
Secretariat memorandum

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Agenda item 10
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Benchmarking Report

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To consider the issues raised by the benchmarking report and to consider how best to take forward the areas identified for further consideration in the report.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That members consider the report and any further actions they wish to take in response to the recommendations or any other aspect of the report.

3 Introduction

- 3.1 London TravelWatch commissioned complaints great limited to carry out a short benchmarking exercise to compare its performance on casework with a selection of other similar organisations. After some initial research, it was identified that the Bus Appeals Body, Passenger Focus, Air Transport Users Council and the Postal Redress Service were suitable organisations for comparison.

- 3.2 The areas of work considered for comparison were:

- Volume of main types of work
- Speed of turn around
- Satisfaction ratings
- Outputs / outcomes achieved as a result of the work
- Resources available to undertake the work

- 3.3 Overall, the exercise concluded that in many areas, such as performance management, tracking systems and publicity, London TravelWatch are providing a level of service that compares well against the activities and structures of similar bodies particularly when comparative resources are taken into account. The company also concluded from the research that the service provided represents value for money given the comparisons made on staffing costs, workload volumes and customer satisfaction levels.

- 3.4 The areas that were identified as giving potential for further consideration by London TravelWatch were:

- Development of a target for case closure
- Development of performance indicators for tracking outcomes achieved
- Regular meetings with companies and organisations

4 Issues for further consideration

4.1 Development of a target for case closure

4.1.1 The report concluded that the inclusion of a target date for closing cases and keeping customers informed of that date is likely to increase customer satisfaction. It also noted that targets for case closure are common within internal complaint procedures but also, increasingly, for independent complaint resolution services. While such a process was only in place at one of the four comparator organisations (Passenger Focus), the other organisations stated that they would consider this.

4.1.2 We recognise that there are some advantages to this approach. Customers would have a better idea of how long they should expect to wait for a response, and therefore are unlikely to contact London TravelWatch prematurely.

4.1.3 Nevertheless, we are heavily reliant on the operators themselves on turnaround times. While it is not unreasonable for us to want to respond quickly to complaints, such a target could prove extremely difficult for those operators that take longer to respond to cases. Our position is particularly difficult compared to the comparator organisations given the more complicated customer relations arrangements within Transport for London, particularly the need to refer some issues on from London Buses to individual bus companies, which has tended to lead the longer response times to complaints.

4.1.4 In effect too, a target on this basis could also penalise the casework team for failing to meet a target when it was the failure of an operator that caused the delay. Similarly, such a target could lead to perverse outcomes where staff close cases in order to meet a target even if they are unhappy with the operator's initial stance. While these are risks in any target-based system, we believe it is particularly high in situations where staff feel that targets might be missed due to factors outside their control.

4.1.5 It may be possible to start giving complainants a date by which we aim to reply and monitoring performance against this target, while both understanding that this target is dependent on factors beyond our control and maintaining those other targets that we have more direct control over.

4.2 Development of performance indicators for tracking outcomes achieved

4.2.1 The report noted that Passenger Focus collects data on outcomes achieved and about the level of compensation achieved for passengers to deliver greater consistency in their complaint handling.

4.2.2 As part of the new database, we have started recording the outcome of complaints using a scale of Positive, Neutral, Negative, Declined or Not Pursued. Further work is required to develop this satisfactorily to ensure that such outcomes are

consistently and accurately recorded and taking account of any changes we make to the database. However, we consider that recording such data could assist us in managing cases and improving future outcomes.

4.2.3 We do record the level of compensation achieved from operators. However, as most journeys within London are of a short distance with comparatively lower fares, and long delays tend to happen less often, the level of compensation we can usually achieve is also lower.

4.2.4 We also record success stories within our database. These are intended to capture the successes we achieve both in monetary terms and any possible precedents. It is important to note though that often any compensation we do get is in the form of a goodwill gesture and relates to the specific circumstances of the passenger, and does not have a wider application. We consider that revealing details of discretionary payments may have the unintended consequence of operators deciding to withdraw them, and possibly lead to a “levelling down” if operators note that they are being more generous than their competitors.

4.3 Regular meetings with companies and organisations

4.3.1 We are aware that Passenger Focus allocates cases to caseworkers based upon the operator, and in this way encourages the relevant officer to meet with the relevant contact at the operator concerned. However, we are also aware that they meet more frequently with some operators than others due to distances and number of cases.

4.3.2 As part of the Casework Review, we also considered such an approach. We considered that there is definitely a benefit in casework staff meeting with appeals contacts but allocating specific operators to specific staff would significantly reduce our flexibility in a small team.

4.3.3 In the three months since starting, the Casework Manager has met with contacts at most of our main operators including First Capital Connect, Southern, Southeastern, Transport for London and Virgin. In recognising the value of meeting with operators, we also need to be aware that some of our contacts are located in areas outside London such as Norwich, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Southampton, Birmingham and Derby. We hope to be able to expand opportunities for team members to meet with operator staff but will need to ensure that introducing regular meetings would not be at the expense of finalising cases.

5 Equalities and inclusion implications

5.1 Due account will be taken whenever any such implications arise from cases brought to the attention of London TravelWatch.

6 Legal powers and financial implications

6.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider – and, where it appears to it to be desirable, to make representations with respect to –

any matter affecting the services and facilities provided by Transport for London which relate to transport (other than freight) and which have been the subject of representations made to it by or on behalf of users of those services and facilities. Section 252A of the same Act (as amended by Schedule 6 of the Railways Act 2005) places a similar duty upon it in respect of representations received from users or potential users of railway passenger services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area.

7 Financial implications

- 7.1 The financial implications for London TravelWatch will vary according to approach taken and will need to be taken into account.

London TravelWatch

Benchmark of casework activity

Version 1.6

16 June 2010

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The briefing

London TravelWatch (LTW) have commissioned complaints great limited to carry out a short benchmarking exercise to compare LTW's performance on casework with a selection of other similar organizations. We also carried out initial research (see Appendix F) that identified suitable organisations for inclusion in the benchmarking exercise.

The areas for comparison suggested by London TravelWatch are:

- Volume of main types of work
- Speed of turn around
- Satisfaction ratings
- Outputs / outcomes achieved as a result of the work
- Resources available to undertake the work

Methodology

Our research is based on visits to four organisations' identified following the initial research project previously completed by us for London TravelWatch. During each visit we collected both verbatim comments and actual data about each organisations casework activities.

The research provides an overview of the comparative information that has been collated - not an in-depth analysis. This is because of the accepted constraints on the time allocated to this project (both the initial and full research were completed within a total of four days).

Organisations identified

We identified the following organisations as suitable for comparison based on a) being a body that handles appeals or appeal complaints (an escalated complaint) and b) has some relation to transport or locally provided service issues.

- Bus Appeals Body
- Passenger Focus
- Air Transport Users Council
- Postal Redress Service

Findings

The benchmarking has considered the case handling activities of five comparable organisations - some using an consumer advocacy approach to obtaining resolution for a consumer and others using an quasi-judicial adjudication approach:

- Passenger Focus - consumer advocacy and negotiation
- London TravelWatch - consumer advocacy and negotiation
- Air Transport Users Council - consumer advocacy and negotiation
- Bus Users UK - consumer advocacy and negotiation / Bus Appeals Body - adjudication
- POSTRS - adjudication

Summarised descriptions of each organisation's activities and processes are presented in the report's appendices (A-D) together with a table of statistical data that has been compiled to allow some comparisons to be made on the data collected during the course of this exercise.

Overall, the exercise has shown that in many areas, such as performance management, tracking systems and publicity, London TravelWatch are providing a level of service that compares well against the activities and structures of similar bodies particularly when comparative resources are taken into account. Our research also suggests that the service provided represents value for money given the comparisons made on staffing costs, workload volumes and customer satisfaction levels.

The areas that we have identified as giving potential for further consideration by London TravelWatch are:

Development of a target for case closure

Passenger Focus were able to clearly demonstrate the positive impact on customer satisfaction from using an overall target for closing the case and keeping the customer informed of the date (customer satisfaction with case handling improved from 73% to 86%). Targets for case closure are common of course within internal complaint procedures but also, increasingly, for independent complaint resolutions services. Customer service research also often suggests that managing customer expectations about response times can have a considerable impact on satisfaction levels.

Both Bus Users UK and the Air Transport Users Council recognised that they do not currently use targets for case closure but indicated that they were likely to develop targets at some point in the future.

Development of performance indicators for tracking outcomes achieved

We are aware that London TravelWatch already collects data about the outcomes achieved on passengers who have a complaint (appeal) handled by the organisation. We also found that the Air Transport Users Council collects and regularly monitors the outcomes achieved for passengers.

Passenger Focus found that a focus on performance managing the amounts of compensation gained and whether or not a positive outcome was obtained for passengers has helped them to deliver greater consistency in their complaint handling (and allows them to make sure all companies are challenged in a consistent, fair and reasonable manner and their advisers achieve consistent outcomes that are not influenced by the company that is being dealt with).

We recommend that London TravelWatch uses this opportunity to review what could be usefully monitored and tracked to show on a regular basis the outcomes that are being achieved for passengers.

Regular meetings with companies and organisations

Passenger Focus collect a proportion of responses from train operating companies to their enquiries (enquiries made during the handling of an appeal) through regular meetings between the senior passenger advisers and link officers at the train operating companies. Both Bus Users UK and the Air Transport Users Council suggested that they will also use this method on occasion.

We are also aware from other sectors and our experiences that, for example, an Ombudsman or even, in large organisations, an internal complaint review team, will use regular meetings with a company/service provider to collect comments on individual casework where performance in responding is known to be weak or slipping.

We recommend that London TravelWatch considers our findings and, we suggest, pilots an exercise where this approach could be tested for an ongoing period of time and the outcomes monitored and analysed. We believe that this is an area where London TravelWatch has the potential to improve the time taken to resolve difficult and/or complex cases and monitor any issues arising.

Appendix A: Air Transport Users Council (AUC)

The Air Transport Users Council deal with unresolved complaints about airline and airport companies in the UK.

Air passengers who are dissatisfied with a company's response, can complain by phone, in writing or by email to the Air Transport Users Council (the majority of complaints are received now by email).

The casework team will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within a target of 2 days.

The complaint handler will attempt to resolve a complaint by making contact with the operating company - by phone or email or, occasionally, a meeting. If a response is not received within 28 days, a reminder will be sent to the company. If no response is received after the 3 attempts, AUC may have to decide to close the case because airlines and airports are not required by regulation to deal with them (unless the complaint is about an activity defined by European Regulation 261/2004).

Publicity

The right to complain to the Air Transport Users Council is publicised using a variety of methods:

- Local authority trading standards services; and
- Citizen Advice Bureaux; and
- Published links on Consumer Direct website; and
- Internet search engines.

Resources

The complaint handling activities are funded by the Civil Aviation Authority. The casework team includes:

- 6 complaint handlers
- 1 consumer affairs manager
- 2 administration assistants
- 1 systems and processes manager

The team currently use a Microsoft Access database to record details of the complaints and enquiries received. The system allows simple tracking by case type (enquiry, complaint, appeal, surgery), company complained about, category of problem and closure reason:

- Compensation gained
- Action taken by airline
- Airline's reply accepted
- Airline's reply not accepted
- Not taken up
- No reply from airline
- Airline to reply direct
- Advice offered only
- For information only

- Injury/accident
- Referred to NEB
- Expenses/refund reimbursed
- Open/new enquiry

The AUC, as a passenger watchdog, is not limited to addressing the concerns of individual air passengers and complaints are often used as the basis for publishing reports, such as 2009's report on compensation for mishandled luggage ("The luggage lottery - an AUC report into compensation payments to passengers for mishandled baggage").

Appendix B: Bus Users UK / Bus Appeals Body

Bus Users UK and the CPT provide the Bus Appeals Body service. The service will deal with unresolved complaints about local bus or express coach operating companies in England (and Wales).

Passengers who are dissatisfied with an operator's response or get no response (after 4 weeks), can complain in writing or by email to Bus Users UK (the majority of complaints are received now by email). The Bus Users UK complaint handler will try to sort out the problem by contacting the operating company but, if unable to resolve, may refer the complaint for adjudication by the Bus Appeals Body.

The complaint handler will attempt to resolve a complaint by making contact with the operating company - by phone or email or, occasionally, a meeting. If a case remains un-actioned for 30 days, the case will be flagged for attention on the case tracker system.

The adjudication process involves an initial assessment of the complaint by a designated Bus Users UK representative and designated operator's representative - if resolution cannot be achieved, a reasoned but non-binding judgement is delivered by the adjudicator, Lord Snape of Wednesbury.

In addition to the complaints and enquiries dealt with by the complaint handler and the Bus Appeals Body, Bus Users UK also collect complaints and compliments at surgeries that they run across the country. The complaints are often resolved at the surgeries but may be escalated to Bus Users UK and/or the Bus Appeals Body as necessary.

Publicity

The right to complain to the Bus Appeals Body / Bus Users UK is publicised using a variety of methods:

- Signposting in company responses (this was accepted as being infrequent); and
- Timetables published by local authorities (although not all local authorities do so); and
- Posters, displayed in vehicles and at stations, for some operators; and
- Published links on some of the operating company websites (we did carry out a search of Arriva's website but could not find any reference to either the Bus Appeals Body or London Travelwatch); and
- Passenger Focus activities - because Passenger Focus now have the remit for bus passenger champion, for services in England outside of London, they are starting to help to increase public awareness of Bus Users UK and the Bus Appeals Body.

Resources

The complaint handling and adjudication activities are funded by Bus Users UK. Bus Users UK are in the process of recruiting a full-time member of staff to carry out the complaint handling activities and another full-time member of staff to carry out the surgery activities.

A new case tracking system was recently implemented with their intranet site. The system allows simple tracking by case type (enquiry, complaint, appeal, surgery) and category of problem:

- Service reliability
- Driver/staff attitude

- Level of service
- Vehicle condition
- Bus failed to stop
- Capacity
- Access
- Ticket issues
- Concessionary pass issues
- Injury/accident
- Incorrect information
- Luggage
- Other
- Compliment

Appendix C: Postal Redress Service (POSTRS)

IDRS Limited provide the Postal Redress Service (POSTRS). The Postal Redress Service (POSTRS) is an independent body whose role is to resolve disputes between licensed postal operators and their customers.

The law requires that all licensed postal operators be a member of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme approved by the Postal Commission (Postcomm). Launched on 1 October 2008, POSTRS is currently the only approved scheme. Customers, who are dissatisfied at the final stage of postal operators complaint procedure (Royal Mail has four internal stages within their complaint procedure), can complain by phone, textphone, fax, form, online form, in writing or by email to POSTRS.

The casework team will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within a target of 5 working days.

On receipt of a new case, a case administrator will advise the relevant company that they have 14 days to settle or submit a defence. The company may request a 7 day extension but, if no defence received, POSTRS can make a decision without a company defence.

On receipt of a company's defence, the details of the defence are sent to the complainant who has an opportunity to then submit comments. The case will then be considered by an adjudicator (who must be a lawyer) who will issue a written, reasoned decision. The decision may be in favour of the company, in favour of the consumer or a split decision. The possible outcomes, when a decision is made in the complainant's favour, are:

- Monetary
- Apology
- Explanation
- Up to £50 compensation for poor complaint handling
- Specific action for the complainant (such as provision of a service)

The target for completing the adjudication process is 6 weeks (100% are currently completed within this target). The complainant has 28 days to accept or reject a decision and a company has 28 days to comply with the decision (a decision is binding on the company if accepted by the complainant).

POSTRS publish key performance indicator data on a quarterly basis on their website.

Publicity

The right to complain to POSTRS is publicised using a variety of methods:

- Postal operator's final response must signpost the complainant to POSTRS; and
- Postal operator's website and code of practice.

Resources

The service is funded by subscription payments from member companies. The casework "team", based in London, includes:

1 casework administrator

1 adjudicator

If required, IDRS Limited operate an external panel of adjudicators that can be used to adjudicate on POSTRS cases.

The team currently use an in-house developed SQL-based database to record details of the complaints and enquiries received. The system allows automatic tracking by case type and stage (enquiry, application, case activated, appointment of adjudicator, publication of decision) including automated monitoring of deadlines at each stage and capture of all correspondence. The database also records company complained about, category of problem, closure reason, compensation awarded, actions and KPI data.

POSTRS is an adjudication service - not a consumer watchdog or a consumer champion. POSTRS is required to identify and report to the postal regulator, Postcomm, on wider trends identified from their adjudication activities. The scheme is overseen by a council comprising industry and lay representative members under an independent chair.

Appendix D: Passenger Focus

Passenger Focus is an independent public body set up by the Government to protect the interests of Britain's rail passengers and England's bus and tram passengers outside of London and coach passengers on scheduled domestic services. However, they do not deal with appeals or complaints from bus and tram passengers outside of London. Passenger Focus carry out evidence-based campaigning and research but also deliver a complaint handling (appeals) service to help get the best deal for passengers. The appeals service will deal with unresolved complaints about train operating companies in England (and Wales).

Passengers who are dissatisfied with an operator's response, are advised to complain in writing, using an online form or by email (the majority of complaints are received now by email or online form). An outsourced contact centre handles all initial enquiries.

Initially, a passenger adviser will receive a new complaint and send an acknowledgement letter or email to the complainant. This correspondence will include the expected date for a full response to be sent to the complainant. Previously, Passenger Focus did not provide a date but has found that providing a date has reduced repeat contacts and increased satisfaction with the service from 73% to 86%.

After acknowledging receipt of the appeal, the adviser will then assign the case to a caseworker (senior passenger adviser) for action. The caseworker will decide if a case can be dealt with as an enquiry (without requiring information from the train operating company) or needs to be referred back for a response by the train operating company (an 'initial' complaint) or needs to be directed to another organisation (such as London TravelWatch or the Bus Appeals Body). If the case is to be handled as a new appeal, the caseworker will review the evidence and request comments from the company. Many requests for comments are 'packaged' and responses collected by visiting the relevant company on a quarterly basis (the Senior Passenger Advisers attend the meetings). These meetings are also used to discuss trends and other related issues. Other requests for comments are dealt with by phone or email with the relevant train operating company.

The target for closing an appeal case (by delivering a full response to the passenger) is 35 working days (acknowledgements are sent within 5 working days, enquiries closed within 5 working days and initials referred back to the train operating company within 5 working days). Performance is measured on a monthly basis using a set of ten indicators (also including complainant satisfaction with the service, complaints about the service and compensation gained for complainants). Outcomes achieved are also measured using a "positive - neutral - negative" categorisation method and monitored monthly.

Passenger Focus categorise root causes of complaints in detail and also categorise enquiries (campaigns, research, information, enquiry).

Publicity

The right to complain to Passenger Focus is publicised using a variety of methods:

- Posters displayed in train carriages and at stations; and
- Published links on operating company websites.

Resources

Passenger Focus are funded by the Department for Transport. An outsourced contact

centre handles all phone and email enquiries The casework team, based in Manchester, includes:

- 3 passenger advisers (2 from April 2010)
- 4 senior passenger advisers
- 1 passenger advice manager

The team currently use Microsoft Dynamics CRM to record and manage the complaints and enquiries received.

Appendix E: London TravelWatch

London TravelWatch is the official independent watchdog representing the interests of transport users in and around London. The role of London TravelWatch is to speak up for transport users in discussions with policy makers and the media; consult with the transport industry, its regulators and funders on matters affecting users; to monitor trends in service quality; and carry out research.

London TravelWatch is also a statutory appeals body and its casework team handles passenger complaints that have not been satisfactorily resolved - the services covered are those operated, procured or licensed by Transport for London, which includes London Underground, London's buses, Docklands Light Railway, Croydon Tramlink, Dial-a-Ride services, London River Services, Woolwich Free Ferry, taxis, private hire cars and most of the major roads in Greater London. In addition, the team also deals with services operated by the national rail companies, Heathrow Express and Eurostar.

Passengers who are dissatisfied with an operator's response, are advised to complain in writing, using an online form or by email (the majority of complaints are received now by email or online form). All enquiries are handled by the team's casework assistants.

All new complaints and enquiries received are initially acknowledged by letter or email.

After acknowledging receipt, the casework manager will then assign the case to a caseworker for action. The caseworker will decide if a case can be dealt with as an enquiry (without requiring information from the relevant service provider - this is known as a 'direct') or needs to be referred back for a response by the service provider (an 'initial' complaint) or needs to be directed to another organisation (such as Passenger Focus or the Bus Appeals Body). If the case is to be handled as a new appeal, the caseworker will review the evidence and request comments from the service provider. These requests for comments are emailed to an identified link person for the service provider who will arrange for a response to be sent to London TravelWatch.

Targets for appeals are focused on acknowledging receipt (5 working days), time taken to pass on to the service provider (5 working days from receipt of case) or time taken to send a final reply to the complainant when there is no need to request further information (10 working days from receipt of case), and time taken to close a case after service providers have provided a proper response (within 10 working days of receipt of response). London TravelWatch has agreed with service providers that they will send substantive replies to appeals queries within 20 working days. Complaint handling targets are set out in complaints handling policies which require train operators to respond within a given period. These procedures form part of their license and performance is overseen by the relevant external regulatory bodies. There is no equivalent regulatory overview of Transport for London.

London TravelWatch categorise root causes of complaints in detail, modes of transport, applicable route(s)/journey(s), station(s) and also categorise enquiries. A questionnaire is sent out when cases are closed to gauge satisfaction both with the case outcome and handling.

Publicity

The right to complain to London TravelWatch is publicised using a variety of

methods:

- Posters displayed in vehicles and at stations; and
- Information advertised in daily newspapers for London; and
- Published links on operating company websites.

Resources

London TravelWatch is sponsored and funded by the London Assembly (part of the Greater London Authority). The casework team includes:

- 2 casework assistants
- 3.2 full-time equivalent caseworkers
- 1 casework manager

The team currently use Microsoft Dynamics CRM to record and manage the complaints and enquiries received.

Appendix F: Collected data

Benchmarking area	Air Users Council	POSTRS	Bus Appeals Body	Passenger Focus	London TravelWatch	
Remit	Geographical	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	England (and Wales)	Great Britain (Rail) England (Bus, coach and tram)	London (in and around London)
	Modes (Complaint handling)	Airlines Airports	Post	Bus Express coach Bus and coach stations	Rail Rail stations	Bus Tram Underground Rail River/Ferry Taxi/Private hire vehicles Stations
Volumes	Appeals	5755	283	588 / 73	2182	2854
	Enquiries	7930	310	2805 / 600	1615#	7200**
	Premature/Initial	392	Not recorded	Not available	1567	1600
Timeliness	Acknowledgement	2 days	7 days	No target	7 days	7 days
		100.00%	100.00%	Not applicable	95.00%	96.70%
	Company response	28 days	14 days	30 days	Monthly meetings	28 days
		Not available	Not available	Not available	Not applicable	55.80%
	Case closure	No target	42 days	56 days	49 days	No target
Outcomes		Not applicable	100.00%	Not available	91.00%	Not applicable
	Outcomes achieved	Apologies Compensation Refunds Action for individual Company action Policy Strategy	Apologies Compensation Refunds Action for individual	Apologies Compensation Refunds Action for individual Company action* Policy* Strategy*	Apologies Compensation Refunds Action for individual Company action Policy Strategy	Apologies Compensation Refunds Action for individual Company action Policy Strategy
	Compensation - cases	360 (6.25%)	Not collectively available	Not collectively available	Unknown	225 (7.88%)
	total £	Unknown	Not collectively available	Not collectively available	£69,798.44	£12,173.00
	average £	Unknown	Not available	Not available	£31.99	£4.27
	Satisfaction	Satisfaction with outcome	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected
	Satisfaction with handling	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	86.00%	79.00%
Resources	Staffing	6 complaint handlers 1 consumer affairs manager 1 system and processes manager 2 admin	1 adjudicator 1 administrator	1 complaint handler 1 external affairs manager 1 administrator 1 surgeries officer 1 adjudicator	3 advisers 4 senior advisers 1 manager	2 casework assistants 3.2 caseworkers 1 manager
	Staffing costs	£294,131.00	Unable to share information	Not currently available	£235,000.00 @	£226,000.00
	ICT	Access	In-house	Web-based case tracker	Microsoft CRM	Microsoft CRM

Notes: All target times have been converted to calendar days to allow for consistent comparisons to be made. All data collected was for a 12 month period covering either calendar 2009 or 2009/2010.

* Outcomes that can be achieved by Bus Users UK

Passenger Focus enquiries are handled by an outsourced contact centre

@ This amount does not include costs associated with handling enquiries (received by the outsourced contact centre)

** Estimated - based on six months' actual data extrapolated to full year.

Appendix G: Initial research

Our initial research aimed to identify contact details for each organisation and headline data related to that organisations casework / complaint handling functions.

Bus Appeals Body

BAB, c/o Bus Users UK
PO Box 2950
Stoke-on-Trent
ST4 9EW

The Bus Appeals Body (BAB) is a non-statutory committee offering independent review of complaints arising from the operation of local bus and scheduled coach services.

The Body is a joint initiative by the Confederation of Passenger Transport (UK), (the industry's trade association) and Bus Users UK, which looks after the interests of passengers. The Traffic Commissioners, who issue the licences under which bus and coach companies operate, assisted in drawing up its Terms of Reference.

The website has very limited information and no information about the casework activities of the organisation. However, this organisation would obviously be very useful to compare against given the similarities in its remit.

(note: the Bus Appeals Body's website has a links area that still refers to London Transport Users Committee rather than London TravelWatch)

Passenger Focus

5th Floor
Wellington House
39/41 Piccadilly
Manchester
M1 1LQ
Phone: 0300 123 2140

Passenger Focus is the independent passenger watchdog. Their mission is to get the best deal for passengers.

If a passenger is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint to a train company or does not feel the train company handled it appropriately, then they may be able to help. Passenger Focus state that they can make representations to mediate with the train company on the passenger's behalf.

Passenger Focus aim to independently review your complaint and judge whether they feel it was handled fairly and appropriately. If they feel that the train company could do more, then Passenger Focus will make representation to them.

A total of 22,625 passengers contacted Passenger Focus in 2008/09. During this same period, Passenger Focus received 3,123 appeal complaints about train companies. 73% of the passengers who complained to Passenger Focus were satisfied with the way their complaint was dealt with (this does not relate to the outcome).

Passenger Focus' annual report did not give any indication of the time taken to deal with cases or the outcomes achieved. However, again this organisation would be very useful to compare against given the similarities in its remit.

Passenger Transport Executives

The regional Passenger Transport Executives (PTE) are responsible for the co-ordination of public

transport in their region. Public information about their complaint handling functions is very limited although the Greater Manchester PTE does have a published target for responding to complaints within 15 working days.

Traffic Commissioners

The Traffic Commissioners use their powers to ensure that people operating passenger carrying vehicles and large goods vehicles are reputable, competent, and adequately funded. The Traffic Commissioners will take action to encourage all operators to adopt robust systems, so that there is fair competition and that the operation of goods and public service vehicles is safe. Traffic Commissioners can also impose financial penalties against bus companies for failures to run registered local transport services on time.

If deciding a case at a public inquiry, they are acting in a judicial capacity. That means that we have to ensure that, like any other tribunal in Great Britain, the proceedings are fair and free from any unjustified interference or bias.

During 2008/2009, the seven traffic commissioners received 37 complaints against existing operating centres. 15 of these were called to Public Inquiry. The commissioners also handled 15,119 driver conduct cases.

Air Transport Users Council

CAA House
45-59 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6TE
Phone: 020 7240 6061
Email: admin@auc.org.uk

The Air Transport Users Council (AUC) is the UK's consumer council for air travellers. They help individual passengers with complaints and enquiries about air travel and promote the interests of passengers with industry, government and regulators.

During 2008/09, the AUC handled 12,307 complaints and enquiries. Of these, 5953 were in writing and 6354 were by telephone.

The website did not give any indication of the time taken to deal with cases, the outcomes achieved or satisfaction with the service. However, again this organisation would be very useful to compare against given the similarities in its remit to handle complaints from passengers of a mode of transport.

Postal Review Panel

[address unknown]

The objective of the Postal Review Panel is to find a mutually satisfactory resolution for a complaint about a Royal Mail service.

The Postal Review Panel considers complaints at the fourth stage of the Royal Mail's complaints process. The unit sits outside of the Royal Mail customer complaints process and was set up to take a fresh and impartial look at a case. After carrying out a review, the Postal Review Panel will establish and provide a final response from Royal Mail about the complaint. The published target for delivering this response is 30 days.

The website gave no other details about the panel.

Postal Redress Service

Angel Gate
City Road

London
EC1V 2PT
Phone: 020 7520 3766
Email: info@postrs.org.uk

The Postal Redress Service (POSTRS) is an independent body whose role is to resolve disputes between licensed postal operators and their customers. All licensed postal operators are required by law to be a member of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme approved by the Postal Commission (Postcomm). POSTRS was launched on 1 October 2008 and is currently the only approved scheme.

The service has a target to publish a decision to the parties involved within six weeks from receipt of the application. A further six weeks is allowed for the complainant to decide whether or not they wish to accept the decision. The website suggests that research has shown that most consumers who accept the decision (80% of consumers) do so within 10 days of receipt of the decision.

The website did not give any indication of the volume of cases handled or other related data.

Traffic Penalty Tribunal (formerly National Parking Adjudication Service)

Barlow House
Minshull Street
Manchester
M1 3DZ
Phone: 0161 242 5252
Email: info@trafficpenaltytribunal.gov.uk

The Traffic Penalty Tribunal decides appeals against parking penalties issued by Civil Enforcement Authorities in England (outside London) and Wales and against bus-lane penalties issued by Civil Enforcement Authorities in England (outside London). The Traffic Penalty Tribunal is an independent tribunal whose impartial, independent Adjudicators consider appeals by motorists and vehicle owners whose vehicles have been:

- issued with parking a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) - or have been removed (towed away) or immobilised (clamped) - by a council in England (outside London) and Wales that enforces parking contraventions under the Traffic Management Act 2004.
- issued with a bus-lane Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) by a council in England (outside London) that enforces bus-lane contraventions under the Bus Lane Contraventions (Penalty Charges, Adjudication and Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2005.

The Traffic Penalty Tribunal (TPT) took over from the National Parking Adjudication Service (NPAS) from 31 March 2008. This change was made to allow for the new traffic regulations introduced from 31 March 2008 under the terms of the Traffic Management Act 2004 and to create more accessible online access to the Tribunal.

The service handled 10,883 appeals (in 2007), acknowledged 92% within 2 working days, decided 90% of postal cases within 7 weeks and offered 64% personal hearings within 8 weeks of registration (88% within 12 weeks).

Parking and Traffic Appeals Service

Angel Square
Upper Ground Floor
Block 2
London
EC1V 1NY

Parking Adjudicators to London

Parking Adjudicators are judicial office holders. They decide appeals from members of the public against penalties imposed by London local authorities, including Transport for London, for

contraventions of traffic controls relating to

- parking
- bus lanes
- moving traffic
- the London lorry ban.

The parking adjudicators handled 64,072 appeals during 2007/2008. The administration functions of the parking adjudicators are delivered by the Parking and Traffic Appeals Service.

Road User Charging Adjudicators'

The Road User Charging Adjudicators Tribunal is an independent tribunal which decides appeals against Congestion Charge and Low Emission Zone penalties in London.

The Road User Charging Adjudicators received 11,835 appeals during 2008/2009. 4,854 cases were not contested by Transport for London and 62% of cases were first considered within 56 days.

The administration functions of the tribunal are delivered by the Parking and Traffic Appeals Service.

London Borough of Southwark - Customer feedback unit

4th floor

Laurence House

Catford

London SE6 4RU

Phone: 020 7525 2599

The London Borough of Southwark provides a wide variety of services to the local residents, business and visitors. Transport related services include freedom passes, parking enforcement, roads maintenance, transport planning and home to school transport.

The council's Customer Feedback Unit reports to the Deputy Chief Executive and handled 850 complaints during 2008/2009. These complaints are appeals against the decision of a department on a complaint. The staffing costs of the unit were £744,000. The unit has a target to respond to complaints within 20 working days and further escalations within another 25 working days.

The unit also handles enquiries from the Local Government Ombudsman - the Ombudsman issued nearly 200 decisions on Southwark complaints during 2008/2009.

London Borough of Lewisham - Independent Adjudicator

Town Hall

Catford

London SE6 4RU

Phone: 020 8314 6340

The London Borough of Lewisham provides a wide variety of services to the local residents, business and visitors. Transport related services include freedom passes, parking enforcement, roads maintenance, transport planning and home to school transport.

If a customer is unhappy with the response that they received from a department at stage 2 of Lewisham Council's complaint procedure, they can ask the independent adjudicator to carry out a review of the complaint. The independent adjudicator has a target to send a response to the complainant within 30 working days. The Independent Adjudicator handled 69 cases during 2008/2009 and is supported by a complaints unit that handles enquiries and provides administration support.

Recommendation

We recommend that the following organisations are contacted and a visit arranged to allow a comparison to be made with the casework functions of London TravelWatch:

- Bus Appeals Body (Stoke on Trent)
- Passenger Focus (Manchester)
- Air Transport Users Council (London)
- Postal Redress Service (London)

Our recommendation is based on three of these organisations handling passenger appeal complaints and also the Postal Redress Service given that this body also handles appeal complaints from consumers but allowing comparison outside of the travel and transport sector. We decided not to recommend the transport commissioners or various adjudicators because the role of these bodies is to act as a tribunal that will often deliver decisions through hearings rather than investigative casework and negotiation.

The two London boroughs were not recommended because both provided complaint resolution services that remained within the management of the organisation (in a similar way to the Royal Mail's Postal Review Panel). However, if we do experience difficulties in contacting any other selected organisations, either of these could still provide a useful comparison.

We also recommend that the benchmarking exercise focuses on arranging visits to each of the recommended organisations to compare the following areas across each organisation (where data is made available to us):

- Volume of complaints handled
- Volume of other enquiries handled
- Performance in time taken to close a case (average number of days)
- Outcomes achieved
- Complainant satisfaction with outcome achieved
- Complainant satisfaction with organisation's handling of complaint
- Staffing (casework administrative support) - including headcount and costs
- Information technology systems used to support the casework functions