
Secretariat report

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Agenda item 9

CA033

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Casework Review 2009 – Progress Report

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To assess progress in implementing changes to the way that London TravelWatch deals with its casework since this area of work was reviewed in 2009 and to recommend future action.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are recommended to note this report

3 Background

- 3.1 A core statutory function of the organisation is to consider complaints brought to it on appeal by members of the public when they have been dissatisfied with the response given by transport operators to their original complaint. This aspect of the organisation's work is also one to which its sponsors, the London Assembly, attribute great importance and against which specific targets have been agreed as part of the process of the annual process of agreeing the business plan and budget.
- 3.2 A major review of the casework function was carried out in 2009 and the report on this (CA003 22.4.09) noted changes that had already been put in place and made a number of further recommendations. These were all agreed other than the suggestion that our telephone number be removed from bus posters to reduce the amount of initial enquiries that came to us rather than London Buses. Despite the impact on workload it was agreed that this was a useful signposting service for the public with which we should continue. Instead it was agreed that there should be further investigations into the use of 0845 numbers and that a new information leaflet should be produced for distribution to general enquirers.
- 3.3 Progress against the main recommendations arising from the review is considered below.

4 Recommendations from Casework Review

- 4.1 Capacity and resourcing
 - 4.1.1 The review noted the vulnerability of casework performance to periods of prolonged staff absence or peaks of work and recommended that agreement in principle be given to ensuring that adequate resources were always available to deal with casework. Since then,

the more proactive use of, in particular temporary staff (both agency and short term contract) as well as temporary increases in hours for part time staff has ensured that we have had staff available to cover during two periods of extended absence in the team as well as the peak of work in respect of the proposed changes to opening hours of the First Capital Connect ticket offices.

4.1.2 There is no doubt that staff changes of any kind are disruptive and impact on the work of the team, but the provision of replacement staff over the past eight months has helped to ensure that performance was not disrupted in the way it would have been previously.

4.1.3 It is not so easy to make short term arrangements to cover managerial absence and such absences have meant we have not made the progress we hoped in further improving performance.

4.2 Policies and procedures

4.2.1 A range of minor changes to ways of working have helped to improve our service, such as writing to all operators asking them to add an additional line into their standard referral wording to remind complainants to include copies of previous correspondence if they choose to make an appeal to us. This helps to speed up the time taken to refer appeals back to the operators.

4.2.2 The change of procedure which means that action on complex cases is agreed within the secretariat rather than being referred to Committee has helped to improve turnaround time on these cases (referral to Committee used to add up to eight weeks to the process) as well as freeing up time for the Committee to consider the more strategic issues affecting casework.

4.2.3 Extracting the policy implications arising from casework and bringing these to the Consumer Affairs Committee has helped to reinforce the wider consumer perspective taken by this Committee, in comparison to the remit of the previous Casework Committee.

4.3 Casework monitoring system

4.3.1 It took several months to procure our new casework monitoring system and it was not until mid-August that the order was finalised and, as members are aware, this left a very short period of time in which to set up the system in order to meet the 1 October 2009 deadline that had been set. The new system became operational on schedule but this meant there was no opportunity to properly test the system or pilot ways of working in advance.

4.3.2 The length of time it has taken to resolve 'glitches' in the system has been a source of continuing frustration for all concerned but in dealing with these priority was given to addressing things that affected the day to day casework function. The next priority was to ensure that all data was 'cleaned' and migrated from our old system before the support contract on this expired at the end of February.

4.3.3 Producing the first full performance reports identified additional issues to be addressed, including the need to amend some working practices. However, as well as making changes to the system to minimise the opportunities for incomplete data collection, it will be much easier for the caseworkers to use the new system now that they are not having to use both the old and new systems in parallel.

4.4 Committee reporting

- 4.4.1 Now that we are starting to produce performance reports from the new database we will take the opportunity to consider whether the presentation of information can be improved to make it easier to assimilate the key issues.

4.5 Quality standards

- 4.5.1 It was intended that the third phase of work arising from the review of casework would be aimed at further improving the quality of our work, such as by reviewing our standard letters, further staff training and comparison with good practice elsewhere.
- 4.5.2 We have commissioned a short benchmarking exercise and the results of this should be available for the next meeting. We have also done some preliminary research into the quality standards used by other organisations but other than that it is intended that no further work will be done on this until the new Casework Manager is settled in post.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 With hindsight, we did not fully appreciate the time, particularly senior management time, that would be needed to procure and install the new casework system, even with the use of consultants. This has been time well spent but means that other areas of work arising from the review have not been progressed at the rate we had anticipated. The absence of the Casework Manager has also contributed to the slippage.
- 5.2 However, the actions taken to date as a result of the review of casework handling have led to improvements and established a platform from which further progress will be made. Some efficiency savings have been made as a result of changed ways of working and more will follow.
- 5.3 In addition the changes made have enabled the Consumer Affairs Committee to take a more strategic approach to its work.
- 5.4 Performance towards meeting our casework targets has continued to improve and it will be the key priority of our new Casework Manager to progress this further. However, it is crucial that we are able to sustain this improvement rather than be in the position we were in previous years when a 'blitz' approach was adopted from time to time followed by a subsequent drop in performance when additional resources were removed. It is also important to remember that there has been a decrease in the numbers of staff available for casework over the past few years.

6 Equalities implications

- 6.1 It is a business plan priority to build a profile of complainants to London TravelWatch and develop a strategy to broaden awareness of our work amongst sections of the community who are under represented in our casework. The initial work to develop a profile of complainants has been completed and a report considered by the Access to Transport Committee. Further work on this will continue during 2010-11.

7 Legal implications

- 7.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 requires London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) to consider, and where it appears to it to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to any service or facility provided by or for (or in the case of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles, licensed by) Transport for London, other than a matter relating to the transportation of freight, if it has been the subject of representations made by or on behalf of users of that service or facility. Section 252B of the same Act places a similar duty on the Committee in respect of users or potential users of railway services provided wholly or partly within the “London railway area” as defined under the provisions of the Railways Act 1993. The Consumer Affairs Committee is not required to consider matters which appear to it to be frivolous or (in the case of railway services) vexatious.

8 Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications for London TravelWatch arising from the contents of this report other than those for which budgetary provision has already been made.