

Policy committee  
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**Secretariat memorandum**

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The evolving role of casework within London TravelWatch

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To update members on the work being undertaken to widen and improve the role of casework within London TravelWatch.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 A thorough review of casework was carried out in 2008/09 and a number of changes were then made to the way we organised the work in order to improve the efficiency of the team. A new system for recording casework was commissioned, emphasis was placed on improving turn around times and a number of procedural changes were made. The fact that the team has coped with a rising workload and a slight reduction in staffing, whilst not just meeting but regularly exceeding target turnaround times, is testament to the success of the improvement strategy then adopted.
- 2.2 It is already acknowledged by transport operators that our appeals casework is of a high standard, reflecting the fact that the team carefully analyse incoming work before passing it on. To avoid raising false expectations of success as well as to eliminate unnecessary work, complainants are told at the outset if it is clear that they do not have legitimate grounds for appeal because the operator has properly followed their own procedures. When we do pass a case to the operator, if it is not already clear, the caseworker takes time to set out what we think should be done to address the issue raised.
- 2.3 Over the years we have regularly introduced initiatives to ensure that the quality of work continuously improves (for example whole team training courses in handling challenging telephone calls and business writing, revision of standard correspondence templates) but these have been done on an ad hoc rather than systematic basis.
- 2.4 Previously, London TravelWatch put casework at the heart of its activities and focussed its work on dealing with individual cases in a very thorough fashion. This gave high levels of satisfaction to those we were able to help but which was resource intensive. We have now moved to become an organisation which has completely overhauled its processes so that we still deal well with individual cases but can do so in a much shorter timescale.
- 2.5 We have always picked up on issues arising from casework to take forward in meetings with operators and providers and also in our research but in recent

years have been better able to demonstrate how we use intelligence gained from our casework to drive improvements more widely in the industry.

### **3 Proposed future approach**

- 3.1 What we intend to do now is to shift our emphasis from 'just' providing an efficient and quality casework service towards demonstrably providing a wider reaching and hence more effective service overall. We will generate more value for the travelling public by better learning from the feedback they give generally, not just through our casework, and using that information to drive improvement within the industry.
- 3.2 There are three key areas in which we will focus our improvement work: further improving the quality of our own casework; encouraging the industry to improve its approach to customer service; and helping the travelling public to be better informed and aware of how they can get a better deal as consumers.
- 3.3 Further information on each of these areas is given below. No particular decisions are required at this stage, instead general feedback is requested to help the Casework Manager as she starts to develop a strategy to widen and improve the role of casework within the organisation.

### **4 An excellent appeals body**

- 4.1 Despite the switch of emphasis, casework remains a core statutory function for us and we will adopt a range of measure to further improve the quality of our own work.
- 4.2 We want to make better use of feedback from appellants who have used our service. We will do this by continuing to analyse the feedback we get from those who complete our questionnaire when their case is closed and responding to this as appropriate. We will also investigate how we could introduce more comprehensive feedback mechanisms such as occasional external telephone surveying.
- 4.3 We have always worked closely with Passenger Focus to share information and ways of doing things. We now want to look more widely at learning from good practice in other public sector organisations (such as local government, housing and other consumer bodies) as well as from the commercial sector. The Casework Manager will be joining one or two complaints forums to assist with this.
- 4.4 We are proud of the standards we achieve in our casework but now want to more clearly benchmark ourselves against acknowledged best practice. The Casework Manager is investigating the various accreditation schemes that exist to establish which one might be a suitable scheme for us to work towards.

### **5 Helping others to improve complaints handling and customer service**

- 5.1 We have always placed a lot of emphasis on the on-going lobbying of operators and providers in our regular meetings. For an organisation with no formal powers to demand improvement it is only through making a good case,

and continuing to promote it, that we are likely to achieve success. As appropriate, intractable or strategic issues arising from casework are raised in these meetings, as well as other feedback we receive from user groups or at local engagement events. Although it is not always easy to demonstrate how our input has helped to drive improvement we can justly claim the credit for many successes.

- 5.2 Several years ago we developed a programme of complaints handling audits where, jointly with Passenger Focus, our staff reviewed a sample of complaints correspondence within a train company and produced a report recommending improvements. This was very successful in helping individual train companies to improve performance in this area. We do not have the resources to do this now (nor is the need as strong) however we have done a couple of audits for LOROL at their request in recent years because they continue to find our input helpful. They meet all the costs involved in carrying out the audit.
- 5.3 At their request, we have provided direct input to several TfL customer service improvement initiatives and will continue to do what we can to assist their internal programmes.
- 5.4 Moving forward we want to improve our internal processes to identify the policy issues underlying what we hear from the public, then better using this to inform our work in helping others to improve.
- 5.5 We will do this through improved interrogation of our own casework evidence and continuing to interrogate TfL's primary complaints data. We also want to establish mechanisms to pick up information about consumer concerns from social media and / or other forms of wider feedback and this will be a key objective in our business plan next year.

## **6 The travelling public are informed and aware of their rights**

- 6.1 We will continue to signpost the travelling public to our website and ensure that the information on it continues to be relevant and demonstrably of interest. Statistics already confirm that our information on how to complain and frequently asked questions (FAQs) are popular parts of our website, and we use what we learn from our casework to develop these topics.
- 6.2 We will also continue encouraging others to publicise to passengers how they can complain (we have done a lot of work to encourage this information to be easily visible in taxis). We will also continue encouraging operators to publish their primary complaints data so that we can analyse this on behalf of consumers. Our success in getting TfL to do this helped us to identify underlying problems with ticket vending machines across a number of modes, something we are now pressing them to address.
- 6.3 We will also further investigate how we can contribute our casework data to My Society and Fix My Transport sites.

## **7 Equalities and inclusion implications**

- 7.1 There are no specific equalities issues arising from this report.

## **8 Legal powers**

- 8.1 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 the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight). Section 252A of the same Act (as amended by Schedule 6 of the Railways Act 2005) places a similar duty upon the Committee to keep under review matters affecting the interests of the public in relation to railway passenger and station services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area, and to make representations about them to such persons as it thinks appropriate.

## **9 Financial implications**

- 9.1 There are no financial implications for London TravelWatch arising from this report. The budget available will dictate how far we can go in extending the role of casework.

## **10 Priority**

- 10.1 London TravelWatch is the only body with a statutory duty to deal with appeals relating to journeys on all public transport modes in London and in the surrounding area for National Rail journeys. The approach outlined in this report is aimed at increasing the impact of the organisation's work. It is intended that by widening the role of casework we will increase the impact of the organisation's work overall.

## **11 Recommendations**

- 11.1 Members to note the report.