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Head of Consumer Policy  
Director Of Economics, Markets & Strategy  
Office Of Rail And Road

John Smith  
Customer Experience Centre  
Operations Manager  
Northern Trains

8<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Marcus

## Complaints Handling Satisfaction

Thank you for your letter dated 15th December 2020 in relation to Northern's complaint handling satisfaction scores in the rail year 2019/2020. Northern use many data sources to make improvements to our complaints handling process and whilst the survey conducted by critical research provides valuable insight it's difficult for Train Operators in its current format to track the feedback provided to the specific complaint.

From the verbatim comments it's clear that several issues contributed to the low scores and below is a list of actions we are taking or have already undertaken to date.

### Introduction of Customer Experience Centre C-SAT survey

In September this year Northern Trains launched our own satisfaction survey to better understand what was driving dis-satisfaction with our complaints handling process and this survey is extended to all customer contacts we receive at the Customer Experience Centre. It simply asks the customer 48 hours after their query or complaint is resolved where they happy with support they received from our customer experience centre.

The customer is then able to answer yes or no to this question, when answering yes, the customer is invited to leave comments. If they state no they can select a drop reason for the driver of dis-satisfaction and leave comments.

We use this data to operate a continuous improvement process in addition to periodic quality control activities and every negative survey is reviewed by our quality team and the reason for dis-satisfaction assigned. This enables us to understand if it is the agent's response, Industry Policy or a Northern process that as driven the negative survey.

Since the 14th September we have conducted 2458 surveys on customer complaints and 772 customers have responded to the survey with an overall satisfaction score of 60%.

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When taking out dis-satisfaction driven by industry policy this increases further to 92% satisfied. We use this data to bench mark best practice across the team, to provide focus coaching to our agents and where possible amend our processes to make it a better experience of our customers. Where industry policy is driving dis-satisfaction this is feedback to key stakeholders who can influence industry change.

### **Customer Experience Centre Response Times**

In rail year 2019/2020 the CEC resolved on average 46% of complaints within 10 working days but the average time to respond and resolve complaints was 17 working days. Based on the verbatim comments this was driving dissatisfaction and negative scores.

In February 2020 a new resource plan and operating model was agreed for the customer experience centre to ensure a 48-hour response on all customer contacts and formed part of the Northern Trains 100 day plan presented to the department for transport, and we would have recruited an additional 21 people into our customer experience centre to support delivering the improvement in response times.

Due to COVID19 and the impact this had to passenger numbers and customer contacts the recruitment is on hold as our customer experience team have been responding to the contacts we receive within 48 hours since March 2020 with our current resource. The additional recruitment will go ahead but will be phased to ensure we maintain and achieve a 48-hour response as volumes increase and passenger demand recovers.

### **Performance driving dis-satisfaction**

62% of the complaint reasons Northern recorded in the rail year 2019/2020 related to cancellations, delays and overcrowding. A number of these issues related to the delay in delivery of the new fleet and the impact this had to our driving training programme, the continued use of pacers and a lack of capacity and the congested rail network through Manchester.

Most of these issues have now been resolved and we have seen a significant uplift in train service performance with almost all our new fleet now in service and our refurbishment programme almost complete. From the verbatim comments its clear many of our customers where dis-satisfied as previous complaints made in relation to these issues did not result in significant improvements in performance or capacity and as result became disenchanted with our complaints process. The surveys we currently completing in house via our customer experience centre and insight team is showing a significant reduction in these types of complaints.

### **Develop better insight and analysis to drive improvements**

Throughout 2020 Northern has been working to modernise its IS capability in many ways. At the end of 2020 we introduced a new realtime feedback platform which will enable us to survey customers across all touchpoints with Northern in an efficient and consistent way, and combine this survey data with other sources of information to enrich our insight on what our customers' pain points are. This will provide us with deeper insight on satisfaction with the complaints handling process, and in time also prevent many complaints from being made in the first place.

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In tandem, we have just launched the pilot for Tableau, a Business Intelligence platform. This will allow multiple insight sources to be collated and visualised across the business, and support far wider dissemination of the complaints being received by the business. This, in partnership with the new CX business partner role described below, will help to drive action off the back of complaints data and other customer insight sources, as the implementation is rolled out and developed during 2021.

### **Customer Experience Business Partners**

In December this year we recruited 4 customer experience business partners who will work with our operational regional teams using the insight provided by the customer insight team to improve customer experience across the regions working on customer focused action plans, driving accountability and improvements.

### **Customer journey mapping and Strategy role**

We recognise that throughout the rail industry, customer experience may not be at the forefront of focus, with safety and performance being the key focus areas. At Northern, we have embarked on a programme to embed a customer first approach. The programme includes defining what our customer experience journey is today, informed by industry and our own insight, including complaint trends. We will then work to define what our future, “to be” customer experience, to inform as to where we have gaps in our customer expectations from where we are today, informing our business planning for future improvements.

We are also defining a set of customer experience tools and approaches, to be used in every area of our business, ensuring our products, service and interactions are customer focused. As part of our toolkit, we are defining and implementing our customer standards, based on our customer insight, informing our training, bringing our customers to the forefront of our colleagues minds in their day to day interactions.

We look forward to our meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> January and welcome the opportunity to discuss our plans in further detail.

Yours sincerely

**John Smith**

Customer Experience Centre, Operations Manager

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