



## Special Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date**            **Friday 17 October 2014**  
**Time**            **9.30 am**  
**Venue**          **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

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### **Business**

#### **Part A**

**Items during which the Press and Public are welcome to attend. Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chairman's agreement.**

1. Apologies for Absence.
2. Substitute Members.
3. Declarations of Interest, if any.
4. Customer First Task and Finish Group Review (Pages 1 - 68)  
Report of the Assistant Chief Executive.
5. Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Quarter 1  
Report 2014/15 (Pages 69 - 86)  
Report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services
6. Children and Adults Services Statutory Annual Representations Report  
2013/14 (Pages 87 - 134)  
Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Adults Services
7. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

**Colette Longbottom**  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall  
Durham  
9 October 2014

To: **The Members of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

Councillor J Lethbridge (Chairman)  
Councillor K Henig (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors J Alvey, J Armstrong, L Armstrong, G Bleasdale, J Buckham,  
P Crathorne, J Hillary, E Huntington, N Martin, P McCourt, A Shield, T Smith,  
P Stradling, L Taylor, A Turner, M Wilkes, S Wilson and R Young

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**Contact: Lucy Gladders**

**Tel: 03000 269712**

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**Special Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**17 October 2014**

**Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Customer First Task and Finish Group Review**



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**Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive**

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**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To present to Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee the draft Customer First Task and Finish Group report and invite comment thereon.

**Background**

- 2 At the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 September 2013, during consideration of the Performance Management Report for Quarter 1 2013/14, reference was made to performance in respect of Customer Services including telephone answering and e-mail transactions. At that time, members were informed of the on-going work being undertaken in respect of the revised Customer First Strategy for the Council. The Committee agreed to establish a small task and finish group to provide policy development support to the refresh of the Council's Customer First Strategy.
- 3 Evidence was gathered over a series of 6 Task and Finish Group meetings culminating in a presentation to the group on 24 September 2014 which highlighted key findings from the review and at which members of the group agreed a series of recommendations.
- 4 A copy of the draft review report is attached at Appendix 2 for members' comments.

**Recommendation**

- 5 Members are asked to receive and comment on the draft review report and, subject to such comments agree that the report be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance – N/A**

**Staffing – N/A**

**Risk – N/A**

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty –** The review report takes into consideration Equality and Diversity, an Equality Impact Assessment having been undertaken.

**Accommodation – N/A**

**Crime and Disorder – N/A**

**Human Rights – N/A**

**Consultation – N/A**

**Procurement – N/A**

**Disability Issues – N/A**

**Legal Implications – N/A**



# **Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## **Customer First Task and Finish Group Review Report**



**September 2014**

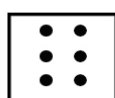


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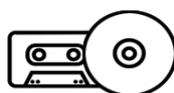
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**Please ask us if you would like this document summarised in another language or format.**

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## Foreword

Durham County Council provides services across 223,260 hectares (862 Square miles) to around 513,000 residents living in 223,000 or so households. Since the establishment of Durham County Council as a new Unitary Council in 2009, we have embarked on a systematic programme of service improvement to ensure that services are provided to all customers in an efficient, effective and consistent manner.



The development of new technology and new ways in which customers are able to do business with the Council has required a wholesale examination of our approach to customer service provision. At a time of increased demand for services, information and support against a backdrop of reducing budgets and austerity, an extensive review of customer services is being undertaken.

As part of this work and set against the refresh of the County Council's Customer First Strategy, the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee tasked a small group of its members to review the development of the revised Customer First Strategy and examine the potential key outcomes and service improvements that will deliver improved customer services. Key areas identified by the group include the effectiveness of the Council's existing access channels and how "channel shift" may deliver significant efficiencies to the Council; the development of customer service standards and performance measures and how the Council can build on improvements being made in collecting and analysing customer feedback to further improve services to customers. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet.

I would like to thank fellow members of the Task and Finish group and officers from Durham County Council and Sunderland City Council for their valuable time and assistance in providing evidence and supporting the review.

**Councillor John Lethbridge**  
**Chairman**  
**Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

# Executive Summary

1. The County Council agreed a revised Customer First Strategy in July 2014, following an extensive public and stakeholder consultation process. As part of this process, the Corporate Issues OSC established a group of Councillors to review and comment upon the development of the new Customer First Strategy as well as examining the progress made, and still required to deliver against the key outcomes identified within the development of the strategy, namely:-
  - Providing a range of effective and easy to use ways in which our customers can deal with us;
  - Delivering responsive and customer focussed services, and
  - Ensuring that customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services.
2. Given the complexity of the programme of business critical activity and projects that will be essential to the delivery of the new Customer First Strategy, it is clear that a focussed plan which includes clear timelines and milestones for the delivery of these projects is needed. The Task and finish group consider that regular reports should be submitted to the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee which set out the progress made in respect of these projects and provide members with assurance that the focus and pace is maintained within the projects.
3. Key areas identified by the group include the effectiveness of the Council's existing access channels and how "channel shift" may deliver significant efficiencies to the Council; the development of customer service standards and performance measures and how the Council can build on improvements being made in collecting and analysing customer feedback to further improve services to customers.
4. The review has also examined the existing IT infrastructure and software capabilities and potential improvements to these that would support delivering the above.

## Customer First Strategy 2014-17

5. There is evidence that the Council has, under the leadership of the Customer Focus board, made significant progress against the Council's initial Customer First Strategy including the delivery of new Customer Access Points, the introduction of improved virtualised call centres and telephone platform, the development of a new Revenues and Benefits system, the provision of extensive customer care training across all Council staff and the implementation of enhanced working practices to improve workforce capacity within Customer services.
6. As part of the development of the revised Customer First Strategy 2014-17, the Task and finish group has expressed its broad support for



the strategy and the direction of travel proposed therein. Specific comments made by the group as part of the consultation process related to:-

- The need to emphasise that we have managed to save frontline services from major cuts and that, in doing so are making as many savings as we can from back office functions;
- The commitment within the Strategy by the Council to “make it easier for customers to contact us” should include actions relating to the wider work being carried out to make contacting the council easier;
- The “did you know” commentary bubbles should be worded to emphasise the positive achievements being delivered by the Council in respect of customers;
- In considering access channels, specifically those based around the Council’s Website and associated on-line transactions, the Council addresses access to broadband issues which exist not only in rural areas but in some urban communities, making it difficult for customers to go online and use these access channels.

### **ICT Infrastructure and Customer Relationship Management (CRM)**

7. The Council’s ICT strategy identifies how ICT will support the delivery of the Customer First strategy. In doing so it must ensure faster service provision across the County and for longer opening hours. As customers move to greater self-service, the Council should ensure that its services can be delivered across a wide range of access channels including the use of social media and smart technology.
8. Members have raised concerns regarding the availability of broadband within County Durham and the difficulties that customers have experienced regarding internet connectivity both in rural areas and also in respect of new housing developments. This severely restricts the ability for customers in these areas from doing business with the Council via digital access channels. The progress being made via the “Digital Durham” programme and other associated initiatives is welcomed and would be supported by initiatives for new housing, business and commercial developments that prioritises the need for digital connectivity in such developments.
9. The provision of an effective CRM software system that allows all services to be provided via greater automation and includes the functionality to log and process customer service requests; enables instantaneous connection to front line service operatives and provides feedback and acknowledgements to customers on progress/completion of service requests is essential.
10. The Council’s existing CRM system does not facilitate this functionality across the whole service spectrum.

11. The Group notes that the Council is currently reviewing its CRM provision and that a working group is examining the requirements that exist in developing a bespoke specification for a replacement CRM system. The group consider this work to be fundamental to the success of delivering customer services against the new Customer First Strategy and will be essential in supporting both the further development of digital access channels as well as service standards and associated performance management arrangements.
12. Evidence presented to the group during its visit to Sunderland City Council would support this.

### **Access Channels**

13. The Customer First Strategy seeks to broaden accessibility to information and increase the online capacity to transact with the Council.
14. The Group has examined various access channels used by customers in terms of demand, functionality, costs and resource requirements. Channels examined were telephones, face-to-face, E-mail, website and social media.

### *Telephones*

15. Telephone is the preferred method of contact for the Council's customers. However, the complexity and diversity of the telephone contact numbers available for the Council does not make it easy for customers to contact the Council, or for the Council to understand the nature of that incoming customer contact. Ongoing work to rationalise the telephony system for the County Council is proposed. Evidence received by the Group from Sunderland City Council, where telephone queries are directed through six dedicated numbers, supports the rationale for undertaking this work. A variety of workforce initiatives including flexible employment contracts, rotas for lunchtime working when demand increases and annual leave monitoring all ensure that ongoing demand is managed.
16. However a key objective of ongoing work is to reduce demand by reducing avoidable contact by ensuring that all correspondence is easily understood by the Customer, reducing the need to telephone or attend a customer access point to clarify matters. Correspondence should also be redrafted to encourage customers to use other access channels which have a lower unit cost per transaction such as the Council's website or e-mail.

### *Face to face/Customer Access Points*

17. The Council's Office Accommodation strategy to expand and develop Customer Access Points has been successful in increasing usage and driving demand. However, the majority of this demand comes from signposting activity and has been created as a direct result of this strategy. This signposting activity at CAPs could be reduced

significantly if digital access channels such as the Website were improved and easier to navigate for customers.

18. Notwithstanding this, it is evident from the demand and interaction information that CAPs provide a well-used service for the community and in some cases provide a vital method for customers to transact with the Council where face to face contact is required.
19. Set against the backdrop of increasing financial pressures and the recognition that a managed process of channel shift for customer services could generate significant financial efficiencies, Cabinet has agreed a revised office accommodation strategy to achieve a reduction in revenue expenditure on CAPs. Paragraph 136 sets out the CAP provision under the new strategy which will be supported by information provision under an "Information Durham" branding in a variety of Council owned properties, providing customers with signposting assistance.
20. The proposals will deliver efficiency savings in respect of operational costs of around £136,655 and are to be supported.

#### *Website and E-mail*

21. Demand for access to services digitally via e-mail and the web is increasing. Between January 2013 and January 2014, e-mails into Customer services increased by 527% and web-form use by 164%.
22. Whilst the move to digital access by customers is encouraging, the use of e-mail as an access channel brings with it some inherent problems. This is largely due to the existing CRM/logging mechanism in that it generates a significant increase in demand upon Customer services staff to manually handle and deal with customer service requests via e-mail. It is considered that a far more effective way of accessing relevant services would be via an enhanced web-form offer/functionality via the Council's website.
23. Work on developing the technology and management arrangements to deliver more effective channel shift through the enhancement of e-based methods of contact is on-going. Progress is being made on the development of an effective e-based offer but this remains some way off until underlying ICT systems, including CRM and web platforms, suffering from historic underinvestment, are updated.
24. The refreshed Customer First strategy recognises that whilst the Council remains committed to placing customers at the heart of everything we do, the means of delivering this must adapt to the changing financial circumstances and to the needs of those customers who prefer to deal with the council by other means using technology such as through the website.
25. As highlighted earlier, the Council is looking to replace its CRM system to ensure that it allows all services to be provided via greater

automation and includes the functionality to log and process customer service requests; enables instantaneous connection to front line service operatives and provides feedback and acknowledgements to customers on progress/completion of service requests.

26. The Council's ongoing website project looks to facilitate more effective channel shift through the enhancement of e-based methods of contact. In implementing a wholesale review of the Council website, the Council is making it easier for customers to use this access channel to do business with the Council, making the website a key Customer Services tool. A new content management system enables easier internal management of the system; it will have a greatly enhanced search function and be more accessible from a range of devices including mobile telephones and tablets.
27. The success of the new website as a transactional channel depends on a number of third party system projects, such as CRM development, ICON payments, mapping developments and projects specific to council tax, business rates portal and the planning application system. The success of the Council's drive to shift customer usage of access channels from face to face and telephony across to e-enabled services critically depends upon the successful implementation of the website improvement project alongside these others.
28. In supporting the website development work, the Group notes that whilst there will undoubtedly remain some customers who will not use online facilities, any improvement in website functionality that makes it more attractive to those customers who want to do business digitally, will free up telephony and CAP capacity for those customers who prefer those access channels.
29. Any such developments within the digital access channel provision must be set against the need to ensure that this demonstrates value for money and contributes to the principle of providing cost effective access channels.

### *Social Media*

30. The Council has experienced an increasing demand for information and services from customers via social media with over 19,500 people following the Council's corporate Facebook and twitter accounts. Staff within the Council's Corporate news team manage these accounts which are primarily used :-
  - To warn and inform the public – alerting residents to gritting, service disruptions, weather warnings, new jobs in the Council and forthcoming events;
  - As an appeal for help – used as a call to action with residents showing dynamic responses in sharing information and alerts thus broadening public awareness of issues;
  - To promote Council services – such as cultural offer via theatres, museums etc;

- To provide real time information about major events - Lumiere, the Lindisfarne Gospels exhibition, the County Council elections for example. These events prove incredibly popular and result in a significant increase in social media followers;
  - To respond to those customers who use social media as a customer service channel – Unlike other access channels, social media responses are highly visible and as such whilst the Council has a series of link officers within services providing standard responses, a system is in place to ensure escalation to senior management where necessary and appropriate.
31. The future for the use of social media as a key access channel for customers lies in the implementation of the revised Customer First strategy. Most social media is designed for two way conversations and, as such, it is increasingly being used by customers as a contact channel for complaints, service requests, compliments and suggestions. It is essential that the current link officer system for social media is reviewed to adapt to the increase of social media as a customer service channel. Additionally, increasing integration of social media with existing customer service methods such as the CRM system and the Highways Action Line is a priority.
  32. The development of social media as an access channel for Customers comes with a necessary caveat that this again must demonstrate value for money and contributes to the principle of providing cost effective access channels. This reflects concerns expressed by the working group around the limits on the use of social media as an access channel for customer services.
  33. The Corporate news team is working with Customer services to pilot how the Council may develop social media into a customer services channel and how this can be made a realistic proposition.

### **Service Standards**

34. The refreshed Customer First strategy identifies that the Council needs “to be clear about what standards of service customers can expect to receive from our staff when contacting the council.” In doing so the Council will “monitor our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of service and use this to make improvements where we can.”
35. The Customer First Strategy refresh includes the customer service standards and it aims to ensure that the council has a set of challenging standards within the resource capacity we have for all of our main services and that we successfully deliver against these standards.
36. There were a number of issues identified with existing service standards, the key ones being :-

- They only cover a limited number of council services and there are large parts of the council not reflected in the standards. A number of services have their own customer services standards.
  - They cover a limited number of access channels (telephone and face to face contact) with none for e-mail, letters or web-form or social media.
  - They concentrate on speed of response and do not reflect quality of response or customer satisfaction.
  - Since the standards were developed, the customer services function has taken responsibility for first line contact for revenues and benefits enquiries.
  - Public services including local authorities are facing unprecedented spending cuts. There is a drive for more efficient services and doing more with the same or less.
37. In examining research undertaken by Mori Ipsos, the Council initiated work to develop customer standards across all access channels and which aims to ensure that those standards address the key factors which influence customer satisfaction with public services, namely, delivery; timeliness; information; professionalism, and staff attitude.
38. Key principles identified for these service standards include
- A measureable time-based service standard is required for all of the Council's main access channels (telephone, face to face, letter, web-form, social media) to ensure customers are aware of the timescale in which they can expect a response;
  - Any service standard/performance measure for telephone calls should apply to all publicised telephone numbers;
  - For face to face contact, service standards should measure the actual time a customer has waited to be seen by a CSO in a CAP;
  - Optimum service performance would identify a standard that aims to resolve customer queries at the first point of contact;
  - Performance standards should be established to measure the quality of the service received by the Customers – this can be achieved by utilising customer service feedback surveys;
  - Performance Indicators monitored via the corporate performance reporting process should be supplemented by an agreed basket of local indicators;

- An agreed mechanism for utilising feedback received from customer standard/performance monitoring should be evident which demonstrates how customer learning is contributing to service improvement.
39. In examining the journey taken by Sunderland City Council in developing their Customer Access strategy, the Task and Finish group consider that the developmental work in respect of Council's Service standards should include a commitment to all customers that they will be kept informed of progress at all stages of their service journey with the Council.
  40. It is considered that upon completion of the customer standards work, the Council should consider how these standards and performance measures are consulted upon both internally with service groupings and elected members but also importantly with customers themselves.
  41. In examining customer services training, it is evident that existing training addresses most of the potential key customer service standards and associated performance measures. However, the Working group want to be assured that this training will be given to all Council staff, across all services and will include Councillors.
  42. The development of a mystery shopping proposal as part of the customer standards project is supported and should include the involvement of elected members.

### **Customer learning**

43. A key outcome within the Customer First Strategy is that "customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services". In delivering against this outcome the Council is committed to:-
  - Taking customer views into account when improving services;
  - Enabling customers to access their information securely online;
  - Using customer feedback to inform business planning;
  - Monitoring the equality impact of service changes and using that information for future service development;
  - Reviewing the way in which we deal with all customer feedback, including complaints, compliments and comments;
  - Telling customers when their feedback has been used to shape service provision through 'you said, we did' information.
44. Since 2012, the Council has adopted a systematic approach across all services in responding to customer feedback, from which a customer experience model has been developed.
45. The model uses feedback and information from service demand statistics, complaints, suggestions, compliments, the "customer journey" and survey results to produce a customer experience report. This report is considered at a customer experience meeting involving

key stakeholders within the Council including customer services representatives and service groupings to ascertain key messages and findings which, in turn, are developed into an improvement programme of activity.

46. The Council has used the customer experience model to develop and introduce a number of service improvements such as:-
- New “repeat missed container” monitoring process, reducing repeat missed bin complaints.
  - New process for requests for sand bags, including through the website.
  - Agreed approach to manage enquiries and complaints in relation to the street lighting energy reduction project.
  - Updated staff training and guidance manuals for refuse and recycling.
  - Establishment of a missing address data process in the CRM to enable customer requests to be processed consistently whilst the address file is updated.
47. Members of the Working Group consider that officers should examine the most frequently occurring complaints received by elected members from their constituents as these may collectively identify service failures. A survey amongst members or a facility whereby this information is gathered on a regular basis is suggested.
48. As new access channels are developed and implemented customers will be able to log their comment /complaint / compliment / suggestion via these channels. As a result, in the future any employee should be able to record the necessary complaint details and pass them on to the Complaints Officer in the relevant Service Area or to Customer Services.

## **Conclusion**

49. The Council’s Customer First strategy has been updated to reflect those key messages received as part of the consultation including improving ease of contact for customers and getting it right first time. The strategy commits to improving clarity for customers on how they can expect services to be delivered and to be kept informed of progress. Choice of access channels is reflected in the strategy together with ensuring that a “personal touch” approach is adopted and on-line payment facilities are easier and secure.
50. A number of key projects are being driven within the Council by the Customer First board and which are considered to be business critical to the Council in delivering against the refreshed Customer First Strategy.



51. The ongoing project work in developing and improving key ICT infrastructures including the delivery of a fit for purpose Customer Relationship Management system as well as an improved website with excellent functionality across all services will deliver significant potential improvements across services. This will contribute to the stated aims of:-
- Providing a range of effective and easy to use ways in which our customers can deal with us;
  - Delivering responsive and customer focussed services, and
  - Ensuring that customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services.
52. These projects will also shape the considerable work being undertaken to develop a suite of customer standards and associated performance measures across all services through which the Council will learn from customer experience and utilise this feedback to further improve service delivery.
53. The proactive decisions by the Council to build on the existing channel shift being demonstrated by customers in doing business with the Council, utilising digital/e-enabled service delivery at a lower unit cost to the Council will continue to contribute to the Council's drive for greater efficiencies against continued funding pressure for Central Government.
54. These efficiencies will be further enhanced through the implementation the previously agreed Office Accommodation strategy in respect of Customer Access Point development and the introduction of an enhanced "Information Durham" service provision and branding.

## **Recommendations**

55. Consideration of the review's findings has led the task and finish group to make the following recommendations:-
- (i) That Cabinet consider as part of the implementation of the refreshed Customer First Strategy, that Customer services training be provided across all Council services as part of the Corporate Training programme, such training to be prioritised to cover all customer facing service provision and also to be offered to all Councillors.
  - (ii) That the Cabinet monitor the implementation and benefits of the new CRM system currently being procured in supporting the delivery of the Customer First Strategy;
  - (iii) That Cabinet seeks to ensure that the provision of broadband/digital service connectivity in respect of new

residential, business and commercial developments is encouraged;

- (iv) That the Cabinet ensures that a focussed and structured plan for the delivery of the customer first strategy is in place which provides clarity on how those business critical projects identified within this report will be delivered including proposed timelines and delivery milestones;
  - (v) That Cabinet supports the rationalisation of the Council's telephone numbers that are promoted and advertised to a small series of golden numbers that are easily recognised and accessible by customers;
  - (vi) That the Cabinet recognises the need for Customer Access Point provision to be supported by the emerging "Information Durham" service provision that is suitably branded, easily identifiable and delivered through as wide a network of facilities and locations as possible, including partner organisations, community facilities and third sector organisations with robust support from the Council's ICT service;
  - (vii) That the Cabinet supports the ongoing development work on the Council's website and that all services commit to provide enhanced service information which will reduce avoidable contact and promote online transactions as part of a structured plan to promote channel shift;
  - (viii) That the Cabinet supports the work of Customer services and the Corporate news team to review social media as a customer services channel and to pilot ideas on how this could work;
  - (ix) That the Cabinet supports the ongoing project work to develop service standards and associated performance management arrangements across all services and, upon completion of this work, all stakeholders including the public, council staff and Councillors will be engaged upon the proposed services standards;
  - (x) That the Council support the development of mystery shopping for use as part of service standard performance management arrangements and that any such proposal include the input/involvement of Councillors.
56. It is further recommended that a systematic review of the report and progress made against recommendations should be undertaken after consideration of this report by Cabinet, within six months.

# Section 1 - Background and Methodology for the Review

## Background

57. The Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee regularly consider customer services performance as part of quarterly performance management reports. In 2012, the Committee carried out a light touch review of telephony, but has remained interested in performance in relation to customer services.
58. At the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 September 2013, during consideration of the Performance Management Report for Quarter 1 2013/14, reference was made to performance in respect of Customer Services including telephone answering and e-mail transactions. At that time, members were informed of the on-going work being undertaken in respect of the revised Customer First Strategy for the Council. The Committee agreed to establish a small task and finish group to provide policy development support to the refresh of the Council's Customer First Strategy.
59. The Council's Customer First Strategy was developed and adopted in 2010. Its aim was to transform the way that customers access services and the services themselves so that they are modern, efficient, effective and customer focussed.
60. The associated plan focussed on identifying and understanding the needs of our customers, measuring levels of customer satisfaction, creating a customer focussed culture within the council, making services accessible to all and to provide high quality services to our customers. The strategy was linked to the Accommodation Strategy and envisaged the expansion of face to face service provision through increased numbers of customer access points as well as harmonised and improved telephony.
61. The strategy has been partially successful and much improvement has been made including:-
  - New Customer Access Points in Consett, Durham, Seaham and Crook
  - A single resilient customer services telephone system
  - Development and publication of the golden phone numbers
  - Additional mechanisms for access channels including 'Looking Local' & Durham Talk units.
  - The roll out of a council wide Customer First – Customer Care training package to ensure that our customers receive the highest level of customer care.

## **Purpose of the Review**

62. The review sought to examine customer services, their development and the emerging Customer First Strategy to support the Council's overarching vision to 'deliver customer services that provide value for money, flexibility and choice whilst placing our customers at the heart of everything we do'.

## **Objectives**

63. The objectives for the customer first task and finish group aligned to the Customer First Strategy and work programme, namely :

### **1. Customer First Strategy**

To consider and respond to the consultation on the draft revised customer first strategy on behalf of the Council's scrutiny function.

### **2. Efficient and effective access channels**

To consider the ways in which customers can contact the Council and how these can be changed to increase both the efficiency of transaction and customer satisfaction. How can the effectiveness of these be measured internally and externally?

### **3. Customer standards**

To review corporate customer standards in comparison to standards set in other local authorities/ organisations. What is good practice, and what can we learn from others?

### **4. Learning from customer feedback**

To look at how the council collects and analyses customer feedback, and how this feedback is used to improve service delivery.

## **Focus of the review**

64. The Review sought to identify outcomes and make recommendations in respect of:-
- (i) The proposed revisions to the Council's Customer First Strategy;
  - (ii) The effectiveness of the Council's access channels for customers in terms of speed of transaction; ease of access and availability to customers and how the Council can measure this effectiveness both internally and externally:

- (iii) The development of customer service standards that improve the Council's ability to benchmark against high performing customer service organisations in both the public and private sector and how lessons can be learned to ensure continuous improvement in Customer services and the customer experience, and,
- (iv) Demonstrating how the Council can collect and analyse customer feedback and the methods by which learning from this can be transformed into enhanced services

### **Timescale**

- 65. Task and Finish Group meetings and visits took place between February and May 2014 with a report scheduled to be presented to the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet thereafter.

### **Membership of the Task and Finish Group**

- 66. The Task and Finish Group comprised the following members of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-
  - Councillor J Lethbridge (Chair of the Working Group)
  - Councillor K Henig (Vice-Chair of the Working Group)
  - Councillor J Armstrong
  - Councillor L Armstrong
  - Councillor G Bleasdale
  - Councillor A Hopgood
  - Councillor T Smith
  - Councillor P Stradling

### **Project Support Officers**

- 67. The project was supported by the following officers:

Alan Patrickson - Head of Projects and Business Services, Neighbourhood Services.

Mary Readman - Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager, Neighbourhood Services.

James Anderson - Contact Centre Co-ordinator, Neighbourhood Services.

Vanessa Glover - Corporate News Manager, Assistant Chief Executive's.

Simon Luckley - Navigation and Design Work Package Lead, Assistant Chief Executive's.

Tony Thompson - Digital Durham Manager, Resources.

Tom Gorman - Corporate Improvement Manager, Assistant Chief Executive's.

## Section 2 – Customer First Strategy

### Background

68. As part of the development of Council services following Local Government Review, the Council agreed its first Customer First strategy in 2010 which aimed “to put the customer first – at the heart of everything the Council does and recognises the importance of understanding the diversity of our customers’ needs when contacting and communicating with the Council.”
69. The three year strategy aimed to transform the way that customers can access our services and also the services themselves, to ensure that they are modern, efficient, effective and customer focused.
70. The vision for customer first was to provide ***‘altogether better customer services which place our customers at the heart of everything we do’***. This was, at that time based around five themes of:-
- **Customer Insight** - Understanding and identifying our customers, consulting with them in a meaningful way and effectively measuring the outcomes of our services;
  - **Organisational Culture** - developing a culture that demonstrates positive behaviours during every contact with our customers, prioritising customer focus at all levels throughout our organisation;
  - **Information and Access** - As many services as possible should be capable of delivery through a single contact – whether this is face-to-face, by telephone, Mincom, Telly-talk or electronically via the web and other channels;
  - **Delivery** - We will promote a culture where we get it right first time and meet our customers’ expectations regarding communicating with them. We will set challenging customer service standards for our services which will take into account our responsibility for delivering national and statutory standards and targets;
  - **Quality of Service** – We will advise our customers via our customer charter about our promises about the timeliness of our responses and the quality of service they can expect to receive. We will monitor our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of service we provide and consider how we can make improvements where necessary.

## **Progress against Customer First Strategy**

71. Under the leadership of the Customer Focus Board, significant progress has been made against the initial Customer First Strategy including:-
- New Customer Access Points delivered at Barnard Castle, Chester-le-Street, Consett, Crook, Durham (Claypath) and Seaham;
  - The introduction of virtualised call centres and a new telephone platform to improve customer telephony contact;
  - Extensive customer care training across all Council staff;
  - The establishment of a series of “Golden Numbers” for key services;
  - The development of a new service delivery model for Revenues and Benefits which historically has been the service which generates the greatest demand upon customer services;
  - Enhanced working practices including the use of home working to improve workforce capacity within Customer services;

## **Customer First Strategy Refresh**

72. On 15 January 2014, the Cabinet agreed a revised Customer First strategy for the Council for 2014-17 for public consultation which, in the light of MTFP savings and changing customer preferences, will provide a direction of travel for the way in which the Council will provide access to services and a commitment to ensure customers are at the forefront of service delivery within the context of reducing budgets and diminishing resources.
73. The main focus of the strategy encompasses the main contact channels used by customers; streamlined service delivery and the council’s approach to use of feedback, intelligence and data to inform service development.
74. The Customer First Strategy seeks to broaden accessibility to information and increase the online capability to transact with the council. This approach will ensure best use of existing resources and buildings to provide a network of service access points which is instantly recognisable through a single branding.
75. The strategy identifies three key outcomes which have provided the focus for the work of the Task and Finish Group, namely:-

- A range of effective and easy to use ways in which our customers can deal with us;
- Customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services;
- Responsive and customer focussed services.

## **Consultation**

76. The refresh process involved working with staff to develop a draft document which addresses the known issues surrounding effective customer care.
77. A cross council project team was set up to drive forward the refresh of the strategy, which has contributed to its content and format; this included identifying service improvements in relation to access to services and statistical data around customer contact.
78. Research data from surveys showing customer preferences in relation to access channels and demographics in terms of the make-up of our communities was used to ensure the strategy document focussed around customer needs.
79. Consultation methods were agreed to encourage wide participation, including:
- On-line survey (Paper copies were available at locations across the county to ensure those without access to PCs/internet access could participate)
  - Focus Group meetings and signposting through AAPs
  - Disability Partnership
  - Partnership Delivery Improvement Group
  - Investors in young people
  - People's Parliament.
80. The consultation took place over a 12 week period, commencing on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2014 until 14<sup>th</sup> April 2014.
81. The Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 27 January 2014 agreed that it would comment upon the proposed Customer First Strategy through this Task and Finish Group.

## **Task and Finish Group Comments on the Customer First Strategy**



82. Having examined the proposed Customer First Strategy, the Task and finish group, in broadly supporting the Strategy and direction of travel, suggest that:-
- (i) The Customer First Strategy introduction emphasise that we have managed to save frontline services from major cuts and that, in doing so are making as many savings as we can from back office functions;
  - (ii) The commitment within the Strategy by the Council to “make it easier for customers to contact us” be more specific including proposed actions that relate to the wider work being carried out to make contacting the council easier;
  - (iii) The “did you know” commentary bubbles be worded to emphasise the positive achievements being delivered by the Council in respect of Customer services – i.e. the “Did you know” bubble about only 2% of complaints going to the Local Government Ombudsman can be made more positive by highlighting that 98% were resolved by the Council without further escalation;
  - (iv) In considering access channels into the Council, specifically those based around the Council’s Website and associated on-line transactions, the Council addresses access to broadband issues which exist not only in rural areas but in some urban communities, making it difficult for customers to go online and use these access channels.

## Section 3 – Customer Relationship Management

83. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays an ever increasing role in people's lives at work, at home and in the way that services are accessed and delivered. Durham County Council's ICT strategy details the Council's ongoing commitment continue to deliver better life chances and improved services for the people of Durham.
84. The strategy identifies how ICT will support the Council's Customer First strategy against a backdrop of:-
- a greater and increasing demand from our customers for faster service delivery across longer opening hours and from many locations;
  - An introduction in the market of new technologies and a growth in new ways of communication such as social media, digital television and video on demand that heighten user expectations;
  - A move to greater self-service;
  - The need to demonstrate value for money, and provide Council services and more effective technology for less.
85. The Strategy also sets out proposals to support the Council's approach to serving its customers using technology where appropriate, by reviewing use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software.
86. Members of the task and finish group received a presentation and a demonstration of the Council's current CRM system which is used to record information on interactions with customers from their contact with Customer Services. The group also noted that currently many interactions between the public and council staff do not involve the customer services team and are not managed through the CRM system.
87. The demonstration covered the various functions used by Customer Services namely:
- Capturing details regarding a customer contact received via a call, visit, web form or e mail
  - Logging an issue
  - Booking requests
  - Making a payment
  - Identifying locations using GIS and drawing on information regarding service provision in an area via My Durham
  - Links to the Street Lighting system "edofis" in order to process a reported street lighting issue.
88. Whilst acknowledging the functionality of the existing system, it was noted that not all property records were contained within the CRM

system and that there is no direct mechanism to link the CRM system to other databases such as the Electoral Register.

89. Furthermore, only the details of those customers who had transacted with the Council were captured by the CRM system and that was predominantly achieved by Customer services staff manually logging details of customers when dealing with service requests. Accordingly, there is little by way of automation built in to the CRM system either for logging customer details or passing service requests directly to service departments and front-line staff. This lack of functionality has led to delays in addressing customer service requests due to the need for customer services staff to undertake such tasks manually via the Council's e-mail infrastructure. It also follows that where customer services staff are undertaking this role then that customer service resource available to deal with face to face and telephone queries is diminished.

### **Review of CRM provision**

90. The Council is currently reviewing its CRM provision to enable the Council to improve and increase the variety of ways in which a customer can contact the Council, improve process efficiencies and customer experience in engaging with the Council. The CRM system will store customer information and feedback which will assist the Council in shaping future service improvement and service delivery.
91. A mapping system in relation to the current ICT infrastructure is being completed to ensure that the Council's systems architecture supports the future delivery of services.
92. Following the review, a series of recommendations have been proposed including the establishment of a CRM owners group; a CRM system replacement roadmap; the alignment of CRM to the customer first strategy and the development of a business case for CRM replacement.
93. As part of ongoing development work, the owners group has considered the strategic objectives for the Council in respect of its CRM provision and examined how an improved CRM infrastructure could address existing shortcomings that have been identified in respect of:-
- Efficient and effective access channels;
  - Responsive and customer focused services;
  - Treating people fairly and respecting differences;
  - Creating channel shift;
  - Creating greater use of customer insight to influence and improve service design, provision and feedback;
  - Harmonising services and processes across the Council, and
  - Delivering value for money.

94. Work is progressing in respect of the development of a bespoke specification for a replacement CRM system which will deliver against the identified objectives. Thereafter, the procurement of a replacement system will be prioritised.

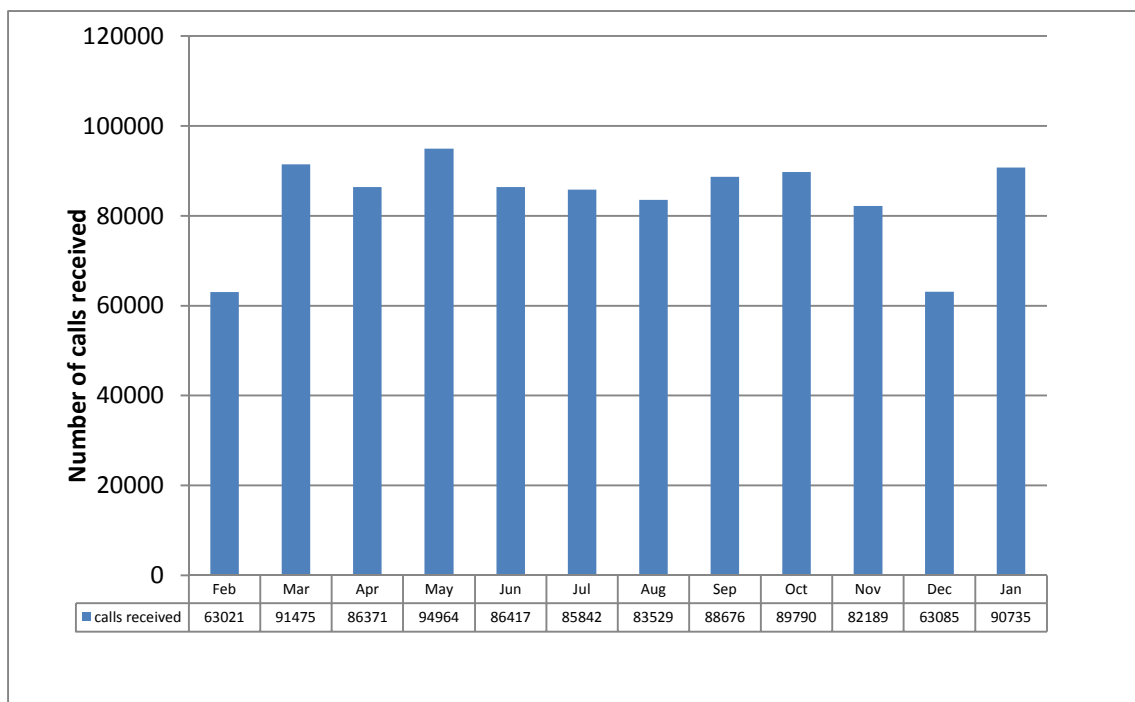
## Section 4 – Access Channels

95. In line with the 'whole council approach' to Customer Services, the refreshed Customer First Strategy seeks to broaden accessibility to information and increase the online capability to transact with the council. This approach ensures the best use of existing resources and buildings to provide a network of service access points which is instantly recognisable through a single branding, provisionally entitled "Information Durham".
96. The Customer First Strategy is clear, concise and linked to the wider priorities of the Council. Delivery of the Strategy will result in changes both internally in relation to integration of services and enabling "channel shift" so that customers who are able and want to access services through digital means at a time and location convenient to them.
97. The refreshed strategy recognises that whilst the Council remains committed to placing customers at the heart of everything we do, the means of delivering this must adapt to the changing financial circumstances and to the needs of those customers who prefer to deal with the council by other means using technology such as through the website.
98. One of the key mechanisms for delivering these objectives is channel shift; with movement of customer contact away from expensive channels and towards cheaper channels wherever possible. Face to face remains the most expensive way of dealing with customer enquiries, with benchmarked SOCITM figures of £8.62 per transaction against £2.83 for telephone transaction and £0.15 per web transaction.
99. The current strategic position is therefore in transition, balancing out the agreed accommodation strategy, the need to deliver immediate savings, and the developing strategy of channel shift to provide a low cost, sustainable service in the longer term.
100. The Working Group examined various access channels used by customers to do business with the Council in terms of:-
  - Demand – levels of customer interaction across the various access channels;
  - Functionality – how effective is each access channel;
  - Costs – What is the most cost effective access channel provided by the Council;
  - Resourcing – what resources does the Council invest in the access channels in terms of ICT and staff resources.
101. The five access channels examined were:-

- Telephones;
- Face to Face contact
- E-mail
- Website
- Social Media.

## Telephones

102. Each year the Council answers more than 1,000,000 telephone enquiries and deal with more than 270,000 face to face enquiries in our customer access points. Telephone is the preferred method of contact for our customers.
103. During the period February 2013 to January 2014, the total telephone calls received into the Council via a “contact centre” exceeded 1,000,000 and included calls received by Council Tax Billing, Housing and Council Tax Benefits, Revs & Bens Hotline, General Enquiries, Streetscene Services, Highways, Durham City Homes, Switchboard, Social Care Direct, Council Tax Recovery, NNDR, Visit County Durham, Integrated Transport Unit, Property Helpdesk and the Gala Theatre.



104. The complexity and diversity of the telephone contact numbers available to customers is reflected in the fact that the Council currently advertises 1080 numbers including 682 for Council services, of which 568 are unique.
105. A range of configurations are in place to handle telephony contact including:-

- An Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) contact centre
  - A Non-ACD contact centre
  - Single line phones to a specialist for certain services
  - A variety of building reception desks such as libraries, leisure centres, sure start centres.
106. An ACD call centre responds to a caller with a voice menu and connects the call to appropriate Customer services staff. It also distributes calls equally to staff. This system also allows for an updated position in the queue to be identified and provided in a message to the caller.
107. The ACD system enables calls to be routed through to the correct Customer services staff with the skills available to deal with that particular service/customer enquiry.
108. Services handled through the ACD centre include Care Connect; Customer services; Initial Response team, property helpdesk and social care direct.
109. Non- ACD services include Planning, school admissions and transport, registrars services and welfare rights.
110. In view of the complexities of the current system, it is essential that the Council takes steps to make it easier for customers to contact us with work ongoing to rationalise the telephony system.
111. 77% of calls made to the Council initially are handled in an ACD contact centre and since May 2013 the Council reports all ACD contact centre data.
112. A previous scrutiny light touch review of telephony undertaken in 2012 following member concerns at below target performance in respect of telephone call answering, identified the importance of managing demand for telephony service and dealing with anticipated spikes in demand associated with service activity.
113. As part of the council tax billing and council tax benefits notification process for 2013/14, service management put in place arrangements to manage the anticipated increase in customer demand for these services. These included:-
- 20 Revenues and benefits staff allocated to taking calls over a two week period;
  - No Customer services staff allowed to take annual leave during the billing period;
  - Additional hours offered to part time staff and extra staff taken on for a month to deal with streetscene, highways and Durham City Homes calls.

114. The rationale for these initiatives lay in the average number of calls taken rising from 550 per day to 1546 per day for council tax billing and from 370 per day to 1099 per day for benefits.
115. Whilst call demand over this period increased by 22%, 51% more calls were answered during the 2013/14 billing period than for the 2012/13 period.
116. To deal with ongoing demand for the telephony service and to ensure that staffing resources are at an optimum level, workforce management software is used in association with performance management information to map resources to demand. A variety of workforce initiatives including flexible employment contracts, rotas for lunchtime working when demand increases and annual leave monitoring all ensure that ongoing demand is managed.
117. Dealing with “avoidable contact” also requires significant time and resources that could otherwise be used to meet other work demands, or resources that simply wouldn’t be required at all, thus reducing costs. It also impacts negatively on the council’s reputation. It has been acknowledged that any customer contact made with the council as a result of the council either failing to provide at the correct time a service it is responsible for delivering, or sending correspondence that the customer cannot understand, is classified as “avoidable” i.e. the customer would not have had occasion to contact the council had we “got it right” the first time.
118. The Council could reduce avoidable contact by ensuring that all correspondence is easily understood by the Customer so that there is no need to telephone or attend a customer access point to clarify matters. Correspondence can also be redrafted to encourage customers to use other access channels which have a lower unit cost per transaction such as the Council’s website or e-mail to clarify matters. This would significantly reduce the level of resource required by the Council in terms of financial resources and would also enable staffing resources within the telephony system and CAPs to be used by those customers who need this type of contact.

### **Face to face contact – customer access points**

119. Agreed by Cabinet in November 2010, the Council’s Office Accommodation Strategy seeks to enhance the Council’s customer service provision and rationalise office accommodation.
120. The Office Accommodation Strategy identified locations from which Customer Access Points would either be developed or moved. These were based around areas of need and with facility design influenced by customers. The current Office Accommodation Strategy is an “invest to save” programme.



121. The Council currently operates nine Customer Access points in Barnard Castle; Bishop Auckland; Chester-le-Street; Consett; Crook; Durham (Clayport); Seaham; Spennymoor and Stanley as well as the Customer Service desk within County Hall Durham.
122. Between April 2013 and January 2014 almost 220,000 customers attended the CAPs as detailed below:-

Customer Access Point	No. of visitors	
	Jan 14	Apr 13 – Jan 14
Chester-le-Street	1,315	15,603
Consett	2,459	23,579
Stanley	1,945	17,164
Clayport	2,206	08,896
County Hall	3,362	27,273
Seaham	2,998	28,321
Old Bank Chambers	983	9,391
Crook	3,530	33,296
Teesdale	806	10,548
Spennymoor	3,311	32,207
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,915</b>	<b>218,278</b>

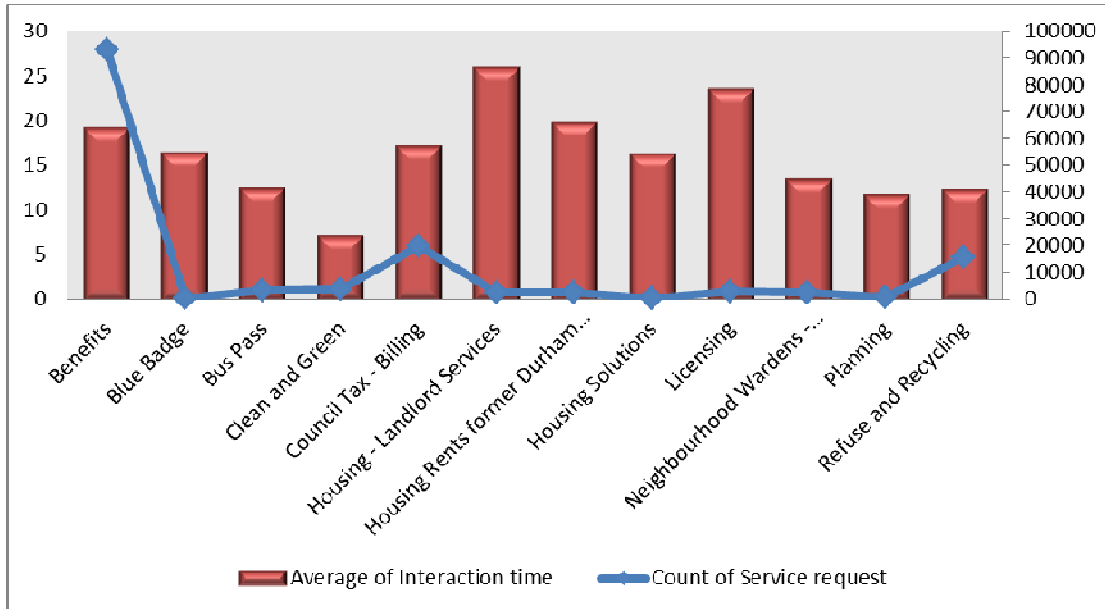
123. Although CAPs are primarily used to manage Customer Services interactions they also host / enable a number of other services.

Primary Customer Services functions	Signposting / other duties carried out by Customer Services staff	CAPs hosting services for
<b>Street scene services</b> e.g. Pest Control; Anti-Social behaviour (Neighbourhood Warden activities)	Libraries Cultural events (e.g. Lumiere tickets)	Housing Solutions Planning Welfare Rights (Crook)
<b>Direct Services</b> e.g. New bin orders, missed bin requests, special collections; Assist List	Reception duty for other services / buildings General help / advice	Blue badges Licensing Registrars
<b>Highways</b>		

<b>services</b> e.g. Pothole reporting, streetlighting faults; flooding issues		
<b>Benefits interactions</b> – processing Housing Benefit and Council Tax support scheme applications; recording changes in circumstances		
<b>Council Tax Billing</b> interactions		
<b>Licensing Pilot</b> (Consett)		
<b>Durham City Homes</b> – repairs; rents		
<b>Bus Passes</b>		

124. Demand for each of these services varies at each CAP although the most common non-signposting transaction at all CAPs is benefits enquiries, while other frequent transactions vary with location. It should be noted that almost all CAPs include a hosted service in their top 5 transactions such as housing solutions, planning or licensing.
125. The Office Accommodation strategy to expand and develop CAPs has been successful in increasing usage and meeting demand. Usage is currently increasing, with 55% more customer visits at CAPs in Q1 2013/14 when compared to Q1 2011/12. The majority of this demand comes from signposting activities and has been created as a direct result of the strategy to develop new and co-located facilities.
126. There is demand for faster, easier contact at a time and place that is convenient to the public. We need to meet this demand. We also need to ensure that we are providing access channels which give good value for money at a time when we have to reduce resources to achieve efficiencies. Also the Government's approach to 'Digital by Design', which aims to deliver public services online or by other digital means, will increasingly see public services being required to consider digital access as the first option. However, we must recognise that there are still groups of people who do not have access to the internet or have a need to access services via a traditional method.

127. Just as demand varies so does the interaction time. The table below shows the average interaction time for some of the most popular interview based transactions against the yearly demand for the service. This data only relates to interactions that require a customer service intervention and does not include signposting.



Note: Blue badges, housing solutions and planning are hosted services in the CAPs

128. It is estimated that 73% of all demand managed via CAPs currently requires a face to face interaction. The largest interaction type by volume of demand is benefits, where interviews take on average 19 minutes.

129. Face to face transactions are most commonly preferred by the customer, or required by the Council, for one or more of the following reasons:

- Council processes require that original documents be produced and witnessed.
- Council processes require that other validation is required on a face to face basis.
- Familiarity with staff and their understanding of individual cases.
- Assistance with forms is required due to literacy or comprehension needs.
- Processes rely on paper documents, for example some planning issues.

130. It can be determined from the demand and interaction information that CAPs provide a well-used service for the community and in some cases provide a vital method for customers to transact with the Council where face to face contact is required.

131. A report to Cabinet in January 2014 detailed the current position and future direction of travel in relation to providing face to face access to services through Customer Access Points (CAPs). The report presented options for consideration and proposed a way forward in the light of customer requirements and savings targets.
132. The Government's 2015/16 spending round and the finance settlement consultation published in the summer of 2013 identified a continuing deteriorating financial position for local government. The Council's most recent Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP4) has identified that the level of savings required in the period 2011 to 2017 has increased considerably to a figure of £222m.
133. Total revenue expenditure on Customer Services is approximately £4.06m, of which 50% is spent on CAPs.
134. Set against the backdrop of increasing financial pressures and the recognition that a managed process of channel shift for customer services could generate significant financial efficiencies, Cabinet agreed to revise the office accommodation strategy to achieve a reduction in revenue expenditure via the CAPs.
135. Under the proposals, Spennymoor, the most popular CAP, will remain open as a staffed face to face CAP. Newton Aycliffe, Bishop Auckland and Peterlee will offer a surgery based service. This would be provided from suitable locations and through working with other service providers.
136. This would result in all the areas identified in the Office Accommodation Strategy receiving a Customer Service offer, as detailed in the following table.

#### **Service provision agreed**

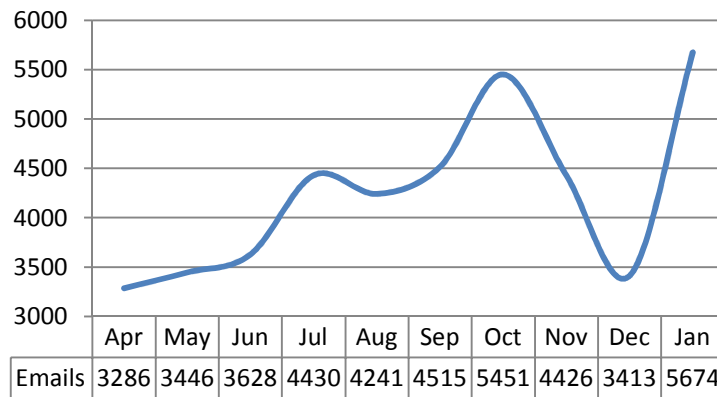
<b>CAP</b>	<b>CAP model</b>
<b>Barnard Castle</b>	Co-located CAP and Library
<b>Bishop Auckland</b>	Surgery
<b>Chester-le-Street</b>	Co-located CAP and housing provider
<b>Clayport</b>	Co-located CAP and Library
<b>Consett</b>	Dedicated CAP
<b>Crook</b>	Multi Use Centre
<b>Newton Aycliffe</b>	Surgery
<b>Peterlee</b>	Surgery
<b>Seaham</b>	Multi Use Centre
<b>Spennymoor</b>	CAP
<b>Stanhope</b>	DurhamTalk
<b>Stanley</b>	Co-located CAP and Library

137. In addition to CAPs identified above, information is available in a variety of Council owned properties, providing customers with signposting assistance. This new provision will be presented under a common 'Information Durham' branding alongside identified CAPs.
138. The development of the "Information Durham" customer service provision aims to ensure that Council service information is available across as many Council, community and partner facilities as possible such as One Point centres, libraries, sports and leisure facilities. This provision could range from remote IT/Web-based services, Freephone telephone provision and leaflet displays but will be instantly recognisable as a Council brand.
139. This will considerably increase access to services when compared prior to LGR. All of the areas identified in the Office Accommodation Strategy would still receive a service of some type, with a further enhancement upon implementation of the strategic direction of 'Information Durham'.
140. The Customer First Strategy has a direction of travel to deliver more efficient and effective access channels and more responsive customer focussed services. The refreshed strategy recognises that whilst the Council remains committed to placing customers at the heart of everything we do, the means of delivering this must adapt to the changing financial circumstances and to the needs of customers who prefer to deal with the council by other means using technology such as through the website.
141. One of the key mechanisms for delivering these objectives is channel shift; the movement of customer contact away from expensive channels and towards cheaper channels wherever possible. Face to face remains the most expensive way of dealing with customer enquiries, with benchmarked SOCITM figures of £8.62 per transaction against £2.83 for telephone transaction and £0.15 per web transaction.
142. The current strategic position is therefore in transition, balancing out the agreed accommodation strategy, the need to deliver immediate savings, and the developing strategy of channel shift to provide a low cost, sustainable service in the longer term.
143. In line with the 'whole council approach' to Customer Services the Customer First Strategy seeks to broaden accessibility to information and increase the online capability to transact with the Council, through the concept of 'Information Durham'
144. This approach will seek to maximise existing resources and buildings to provide a network of service access which is instantly recognisable. When implementing this approach clarity needs to be provided in relation to where key transactions will be offered, such as Benefits. By

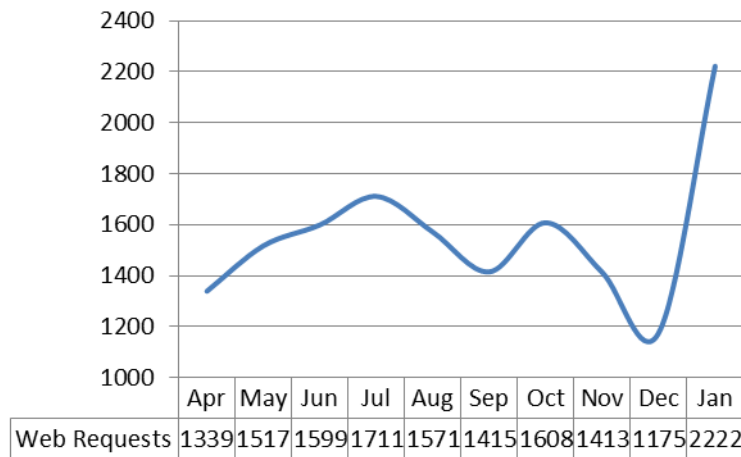
evolving this approach customers will have much greater access to services / information with little to no revenue budget implications.

### **E-enabled contact – Website and E-mail**

145. Work on developing the technology and management arrangements to deliver more effective channel shift through the enhancement of e-based methods of contact is on-going. Projects have been initiated to improve the website, develop the Civica e-billing / open access system and the 'proof of concept' for online booking and payment of a new bin request. By offering these alternative methods of accessing services it is anticipated that demand via traditional methods of contact will reduce.
146. Progress is being made on the development of an effective e-based offer, although this remains some way off until underlying ICT systems, including CRM and web platforms, suffering from historic underinvestment, are updated.
147. We know that our customers' expectations regarding the way they can access our services are changing; for example, one independent survey showed that 44% of our households use the internet to make payments, higher than nationally typical.
148. The refreshed strategy recognises that whilst the Council remains committed to placing customers at the heart of everything we do, the means of delivering this must adapt to the changing financial circumstances and to the needs of customers who prefer to deal with the council by other means using technology such as through the website.
149. Demand for accessing services digitally via e-mail and the web is increasing. Between January 2013 and January 2014, emails into the Customer services increased by 527% and web-form use by 164%.
150. Customers contacting the council for general enquiries can use the [help@durham.gov.uk](mailto:help@durham.gov.uk) e-mail address. A small dedicated team within the service deal with this contact within the agreed service standard of a response within 48 hours, although this is usually achieved within 24 hours. The graph below shows e-mail contact from April 2013 to January 2014.



151. Whilst the move to digital access by customers is encouraging, the use of e-mail as an access channel brings with it some inherent problems. This is largely due to the existing CRM/logging mechanism in that it generates a significant increase in demand upon Customer services staff to manually handle and deal with customer service requests via e-mail. It is considered that a far more effective way of accessing relevant services would be via an enhanced web-form offer/functionality via the Council's website.
152. Service requests are frequently made via the Council's website and on-line web-forms. The Council's existing website enables customers to:-
- Submit and sign e-petitions;
  - Respond to Council consultations making use of the Council's "Survey Monkey" account to create online forms for users to submit responses to consultation questions;
  - Make payments for certain services including buying a birth certificate, paying council tax and other general invoices;
  - Find a range of council facilities based upon their postcode using the "My Durham" web portal;
  - Use on line forms in respect of certain services to apply for services and report issues in respect services;
  - Renew and reserve library items via Library On-line.
153. The graph below shows the number of web requests generated from April 2013 to January 2014.



154. As part of the ongoing work to facilitate more effective channel shift through the enhancement of e-based methods of contact, an examination of the Council Website's new Content Management System (CMS) has been undertaken.
155. During 2013, Durham County Councils website had more than 3m web visits and more than 10m page views suggesting that there is an ongoing shift in the way in which some customers are choosing to do business with the Council.
156. The ongoing website improvement project addresses concerns around the website being dated and not fit for purpose. The Society of Information Technology Management 's (SOCITM) website rating system, which was an industry rating with a maximum of four stars, gives Durham's website a one star rating.
157. The new Content Management System is a complete redesign of the website which aims to make it easier for customers to use; improves the ability of the website to be internally managed and also makes it more suitable for mobile telephone and tablet usage.
158. The website was split into the following main sections;
- Residents
  - News and Events
  - Business
  - Council
159. To prevent users from being diverted to different sections, the website has been designed so that once a user enters a section, they are unable to divert to another, unless they return to the home page.
160. The new home page includes a slideshow of the five most popular pages, however it can be updated instantly with anything that the Council deems important for users to know, for example severe weather warnings or changes to council services.

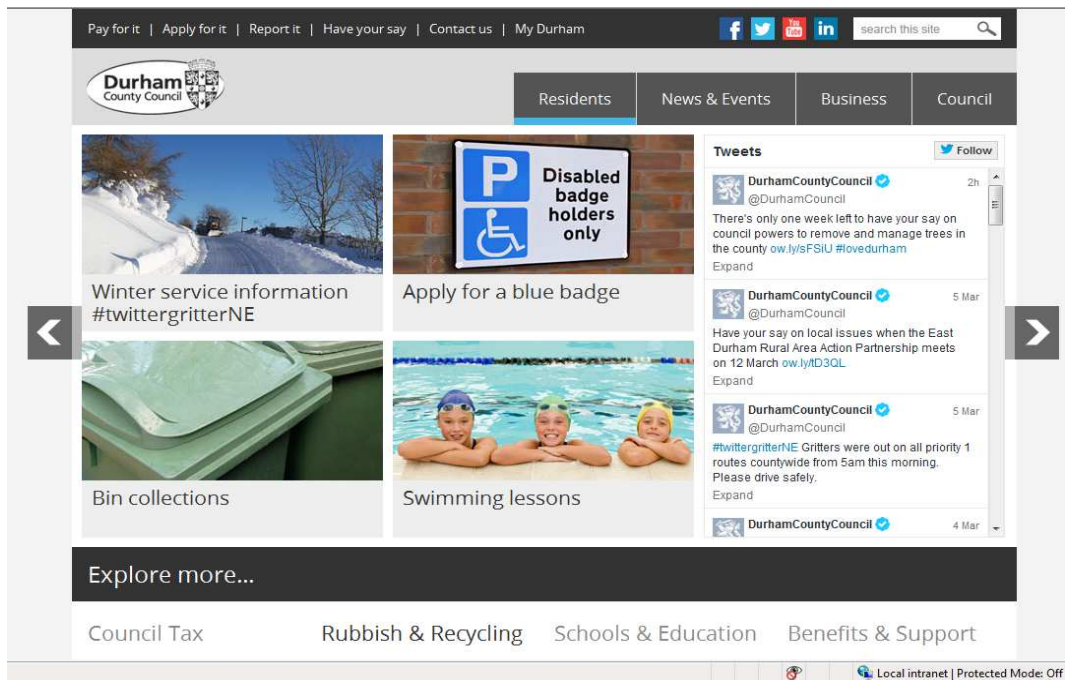


161. The content menu at the top of the home page directs users to the following main services;
- Pay for it
  - Apply for it
  - Report it
  - Have your say
  - Contact us
  - My Durham – a feature to direct people to their local area news, events, bin collections etc.
162. The webpages are designed to use large and medium sized icons designated by the most popular pages accessed. The icons are allocated depending on the number of visits to each page and this feature is automatically updated by the new Content Management System. There is also a new feature which links to relevant functions and gives users the option of a shortcut to specific information they might be looking for.
163. These links include report it, apply for it and contact us, which whilst an existing function of the previous website, will send web forms to the correct service and acknowledges them so that customers know that their query is being dealt with.
164. During a demonstration of the new Website, members of the working group have suggested that:-
- The Council notes Customer feedback which highlighted that the language used on the website should be easy for people to understand. By way of example, customers prefer words such as 'refuse' to be described as 'rubbish' and 'household waste recycling centres' to be referred to as 'tips';
  - Users should be able to undertake a postcode search for local area information, and whilst this is the purpose of the My Durham function, this might not always be clear to the customer and may be misinterpreted as being solely about Durham City or County Durham.
165. The success of the new website depends on a number of third party system projects, such as CRM development, ICON payments, mapping developments and projects specific to council tax, business rates portal and the planning application system. It clearly remains that the success of the Council's drive to shift Customer usage of access channels from Face to face and Telephony across to e-enabled services critically depends upon the successful implementation of the website improvement project alongside those others identified here.

166. Councillors retain some reservations with the move to e-enabled service delivery, as there are service users who would never be persuaded to access online facilities, particularly the elderly.
167. Members note however that, the website refresh is primarily aimed at making the system easier to navigate for all people who have access to the internet. It is envisaged that, in improving the functionality of the website, thus making it more attractive to customers who prefer doing their business on-line, this will free up telephone operators and customer access points, allowing them to dedicate more time to people who require essential telephone exchange or face-to-face contact.
168. Any such developments within the digital access channel provision must be set against the need to ensure that this demonstrates value for money and contributes to the principle of providing cost effective access channels.

## **Social Media**

169. The Council has experienced an increasing demand for information and services from customers via social media with over 16,000 people following the Council's corporate Facebook and twitter accounts. Staff within the Council's Corporate Communications team manage these accounts which are primarily used :-
  - To warn and inform the public – alerting residents to gritting, service disruptions, weather warnings, new jobs in the Council and forthcoming events;
  - As an appeal for help – used as a call to action with residents showing dynamic responses in sharing information and alerts thus broadening public awareness of issues;
  - To promote Council services – such as cultural offer via theatres, museums etc;
  - To provide real time information about major events - Lumiere, the Lindisfarne Gospels exhibition, the County Council elections for example. These events prove incredibly popular and result in a significant increase in social media followers;
  - To respond to those customers who use social media as a customer service channel – Unlike other access channels, social media responses are highly visible and as such whilst the Council has a series of link officers within services providing standard responses, a system is in place to ensure escalation to senior management where necessary and appropriate.



Digital customer services via DCC Website

170. The importance of social media contact lies in the need for quick responses that acknowledge that an issue has been reported and how the Council will address the issue and finally confirm what action has been taken. The speed of response to social media contact can turn complaints into compliments, for example:-



171. Social media is also unique because it is possible to provide pre-emptive customer service, particularly around large scale Council events. During Lumiere, the hashtag #lumieredurham was set up months in advance and included in all promotional material, allowing the Council to monitor people using the hashtag and answer their queries without them even contacting us.
172. The future for the use of social media as a key access channel for customers lies in the implementation of the revised Customer First strategy. Most social media is designed for two way conversations and

as such it is increasingly being used by customers as a contact channel for complaints, service requests, compliments and suggestions. It is essential that the current link officer system for social media is reviewed to adapt to the increase of social media as a customer service channel. Additionally, increasing integration of social media with existing customer service methods such as the CRM system and the Highways Action Line is a priority.

173. The Corporate news team is working with Customer services to pilot how the Council may develop social media into a customer services channel and how this can be made a realistic proposition.
174. The development of social media as an access channel for Customers comes with a necessary caveat that this again must demonstrate value for money and contributes to the principle of providing cost effective access channels

### **Digital Durham programme**

175. The Council's ability to facilitate customer service users' shift from face to face and telephony to web-based, e-mail and social media will largely be determined by the accessibility of broadband/internet infrastructure provision throughout the County.
176. The Council's Digital Durham programme is designed to provide superfast broadband to all businesses, homes and communities across the County.
177. Based on the outcome of the programme's procurement process and completion, 96% of premises in Durham will have access to a superfast broadband (in excess of 24 megabits per second mbps) while 98% will have access to a fibre broadband service (Next Generation Access NGA).
178. Services will be sustainable and provided by retail Internet Service Providers (BT, Sky, Talk Talk etc.) at the same rates that are provided across the country.
179. All remaining premises in the County will have access to a minimum service of 2mbps and the programme will continue to try and improve this service level.
180. The Programme is actively involved in digital inclusion and demand stimulation activities and is:
  - a. Working with BT to develop a programme of activities around individual cabinet deployment.
  - b. A Go On North East member.

- c. Providing digital inclusion training with Neighbourhood Services staff.
  - d. Working with Business Durham to look at a programme of work relating to business engagement and take up on business parks.
  - e. Working with town centre managers to investigate how digital access can regenerate our town centres.
181. Regarding the Cabinet deployment process, this was accompanied by a targeted leaflet campaign to promote the enhanced service and encourage both domestic and commercial sign-up to the service. This process allows for a percentage of the revenue generated to be paid back to the Council and made available for further investment into the scheme if a certain number of properties sign up to the fibre optic services.
182. One initiative examined that aimed to improve digital inclusion was “ Go ON NE”, a multi-agency board which included organisations such as Lloyds Bank, Argos, Talk Talk, BBC, Post Office and EE, working in partnership to improve digital skills. A 6 month campaign to boost the basic online skills of people, small business and charities in the North East, the initiative consisted of running events, providing access points or offering incentives. Funding was also made available to businesses as an incentive to train NEETs and work with local communities, and there was a small amount of funding available to Registered Social Landlords with regular meetings to improve and support them in improving digital skills in County Durham. In addition, Area Action Partnerships were being consulted to promote services and Digital Durham had commissioned a former mobile library to travel around localities and host roadshows.
183. In considering the problems that have been experienced in the more rural parts of County Durham regarding connectivity, some areas of County Durham are so remote that they do not have a telephone exchange to facilitate broadband access. In order to improve this, the Rural Community Broadband Fund, a joint fund with Tees Valley, has been allocated £1m to address such problems, across Teesdale and Weardale.
184. Reference has also been made to the BDUK Superfast Extension programme which has been allocated £250m to extend fibre coverage across the UK and from which £3.9m had been allocated to the whole programme area (Durham and parts of Tees Valley), although this had to be match funded.
185. Concerns have been identified regarding new housing developments not having access to telephone/internet infrastructures and residents having to wait considerable time before this became available. This was of particular concern where developments consisted of “family

homes” and which relied on internet access to help with children’s schoolwork and also for those people who worked from home or were self-employed. It has been suggested that such consideration should be given for new residential, economic regeneration and commercial developments.

### The economic case for encouraging channel shift

186. In examining access channels and how the Council manages demand across the various channels, it is evident that face-to-face contact is the most costly followed by telephone and E-mail/web based contact. It therefore follows that in order to reduce the cost to the Council of customer services across these access channels would require a degree of channel shift from face-to-face/telephony to web based contact.
187. Durham County Council access channel costs are benchmarked against those gathered by the Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) and the table below sets out comparator figures across the main access channels.

Channel	DCC Cost	SOCITM Cost
Face to Face (CSA)	£5.29	£8.62
Face to Face (CSO)	£8.70	
Telephone (CSA)	£1.08	£2.83
Telephone (CSO)	£3.30	
Telephone (BECS Claims)	£3.61	
Telephone (Switchboard)	£0.18	
E-mail (CSA)	£1.81	£0.15
E-mail (CSO)	£3.30	
Web (CSA)	£1.81	£0.15
Web (CSO)	£3.30	

188. The DCC costs are based upon the member of staff dealing with the customer contact be that Customer Services Assistant; Customer Service Officer, Benefits/CT officer or switchboard. The costs reflect the length of time taken to deal with an issue, the complexity of the customer contact/enquiry and the staffing salary costs across the various disciplines.
189. The costs evidence the higher unit cost of the more popular and frequently used face to face and telephony access channels in comparison to internet/web-based channels that experience less demand fall below the customers' expectations.
190. When examining the costs it is evident that face to face unit cost for DCC (£8.70 CSA) compare favourably with the SOCITM benchmark and other councils (£8.62).
191. The unit cost for telephony is higher for DCC than SOCITM (£2.83) when customer enquiries necessitate the involvement of a CSO (£3.30) or BECS Claim (£3.61) handler due to the more technical knowledge of the subject matter being required.
192. The Council's E-mail and Web transactions' unit costs (£3.30 CSO and £1.81 CSA) are considerably higher than the SOCITM Unit cost (£0.15) because of the need to double handle enquiries and the need for manual intervention because of the shortcomings within the Council's existing CRM system and the wide variances and number of IT systems through which such enquiries are received.
193. Encouraging customers to access services through digital channels would reduce costs to the Council when compared with face to face. However, not all services are geared up to be accessible through e-mail and the Website and the Council is working to ensure that customer expectations with regard to digital transactions and enquiries are met.
194. The challenge facing the Council is therefore one of :-
- Ensuring that more Council services are accessible to customers via the website;
  - Encouraging customers to access services through the less costly Web-based channels;
  - Eliminating the need to double handle enquiries and manually intervene in E-mail and Web-based by investing in a suitable CRM platform that supports effective customer service delivery in a more timely manner;
  - Reducing the unit cost of the Council 's E-mail and Web transactions;

- Ensuring that only those customers that need the face to face or direct telephone contact with a CSA, CSO or BECS Claim handler use this access channel.

### Customer contact – changes in channel shift

195. An analysis of the use of access channels by customers has identified that this is shifting and that this can be facilitated by:-

- Reducing customer reliance on telephone enquiries;
- Reducing the need for customers to have face to face contact with the Council;
- Increasing and encouraging digital contact;
- Utilising online payments systems across Council services;
- Developing mobile solutions, and
- Combining access channels to facilitate the provision of a 24/7 customer service.

196. The Council has experienced significant access channel shift from 2011/12 to 2013-14 without systematically changing its focus corporately on how services are being offered to customers and how customers can do business with the Council.

Contact Channel	2011-12	2013-14
By Telephone	69%	34%
In Person	12%	9%
Website	3%	51%
E-mail	1%	2%
Auto Payment by Telephone	3%	2%
Payments via Website	12%	2%

197. Based upon existing service processes and projected channel shift, the Council could assume savings in the region of £800k by changing attitudes towards customer contact and improving and streamlining Customer service processes.

198. These savings could be increased by developing and implementing an assisted digital strategy which supported the delivery of the Customer First Strategy. This strategy should include an improved CRM system alongside an enhanced Council website which incorporates enhanced Web-based customer service functionality.

199. By encouraging customer service access via digital channels, this would also reduce the demand placed upon face to face and telephone



access and allow greater utilisation of Customer services staff within these access channels for those customers who require this enhanced degree of support and personal contact.

## Section 5 – Service Standards

200. The refreshed Customer First strategy identifies that the Council needs “to be clear about what standards of service customers can expect to receive from our staff when contacting the council.” In doing so the Council will “monitor our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of service and use this to make improvements where we can.”
201. The Customer First Strategy refresh includes the customer service standards and it aims to ensure that the council has a set of challenging standards within the resource capacity we have for all of our main services and that we successfully deliver against these standards.
202. There were a number of issues identified with the current service standards, the key ones being :-
- They only cover a limited number of council services and there are large parts of the council not reflected in the standards. A number of services have their own customer services standards.
  - They cover a limited number of access channels (telephone and face to face contact) with none for e-mail, letters or web-form or social media.
  - They concentrate on speed of response and do not reflect quality of response or customer satisfaction.
  - Since the standards were developed, the customer services function has taken responsibility for first line contact for revenues and benefits enquiries.
  - Public services including local authorities are facing unprecedented spending cuts. There is a drive for more efficient services and doing more with the same or less.
203. The Institute of Customer Services states that service standards are important for customers, potential customers, employees and management of a business. They help to define what a customer can expect and to remind management and employees of the challenge and obligations that they face.
204. Service standards have been defined as “a given level of desired performance or minimum level of acceptable performance status to be achieved or maintained” and “a public commitment to a measurable level of performance that clients can expect under normal circumstances”.

205. Research undertaken by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the Public services Trust and detailed within a report published entitled “What do people want, need and expect from public services?”, identified five key areas of importance for the public, namely:-

- The meaning of fairness, uniform standards, outcomes and help for those in legitimate need;
- Customer service standards;
- Local control,
- Accountability;
- Personalisation and choice.

206. This research suggests that people’s expectations of public service standards are often shaped by their experiences of customer service in the private sector, particularly in respect of quick response times, convenient ways of accessing services and higher service standards from private companies.

207. Five key factors were identified which drive customers’ satisfaction with public services: delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. The following model identifies the relative relationship/importance between these drivers and the main elements within each.

Quantitative  
Qualitative

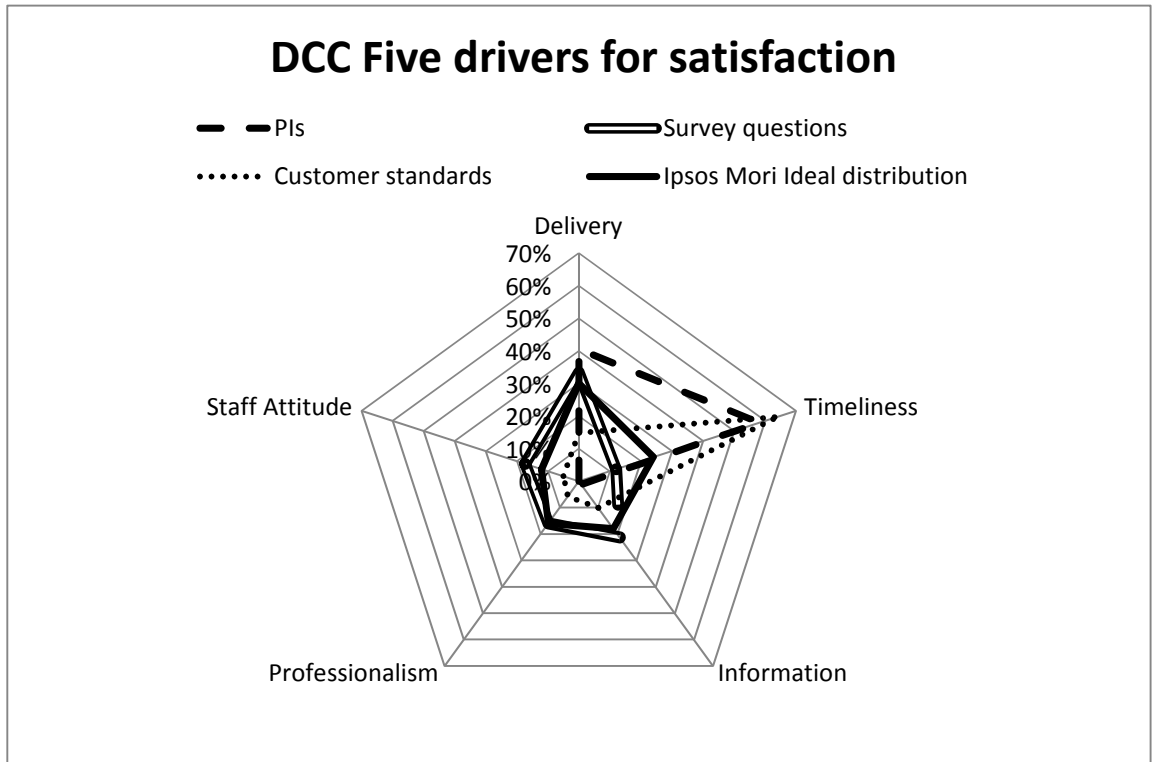
<b>DRIVER</b>	<b>MAIN ELEMENTS</b>	<b>IMPORTANCE (%)</b>
<b>DELIVERY</b>	The final outcome The way the service kept its promise The way the service handled any problems	30%
<b>TIMELINESS</b>	Initial wait How long it takes overall No. of times had to contact service	24%
<b>INFORMATION</b>	Accuracy Comprehensiveness Being kept informed about progress	18%
<b>PROFESSIONALISM</b>	Competent staff Being treated fairly Reliability	16%
<b>STAFF ATTITUDE</b>	Polite and friendly staff How sympathetic staff were to your needs	12%

208. The drivers can be assessed as either quantitative or qualitative and the development of robust service standards within each will depend upon the relative mechanisms through which performance in each can be collected, analysed compared and assessed. In assessing customer satisfaction, the drivers were present when people were satisfied and absent when there was poor satisfaction.

209. The more quantitative drivers appear easier to measure and report than qualitative measures though they remain important to customers and so measures need to be developed and reported.

### **Customer standards**

210. The Council has initiated work to develop customer standards across all communication mediums (letters, emails, faxes or postings to social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook), services and also standard types (timeliness around initial contact; timeliness related to processes -benefits, highways repairs; Avoidable contact; service delivery, professionalism and staff attitude).
211. Based upon the key drivers of customer satisfaction identified by Ipsos Mori, the work has analysed the existing tools available to the Council to monitor customer satisfaction, namely Performance Indicators, Customer satisfaction Surveys and customer service standards.
212. In relation to the customer standards, three main areas where there are gaps are 'Information', 'Professionalism' and 'Staff attitude'. There are no quantitative service standards within the council for these and a small number of qualitative service standards (19, 11, 10) and a large proportion of these are not currently measured or monitored. The majority (121 or 64%) of our service standards relate to timeliness and are mostly quantitative. These are mainly around how quickly we answer telephones and correspondence, waiting times and assessment timescales. There are also a number of ones which could also be included in the delivery section around timescales for pest control and new bin delivery. 15% of the service standards related to delivery but they do not cover all services.
213. As the following table shows, some of the five drivers of customer satisfaction underpin a significant number of PIs, survey questions and customer standards, while other drivers are much less evident. Timeliness is well covered, as is delivery. 'Information' is much less well covered and professionalism and staff attitude have only slight coverage in the survey questions and customer standards, and are not reflected in the PIs. This indicates that our performance management framework needs to be amended to take more account of the five drivers. In particular, in order to get more balanced distribution of the five drivers to customer satisfaction, our standards, PIs and surveys should include reflect more of the 'information', 'professionalism' and 'staff attitude' drivers.



Services	Delivery	Timeliness	Information	Professionalism	Staff Attitude	Total
Mori ideal distribution	30%	24%	18%	16%	12%	100%
PIs	41% (32)	58% (46)	1%(1)	0% (0)	0%(0)	100% (79)
Survey questions	33% (25)	12% (9)	21% (16)	16% (12)	17% (13)	100% (75)
Customer standards	15% (28)	64% (121)	10% (19)	6% (11)	5% (10)	100% (189)
3 tools overall	25% (85)	51% (176)	10%(36)	7% (23)	7% (23)	100%(343)

214. Delivery, timeliness and to a certain extent, information, are measurable and are reflected in our performance indicators and standards. The customer perception of information, professionalism and staff attitude should be monitored through surveys and mystery shopping. Looking at all three tools used across the council shows that most of our effort is directed at determining timeliness performance.
215. One way to get closer to the Ipsos Mori's ideal distribution for five customer satisfaction drivers is to conduct regular satisfaction surveys in relation to customer services across the authority in order to improve our insight of customer perception of all five drivers but in particular, those qualitative aspects of service delivery.

## **Development of new service standards**

216. The development of new service standards across the five drivers for customer satisfaction also requires the establishment of performance measures across these standards.

217. Key principles for these service standards include:-

- A measureable time-based service standard is required for all of the Council's main access channels (telephone, face to face, letter, e-mail/web-form, social media) to ensure customers are aware of the timescale in which they can expect a response;
- Any service standard/performance measure for telephone calls should apply to all publicised telephone numbers;
- For face to face contact, service standards should measure the actual time a customer has waited to be seen by a CSO in a CAP;
- Optimum service performance would identify a standard that aims to resolve customer queries at the first point of contact;
- Performance standards should be established to measure the quality of the service received by the Customers – this can be achieved by utilising customer service feedback surveys;
- Performance Indicators monitored via the corporate performance reporting process should be supplemented by an agreed basket of local indicators;
- An agreed mechanism for utilising feedback received from customer standard/performance monitoring should be evident which demonstrates how customer learning is contributing to service improvement.

218. Upon completion of the ongoing customer standards work, the Council should consider how these standards and performance measures are consulted upon both internally with service groupings and elected members but also importantly with customers themselves.

## **Customer First Training**

219. The working group examined the extent to which Customer services training was provided across the Council's workforce and how this was used to reinforce the need for the development of customer standards and the monitoring of performance across these standards.

220. The Council offers a corporate Customer First Training course for all relevant staff and it is a mandatory training requirement for Customer

Services Advisors and Customer Services Officers. Its aim is to develop positive customer relationships, provide an excellent service and review opportunities for continuous improvement.

- 221. As part of the ongoing customer standards activity, an analysis has been undertaken to determine how the training delivers against the five key drivers for customer satisfaction and the results show that the training is primarily relevant to staff attitude, professionalism and information.
- 222. Staff attitude is dealt with in the training module by addressing how polite and friendly officers are to customers and how they listen and understand their needs. All of the areas of training are applicable to this from body language to telephone etiquette and dealing with difficult customers.
- 223. Professionalism relates to how reliable and competent staff are in doing their job and again the majority of areas in the training module are relevant to professionalism.
- 224. There are slightly fewer areas that relate to information and these are mainly around good communication skills, handling complaints and telephone/e-mail etiquette.
- 225. Timeliness is referenced in the e-mail and telephone etiquette element of the training.
- 226. In terms of delivery i.e. the final outcome the training does not appear to be directed at this area as it is mainly focussed on the initial contact. The table below highlights the key areas of training and relevance to the five drivers.

	<b>Del.</b>	<b>Time.</b>	<b>Info.</b>	<b>Prof.</b>	<b>Staff Att.</b>
Body language					✓
Good communications skills – empathy					✓
Good communication skills - courtesy					✓
Good communication skills - speak clearly					✓
Good communication skills - Good communication	✓		✓	✓	✓
Telephone etiquette		✓	✓	✓	✓

	Del.	Time.	Info.	Prof.	Staff Att.
E-mail etiquette		✓	✓	✓	✓
Dealing with Difficult customers				✓	✓
Handling customer complaints	✓		✓	✓	✓
Irate customers				✓	✓
Listening skills				✓	✓
Create the right first impression:				✓	✓
The Customer Interaction			✓	✓	✓

227. In supporting the development of systematic customer service training across all Council staff, including front line service staff, the task and finish group are keen that this also be offered to all Councillors.

### **Mystery shopping**

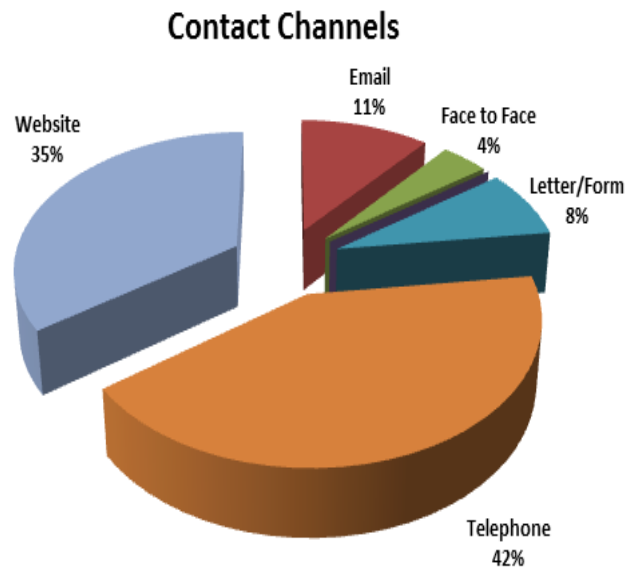
228. Mystery shopping is a tool used to measure the performance of a service or organisation and gain an insight into the customer experience. It generally involves independent representatives contacting the relevant organisation seeking information or answers as if they were genuine customers. The feedback from this experience would then be recorded (and sometimes scored) with a view to making changes in the organisation to improve the customer experience.
229. When considering the work being undertaken across the Council in respect of the refresh of the Customer first strategy, the development of service standards across all services and the use of customer feedback to shape future service delivery and improve performance /customer satisfaction, the task and finish group support the use of mystery shopping as an excellent mechanism to obtain some feedback on the 'qualitative' aspect of the customer experience and to use this information to implement service improvements to benefit customers of the council.
230. The development of a potential "mystery shopping" proposal is being examined as part of customer standards work and the group would support this initiative, including the involvement of Councillors within such activity.



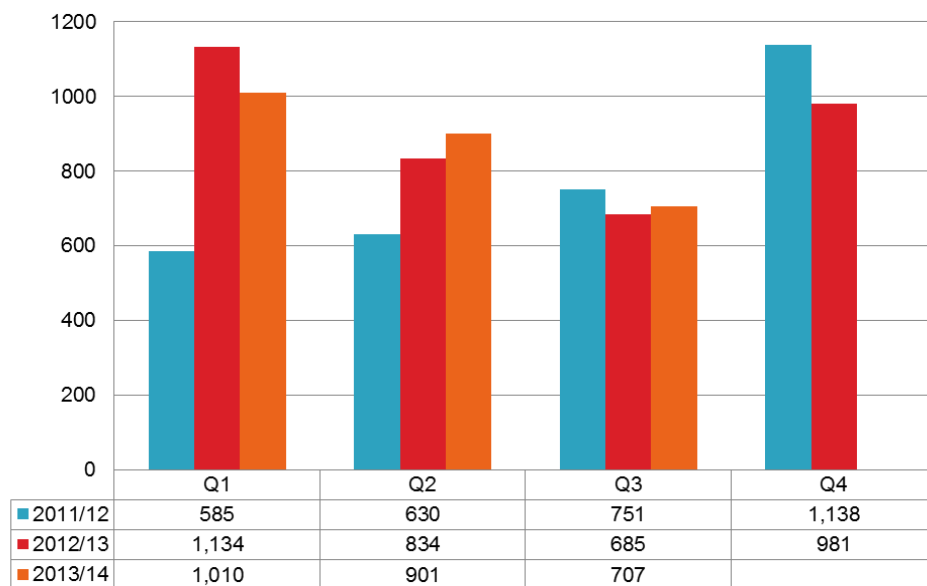
## Section 6 – Customer Learning

231. A key outcome within the Customer First Strategy is that “customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services”. In delivering against this outcome the Council is committed to:-
- Taking customer views into account when improving services;
  - Enabling customers to access their information securely online;
  - Using customer feedback to inform business planning;
  - Monitoring the equality impact of service changes and using that information for future service development;
  - Reviewing the way in which we deal with all customer feedback, including complaints, compliments and comments;
  - Telling customers when their feedback has been used to shape service provision through ‘you said, we did’ information.
232. The Council’s current corporate complaints policy defines a complaint as **“an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service or lack of action by the Council, its staff or contractors”**.
233. The corporate complaints procedures aim to:-
- recognise good service through the recording of compliments and acknowledge what the Council have done well;
  - drive the improvement of services we provide to customers by responding positively to comments, complaints and suggestions and, where appropriate, making changes to the way in which we deliver services;
  - promote a consistent approach to handling comments, complaints, compliments and suggestions that is easy for customers and staff to use.
234. In order to provide an open and accessible policy/procedure, a comment/complaint/compliment/suggestion can be received via any existing access channel e.g. verbally (face to face or telephone), written (letter, e-mail or on a pro-forma), web form etc.
235. As new access channels are developed and implemented customers will be able to log their comment /complaint / compliment / suggestion via these channels. As a result, in the future any employee should be able to record the necessary complaint details and pass them on to the Complaints Officer in the relevant Service Area or to Customer Services.
236. Communication is important and therefore help should be provided for those customers whose first language is not English or who may have difficulty in expressing themselves through disability and this should comply with the Council’s equality and diversity policy/standards.

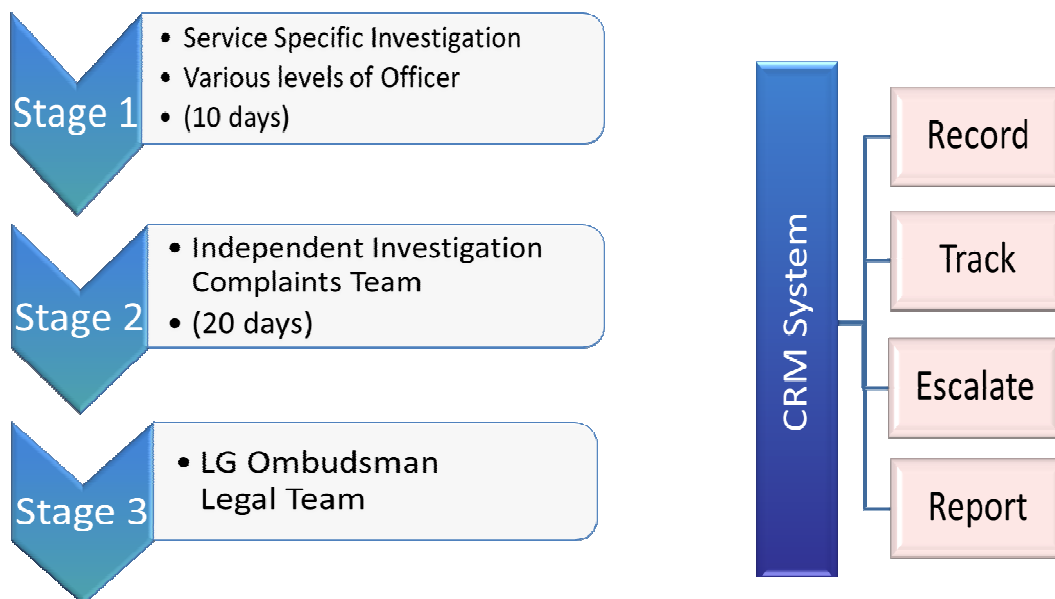
- 237. Members Support staff are trained to log complaints onto the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system on behalf of Members and will be responsible for communicating progress to the relevant Member/s. This team also deals with any complaints received from Members of Parliament.
- 238. Complaints received from Town and Parish Councils are handled via the same procedure as complaints from customers.
- 239. The current methods of receiving complaints via current access channels are:-



- 240. Since 2011, the number of complaints logged by the Council has increased. This can be seen in the following table.



- 241. The Council operates a 3 stage complaints process.



242. 98% of the complaints received into the Council in 2012/13 were resolved within stage 1 and 2 of the process without the need for escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman.
243. Within the complaints process, it is essential that the CRM system is fit for purpose and provides the appropriate functionality to support staff in recording, tracking, escalating and reporting upon all issues raised including complaints, compliments, requests for services and suggestions. The system should also do this instantaneously to enable all relevant officers to have access to the most up to date information regarding the status of the issue.
244. The reasons why the complaints have been made are:-

Administration	3%
Communication	4%
Council Policy	5%
Environmental Impact	2%
Planning	1%
Quality of Service	15%
Service Failure	61%
Speed of Delivery	2%
Staff Attitude	7%

245. To enable the Council to adopt a systematic approach across all services in responding to customer feedback, a customer experience model was developed in 2012.

246. The model uses feedback and information from service demand statistics, complaints, suggestions, compliments, the “customer journey” and survey results to produce a customer experience report. This report is considered at a customer experience meeting involving key stakeholders within the Council including customer services representatives and service groupings to ascertain key messages and findings which, in turn, are developed into an improvement programme of activity.
247. The Council has used the customer experience model to develop and introduce a number of service improvements such as:-
- New “repeat missed container” monitoring process, reducing repeat missed bin complaints.
  - New process for requests for sand bags, including through the website.
  - Agreed approach to manage enquiries and complaints in relation to the street lighting energy reduction project.
  - Updated staff training and guidance manuals for refuse and recycling.
  - Establishment of a missing address data process in the CRM to enable customer requests to be processed consistently whilst the address file is updated.
248. Members of the Working Group consider that officers should examine the most frequently occurring complaints received by elected members from their constituents as these may collectively identify service failures. A survey amongst members or a facility whereby this information is gathered on a regular basis is suggested.
249. Members are also mindful that where an increase in complaints around a particular service reflect an agreed change in council policy/service delivery methodology, this would be reduced by ensuring that any such changes are preceded by a robust and widespread communications plan to include leafleting/use of Durham County News.
250. Members referenced the Council’s revised Tree Management Policy as an example where proactive information sharing to residents alongside the emerging policy helped to ensure that the communities of County Durham were clear about the new policy.

## Section 7 – Site Visit to Sunderland City Council

251. A key requirement built into the terms of reference and methodology for the Review is the need to examine corporate customer standards in comparison to standards set in other local authorities/ organisations. The review has considered what good practice might look like and particularly what we can learn from others.
252. In 2011, Sunderland City Council embarked upon a process to develop a Customer Access Strategy which set out its plans to further develop and improve customer service across the council. To help develop the Strategy and understand people's experiences, expectations and preferences when contacting the council, the City Council undertook workshops and a survey during May to July 2011.
253. Key learning from the workshops and survey undertaken by Sunderland was used to inform its Customer Access Strategy. The Strategy includes a set of four principles which address aspects raised in the consultation, namely :-
- Accessibility - One size does not fit all - we will always respect customers' desire for choice in the way they prefer to access services so we don't exclude or unfairly disadvantage anybody;
  - Consistency - Regardless of how, when and where a customer contacts the council, the experience should always be the same - a person who wants to request the removal of litter, for example, should be told how and when their request will be fulfilled, be given the same information and be treated with the same respect regardless of whether they telephone, visit the council's web-site or visit a customer service centre;
  - High quality - Every service promise should be fulfilled - the way each contact is handled should be efficient but courteous, gather all the necessary information from the customer, and give all necessary information to the customer. Wherever possible, the customer's needs should be fulfilled at the first point of contact. All requests for service should be delivered on time and to expectation;
  - Value for Money - Every contact should provide value for money whilst not compromising any of the above principles.
254. The feedback from Customers has also been used to directly influence service provision across access channels, making them more effective, responsive and user friendly.
255. The development of the City Council's Customer Access strategy required a shift in organisational culture from the top down. The Chief Executive led the development of the strategy and ensured that strategic leadership from the Council's Executive management team

flowed through the Council's staffing structure, across all services and resulted in a corporate customer service and access ethos which was developed and nurtured. The change programme also received very strong political support from the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Responsive Services and Customer Care.

### **Telephone contact**

256. The key change implemented within Sunderland has been the rationalisation of Council telephone numbers to a much smaller set of numbers, each covering a grouping of services. These groupings are designed to help customers decide which number is the most appropriate for the service they require. Continuous monitoring of the usage of the numbers is undertaken to ensure they are meeting customer's needs
257. The use of automated telephone services where appropriate, similar to automated payments facilities are promoted. Such systems have been carefully designed to ensure excellent usability and address the feedback received in the consultation including the desire to always have the option of speaking to a 'real person'.
258. Text and email alerts have been introduced to those customers who wish to receive them to provide information such as e.g. school closures, changes to bin collection rounds, reminders of appointments.
259. The Council has also replaced background music when customers are queuing on the telephone with the provision of useful information about forthcoming events and Council services.

### **Improvements to the Sunderland City Council website**

260. A range of improvements to the Sunderland City Council's website have been implemented which included updating and improving content and making it easier to navigate and search for information.
261. It also included creating the facility to make online payments for services.
262. More online transactional services have been developed such as reporting graffiti, requesting a collection for large items and applying for a blue car badge. This process has also included the ability for customers to track services and receive updates. The security of these services is robust.

### **Customer service centres**

263. Sunderland City Council have reviewed their Customer service centre provision. The Council's Customer Contact Centre has relocated from Doxford Park into the Civic Centre Sunderland.

264. Face to Face customer services are available in a number of Customer Service Centres throughout the City. There are full time presences at Fawcett St, Southwick, Houghton, Highfield and Washington. Freephone access to services and appointment services offered at all points.
265. A hub and spoke approach has been adopted by the City Council with each area of the city having a well-recognised Customer Services community “hub,” complemented by “spokes” of offerings in additional council / partner locations.
266. Key principles adopted in respect of contact at Customer service centres include:
- The availability of both drop in and appointment based services;
  - Customers’ desire for confidentiality and privacy will always be respected;
  - Staff will wear appropriate uniforms and name badges, and offer a courteous, professional service at all times
  - Telephones are available for customers to speak, free of charge, to specialists within services where such assistance is required;
  - Computing facilities are available to allow customers to access services via the City Council’s website and staff will offer assistance and encouragement to customers who are willing to use them.
267. The City Council has adopted a “service pyramid “model for customer service enquiries which empowers Customer services staff to deal with queries at the first point of contact. This means that customers are only dealing with professional staff for those parts of the customer journey where it is essential and that service specific expertise is required.

### **Keeping a record of interactions and sharing information**

268. During 2011 Sunderland City Council launched the ‘Tell Us Once’ Birth and Bereavement services. This means that when you register a birth or death of a loved one, upon request this information can be shared across council and government departments on your behalf. Customers are always asked if they want to take-up this service and customer services will only share information if the service is taken up.
269. A Customer Contact System has been introduced which manages the way the Council delivers services and allows it to record, track and monitor requests for services. The system also allows the delivery of several council services during one interaction, for example, a customer moving house may want to register for Council Tax and on the Electoral Roll and find out about their bin collection days and local leisure facilities.

## **Promoting how to access services**

270. Following customer feedback the City Council updated its 'contact us' web pages and some of our leaflets and information. They also included a 'contact us' section in the City Council's Community News publication which goes to every household. This includes details of direct telephone numbers for council services and local Customer Service Centres.

## **Grouping council services**

271. Customer feedback and engagement highlighted the need for the City Council to reduce the number of telephone numbers available through which to contact the council. Customers also raised concerns about not knowing who to contact and difficulties in getting through to the right department.
272. The following service groupings were agreed and descriptors/examples of services within the groupings included within customer service information to assist customers identify which number to call.

### **City and neighbourhood - Telephone: 0191 520 5550**

Help with enquiries such as waste and recycling, parks, highways, parking, licensing, pest control, community safety, elections and visitor information.

### **Home and money - Telephone: 0191 520 5551**

Help with enquiries such as council tax, housing and housing advice, planning and building control, and welfare rights advice.

### **Health and wellbeing - Telephone: 0191 520 5552**

Help with enquiries such as social care and concern for welfare, disabled parking badges, concessionary travel passes, and sport and leisure.

### **Life, family and learning - Telephone: 0191 520 5553**

Help with enquiries such as education, families' information, fostering and adoption, youth services, births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and libraries.

### **Business services - Telephone: 0191 520 5554**

Help with business enquiries such as business rates, business investment and business advice.



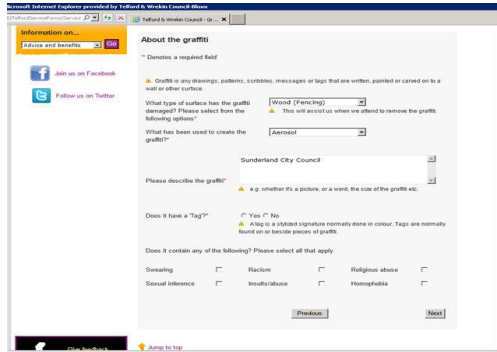
## **Council switchboard - Telephone: 0191 520 5555**

Use the switchboard if you know the name of the person you wish to speak to.

### **Enhanced customer services via digital channels**

273. As part of the customer engagement process during the development of the City Council's Customer Access strategy, 80% of survey respondents indicated that they use the internet and 75% had used the council's website within the last year, mainly to find information.
274. Two thirds of survey respondents considered easy navigation and good search facilities to be among the most important features of the Council's website.
275. In examining the potential take up of customer services via digital channels, it was established that 9 out of 10 adults in Sunderland have a mobile phone and internet usage rates within the city Council's area was 28% compared to just 18% nationally. It was therefore evident that there existed an identifiable customer base via these channels utilising mobile/smart phones, mobile tablets and PCs.
276. An overarching digital strategy has been developed by Sunderland City Council's communications team which:-
- Makes all service information and guidance available via [www.sunderland.gov.uk](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk)
  - Designed transactional services that are easy to use, reliable and provide reassurance to customers in respect of security and what response they can expect;
  - Explored the use of mobile applications and digital TV (although the latter has proven to be little used by customers).

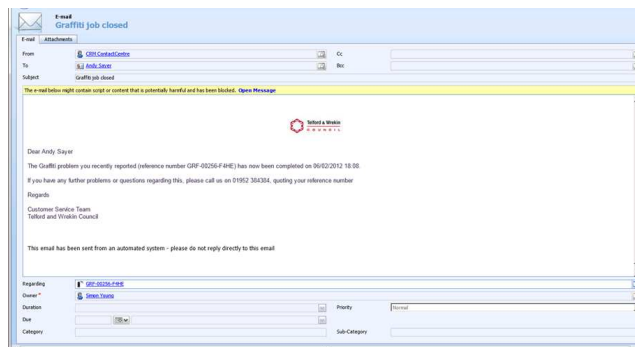
### **How it works**



Customer logs service request via Website



Service request received by operatives



Recognition for action, job completed...customer receives thanks and notification via email.

277. The City Council has also introduced SMS services for Customers who have requested information or services via their smartphone, tablet or where a mobile telephone number has been provided by them. Examples include:-

“Sunderland City Council - thank you for requesting a special collection for Friday 16th March. Please do not forget to place your mattress at the usual collection point before 8am”

“Sunderland City Council – thank you for contacting us, your appointment with Jane Smith, Social Worker will take place on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March at 2.00pm”

278. In adopting these approaches, the City Council has ensured that it is addressing the principles identified by the Customers that by fostering this idea of the customer promise, the Council gives the customer at the end of every encounter a specific undertaking about what will happen next and gives a timescale.

## Section 8 – Conclusions and Recommendations

279. The Council's Customer First strategy has been updated to reflect those key messages received as part of the consultation including improving ease of contact for customers and getting it right first time. The strategy commits to improving clarity for customers on how they can expect services to be delivered and to be kept informed of progress. Choice of access channels is reflected in the strategy together with ensuring that a "personal touch" approach is adopted and on-line payment facilities are easier and secure.
280. A number of key projects are being driven within the Council by the Customer First board and which are deemed to be business critical to the Council in delivering against the refreshed Customer First Strategy.
281. The ongoing project work in developing and improving key ICT infrastructures including the delivery of a fit for purpose Customer Relationship Management system as well as an improved website with excellent functionality across all services will deliver significant potential improvements across services. This will contribute to the stated aims of:-
- Providing a range of effective and easy to use ways in which our customers can deal with us;
  - Delivering responsive and customer focussed services, and
  - Ensuring that customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services.
282. These projects will also shape the considerable work being undertaken to develop a suite of customer standards and associated performance measures across all services through which the Council will learn from customer experience and utilise this feedback to further improve service delivery.
283. The proactive decisions by the Council to build on the existing channel shift being demonstrated by customers in doing business with the Council, utilising digital/e-enabled service delivery at a lower unit cost to the Council will continue to contribute to the Council's drive for greater efficiencies against continued funding pressure for Central Government.
284. These efficiencies will be further enhanced through the implementation the previously agreed Office Accommodation strategy in respect of Customer Access Point development and the introduction of an enhanced "Information Durham" service provision and branding.

## Recommendations

285. Consideration of the review's findings has led the task and finish group to make the following recommendations:-

- (i) That Cabinet consider as part of the implementation of the refreshed Customer First Strategy, that Customer services training be provided across all Council services as part of the Corporate Training programme, such training to be prioritised to cover all customer facing service provision and also to be offered to all Councillors.
- (ii) That the Cabinet monitor the implementation and benefits of the new CRM system currently being procured in supporting the delivery of the Customer First Strategy;
- (iii) That Cabinet seeks to ensure that the provision of broadband/digital service connectivity in respect of new residential, business and commercial developments is encouraged;
- (iv) That the Cabinet ensures that a focussed and structured plan for the delivery of the customer first strategy is in place which provides clarity on how those business critical projects identified within this report will be delivered including proposed timelines and delivery milestones;
- (v) That Cabinet supports the rationalisation of the Council's telephone numbers that are promoted and advertised to a small series of golden numbers that are easily recognised and accessible by customers;
- (vi) That the Cabinet recognises the need for Customer Access Point provision to be supported by the emerging "Information Durham" service provision that is suitably branded, easily identifiable and delivered through as wide a network of facilities and locations as possible, including partner organisations, community facilities and third sector organisations with robust support from the Council's ICT service;
- (vii) That the Cabinet supports the ongoing development work on the Council's website and that all services commit to provide enhanced service information which will reduce avoidable contact and promote online transactions as part of a structured plan to promote channel shift;
- (viii) That the Cabinet supports the work of Customer services and the Corporate news team to review social media as a customer services channel and to pilot ideas on how this could work;

- (ix) That the Cabinet supports the ongoing project work to develop services standards and associated performance management arrangements across all services and, upon completion of this work, all stakeholders including the public, council staff and Councillors will be engaged upon the proposed services standards;
- (x) That the Council support the development of mystery shopping for use as part of service standard performance management arrangements and that any such proposal include the input/involvement of Councillors.

286. It is further recommended that a systematic review of the report and progress made against recommendations should be undertaken after consideration of this report by Cabinet, within six months.

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**Special Corporate Issues Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee**

**17 October 2014**

**Customer Feedback: Complaints,  
Compliments and Suggestions  
Quarter 1 Report 2014/15**



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**Report of Terry Collins, Corporate Director for Neighbourhood  
Services**

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**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To present to Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CIOSC) the Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Quarter 1 Report 2014/15 (full report attached at Appendix 2).

**Background**

- 2 The report in relation to the council's performance and key issues regarding complaints, compliments and suggestions is aligned to the performance reporting mechanisms, so the implications of this customer feedback can inform scrutiny of council performance.

**Quarter 1 Report 2014/15**

- 3 The full report at Appendix 2 provides details for each service grouping in relation to both statutory and non-statutory complaints compliments and suggestions received in Quarter 1 2014/15.

**Recommendation**

- 4 Members are asked to note the information in the report.

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**Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance – N/A**

**Staffing – N/A**

**Risk – N/A**

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – N/A**

**Accommodation – N/A**

**Crime and Disorder – N/A**

**Human Rights – N/A**

**Consultation – N/A**

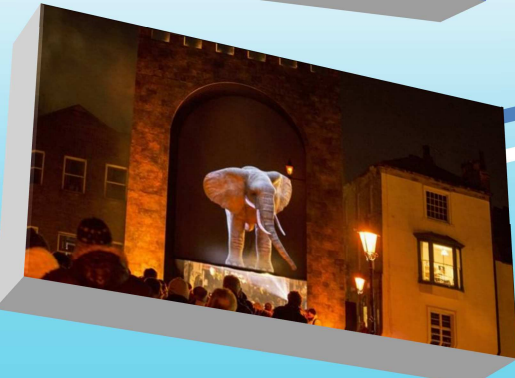
**Procurement – N/A**

**Disability Issues – N/A**

**Legal Implications – N/A**



# Customer Feedback Report: Complaints, compliments and suggestions Quarter 1 report 2014/15



*Altogether better*



## Overview

1. This report provides the performance information and learning outcomes in relation to Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions received for all Council Services during quarter 1 2014/15.
2. Complaints are categorised as:
  - **Statutory.** A complaint which arises from the duties placed on a local social services authority to provide assessments and care services under the provisions of relevant adult and children's social care legislation. The process followed for managing these complaints is prescribed in Regulations.
  - **Non-Statutory.** All other complaints
3. The report is divided into 2 main parts; overall performance summary and detailed information for each service grouping.

### **PART ONE: Summary of complaints, compliments and suggestions received across the Council during quarter 1 2014/15**

4. Between 1 April and 30 June 2014, Durham County Council received 617 non-statutory complaints, 238 compliments and 67 suggestions. During the quarter, 62 complaints were escalated to stage 2 of the complaints process.

#### **Responding to Complaints**

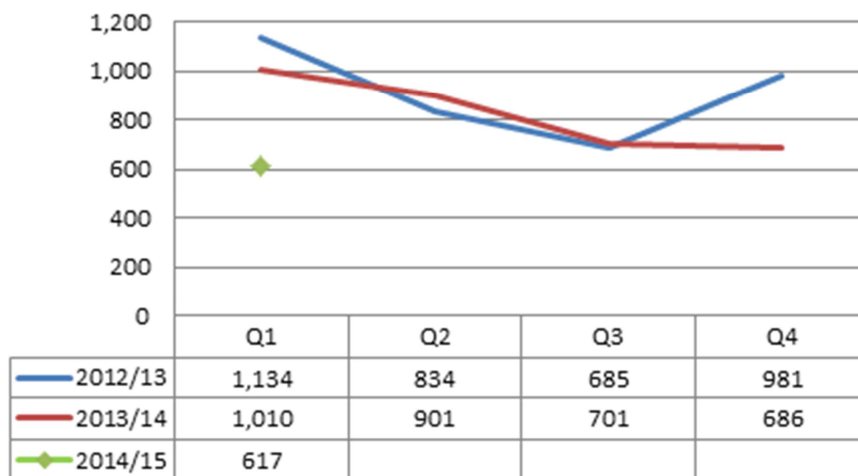
5. The council's service standards for dealing with non-statutory complaints are:
  - Acknowledging all complaints within 2 working days;
  - Responding to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days
  - Responding to stage 2 complaints within 20 working days.
6. During quarter , 96% of Stage 1 and 97% of Stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days and 79% of Stage 1 and 54% of Stage 2 complaints were investigated and responded to within target, showing an improvement when compared with the same period in 2013/14
7. The table below shows numbers of complaints received across Service Groupings since 2012/13:

Service Grouping	2012-13 Total	2013-2014					2014-2015
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1
ACE	7	3	3	2	1	9	1
CAS	33	10	15	18	11	54	6
NS	2,398	724	614	446	446	2,230	447
RED	357*	92*	128	97*	95*	412*	67
RES	809	180	141	139	132	592	96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,634</b>	<b>1,010</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>3,298</b>	<b>617</b>

\*Please note that the data has been updated from the Q4, 2013/14 report, as a result of data cleansing following quality assurance.

## Key Improvements

8. The number of complaints received across the Council since April 2012 is illustrated in the graph below. Complaints received during quarter 1 2014/15 have decreased by 11% from the previous quarter and by 33% when compared with the same period in 2013/14



9. We have seen a number of improvements in relation to the most common complaints received across the Council since 2012 as detailed below:

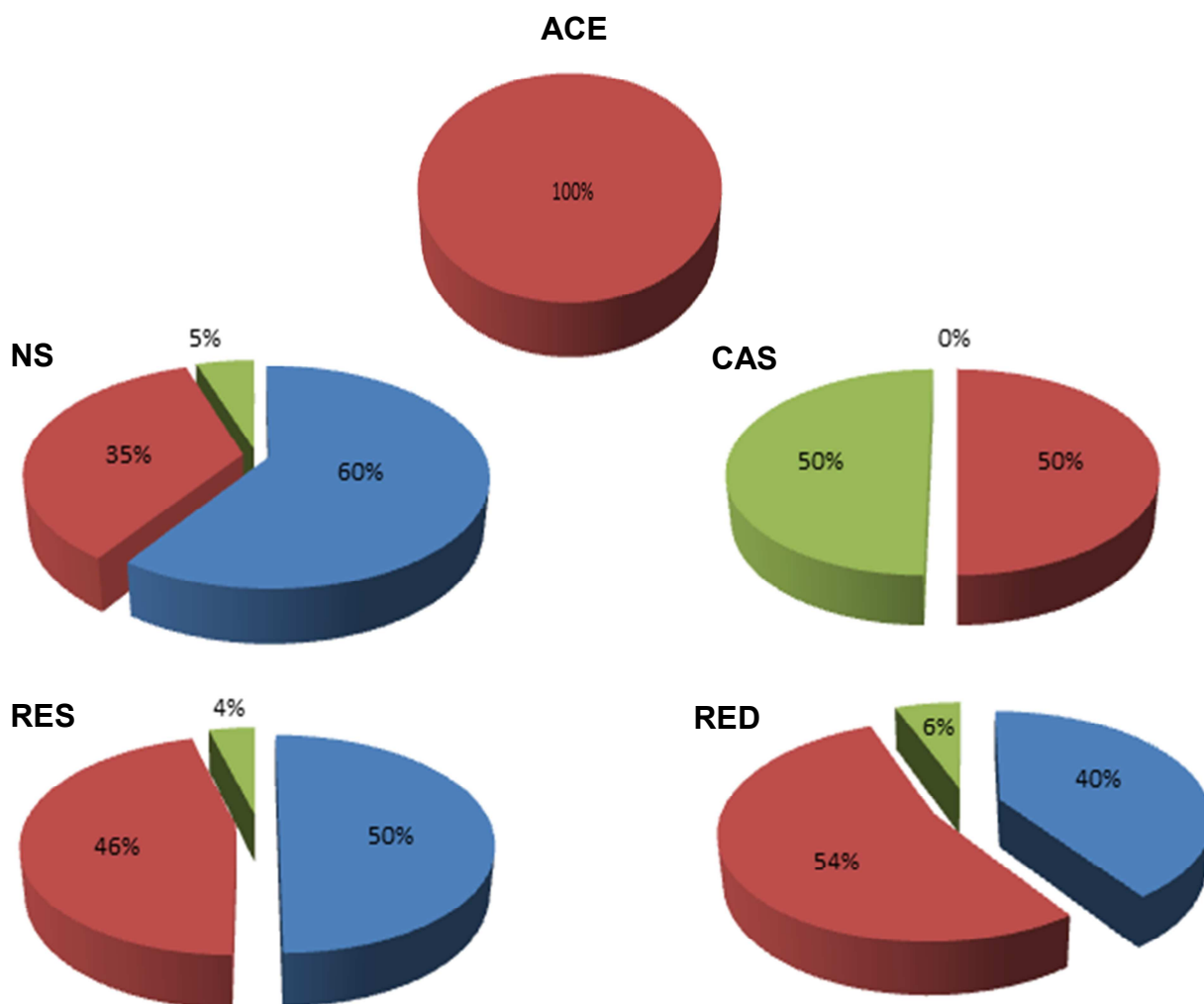
- Missed Bins:** The number of complaints received in relation to missed bins has seen a significant reduction throughout the year. This improvement can be attributed to a number of factors including the 'bedding in' of the Alternate Weekly Collection service; the introduction of a new strengthened 'Repeat Missed Container' Monitoring Process; improved communications in relation to collection dates during bank holidays and the implementation of the incab 'Bartec' system that has improved information capture and in support of the operational delivery of the service. During quarter 1, 96 complaints were received regarding missed bins, a 41% decrease when compared with the same period in 2013/14.
- Changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):** Engagement and communication mechanisms with our contractor have been strengthened and customer care training has been delivered to all of their staff to address complaints regarding staff attitude. As a result, the number of complaints regarding HWRCs has decreased throughout the year. 31 complaints were received regarding HWRCs during quarter 1 2014/15, a 55% decrease when compared with Q1 2013/14.
- Revenues and Benefits Service:** As a result of ongoing improvements to practices & procedures to ensure the maximum level of service is being achieved the Revenues and Benefits Service has seen a significant reduction in the number of complaints received during quarter 1. The Benefits Service received 37 complaints, a 48% reduction when compared with the same period in 2013/14. The Revenues Service received 49 complaints, a 47% reduction when compared with the same period in 2013/14.
- Flooding and Drainage Issues:** The number of complaints received in relation to flooding and drainage issues has also seen a significant reduction due to strengthened operations and improved communications, resulting in an 85% decrease when comparing with quarter 1 2013/14.

## Key Challenges

- During the quarter we received an increased number of complaints in relation to the Garden Waste service. This is in line with expected seasonal demand and complaints were mainly from customers who have been advised that they are unable to join the current scheme.

## Outcomes

- Further investigation of stage 1 complaints received shows that during quarter 1 2014/15 there were 242 occasions (39% of complaints processed) where the complaint was not upheld. This indicates that, although service users were dissatisfied, the service had acted properly and followed the correct procedures.
- If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 341 (55%) justified complaints, from which there is possibility of learning.
- The charts below show a breakdown of the categorisation of complaints in terms of justification for each Service Grouping.



## Compliments and Suggestions

**KEY**    ■ Justified    ■ Not Justified    ■ Ongoing

14. The following table shows the numbers of compliments and suggestions received across service groupings during quarter 1 2014/15:

Service Grouping	Compliments	Suggestions
ACE	8	1
CAS	54	0
NS	129	52
RED	15	8
RES	32	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>67</b>

15. A large proportion of compliments are for staff in recognition of their support and help in resolving the customer's concerns and issues. On each of these occasions, the individual officer is notified of the compliment and thanked by their line manager. Many of these relate to the professionalism, speed of service and general helpfulness of staff.

## **PART TWO: Detailed report for each service grouping for quarter 1 2014/15**

16. The following sections provide details for each Service Grouping in relation to Customer Feedback received in quarter 1 2014/15 and any learning outcomes.

### **Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)**

#### **Overview**

17. During quarter 1 2014/2015, 1 complaint, 8 compliments and 1 suggestion were received. A summary of feedback since 2012/2013 is shown below:

Service Grouping ACE	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14				13/14 Total	14/15				14/15 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
<b>Complaints</b>	<b>7</b>	3	3	2	1	9	1	-	-	-	1
<b>Compliments</b>	<b>25</b>	3	9	25	12	49	8	-	-	-	8
<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>9</b>	3	3	4	14	24	1	-	-	-	1

#### **Complaints**

18. The complaint related to a customer banned from posting on DCC's Facebook page.

#### **Compliments and Suggestions**

19. All 8 compliments related to thanking staff in the County Records Office for help and support with enquiries. The suggestion was from an organisation offering its services.



## Children and Adults Services (CAS)

### Corporate Complaints Overview

20. During quarter 1 2014/2015, 6 complaints, 54 compliments and 0 suggestions were received. A summary of feedback since 2012/2013 is shown in the table.

Service Grouping CAS	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14				13/14 Total	14/15				13/14 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	33	10	15	18	11	54	6				6
Compliments	547	88	42	47	7	184	55				55
Suggestions	26	0	0	1	4	5	0				0

21. The total number of corporate representations (complaints, compliments and comments) received by CAS has increased between quarter 4 2013/14 and quarter 1 2014/15 (from 22 in quarter 4 to 60 in quarter 1). This is attributable to an increase in compliments. When compared with the same period last year, total representations have decreased by 39%

### Complaints

22. The numbers of complaints received in quarter 1 have decreased by 40% when compared with the same period in 2013/4. Complaints related to the following service areas:
- Children's Services received 2 complaints, both in relation to the One Point service.
  - Education received 4 complaints (1 in relation to school transport, 1 relating to school places, 1 relating to the Special Educational Needs team and 1 relating to the Music Service).

### Compliments and Suggestions

23. During the quarter, 55 compliments were received, a decrease of 38% in comparison to the corresponding period in 2013/14. Children's Services received 23 compliments (10 for the One Point service and 13 for the Youth Offending Service) and Education received 32 compliments (18 for the Educational Development Service, 7 for School Admissions and Transport, 3 for School and Governor Support Service, 2 for SEN Placement and Provision and 1 each for LACES and Improving Progression of Young People team).

### CAS Statutory Complaints, Compliments and Comments Q1 2014/15

24. The table below shows that the total number of statutory complaints compliments and comments received during the quarter has decreased by 6% when compared to the same period in 2013/14; complaints have decreased by 9% when compared with the same period in 2013/14.

Service Grouping CAS	Number Received									
	13/14				13/14 Total	14/15				14/15 Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	64	75	43	47	229	58				58
Compliments	155	100	97	99*	451*	148				148
Comments	0	0	0	0	0	0				0
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>668</b>	<b>206</b>				<b>206</b>

\*Please note that the data has been updated from the Q4, 2013/14 report, as a result of data cleansing following quality assurance.

25. The following is a breakdown of the compliments and complaints received about Children's Services and Adult Care in quarter 1:

	Children's Services	Adult Care	Totals
<b>Complaints</b>	30	28	<b>58</b>
<b>Compliments</b>	104	44	<b>148</b>

### Children's Services Statutory Complaints, Compliments and Comments Q1 2014/15

26. During quarter 1, a total of 30 complaints were recorded in relation to children's social care services, 29 Stage 1 complaints and 1 complaint was taken to Stage 2.
27. Of the 29 Stage 1 complaints, 100% were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt, and 23 (79.3%) of these complaints were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 20 working days. This is an improvement on the 75% resolved within timescale in quarter 4 of 2013/14.
28. One of the Stage 1 complaints was resolved outside timescale with the complainant's agreement. The remaining 5 Stage 1 complaints were received near the quarter end and couldn't be resolved within timescale.
29. There are continued efforts to resolve complaints as soon as possible, avoiding going to Stage 2. This includes senior managers meeting with complainants and working with staff in the service areas to achieve resolution where possible. Despite these efforts, 1 complaint was taken to Stage 2 in quarter 1. The independent investigation is on target to be completed within the 65 working day timeframe.
30. Stage 1 complaints received, by team, are broken down as follows:

Teams	Current Q1
Assessment and Intervention – Bishop Auckland	1
Assessment and Intervention - Durham	1
Assessment and Intervention – Peterlee & Easington	1
Assessment and Intervention - Seaham	3
Assessment and Intervention - Spennymoor	2
Assessment and Intervention – Stanley 1	1
Child Protection - Peterlee	5
Child Protection - Spennymoor	4
Child Protection - Stanley	1
Disability social work	1
Fostering	1
Independent Reviewing Officers	1
Initial Response Team	4
Looked After and Permanence 2 - Durham	1
Safeguarding Children - Chester-le-Street	1
Safeguarding Children - Peterlee	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>

### Declined Complaints

31. No complaints were declined in the quarter.

### Themes of Complaints

32. *Lack of Service - Communications/Information* was the category with the highest number of complaints, with 16 complaints. *Professional Conduct of Staff* was a theme in 7 complaints, followed by *Provision of Service – Delay/Lateness of Actions* which was an element in 6 complaints. It is possible for a complaint to contain more than one theme.

### Outcome of Complaints

Outcome of Children's Complaints received in the Quarter					
Team	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	tbc	Total
Assessment and Intervention – Bishop Auckland		1			1
Assessment and Intervention - Durham		1			1
Assessment and Intervention – Peterlee & Easington		1			1
Assessment and Intervention - Seaham	1		1	1	3
Assessment and Intervention - Spennymoor	1	1			2
Assessment and Intervention – Stanley 1				1	1
Child Protection - Peterlee			3	2	5
Child Protection - Spennymoor	3		1		4
Child Protection - Stanley	1				1
Disability social work	1				1
Fostering	1				1
Independent Reviewing Officers	1				1
Initial Response Team	3	1			4
Looked After and Permanence 2 - Durham				1	1
Safeguarding Children – Chester-le-Street			1		1
Safeguarding Children - Peterlee		1			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>29</b>

### Actions as a Result of Statutory Complaints

33. Improvement actions have included staff briefings to clarify a number of operational processes and procedures.

### Compliments

34. 104 compliments were received in quarter 1 as follows:

Service Area	Number of compliments
Aycliffe Secure Services	3
Assessment and Intervention Teams	6
Children's Homes	10
Community Support Team	21
Disabled Children and Families Team	3
Emergency Duty Team	5
First Contact and Prevention service	1
Looked After Children	2
4 Real	2
Pathfinder teams	49
The Full Circle	2



### Adult Services Statutory Complaints, Compliments Comments Q1 2014/15

35. During the quarter, 28 complaints were received in relation to adult social care services; an increase of 5 complaints (21.7%) in comparison to the previous quarter. Whilst there is no obvious reason for the increase, in the first quarter of previous years this appears to be a characteristic pattern.

Comparison of Complaints received by quarter					
Service Area	Q2 13/14	Q3 13/14	Q4 13/14	Q1 14/15	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Adult Care	21	20	23	28	↑

36. All complaints received were acknowledged within 2 working days. Complaints Resolution Plans (CRPs) were completed for all 28 complaints. Of the 28 complaints received, 13 were completed within the quarter and responded to within the timescales set out in the CRP. The remaining 15 cases were ongoing at the quarter end but were still within their agreed completion timescales.
37. The table below shows a breakdown against Teams of the complaints received:

Service area	Number of compliments
Adult Social Work Teams: Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services	14
Adult Social Work Teams: Learning Disabilities, Mental Health, Substance Misuse services	5
Commissioning	5
County Durham Care and Support	3
Emergency Duty Team	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

### Declined Complaints

38. Two complaints were declined in the quarter both on the grounds that the complaints had previously been concluded.

### Category of Complaint

39. *Disputed Decision and Communications/Information* constituted the category with the highest number with 6 complaints containing this as an element. *Professional Conduct of Staff* constituted the next highest category with 4 complaints.

### Outcome of Complaints

40. Of the 13 complaints completed in the quarter, 9 were not upheld, 1 was partially upheld and 1 was upheld.

Outcome of Complaints received and completed in the quarter				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Total

Social Work Teams: Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services	9	1	0	<b>10</b>
Adult Social Work Teams: Learning Disabilities, Mental Health, Substance Misuse services	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Commissioning	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>

### Actions as a result of statutory complaints

41. During the period a briefing note was issued to staff in Adult Care by the Operations Manager for Older People's Services/MHSOP/PD/SS Services. This included the following areas for learning:

Staff were reminded that:

- Notifications of Service/Change of Circumstances should provide clear information to avoid miscommunication. (In this case a further briefing is being prepared aligned to the findings of the Ombudsman referred to below)
- Service users must be informed if they are no longer to have an allocated worker and the reasons for this. They need to be given information on the team's duty system and the contact details.

### Compliments

42. There were 44 compliments received in the quarter. This represents a decrease of 31.3% from the previous quarter.

Service area	Compliments Received	
	Current Q1	Previous Q4
County Durham Care and Support	29	43
Social Work Teams: (Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services)	13	19
Social Work Teams (Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/Substance Misuse Services)	1	1
Commissioning	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>64</b>

43. Work continues in regard to strengthening the receipt of compliments as much as possible by communications to and speaking with management teams.

## Neighbourhood Services (NS)

### Overview

44. During quarter 1 2014/2015, 447 complaints, 129 compliments and 52 suggestions were received. A summary of feedback since 2012/2013 is shown in the following table:

NS	Number Received				
	2012-	13/14 split by quarter	13/14	14/15 split by quarter	14/15

	13	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	2,398	724	614	446	446	2,230	447				447
Compliments	402	126	134	125	121	506	129				129
Suggestions	215	62	57	41	88	248	52				52

45. Analysis shows that when compared to the same quarter in 2013/14, the number of complaints received decreased by 38%, this can be largely attributed to reduced complaints regarding the Refuse and Recycling Service and HWRCs.

### Improvement

- **Missed Bins:** 96 complaints were received regarding missed bins during quarter 1 2014/15, a 41% decrease when compared with the same period in 2013/14. This improvement can be attributed to a number of factors including improved logging and monitoring of missed bins following the implementation of the Bartec system.
- **Changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):** We received 31 complaints regarding HWRCs during quarter 1 2014/15. Complaints related to a number of issues including tighter control of the waste being put through the sites, waste permit issues and staff attitude. However, this is a 55% decrease when compared with quarter 1 2013/14.
- **Charges for replacement wheeled bins:** 21 complaints were received from residents objecting to the £20 charge for replacement bins. Complaints of this kind have reduced by 40% when compared to the same period last year.
- **Grass cutting issues:** Customers submitted 14 complaints regarding various aspects of the grass cutting service during quarter 1 2014/2015. This can be attributed to seasonal demand. Complaints include standard of grass cutting, areas being missed off grass cutting schedules and mess left by grass cutters. When looking at quarter 1 2013/14, complaints regarding this service have reduced by 44%.

### Challenges

- **Customer services administration / misplaced documents:** 14 complaints were received from customers who were unhappy with their customer service experience. Complaints regarding this service included; service request details being logged incorrectly by staff, documents being misplaced by customer services and customers being asked to provide supporting information that has already been handed in.
- **Garden waste service:** During the quarter we received an increased number of complaints regarding the garden waste service. These complaints were mainly from customers who have been advised that they are unable to join the current scheme. We received 14 complaints regarding this matter. We also received 1 complaint in relation to the introduction of a charge for the service under the new scheme.

### Learning and Future activity

45. Neighbourhood Services is currently undertaking a number of improvements which will take into account previous customer feedback. These relate to new ways of working to identify and address recycling contamination; development of service channels to support implementation of the new Garden Waste Scheme and a new process for the Highways Skips and Scaffold Service.

### Compliments and Suggestions

46. 129 compliments were received during quarter1 2014/15, this is a 3% increase when compared with the same period in 2013/14.
47. The majority of compliments relate to staff in the Refuse and Recycling, Clean and Green, Neighbourhood Wardens and Customer Service teams in recognition of their support and help in resolving customer enquiries in a professional and timely manner.
48. The remaining compliments relate to service provision; including the standard of work, e.g. keeping local areas clean and tidy, resolving pest control concerns and speed of work in relation to returning to collect missed bins and clearing litter.
49. There were 52 suggestions received, a 16% decrease when compared with the same period in 2013/14. A number of suggestions were in relation to the grounds maintenance service in particular regarding trees and hedges being maintained more frequently, increasing grass cutting and planting of more flower beds.

### Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

#### Overview

50. Between 1 April and 30 June 2014, 67 complaints, 15 compliments and 8 suggestions were received by the Regeneration and Economic Development (RED) Service Grouping.
51. As can be seen in the table below, the level of complaints has been decreasing since quarter 2 2013/14.

Service Grouping RED	Number Received										
	12/13	13/14 split by quarter				13/14	14/15 split by quarter				14/15
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	357	92	128	97	95	412	67				
Compliments	125	34	27	85	39	185	15				
Suggestions	33	11	6	13	10	39	8				

#### Complaints

52. RED received 67 complaints, a decrease of 27% when compared with the same period in 2013/14. 68% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within the 10 working day deadline and 19 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process, 15 of which were in relation to Planning Development.
53. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during quarter 1 shows that 3 areas of the Service Grouping received 81% of the complaints submitted; with 2 of these service areas showing significant reductions in the number of complaints received:

- **Planning Development:** 27 complaints received were in relation to Planning Development mainly in connection to planning decisions and building control. This is a slight increase on the same period of the previous year. 15 Planning Development complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process during quarter 1.
- **Durham City Homes:** 17 complaints were received in relation to Durham City Homes, particularly in regard to the handling of repairs and maintenance issues and the associated contractors. This is a decrease of 41% from the same period in the previous year and 53% from quarter 4.
- **Strategic Traffic:** 10 complaints were received by Strategic Traffic in the quarter, the majority are parking and road works related. This is a decrease of 47% from the same period in the previous year and 41% from quarter 4.

### Compliments and Suggestions

54. The service grouping received 15 compliments in quarter 1. These are generally thanks to staff for the service they have provided.
55. RED received 8 suggestions during quarter 1, covering a wide range of subjects and service areas, including transport information and improvements to town centres.

### Resources (RES)

#### Overview

56. In the first quarter of 2014/15, Resources received 96 complaints; this represents a 30% decrease since quarter 4, and an encouraging 47% reduction compared to the equivalent quarter in 2013/14.

RES	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14 Total	14/15 split by quarter				14/15
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	809	180	141	139	138	592	96				96
Compliments	69	14	10	17	38	79	32				32
Suggestions	24	3	5	3	8	19	6				6

57. The proportion of complaints responded to within the 10 days corporate target improved from 82% in quarter 4 to 84% in quarter 1 2014/15.

### Complaints and Improvements

58. The Revenues and Benefits service is committed to improving customer service and the customer experience and over recent months such efforts have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of complaints received. The 86 complaints received in quarter 1 2014/15 represents a 47% reduction over the same quarter in 2013/14 when 163 complaints were received.
59. Detailed analysis of customer feedback received during quarter 1 reveals that 98% of the complaints are attributable to the following:

- **Benefits Service:** The Benefits Service received 37 complaints in quarter 1, a 27% reduction over the previous quarter (51 in quarter 4). Twelve complaints (32%) were received from landlords or agents and 4 (11%) were made by claimants disputing the calculation of their benefit entitlement. Of the 12 made by landlords, 4 complained about payments being made directly to tenants.
- **Revenues Service:** The Revenues Service received 49 complaints this quarter (78 in quarter 4), a reduction of 37%. The reduction is a result of ongoing improvements to practices & procedures to ensure the maximum level of service is being achieved. The Quality Assurance team monitors all aspects of Council Tax billing and recovery to ensure that the correct discounts and exemptions are applied and the appropriate recovery action is taken as defined by legislation.

Analysis reveals that 13 (27%) of the complaints arose due to the council taking recovery action. Of these, 5 related to the attitude and behaviour of bailiffs. Contracts with bailiffs are subject to ongoing monitoring and any complaints received are forwarded onto the appropriate company. If an individual bailiff is subject to repeat complaints, the Revenues Service asks for their removal from working on the Council's contract. There were no other trends within the complaints received by the Revenues Service.

- **Legal & Democratic Services:** There was no pattern to the complaints received this quarter (8 in total), and each was subject to investigation. Of these, 4 related to electoral services, but all identified different issues.

### Compliments and Suggestions

60. There were 32 compliments received by the Resources service grouping in quarter 1 2014/15.
61. 18 compliments related to employees in Human Resources & Organisational Development. Four customers referred to the excellent service provided by individual members of staff in the Revenues and Benefits Service, and support for a community event was also subject to a compliment. Legal & Democratic Services continue to receive a number of compliments arising from conducting wedding ceremonies.
62. Suggestions received this quarter related to:
  - Legal & Democratic Services - online registration facility
  - Wording of recovery documentation to be made clear and in plain English.
  - Fast tracking housing benefit claims in emergency circumstances.
  - Not issuing council tax bills for information only purposes.

### Local Government Ombudsman (LGO): current activity

63. During the quarter the LGO made initial enquiries/ initiated investigations into 12 matters.

64. The Ombudsman discounted their involvement in 4 of these cases as they found no fault by the Council. These related to a School Admissions Appeal; Vehicle MOT; Benefits Claim and Exclusion from a Library.
65. 1 complaint, in relation to a highways issue was subject to a full investigation and the Ombudsman concluded that there had been injustice and maladministration. The complaint was closed when the Council agreed to various actions recommended by the Ombudsman, including a financial settlement.
66. Enquiries made by the Ombudsman in respect of the remaining 7 cases have now had the Council's response. The outcomes are currently awaited and relate to the following areas :
- Adult Social Care
  - Children's Services
  - Planning
  - Home to School Transport
  - Non-domestic Rates
  - 2 regarding the Council's list of contractors
67. The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 5 matters subject to investigations initiated prior to the beginning of the quarter relating to :
- Environmental Health issue – no fault by the Council.
  - Dog Fouling issue – no fault by the Council.
  - Refusal of a grant application – no fault by the Council.
  - Children's Services issue - The Ombudsman identified maladministration and injustice by the Council. The investigation was closed when the Council agreed to various actions to remedy the issues; including a financial settlement.
  - Adult Care Services - The Ombudsman identified maladministration and injustice by the Council. The investigation was closed when the Council agreed to various actions to remedy the issues; including a financial settlement. Actions implemented by the service include delivering clearer procedural documentation and staff refresher training
68. During the quarter the LGO also notified the Council of outcomes in relation to matters not subject to full investigation – these decisions are reached through consideration of details supplied by complainants, supplemented by information supplied by the Council:
- 2 Adult Care Services; 2 Planning and 1 Licensing issue – all referred to the LGO prematurely to be initially dealt with through the Council's complaints procedure.
  - 1 ASB and 3 Benefits/Tax issues were deemed outside the LGO's jurisdiction.
  - 1 Highways & Transport issue – Investigation not initiated.

### **Recommendation**

69. Corporate Issues, Overview and Scrutiny to note the report

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#### **Contact:**

**Alan Patrickson**

Head of Projects and Business Services

Tel: 03000 268161

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**Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**17 October 2014**



**Children and Adults Services Statutory  
Annual Representations Report 2013/14**

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**Report of: Rachael Shimmin, Corporate Director for Children and  
Adults Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CIOSC) of the key messages in relation to the management and handling of statutory representations of Children and Adults Social Care Services during the period 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014.

**Background**

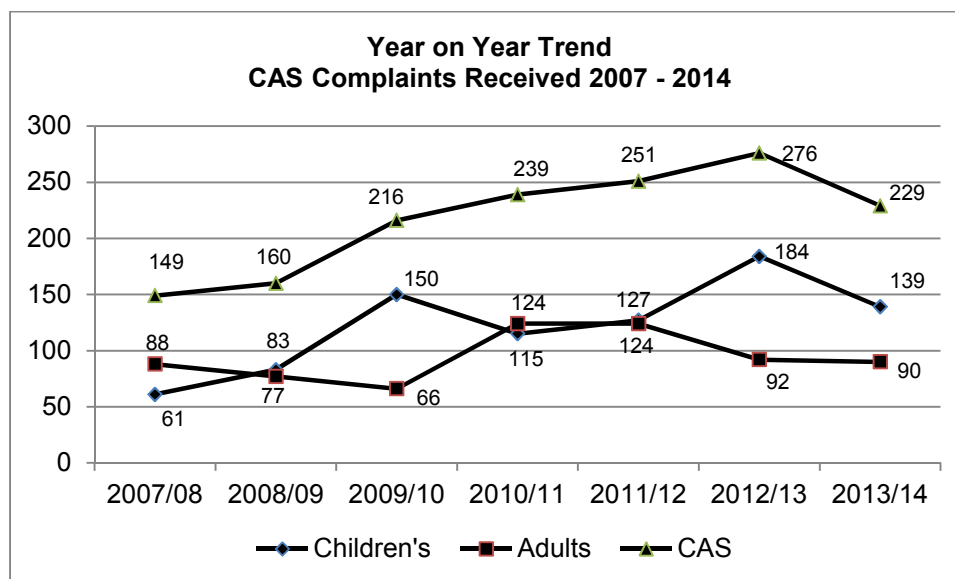
2. The annual report is published under the provisions and requirements of the '*Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006*' and the '*Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009*'. The reporting format reflects the requirements detailed in the Regulations.
3. The annual report provides information on the management and information of statutory representations from service users, their families and carers and includes details of complaints as well as compliments. A copy is attached at Appendix 2.

**Key Messages – Statutory Complaints**

4. In 2013/14, there were 229 statutory complaints received in CAS.
  - A total of 139 complaints related to children's social care services (60 of which were managed informally and 79 were managed at the formal stages of the complaints procedure) and a total of 90 complaints related to adult social care services.
  - CAS complaints have decreased by 17% in comparison to 2012/13. Children's social care complaints have decreased by 24.5% whilst complaints about adult social care services have decreased by 2.2% over the same period.

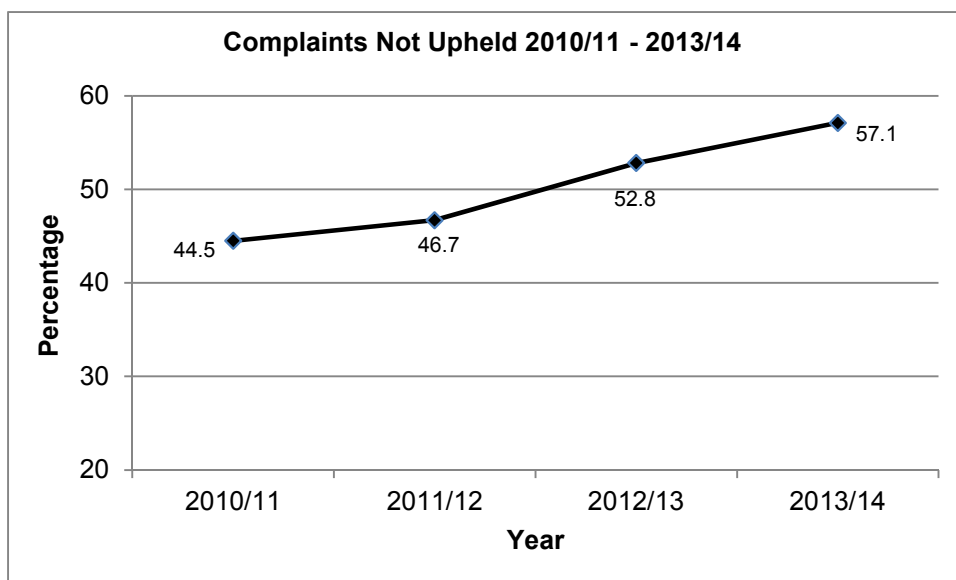
Graph 1 below illustrates the trend during 2007-2014:

**Graph 1: Year on Year Trend 2007-2014 – CAS Complaints Received**



- Of the 79 complaints relating to children’s social care services which were managed formally, 44 complaints (58.7%) were resolved within the 20 working day timescale for Stage 1 complaints. This is an improvement on the 39.4% resolved in timescale in 2012/13. There were 3 Stage 2 complaints, none of which were resolved within timescale. Attempts to improve performance around resolution timescales have included developing a tighter project management approach to investigations and building in escalation processes to Senior Managers when deadlines are due. It is anticipated that performance in this area will improve in 2014/15.
- In respect of complaints relating to adult social care, 79 of the 90 complaints were concluded at the year end, with 11 ongoing. Of the 79 completed complaints, 97.7% were completed within the individual timescales agreed in the Complaints Resolution Plan.
- Over half of all complaints concluded at the end of the reporting year in CAS were not upheld (57.1%). A further 18.5% of complaints were partially upheld and 24.4 % were upheld.
- In comparison to previous years, the number of complaints not upheld across CAS as a whole is increasing. In 2012/13 the figure was 52.8%, in 2011/12 it was 46.7% and in 2010/11 it was 44.5% as Graph 2 overleaf illustrates.

**Graph 2: Complaints Not Upheld in CAS 2010-2014**



- *'Lack of Communications/information'* constituted the category with the highest number of complaints, being recorded in 32%. This was followed by *'Professional Conduct of Staff'* which featured as an element in 26%, and *'Disputed Decision'* which was mentioned in 22% of complaints.
- *'Parents'* constituted the largest percentage of complainants in complaints for children's services (49.1%). In complaints about adult social care, *'Relatives (non-parent)'* constituted the highest percentage of complainants at 54.4%.
- Based on gender profiles, 42 (53.2%) of the 79 formal children's complaints were made on behalf of girls and 37 (46.8%) were made on behalf of boys. In relation to adult's complaints, over twice as many complaints were made on behalf of females than males (69.3% as opposed to 25.3%). This is a reversal of the previous year, when twice as many complaints were made by (or on behalf of) adult males.
- During the year, CAS declined to consider 14 complaints – 5 involving children's social care services and 9 involving adults social care services. Declined complaints are not included in the numbers of actioned complaints.

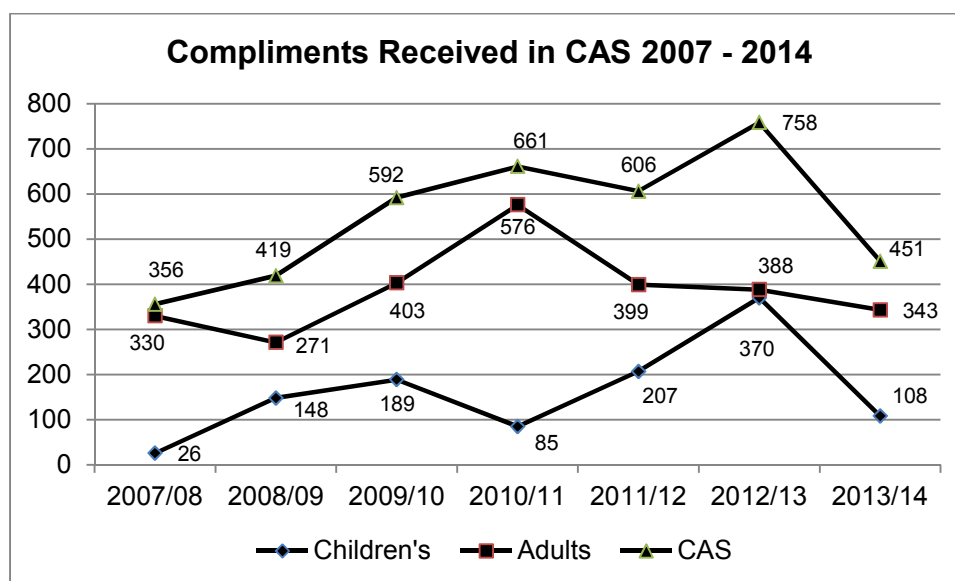
## Key Messages – Benchmarking Comparisons for Statutory Complaints

6. A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to gather information from neighbouring Local Authorities (LAs) relating to Children’s Social Care and Adult Social Care services.
7. The benchmarking information showed for Children’s Social Care:
  - Durham had the second lowest rate of Stage 1 complaints per 1000 population aged 0-19 years.
  - Durham had the fourth lowest percentage of Stage 1 complaints progressing to Stage 2 of the formal complaints procedure.
8. In the benchmarking data for complaints relating to Adult Social Care Services:
  - Durham had the fourth lowest rate of complaints per 1000 population aged 18+ years.

## Key Messages – Compliments

8. In the reporting year, a total of 451 compliments were received by CAS, of which 108 related to children’s social care and 343 to adult social care.
  - Overall, there has been a decrease of 41% in compliments in comparison to the previous year when 758 compliments were received.
  - CAS had seen a steady increase in compliments in the preceding 7 years with compliments regarding children’s social care and compliments regarding adult social care reaching similar levels for the first time in 2012/13 as the graph below shows. Reasons for this increase were attributed to improved collection and reporting of compliments. Managers have been reminded to report any compliments received from service users and their families, which may take the form of emails, letters, and cards directly and through staff communications.

**Graph 2: Compliments Year on Year Trend 2007-2014**



- The ratio of compliments to all complaints received in 2013/14 was 2:1. This represents a decrease on the previous year when the ratio of compliments to complaints was 2.8:1.
- In respect of compliments relating to children's social care services, the Community Support Team received 51.9% of reported compliments, followed by Aycliffe Secure Services and the Safeguarding Children teams, with 10.3% each.
- In respect of compliments relating to adult social care services, County Durham Care and Support (CDCS), the in-house provider, received 67.9% of total compliments about adults services, with Older People's/Older People's Mental Health/Physical Disabilities/Sensory Support service receiving 28.9%.

### **Complaints Referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

9. During the reporting year, the LGO issued 20 Final Decisions in relation to children and adults social care cases:
  - In 5 cases (2 children's and 3 adults) the LGO decided not to investigate.
  - Two cases (1 children's, 1 adults) were outside the LGO's jurisdiction.
  - Five cases (2 children's, 3 adults) were investigated and no fault was found.
  - Two adult's cases were investigated and the LGO found no maladministration or injustice.
  - In 2 children's cases the Ombudsman recommended the Local Authority pay compensation to the complainants.
  - One complaint in relation to an adult's case was deemed premature.
  - Three cases were referred to Children's Services for further investigation; 1 was reviewed and upheld, 2 are being independently investigated at Stage 2.

### **Remedies and Learning Outcomes**

10. Learning outcomes extracted and acted upon in the reporting year are detailed within the report in Part Five.
11. Examples include staff being reminded that they must ensure:
  - that where service users ask to remain anonymous in referrals, this will be noted and adhered to;
  - that great care should be taken in regard to recording case notes to capture all incidents and ensure entries are complete and accurate; and
  - that no service provision can be ended without consultation and discussion with the service user (and their relatives if appropriate).

### **Conclusions**

12. In 2013/14, both complaints and compliments have decreased. It is reassuring to note that for every complaint received, nearly twice as many compliments are received. However, the service must continue to learn from the complaints received whilst improving the reporting of compliments.
13. The rate of complaints received in comparison to population size shows positive performance. In comparison to other Local Authorities in the region, County Durham

has the second lowest number of children's social care complaints and the fourth lowest for Adult Care complaints.

14. The greatest number of complaints received relates to lack of communication and professional conduct of staff.
15. A collaborative approach with the complainant to reach complaint resolution continues to develop. An approach based on swift resolution at the earliest opportunity and one where the complainant is central to the discussion and resolution of the complaint is proactively encouraged.
16. It is positive to note that over half of the complaints received were not upheld.

### **Recommendations**

18. It is recommended that the Committee:
  - Note the key messages of the Annual Report.

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**Appendix 1: Implications**

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<b>Finance</b>	Complaints can lead to financial claims for compensation in extreme cases.
<b>Staffing</b>	None.
<b>Risk</b>	Upheld complaints can lead to reputational risk for the local authority.
<b>Equality and diversity/ /Public Sector Equality Duty</b>	Consistent with national and local requirements. Representations Procedure takes into account equality and diversity and ensures accessibility. The profile of complainants in relation to equality and diversity is consistent with the equality and diversity profile of County Durham.
<b>Accommodation</b>	None
<b>Crime and disorder</b>	Any complaint made in relation to hate crime will be redirected to the appropriate officer to progress under the relevant policy and procedure.
<b>Human rights</b>	Compatible with Human Rights Act – able to record and respond to complaints about alleged breaches.
<b>Consultation</b>	None.
<b>Procurement</b>	None.
<b>Disability Issues</b>	Taken into consideration within the procedure.
<b>Legal Implications</b>	Complaints Team work closely with Legal Services when appropriate.

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## Children and Adults Services

# ANNUAL STATUTORY REPRESENTATIONS REPORT CHILDREN AND ADULTS SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2013/14

**ANNUAL REPRESENTATIONS REPORT**  
**CHILDREN AND ADULTS SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2013/14**  
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## Part One - Introduction

Welcome to Durham County Council's (DCC) Children and Adults Services (CAS) Annual Report detailing representations made in relation to Children and Adults Social Care Services. The report covers the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

The report is published under the provisions and requirements of the relevant regulations: *The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006* and the *Local Authority Social Services and the National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009*<sup>1</sup>. The reporting format reflects the requirements detailed in the Regulations. The Regulations for children and young people's social care complaints are different to those for adult social care complaints and for this reason the data and analysis is presented in individual sections within the report.

Complaints are valued as an important source of feedback from service users on the quality of services provided by CAS. Each complaint is investigated and findings are fed back to the complainant and various remedies provided. Complaints also provide opportunities to learn lessons and continually improve services to prevent a repeat of any failures.

Whilst there is no statutory requirement to publish data on compliments it is important that the fullest picture is obtained about what service users, their carers, families and other representatives think about the services they receive and their experiences of the professionalism of staff. Compliments equally provide the opportunity to learn lessons about what works best.

The report is broken down into six parts and provides an overview of the following areas in the reporting period:

- the numbers and composition of complaints and compliments received;
- information in relation to the complainant;
- performance data in relation to the handling of complaints;
- lessons learnt and actions taken to improve service delivery; and
- future developments.

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<sup>1</sup> Statutory Regulations for the management of complaints only apply to complaints about **social care** provision, as defined in community care legislation, not to any other service within the Authority. The Regulations **prescribe** how social care complaints must be managed and progressed, hence children's and adult social care complaints are referred to as 'statutory complaints'. All other complaints received in the Authority are dealt with under the corporate complaints procedures. Whilst there is a duty placed upon a Local Authority to have a complaints procedure how such complaints are managed is not prescribed by Regulations. Each Local Authority can determine how it manages its non-statutory (or corporate) complaints.

## Part Two - Key Messages for CAS

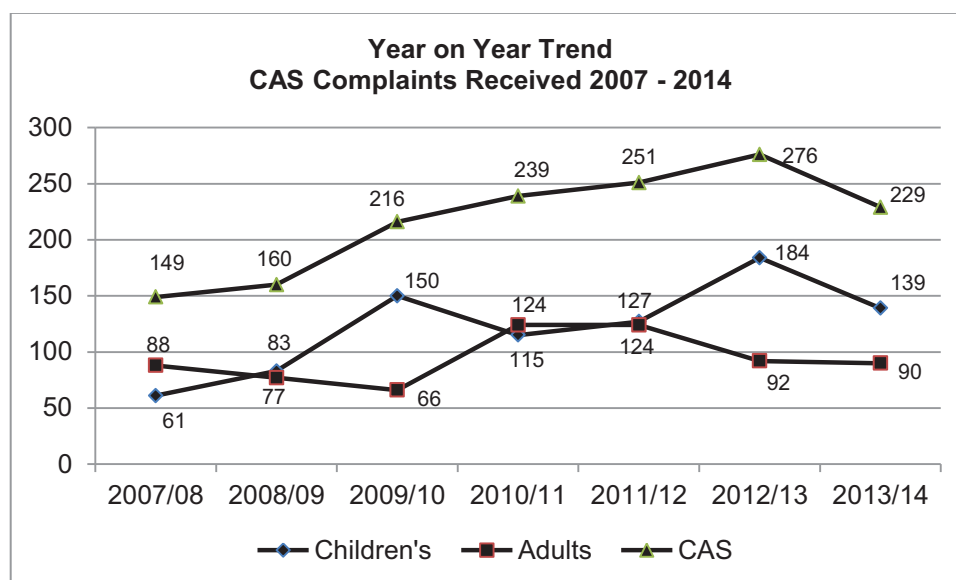
### Number of Complaints Received

In 2013/14, a total of 229 complaints were received by CAS; 139 related to children's social care services and 90 related to adults social care services. There has been a 17% decrease in CAS complaints when compared with the number of complaints received in 2012/13 (276). Children's social care complaints have decreased by 24.5% in comparison to the previous reporting year whilst complaints about adult services have decreased by 2.2% over the same period.

Graph 1 below illustrates the trend of a steady overall increase in the number of statutory complaints received over the period 2007 – 2013, with the increase being attributable to complaints in relation to children's social care services. In relation to those complaints:

- the number received in 2013/14 is the lowest since 2009/10;
- there was improved collecting and reporting of complaints between 2007/08 and 2009/10;
- in 2013/14, numbers returned to the levels experienced in 2010 – 2012;
- numbers had remained relatively static until 2012/13, when there was a sharp increase from 127 to 184 complaints. Reasons for this increase were explored with Children's Services managers and with neighbouring local authorities, 4 of whom also reported large increases in the same year. No particular and over-riding factor was identified for the increase in complaints about Durham children's social care services in 2012/13.

**Graph 1: Year on Year Trend 2007-2014 – CAS Complaints Received**



It is pleasing to note the decrease in the total number of complaints received this year, across CAS as a whole and particularly in children's services complaints. Although there has been a decrease in the overall number of complaints received regarding children's social care services, there were more stage 1 complaints received this year in comparison to the previous year, which this is due to improved recording and logging practices.

## Composition of Complaints Received

Of the 139 complaints received in relation to children’s social care, 60 were resolved informally and at a local level and 79 were managed at Stages 1 – 3 of the statutory complaints process. Of these, 75 were addressed at Stage 1, there were 3 taken to Stage 2 and 1 was taken to Stage 3.

(Children’s social care complaints are managed and resolved in 3 Stages:

- Stage 1 (local resolution) which has a target timescale of up to 20 working days;
- Stage 2 (independent investigation) which has a target timescale of 25-65 working days from the complaint details being agreed; and
- Stage 3 (Review Panel) which has a timescale of up to 50 working days.)

For complaints related to adult social care, all complaints must be resolved within 6 months of receipt and within timescales agreed with the complainant (see Part Four for more details). There is one stage to this procedure.

The detailed information given in this report refers to 169 formal complaints: the 79 Stage 1, 2 and 3 complaints about children’s services, 77 of which were concluded at the year-end (the 2 ongoing were Stage 2 complaints); and the 90 complaints in relation to adults social care services, 79 of which were concluded by the year end, equating to 156 complaints completed at the year end.

## Benchmarking Comparisons

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to gather information from neighbouring Local Authorities (LAs). Each authority was contacted for their annual statutory complaints data.

Information received to date is summarised in Tables 1 and 2 below:

**Table 1: Complaints Relating to Children’s Social Care Services**

Local Authority	Total Number Stage 1 Complaints	Rate of Complaints per 1000 0-19 Population	% of Stage 1 Complaints Progressed to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure
Durham	75	0.66	4%
A	46	1.83	19.5%
B	34	0.76	11.8%
C	22	0.97	27.3%
D	107	2.97	No information provided
E	No information provided	-	No information provided
F	141	2.08	2.1%
G	19	0.62	26.3%
H	70	2.11	1.4%
I	76	1.6	19.7%
J	176	2.84	3.4%

\* ONS Mid-2012 estimates, Office for National Statistics

The benchmarking information shows that from the information supplied, in 2013/14:

- Durham had the second lowest rate of Stage 1 complaints per 1000 population aged 0-19 years.
- Durham had the fourth lowest percentage of Stage 1 complaints progressing to Stage 2 of the formal complaints procedure.

Durham has had a lower percentage of complaints escalating to Stage 2 than neighbouring authorities for a number of years. Managers and staff try to resolve as many complaints as possible within the informal and Stage 1 part of the process. This may mean that resolution is achieved outside target timescale (20 working days), for example, due to further meetings being held with complainants to reach a satisfactory conclusion; this is balanced against the time and cost involved in the Stage 2 process.

**Table 2: Complaints Relating to Adult Social Care Services**

Local Authority	Total Number of Complaints	Rate of Complaints per 1000 18+ Population
Durham	90	0.22
A	26	0.32
B	81	0.51
C	15	0.21
D	17	0.16
E	No information provided	No information provided
F	69	0.27
G	18	0.17
H	35	0.30
I	54	0.36
J	144	0.66

*\*\* ONS Mid-2012 estimates, Office for National Statistics*

- The benchmarking information shows that from the information supplied, in 2013/14, Durham had the fourth lowest rate of complaints per 1000 population aged 18+ years.

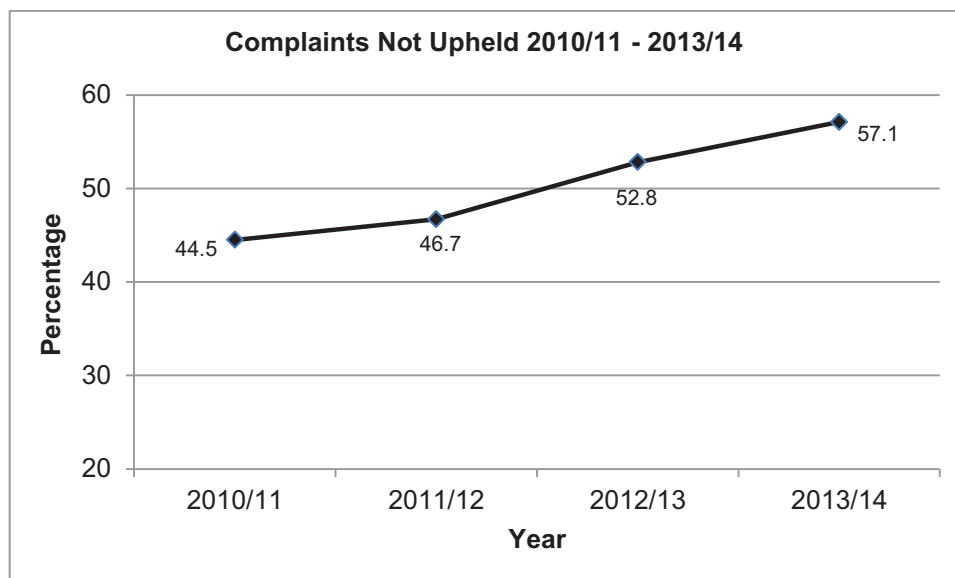
### Number of Complaints Upheld

Once complaints have been investigated, a determination is made based upon the findings about whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. A complaint determined as upheld means that all elements of the complaint have been found to be substantiated. A complaint 'not upheld' indicates that no element of the complaint has been substantiated. A finding of a complaint being 'partially upheld' denotes that some elements of the complaint have been found to be substantiated whilst other elements of the complaint have not.

Of the 156 formal complaints completed at the year-end, over half were not upheld. There were 89 not upheld (57.1%), 29 complaints partially upheld (18.5%) and 38 upheld (24.4%).

In comparison to previous years, the number of complaints not upheld across CAS as a whole is increasing; in 2012/13 the figure for CAS was 52.8% of all complaints not upheld; in 2011/12 it was 46.7% and in 2010/11, 44.5% were not upheld as Graph 2 below illustrates.

**Graph 2: Complaints Not Upheld in CAS 2010-2014**



In children’s social care complaints, of the 79 Stage 1-3 complaints, 12 were upheld in full (15.2%) and 19 were partially upheld (24.1%) (including one complaint at Stage 3). There were 46 complaints that were not upheld (58.2%) (including the one completed Stage 2 complaint); and 2 complaints were ongoing at the year-end (2.5%) (both stage 2 complaints). This means that the majority of complaints were found to be not upheld, in contrast with 2012/13 when 38.3% were not upheld.

In adult social care complaints, of the 79 complaints completed by the end of the reporting year, 26 were upheld in full (32.9%) and 10 were partially upheld (12.7%). There were 43 complaints that were not upheld (54.4%). In comparison to 2012/13 the number of complaints not upheld has decreased from 61.4% to 54.4%.

**Percentage of Complaint Acknowledgements within 2 Working Day Timescale**

There were 97% of complaints acknowledged within the timescale of 2 working days. Four complaints about children’s services and one complaint about adult’s services were acknowledged outside the 2 working days during the early part of the year. This was due to an administrative error and has been resolved.

**Complaints Completed within Timescale**

Of the 75 children’s social care Stage 1 complaints, 44 were resolved within the 20 working day timescale (58.7%), an improvement on the previous year when 39.4% were resolved in timescale. The other 31 complaints (41.3%) were resolved outside of timescale. There were 3 Stage 2 complaints, none of which were resolved within timescale of 65 working days. The Stage 3 complaint was resolved within the target timescale of 50 working days.



For complaints relating to adult social care, 79 complaints were completed at the year end with 11 ongoing. Of the 79 completed complaints, 97.5% were completed within the individual timescales agreed in the Complaints Resolution Plan (CRP), compared with 100% resolved within agreed CRP timescales in 2012/13. In the one case where the timescale was not achieved the response was one day overdue due to an administrative error.

### Subject Matter of Complaints

The top 3 subject matters for complaints within CAS were:

1. *'Lack of Communication/Information'* - featured as an element in the majority of both children's and adult's services complaints, relating to 32% of CAS complaints (32 children's services complaints and 22 adults services complaints).
2. *'Professional Conduct of Staff'* was cited in 28 complaints about children's services and 16 about adult's services, equating to 26% of total CAS complaints.
3. *'Disputed Decision'* – 21.9% of total CAS complaints were about or contained this as an element (15 children's services and 22 adult's services complaints).

### Complaints by Team and Service Area

Tables 3 and 4 below show the breakdown of complaints by team, whilst Graph 3 provides the breakdown by service area. Further detail is given in Parts Three and Four of the report.

**Table 3: Children's Complaints by Team**

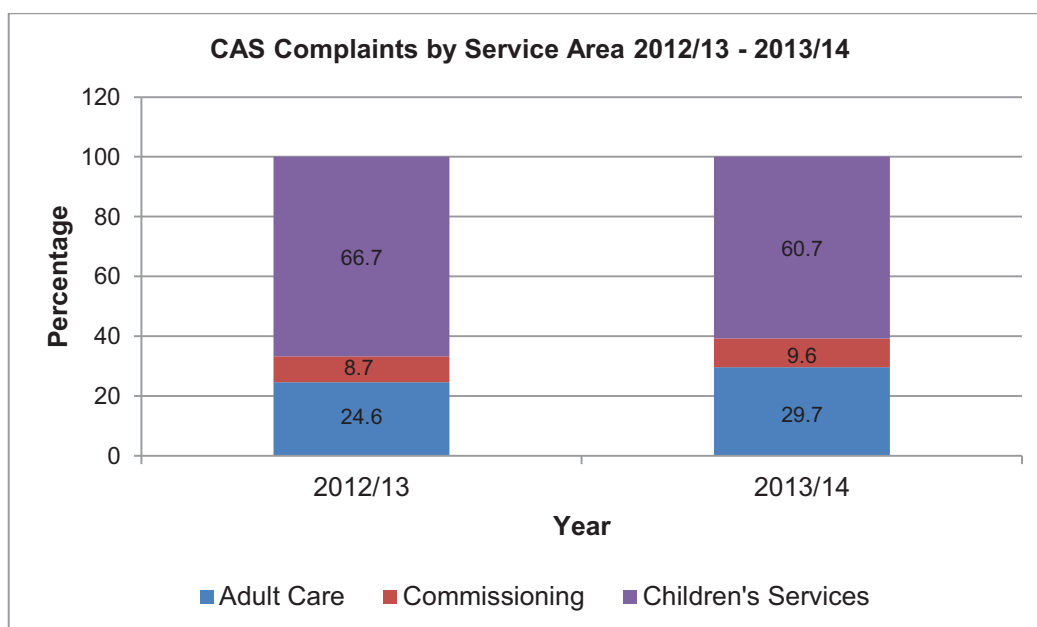
Service	Number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints 2013/14	Number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints 2012/13	Direction of Travel*	% of Total Complaints 2013/14	% of Total Complaints 2012/13
Safeguarding Children teams	55	24	↑	69.6%	61.5%
Initial Response/Emergency Duty	6	5	↑	7.6%	12.8%
Looked After Children teams	5	0	↑	6.3%	0
Young People's Service	4	2	↑	5.1%	5.1%
Assessment & Intervention teams	3	0	↑	3.8%	0
Disabled Children and Families Team	2	6	↓	2.5%	15.4%
Aycliffe Secure Services	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Children's Home	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Full Circle	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Pathfinder	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Fostering and Adoption	0	2	↓	0	5.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>39</b>	↑*	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Whilst the Direction of Travel shows an increase in the number of formal Stage 1 and 2 complaints received, the overall number of complaints about children's social care (both informally and formally resolved complaints) decreased, from 184 to 139. Therefore the percentage of formally resolved (Stage 1/2/3) complaints increased, from 21.2% in 2012/13 to 56.8% in 2013/14. Systems for the logging and reporting of complaints continue to be reviewed, and from Q1 2014/15, all reported complaints will be logged at Stage 1/2/3, which will make both the management and reporting of complaints simpler.

**Table 4: Adult Complaints by Team**

Service	Number of Complaints 2013/14	Number of Complaints 2012/13	Direction of Travel	% of Total Complaints 2013/14	% of Total Complaints 2012/13
Older People/Mental Health Services for Older People/ Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment/ Sensory Support	48	41	↑	53.3%	44.5%
Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/ Carers	12	17	↓	13.3%	18.5%
Commissioning	22	24	↓	24.4%	26.1%
County Durham Care And Support	4	8	↓	4.5%	8.7%
Adult Care - Safeguarding	4	2	↑	4.5%	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Graph 3: CAS Statutory Complaints by Service Area**



In 2012/13 and 2013/14, the highest percentage of CAS complaints received related to the Children’s Services service area (66.7% and 60.7% respectively). Adult Care accounted for 24.6% of all complaints in 2012/13 and 29.7% in 2013/14 whilst complaints relating to the Commissioning service area were 8.7% and 9.6% respectively.

### Complaints Referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

During the reporting year, the LGO issued 20 Final Decisions in relation to children and adults social care cases:

- In 5 cases (2 children’s and 3 adults) the LGO decided not to investigate.
- Two cases (1 children’s, 1 adults) were outside the LGO’s jurisdiction.
- Five cases (2 children’s, 3 adults) were investigated and no fault was found.
- Two adult’s cases were investigated and the LGO found no maladministration or injustice.

- In 2 children's cases the Ombudsman recommended the Local Authority pay compensation to the complainants.
- One complaint in relation to an adult's case was deemed premature.
- Three cases were referred to Children's Services for further investigation; 1 was reviewed and upheld, 2 are being independently investigated at Stage 2.

### Complaints by Complainant Type

In formal complaints received about children's social care services, 'Parents' constituted the largest cohort of complainants (49.1%). In complaints about adult social care services, 'Relatives (non-parent)' constituted the highest cohort of complainant at 54.4%. These complainant types have consistently been the largest cohorts over previous reporting years.

### Age and Gender Profiles of Complainants

Using information based on the eldest child in a family, 42 (53.2%) of the 79 formal children's social care services complaints were made on behalf of girls aged 0-18 years, and 37 (46.8%) were made on behalf of boys aged 0-17 years. In relation to adults complaints, the majority, 69.3%, were made in respect of females (23.1% aged 18-64 years, 24.2% aged 65-84 years and 22.0% aged 85+ years). Males made 25.3% of complaints (14.4% aged 18-64 years, 7.7% aged 65-84 years and 3.3% aged 85+ years). For the remaining 5.4%, age/gender information was not recorded.

### Declined Complaints

During the year, CAS declined to consider 14 complaints, an increase on the 8 declined complaints in 2012/13. There were 5 declined complaints about children's social care and 9 about adults. Declined complaints are not included in the numbers of actioned complaints.

### Remedies and Learning Outcomes

Examples of the remedies used to achieve resolution and the learning and practice developments that have accrued from complaints are provided in Part Five of the report.

### Number of Compliments Received

In the reporting year, a total of 451 compliments were received by CAS; 108 in relation to children's social care and 343 about adult social care. This represents a decrease across the service of 41% in comparison to the previous year (758).

As outlined in Graph 4, CAS had experienced a steady increase in compliments in the period 2007-2013 with compliments regarding children's social care and compliments regarding adult social care being approximately the same in 2012/13. Improvements in the way compliments were captured and recorded in children's services was partly attributable for this improvement.

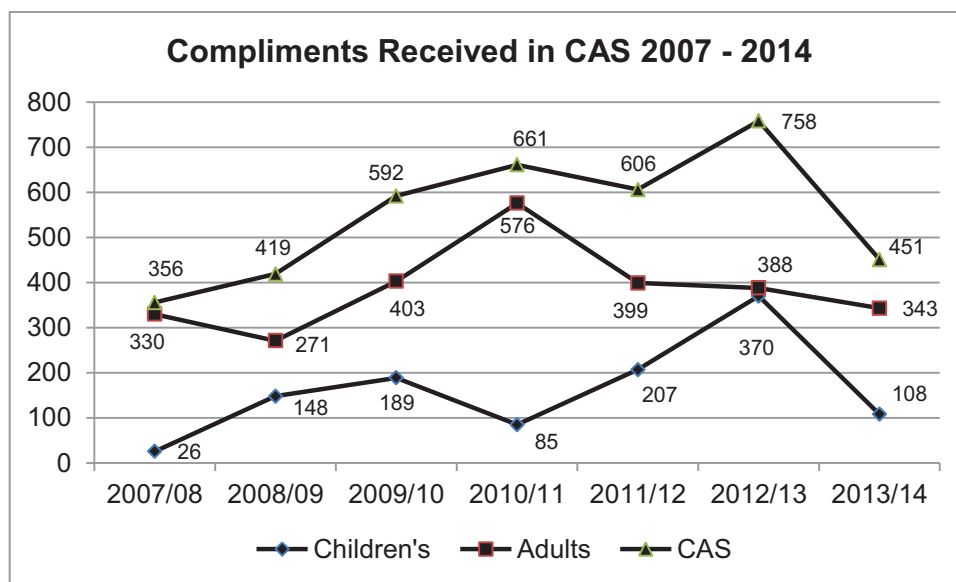
The decrease in compliments received in 2013/14 may not necessarily be attributable to an implied expression of dissatisfaction with service provision. In

adults, for example, which experienced an overall 11.6% decrease in the number of compliments received, County Durham Care and Support's (CDCS's) in-house residential care services experienced a slight decline in the numbers received and this followed the uncertainty arising from the consultation on in-house residential care provision. Nevertheless, CDCS still attracted the greatest proportion of compliments across the service areas. The compliments received in Older People/Mental Health Services for Older People/ Physical Disabilities and Sensory Support (OP/MHSOP/PD/SS) declined more sharply from 135 in 2012/13 to 99 in 2013/14 (a decrease of 26.6%). The reason for this decline is not known but it could be associated with the changes to care provision and eligibility criteria for services and a more general reaction to negative media reporting.

In Children's Services, realignment may have had an impact as staff implement change. The Copelaw Activities Service (CATS) also previously represented a large proportion of compliments received (25% in 2012/13). This service no longer exists and has therefore impacted the numbers of compliments received. The service areas of Aycliffe Secure Services, Children's Homes, Fostering and Adoption, Children's Safeguarding, Family Pathfinder and 4Real have all seen a reduction in compliments received in 2013/14. In contrast, the Community Support Team<sup>2</sup> has seen an increase.

Managers are being reminded regularly through CAS communications of the importance of capturing and reporting compliments received by staff in the form of letters, emails and cards, ensuring that these are sent to the Quality and Improvement Team (QIT) for recording and reporting.

**Graph 4: Compliments Received in CAS 2007-2014**



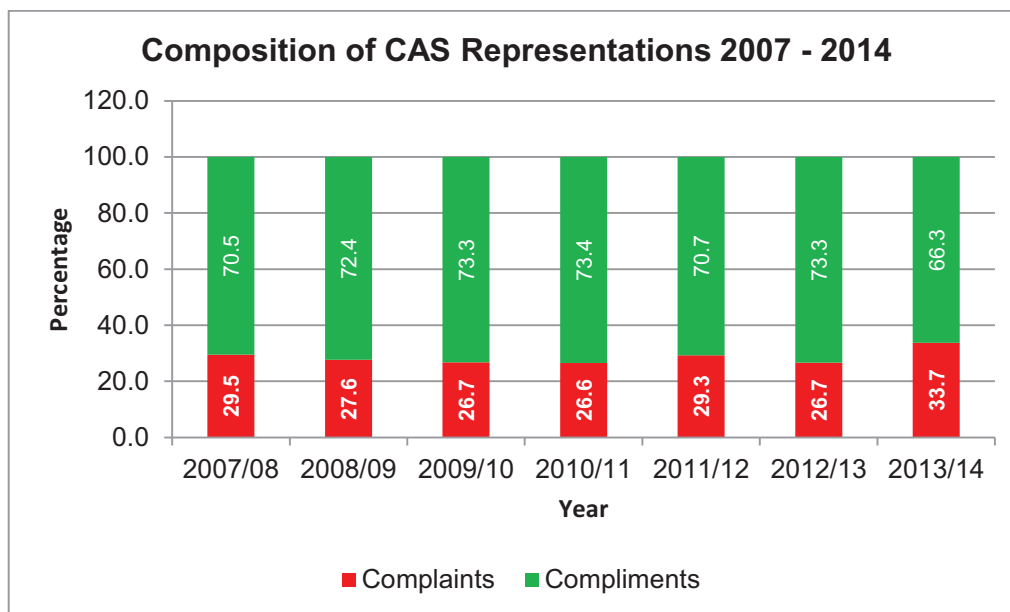
<sup>2</sup>The Community Support team works alongside the Emergency Duty team to support young people and their families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Staff have experience in a wide range of areas, working with families in a number of different circumstances. The **aim of the team** is to help to prevent the breakdown of a young person's living situation. This could be at home with their family, living with foster carers or living on their own. The team also assists with the re-integration of a young person to their home following a period of short-term accommodation.

## Ratio of Compliments to Complaints

The ratio of compliments to all complaints across CAS received is 2:1. This represents a decrease on the previous year when the ratio of compliments to complaints was 2.8:1.

Graph 5 below shows that between 2007/08 and 2013/14, the percentage of compliments received has consistently outweighed the percentage of complaints received, however, in 2013/14, the proportion of compliments has fallen below 67% of all representations received.

**Graph 5: Composition of CAS Representations 2007-2014**



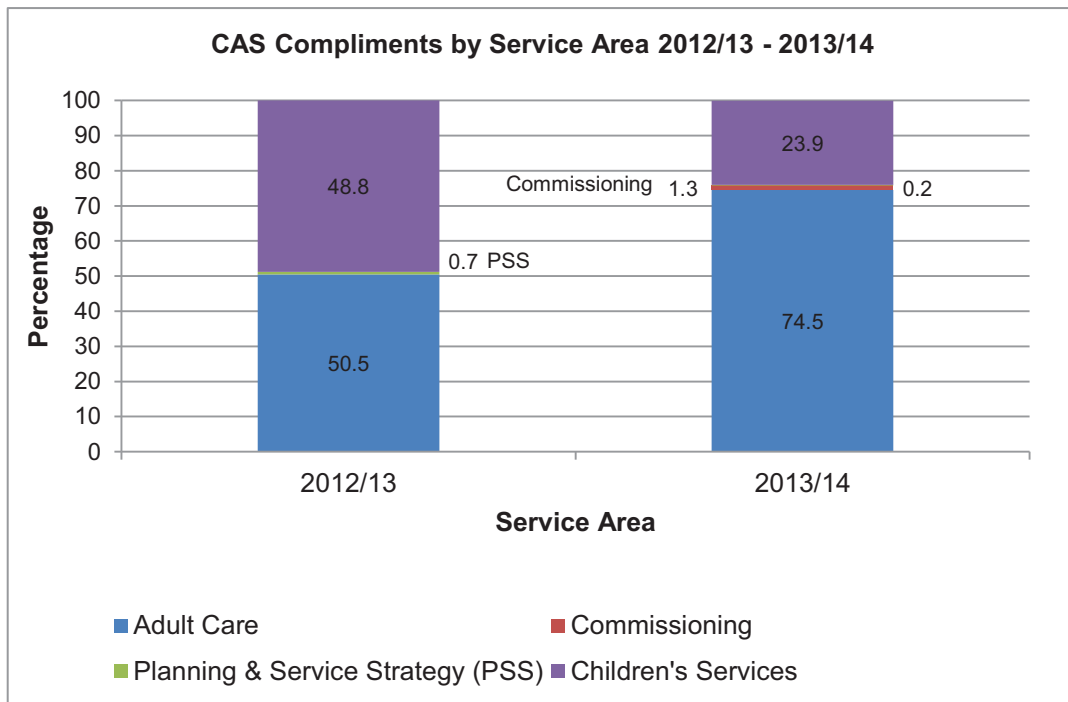
## Compliments by Team and Service Area

The Community Support Team<sup>2</sup> received the majority of compliments about children's social care with 56 (51.9%) of the total compliments, followed by Aycliffe Secure Services with 11 (10.3%) and the Safeguarding Children teams with 11 (10.3%).

For compliments relating to adult social care, County Durham Care and Support (CDCS), the in-house provider, received 233 (67.9%) of the total number of compliments, with Older People's/Older People's Mental Health/Physical Disabilities/Sensory Support service receiving 99 (28.9%) compliments. This reflects the previous year's trends in relation to the service areas receiving the greatest number of compliments.

Graph 6 overleaf shows that as with complaints, the largest percentage of compliments received relate to the Adult Care and Children's Services service areas in both 2012/13 and 2013/14. The percentage of compliments relating to Adult Care increased from 50.5% in 2012/13 to 74.5% in 2013/14. However, compliments relating to Children's Services decreased from 48.8% to 23.9% during the same period.

**Graph 6: CAS Compliments by Service Area**



Examples of compliments received and themes are contained within the report in Parts Three and Four.

## Part Three - Representations Relating to Children's Social Care Services

### Context

This part of the report presents the data for representations relating to children's social care services received during the reporting year 2013/14. It reflects the publication requirements of *The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006*. Locally-agreed reporting information is also provided.

The Regulations for children's social care complaints detail that complaints should be managed and resolved in 3 Stages:

- Stage 1 (local resolution) which has a target timescale of up to 20 working days;
- Stage 2 (independent investigation) which has a target timescale of 25-65 working days from the complaint details being agreed; and
- Stage 3 (Review Panel) which has a timescale of up to 50 working days.

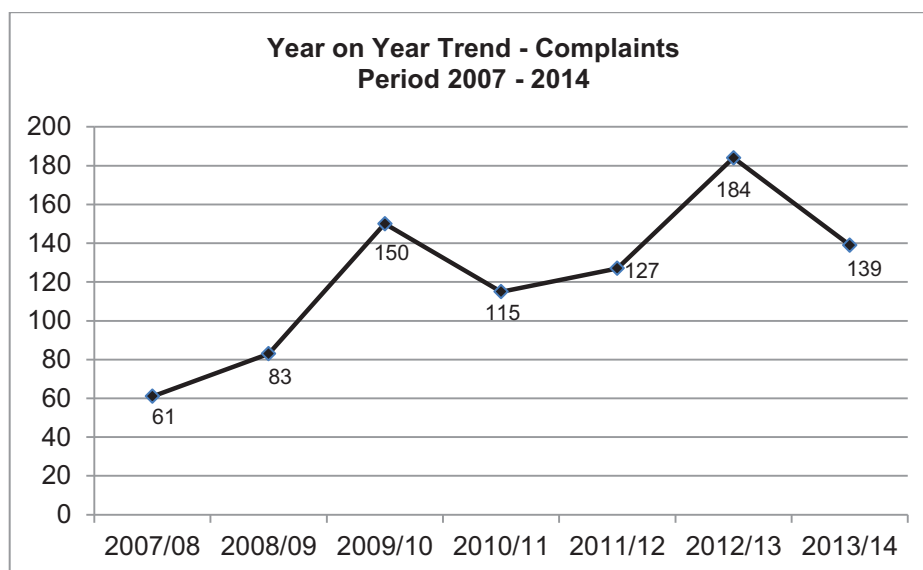
When a complaint is received it is risk-assessed to ensure that there are no safeguarding or other procedural issues that might supersede the complaints procedure, and dates checked to ensure that it is within the 12 month limitation period (which may be waived in certain circumstances at the discretion of the local authority).

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint heard under the regulations, they can refer outstanding issues to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) who will determine their course of action dependent on the issues presented within the complaint.

### Year on Year Trend 2007-2014

In order to obtain an overview of overall performance from previous annual reports Graph 7 below shows year on year comparisons of the total numbers of complaints received for children's social care.

**Graph 7: Complaints Trend 2007-2014 – Children's Social Care**





In 2013/14, a 24.5% decrease was evident in the total number of children's social care complaints received; 139 compared to 184 complaints received in 2012/2013. Over the period 2007 - 2014, the graph shows that the number of complaints increased between 2007/08 and 2009/10, some of which was due to improved recording. Complaints then decreased before rising again to peak in 2012/13. Reasons for this increase were explored with Children's Services managers and with neighbouring local authorities, 4 of whom also reported large increases in the same year. No particular and over-riding factor was identified for the increase in complaints about Durham children's social care services in 2012/13.

The service is increasingly looking at ways of ensuring that complaints are dealt with at as early a stage as possible to stop them escalating to more formal stages. This has included meeting with complainants, using the telephone or face to face communication rather than written communication, apologising when necessary and writing high quality robust responses when a formal letter is required. The service is also increasingly looking at ways of ensuring that learning from complaints is noted and implemented so that mistakes are not repeated. A culture of 'valuing the apology' and 'learning from complaints' is gradually becoming embedded. All of this may account for the decreased number of complaints in 2013/14.

### **Number of Complaints Received**

In 2013/14, a total of 139 complaints were received and progressed under the Children's Social Care Complaints Regulations. This represents a decrease of 24.5% on the 184 complaints received in 2012/13.

Of the 139 complaints received:

- 60 were recorded as resolved at an informal level;<sup>3</sup>
- 75 were logged as Stage 1 complaints (local resolution);<sup>3</sup>
- 3 were taken through the Stage 2 complaints process; and
- 1 was actioned at Stage 3.

This report contains performance information in relation to the 79 complaints recorded at Stages 1, 2 and 3; of which 77 (97.5 %) were concluded by the year end (75 at Stage 1, one at Stage 2 and one at Stage 3).

Although there was a reduction in the number of complaints received, due to improved logging practices, more complaints were logged at Stage 1 than in previous years.

<sup>3</sup>Note: Informal resolution is where complaints are resolved quickly without entering the formal process. Stage 1 (local resolution) complaints are logged and enter the formal procedure and the LA has a 20 day timescale to respond. There have been improved logging practices implemented in the reporting period which led to more stage 1 complaints being logged than in previous years, despite there being an overall reduction in total complaints received. This is a trend that is likely to continue next year.



## Number of Complaints Upheld

Of the 79 Stage 1-3 complaints, 12 were upheld in full (15.2%) and 19 were partially upheld (24.1%) (including one complaint at Stage 3). There were 46 complaints (58.2%) that were not upheld (including 1 Stage 2 complaint). Two complaints at Stage 2 (2.5%) were ongoing at the year end.

In 2012/13, 17.6% of complaints were upheld, 44.1% were partially upheld and 32.4% were not upheld (with 5.9% withdrawn). Therefore, in 2013/14 a greater percentage of complaints were not upheld than in the preceding year.

**Table 5: Outcome of Complaints for Children’s Social Care Services 2013/14**

Outcome of Complaints 2013/14 Children’s Social Care					
Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing	Total
Safeguarding Children teams	9	11	33	2	55
Initial Response/Emergency Duty	0	2	4	0	6
Looked After Children teams	1	4	0	0	5
Young People’s Service	0	0	4	0	4
Assessment & Intervention teams*	1	1	1	0	3
Disabled Children and Families Team	1	0	1	0	2
Aycliffe Secure Services	0	0	1	0	1
Children’s Home	0	0	1	0	1
Full Circle	0	0	1	0	1
Pathfinder	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>79</b>

\* Teams in place since February 2014 following an internal restructure

## Percentage of Complaint Acknowledgements in Timescale

The statutory timescale for acknowledging a children’s social care complaint is 2 working days. Of the 79 complaints logged at Stage 1-3, 75 (94.9%) were acknowledged within the 2 day timescale. During the early part of the reporting year, 4 Stage 1 complaints were acknowledged outside 2 days; this was due to an administrative error and was quickly resolved.

## Complaints Completed within Timescale

Of the 75 Stage 1 complaints received, 44 (58.7%) were resolved within the 20 working day timescale for Stage 1 complaints. (Of these 44, half were resolved within 10 working days). This is an improvement on the previous year, when 39.4% were resolved within the 20 day timescale. The other 31 complaints (41.3%) were resolved outside the timescale. The service continues to strive to improve on performance against the 20 day target and will be introducing new escalation measures to improve this.

Stage 2 complaints have a target timescale of 65 working days from the date the complainant signs their agreement with the elements of the complaint to the date that the Local Authority issues a response to the report written by an independent investigator.

Of the 3 Stage 2 complaints received, none were resolved within the 65 day timescale. One complaint took 5 months to conclude and two remained ongoing at

the year end. The independent investigating officer gives regular progress updates to the complainants and the Local Authority. Developments have been put in place to improve the management of this process such as utilising a project plan and escalating to the Strategic Manager for the service. However, complaints which are taken to Stage 2 are particularly complex and usually comprise numerous elements. One of the ongoing Stage 2 complaints requires an investigation of 26 complaints in relation to the cases of 5 children.

Stage 3 complaints follow a process which takes up to 50 working days to complete; the process involves an independent Review Panel considering the Stage 2 complaint investigation report and deciding if any further recommendations are required. The complaint which was taken to Stage 3 in 2013/14 was the first to follow this process since 2008/09, and was concluded within the required timescale.

**Table 6: Percentage of Stage 1-3 Complaints Completed within Timescale**

	Total	Percentage of Total Formal Complaints	Percentages 2012/13	Direction of Travel
Stage 1-3 complaints resolved within target timescale	45	57.0%	37.8%	↑
Stage 1-3 complaints to be completed	2	2.5%	5.4%	↓
Stage 1-3 complaints resolved outside timescale	32	40.5%	56.8%	↓
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	-

### Themes of Complaints

As shown in Table 7 overleaf, of the 79 Stage1-3 complaints received, 32 (40.5%) included *Lack of Communication/Information* as at least one of the reasons for the complaint. Examples of this are complaints about not being able to get in contact with social workers; not being kept informed about what was happening in a child's case; and not receiving copies of children's records such as contact sheets or assessment reports.

*Professional Conduct of Staff* was included as a reason in 28 (35.4%) complaints. Complaints in this category usually detailed that social workers had failed to follow procedures, had lied to families, or had given preferential treatment to one parent over another.

There were 15 complaints (19.0%) which were about a *Disputed Decision*. In some cases this related to parents being unhappy about the decisions made by social work teams in relation to family dynamics (e.g. children must not have contact with a mother's partner, who is believed to be a risk to the children). In other cases, young people complained about decisions made to move them to a different foster placement or school.

These three major themes of complaints can be compared to 2012/13, when *Professional Conduct of Staff* was cited in 43.6% of complaints, followed by *Lack of Communication/Information* (35.9%) and *Disputed Decision* (18.0%).

In the majority of cases citing failures in communication and information there is a direct link with '*Professional Conduct of Staff*', which relates to how a worker conducts themselves according to their professional responsibilities (e.g. complaints

about Social Workers allegedly being biased toward one parent). Complaints about *Staff Attitude* are in relation to staff being rude or appearing not to care, for example.

Table 8 shows the subject matter of the 31 complaints which were upheld or partially upheld (as detailed in Table 5); that is, where the service was found to be at fault. This highlights that of the 12 complaints which were fully upheld, 4 (one-third) cited *Provision of Service – Assessment*. This means that the service did not carry out an adequate process in relation to assessing families to determine what services they might benefit from or require.

**Table 7: Themes of Complaints Received 2013/14**

Complaint Classification / Issue	Number of Complaints
Lack of Service – Communications/Information	32
Professional Conduct of Staff	28
Disputed Decision	15
Lack of Service – Contact/Visits	12
Provision of Service - Assessment	9
Lack of Service – Referrals Not Actioned	9
Quality of Service – Report Writing	9
Quality of Service – Late Referrals	7
Staff Attitude	6
Confidentiality	4
Finance - Assessment	4
Safeguarding	4
Quality of Service - Personal Financial Issues	3
Application of Service Guidance/Procedures	2
Provision of Services – Reviews/Conferences	2
Lack of Service – Denied Service	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>147*</b>

*\*Note: a complaint can have more than one classification recorded within it*

**Table 8: Themes of Upheld and Partially Upheld Complaints 2013/14**

Complaint Classification / Issue	Fully Upheld Complaints	Partially Upheld Complaints	Total
Lack of Service – Communications/Information	2	11	13
Professional Conduct of Staff	2	9	11
Disputed Decision	2	5	7
Lack of Service – Contact/Visits	3	1	4
Provision of Service - Assessment	4	1	5
Quality of Service – Report Writing	-	5	5
Quality of Service – Late Referrals	1	3	4
Finance - Assessment	2	1	3
Lack of Service – Referrals Not Actioned	-	2	2
Staff Attitude	-	2	2
Provision of Services – Reviews/Conferences	1	1	2
Safeguarding	-	1	1
Quality of Service - Personal Financial Issues	-	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>60</b>

*\*Note: a complaint can have more than one classification recorded within it*

In addition to the information above, further information given by complainants suggests that service users:

- experienced difficulties in making a complaint (resulting in some complainants going directly to the Corporate Director of CAS with their complaints)
- felt that they were discriminated against on the basis of gender; and

- lacked confidence in the service’s ability to record factually correct information.

These issues are all being explored by the service in order to mitigate against further complaints with these themes. Managers and staff are:

- reviewing the complaints process to ensure accessibility;
- to receive complaints training to ensure that they know how to action any complaint and signpost service users to the complaints procedures;
- give equal attention to information and views from both parents (without giving more attention to the primary carer); and
- being vigilant about recording information and ensuring factual accuracy.

### Complaints Received by Service Area

The service area receiving the greatest number of complaints was Safeguarding Children followed by the Initial Response Team. These two service areas have arguably the greatest amount of contact with service users and members of the public. It is pleasing to note that the number of complaints about services to disabled children decreased by 4 complaints and that the number of complaints received by Fostering and Adoption decreased by 2 complaints.

It is noted that although the total number of complaints decreased from 2012/13, the number of stage 1 complaints increased across the majority of areas. In Safeguarding Children teams, the number of complaints rose by 31, although of the 55 complaints received by those teams, 33 (60%) were not upheld.

**Table 9: Number of Complaints Received by Service Area 2013/14**

Service	Number of Stage 1-3 Complaints 2013/14	Number of Stage 1 – 3 Complaints 2012/13	Direction of Travel	% of Total Complaints 2013/14	% of Total Complaints 2012/13
Safeguarding Children teams	55	24	↑	69.6%	61.5%
Initial Response/Emergency Duty	6	5	↑	7.6%	12.8%
Looked After Children teams	5	0	↑	6.3%	0
Young People’s Service	4	2	↑	5.1%	5.1%
Assessment & Intervention teams	3	0	↑	3.8%	0
Disabled Children and Families	2	6	↓	2.5%	15.4%
Aycliffe Secure Services	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Children’s Home	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Full Circle	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Pathfinder	1	0	↑	1.3%	0
Fostering and Adoption	0	2	↓	0	5.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Complaints Referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

The Ombudsman had involvement in 10 children’s social care cases during 2013/14, compared with 7 in 2012/13. During 2013/14 the LGO issued 10 Final Decisions in cases that had been referred to them. In 2 of the cases the LGO declined to fully investigate on the grounds that public expense could not be upheld as

maladministration had not occurred. One case was about a Court matter and was therefore outside the jurisdiction of the Local Authority and the Ombudsman.

Of the 7 cases which the Ombudsman investigated:

- Two were not upheld.
- One case was referred back to children's services to review. The review found that children's services had been at fault and actions were undertaken.
- Two cases were referred back to the service, to arrange for Stage 2 independent investigations.
- The Local Authority was recommended to pay compensation in 2 cases, 1 in relation to a data breach; and 1 in relation to a child's Birth Plan not being clear enough and the subsequent impact this had on the family.

### Complaints by Complainant Type

As has been the trend over previous reporting years, *Parents* constituted the highest number of complainants, representing 42 of the 79 Stage 1-3 complaints (53.2%). *Other relatives* brought 18 (22.8%) complaints (in most cases, grandparents); followed by *Advocates\** who made 11 complaints (13.9%). *Carers* made 3 complaints (3.8%) and *Clients* (service users, young people) made 3 (3.8%) complaints. Two complaints (2.5%) were made by *Other* people (1 was made by a mother's partner and 1 was made by a father's former partner).

*\*DCC has a contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to provide free advocacy services to children and young people who are looked after.*

### Gender Profile

Complaints made about services to children or young people may be submitted on behalf of one or more children in the family. If a complaint is made on behalf of more than one child, it is logged on the record of the eldest child. The 79 Stage 1-3 complaints were made on behalf of a total of 153 children and young people. Using the eldest child's information, it can be reported that 42 of the 79 complaints were made on behalf of girls aged 0-18 years, and 37 were made on behalf of boys aged 0-17 years.

### Ethnicity and Diversity

In 76 of the 79 (96.2%) complaints, the eldest child (or the child who the complaint was made on behalf of) was White British; in 2 cases the child was recorded as being Mixed Race Asian, and in 1 case the child was Mixed Race Caribbean.

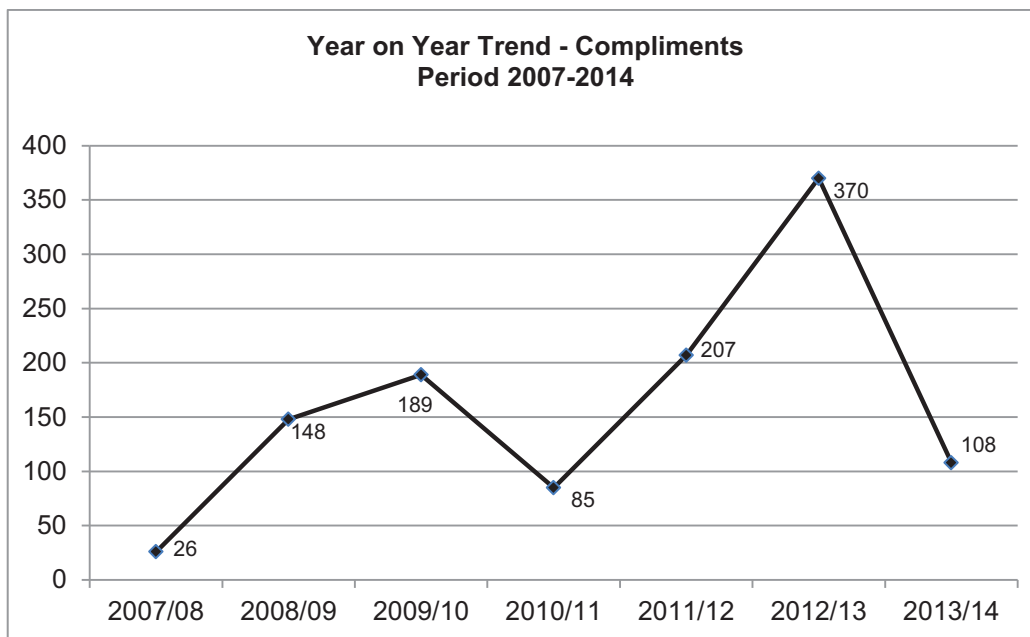
### Declined Complaints

During the reporting year, 5 complaints were declined, 1 due to it being out of timescale by 20 years, 1 which did not meet the criteria for making a statutory complaint, and 3 about matters which should have been taken through a respective legal process. Declined complaints are *not* included in the total figure of 139 complaints received.

## Number of Compliments Received

It is disappointing to note that in the reporting year, the number of recorded compliments fell from 370 in 2012/13 to 108 in 2013/14. This represents a decrease of 70.8%, in contrast to the 78.7% increase which was reported in the previous year. Reasons for this increase were attributed to improved collecting and reporting of compliments, therefore managers have been reminded to report any compliments received from service users and their families, which may take the form of emails, letters, and cards and ensure these are sent to the QIT for recording.

**Graph 8: Compliments Year on Year Trend 2007-2014**



## Compliments Received by Service Area

In 2013/14, the service which received the most compliments was the Community Support Team, which is a positive intervention service. There was also a substantial increase from the year before.

Aycliffe Secure Services received over 10% of total compliments, as they did in 2012/13.

A number of service areas saw a reduction in compliments such as Children's Homes, Family Pathfinder, Fostering and Adoption, Safeguarding Children and 4Real.



**Table 10: Number of Compliments Received by Service Area 2013/14**

Service	Number of Compliments 2013/14	Number of Compliments 2012/13	Direction of Travel	% of Total Compliments 2013/14	% of Total Compliments 2012/13
Aycliffe Secure Services	11	40	↓	10.3%	10.8%
Copelaw Activities (CATS)	1	96	↓	0.9%	25.9%
Children's Homes	2	25	↓	1.9%	6.8%
Community Support Team	56	49	↑	51.9%	13.2%
Countywide Admin teams	0	13	↓	-	3.5%
Disabled Children and Families Team	1	2	↓	0.9%	0.5%
Family Pathfinder	2	34	↓	1.9%	9.2%
Fostering and Adoption	1	20	↓	0.9%	5.4%
Full Circle	6	5	↑	5.6%	1.4%
Initial Response/Emergency Duty	1	5	↓	0.9%	1.4%
Looked After Children – Aycliffe/Durham	8	11	↓	7.4%	3.0%
Safeguarding Children teams	11	31	↓	10.3%	8.4%
Supervised Contact Service	1	-	↑	0.9%	-
Young People's Service	0	5	↓	-	1.4%
4Real	7	34	↓	6.5%	9.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>370</b>	↓	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Ratio of Compliments to Complaints

The ratio of compliments to complaints received is 0.8:1 compared to 2:0:1 in 2012/13 and 1.6:1 in 2011/12.

### Key Areas Highlighted within Compliments Received

Compliments highlight that service users have appreciated the following:

- feeling respected, listened to and supported;
- having decisions explained to them;
- being kept informed;
- staff explaining issues in a way the client understood;
- professionalism, care and commitment of staff; and
- being able to contact staff easily.

### Examples of Compliments Received

Some examples of compliments received include:

- *My life has improved and I feel a lot better in myself and feel a lot more grounded to be able to sort my own life out, I will miss [worker] and always remember how she has helped me turn my life around over the years. Couldn't have done it without you.*
- *This support was invaluable. [Worker] was patient and understanding with both of us. He spoke at an appropriate level depending on who he was talking to. He phrased questions and checked understanding before moving on.*
- *[Young person] has been extremely vocal in her opinions of Education whilst at Aycliffe, all of which are encouraging. [She] has received an excellent school report, in her own words she is quoted as saying "...I would also like to thank ... for their support and their effort and changing my views on education."*

- *I would like to say a huge thank you for everything you have done for [child] and our family over the past years...you are the best social worker we could have asked for as, as well as doing your job you also took time to listen and care especially over this last year and your support was a godsend.*
- *We have always found [worker] to be supportive, especially at times when things were difficult with family members. She always made herself available for a chat when we needed to discuss things, and sometimes called just to say hello, which made us feel like she cares about her work with the children and the families.*



## Part Four - Representations Relating to Adult Social Care Services

### Context

This part of the report presents the data for representations regarding adult social care received during the year 2013/14 and reflects the statutory requirements of *The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009*. The reporting format also includes locally-agreed reporting information over and above that required by the Regulations.

The Regulations for adult social care complaints promoted new ways of managing and seeking to resolve complaints. There are no fixed timescales with the exception of 3 working days to acknowledge the complaint although the local performance target has been set at 2 working days (to align with the Children's Regulations) and a 6 month completion target. A complaint made verbally, if capable of being resolved within 1 working day, does not constitute a complaint for recording purposes under the Regulations.

As with children's social care complaints, when a complaint is received it is risk-assessed to ensure that there are no safeguarding or other procedural issues that might supersede the complaints procedure and that it is within the 12 month limitation period; consent has to be obtained to confirm that someone making a complaint on another's behalf has been given the authority to do so.

Once the above determinations have been made complainants are invited to be fully involved in planning how their complaint is to be addressed, within what timescale and their expectations on the desired outcome and from this a Complaints Resolution Plan letter is produced.

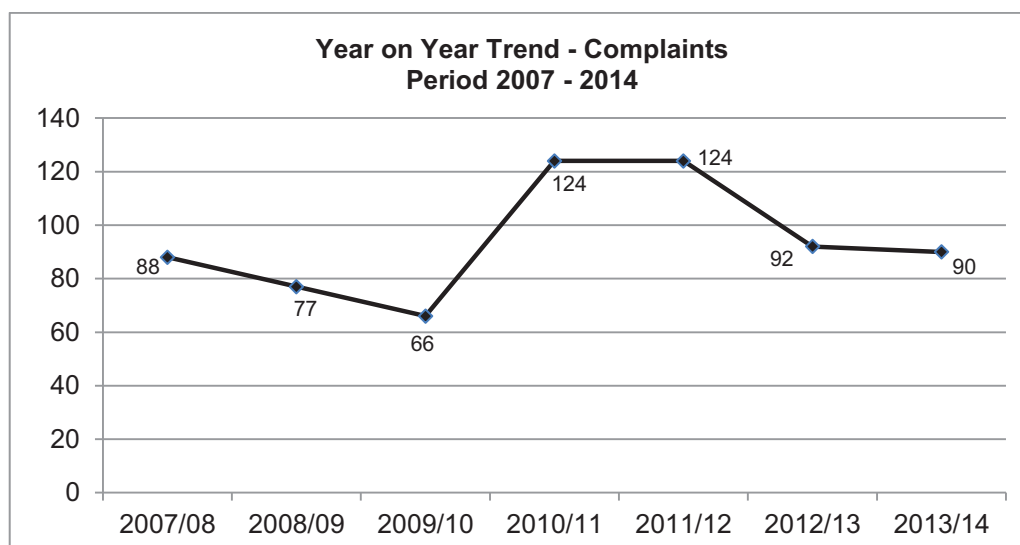
Different resolution methods are utilised depending on the issues being addressed and individual preferences and circumstances.

Where all proportionate resolution mechanisms have been exhausted and if the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant can refer outstanding issues to the Local Government Ombudsman.

### Year on Year Trend 2007-2014

Graph 9 overleaf shows year on year comparison of the numbers of complaints received for adult social care.

**Graph 9: Year on Year Trend Complaints - Period 2007-2014 – Adult Social Care**



In 2013/14, there was a 2.2% decrease in the number of complaints received; 90 compared to 92 complaints received in 2012/13 continuing the downward trend of the previous reporting year when compared to a spike which occurred between 2010/11 and 2011/12. This coincided with changes to charging policies leading to a greater number of complaints being made.

### Number of Complaints Received

In 2013/14, a total of 90 complaints were received and progressed through the Statutory Adult Social Care Complaints Procedure. This represents a decrease of 2.2% on the 92 complaints received in 2012/13.

Of the 90 complaints received, 79 were concluded by the end of the reporting year with 11 complaints ongoing.

### Number of Complaints Upheld

Of the 79 complaints completed by the end of the reporting year, 26 (32.9%) were upheld in full and 10 (12.7%) were partially upheld. There were 43 (54.4%) complaints that were not upheld.

**Table 11: Outcome of Complaints 2013/14**

Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing	Total
Adult Care - LD/MH/Carers	5	0	3	4	12
Adult Care - OP/MHSOP/PDSI/SS	14	6	24	4	48
Adult Care - Safeguarding	0	1	3	0	4
Commissioning	6	3	12	1	22
County Durham Care And Support	1	0	1	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>90</b>

## Percentage of Complaint Acknowledgements in Timescale

The statutory timescale for acknowledging an adult social care complaint is 3 working days. The CAS performance target for adult social care complaints is 2 working days. Of the 90 complaints received, 89 (98.8%) were acknowledged within the 2 day timescale. In the one case timescale for acknowledgement was not met, this was due to an administrative error and was resolved.

## Complaints Completed within Timescale

Complaints Resolution Plans (CRPs) were completed in all of the 90 complaints received in the year. The CRPs included timescales for response and are calculated based upon the potential complexity of the case. Of the 90 complaints received, 79 were completed at the end of the reporting year and 97.7% of these were completed within the agreed timescale of the CRP. In one case a complaint response missed the timescale by 1 day due to an administrative change. Of the 11 complaints not completed at the end of the reporting year they remained within the timescale agreed in the CRP.

Of the 79 complaints concluded over the year 17 (21.5%) were completed in less than 10 working days; 33 (41.8%) were concluded between 10 and 20 working days; 16 (20.3%) were concluded between 21 and 30 working days; 13 (16.4%) of the completed complaints took more than 30 days to complete due to their complexity.

## Themes of Complaints

Of the 90 complaints received, 22 related to the category of *'Disputed Decisions'*. An example of *'disputed decisions'* is where following assessment, a client did not meet the criteria to receive a service and this was challenged. There were 22 complaints in the *'Communications/Information'* category. Complaints in this category usually detailed a failure in providing comprehensive and comprehensible information or not following up with information and updates when promised. The next highest category of complaint was *'Professional Conduct of Staff'*. Such complaints tended to be allied to disputed decisions and involved allegations that assessments had not been thoroughly conducted. The distinction between *'Professional Conduct'* issues and the category of *'Staff Attitude'* is that the former relates to how the worker conducts themselves according to their professional responsibilities and the regulatory requirements whilst the latter relates to, for example, allegations of rudeness in communication.

**Table 12: Themes of Complaints Received 2013/14**

Complaint Classification / Issue	Number of Complaints
Disputed Decision	22
Lack Of Service - Communications/Information	22
Professional Conduct Of Staff	16
Provision Of Service - Equipment	14
Finance - Charging Policy	11
Application Of Service Guidance/Procedures	10
Quality Of Service - Personal Financial Issues	7
Finance - Assessment	4
Lack Of Service - Denied Service	4
Quality Of Service - Personal Care	4
Safeguarding	4
Staff Attitude	4
Confidentiality	4
Provision Of Service - Assessment	3
Finance - Direct Payment	3
Provision Of Service - Reviews/Conferences	2
Quality Of Service - Work Of Other Agencies	2
Quality Of Service - Missed/Late Dom Care Calls	1
Lack Of Service - Contact/Visits	1
Lack Of Service - Restricted Choices Of Current Services	1
Refusal Of A Service	1
Service Withdrawal	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>141*</b>

\*A complaint can have more than one classification recorded within it.

**Table 13: Themes of Upheld and Partially Upheld Complaints 2013/14**

Complaint Classification / Issue	Upheld Complaints	Partially Upheld	Total
Disputed Decision	4	6	10
Lack Of Service - Communications/Information	6	5	11
Professional Conduct Of Staff	3	2	5
Provision Of Service - Equipment	1	2	3
Finance - Charging Policy	3	-	3
Application Of Service Guidance/Procedures	5	2	7
Quality Of Service - Personal Financial Issues	3	1	4
Finance - Assessment	-	1	1
Lack Of Service - Denied Service	-	2	2
Quality Of Service - Personal Care	3	-	3
Safeguarding	-	1	1
Staff Attitude	1	1	2
Confidentiality	1	-	1
Provision Of Service - Assessment	2	1	3
Finance - Direct Payment	2	-	2
Provision Of Service - Reviews/Conferences	1	1	2
Quality Of Service - Work Of Other Agencies	1	-	1
Quality Of Service - Missed/Late Dom Care Calls	1	-	1
Lack Of Service - Contact/Visits	-	1	1
Service Withdrawal	1	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>64*</b>

\*Note: a complaint can have more than one classification recorded within it

## Complaints Received by Service Area

The service receiving the greatest number of complaints was Older People/Older People's Mental Health/Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment/Sensory Support, followed by Commissioning. In previous years the second highest number of complaints would usually be in the Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/ Carers/ Substance Misuse Service Area. This service area has, however, experienced a decrease in the number of complaints in 2013/14 when compared to 2012/13 when 18 were received. The main reason, however, why there has been a change in trend is that complaints about Finance and Direct Payments now come under Commissioning and the data is now combined rather than being reported as separate service areas.

**Table 14: Number of Complaints Received by Service Area 2013/14**

Service	Number of Complaints 2013/14	Number of Complaints 2012/13	Direction of Travel	% of Total Complaints 2013/14	% of Total Complaints 2012/13
Older People/Mental Health Services for Older People/ Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment/ Sensory Support	48	41	↓	53.3%	44.5%
Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/Carers/Substance Misuse	12	17	↓	13.3%	18.5%
Commissioning	22	24	↓	24.4%	26.1%
County Durham Care And Support	4	8	↓	4.5%	8.7%
Adult Care - Safeguarding	4	2	↑	4.5%	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Complaints Referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

During 2013/14, the LGO issued 10 Final Decisions in adult social care cases that had been referred to them:

- In 3 cases the LGO found no evidence of fault.
- In 3 cases the LGO decided not to investigate on the basis of the information provided to the preliminary enquiries.
- One complaint was not within jurisdiction due to the passage of time.
- Two complaints were subject to full investigation and the LGO found no maladministration or injustice in either case. One complaint was deemed premature.

Following the establishment of its specialist adult social care complaints investigation unit the LGO has for the first time published statistics for local authority adult social care complaints and private care providers. The Review Report notes that the LGO has seen a 130% increase in adult social care complaints since it took on responsibility for registered private care providers in 2009. In the last year, the LGO saw a 14% increase in the number of complaints and enquiries received about adult social care.

The Review established that 40% of the total number of complaints the LGO received related to just 25 council areas.

Durham County Council was one of only 44 (22.6%) of the 194 Councils where the LGO made no findings against it in any of the adult social care complaints referred there.

### Complaints by Complainant Type

As has been the trend over previous reporting years, relatives (non-parent) constituted the highest category of complainant at 49 complaints (54.4%). In almost all cases an adult child made the complaint on behalf of their parent. The number of people who raised complaints on their own behalf was 26 (28.9%). The number of parents making a complaint relating to adult children was 12 (13.3%). Three (3.4%) complaints were made by advocates. This data is consistent with trends in previous reporting years.

### Complaints by Client Group

Complaints about services for older people constituted the highest proportion of complaints at 55.4%, with services for learning disabilities clients at 23.9%.

**Table 15: Complaints by Client Group 2013/14**

Service Area	Learning Disabilities	Mental Health	Older People	Physical Disabilities	Total
Adult Care - LD/MH/Carers	11	1	0	0	12
Adult Care - OP/MHSOP/PDSI/SS	0	0	36	12	48
Adult Care - Safeguarding	0	0	4	0	4
Commissioning	1	1	19	1	22
County Durham Care And Support	0	1	3	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>68.9%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Age and Gender Profiles of Complainants

The majority (69.3%) of complaints were made by on or behalf of females (23.1% aged 18-64 years, 24.2% aged 65-84 years and 22.0% aged 85+ years). Males accounted for 25.3% of complainants (14.4% aged 18-64 years, 7.7% aged 65-84 years and 3.3% aged 85+ years). For the remaining 5.4%, age/gender information was not recorded. This data represents a decrease in complaints for females and males in the 18-64 age range (compared to previous years) and an increase for females aged 85+.

### Ethnicity and Diversity

Complaints analysed by ethnicity represented 100% White British.

### Declined Complaints

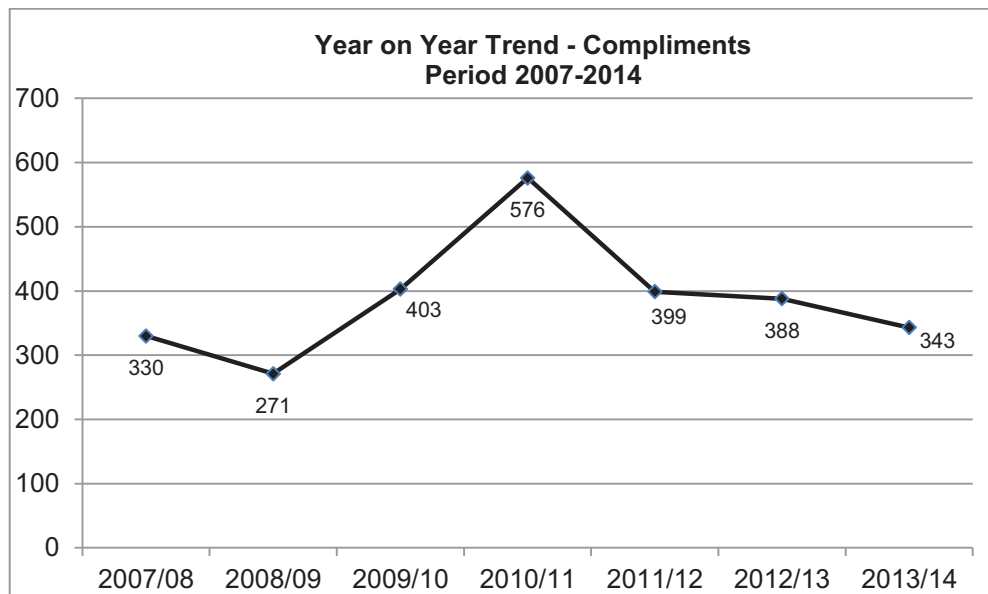
During the year, 9 complaints were declined. Three of the complaints were declined on the grounds that the issues complained about were significantly outside of the 12 month time limit for bringing a complaint; 2 were declined as the issues did not fall within DCC's jurisdiction; 2 of the complaints had previously been investigated and responded to and the complaints procedure exhausted; and 2 of the complaints were

declined as the service user declined to give their consent to the complaint being made. Declined complaints are *not* included in the figure total of 90 complaints received.

### Number of Compliments Received

In the reporting year, a total of 343 compliments were received. This represents a decrease of 11.6% from the 388 received during 2012/13.

**Graph 10: Year on Year Trend Compliments – 2007-2014**



### Ratio of Compliments to Complaints

The ratio of compliments to complaints in 2013/14 was 3.8:1 compared to 4.2:1 in the previous reporting year.

### Compliments by Service Area

County Durham Care and Support (CDCS), the in-house provider received 233 (67.9%) of the total number of compliments. The Older People's/Older People's Mental Health/Physical Disabilities/Sensory Support Service area received 99 (28.9%) of compliments.



**Table 16: Total Number of Compliments by Service Area 2013/14**

Service	Learning Disabilities	Older People	Physical Disabilities	Sensory Impairment	Total Compliments 2013/14	Total Compliments 2012/13	Direction of Travel	% of Total Compliments 2013/14	% of Total Compliments 2012/13
Adult Care - LD/MH/ Carers	3	1	-	-	4	3	↑	1.2%	0.8%
Adult Care – OP/ MHSOP/PDSI/SS	-	89	3	7	99	135	↓	28.9%	34.8%
County Durham Care and Support	4	227	2	-	233	245	↓	67.9%	63.1%
Commissioning	-	5	1	-	6	0	↑	1.7%	0
Planning And Service Strategy	-	1	-	-	1	5	↓	0.3%	1.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Key Areas Highlighted within Compliments Received

Compliments highlight that Service Users have appreciated:

- being treated with dignity by staff providing care;
- being helped to regain their independence and confidence with the support of carers;
- being provided with aids and equipment that assists with their daily living;
- the high quality of care and support provided by the staff in residential and domiciliary care services;
- staff's sensitivity and support when dealing with family bereavement;
- being given information in a way that is easy to understand; and
- the quick responses they have received when requesting assistance.

### Examples of Compliments Received

Some examples of compliments received include:

- *Thank you for your care and kindness. Your help and advice has lifted the stress from me and my family and I always look forward to the carers coming.*
- *We feel very lucky to have had you as the Social Worker for our Mum. You have made things happen and our parents trust you.*
- *When Mam died I was unsure how to tell [my sister] (a learning disabilities client). The staff were brilliant – they talked to her at her level in a very sensitive and thoughtful way so that she could understand. It was a great comfort to have such invaluable help at such a sad and difficult time.*
- *A massive thank you – if it wasn't for you and the caring support I received I wouldn't have got to the point I am today.*
- *Thank you for the help you have given me and my family during the stressful time placing my wife in residential care. I was helped through the various steps and without your calmness and reassurance this would have been so much more upsetting.*



## Part Five - Remedies and Learning Outcomes 2012/13

### Remedies in Children's and Adult Complaints

Providing remedies to issues that have arisen in a complaint are essential if trust and confidence are to be restored between the local authority and its service users. Even where complaints are not upheld, full explanations, further information and often apologies are given.

Remedies can be varied and examples of some provided in this reporting year are as follows:

#### Children's Complaints:

- Full explanations were given or repeated in terms that the complainant was able to understand more clearly.
- Managers met with complainants, which was appreciated in terms of complainants feeling listened to and that their concerns had been taken seriously.
- Placement moves were put on hold so that young people's views could be more fully considered prior to decisions being reconsidered.
- Social Workers were changed in some cases, even where complaints were not upheld, in order to improve working relationships with parents.
- Meetings with managers have continued to be an extremely effective method in satisfactorily concluding complaints. Complainants appreciate the time that managers give to addressing their concerns in an open and informal way.
- Addendums were added to reports to ensure that discrepancies were recorded in line with parent's wishes.
- Compensatory payments were made where the failures constituted maladministration as defined by the Local Government Ombudsman.

#### Adult Complaints:

- Occupational Therapy and Needs assessments were conducted under second opinion conditions where disputes arose following the original assessments for adaptations or care services.
- Reimbursement action was taken where there was no evidence on the case record that charging policies and the financial assessment process had been discussed or explained.
- Meetings with managers have continued to be an extremely effective method in satisfactorily concluding complaints. Complainants appreciate the time that managers give to addressing their concerns in an open and informal way.
- Explanations were provided or reiterated where communication had previously taken place but the client's understanding had not been checked.
- Where the client expressed a loss of trust and confidence in an individual worker a different worker was allocated to restore the relationship.

- Compensatory payments were made where the failures constituted maladministration as defined by the Local Government Ombudsman.

In all of the concluded complaints in CAS, full explanations and apologies, where appropriate, were provided in each case. It should be noted that compensatory redress was only considered (and agreed in line with Scheme of Delegation) where there was strong evidence of shortcomings that may be construed within the Local Government Ombudsman's definition of maladministration. It is recognised however, that where CAS is responsible for service failures that have caused losses and significant emotional distress, there is clearly the duty to acknowledge that and avoid further distress to the complainant.

### **Learning Outcomes in Children's and Adults Complaints**

Complaints provide invaluable information from which the Service learns how to improve. Complaints also act as a prompt to ensure all staff work consistently to policies and procedures. Some of the learning outcomes extracted and acted upon in the reporting year have included:

#### **Children's Complaints:**

- Workers who supervise contact sessions have been reminded to be vigilant about photographs and videos being taken of children.
- Where service users ask to remain anonymous in referrals, this will be noted and adhered to.
- Where Social Workers are asked to return service users calls, they will do so as soon as reasonably possible and if unable to, will note why not with reasons.
- Social Workers and Team Managers who quality assure and sign-off reports have been reminded that they must meet the required standards and include times, dates and a signature.
- Staff have been reminded that great care should be taken in regard to recording case notes to capture all incidents and ensure entries are complete and accurate.

#### **Adult Complaints:**

- Staff in the Learning Disabilities Service were reminded that they must ensure support/representation at complaint meetings is available for complainants with learning disabilities.
- A memorandum was issued to all social work staff in the Older Person's/Mental Health Services for Older Person's/Physical Disability/Sensory Support teams instructing that where a Continuing Health Care Decision Support Tool assessment results in funded nursing care, clear explanations should be given that charges for residential care to the client remain. Whilst it is the responsibility of the NHS staff to communicate both verbally and in writing it is expected that social work staff provide clear and explicit explanations.
- Learning Disabilities social work teams were reminded that there should be regular and effective communication with colleagues where a client's behaviour was impacting upon another client.

- Reminders were provided to all staff that information on the recording systems must be kept up to date at all times and that the worker commissioning the care package must record accurate provisions.
- Staff have been reminded that no service provision can be ended without consultation and discussion with the service user and their relatives (if the latter is appropriate) and that this should be fully and openly discussed in a review or re-assessment setting.

## Part Six – Developments

A number of developments have been undertaken in 2013/14. These include:

- Information about how to complain has been streamlined and made easier to understand.
- The policies and procedures for children and young people's statutory complaints have been reviewed and revised and will be available for staff on DCC's intranet in July 2014.
- Heads of Service are now receiving details of upheld complaints in their service area to improve communications and aid learning from complaints and service improvement.
- Examples of compliments are shared through the quarterly reports and internal staff publications.
- Staff have been reminded of the importance of valuing and recording compliments.
- The Service has taken a proactive approach to the early resolution of complaints, focusing on talking to service users and resolving issues at a local level.
- Improvements to recording and logging systems has been put in place.

There are a number of key areas that are in development for 2014/15. These include:

- Introducing monitoring systems to ensure actions and learning outcomes arising from complaints are implemented in a timely and effective way and embedded.
- Building a culture of 'valuing the apology' through a series of manager briefings and training events for staff dealing with concerns and complaints at a local level.
- Disseminating information to relevant senior managers whenever a complaint or compliment is received about their service.
- Undertaking a full review of the children's complaints process to ensure accessibility and transparency in line with best practice from the LGO. This will include accessibility for children and young people to the complaints process.
- Improving communications regarding the capturing and sharing of compliments with the QIT for reporting purposes.

## Part Seven – Conclusion

Complaints and compliments are a valuable source of feedback to inform service improvement. This Annual Report indicates positive achievements in performance in the handling and consideration of complaints and compliments but also recognises the need to strive for continuous improvement. The implementation of learning outcomes arising from complaints provides the opportunity to change practice and improve service delivery with transparency and accountability.

Over the period 2007-2012, there has generally been an overall upward trend for complaints and compliments, with a reduction witnessed in both of these areas in 2013/14. Although the number of compliments has decreased this year, it is reassuring to note that for every complaint received, twice as many compliments were received. Interestingly, the number of complaints about children's services has also decreased; whilst those about adult's services have remained static with the previous year.

The service must continue to learn from the complaints received and take action to improve. As the complaints function embeds into the quality and development service, it plays a vital role and contributes to shaping our knowledge and management of quality and assurance across the service. Developments for the future focus on learning from our complaints to improve our service.

The highest number of complaints received relates to a lack of communication/information, staff conduct and disputed decisions. Whilst remembering that complaints are often about perception and the majority of complaints received could not be substantiated, the service must monitor these areas in particular in the future.

A collaborative approach with the complainant to reach complaint resolution continues to develop. An approach based on local resolution and one where the complainant is central to the discussion and resolution of the complaint is proactively encouraged.

Details about the CAS Complaints procedures are available on Durham County Council's website ([www.durham.gov.uk](http://www.durham.gov.uk)) and public information is in key locations throughout the County.

Contact the CAS Complaints Team in writing at CAS Complaints Team, Room 3/48, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL or by phone on 03000 265762 (children's social care complaints) and 01388 527956 (adults social care complaints) or email [CASComplaints@durham.gov.uk](mailto:CASComplaints@durham.gov.uk) .

## Glossary of Abbreviations

<b>CAS</b>	Children and Adults Services
<b>CDCS</b>	County Durham Care and Support
<b>CRP</b>	Complaints Resolution Plan
<b>DCC</b>	Durham County Council
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>LD</b>	Learning Disabilities
<b>LGO</b>	Local Government Ombudsman
<b>MH</b>	Mental Health
<b>MHSOP</b>	Mental Health Services for Older people
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>NYAS</b>	National Youth Advocacy Service
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>OP</b>	Older People
<b>PDSI</b>	Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment
<b>QIT</b>	Quality and Improvement Team
<b>SS</b>	Sensory Support

# Children and Adults Services

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