main function is to deliver and support effective communication within and on behalf of West Lothian Council. The service co-ordinate communication with external and internal customers and use many methods of communication to achieve this, including; publications such as West Lothian Bulletin and more immediate and responsive tools such as Facebook and Twitter.

E.5.3. The CLI team noted the mix of skills, experience and professional expertise Corporate Communications can contribute to communication campaigns and projects undertaken by council services.

E.5.4. There is some concern that Corporate Communications are not always engaged at the right time in the evolution of a project. In some instances services do not involve Corporate Communications from the start of a project and they are called in too late to have maximum beneficial effect. This situation may, however, have improved since the CLI interviews were held in this area. A new Corporate Communications Manager has been appointed and has been subject to some re-structuring.

E.5.5. The council continues to provide a quarterly newsletter to all homes and businesses in West Lothian. When surveying the general public the Bulletin was found to be a popular medium to receive information from the council, the public opinion and the reach of Bulletin suggests that there is still great merit in investing in this communication tool. However, all types of communication should be continually monitored to ensure that they are effective. As the Bulletin is so popular, the use (and value) of space should be carefully considered and prioritised, with the newsletter used predominantly to impart important messages and information.

E.5.6. At the time of the CLI process, the council website was being re-developed. The council website stores information on all services. This is updated by each service whenever changes occur and is used by customers to access information and to make payments.

E.5.7. It is important that the council in their journey to "channel-shift" the population of West Lothian does not lose sight of the different needs that people have and the importance of a community hub where people can access a range of services.

E.5.8. Customer focus may not coincide entirely with the need to save money through communications technologies. Face-to-face discussions, and home visits, are expensive, time-consuming and inefficient, but may also be the only communications channel that particular customer groups or sections of the community are able or willing to use. The council must find a balance between maintaining access and choice for the customer and reducing operational costs.

Data Label: PUBLIC

E.5.9. The CLI team gathered many positive comments or feedback from customers regarding their interaction or dealings with the council.  Some of the customers also felt West Lothian Council compared favourably with their experiences with other local authorities. Most comments and views were gathered from customers in the partnership centres or one-stop CIS locations.  The CLI team felt this strength of feeling was a re-affirmation of the need for, and an endorsement of, the continuance of personalised, face-to-face advice and access and one-to-one services for hard to reach customers.

E.5.10. Despite the other options that are now available, the council's frontline customer services remain a popular route with customers for the provision of information and access to services and advice. The service manager also stressed how important the choice to engage face-to-face with council employees was for the "difficult to reach" groups in the community. The team also recognised the major challenge that "personalisation" presents, and how important it is that council communication with the public should be appropriate to individual circumstances, needs and preferences.

E.5.11. There seemed to be no established or "scientific" method of arriving at a coherent "single view" of the customer within the council. It was estimated that the existing approach to being customer oriented was in the region of 40% effective at present.

E.5.12. Customer complaints in relation to the quality and timeliness of communication are captured and monitored through performance management arrangements. They are monitored on a daily basis and there are customer satisfaction surveys across all service areas that are used to monitor the effectiveness of communication.

E.5.13. There were some notable successes where close involvement of customer groups paid dividends, such as the re-design of Bathgate Library based on feedback from the public i.e. "National Initiatives" and the use of focus groups to reach specific groups in society.

**Examples of service practice:**

E.5.14. Service managers have described how they are making use of a wide range of communication methods, both "traditional" and the options that new technology allows.  They were also able to describe how this is making communication better and that customers are offered choice and more accessible and personalised services.

E.5.15. **Customer and Community Services:**  to ensure customers' needs are met many different services processes are in place.
- Emails for queries and some Registration requests
- Some services are requested online
- Libraries use leaflets and social media e.g. Facebook Twitter etc
- The local press is used occasionally and posters are distributed to main council offices

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- User groups are held in Libraries
- E-resources for book lending purposes, audio and magazines
- The new website should enable customers to have a higher degree of 'self-sufficiency'

E.5.16. **Housing, Construction and Building Services:** before the campaign to contact 3,000 members of the public, the service developed special forms to record details of face-to-face interviews and capture a range of different opinions. With the assistance of Corporate Communications these forms, as well as posters and leaflets, were produced and refer to existing Housing Services Protocols and Guidelines.

E.5.17. **Recommendations for Corporate Communications:**

- Corporate Communications need to become more involved with the problems in communicating directly with the distinct and varied groups of customers that make up the population of West Lothian.

- The format of the "West Lothian Way" document should be refined in order to make it more accessible and user-friendly, making it easier to use or become the "go-to" resource for front-line employees in the course of their dealings with customers.

- Corporate Communications should seek to be more proactive in their dealings with Services on a regular basis. This will help identify proposed communications projects at their development stage.

E.5.18. **Recommendations for Customer Services:**

- Include in their process of engagement with services to pass on information regarding unsatisfactory communication in order to make improvements.

E.5.19. **Recommendations for the council:**

- It is important that the council in their journey to "channel-shift" the population of West Lothian does not lose sight of the hard to reach category of customer who may comprise as much as 20% of the total population of the county (*see AFI Theme 2*).

- The council should establish simple standards for communication and communicate them to employees.

- The council should ensure that communication standards are captured and monitored through the performance management system to help understand how effectively services communicate with customers.

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■ The council should aim to ensure all customers can understand information that is provided to them and encourage the use of "plain English" in all letters and publications.

■ Evidence was found that some communications were not easily understood and that this can lead to customers not engaging properly with the service/council.

■ The council should ensure that there is regular and consistent updating of the council website and intranet content.

■ The council should continue to expand the use of new media, for example; Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and the council's weekly e-bulletin, and website.

■ Social Media access channels should be monitored and changes made to communication in accordance with the results.

■ The council should advertise more widely the general council telephone number and services provided for "hard to reach" groups in rural areas, for example; the existence of the mobile library service was not well known.

**Rating: ADEQUATE**

E.6. **CUSTOMER RESULTS**

E.6.1. The CLI team used the inspection framework to evaluate the effectiveness of Customer Results for communication, the criteria included:

**Criterion 6:  Customer Results**
The service:
✓ Are measuring the right thing(s) in relation to customer results and what is important to the customer
✓ Can show positive and sustained good performance over a period of 3 or more years
✓ Have set and met challenging targets
✓ Compare their own performance against performance leaders in other councils or organisations
✓ Can explain any dips in their performance or positive changes

E.6.2. Generally speaking, West Lothian Council has several ways to measure and assess the effectiveness of communications with its citizens.

E.6.3. The first is through customers' perceptions of the service that they receive.  The council has established "core" performance indicators that are measured by all services and these include satisfaction measures around both quality and accuracy of the information that they receive.

| Customer Results | Example of Performance Indicators |
|---|---|
| Customer satisfaction with the timeliness of the service | • % of respondents who rated the timeliness of the service as good or excellent |
| Customer satisfaction with the service delivered | • % of respondents who rated the service delivered as good or excellent |
| Customer satisfaction with communication | • % of respondents who rated the service's performance in keeping them informed as good or excellent |
| Customer satisfaction with staff attitude | • % of respondents who rated the staffs' attitude as good or excellent |
| Customer satisfaction with staff professionalism | • % of respondents who rated the staffs' professionalism/knowledge as good or excellent |
| Customer satisfaction with the equality of service provision | • % of respondents who consider they were treated fairly |
| Customer satisfaction with the service overall | • % of respondents who rated the overall quality of the service as good or excellent |
| Complaints received by the service | • Number of complaints that are upheld<br>• Handling time of complaints |
| Performance against Service Standards | • % of enquiries handled within X hours/days<br>• % of enquiries resolved within X hours/days/weeks<br>• % of calls returned within X hours/days<br>• % of voicemails returned within X hours/days<br>• % of emails returned within X hours/days |

E.6.4. Covalent and the new council website will have the capacity to monitor online interactions with the public. There are regular surveys, focus groups and online systems in place to gather information and compile statistics for performance reporting. The Scottish Govt's Chartermark public service quality assurance scheme is used as a guide to "good practice" for customer service.

E.6.5. Most citizens in West Lothian will have access to a range of technology-based communications methods if they feel the need to contact the council, or to respond to a communication from the council, but some groups of citizens may always prove to be "communications-resistant". Examples of such groupings was evidenced by information provided to the CLI team by Waste Services in June 2014. These were referred to in the management's review of the CLI project done on Waste Services last year.

E.6.6. Citizens who are "hard to reach" may account for as much as 20% of the population of West Lothian e.g. social categories identified in a segmentation model of Scottish Households as: "Renters under Pressure" and "Struggling Singles with Other Priorities".

E.6.7. West Lothian citizens in these groupings account for 10% each in the demographic profile of the

total population of West Lothian. Most of these "types" of residents are to be found in particular Wards of the county e.g. East Livingston/East Calder (14% of local population); Armadale & Blackridge (14% of local population) and Bathgate (12% of local population).

E.6.8. These are not current figures and relate to environmental or recycling attitudes and behaviours, not to communications issues, but there may be a strong correlation between them (website: www.scotland.gov.uk, 2007). This is effectively a "Pareto" distribution which exemplifies the well-known "80/20" rule of thumb much quoted in industry i.e. "80% of your problems in communication come from 20% of your customers"

E.6.9. Knowing how many WL citizens currently comprise these, and other significant socio-demographic categories, together with where they are located, would help WL council to allocate appropriate frontline staffing and resources more efficiently and according to need. Frontline employees would also be forewarned as to expected responses, attitudes and behaviours from particular sections of the community.

E.6.10. Such customer specific information may also provide the opportunity to make savings in other areas of the county where such "problem" groupings are much less prominent e.g. < 5% of the local population.

E.6.11. **Recommendations**

■ The council should acquire more recent data for West Lothian relating to Socio-demographic segmentation in particular locations since the information submitted to the CLI team by Waste Services is for 2007 and there may well have been significant changes after the 2008 economic crisis.

■ The council should review their target setting for effective communications so that distinct differences in lifestyle and attitudes are taken account of when designing or modifying communication strategies, particularly with "hard to reach" groups and "problem areas" within West Lothian.

■ The council should benchmark their performance on communications against other local authorities, particularly against those who have adopted the "Segmentation" approach" previously described.

E.6.12. The concept of "who the customer is" with regard to communications is complex and varied. In personal communication between individuals it is easy to modify the message, tone and style but this is not easy when dealing with groups of people or citizens as a whole in a more formal context.

E.6.13. It has to be recognised, however, by any service that there are distinctly different customer groups within West Lothian and each is characterised by different attitudes, behaviours or

lifestyles. In order to communicate effectively and efficiently with a group it is necessary to understand how these factors may affect 2-way communications.

**Rating: GOOD**

E.7. **KEY RESULTS**

E.7.1. The CLI team used the inspection framework to evaluate the effectiveness of Key Results for communication, the criteria included:

**Criterion 7: Key Performance Results**
The service:
✓ Are measuring the right thing(s) in relation to the key activities and the long-term outcomes
✓ Can show positive and sustained good performance over a period of 3 or more years
✓ Have set and met challenging targets
✓ Compare their own performance against performance leaders in other councils or organisations
✓ Can explain any dips in their performance or positive changes

E.7.2. The council has a range of performance measures that cover the efficiency and effectiveness of communications:

| Communication | Service | Example of Performance Indicators |
|---|---|---|
| Face-to-face communication | Customer Information Service | • Unit cost of each Customer Information Service (CIS) customer enquiry, including cash transactions<br>• Customer Information Service average number of enquiries per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff<br>• Percentage of Customer Information Service (CIS) enquiries resolved at first point of contact |
| Telephone communication | Contact centre (CSC) | • Unit cost of each Customer Service Centre (CSC) call.<br>• Percentage of customer (telephone) enquiries that require an outbound call<br>• Percentage of calls that are abandoned.<br>• Percentage of Customer Service Centre enquiries resolved at first point of contact<br>• Percentage of CSC Generic calls routed to voicemail.<br>• Percentage of calls successfully answered by the Customer Service Centre (CSC) Generic Team<br>• Percentage of voicemail messages responded to within 4 hours |

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| Communication | Service | Example of Performance Indicators |
|---|---|---|
| Email communication | Contact centre (CSC) | • Percentage of emails responded to within 24 hours |
| Publications | Corporate Communications | • Total cost to the council of each issue of Bulletin.<br>• Unit cost of Bulletin per household<br>• Unit cost of Bulletin offset by internal/partnership project advertising<br>• Percentage of local households who receive Bulletin.<br>• Number of articles in Bulletin/Inside News promoting equality or diversity<br>• Percentage of customers who were satisfied with Bulletin<br>• Creative design jobs completed per FTE<br>• Press releases issued per FTE<br>• Number of press releases issued |
| Online | Corporate Communications | • Number of visits per month to the Council website homepage<br>• Percentage of customers who were satisfied with the council website |

E.7.3. The new benchmarking framework launched in March 2013 allows local authorities to compare their performance on "Key Results" with that of other authorities. This enables them to improve their performance and adopt "best practice" in various services, including communications.

E.7.4. Research done by the CLI team had identified where some UK local authorities, including Scottish Borders Council, had adopted a "Segmentation Model" to profile their citizens into various socio-demographic groupings. This technique enables local authorities to understand the attitudes and behaviours of various segments of society. These insights help front-line employees to design appropriate communication methods and techniques based on variations in the lifestyles and attitudes of their citizens.

E.7.5. There seems to be little evidence across West Lothian Council that such information is being collated and used to design communications messages to the public. One service (Waste Services) does seem to recognise the value of this information with regard to their approaches or reactions to dealing with the public regarding recycling and waste disposal.

E.7.6. **Recommendations**

■ Corporate Communications should seek out opportunities to benchmark against other UK local authorities to find out how they have targeted customer groups e.g. Scottish-Borders Council, have adopted and utilised Socio-demographic segmentation to design and modify their communications strategies to improve the effectiveness with various groups of citizens in their population.

■ The council should also review their policy on response times for telephone enquiries from the public. The CLI team had direct experience of having to wait @ 20 minutes for the council to respond to a telephone call. This does not reflect the published performance by the Customer Service Centre. A review of the measurement approach to this indicator should be carried out.

**Rating: GOOD**

E.8. **REVIEW DATE**

E.8.1. The inspection team will return to the service in November 2015 to review progress in the areas identified for improvement.