

Standards Committee

**16th September, 2010
Corporate Complaints,
Compliments, Comments and
Suggestions Performance Report
- Quarter 1 (1st April to 30th June,
2010)**



Report of Terry Collins , Corporate Director - Neighbourhood Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of Standards Committee the first Quarterly report for 2010/11 on Complaints, Compliments, Comments and Suggestions.

Background

- 2 This Paper informs the Standards Committee of performance results for the first quarter of 2010/11, providing information from 1 April to 30 June 2010.
- 3 Corporate Complaints, Compliments, Comments and Suggestions are currently monitored by the Corporate Complaints Team within Customer Services in the Neighbourhood Services Grouping. They deal with Corporate Complaints across the Council, as well as non-statutory complaints for Adults, Wellbeing & Health and Children's & Young Peoples Services. This report also contains information on statutory complaints for Adults, Wellbeing & Health and Children's & Young Peoples Services.

Progress of Complaints Handling Review

- 4 A project has recently been agreed as part of the Customer Focus theme called "learning from the customer". This will review all of the procedures currently in place for handling non-statutory complaints, compliments, comments and suggestions and how services can learn from what the customers are telling us. A project initiation document and action plan is to be presented to the thematic board at the end of September.

Summary Analysis and Overview – Performance Quarter 1

- 5 During 1 April – 30 June 2010, a total of 330 complaints were received.
- 6 A breakdown of these complaints handled by the Corporate Complaints Team are as follows; - 11 for Adults Wellbeing and Health, 0 for Assistant Chief Executive's, 1 for Childrens and Young Peoples Service, 75 for Resources, 182 for Neighbourhood Services and 61 for Regeneration & Economic Development. This compares to the first quarter of last year which recorded receipt of 386 Corporate Complaints; 9 for Adults, Wellbeing and Health, 3 for Assistant Chief Executive's, 12 for Children & Young Peoples Services 96 for

Resources, 222 for Neighbourhood Services, and 44 for Regeneration and Economic Development.

- 7 The table below provides a summary breakdown of complaints received since 1st April 2009. It should be noted that, following the implementation of the new Unitary Council, work to harmonise the systems previously operated by the County Council and 7 former districts has continued. This has included ensuring consistency of reporting and recording of all of the data in relation to customer feedback. As this work continues, there remains a number of issues in relation to data quality.

Summary of Complaints											
Service Area	Q1 total 2009 /10	Q2 total 2009/ 10	Q3 total 2009/ 10	Q4 total 2009/ 10	Q1 2010/ 11	Direction of travel	Year to date	% acknowledged within 2 working days (CCU)		% response within 10/20 working days	
								Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
Adults Wellbeing and Health	9	9	29	12	11	↓	11	30	0	80	0
Assistant Chief Executive	3	0	0	2	0	↓	0	-	-	-	-
Children and Young People's Service	12	17	3	3	1	↓	1	100	-	100	-
Resources	96	50	37	36	75	↑	75	38	0	64	40
Neighbourhood Services	222	121	103	180	182	↑	182	41	0	65	0
Regeneration and Economic Development	44	33	28	37	61	↑	61	35	6	41	0
Total	386	230	200	270	330		330	49	2	60	10

- 8 The following sections provide more detail in relation to the types and numbers of corporate and statutory complaints received across the service groupings during quarter 1 of 2010/11:

ADULTS, WELLBEING AND HEALTH


9 Introduction

This report provides details on complaints, compliments and comments in Adults Well-Being and Health for the 1st quarter ending 30 June 2010.

10 **Statutory Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments**

11 **Complaints Received in the Quarter**

During the Quarter, 16 complaints were received.

Comparison of Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q1 09/10 total	Q2 09/10 total	Q3 09/10 total	Q4 09/10 total	Q1 10/11 total	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Adult Social Care – AW&H	17	18	10	19	16	

During the quarter 16 complaints were received. This is a 15.7% decrease on the complaints received in the last quarter, which totalled 19. The table provides a comparison with the previous four quarters and the figures remain fairly consistent.

Complaints Received by Service Area			
Area Service	Learning Disabilities	Older People	Total
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers)	6	0	6
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons/Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	0	6	6
Finance	2	1	3
County Durham Care and Support	0	1	1
Total	8	8	16

Performance in the quarter has differed from last quarter 2009-10 in the increase in comparator numbers of complaints received in Learning Disabilities. This is in the main due to delays in funding decisions. The numbers of complaints for the other Service Areas remain relatively constant with previous quarter numbers.

12 **Responding within Timescales**

Of the 16 complaints all (100%) were acknowledged within 3 working days.

13 **Complaints Resolution Plans (CRP)**

CRPs were completed in all 16 cases (100%) This compares to 79%, 90% and 72%, respectively in the preceding three quarters.

14 **Completion within CRP Timescales**

11 of the 16 complaints were completed in the Quarter within the timescales agreed in the CRP. Of the remaining 5 cases these are ongoing not yet having reached the agreed timescale.

15 Outcomes

The outcomes of the 11 complaints received and completed in the quarter and the 4 carried forward from the previous quarter were as follows:-

Outcome of Complaints Completed in the Quarter				
Service Area	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Total
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers)	2	1	2	5
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons/Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	3	1	3	7
Finance	1			1
County Durham Care and Support			1	1
Social Inclusion		1		1
Total	6	3	6	15

NOTE: This excludes the 1 complaint that was received within the period but not completed by the end of the quarter.

16 Complaints by Classification

Poor communication constituted the highest category of complaint. Poor communication was a characteristic of all of the complaints in the Learning Disabilities Service and, in the majority of cases, linked to delays in funding decisions and panel decisions that declined funding for Residential Care placements. Consequently, the complaints had dual classifications as parents/carers complained about Placement Provision. The table below illustrates the range of complaint classification during the quarter.

Classification	No of Complaints
Lack Of Service - Communications/Information	8
Provision Of Service – Placement Provision	5
Quality of Service – Personal Care	4
Conduct Or Attitude Of Staff	3
Quality Of Service - Personal Financial Issues	3
Provision Of Service - Assessment	3
Quality Of Service – Domiciliary Care Services	2
Lack Of Service - Restricted Choices Of Current Services	1
Provision of Service - Equipment	1
Lack Of Service - Other	1
Application Of Service Guidance/Procedures	1

NB A complaint may have more than one classification recorded against it

17 Remedies

In all of the concluded 11 cases, full explanations and apologies were provided in each case, even where the complaint was not upheld, or upheld in part.

Examples of additional remedies include:-

- Waiving of respite care fees due to failure to provide appropriate equipment and to facilitate hospital discharge.
- Re-assessments of need conducted.

18 Declined Complaints

During the quarter no complaints were received that were declined.

19 Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman referred a complaint during the Quarter as he had concluded that Durham County Council had not been given the opportunity to deal with the matter under Local Resolution procedures, based on the information provided by the complainant. However, the complaint had been investigated and fully concluded but the complainant had not included this in their referral. The LGO was informed and the response is awaited.

20 Learning Outcomes

A number of changes were made to improve processes relating to the provision of placements including communication and minimising delays in the funding arrangements in the Learning Disabilities Service.

21 Compliments

99 compliments were received in the quarter compared to 122 compliments in quarter 4, 84 in quarter 3, and 100 in quarter 2. The ratio of compliments to complaints is 6.7:1, compared to 6.5:1 in the previous Quarter.

Service Area	Compliments Received
County Durham Care and Support	79 (79.8%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons/Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	20 (20.2%)
TOTAL	99 (100%)

The majority of compliments received in County Durham Care and Support relate to in-house Residential Care provision and the high quality of care received. The caring and dedicated staff are frequently cited.

Intermediate Care services are praised for the support given in maintaining independence.

22 **Comments**

One comment was received in Adult Social Care, it related to a request that Durham County Council fund annual holidays for clients in residential care. The correspondent was provided with an explanation as to why this was not feasible.

23 **Corporate Service Complaints (non-statutory)**

24 **Libraries, Learning and Culture (LLC)**

9 complaints were reported as received in Libraries. Learning and culture (LLC) in Quarter 1 the same as in the last quarter. Of the 9 complaints received full explanations were provided in all cases. For example, one complaint was about the design of a library bag. Another was about the alleged improper use of internet websites by other customers. This particular complaint exceeded the response time significantly. However, the complainant was persistently resurrecting the complaint even when it had been found not to be upheld. No key trends were identified from the complaints received. In all cases information and explanations were provided to complainants which resolved the enquiries.

LLC received 8 compliments compared to 3 the previous quarter and 2 comments compared to 0 comments the previous quarter.

No key trends were identified from the compliments received: 1 was about the excellent and helpful staff in the County Records Office. 7 related to the service and activities in Branch Libraries which were greatly appreciated by customers. 1 comment related to the absence of a public telephone within the library environment and the other related to the misuse of library parking facilities by motorists not using the library.

No learning outcomes emerged from this quarter's complaints

25 **Policy, Planning and Performance**

No complaints were received in this Service Area.

26 **Finance**

No complaints were received in this Service Area.

27 **Adult Social Care**

No complaints were received in this Service Area.

28 **Social Inclusion**

2 complaints were received in Social Inclusion compared to 1 the previous quarter. One of the 2 complaints in Social Inclusion was received in Community Safety and the other in Welfare Rights. The community safety complaint was dealt with immediately and action taken to address the

concerns. The complaint about welfare rights was about there being no facility for potential clients to see advisers in the office before a case has been accepted. No clear learning outcomes could be extracted from the complaints but full explanations were provided to the complainants. The complainants were satisfied with the explanations given.

Social Inclusion received 130 compliments this quarter compared to 151 the previous quarter. Both Welfare Rights (100) and WorkAble Solutions (30) receive highly complimentary feedback about the services they provide, which demonstrates the importance and value of those who need to use them. The compliments in Welfare Rights reflect the satisfactory outcomes achieved in appeals. Clients of WorkAble Solutions express a high degree of satisfaction in the support received in finding and maintaining employment. Both Welfare Rights and Workable Solutions feed back to their advisers and staff when compliments are received that refer to individual members of the teams.

CHILDRENS AND YOUNG PEOPLES SERVICES

29 Overview of Representations received in Q1

A total of **78 new representations** were received by the Representations and Quality Officer. This includes:

- 31 compliments (24 statutory, 7 corporate);
- 6 comments;
- 30 new complaints resolved informally (23 statutory, 7 corporate); and
- 11 new formal complaints(10 statutory, 1 corporate)

This compares with 138 compliments, 7 comments and 49 new complaints (9 formal, 40 informal 6 statutory,3 corporate) received and actioned in Q4 2009/10.

30 New formal complaints by service area and theme

A breakdown of new complaints by service area and theme is shown in the table below:

	Poor Service	Staff Conduct	Poor Service & Staff Conduct	Decision re Service	Staff Conduct & Decision re Service	Other	Totals
Statutory Complaints (SaSS)	4 (3)	2 (2)	0 (0)	4 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (6)
Corporate Complaints (Access and Inclusion)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (2)	1 (3)
Totals	5 (4)	2 (2)	0 (0)	4 (1)	0 (0)	0 (2)	11 (9)

(numbers in brackets refer to Q4 2009/10)

31 Performance Indicators

100% of new statutory and 100% of new corporate formal complaints at Stage 1 were acknowledged within the target timescales (5 and 2 working days respectively). Q4 figures were 100% acknowledgement within the CYPS target of 2 working days.

40% of new statutory and 100% of new corporate formal complaints at Stage 1 were resolved within the target timescales (20 working days for statutory, 10 working days for corporate), as shown in the table below. Q4 figures were 50% and 100% respectively.

32 Formal complaints: resolution and outcome

	No. (new) resolved in timescale	% (of new) resolved in timescale	% (no.) still potentially in time (ongoing)	No. upheld	No. partially upheld	No. not upheld
Statutory	4 out of 10	40%	0	0 (2)	1 (1)	3 (2)
Corporate	1 out of 1	100%	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (3)

33 Key messages and learning from complaints

Resolving complaints within timescale has remained at 100% for corporate complaints but has worsened again for statutory complaints, despite the lower number of complaints received. The complex nature of complaints taken through the formal procedure has had an adverse effect on the resolution timescales; however managers working on complaints investigations have been keeping the Representations Officer informed of progress and complainants have been kept informed.

As in previous quarters, poor service is a major theme of complaints (50% of formal statutory complaints). This quarter, decisions regarding service accounted for 40% of statutory complaints. This is reflective of the fact that the Local Authority must make decisions based on statutory policies and procedures, often relating to safeguarding children, but which parents are unhappy about-where complainants are unhappy with social care services' involvement with their children; they may raise complaints about perceived poor service, or the decisions about the services given/offered.

The one corporate complaint which was received in the quarter was about poor service, but this was not upheld.

54.5% of complaints resolved in the quarter were partially or not upheld, showing that almost half were at least partially justified, with lessons to be learned. In previous quarters, this percentage was 50% (Q4 2009/10) and 81.3% (Q3).

The following actions for improvement have been identified from complaints received in Q1:

- Families should be offered an apology when meetings need to be cancelled or re-scheduled. This is a matter of common courtesy.

- The good practices of some Social Workers should be noted and learned from, in particular with regard to communication with families.
- Wherever possible, young people should be kept regularly informed of the decision making process regarding placements insofar as it affects them.

34 Breakdown of compliments by team

The number of recorded compliments notified to the Representations and Quality Officer decreased. Compliments have been broken down by team, as shown in the table below:

Service area	Team/function	Number of compliments
Safeguarding and Specialist Services (SaSS)	Initial Assessment Team	13
SaSS	Children in Need Durham	4
SaSS	Children in Need Stanley 1	1
SaSS	Children in Need Seaham	1
SaSS	Young People's Service North	1
SaSS	Disabled Children and Families Team	2
SaSS	Children's Homes	1
SaSS	Safeguarding Children in Education Team	1
Strategic Commissioning	Human Resources	2
Strategic Commissioning	Quality, Planning and Performance Team	2
Strategic Commissioning	Child Protection Admin Team	2
Strategic Commissioning	Commissioning and Procurement	1

Statutory compliments were received from families about particular members of staff, mainly Social Workers, eg for being helpful and supportive. Corporate compliments were about the professionalism and support of staff, and prompt responses.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

35 Complaints

The CRM lists 182 complaints received for Neighbourhood Services between 1 April and 30 June 2010.

The following table details the prevalence of complaints across the service grouping for this Quarter and the comparison to the same quarter last year. However, due to the method of categorising complaints within the CRM, the split between service areas is an approximation.

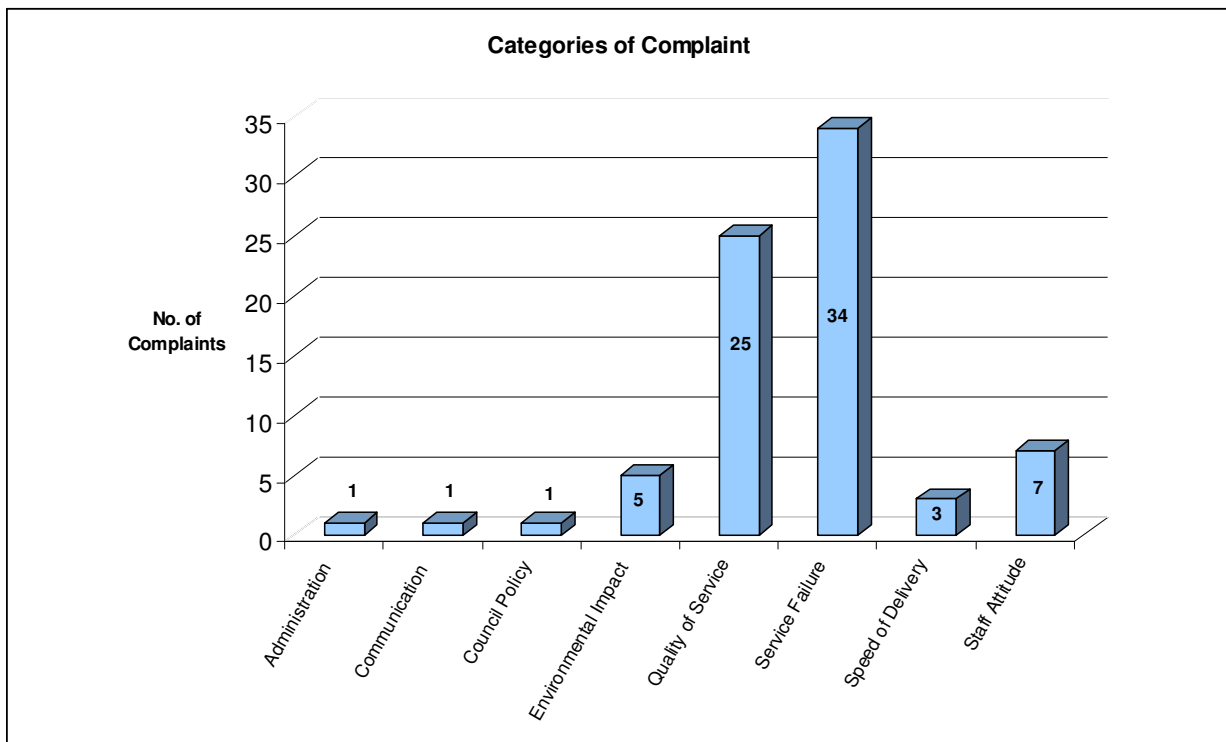
Service Area	1 April to 30 June 2009		1 April to 30 June 2010	
	Number of complaints	% of complaints received	Number of complaints	% of complaints received
Direct Services	138	62.16%	122	67.03%
Environmental Health & Consumer Protection	41	18.47%	11	6.04%
Sport and Leisure	17	7.66%	7	3.85%
Technical Services	25	11.26%	22	12.09%
Customer Services	1	0.45%	20	10.99%
Finance, HR, Bus. Support	0	NA	0	NA
Neighbourhood Services Total	222	100%	182	100%

The table shows that when compared to the same period last year, the overall number of complaints have reduced. Further investigation into the complaints received in this quarter shows that there are 105 records in which the complaint was not upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with services received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.

If these 105 records are removed, Neighbourhood Services is left with 77 legitimate complaints from which there is possibility of learning. Of those, 54 were partly justified complaints. The following table shows the breakdown across the service areas of the complaints deemed to be “justified”:

Service Area	1 April to 30 June 2010	
	Number of complaints (after not justified removed)	% of complaints received
Direct Services	51	66.23%
Environment, Health and Consumer Protection	4	5.19%
Sport and Leisure	2	2.60%
Technical Services	4	5.19%
Customer Services	16	20.79%
Neighbourhood Services Total	77	100%

Analysis of the complaints has shown that the 77 complaints can be classified as belonging to one of the following 8 categories.



Detailed Analysis of complaints according to service area with associated learning outcomes:

36 **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND CONSUMER PROTECTION** – 4 justified complaints were received in relation to this service area for quarter 1. Of these, one related to an environmental issue of pigs in protected woodland, two related to noise levels of Public Houses in the county and one on the process issuing of taxi licence plates.

37 **Learning Outcomes**

Although classed as “justified”, the complaint in relation to pigs in protected woodland relates to an investigation undertaken by EHCP which was conducted properly and at the time of the investigations no pigs were found at the site and no statutory nuisance was evident. The complainant was duly informed of the outcome of our investigations by the investigating officer. The complaint however does refer to planning and conditions of sale on the land which are outside of the remit of EHCP services.

The complaints in relation to noise in public houses are subject to an ongoing investigation and licensing review which may result in enforcement action. Any learning outcomes will be determined upon completion of the investigations.

The complaint which concerned the issuing of taxi licence plates is as a result of staff resources being limited in the Easington Office with only licensing enforcement officers located in that locality office and licensing processing team are currently operating out of Dragonville depot. We have no plans or staff resources to provide any front line reception facilities which will enable plates to be prepared immediately at the Easington office. Our proposed area delivery model will be delivered in accordance with the Council's Asset Management Strategy.

38 **SPORT AND LEISURE SERVICES** – There were 2 justified complaints received in relation to this service area for quarter 1. One related to the decline in service levels and leisure centre conditions at Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre, including showers not available for use. The other related to not being informed of an increase in costs for gymnastics course at Teesdale Leisure Centre.

39 **Learning Outcomes**

The service accepts that the two key areas which need to be addressed in order to drive improvement identified in the complaints relate to increasing the speed of effective maintenance through more efficient maintenance regimes and to improve the quality of customer communications following service failures. These are being looked at as part of the service review

40 **CUSTOMER SERVICES** – 16 justified complaints were received for this service in quarter 1.

14 of these complaints related to contacting customer services or switchboard and the problems of having to ring repeatedly, the length of time to answer calls, being cut off after waiting in a queue, length of time on hold, being passed from officer to officer when making a call instead of to the correct person immediately.

The other 2 complaints relate to administrative errors when inputting data onto systems, or the lack of response to a previous report.

41 **Learning Outcomes**

In relation to those complaints received regarding the switchboard service, the key problem related to the quality of data contained with the council's main database of contact numbers (staff directory). As a result calls were being diverted to wrong officers.

Throughout June and July 2010 a series of communications have been sent across the organisation to identify the importance of updating the system. In addition, switchboard operators now have the facility to update records themselves thus putting things right immediately. It is envisaged that such actions will address future complaints.

In terms of delays in handling calls, this was in the main directed at 2 key numbers and was a direct result of a loss of resources. As a result 3 additional officers have been employed and following an extensive training programme, should be in place to take calls effectively by August 2010. It is hoped that this will alleviate pressure in the areas of concerns and that performance will improve.

All technical faults with the telephone systems have been resolved and plans put in place to ensure no repeat of similar issues can take place in the future.

42 **DIRECT SERVICES** - this service area received 51 justified complaints during quarter 1; the key trends are highlighted below:

43 **Refuse Services**

More than half of the complaints received related to refuse/recyclable collections. Missed bins/recycling boxes being prevalent, with most complainants stating this was a regular occurrence. Other refuse complaints related to residents accessing or trying to access the Assist List Service, the locations of wheelie bins after emptying, and bulky item collection service. Complaints were also received about delays in receiving wheelie bins and green waste bins

Street cleansing, litter and poorly maintained alleyways that have been reported as having piles of rubbish not being cleared, customer requests for dog bins to be emptied and moved, complaints about delays in receiving wheelie bins and green waste bins.

Two complaints were received about staff attitude.

44 **Street Cleansing**

Complaints about litter and rubbish in alleyways, dog bins not being emptied properly, lack of street cleansing despite previous requests, asbestos not being removed from outside a school,

45 **Fleet Operations**

3 complaints were received during quarter 1 about inconsiderate driving of council employees in fleet vehicles. Two of the complaints listed the registrations of the vehicles concerned.

46 **Grounds Maintenance**

Five complaints were received for this area, 3 around grass cutting either not being done, or the quality of the work when it is carried out and 1 complaint of damage caused to gas meter box by a grass cutter and 1 complainant who has requested some trees be pruned numerous times.

47 **Repairs and Maintenance**

Three complaints were received about repairs and maintenance, 1 based on having to request the same repairs numerous times and 2 concerning the length of time to fix a faulty boiler.

48 **Learning Outcomes**

49 **Green Waste Collection Scheme** – Since the creation of a Unitary Authority, the County Council has extended the garden waste collection service to an additional 89,000 households bringing the number of households receiving this to around 156,000. The majority of complaints, (only 4 of them) suggest that garden waste bins had not been delivered. Improved communication for green waste roll out is under consideration.

50 **House Waste Collections** - The Council's Refuse and Recycling Service undertakes 18.5 million bin lifts per year. For this quarter it is estimated that this service has carried out 4.6 million bin lifts. In perspective, complaints received in respect of household bins that have not been missed or not emptied, in percentage terms are very low (0.003%).

51 **Streetscene** is working to better coordinate the information obtained through the complaints system and to use geographical data systems to map information which will inform future targeting of improvement activity. The new Customer First Strategy will assist in the transformation of the way that customers can access services and also the services themselves. This will ensure that they are modern, efficient, effective and customer focused.

52 **TECHNICAL SERVICES** - This service area received 4 complaints during quarter 1.

One of the complaints related to the condition of a footpath, two related to staff attitude to customers and one regarding the council's intention to install a fence adjacent to the highway.

53 **Learning Outcomes**

The majority of complaints were due to service failure and quality of service relating to works carried out by Highway Operations and the condition of footways. Improvements are therefore required in execution and quality of service provided.

All complaints are investigated and staff involved (where known) made aware of the complaints.

In relation to staff attitude, the problem of the blocking of access could perhaps have been foreseen and managed in a more satisfactory manner had there been better communications.

54 **Compliments/Comments/Suggestions**

During quarter 1, there were 44 compliments, 30 comments and 15 suggestions received by Neighbourhood Services. All staff were informed of the compliment and thanked for their efforts.

In terms of compliments, the following provides a breakdown of these in accordance with the service areas:

Service	Number of compliments
Direct Services	30
Technical Services	7
Customer Services	6
Environment, Health and Consumer Protection	1
Sport and Leisure	0
Total	44

REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

55 **Economic Development**

There have been no complaints in the last 2 quarters

56 Planning

The number of complaints has risen this quarter to 37 compared to 11 in quarter 4. No specific trends to service level complaints noted; although some indication that delays in response to requests for information apparent. In this respect managers have been reminded of the need to ensure staff is aware of service wide targets in relation to such enquiries and that these are met. Indeed management information in this area suggest that vast majority of enquiries are responded to swiftly; which will explain why although some complaints in this area have been received they are a very low percentage of the overall number.

A large proportion of complaints (estimated at around a third) relate to customers complaining about adverse planning decisions (the majority being where they objected to applications which were subsequently approved). In this respect whilst this is unfortunate as service procedures have been designed to try and explain decisions as best as possible, it has to be borne in mind that these complaints are an inevitable part of the service's business and can never be eradicated. The fact that the service is performing well in terms of the number of planning appeals allowed (only 23% for relevant quarter); has not had any decisions to grant planning permission revoked through the Courts, and has been free of LGO maladministration findings since LGR suggests that decisions being taken are largely very sound.

57 Learning Outcomes

There were no specific learning outcomes other than the need to maintain officer focus on speed of response to customer enquiries and complaint handling.

58 Transport

11 complaints received in this quarter compared with 5 the previous quarter.

59 Learning Outcomes

As the complaints received are spread across different service areas there are no learning outcomes although they will continue to be monitored.

60 Housing

The number of complaints received this quarter has decreased from 20 complaints to 13. The common strand that runs through these complaints is regarding management and maintenance of council properties within Durham City area.

61 Learning Outcomes

Durham City Homes delivery plan sets out how Durham County Council will deliver housing services to Council tenants in the former District of Durham City. It outlines how they intend to take forward the delivery of steadily

improving services. The procedure for acting upon and learning from complaints is being looked at across all Housing Service areas to ensure that information received in relation to complaints is used effectively to inform service improvement.

62 **Compliments, Comments and Suggestions**

14 Compliments 8 comments and 1 suggestion were received for this quarter. Of the 14 compliments 9 were for Development Control 4 were for Building Control and 1 was for Transport. Of the 8 comments 4 related to Economic Development 3 were Housing and 1 Planning while the one suggestion was for Policy Planning and Performance

RESOURCES

- 63 **Legal and Democratic Services** received 6 complaints during quarter 1 of 2010/11 compared to 1 in the last quarter. 5 of the complaints were regarding service failure or poor service quality; in particular 2 complainants had problems getting through on the telephone. There was a complaint regarding the use and subsequent closure of a primary school for use as a Polling Station. The complainant was informed that a review of all locations will take place prior to the next election taking place.

Another complaint was regarding the involvement of Councillors in the planning process.

A complaint was made regarding the length of time it was taking to carry out a Land Search at the Crook office.

The final complaint was regarding an application for a proxy vote which was complicated by a last minute change of circumstances (volcanic ash causing, a flight cancellation) and a further request for a postal vote (instead of the proxy vote) which went unanswered for a number of days.

With regards to the location of polling stations the complainant was informed that we continually review the location of polling stations with a policy to find alternative accommodation to schools wherever possible. All Head Teachers of schools used at the Parliamentary General Election were contacted in advance of the election for their comments on using their school. In advance of the next elections there will be a review of polling station provision.

Regarding the complaint about the involvement of Councillors in the planning process, the complainant was provided with a detailed record of the specific meeting and was advised if he wanted to pursue a complaint against a Councillor this was a different process to the Corporate Complaints procedure.

An investigation into the Land Search delay was carried out and an explanation was sent to the complainant, which explained that there was a 4-5 week turnaround on searches for the Wear Valley area due to a temporary backlog caused by the office move and loss of ICT systems.

An investigation into the delays surrounding the request for a postal vote were undertaken and an apology issued along with the required postal vote resulting in the complainant eventually being able to vote.

- 64 No complaints were received for the Corporate **Human Resources** function in quarter 1.
- 65 1 complaint was received for **Information and Communication Technology** in quarter 1 compared to none in the last quarter. The complaint was regarding the failure of the automated reminder service provided to library on line users. In order to resolve this complaint the customers Internet Service Provider (BT) was blocking the automated notifications generated by our system. The Customer was advised how to rectify this problem with BT. There were no compliments comments and suggestions this quarter.
- 66 **Finance** received 59 complaints during quarter 1 compared to 32 in the previous quarter. There were 1 of each for the following; Insurance, Finance admin and one relating to a compensation claim. The remaining 56 relate to Revenues (27) & Benefits (29). There is a continuing trend of customer dissatisfaction with the service delivery and quality of service of the Revenues and Benefits service, in particular with the length of time taken to respond to queries, to undertake investigations and to process claims. The frontline delivery of the Revenues & Benefits service is carried out, in a number of locations, by Customer Services staff. At this stage in the development of the Complaints process it is not always possible to differentiate between who the complainant has been in contact with. A workshop is planned in September to look at the proposed improvements to the Complaints process.

There has been a problem with the initial categorization of Finance service requests on the CRM – when inputting the details of a complaint it was not always clear to the member of staff where to allocate a complaint. The choices were ambiguous and confusing. The Service Request was amended in June 2010 so data will be improved for Q2.

A number of the complaints relate to problems with the telephone system.

- 67 **Assets** received 9 complaints this quarter compared to 6 the previous quarter.

8 of the complaints cited poor service quality or service failure, 1 complaint was regarding poor communications. 3 complaints were concerning horses being tethered on public land and the hazards concerned with this practice. 3 complaints were issues around alleged misuse or poor maintenance of DCC land. 2 complaints concerned delays/issues around requests to purchase land. Staff resources are being moved into areas where they are more effective, and processes are being mapped to look for more efficient ways of working. This will ensure prompt and informed communications in future. Unfortunately more often than not the recommendation is not what the complainant wants to hear although as a service, we try to deliver this in a comprehensive way with the reasons behind the decision made quite clear.

Ways of improving the Horse Impounding Service are under consideration including joint working with other agencies. Staff training issues may alleviate

any poor communication issues and discussions at team meetings on the importance of customer service issues will be added as an agenda item.

68 **Compliments, Comments and Suggestions**

32 compliments were received this quarter compared to 13 the previous quarter. 8 compliments were received relating to Finance of which 5 were for staff at the Easington and Chester le Street offices. 2 were for the pensions department and 1 for the kindness shown by a member of the Finance Department following a minor accident. The remainder were regarding weddings and civil ceremonies.

4 comments were received 3 relating to Finance and 1 to Legal and Democratic.

1 suggestion was received relating to Council Tax.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - CURRENT ACTIVITY

69 During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) initiated investigations into 13 matters relating to a range of complaints concerning:

- Dispute regarding Council's bailiffs – outcome awaited.
- 2 X Planning issues – outcomes awaited.
- Rights of Way issue – the Ombudsman exercised discretion in the matter.
- Housing related complaint – outcome awaited.
- Housing related complaint – outcome No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration (NIEM).
- 2 X Planning and Building Control issues – the Ombudsman exercised discretion into both cases.
- Payment of Housing Benefit – outcome awaited.
- Failure by Council to comply with previous settlement – outcome awaited.
- School admissions issue – the Ombudsman exercised discretion in the matter.
- Planning and Environmental issue – outcome awaited.
- Handling of complaint by internal complaints within Service Dept as this is a statutory complaint– outcome awaited.

The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 3 matters which had been subject to investigations that had been initiated prior to the beginning of the quarter. These matters can be summarised as follows:

- 2 X Other – 1 Ombudsman’s Discretion and 1 Outside Jurisdiction.
- Planning and Building Control – Ombudsman’s Discretion.

During the quarter the Ombudsman also notified the Council of the outcome in relation to a range of matters which were not subject to full investigation. The Ombudsman’s investigators reached their decisions on the basis of the details supplied by complainants supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers. These matters can be summarised as follows:

- Housing Benefit – No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration.
- Highways Management – No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration.
- Education – Ombudsman’s Discretion.
- Planning & Building Control – No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration.
- Other – Local Settlement.

Furthermore, during the quarter the Ombudsman initiated a review into a complaint which had previously been closed, further to a request from the complainant. The matter relates to a planning issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND REASONS

- 70 Members of Standards Committee are asked to note the contents of the report.

When the current reporting regime for complaints handling was introduced it was on the understanding that refinements/further development would take place as a continuing process. The views of Members as part of this process are always welcome.

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