



Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date Tuesday 17 November 2015
Time 9.30 am
Venue Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham

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.
2. Substitute Members.
3. Minutes of the meeting held 28 September 2015 (Pages 1 - 8)
4. Declarations of Interest, if any.
5. Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Quarter 2 - 2015/16 (Pages 9 - 12)
Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.
6. Customer First Task and Finish Group Review - Update on progress against recommendations (Pages 13 - 88)
Joint Report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Assistant Chief Executive.
7. Q1 2015/16 Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions (including LGO reporting) (Pages 89 - 104)
Report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services.
8. Children and Adults Services Annual Statutory Representations 2014/15 (Pages 105 - 150)
Report of the Corporate Director Children and Adults Services.
9. Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Attendance Management Working Group Review (Pages 151 - 184)
Report of the Assistant Chief Executive.

10. 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 November 2015

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

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

Councillors J Alvey, B Armstrong, J Armstrong, L Armstrong, H Bennett,
G Bleasdale, J Carr, P Crathorne, J Hillary, E Huntington, N Martin, J Rowlandson,
A Shield, P Stradling, L Taylor, A Turner, M Wilkes, S Wilson and R Young

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DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE ISSUES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 28 September 2015** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Lethbridge (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Alvey, J Armstrong, L Armstrong, H Bennett, J Carr, P Crathorne, K Henig (Vice-Chairman), J Hillary, N Martin, J Rowlandson, A Shield, P Stradling, L Taylor, M Wilkes and S Wilson

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Armstrong, G Bleasdale and E Huntington.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

The Head of Planning and Performance, Jenny Haworth referred to Minute 5, page 3 of the agenda pack and noted that, in relation to a question from Councillor A Shield in terms of tenants arrears and whether moving to properties with fewer bedrooms was an option, there was discretion within providers to be able to rehouse where appropriate. The Head of Planning and Performance also advised Members that in relation to an issue raised by Councillor L Armstrong in terms of a breakdown of child poverty statistics by electoral division, up-to-date figures would be produced after October 2015 and circulated to Members after this time.

Councillor A Shield noted that the scales used on graphs within reports, namely that as regards sickness absence figures, were such that a large proportion of the graph was empty, with the data being within a narrow band. Councillor A Shield noted that it had been agreed to use a scale that starting at a figure closer to the data values, not at zero, to allow a widening of the scale to give better resolution.

Councillor N Martin noted he disagreed with the idea and believed that it was important to have any graphs starting at zero. The Head of Planning and Performance noted she did not recall any agreement to start graphs axis at a non-zero figure, however, would check as regards this. It was added that the use of zero as a starting point was good practice, to avoid overstating variance. Councillor J Armstrong noted that he believed that it had been a suggestion, rather than a resolution in respect of the graph scales, however, if the Officers could look at the issue and report back to Councillor A Shield in this respect.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

The Committee considered two reports of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. The first report was the annual review of the Council's use of powers and approval of the RIPA policy. The report informed Members about the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) during the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. The Solicitor - Governance, Clare Burrows explained that the annual review report set out the types of cases and number of occasions that the powers were used, noting a slight increase in the use of the powers, as a consequence of a greater number of intelligence led investigations. Members noted that there was an amended RIPA policy attached at Appendix 2 to the annual report, with changes marked for Members information.

The Solicitor - Governance explained that the second report was the quarterly report on the Council's use of its powers under RIPA for the period 1 April 2015 and 30 June 2015. The report set out that there had been two new RIPA directed surveillance authorisations, 1 renewal of a directed surveillance authorisation and two Covert Human Intelligence Source authorisations, noting that investigations remain ongoing in relation to two operations regarding the sale of counterfeit tobacco and cigarettes from premises. No formal action is to be taken in relation to the other two cases.

Councillor J Hillary asked whether these reported figures included operations in connection with fly-tipping. The Solicitor - Governance noted that RIPA was for covert surveillance and that overt surveillance is used in connection with fly-tipping, with signage put in place to alert the public of cameras being used to detect such activity.

Resolved:

- (i) Receive the Annual Report on the Council's use of powers under RIPA.
- (ii) Approve the Council's policy on the use of RIPA.
- (iii) Receive the quarterly report on the Council's use of RIPA for the period 1 April 2015 to 30 June 2015 and resolve that it is being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

6 MTFP 6, Council Plan, Service Plans 2016/17 - 2018/19 and Review of the Council's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2016/17, plus an update to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy 2015/16

The Chairman thanked the Head of Finance - Corporate Finance, Jeff Garfoot who was in attendance to speak to Members in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 6, Council Plan, Service Plans 2016/17 - 2018/19 and Review of the Council's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2016/17, plus an update to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy 2015/16, with the Head of Planning and Performance to speak on some elements of the report (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance - Corporate Finance noted the report contained a lot of detail as regards MTFP 6 and added that the main issues were the result of the general election and the summer budget, noting that austerity would now continue through to 2019/20. Members noted that this meant a period of 9 years of funding reductions now effectively halfway through the process.

Councillors learned that the forecast for 2016/17 was for a better position than originally thought, however, with the Chancellor announcing Government Departmental reductions of between 20% to 40%, then it would be prudent to predict a 30% reduction for Local Government, which would equate to an additional loss of around £80 million by 2019/20. It was added that the Government's Spending Review would now be announced on 25 November and the Council would then receive details of its financial settlement in December. Members learned that savings that will have been realised since the beginning of austerity would be likely to be in excess of £260 million by 2019/20. The Head of Finance - Corporate Finance explained that there had been considerable work to protect frontline services to make savings through other means such as back office services and that further austerity would likely mean that the significant challenge being faced would begin to affect frontline services.

Members noted that the Council had retained its Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, one of only two Authorities in the region and it was explained that other issues to note included: a 7% reduction in the Public Health grant; the impact of the National Living Wage on the Council; and the differential between public and private sector wage rises, affecting the cost of services the Council would procure from the private sector.

The Head of Finance - Corporate Finance explained that key adjustments being made to the budget included: prudent assumptions in respect of business rates and Top Up grant; and "net loss" in terms of New Homes Bonus, as this is top-sliced from the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), with it possible that this would continue beyond the Government's original 6 year programme. It was added other adjustments would be in respect of: Council Tax base and Business Rates, and the impact of the National Living Wage, being significant in terms of procured services. Members noted that other budget pressures included: concessionary fares; energy prices; and staff being "auto enrolled" into the pension scheme.

The Committee noted that all Councils were facing pressure in terms of pension schemes, with low interest rates and low prices of stocks and bonds affecting portfolios and investments.

It was explained that taking into account the reduction in the Public Health grant the 2016/17 savings target would be for £27.188 million, with further reports to be presented to Cabinet and Council in this regard.

The Head of Finance - Corporate Finance noted that the MTFP 6 update for 2016/17 – 2018/19 would contain additional assumptions in terms of modelling, namely: a 2% increase in NHS budgets; a 1% increase in the Education budget; Defence and International Aid to increase; and for all unprotected Government Departments to receive the same percentage budget reductions. Members were directed to the table within the report setting out a summary of the revised funding reductions and savings required, noting that the details as regards the assumptions were set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

It was reiterated that austerity would continue through to 2019/20 and that as there would be challenges going forward, there would be a need to consult with the public in order to establish priorities in terms of Council services, with a table within the report showing the re-profiled funding reduction forecasts, taking into account the additional year of austerity. It was added that Durham County Council was in a strong position in terms of its current finances and its level of reserves to be able to have the necessary time to make measured decisions on how to manage funding reductions. Members were referred to the timetable as regards budget setting, noting Cabinet and Council to receive reports in January 2016.

The Head of Planning and Performance referred Members to paragraphs 27 to 33 in the report that set out the approach to the development of the Council Plan and associated Service Plans, developed in parallel with the MTFP to ensure money available aligned with the plans to be put in place. Members noted the proposals in terms of consultation, involving Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and relevant partners in due course, noting workforce and equality implications to be considered prior to the reporting to Cabinet and Council as previously mentioned.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Finance - Corporate Finance and Head of Planning and Performance and asked Members for their questions on the report.

Councillor N Martin noted that he hoped interest rates would rise, in the context of helping as regards pension deficit, and wondered whether a base build-in of a 2% rise would be reasonable. Councillor N Martin noted that a question had been raised at Parliament as regards the Council Tax exemptions on student houses, and as regards “compensation” that Authorities received in this respect, and that if this were removed by Government would this have an impact on the Council. The Head of Finance - Corporate Finance noted that pension estimates were based upon information from the Council’s Actuary, noting the position was to make prudent assumptions. In relation to Council Tax exemptions, the Head of Finance - Corporate Finance explained that in 2012, the baseline was frozen, with no formula changes until 2020. The Head of Finance - Corporate Finance noted that in the past, formulae had been based upon need.

Resolved:

That the Committee note:

- (i) the forecast funding reductions for 2016/17 to 2018/19 resulting from the analysis of the Summer Budget.

- (ii) the requirement to identify £102.875m of savings across the 2016/17 to 2018/19 period.
- (iii) the approach to preparing the Council Plan and Service Plan.
- (iv) the high level MTFP(6) and Council Plan timetable.
- (v) the approach outlined for consultation.
- (vi) the proposals to build equalities considerations into decision making.
- (vii) that Cabinet recommend to Full Council that the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme should remain unchanged for 2016/17, with a further review to be undertaken in Quarter 1 of 2016/17 to inform budget options for 2017/18 and beyond.
- (viii) the revisions to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy agreed under delegated powers.

7 Quarter 1 2015/16 Performance Management Report

The Chairman thanked the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager, Tom Gorman who was in attendance to speak to Members in relation to the Quarter 1, 2015/16 Performance Management Report (for copy see file of minutes).

Members were asked to note that the volume of customer contacts would be recorded and reported in terms of a rolling 12 month period, similar to sickness absence reporting, in order to smooth out any seasonal peaks.

Councillors noted that some of the key achievements in Quarter 1 included: continued good performance in terms of handling telephone calls, especially in the context of an increase in the number of telephone calls received; reduced footfall at Customer Access Points, noting a reconfiguration of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system meant figures as regard customers seen within the 15 minute target would be reported at Quarter 2; and better than target performance sustained for both new benefit claims and change of circumstance. It was added that the collection rate for council tax and business rates had achieved target; the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days had exceeded target; and the Council Plan actions were making good progress with the Iken software management system within Legal Services having been completed ahead of target and the Office Accommodation project being on track.

It was explained that key performance issues going forward included: the employee appraisal rate being below target; sickness levels were still outside of target, though it was noted this was the subject of an ongoing Overview and Scrutiny review; and the Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests responded to within deadline had deteriorated and remained below national target.

Members were asked to note that Council Plan actions which had not achieved target were set out from page 91 of the report and included the ongoing development of customer service standards and the development of performance indicators in terms of Welfare Reform, although both areas were being progressed.

The Chairman thanked the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager and asked Members for their questions on the report.

Councillor N Martin noted in regard to Discretionary Housing Payments, there appeared to be an 80% reduction from previous figures and asked whether this was correct or a typographical error. The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager would follow up and confirm the reason for the difference in figures.

Councillor M Wilkes noted page 98 of the report referred to customer contact via “web forms” and asked whether any comparisons could be made with other Local Authorities as he felt that the figures as reported represented a very low percentage. Councillor S Wilson noted that it could be due to access to the internet rather than issues with web forms on the Council’s website. The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager noted that not all services provided by the Council had customer access via web forms, adding this was something that was subject to review.

Councillor M Wilkes noted that the issue had been raised at Committee two years ago, in terms of making services accessible via the website, and therefore asked that a list of what services were available online, what could be done online, and what could not be done, be provided for Members’ information. Councillor J Armstrong suggested that the Council’s Head of ICT, Phil Jackman attend a future meeting of the Committee in this respect. The Head of Planning and Performance noted that this had been a concern of the Committee and that at the next meeting of the Committee, the Council’s Head of Projects and Business Services could give an update on the implementation of the new CRM system and how the setting up of such web form was enabled through the new system.

Councillor J Hillary noted that recent press articles had highlighted the general trend of the use of bailiffs by Local Authorities and asked whether this was used in the first case or a last resort by the Authority. Councillor J Armstrong noted it was a last resort. Councillor M Wilkes noted he had sight of the warning letters sent to those in arrears, explaining that there was a staged approach and the letters were worded very reasonably. Councillor M Wilkes asked whether it was a case of 4 letters from the Authority, then bailiffs were instructed, or did an Officer from the Council attend an address prior to instructing bailiffs.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Quarter 4 Revenue and Capital Outturn 2014/15

The Committee considered two reports, the first of the Corporate Director, Resources and the second of the Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) which provided details of the Quarter 4 2014/15 outturn budget position highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position at the year-end (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Azhar Rafiq provided a summary report for the Resources service grouping detailing the analysis by Head of Service and highlighting significant variances in the core budget. It was noted that MTFP savings had been made for the year, there was a £1.970 million revenue underspend, against a revised budget of £15.693 million. The capital programme outturn spend was £6.798 million against a budget of £7.178 million, noting that the majority of this spend was in relation to ICT. It was added there was a breakdown of the capital programme within Appendix 2 to the report.

The second report related to the Assistant Chief Executive's service grouping and an analysis by Head of Service was provided alongside those significant variances to the core budget. It was noted that the outturn position was a £0.234 million underspend against a budget of £10.873 million. Members noted that MTFP savings had also been made for this service and that the ACE Capital Programme had an underspend of £1.585 million and this would be re-profiled for the 2015/16 budget.

The Chairman thanked the Finance Manager and asked Members for their questions on the 2014/15 reports.

Councillor M Wilkes noted that the Resources Revenue General Fund was underspent by 12.5%, and while accepting that the Council was a large Local Authority with large budgets, he felt that if there were similar large differences in spends compared to budgeted positions across all departments then questions would need to be asked.

Councillor M Wilkes asked whether it was a case that costs were overstated at budget setting, and noted that the Resources Capital Budget spend was approximately 25% less than the original budget set.

The Finance Manager noted in terms of the Resources Capital Budget, the original budget was re-profiled and the final spend of £6.798 million from a revised budget of £7,178 million represented a 95% spend, with the remainder to carry forward into future years. Councillor M Wilkes asked whether the re-profiling was due to external factors, or whether it was an issue of creep within the Capital Programme. The Finance Manager noted he would look to obtain further information in this regard, thought felt that many capital programmes involved delivery with external partners and re-profiling could be associated with managing those relationships and contracts.

Councillor N Martin noted concern as regards keeping control over the spends within budgets and projects, in the context of difficult future choices that may affect staff and frontline services. Councillor N Martin asked whether there was any information in relation to the transfer of bowling greens to clubs, and whether any delays in such were a reflection of a lack of capacity at the Council to undertake the necessary work. Councillor J Armstrong noted that in the case of any redundancies, there would need to be a business case to support any recommendations being made. Councillor J Hillary noted that spends in relation to ICT Business Continuity and Telephony had large percentage overspends and asked why this was the case. The Finance Manager noted he would look to obtain further information in this regard from the relevant budget managers.

Resolved:

That the content of the reports be noted.

9 Quarter 1 Revenue and Capital Outturn 2015/16

The Committee considered two reports, the first of the Corporate Director, Resources and the second of the Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) which provided details of the Quarter 1 2015/16 forecast outturn budget position highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position at the end of June 2015 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager provided a summary report for the Resources service grouping detailing the analysis by Head of Service and highlighting significant variances in the core budget. It was noted that MTFP savings were on target and, and it was forecast for a £0.685 million revenue underspend, against a revised budget of £15.629 million. It was added there was a summary of the capital programme financial performance to the end of June 2015 set out within the report, with the main significant spend being in relation to the Digital Durham programme.

The second report related to the Assistant Chief Executive's service grouping and an analysis by Head of Service was provided alongside those significant variances to the core budget. It was forecast for a £0.152 million underspend against a budget of £10.162 million. Members noted that MTFP savings were on track, with the ACE Capital Programme for 2015/16 having been re-profiled and the revised budget standing at £5.676 million.

The Chairman thanked the Finance Manager and asked Members for their questions on the 2015/16 reports.

Councillor M Wilkes asked if the tables on page 120 of the report referred to revenue budgets for Resources, and noted variations in the amount of spend to date across budgets, with up to 57% of annual budgets in some cases, less than 13% for others. The Finance Manager noted the tables did refer to revenue budgets for Resources, and that the profile of when budgets are spent does differ between categories. This is particularly the case with respect to supplies and services in Resources which contained benefit payments which are significant in value and the reported position is therefore based on the timing of these payments. It was explained that the key column for focus was the forecast outturn position in the tables, which ignored the fluctuation of when spend and income was incurred during the year, but gave an accurate estimate at this stage of the outturn position for the whole year.

Resolved:

That the content of the reports be noted.

Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17 November 2015

Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 – Quarter 2 - 2015/16



Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform members about the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('RIPA') during the period 1 July 2015 until 30 September 2015 (Quarter 2) to ensure that it is being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

Background

2. As members are aware, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) enables local authorities to carry out certain types of surveillance activity provided that specified procedures are followed. The Local Authority is able to rely upon the information obtained from those surveillance activities within court proceedings.
3. This report gives details of RIPA applications that have been authorised during the period 1 July 2015 until 30 September 2015 and the outcomes following surveillance.

Quarter 2 Activity

4. During Quarter 2 there were 7 new RIPA Directed Surveillance authorisations which related to operations conducted by Trading Standards regarding sales of counterfeit tobacco from residential premises, sales of counterfeit goods (clothing, footwear, cosmetics and accessories) and test purchases at premises where complaints had been received regarding underage sales of alcohol and tobacco.

5. There were 2 new Covert Human Intelligence Source (CHIS) authorisations which related to operations conducted by Trading Standards where a Directed Surveillance authorisation was also in force.
6. During the reporting quarter there has been 1 Communications Data application, which related to an investigation conducted by Trading Standards to substantiate whether counterfeit products were being sold to the public and where a Directed Surveillance authorisation and CHIS authorisation were granted.
7. All authorisations were approved the Magistrate and there were no difficulties or issues raised by the Magistrate in approving the applications.
8. The Council's Senior Responsible Officer is satisfied that the Council's use of its powers under RIPA during Quarter 2 is consistent with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

Outcomes following surveillance

9. A prosecution is pending in relation to an investigation relating to underage sales of tobacco. Investigations remain ongoing in relation to three operations regarding the sale of counterfeit tobacco from premises and sales of counterfeit goods. No formal action is to be taken in relation to the test purchase investigations.

Recommendations and Reasons

10. It is recommended that members receive the quarterly report on the Council's use of RIPA for the period 1 July 2015 to 30 September 2015 and resolve that it is being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

Background Papers

None

Contact: Clare Burrows

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance: None

Staffing: None

Equality and Diversity: None

Accommodation: None

Crime and Disorder: The appropriate use of an oversight of RIPA powers will enable the Council to provide evidence to support appropriate prosecutions and tackle crime.

Human Rights: None

Consultation: None

Procurement: None

Disability Discrimination Act: None

Legal Implications: None

Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17 November 2015



Customer First Task and Finish Group Review – Update on progress against recommendations

Joint Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive and Terry Collins, Corporate Director of Neighbourhood Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to update members of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress made against the recommendations from the Customer First Task and Finish group Review.

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 Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the review report at a special meeting held on 17 October 2014 and a copy of the review report is attached at Appendix 2 for members' information.

Recommendations from the review

- 5 The review made the following ten recommendations:
 - a. 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.

- b. 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;
- c. That Cabinet seeks to ensure that the provision of broadband/digital service connectivity in respect of new residential, business and commercial developments is expected;
- d. 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;
- e. 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;
- f. 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;
- g. 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;
- h. 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;
- i. 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;
- j. 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.

Systematic Review

- 6 The pro-forma attached at Appendix 3 provides an update on the recommendations of the final report.

Customer Relationship Management system development, procurement and implementation

- 7 One of the recommendations made by the Customer First Task and Finish Group was 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.
- 8 A key element of the implementation of the Council's preferred CRM system is how the system can support Councillors in dealing with and tracking their casework and constituents' queries. To this end, the Committee is invited to consider appointing a small cross party panel of members to input into the CRM implementation prior to its launch in April 2016.
- 9 It is envisaged that the group would meet on three occasions during January to March 2016. A detailed project plan and terms of reference would be submitted to the group's first meeting for agreement.

Recommendations

- 10 The Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:-
 - (a) Note the update on the recommendations of the Customer First Task and Finish Group Review, and
 - (b) Agree to the establishment of a small cross party panel of members to undertake a further task and finish review which would input into the CRM implementation prior to its launch in April 2016.

Background papers

Customer First Task and Finish Group Review report

Contacts:

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Alan Patrickson, Head of Projects and Business Services, Neighbourhood Services – Tel: 03000 268 165

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing - None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - None

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder - None

Human Rights - None

Consultation - None

Procurement - None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications - None



Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Customer First Task and Finish Group Review Report



September 2014

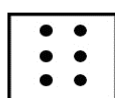


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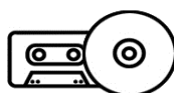
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Foreword

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 expected;
- (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 20th January 2014 until 14th 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.

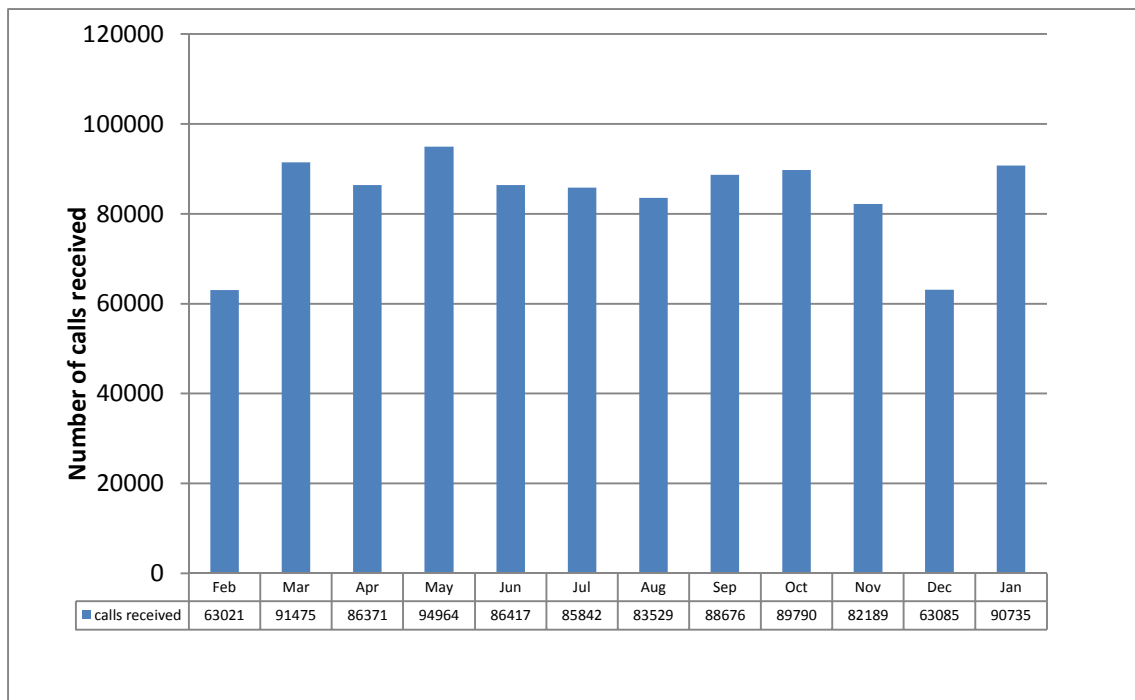
Section 4 – Access Channels

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
Total	22,915	218,278

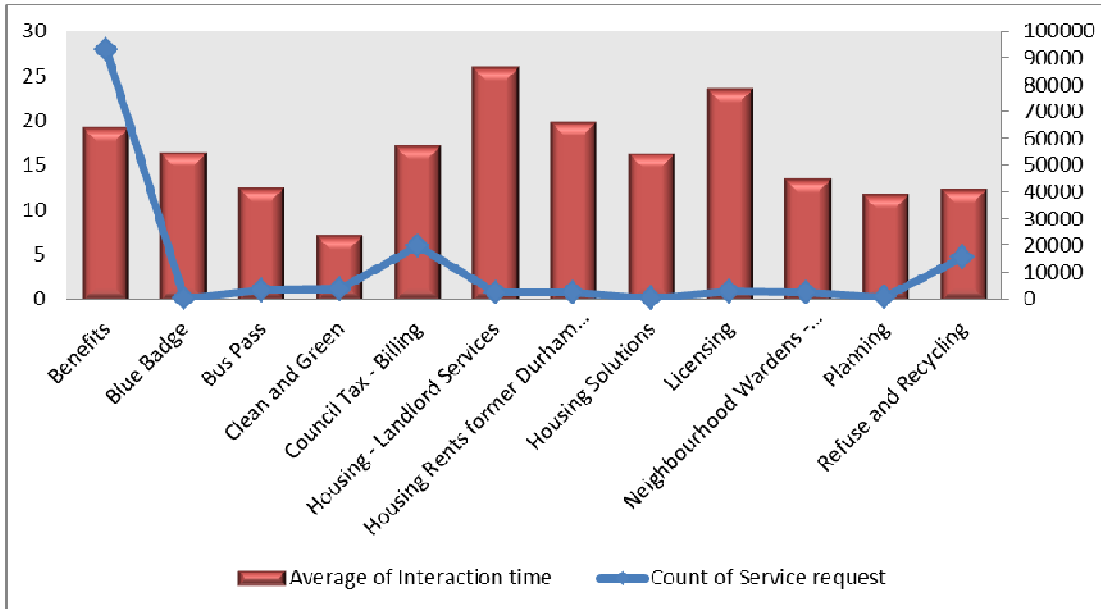
123. Although CAPs are primarily used to manage Customer Services interactions they also host / enable a number of other services.

Primary Customer Services functions	Signposting / other duties carried out by Customer Services staff	CAPs hosting services for
Street scene services e.g. Pest Control; Anti-Social behaviour (Neighbourhood Warden activities)	Libraries Cultural events (e.g. Lumiere tickets)	Housing Solutions Planning Welfare Rights (Crook)
Direct Services 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
Highways		

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

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

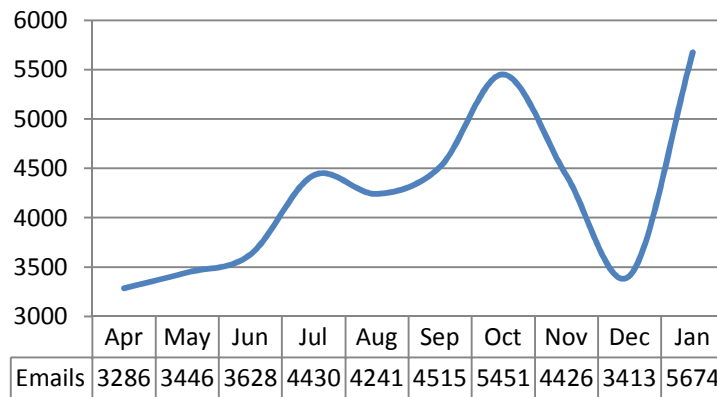
CAP	CAP model
Barnard Castle	Co-located CAP and Library
Bishop Auckland	Surgery
Chester-le-Street	Co-located CAP and housing provider
Clayport	Co-located CAP and Library
Consett	Dedicated CAP
Crook	Multi Use Centre
Newton Aycliffe	Surgery
Peterlee	Surgery
Seaham	Multi Use Centre
Spennymoor	CAP
Stanhope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

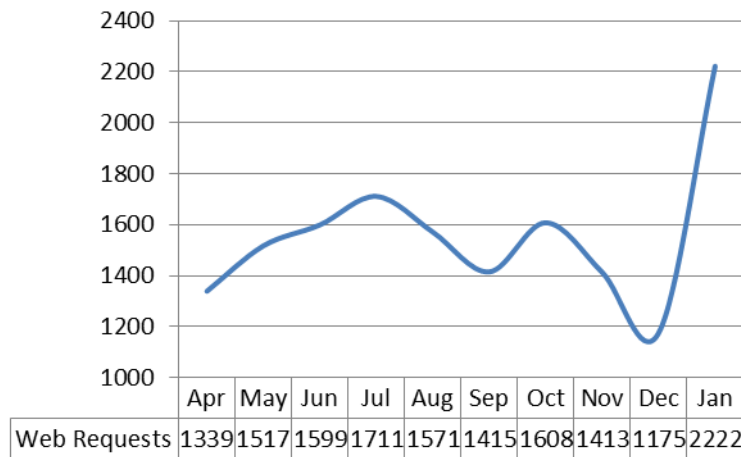
evolving this approach customers will have much greater access to services / information with little to no revenue budget implications.

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 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.



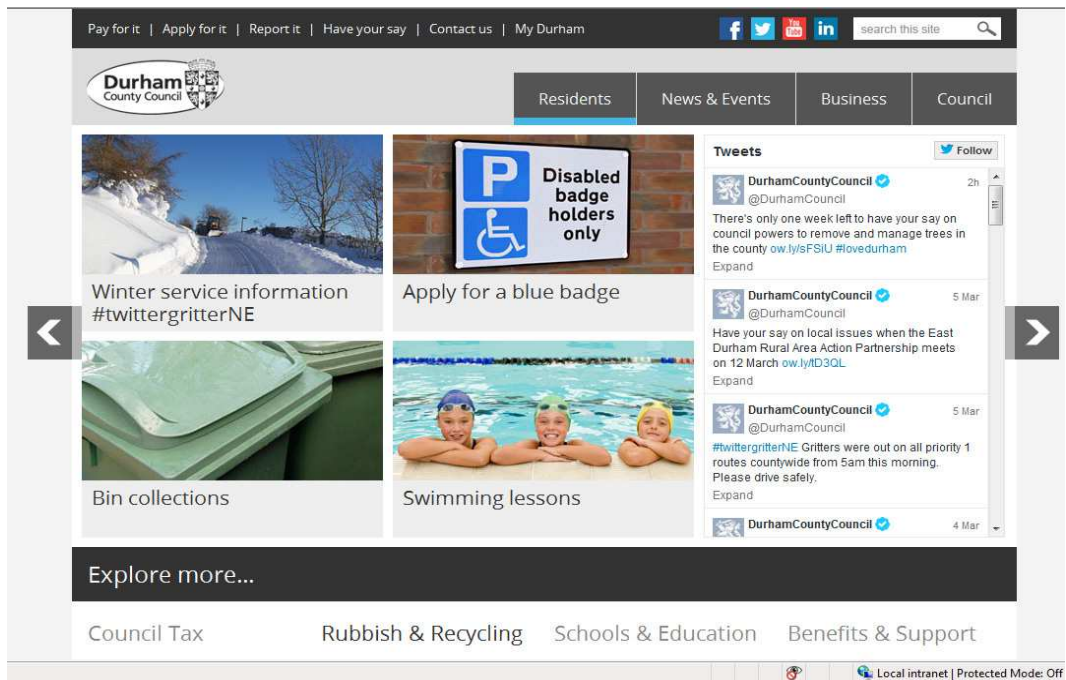
154. As part of the ongoing work to facilitate more effective channel shift through the enhancement of e-based methods of contact, an examination of the Council Website's new Content Management System (CMS) has been undertaken.
155. During 2013, Durham County Councils website had more than 3m web visits 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	
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

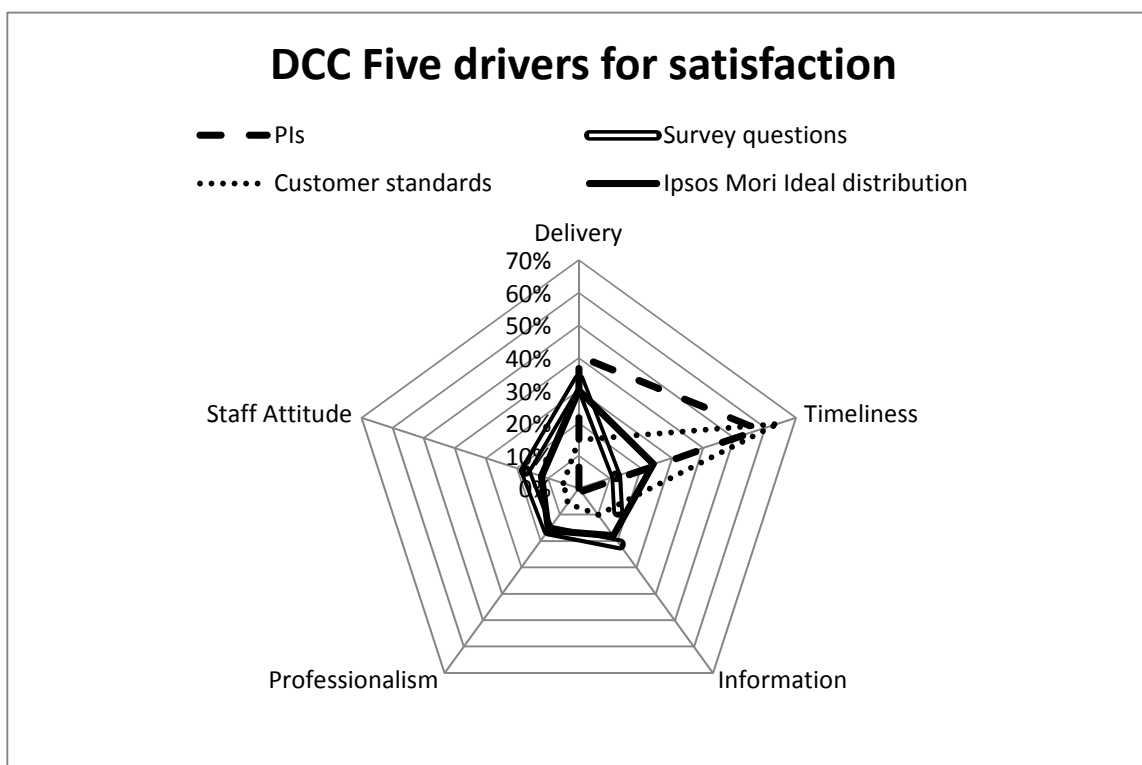
DRIVER	MAIN ELEMENTS	IMPORTANCE (%)
DELIVERY	The final outcome The way the service kept its promise The way the service handled any problems	30%
TIMELINESS	Initial wait How long it takes overall No. of times had to contact service	24%
INFORMATION	Accuracy Comprehensiveness Being kept informed about progress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

	Del.	Time.	Info.	Prof.	Staff Att.
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.

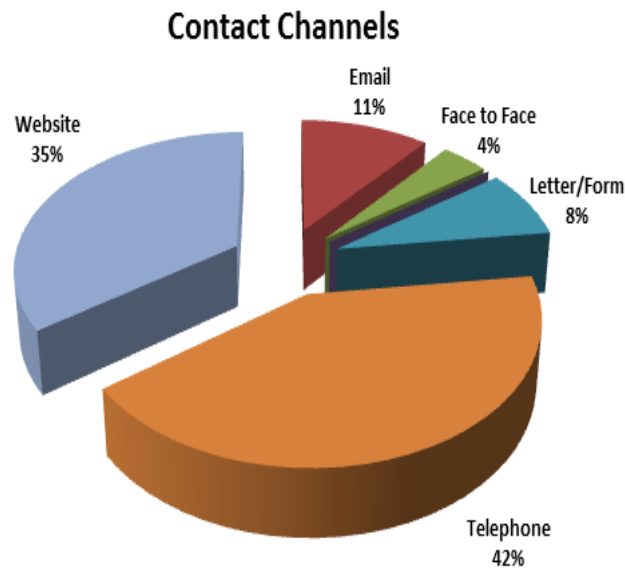
Mystery shopping

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.

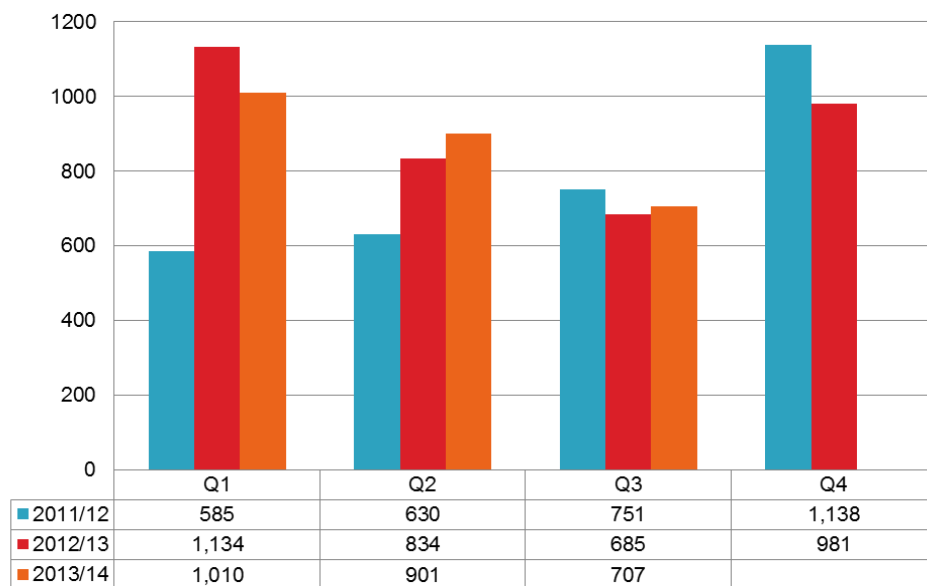
Section 6 – Customer Learning

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.

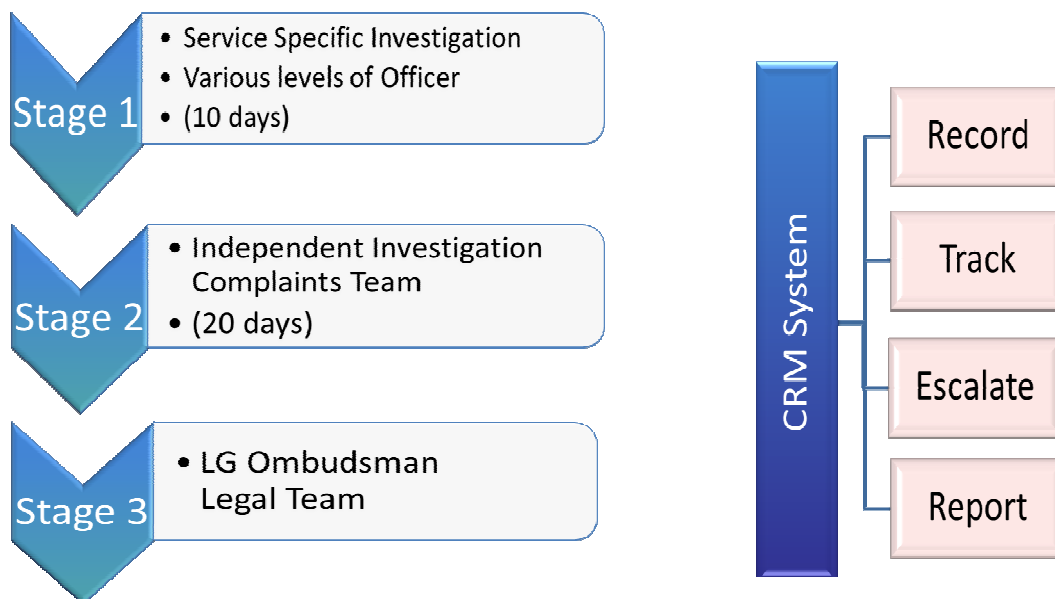
- 237. Members Support staff are trained to log complaints onto the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system on behalf of Members and will be responsible for communicating progress to the relevant Member/s. This team also deals with any complaints received from Members of Parliament.
- 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.

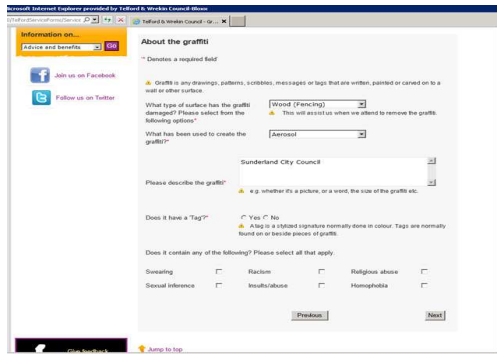
Council switchboard - Telephone: 0191 520 5555

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

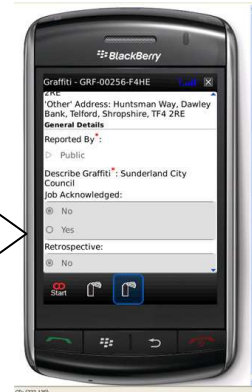
Enhanced customer services via digital channels

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
 - 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).

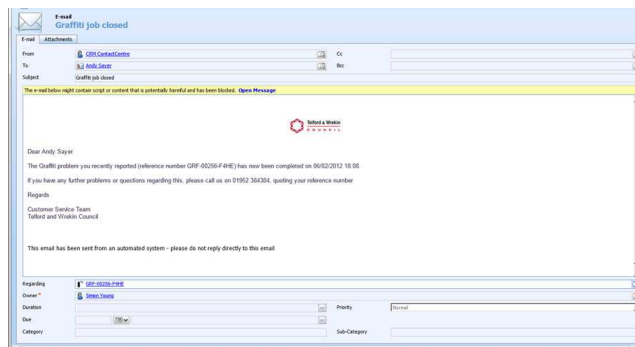
How it works



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 16th 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 expected;
- (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.

Appendix 3

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CUSTOMER FIRST TASK AND FINISH GROUP REVIEW

Review of recommendations considered by CIOSC 17th October 2014

Review Recommendation	Progress Report of Action taken to implement recommendation	Responsibility	Timescale
<p>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.</p>	<p>A customer first course is available as part of the corporate training programme.</p>	<p>Organisational Development Team</p>	<p>Complete</p>
	<p>Additional training that has been delivered as part of the Customer First Programme includes training for the new complaint process as part of the complaints project and also writing for the website as part of the web project.</p>	<p>Complaints Review Team</p>	<p>Complete</p>
	<p>The Durham Managers programme has a session dedicated to customer service; this is delivered by Terry Collins and Alan Patrickson</p>	<p>Organisational Development Team</p>	<p>Complete</p>
	<p>The Customer First Strategy is included as part of the new members induction.</p>	<p>Member Services</p>	<p>April 2016</p>
	<p>An e-learning package of compulsory training is currently being developed for roll out to all staff and members in line with the Organisational Development Strategy.</p>	<p>Customer Focus Board</p>	

<p>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.</p>	<p>As part of the CRM project a benefits strategy has been developed and approved by the Customer First Board to monitor the achievement of benefits throughout the project.</p> <p>Financial and benefit updates will be included as part of quarterly outturn reports and as part of the annual update on the Customer First Strategy to be provided to Cabinet.</p>	<p>CRM Team</p> <p>CRM Team</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Dec 2015</p>
<p>iii. That Cabinet seeks to ensure that the provision of broadband/digital service connectivity in respect of new residential, business and commercial developments is expected.</p>	<p>The Durham digital programme is slightly ahead of schedule.</p> <p>There are over 75,000 properties now with access to faster broadband connections (min 24MB) with a 20% take up.</p> <p>Planning legislation currently doesn't allow for the inclusion of broadband/digital connectivity.</p> <p>Contract 2 will extend the scheme to a further 28,000 properties.</p>	<p>Digital Durham</p>	<p>December 2018</p>
<p>iv. That the Cabinet ensures that a focused and structured plan for the delivery of the customer first strategy is in place</p>	<p>A detailed programme has been developed for the delivery of Customer First. This is centred on the delivery of the new CRM and the associated service review process, with staged</p>	<p>Customer Focus Board</p>	

<p>which provides clarity on how those business critical projects identified within this report will be delivered including proposed timelines and delivery milestones.</p>	<p>implementation date of April 2016 and September 2016.</p> <p>The delivery of the Customer First Strategy forms the core function of the Customer Focus Board. An annual report will be presented to Cabinet, providing an update on delivery of the programme against plan and highlighting performance improvements arising from implementation of the Strategy.</p>	<p>Customer Focus Board</p>	<p>July 2016 and annually every subsequent July</p>
<p>v. That the 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.</p>	<p>In April 2014 the Council reduced the number of publicised numbers by 90 across the organisation.</p> <p>Further work has taken place to introduce ACD technology into key areas of the business, this has helped to improve call handling and reduce missed call rates.</p> <p>A new process has been implemented to manage requests for the publication of new telephone numbers on the web.</p> <p>Further work has been ongoing to communicate the key golden numbers across the organisation.</p> <p>A series of process reviews have been</p>	<p>Customer Focus</p>	<p>Sep 16</p>

		established. These reviews will consider further the rationalisation of numbers on an individual service basis.	Board	
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.	<p>Through the Information Durham Project a number of key facilities have been identified and a consistent branding and approach is being rolled out across the organisation.</p> <p>Further work will provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent identification of information available at all Council buildings. • Increased self-serve opportunities where possible. • On demand printing of information by Council staff to provide greater access. • A set of “key” information leaflets across all venues • Reduced leaflets <p>Ongoing work with key partners and other organisations to increase visibility of DCC information, examples include through GP surgeries, housing providers and the launch of the new Locate service.</p>	<p>Customer Focus Board</p> <p>Customer Focus Board</p>	Oct 15
vii.	That the Cabinet supports the ongoing development work on the Council’s website and that all	The Council website went live in October with improved content and navigation.	Corporate Communications Team	Complete

	<p>services commit to provide enhanced service information which will reduce avoidable contact and promote online transactions as part of a structured plan to promote online transactions as part of a structured plan to promote channel shift.</p>	<p>The garden waste service which is the Council's first fully transactional automated service went live in September 2014.</p> <p>The business process reviews and the implementation of a new CRM system will promote further on-line transactions</p>	<p>CRM Team</p>	<p>Complete</p>
viii.	<p>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.</p>	<p>The pilot was successful in terms of Customer Service Staff dealing with initial enquiries through social media sites.</p> <p>A joint approach is now in place enabling service requests to be handled by the customer services team and comments/reputational issues to be considered by the corporate media team</p> <p>Further work is now underway between Customer Services and the media team to use the website and social media for key alerts in relation to customer contact</p> <p>A new system to conduct sentiment monitoring and analysis of our social media channels is included in the wider CRM enterprise architecture and will be procured in the future</p>	<p>Customer Services/Corporate Media Team</p> <p>CRM Team</p>	<p>Dec 2018</p>

Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee



17 November 2015

Customer Feedback : Complaints Compliments and Suggestions 2015/16 – Quarter 1

Report of Terry Collins, Corporate Director for Neighbourhood Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To present to Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CIOSC) the Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions report for Quarter 1 2015/16 (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 2015/16

- 3 The full report at appendix 2 provides details for each service grouping in relation to both the statutory and corporate complaints, compliments and suggestions received during the first quarter of 2015/16 and the learning outcomes which are built into service improvement as a result of the investigations into them.

Changes to Customer Feedback reporting

- 4 As the new Complaints Policy and Process was adopted by Cabinet in July, there is now an opportunity to review the way in which this information is presented to Members and to include previous feedback. The new way of reporting is proposed to focus on the key issues our customers are presenting through their feedback and the work being done to address these, as well as providing the direction of travel in terms of numbers of complaints, compliments and suggestions.

Recommendations

5 Members are asked to note the information in the report.

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E-Mail: mary.readman@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

None

Staffing

None

Risk

None

Equality and Diversity

None

Accommodation

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Human Rights

None

Consultation

None

Procurement

None

Disability Discrimination Act

None

Legal Implications

None

Customer Feedback Report: Complaints, compliments and suggestions Quarter 1, 2015/16



Altogether better

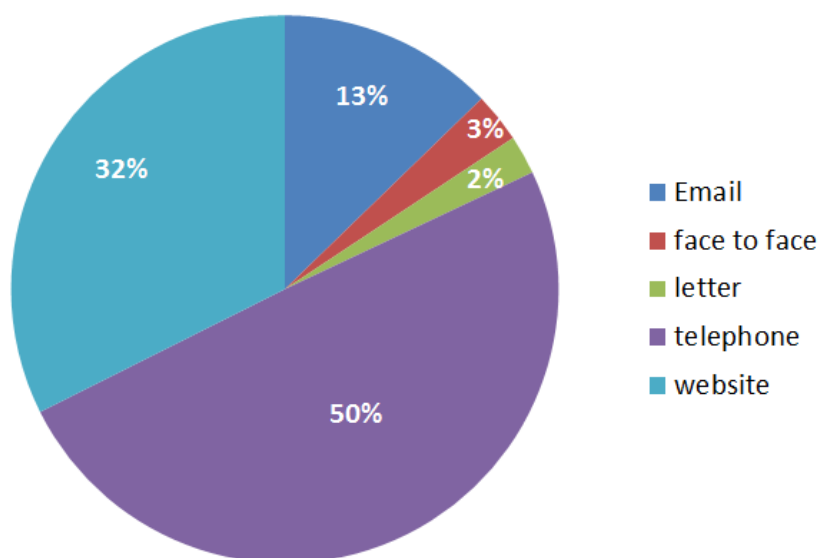


Introduction

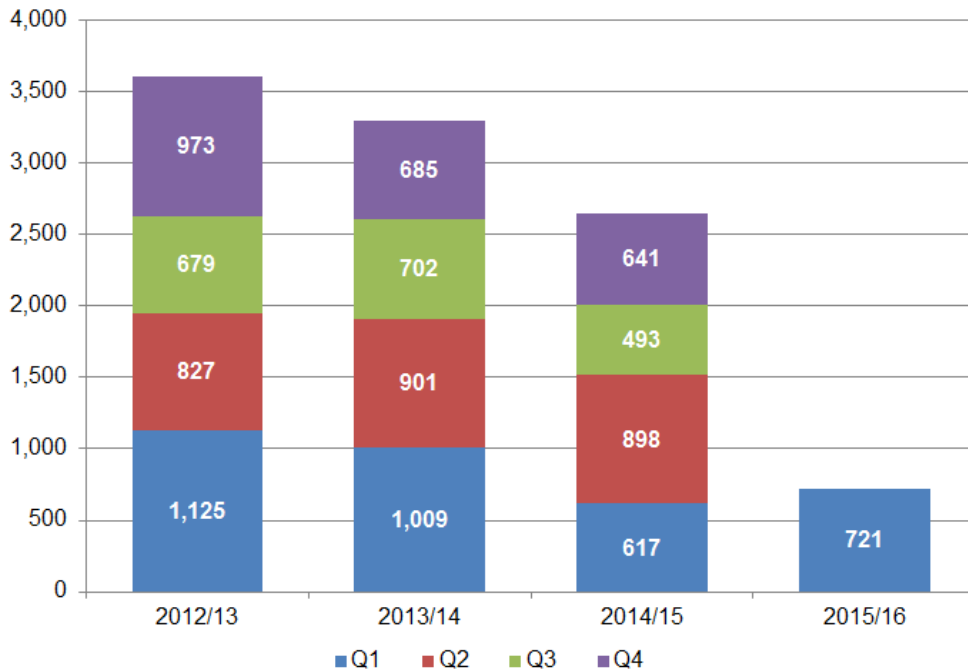
1. This report provides information and learning in relation to Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions for all Council Services during Q1, 2015/16. Complaints being:
 - Statutory - a complaint arising from the duties placed on a local social services authority to provide assessments and care services under the provisions of relevant adult and children's social care legislation.
 - Corporate - all other complaints

Section 1: Overview of Quarter 1, 2015/16

2. Between 1 April and 30 June 2015, Durham County Council (DCC) received 721 stage 1 corporate complaints, 256 compliments and 91 suggestions. 57 complaints were escalated to stage 2 and complaints handling performance showed:
 - 90% of stage 1 and 93% of stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days;
 - 85% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days;
 - 46% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within 20 working days.
3. During the quarter, there were 45 complaints and 100 compliments received in relation to adult and children's social care statutory services. Statutory complaints handling performance showed:
 - 100% of stage 1 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt
 - 56% of the 45 statutory complaints about adults and children's social care services were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 20 working days. Of the remaining 20 stage 1 complaints, 6 were resolved after 20 working days and 14 were ongoing at the quarter end.
4. Customers are using a variety of access channels to complain, with the telephone remaining the preferred channel:

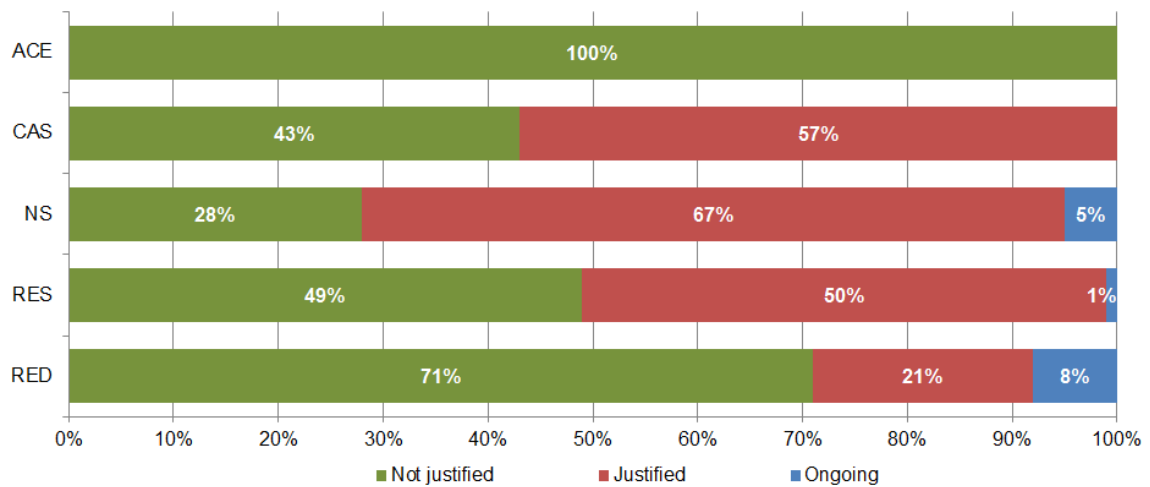


5. The graph overleaf shows the number of complaints received across all service groupings since 2012/13. There has been a 17% increase in complaints received this quarter when compared with the same quarter last year. Details of the improvement areas for each service grouping are outlined in section two of the report.



Investigation of complaints: Outcomes

6. Of the stage 1 complaints processed during Q1, 35% were not classed as justified. This indicates that, although service users were dissatisfied, the service had acted properly and followed the correct procedures. The Service Grouping breakdown of this categorisation is shown below:



Section 2: Detailed report for each service grouping for quarter 1, 2015/16

Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)

Overview

7. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

ACE	13/14	Number Received									
		14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	9	1	2	2	4	9	2	-	-	-	2
Compliments	49	8	5	31	13	57	16	-	-	-	16
Suggestions	24	1	2	3	3	9	1	-	-	-	1

Complaints

8. One complaint related to concerns over the allocation of £500k to the Crook Community Partnership/Slam bid and the extension granted to the project. A response was sent to the customer addressing the themes raised. The other complaint related to the non-delivery of Durham County News, caused by Royal Mail. Both complaints have now been resolved.

Compliments and Suggestions

9. 11 of the 16 compliments were in relation to the County Records Office, thanking staff for their help with various family and local history queries, including help and assistance given to obtain a grandfather's war medals. The other compliments thanked the AAPs for their help and support and for grants to help community projects.
10. The suggestion related to advertising and promoting DCC through motorsport sponsorship. A reply was sent advising that due to the current financial climate, DCC were unable to help with this type of sponsorship.

Children and Adults Services (CAS)

Corporate Complaints Overview

11. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

CAS	13/14	Number Received									
		14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	54	6	8	7	11	32	7	-	-	-	7
Compliments	184	55	51	45	111	262	42	-	-	-	42
Suggestions	5	0	4	1	0	5	1	-	-	-	1

Complaints

12. Of the 7 complaints received, all were acknowledged within 2 working days and 6 were responded to within the target timescale of 10 working days. The remaining complaint was resolved outside of timescales due to lack of engagement with the service by the complainant.

13. Three complaints were not upheld and four upheld. The upheld complaints were in relation to staff attitude, poor communication, speed of service, confidentiality and a change in services. As a result of the upheld complaints, the following actions have been taken:
- Officers in the First Contact and Intervention services were reminded of the need to ensure that individuals submitting a referral remain anonymous when this has been requested
 - A telephone caller was kept on hold for an excessive period, when checked it was identified that there were problems with the telephone system and this was rectified.

Compliments and suggestions

14. 42 compliments were received, 13 fewer than the corresponding period in 2014. 34 related to Children's Services (One Point – 13, Youth Offending service – 21) and 8 related to Education (School Places and Admissions service – 7, School and Governor Support service – 1).

Children and Adult Services statutory complaints, compliments and comments

15. The number of statutory complaints, compliments and comments increased from 141 in Q4, 14/15 to 145 in Q1, 15/16. However, when comparing with the corresponding period last year there has been a 29.6% decrease.

Statutory	Number Received										% change*
	14/15					15/16					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	
Complaints	58	41	33	45	177	45	-	-	-	45	-22.4%
Compliments	148	130	135	96	509	100	-	-	-	100	-32.4%
Comments	0	2	0	0	2	0	-	-	-	0	no change
Total	206	173	168	141	688	145	-	-	-	145	-29.6%

*Q1 figure 2015/16 compared with Q1 figure 2014/15

Children's Services statutory complaints, compliments and comments

Comparison of Children's Services complaints received by quarter						
Complaint type	Q1 14/15	Q2 14/15	Q3 14/15	Q4 14/15	Q1 15/16	DoT from previous quarter
Stage 1	29	21	20	30	29	↓
Stage 2	1	0	2	2	0	↓

16. Of the 29 stage 1 complaints received, all were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt. 15 (51.7%) were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 20 working days, 6 were resolved after 20 working days and 8 were ongoing at the quarter end (4 of which are outside timeframe). No complaints were taken to stage 2 during the quarter.

Declined complaints

17. Six complaints were declined in the quarter. Three on the grounds that the issues of complaint had already been considered as part of court proceedings, one due to the complainant not having Parental Responsibility so the complaint matter could not be considered, one due to there being concurrent criminal proceedings against the complainant and one related to matters that occurred outside of the 1 year timescale (1999) and had been dealt with at that time

Category of complaints

18. *Lack of service – Communications/Information* was the category with the highest number of complaints (11). *Professional Conduct of Staff* received 10 complaints, followed by *Disputed Decision* in 5 complaints. It is possible for a complaint to fall within more than one category.

Outcome of complaints

19. Of the 21 complaints completed in Q1, 7 were not upheld, 11 were partially upheld and 3 were upheld. The categories of the 3 upheld complaints were *Confidentiality*, *Lack of Service – Communications/Information*, and *Provision of Service – Assessment*.

Action as a result of statutory complaints

20. The following are examples of actions taken as a result of concluded statutory complaints:
- The Social Resource Centre (which provides drivers to taken children to and from contact sessions) was informed of a complaint about their service and alternative transport arrangements were put in place.
 - The process between First Contact and social work teams has been reviewed and updated to ensure families are contacted more promptly after a referral has been received.
 - Monitoring arrangements have been introduced to ensure improved performance and compliance with regard to Single Assessment timescales.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

21. During the quarter, the LGO contacted the service in relation to the following 2 cases within children's social care services:
- An enquiry was received regarding a case where the Council is responsible for facilitating indirect contact between parents and their adopted children.
 - A draft decision was received in which the LGO recommended that the Council reviews the actions taken in this complaint and provide a statement to the complainants with regard to the management of a child protection investigation. The Local Authority has provided a draft statement and awaits the LGO's final decision.

Compliments

22. There were 74 compliments received in Q1, an increase of 7 compared to the previous quarter.

Adults Services statutory complaints, compliments and comments

Comparison of complaints received by quarter						
Service Area	Q1 14/15	Q2 14/15	Q3 14/15	Q4 14/15	Q1 15/16	DoT from previous quarter
Adult Care	28	20	13	15	16	↑

23. Of the 16 complaints received, all were acknowledged within 2 working days. 10 complaints were completed within the quarter, all within the target timescales. The remaining 6 cases were ongoing and within timescales at the quarter end.
24. Older People/Physical Disability & Sensory Support service received 8 complaints. Commissioning (3). County Durham Care and Support (2) and Learning Disabilities/Mental

Health/Substance Misuse service (2). The Emergency Duty Team received 1 complaint in relation to an adult case.

Declined complaints

No complaints were declined in the quarter.

Category of complaints

25. 4 complaints recorded in the category of *Lack of Service – Communication/ Information*, 3 complaints recorded in the category of *Professional Conduct of Staff* and *Lack of Service* and a further 3 in *Restricted Choices of Current Services* category. It is possible for a complaint to contain more than one category.

Outcome of complaints

26. Of the 10 complaints completed in the quarter, 8 were not upheld, 1 was partially upheld and 1 was upheld. The one upheld complaint was recorded in the categories of *Lack of Service – Communications/ Information* and *Quality of Service – Missed Domiciliary Care Calls*.

Action as a result of statutory complaints

27. As a result of the one complaint which was upheld during the quarter an alternative domiciliary care provider was quickly contacted to take over from the provided which had cancelled their provision at late notice.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

28. During the quarter, the LGO made one enquiry in relation to an adult social care case. The LGO is currently still considering the information which the Council has provided. The complaint to the LGO was that a service user's complaints to the Local Authority had not been looked into or responded to and notes were not kept about incidents which the service user had reported.

Compliments

29. 26 compliments were received in Q1, 3 fewer when compared to the previous quarter.

Neighbourhood Services (NS)

Overview

30. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

NS	Number Received										
	13/14	14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	2,230	447	691	339	463	1,940	563	-	-	-	563
Compliments	506	129	161	152	153	595	161	-	-	-	161
Suggestions	248	52	49	45	92	238	77	-	-	-	77

Complaints

Key Challenges

- Changes to the garden waste service: 201 complaints (36% of total received) related to various aspects of the scheme including; the introduction of a charge for the service, bins not being collected and delays or non-receipt of documentation or bins. In some instances, delays have led to customers not receiving the full number of prescribed collections. The most frequent complaint (72%) related to non-collection of bins. In some cases, customers' bins were missed on multiple occasions. A number of improvements are being implemented to address the issues, including improved communications and system enhancements.
- Crew not returning bins to original collection point after emptying: 18 complaints were received, which is a 44% increase when compared with 14/15. Complaints of this nature cover all refuse and recycling collection services, including the garden waste service.
- Attitude of refuse and recycling crews: Complaints have increased by 33% when looking at the same period last year and includes complaints from customers who have approached the crew regarding missed collections, disagreements between customers and crew over access issues and crew using inappropriate language

Key Improvements

- Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs): 16 complaints (a 48% decrease when compared with Q1, 14/15) were received regarding a number of issues including tighter control of the waste being put through the sites, waste permit issues and staff attitude.
- Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project: Almost 25,000 LED street lights, covering approximately 100,000 households, have now been retrofitted, and although customers still express concern over lighting in residential areas, complaints of this nature are declining and only 4 complaints were received during Q1, 15/16. Key actions implemented as a result of these complaints include improved communication regarding the scheme; desktop reviews and on-site lighting levels checks to ensure lighting levels were within the design criteria. All reviews and checks carried out confirmed that the lighting was operating to the British Standard for street lighting.
- Contaminated waste: Customers submitted 9 complaints regarding various aspects of the contamination process, a 31% reduction when compared with Q1, 14/15. Complaints include customers who did not consider they were responsible for the incorrect items in their bin and customers who were not aware that the items they had placed in their bin would cause contamination. Campaigning and enforcement activity has been carried out to educate residents on recyclable materials and reduce the amounts of contamination.
- Charge for a replacement bin: 19 complaints were received from residents objecting to the £20 charge to replace lost or stolen bins. As customers become more aware of the policy to charge for this service, complaints of this kind continue to reduce.
- Missed Recycling and Household Waste Bins: 60 complaints were received regarding missed bins during Q1, 15/16, a 37% decrease when compared with the same period in 14/15. This improvement can be attributed to a number of factors including the 'bedding in' of the Alternate Weekly Collection service; the new 'Repeat Missed Container' Process; improved communications in relation to bank holiday collection dates and the implementation of the incab 'Bartec' system which provides better operational information capture.

Compliments and Suggestions

31. 161 compliments were received during Q1, 15/16, the majority of which related to the helpfulness of staff and recognition of their support by resolving customer enquiries in a professional and timely manner. In each instance, feedback is passed to the relevant team or member of staff by their line manager.
32. 77 suggestions were received; a number of these related to double yellow lines being applied to the Pity Me area to prevent cars parking inappropriately and hindering the flow of traffic. Suggestions also suggested extending the garden waste collection scheme into November, increasing the volume of the customer services telephone menu and improving access to library services.

Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

Overview

33. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

RED	Number Received										
	13/14	14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	412	67	78	67	55	267	48	-	-	-	48
Compliments	185	15	27	54	44	140	23	-	-	-	23
Suggestions	40	8	5	8	5	26	10	-	-	-	10

Complaints

Key Improvements

34. 48 complaints were received, a decrease of 28% on the same period in the previous year and a 13% decrease on the previous quarter.
- 67% of stage 1 complaints were responded to in 10 working days;
 - 2 complaints are ongoing and in target time
 - 2 complaints were escalated to stage 2
35. The proportion of complaints found to be justified or part justified is 22% compared to 50% at Q4, 14/15. It is a significant improvement than the average 43% for 14/15.
36. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during shows that two areas of the service grouping account for 59% of complaints received.
- Planning Development: (11 complaints) mainly in connection to planning decisions and building control. This is a significant decrease (60%) on the same period last year. One complaint was escalated to stage 2
 - Strategic Traffic: (18 complaints) majority related to residential parking matters. This is an increase from same period last year (80%) and Q4, 14/15 (100%).

Compliments and Suggestions

37. The service grouping received 23 compliments. These are generally thanks to staff for service they have provided.
38. Eight suggestions were received covering a wide range of topics and service areas, including parking and the move of 'The Journey' sculpture.

Resources (RES)

Overview

39. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

RES	Number Received										
	13/14	14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	592	96	118	78	108	400	101	-	-	-	101
Compliments	79	32	40	33	34	139	51	-	-	-	51
Suggestions	19	6	1	5	8	20	2	-	-	-	2

Complaints

40. During Q1, 15/16, 101 complaints were received; this represents a 6% decrease since Q4 14/15, but a 5% increase compared to the equivalent quarter in 14/15. The majority of complaints related to the Revenues & Benefits Service.
41. The proportion of complaints responded to within the 10 days corporate target slightly deteriorated from 88% in Q4 to 86% in Q1 15/16.
42. Of the 101 complaints received, 49.5% were either justified or part justified (49% in Q4), 48.5% were not justified (40% in Q4) and 2% were unresolved at the point of reporting (11% in Q4).

Key Improvements

43. Detailed analysis of customer feedback received during Q1 reveals that 97% of the complaints are attributable to the following:
44. Revenues and Benefits Service: There were a total of 85 complaints received in Q1, 15/16 a 12% decrease on the previous quarter and a 3% reduction in the number of complaints received in Q1, 14/15 when 88 complaints were received.
45. The Assessment Team is responsible for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction claims. The majority of complaints relate to the customers' perception of service failure, the way in which claims were handled, or the outcome of the application. 'Service failure' is a very broad generic descriptor and further detailed analysis failed to identify any specific trends or deficiencies in the claims administration process. In all cases, the claims were reviewed to ensure that the correct law, process and procedure have been applied and that in areas where discretion had been applied, that a sound decision making rationale was adopted.
46. The Awards Team received a total of 17 complaints; a reduction of 37% on the previous quarter. The majority of these complaints concerned discounts or exemptions. In each of these instances council policy, process and procedure was correctly applied.
47. The Collections Team received a total of 17 complaints; this represents a 39% reduction against the previous quarter. The majority of these complaints related to recovery action i.e. summons, final notices and enforcement action. In all cases, consideration is given to the Council's Debt Management Strategy and customers are sign-posted to free support agencies as appropriate.
48. Legal & Democratic Services: complaints this quarter have more than doubled since Q4, 14/15.
49. However, of the 13 complaints lodged, 9 were as a direct result of the Parliamentary Election. Those complaints covered a range of issues such as lack of disabled access at a polling station,

people discovering they were not eligible to vote and people having not received postal votes.

50. Although the disabled access complaint was officially logged following a call from a member of the public on Polling Day, the local County Councillor had already contacted the Elections Team earlier in the day to highlight the issue. The Elections Team worked immediately with the Polling Station Staff to try to overcome the problem and the Elections Manager will work with the venue to ensure that similar issues do not occur in future years.
51. Another complaint, although logged following an email from a member of the public, had actually already been sent to the local MP, who in turn raised the complaint with the Corporate Director, Resources. The complaint was from a mother whose daughter was studying abroad and it was alleged that the Council had neglected to make the necessary proxy voting arrangements. A formal response was sent from the Corporate Director to the MP.
52. It is worth noting that of all the arrangements on polling day, the number of electors casting votes, the number of electors eligible to vote, the number of polling venues, postal voters, candidates etc., it is encouraging that the Parliamentary Election generated only 9 complaints

Compliments and Suggestions

53. There were 51 compliments received by the Resources service grouping in Q1, 15/16.
54. The Revenues and Benefits service received 7 compliments for the excellent service provided by individual members of staff. There were also 2 suggestions:
 - Landlord CT liability exemption for 1 month from when a tenant moves out, to allow time for the landlord to find another tenant
 - Details of CAPs to be provided on letters requesting further evidence. Letter refers to accessing a CAP but no further details.
55. The Revenues and Benefit Service is governed by prescriptive legislation and therefore it is not always possible to adopt customers' suggestions particularly regarding Council Tax. Suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of the service, and any suggestions regarding internal processes and procedures are considered as part of the ongoing reviews
56. 21 compliments related to employees within Advice and Guidance in Human Resources & Organisational Development; and 10 compliments within HR Operations and Data. Legal & Democratic Services continue to receive compliments (11) arising from conducting wedding ceremonies and 1 compliment was for assistance provided by a member of the Electoral Services team on Polling Day. ICT Services received 1 compliment this quarter

Section 3: Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Activity

57. During Q1 the LGO made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 33 matters. Decisions were delivered on 22 investigations and another 18 are ongoing.

Decisions Delivered – Part Investigation

58. During the quarter the LGO notified the Council of the outcome in relation to 8 matters which were not subject to full investigation. The Ombudsman's investigators reached their decisions on the basis of the details supplied by complainants, supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers. The investigations related to Planning, garden waste, insurance, benefits and adult care services. 4 were found to be outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and 4 were no fault by the council.

Decisions Delivered – Full Investigation

59. The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 14 matters which had been subject to investigations.
60. In 6 of these cases the Ombudsman found no fault on the part of the Council. These cases related to a number of service areas including: Environmental Services, Planning, Adult services. One case was outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.
61. In 5 of the cases investigated by the Ombudsman found both maladministration and injustice to the complainant and 1 with maladministration but no injustice. All investigations were closed as the Council agreed to various actions to remedy the issues raised in the complaints; four of these cases included a financial settlement.

Ongoing Enquiries

62. We are still waiting for a decision for 18 cases subject to LGO enquiries.

Review of the Complaints Policy and Process

63. Following adoption of the new Complaints Process, work has been undertaken to implement the new way of working across the Council. All services, excluding Neighbourhood Services, have moved over to the new process from 1 July 2015. NS will be in place by October 2015.
64. As part of the change, the reporting process is also being reviewed to ensure that information on Customer Feedback is useful and aligns with continuous improvement.

Recommendation

65. To note the contents of the report

Contact: Mary Readman 03000 268161

17 November 2015



**Children and Adults Services
Annual Statutory Representations 2014/15**

**Report of Rachael Shimmin, Corporate Director, Children and Adults Services
(CAS)**

Purpose of report

- 1 The purpose of the Annual Statutory Representations Report is to provide Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of statutory representations relating to children's and adults social care services during the period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015.

Background

- 2 The Annual Statutory Representations Report is prepared 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 Non-statutory (corporate) complaints and compliments are reported and approved by Children and Adults Services (CAS) Management Team on a quarterly basis. Neighbourhood Services lead on production of the annual corporate complaints, compliments and suggestions report and the extract relating to CAS is outlined in Appendix 2 for information.

Content

- 4 The Annual Statutory Representations Report brings together statutory representations from service users, families and carers that have been previously reported to CASMT on a quarterly basis and includes information on the management of statutory representations. The full report is attached as Appendix 3.

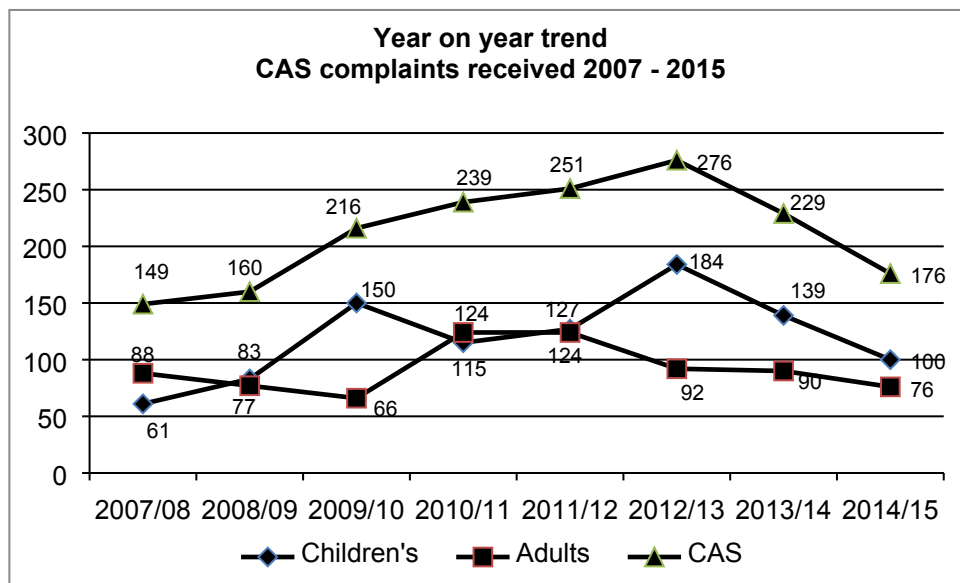
Key messages - statutory complaints

- 5 In 2014/15, a total of 176 statutory complaints were received by CAS:
 - 100 complaints related to children's social care services, of which 5 were subsequently progressed to Stage 2 of the statutory complaints process.
 - 76 complaints related to adult social care services.
 - There has been an overall decrease of 23.1% in CAS complaints when compared with the number of complaints received in 2013/14 (229).

- Children’s social care complaints have decreased by 28.1% in comparison to the previous reporting year.
- Complaints about adult services have decreased by 15.6% over the same period.

6 Graph 1 (below) illustrates a steady overall increase in the number of statutory complaints received over the period 2007 – 2013, attributable to complaints in relation to children’s social care services. However, since 2013/14 the number of statutory complaints has decreased in relation to both children’s and adults social care services. The total figure for 2014/15 is the lowest for 6 years.

Graph 1: Year on year trend 2007-2015 – CAS complaints received



7 It should be noted that in previous years, for statutory complaints about children’s services, when a complaint was progressed to further stages of the process, at each stage the complaint was counted as a *new* complaint. Therefore the comparator information with previous reporting years is not on a like-for-like basis, throughout the report.

8 Of the 100 children’s social care complaints, 70 (70%) were resolved within the 20 working day timescale, an improvement on the previous year when 58.7% were resolved in timescale. Three investigations (3%) were ongoing at the year-end (all at Stage 2) and the other 27 complaints (27%) were resolved outside timescale.

9 For complaints relating to adult social care, 74 complaints were completed at the year-end with 2 ongoing. Of the 74 completed complaints, 100% were completed within the individual timescales agreed in the Complaints Resolution Plan (CRP), compared with 97.5% in 2013/14.

10 Of the total 176 complaints, 37 (21.0%) were upheld and 55 (31.3%) were partially upheld. There were 79 (44.9%) that were not upheld, and 5 (2.8%) that were not completed by the year end.

- 11 *Lack of communication/information* featured as a category in 43 (24.4%) CAS complaints (27 children’s services and 16 adult complaints). *Professional conduct of staff* featured in 34 (19.3%) CAS complaints (22 children’s services and 12 adult services). *Disputed decision* was prevalent in 32 (18.2%) CAS complaints (19 children’s services and 13 adult services).
- 12 *Parents* featured as the largest cohort of complainants in relation to children’s social care services, with 69 (69%) complaints made by parents. In complaints about adult social care services, *relatives (non-parent)* made 32 (42.1%) complaints. These “complainant types” have consistently been the largest cohorts over previous reporting years.
- 13 During the year, CAS declined to consider 9 complaints (5 children’s services and 4 adult services) a decrease on the 14 declined complaints in 2013/14. Declined complaints are not included in the numbers of actioned complaints.

Benchmarking comparisons for statutory complaints

- 14 Although the regulations do not require local authorities (LAs) to publish benchmarking information, it is recognised that comparator information may be of interest. Benchmarking information from neighbouring (North East) authorities for the 2014/15 reporting year is shown in Tables 1 and 2 below and overleaf.

Table 1: Complaints relating to children’s social care services – North East regional authorities 2014/15

Local Authority	Number of Complaints	Rate of Complaints (per 1000 0-19 Population*)	Number of complaints actioned at Stage 2**	Stage 2 Complaints as a % of Stage 1 Complaint Numbers**
A	15	0.488	5	33.3%
Durham	100	0.876	5	5.0%
B	65	0.966	7	10.8%
C	45	1.003	3	6.7%
D	45	1.007	1	2.2%
E	42	1.167	7	16.6%
F	31	1.372	22	71.0%
G	78	1.654	18	23.1%
H	60	1.817	4	6.7%
I	60	2.389	15	25.0%
J	213	3.461	19	8.9%
K	No information	-	No information	-

* ONS Mid-2013 population estimates, Office for National Statistics

** Note: some complaints actioned at Stage 2 in 2013/14 may have been investigated initially at Stage 1 during 2013/14 or 2014/15; and some may have been investigated directly at Stage 2, bypassing Stage 1

- 15 From the information supplied:
- Durham had the second lowest rate of childrens Stage 1 complaints (0.876) per 1000 population aged 0-19 years. This is the same result as in 2013/14.

- Durham had the second lowest percentage (5%) of children’s complaints progressing to Stage 2. This is an improvement on 2013/14 when Durham had the fourth lowest rate.

Table 2: Complaints relating to adult social care services – North East regional authorities 2014/15

Local Authority	Total Number of Complaints	Rate of Complaints (per 1000 18+ Population**)
A	14	0.130
B	33	0.141
C	18	0.168
Durham	76	0.183
D	17	0.235
E	46	0.285
F	24	0.290
G	36	0.302
H	54	0.358
I	64	0.401
J	152	0.686
K	No information	-

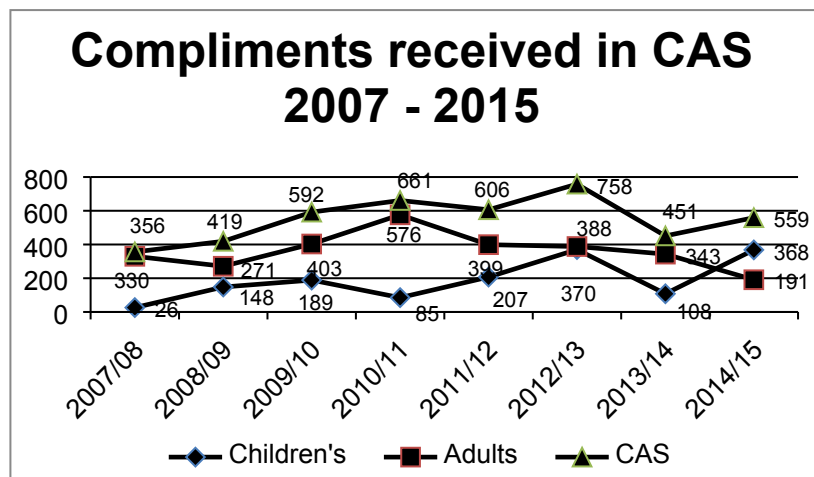
** ONS Mid-2013 estimates, Office for National Statistics

- 16 From the information supplied, Durham had the fourth lowest rate of adult complaints (0.183) per 1000 population aged 18 and over. This is an improvement on 2013/14 when Durham had the fifth lowest rate.

Compliments

- 17 As shown in Graph 2 overleaf, in the reporting year, a total of 559 compliments were received by CAS of which 368 related to children’s social care and 191 to adult social care.
- 18 Overall, there has been an increase of 23.9% in compliments in comparison to the previous year when 451 compliments were received, as shown in Graph 2 below.

Graph 2: Compliments received in CAS 2007-2015



- 19 The ratio of compliments to all complaints received across CAS is 3.2:1. This represents an increase on the previous year when the ratio of compliments to complaints was 2:1.
- 20 In Adult Care the 44.3% decrease in compliments received in 2014/15 is linked to changes in the types of provision provided by CDCS in-house residential care services.
- 21 Examples of compliments and themes are contained within the Annual Statutory Representations Report under parts three and four.

Complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

- 22 During 2014/15, CAS statutory services received 5 LGO enquires (2 children's and 3 adult cases) which were not taken to investigation. A further 19 enquiries (9 children's and 10 adults cases) were answered, against which draft and final decisions were subsequently received.
- In 7 cases (6 children's and 1 adult) the LGO decided not to investigate
 - In 7 cases (1 children's and 6 adult) the LGO investigated and no fault was found
 - In 3 adult cases maladministration and injustice were identified
 - In 1 children's case the LGO decided there had been injustice to the complainants
 - In 1 children's case a draft decision did not conclude there had been maladministration or injustice but suggested a remedy to resolve the complaint.

Remedies and learning outcomes

- 23 Remedies and learning outcomes are continually identified and acted upon by CAS.
- 24 Examples of learning in relation to children's social care complaints includes:
- Staff being reminded to ensure that parents are informed of dates, times and venues of meetings and contact sessions (including any changes) in a timely way.
 - The need for good communication between colleagues in different teams, or when handing over cases, to ensure that no unnecessary delays are experienced by service users.
 - Reviewing and amending the procedures relating to the Public Law Outline (PLO) process to ensure that it is clear to parents whose children are at potential risk of being removed from their care.
- 25 Examples of learning in relation to adult social care complaints includes:
- Ensuring staff inform service users if they no longer have an allocated worker and the reasons for this. Information about any duty system and appropriate contact details should be provided.

- Team managers and staff were reminded that they must clarify to care providers why respite care is required for individual service users.
- Ensuring that letters sent to families, in the event of a service user death whilst subject to a Deprivation of Liberties (DOLs) authorisation, should mention that a coroner might *routinely* become involved.

Summary

- 26 During the period 2007-2012, there was an overall upward trend for complaints, followed by a reduction from the 2012 level in 2013/14. In 2014/15, the reduction in complaints continued. Compliments relating to children's services, and total compliments, increased in 2014/15. Although the number of compliments about adult services has decreased in 2014/15, for every complaint received by CAS, over three times as many compliments were received.
- 27 The highest number of complaints relate to a lack of communication/ information, staff conduct and disputed decisions. Whilst recognising that complaints are often about perception, the service continues to closely monitor these areas.
- 28 CAS continues to develop a collaborative approach with complainants to seek to reach appropriate resolution. An approach based on local resolution, where the complainant is central to the discussion and resolution, is proactively encouraged.

Recommendations

- 29 It is recommended that Committee:
- Note the CAS Annual Statutory Representations Report (Appendix 3).

Contact: Peter Appleton, Head of Planning and Service Strategy, CAS

Tel: 03000 267381

Email: peter.appleton@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance	Complaints can lead to financial claims for compensation in some cases.
Staffing	N/A.
Risk	Upheld complaints can lead to reputational risk for the local authority.
Equality and diversity/ /Public Sector Equality Duty	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.
Accommodation	None
Crime and disorder	Any complaint made in relation to hate crime will be redirected to the appropriate officer to progress under the relevant policy and procedure.
Human rights	Compatible with Human Rights Act – able to record and respond to complaints about alleged breaches.
Consultation	None.
Procurement	None.
Disability Issues	Taken into consideration within the procedure.
Legal Implications	Complaints Team work closely with Legal Services when appropriate.

Appendix 2: Summary of CAS Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions 2014/15

- 1 From 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, a total of 32 corporate complaints were received in CAS as shown in the table below:

Q1 14/15 Total	Q2 14/15 Total	Q3 14/15 Total	Q4 14/15 Total	Total of Corporate Complaints Received in 2014/15
6	8	7	11	32

Acknowledgement within 2 working days 2014/15

- 2 Of these 32 complaints, 31 (96.9%) were acknowledged within 2 working days during the period 2014/15.

Corporate Complaints responded to within 10 working days 2014/15

- 3 Of the 32 corporate complaints received, 18 (56.3%) were responded to within 10 working days. The 14 (43.7%) not responded to within timescale were particularly complex cases.

Service Breakdown of Corporate Complaints received 2014/15

- 4 The breakdown of the 32 corporate complaints is as shown in the table below.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Adult Care	0	0	0	0	0
Children's Services	2	1	1	9	13
Commissioning	0	1	0	0	1
Education	4	6	4	2	16
Planning & Service Strategy	0	0	2	0	2
Public Health	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	6	8	7	11	32

Compliments received 2014/15

- 5 The table below shows a breakdown by service area of the 262 compliments received by CAS between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals

Children's Services	23	29	39	98	189
Education	32	20	6	13	71
Planning & Service Strategy	0	2	0	0	2
Totals	55	51	45	111	262

Learning Outcomes

6 Some actions as a result of learning from corporate complaints are shown below:

- Members of staff within the One Point service being reminded of good practice in relation to managing sensitive issues linked to safeguarding.
- Members of staff who work directly with families who need financial information reminded about signposting to the Council's Welfare Rights service which specialises in providing such information for service users.

Appendix 3



Children and Adults Services

Annual Statutory Representations Report
Children and Adults Social Care Services 2014/15

Annual Statutory Representations Report

Children and Adults Social Care Services 2014/15

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Part One - Introduction

Welcome to Durham County Council's (DCC) Children and Adults Services (CAS) Annual Report which details representations made in relation to CAS Social Care Services. The report covers the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

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*¹. 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, findings 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.

There is no statutory requirement to publish data on compliments but it is important to provide a rounded view of what service users, their carers, families and nominated representatives think about the services they receive. Compliments provide the opportunity to understand what elements of services are valued and why.

The report is broken down into seven 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 complainants
- Performance data in relation to the handling of complaints
- Lessons learnt and actions taken to improve service delivery
- Future developments

¹ 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 by the Local Authority are dealt with under the corporate complaints procedures. Whilst for 'corporate complaints' 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.

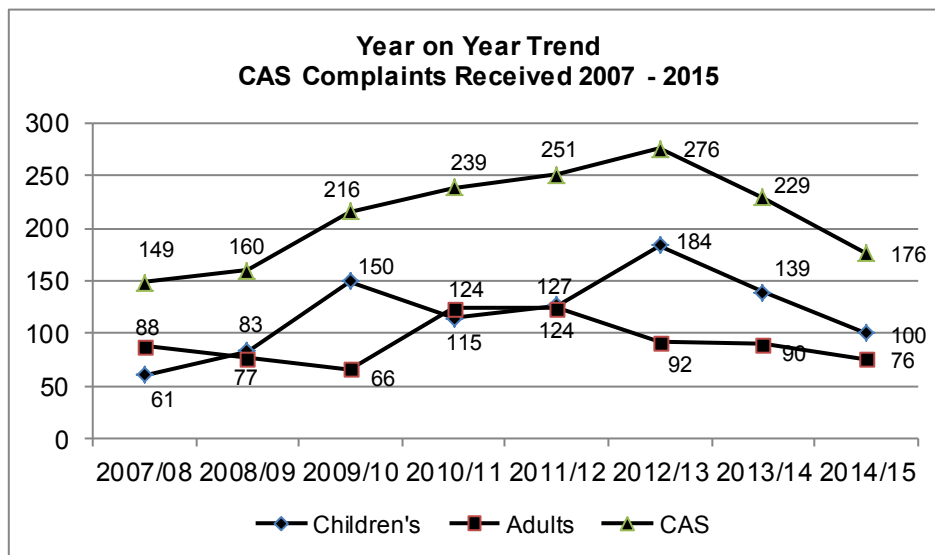
Part Two - Key messages for CAS

Number of complaints received

In 2014/15, a total of 176 complaints were received by CAS; 100 related to children's social care services and 76 related to adult social care services. There has been a 23.1% decrease in CAS complaints when compared with the number of complaints received in 2013/14 (229). Children's social care complaints have decreased by 28.1% in comparison to the previous reporting year whilst complaints about adult services have decreased by 15.6% over the same period.

Graph 1 below illustrates a trend of a steady overall increase in the number of statutory complaints received over the period 2007-2013, with the increase being mainly attributable to complaints in relation to children's social care services. Since 2013/14 the number of complaints decreased in relation to both children's and adults social care services. In 2014/15 the total figure was at its lowest for 6 years.

Graph 1: Year on year trend 2007-2015 – CAS complaints received



Composition of complaints received

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
- Stage 3 (Review Panel) which has a total timescale of up to 50 working days

Of the 100 complaints received in relation to children's social care, all were managed at Stages 1 and 2 of the statutory complaints process. Of the 100 Stage 1 complaints, 5 were subsequently progressed to Stage 2, and no complaints were progressed to Stage 3. Of the 100 complaints, 97 were concluded at the year-end (the 3 ongoing were at Stage 2 of the process).

Complaints relating to adult social care 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. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the Local Authority's (LAs) response, the next step is for them to take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Of the 76 complaints in relation to adults social care services, 74 were concluded by the year end.

A total of 171 (97.2%) CAS complaints were completed at the year-end.

Benchmarking comparisons

Although the Regulations do not require Local Authorities (LAs) to publish benchmarking information it is recognised that comparator information may be of interest. Benchmarking information from neighbouring (North East) authorities for the 2014/15 reporting year is shown in tables 1 and 2 below and overleaf.

Table 1: Complaints relating to children's social care services – North East regional authorities 2014/15

Local Authority	Number of Complaints	Rate of Complaints (per 1000 0-19 Population*)	Total Number of Stage 2 complaints**	Stage 2 Complaints as a % of Stage 1 Complaint Numbers**
A	15	0.488	5	33.3%
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G	78	1.654	18	23.1%
H	60	1.817	4	6.7%
I	60	2.389	15	25.0%
J	213	3.461	19	8.9%
K	No information	-	No information	-

* ONS Mid-2013 population estimates, Office for National Statistics

** Note: some complaints actioned at Stage 2 in 2013/14 may have been investigated initially at Stage 1 during 2013/14 or 2014/15; and some may have been investigated directly at Stage 2, bypassing Stage 1

Table 1 shows that from the information supplied, in 2014/15 in comparison to regional neighbours:

- Durham had the second lowest rate of Stage 1 complaints (0.876) per 1000 population aged 0-19 years. This is the same result as for 2013/14.
- Durham had the second lowest percentage of Stage 1 complaints progressing to Stage 2. Durham has historically had a relatively low percentage of complaints escalating to Stage 2 for a number of years. Managers and staff try to resolve as many complaints as possible within the 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– North East regional authorities 2014/15

Local Authority	Total Number of Complaints	Rate of Complaints (per 1000 18+ Population**)
A	14	0.130
B	33	0.141
C	18	0.168
Durham	76	0.183
D	17	0.235
E	46	0.285
F	24	0.290
G	36	0.302
H	54	0.358
I	64	0.401
J	152	0.686
K	No information	-

** ONS Mid-2013 estimates, Office for National Statistics

Table 2 shows that in 2014/15, in comparison with 10 neighbouring authorities who supplied information, Durham had the fourth lowest rate of complaints (0.183) per 1000 population aged 18 and over. This is an improvement on 2013/14 when Durham had the fifth lowest rate.

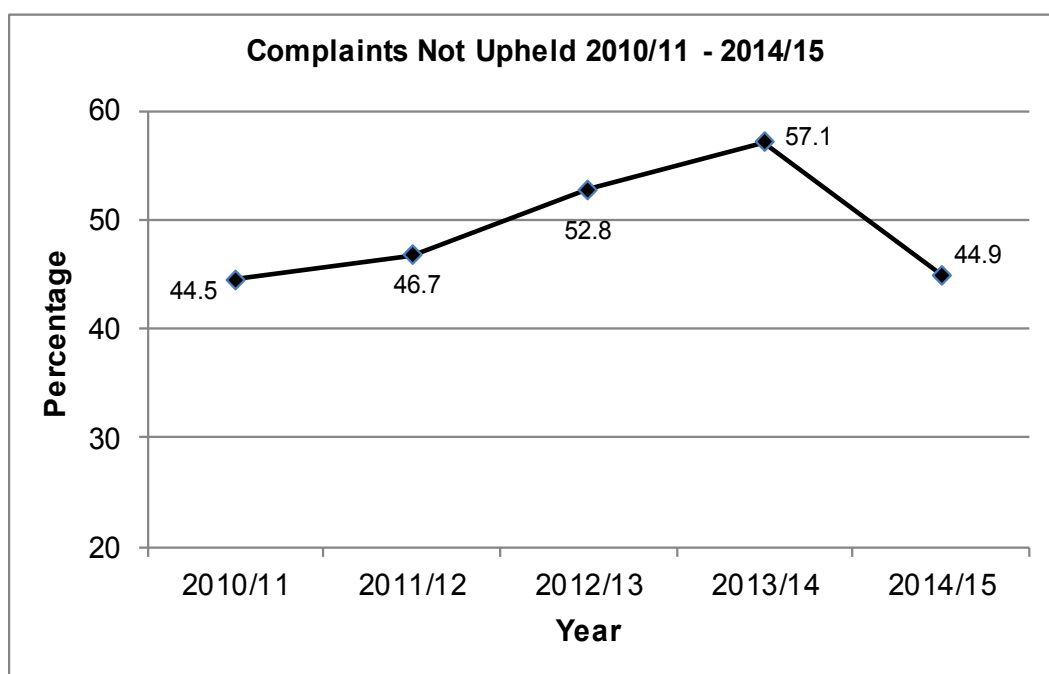
Number of complaints upheld

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

Of the 176 complaints received by CAS, 37 (21.0%) were upheld and 55 (31.3%) were partially upheld. There were 79 (44.9%) that were not upheld, and 5 (2.8%) that were not completed by the year end.

As Graph 2 overleaf illustrates, in previous years the number of complaints not upheld across CAS as a whole had been increasing year-on-year. However in 2014/15 a greater percentage of complaints (52.3%) were upheld or partially upheld. Consideration has been given for reasons for this increase but no trends or themes have been identified.

Graph 2: Complaints not upheld in CAS 2010-2015



In children's social care complaints, of the 100 Stage 1 and 2 complaints, 20 (20%) were upheld in full and 29 (29%) were partially upheld. There were 48 (48%) complaints that were not upheld. There were 3 (3%) complaints, all at Stage 2, which were not completed by the year end. At the end of 2013/14, 58.2% of complaints about children's social care services were not upheld, and in 2012/13 this figure was 38.3%.

In adult's social care complaints, of the 76 complaints received, 17 (22.4%) were upheld and 26 (34.2%) were partially upheld. There were 31 (40.8%) complaints that were not upheld. There were 2 (2.6%) complaints which were not completed by the year end. At the end of 2013/14, 54.4% of complaints about adults social care services were not upheld, and in 2012/13 this figure was 61.4%.

Percentage of complaint acknowledgements within 2 working day timescale

There were 97.7% of complaints acknowledged within the timescale of 2 working days, which is a 0.7% improvement on the previous year. One complaint about children's services and 3 complaints about adults' services were acknowledged outside the 2 working days during the early part of the year. This was due to administrative error and has been resolved by introducing a more robust system for when complaints are initially received.

Complaints completed within timescale

Of the 100 children's social care complaints, 70 (70%) were resolved within the 20 working day timescale, an improvement on the previous year when 58.7% were resolved in timescale. Three investigations (3%) were ongoing at the year-end (all at Stage 2) and the other 27 complaints (27%) were resolved outside timescale.

For complaints relating to adult social care, 74 complaints were completed at the year-end with 2 ongoing. Of the 74 completed complaints, 100% were completed within the individual timescales agreed in the Complaints Resolution Plan (CRP), compared with 97.5% in 2013/14.

Subject matter of complaints

As in previous reporting years, the 3 major categories for complaints within CAS were:

1. *Lack of Communication/Information* featured as an element in the majority of both childrens and adult services complaints, relating to 43 (24.4%) of CAS complaints (27 children's services and 16 adults services).
2. *Professional Conduct of Staff* featured in 34 (19.3%) CAS complaints (22 childrens services and 12 adult services).
3. *Disputed Decision* – 32 (18.2%) of total CAS complaints contained this as an element (19 childrens services and 13 adult services).

In an effort to mitigate against complaints with these categories, within Adult Care, key messages and learning from complaints are communicated to managers and staff through briefing notes which are published on the intranet. In Children's Services the recently introduced Single Assessment Process for families requires feedback to individuals making referrals, thereby improving communication. Across CAS, disputed decisions are reviewed on an individual basis, and practice standards have been developed which include expectations in regard to communication and professional conduct.

Complaints by team and service area

Tables 3 and 4 overleaf 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 shows that in Children's Services the service area receiving the greatest number of complaints was the Assessment and Intervention service followed by the Child Protection service. These two service areas have the greatest amount of direct contact with service users and members of the public.

Table 3: Children's complaints by team

Service Area	Number of Stage 1-3 Complaints 2014/15	Number of Stage 1-3 Complaints 2013/14	Direction of Travel	% of Total Complaints 2014/15	% of Total Complaints 2013/14
Assessment & Intervention*	35	3	↑	35%	3.8%
Child Protection*	32	-	-	32%	-
Initial Response/First Contact	10	6	↑	10%	7.6%
Looked After Children	8	5	↑	8%	6.3%
Fostering and Adoption	7	0	↑	7%	-
Disability Social Work	4	2	↑	4%	2.5%
Safeguarding Children	2	55	↓	2%	69.5%
Independent Reviewing Officers	1	0	↑	1%	-
Children's Home	1	1	↓	1%	1.3%
Young People's Service	0	4	↓	-	5.1%
Aycliffe Secure Services	0	1	↓	-	1.3%
Full Circle	0	1	↓	-	1.3%
Pathfinder	0	1	↓	-	1.3%
Total	100	79	↑	100%	100%

*Teams in place since February/March 2014 following an internal restructure. The Safeguarding teams have been superseded by Child Protection and Assessment & Intervention teams.

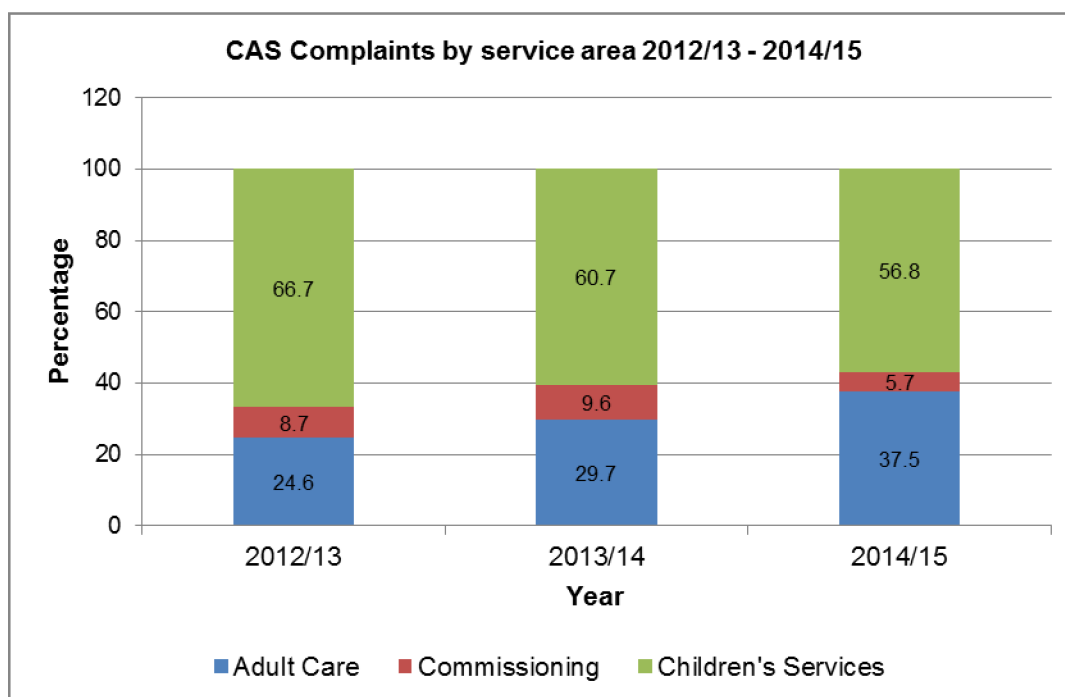
Table 4 below shows that in Adult Care the service area receiving the greatest number of complaints was Older People/ Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment service followed by the Learning Disability/Mental Health/Substance Misuse service, which has the greatest amount of direct contact with service users and members of the public.

Table 4: Adult complaints by team

Service Area	Number of Complaints 2014/15	Number of Complaints 2013/14	Direction of Travel	% of Total Complaints 2014/15	% of Total Complaints 2013/14
Older People/ Physical Disabilities & Sensory Impairment (OP/PDSI)	41	48	↓	54.0%	53.3%
Learning Disability/Mental Health/ Substance Misuse	17	12	↑	22.3%	13.3%
Commissioning	10	22	↓	13.2%	24.4%
County Durham Care And Support	7	4	↑	9.2%	4.5%
Adult Care - Safeguarding	1	4	↓	1.3%	4.5%
Total	76	90	-	100%	100%

As Graph 3 overleaf illustrates, for the past 3 years, Children's Services have received the highest percentage of complaints relating to CAS. In 2014/15, of the 176 CAS complaints, 56.8 % related to Children's Services. Adult Care accounted for 37.5% of all complaints in 2014/15, whilst complaints relating to the Commissioning service area accounted for 5.7% in 2014/15.

Graph 3: CAS statutory complaints by service area



Complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

During 2014/15, the LGO contacted the council in relation to 24 (11 children's and 13 adult) statutory cases that had been referred to them. The LGO usually makes an enquiry with the council to ask what action has been taken, and to request copies of any correspondence. After considering the information from the council and the complainant, the LGO then issues a Draft Decision Notice, which both parties are given an opportunity to comment upon, before the LGO issues a Final Decision.

The process for complaints about children's social care services has 3 stages prior to referral to the LGO, in contrast to the adult procedure which only has 1 stage. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the LAs response, the next step is for them to take the matter to the LGO.

During 2014/15 in relation to children's and adults social care services, the council received 5 LGO Enquires (2 childrens and 3 adult cases) which were not taken to investigation. A further 19 enquiries (9 childrens and 10 adults cases) were answered for which Draft and Final Decisions were subsequently received.

- In 7 cases (6 childrens and 1 adults) the LGO decided not to investigate
- In 7 cases (1 childrens and 6 adults) the LGO investigated and no fault was found
- In 3 adult's cases maladministration and injustice were identified
- In 1 children's case the LGO decided there had been injustice to the complainants
- In 1 children's case a Draft Decision did not conclude there had been maladministration or injustice but suggested a remedy to resolve the complaint.

Complaints by complainant type

In complaints received about children's social care services, *Parents* constituted the largest cohort of complainants with 69 (69%) of complaints made by parents. In complaints about adult social care services, *Relatives (non-parent)* made 32 (42.1%) complaints. 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, 49 (49%) of the 100 children's services complaints were made on behalf of girls aged 1-17 years, and 51 (51%) were made on behalf of boys aged 0-18 years. In relation to adult's complaints, the majority 55.3% were made by females. Males made 44.7% of complaints.

Ethnicity and diversity

Of the total of 176 complaints made regarding childrens and adults social care services, 98.3% were made by or on behalf of services users recorded as being White British and 1.7% Mixed Race Asian.

Declined complaints

During the year, CAS declined to consider 9 complaints, a decrease on the 14 declined complaints in 2013/14. There were 5 declined complaints about children's services and 4 about adults services. Declined complaints are not included in the numbers of actioned complaints. Reasons for declining complaints are detailed in Parts Three and Four of the report.

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.

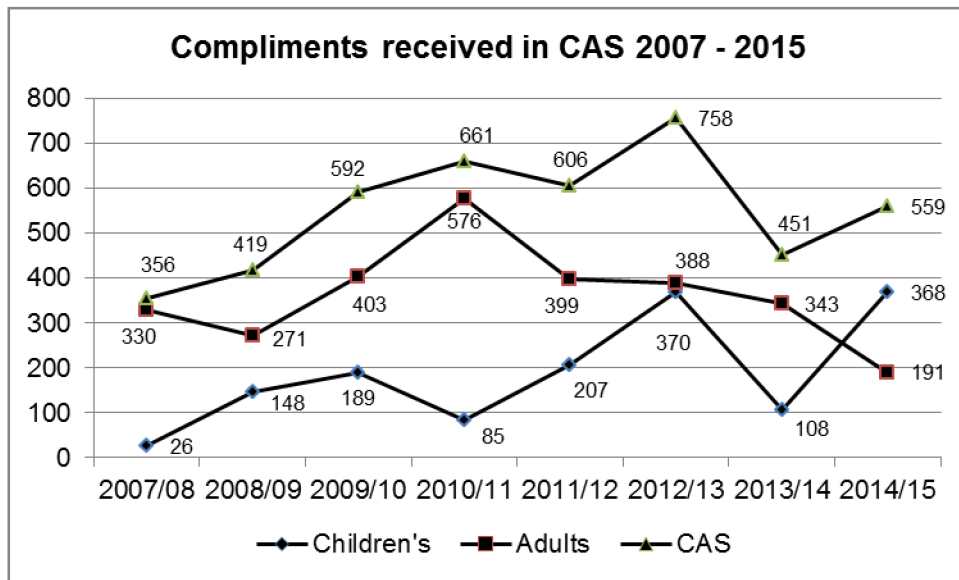
Number of compliments received

In the reporting year, a total of 559 compliments were received by CAS; 368 in relation to children's social care and 191 regarding adult social care. This represents an increase across the service of 23.9% in comparison to the previous year's number of 451.

This information is illustrated in Graph 4 overleaf.

Managers are reminded regularly through CAS communications of the importance of capturing and reporting compliments received by staff in the form of letters, emails and cards.

Graph 4: Compliments received in CAS 2007-2015

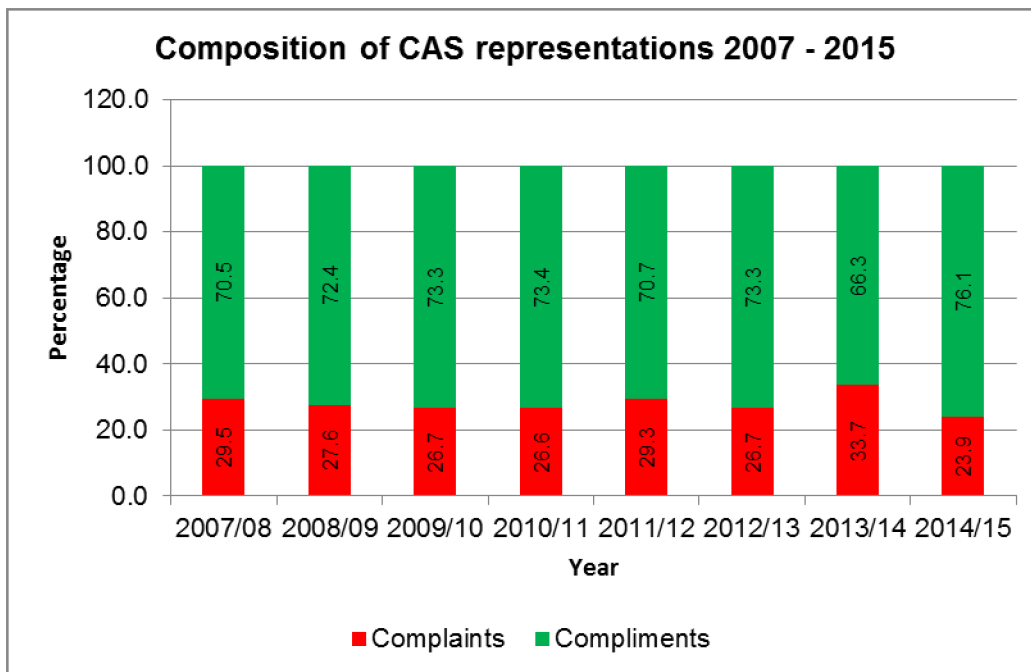


Ratio of compliments to complaints

The ratio of compliments to all complaints received across CAS is 3.2:1. This represents an increase on the previous year when the ratio of compliments to complaints was 2:1.

Graph 5 below shows that between 2007/08 and 2014/15, the percentage of compliments received has consistently outweighed the percentage of complaints received. In 2014/15 compliments as a proportion of total representations were at the highest level to date, at 76.1%.

Graph 5: Composition of CAS representations 2007-2015



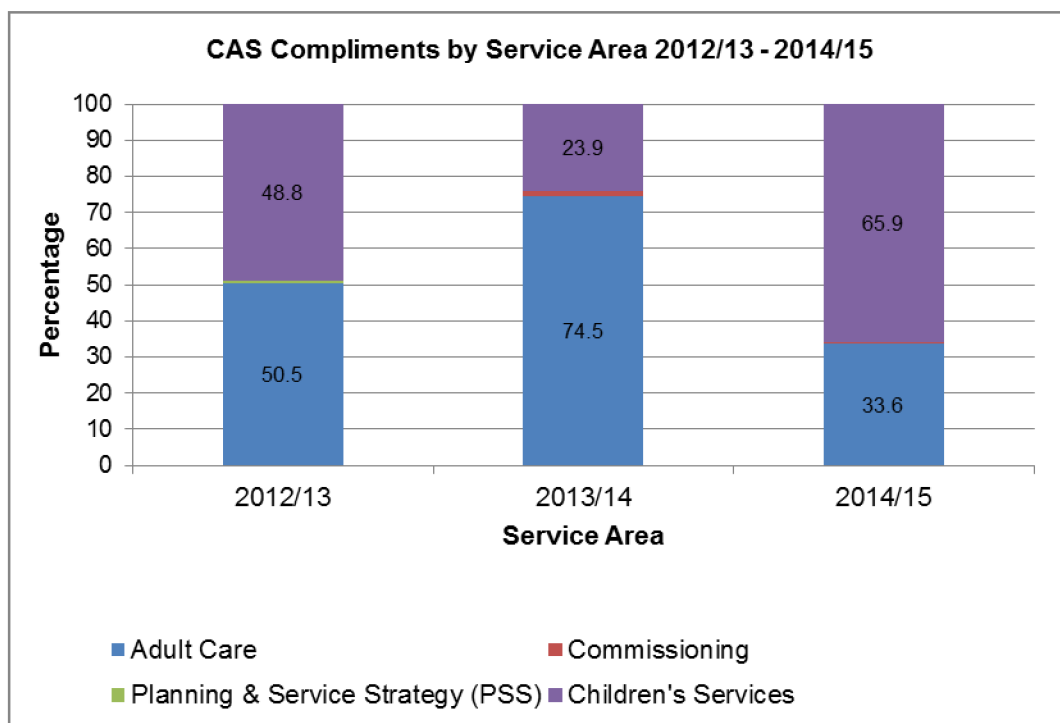
Compliments by team and service area

In Children's Services, in relation to social care provision the Family Pathfinder service received the highest percentage of compliments in 2014/15, closely followed by Aycliffe Secure Service, (24.7% and 24.5% respectively).

In Adult Care the 44.3% decrease in compliments received in 2014/15 is linked to changes in the types of provision provided by County Durham Care and Support's (CDCS) in-house residential care services. However CDCS still attracted the greatest proportion of compliments across the service area, receiving 126 (65.9%) compliments. The Older People's/Physical Disabilities and Sensory Support Service area received 58 (30.4%) of compliments.

Graph 6 shows that in 2014/15 the percentage of CAS compliments relating to Adult Care decreased to 33.6% from 74.5% in 2013/14. Compliments relating to Children's Services increased to 65.9% from 23.9% during the same period.

Graph 6: CAS compliments by service area



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 2014/15. 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
- Stage 3 (review panel) which has a timescale of up to 50 working days

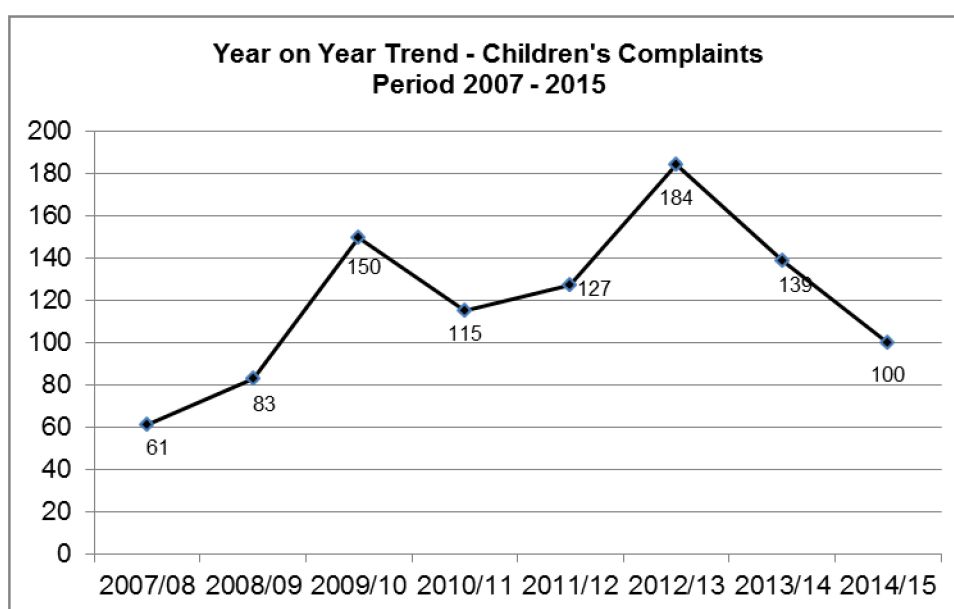
When a complaint is received it is risk-assessed to ensure that there are no safeguarding or other procedural issues that might supersede the complaints procedure. Dates are checked to ensure that it is within the 12 month limitation period (which may be waived in certain circumstances at the discretion 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 LGO who will determine their course of action dependent on the issues presented within the complaint. This can be done at any point of the process.

Year on year trend 2007-2015

Graph 7 below highlights overall performance from previous annual reports, showing year on year comparisons of the total numbers of complaints received for children's social care.

Graph 7: Complaints trend 2007-2015 – children's social care



In 2014/15 there was a 28.1% decrease in the total number of children's social care complaints received; 100 compared to 139 complaints received in 2013/2014. A decrease of 24.5% was experienced between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Over the period 2007-2015 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 children's social care services in 2012/13.

The service regularly considers ways of ensuring that complaints are resolved as quickly as possible and endeavours to find ways of minimising the number of complaints which are escalated to Stages 2 and 3. 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. This may account for the decreased number of complaints in 2013/14 and 2014/15. A culture of 'valuing the apology' is also becoming embedded.

Number of complaints received

In 2014/15, a total of 100 complaints were received and progressed under the children's social care complaints regulations. This represents a decrease of 28.1% on the 139 complaints received in 2013/14.

Of the 100 complaints received:

- All were actioned at Stage 1 complaints (local resolution).
- Complainants asked for 5 of the 100 to be escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process.
- None were actioned at Stage 3.

This report contains performance information in relation to the 100 complaints recorded at Stages 1 and 2; of which 97 (97%) were concluded by the year end (with 3 Stage 2 complaints remaining open into the 2015/16 reporting year).

Of the 5 complaints recorded at Stage 2, none were new complaints considered directly at Stage 2. All 5 had been investigated at Stage 1 and had subsequently been escalated to Stage 2 of the process at the complainants' request. This report contains information about those complaints whilst at Stage 2.

Number of complaints upheld

Of the 100 Stage 1 and 2 complaints, 20 were upheld in full (20%) and 29 were partially upheld (29%). There were 48 complaints (48%) that were not upheld. Three complaints all at Stage 2 (3%) were ongoing at the year end.

In 2013/14, 15.2% of complaints were upheld, 26.6% were partially upheld and 58.2% were not upheld. Therefore, in 2014/15 a greater percentage of complaints were upheld than in the preceding year.

Table 5: Outcome of complaints for children’s social care services 2014/15

Outcome of Complaints 2014/15 Children’s Social Care					
Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing	Total
Assessment & Intervention*	4	11	18	2	35
Child Protection *	11	10	11	0	32
First Contact*	1	1	8	0	10
Looked After and Permanence	1	3	4	0	8
Fostering and Adoption	1	4	2	0	7
Disability Social Work	0	0	4	0	4
Safeguarding Children	1	0	0	1	2
Independent Reviewing Officers	0	0	1	0	1
Children’s Home	1	0	0	0	1
Total	20	29	48	3	100

* 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 100 complaints, 99 (99%) were acknowledged within the 2 day timescale. During the early part of the reporting year, 1 Stage 1 complaint was acknowledged outside 2 day. This was due to an administrative error and was quickly resolved.

Complaints completed within timescale

Of the 100 complaints received, 70 (70%) were resolved within the 20 working day timescale for Stage 1 complaints. This is an improvement on the preceding years as 58.7% were resolved in timescale in 2013/14 and 39.4% in 2012/13. Three investigations were ongoing at the year-end (all Stage 2) and the other 27 complaints (27%) were resolved outside the timescale. The service continues to strive to improve on performance against the target response timeframes and has introduced escalation measures to improve this, whereby more senior managers are informed when there is a potential risk of timescales being exceeded.

At Stage 2, complaints are investigated by an Investigating Officer (IO) who is independent of the service area being complained about. In accordance with the regulations, an Independent Person (IP) is also commissioned. This person must not have worked for the LA for at least 3 years. Their role is to oversee the process to ensure it is carried out in a fair and timely manner. The 65 day response timeframe includes the issuing of the LA’s Adjudication response to the IO and IP reports.

Part of the independent investigating officers’ role is to give regular progress updates to the complainants and the LA. As relatively few complaints are taken to Stage 2, those which do reach this stage are particularly complex and often comprise numerous elements.

Categories of complaints

As shown in Table 6 below, of the 100 complaints actioned, 27 (27%) included *Lack of Communication/Information* as at least one of the reasons for the complaint. Examples include complaints relating to not being able to contact social workers and not receiving copies of children's records such as contact sheets or assessment reports.

Professional Conduct of Staff was included in 22 (22%) complaints. Complaints in this category usually alleged that social workers had failed to follow procedures, had misled families, or had given preferential treatment to one parent over another.

There were 19 complaints (19%) categorised as *Disputed Decision*. In some cases, this related to parents being unhappy about the decisions made by social work teams in relation to family dynamics, for example in cases where a mother's new partner is believed to be a risk to the children.

These have been the 3 major categories of complaints in preceding years in relation to children's social care services. In 2013/14 *Lack of Communication/Information* was cited in 40.5% of complaints, followed by *Professional Conduct of Staff* (35.4%) and *Disputed Decision* (19.0%).

In Children's Services the recently introduced Single Assessment Process for families requires feedback to referrers, which is way of improving communication. Across CAS, disputed decisions are reviewed on an individual basis, and practice standards have been developed which include expectations in regard to communication and professional conduct.

Table 6: Categories of complaints received 2014/15

Complaint Category / Issue	Number of Complaints
Lack of Service – Communications/Information	27
Professional Conduct of Staff	22
Disputed Decision	19
Lack of Service – Contact/Visits	10
Speed of Service	10
Staff Attitude	9
Confidentiality	9
Quality of Service – Report Writing	6
Lack of Service – Denied Service	5
Lack of Service – Restricted Choices of Services	5
Application of Service Guidance/Procedures	4
Provision of Services – Reviews/Conferences	4
Safeguarding	4
Provision of Service - Assessment	2
Quality of Service - Personal Financial Issues	2
Lack of Service – Referrals Not Actioned	1
Quality of Service – Late Referrals	1
Finance - Assessment	1
Finance – Charging Policy	1
Provision of Service – Foster Care	1
Protection Investigation	1
Total	144*

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

Complaints received by service area

As shown in Table 7 below, the service area receiving the greatest number of complaints was the Assessment and Intervention service followed by the Child Protection service. These two service areas have the greatest amount of direct contact with service users and members of the public.

Table 7: Number of complaints received by service area 2014/15

Service Area	Number of Stage 1-3 Complaints 2014/15	Number of Stage 1 – 3 Complaints 2013/14	Direction of Travel	% of Total Complaints 2014/15	% of Total Complaints 2013/14
Assessment & Intervention	35	3	↑	35%	3.8%
Child Protection	32	-	-	32%	-
First Contact*	10	6	↑	10%	7.6%
Looked After and Permanence	8	5	↑	8%	6.3%
Fostering and Adoption	7	0	↑	7%	-
Disability Social Work	4	2	↑	4%	2.5%
Safeguarding Children	2	55	↓	2%	69.5%
Independent Reviewing Officers	1	0	↑	1%	-
Children's Home	1	1	↓	1%	1.3%
Young People's Service	0	4	↓	-	5.1%
Aycliffe Secure Services	0	1	↓	-	1.3%
Full Circle	0	1	↓	-	1.3%
Pathfinder	0	1	↓	-	1.3%
Total	100	79	↑	100%	100%

Complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

During 2014/15, the LGO contacted the council in relation to 11 children's social care cases that had been referred to them. The LGO usually asks the council what action has been taken and requests copies of any correspondence. The LGO then issues a Draft Decision Notice, which the council and complainant are invited to comment upon, before the LGO issues a Final Decision.

During 2014/15, of the 11 social care cases received by the LGO, 9 were progressed to investigation. Final Decision letters were received for 8 of the 9 cases:

- One stated that the council had not been at fault;
- One stated that there had been injustice to the complainants;
- In 6 cases the LGO decided not to investigate.

In the other case, a Draft Decision Notice was received after the end of the reporting year. The council has agreed to undertake the LGOs recommended action to resolve the complaints.

The 2 enquiries which the LGO did not progress to investigation are summarised below:

- In one case the LGO decided to close as 'premature' as it had not been through Stage 2 of the complaint procedure. It is currently ongoing as a Stage 2 complaint.

- Another case was classified by the Ombudsman as ‘premature’ due to the complainant escalating to the Ombudsman before the Council’s process had been completed.

Complaints by complainant type

As has been the trend over previous reporting years, *Parents* constituted the highest number of complainants, representing 69 (69%) of the 100 complaints. This is an increase on the 2013/14 figure of 53.2% complaints made by Parents. *Other relatives* (in most cases, grandparents) brought 18 (18%) complaints compared with 22.8% in 2013/14. *Carers* made 9 (9%) complaints followed by *Advocates** who made 3 (3%) complaints. One complaint (1%) was made by an *Other* person (a Head teacher) in relation to a child’s case. In 2013/14, 3.8% of complaints were made by Carers, 13.9% by Advocates, 3.8% by clients and 2.5% by Other persons.

**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.*

Age and gender profiles of complainants

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 100 complaints were made on behalf of a total of 174 children and young people. Using the eldest child’s information, 49 of the 100 complaints were made on behalf of girls aged 1-17 years, and 51 were made on behalf of boys aged 0-18 years.

Ethnicity and diversity

In 99 of the 100 (99%) complaints, the eldest child (or the child who the complaint was made on behalf of) was White British; in 1 (1%) case the child was recorded as being Mixed Race Asian.

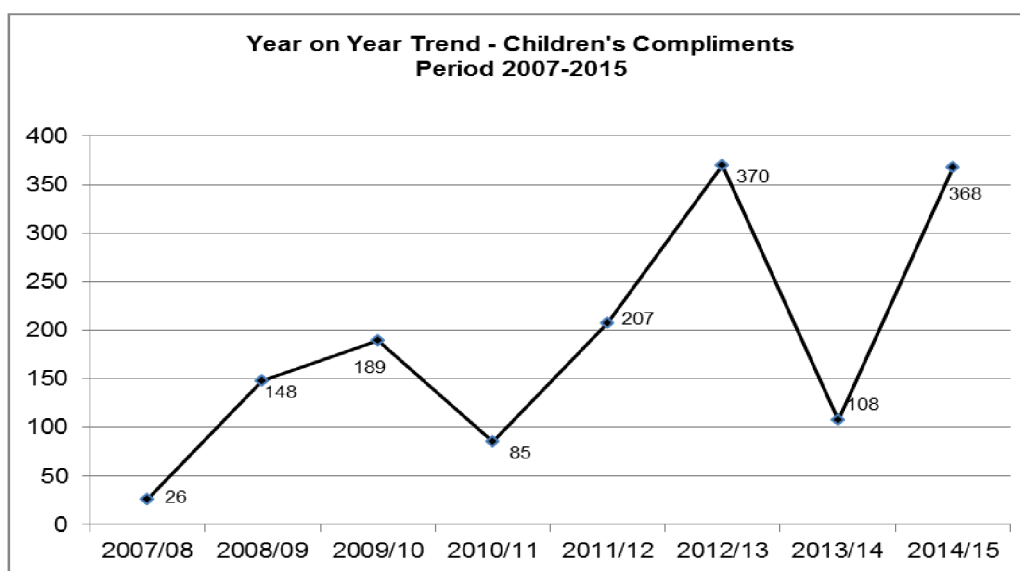
Declined complaints

During the reporting year, 5 complaints were declined, 2 due to the cases being subject to legal processes and therefore required to be addressed through the Courts and 2 cases were in relation to matters which were over one year old; 1 of these cases had been through a legal process, and in the other case the complainant had stated an intention to take legal action against the Council. The other case was one which DCC had not been involved with. Declined complaints are *not* included in the total figure of 105 complaints received.

Number of compliments received

In the reporting year, the number of recorded compliments rose again to former levels, from 370 in 2012/13 to 108 in 2013/14 to 368 in 2014/15. This represents an increase of 240.7% from 2013/14 to 2014/15, in contrast to the decrease of 70.8% which was reported in the previous year.

Graph 8: Compliments year on year trend 2007-2015



Reasons for this increase are attributed to improved collecting and reporting of compliments, with managers having been reminded to report any compliments received from service users and their families.

Compliments received by service area

In 2014/15, the service which received the most compliments was the Family Pathfinder Service, closely followed by Aycliffe Secure Services, which received 24.7% and 24.5% of compliments respectively. The Community Support Team, and Think Family, which are both positive intervention services, received 11.7% and 9.5% of total compliments respectively.

Table 8: Number of compliments received by service area 2014/15

Service Area	Number of Compliments 2014/15	Number of Compliments 2013/14	Direction of Travel	% of Total Compliments 2014/15	% of Total Compliments 2013/14
Aycliffe Secure Service	90	11	↑	24.5%	10.3%
Assessment and Intervention	24	-	-	6.5%	-
Copelaw Activities (CATS)	0	1	↓	-	0.9%
Children's Homes	22	2	↑	6.0%	1.8%
Child Protection	10	-	-	2.7%	-
Community Support Team	43	56	↓	11.7%	51.8%
Disability Social Work	7	1	↑	1.9%	0.9%
Family Pathfinder	91	2	↑	24.7%	1.8%
Fostering and Adoption	8	1	↑	2.2%	0.9%
Full Circle	3	6	↓	0.8%	5.6%
Initial Response/Emergency Duty	7	1	↑	1.9%	0.9%
Looked After & Permanence	23	8	↑	6.3%	7.4%
Safeguarding Children	0	11	↓	-	10.3%
Supervised Contact Service	0	1	↓	-	0.9%
Think Family	35	0	↑	9.5%	-
4Real	5	7	↓	1.3%	6.5%
Total	368	108	↑	100%	100%

Ratio of compliments to complaints

The ratio of compliments to complaints received is the highest for a number of years at 3.5:1. In 2013/14 the ratio was 0.8:1. In 2012/13 it was 2.0:1 and in 2011/12 it was 1.6:1.

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
- Being able to contact staff easily

Examples of compliments received

Some examples of compliments received include:

- *You have been lovely to work with, we always felt listened to and we know you did your very best for (child). Thank you! You have been great! **Looked After and Permanence teams***
- *I am very grateful for all the help and support that (worker) has given me. With Community Support help I now feel that my son will live with me forever and we can look forward to our future together as a happy family. **Community Support Team***
- *You are straightforward, not false and you made me feel confident in you; you put me at ease; you got the children counselling and you listened to me in a way that no one else had done. **Assessment and Intervention Team***
- *Thank you so much for taking care of us when we were born and for finding us our new mammy and daddy. We will always be grateful to you, and we will be happy and healthy in our new home. Our mammy and daddy are really grateful too that you picked them to look after us and are looking forward to a lovely family life together. **Looked After and Permanence teams***
- *I have to say that XXXX is amazing and has been a huge positive in both mine and XXXX life. XXXX has been easy to get hold of, she always replies to messages and has been such a big help for me too. She has always been there with advice when I needed it. **Looked After and Permanence teams***
- *It was lovely working with XXXX, she listened to my worries and helped me through the bad and hard times and never failed to cheer me up. I have come so far and made so much progress since working with XXXX. **Community Support Team***

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 2014/15 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. Under the regulations, a complaint made verbally, if capable of being resolved within 1 working day, does not constitute a complaint for recording purposes.

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 must 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 involved in planning how their complaint is to be addressed, within what timescale and their expectations on the desired outcome. From this a Complaints Resolution Plan (CRP) letter is produced.

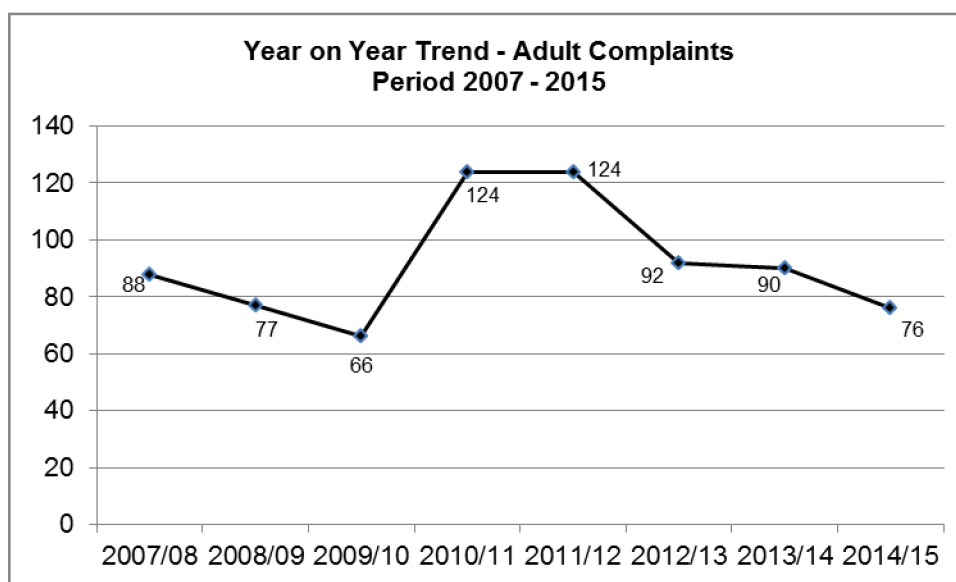
Different resolution methods are utilised depending on the issues being addressed and individual preferences and circumstances.

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 2007-2015

Graph 9 overleaf shows year on year comparison of the numbers of complaints received for adult social care. The graph shows that in 2014/15 there was a 16% decrease in the number of complaints received; 76 compared to 90 complaints received in 2013/14, continuing the downward trend of the previous reporting year when compared to a spike which occurred between 2010/11 and 2011/12. (This had coincided with changes to charging policies leading to a greater number of complaints being made.) The 76 complaints received in 2014/15 reflect the second lowest number in the 8 years since 2007/08 and reflects the ongoing work to improve service delivery, including learning from previous complaints so that mistakes are not repeated.

Graph 9: Complaints trend 2007-2015 – adult social care



Number of complaints received

In 2014/15, a total of 76 complaints were received and progressed through the statutory adult social care complaints procedure. This represents a decrease of 16% on the 90 complaints received in 2013/14. Of the 76 complaints received, 74 were completed by the end of the reporting year.

Number of complaints upheld

Of the 76 complaints received, 17 (22.4%) were upheld in full and 26 (34.2%) were partially upheld. There were 31 (40.8%) complaints that were not upheld. Two complaints (2.6%) were carried forward into 2015/16, one of which is the subject of an independent investigation.

Table 9: Outcome of complaints 2014/15

Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing	Total
Older People/ Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment	8	11	21	1	41
Learning Disability/ Mental Health / Substance Misuse	5	7	4	1	17
Adult Care - Safeguarding	0	1	0	0	1
Commissioning	3	4	3	0	10
County Durham Care And Support	1	3	3	0	7
Total	17	26	31	2	76

Percentage of complaint acknowledgements in timescale

In accordance with the regulations the statutory timescale for acknowledging an adult social care complaint is 3 working days; however the CAS performance target is 2 working days. Of the 76 complaints received, 73 (96.1%) were acknowledged within the 2 day timescale. In the 3 cases where the timescale for acknowledgement was not met, this was due to administrative error and was resolved.

Complaints completed within timescale

Complaints Resolution Plans (CRPs) were completed in all of the 76 complaints received in the year. The CRPs included timescales for response and are calculated based upon the potential complexity of the case. Of the 76 complaints received, 74 were completed at the end of the reporting year and 100% of these were completed within the agreed timescale of the CRP. Of the 2 complaints not completed at the end of the reporting year they remained within the timescale agreed in the CRP.

Categories of complaints

As detailed in Table 10 below, of the 76 complaints received, 16 (21.1%) contained a category of *Lack of Communication/Information*. Complaints in this category usually detailed a failure in providing comprehensive and comprehensible information or not following up with information and updates when promised.

There were 13 (17.1%) complaints related to the category of *Disputed Decision*. An example of this is where following assessment, a client did not meet the criteria to receive a service and this was challenged.

The next highest category of complaint was *Professional Conduct of Staff* with 12 (15.8%) complaints containing this as an element. Such complaints tended to be allied to disputed decisions and involved allegations that assessments had not been thoroughly conducted.

These have been the three major categories of complaints in preceding years in relation to adult's social care services. In 2013/14 *Lack of Communication/Information* featured in 24.4% of complaints, *Disputed Decision* featured in 24.4% followed by *Professional Conduct of Staff* (17.7%).

Table 10: Categories of complaints received 2014/15

Complaint Category / Issue	Number of Complaints
Lack Of Service - Communications/Information	16
Disputed Decision	13
Professional Conduct Of Staff	12
Quality Of Service - Personal Care	7
Staff Attitude	6
Quality Of Service - Work Of Other Agencies	6
Finance - Direct Payment	5
Finance - Charging Policy	5
Application Of Service Guidance/Procedures	4
Lack Of Service - Denied Service	4
Lack Of Service – Change to Clients Service	4
Provision Of Service - Assessment	4
Provision Of Service - Equipment	3
Finance - Assessment	3
Quality Of Service - Missed/Late Dom Care Calls	3
Lack Of Service - Restricted Choices Of Current Services	3
Quality Of Service - Personal Financial Issues	2
Safeguarding	2
Provision Of Service - Reviews/Conferences	2
Quality of Service – Missed Medication	1
Total	105*

*A complaint can have more than one category recorded within it

To try to mitigate against complaints with these categories, in Adult Care key messages and learning from complaints are communicated to managers and staff through briefing notes which are published on the intranet. Across CAS, disputed decisions are reviewed on an individual basis, and practice standards have been developed which include expectations in regard to communication and professional conduct.

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.

Complaints received by service area

As in previous years, the service receiving the greatest number of complaints was Older People/ Physical Disabilities/ Sensory Impairment, followed by the Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/ Substance Misuse service area.

Table 11: Number of complaints received by service area 2014/15

Service	Number of Complaints 2014/15	Number of Complaints 2013/14	Direction of Travel	% of Total Complaints 2014/15	% of Total Complaints 2013/14
Older People/ Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment	41	48	↓	54.0%	53.3%
Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers/Substance Misuse	17	12	↑	22.3%	13.3%
Commissioning	10	22	↓	13.2%	24.4%
County Durham Care And Support	7	4	↑	9.2%	4.5%
Adult Care - Safeguarding	1	4	↓	1.3%	4.5%
Total	76	90	↓	100%	100%

The service area receiving the greatest number of complaints was Older People / Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment service followed by the Child Protection service, which has the greatest amount of direct contact with service users and members of the public.

Complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

During 2014/15, the LGO contacted the council in relation to 13 adult social care cases that had been referred to them. The LGO usually asks the council what action has been taken and requests copies of any correspondence. The LGO then issues a Draft Decision Notice, which the council and complainant are invited to comment upon, before the LGO issues a Final Decision.

During 2014/15 in relation to adult social care complaints the council received 3 enquires and 10 Final Decision letters. Of these:

- In 6 cases it was stated that the council had not been at fault;
- In 3 cases maladministration and injustice were identified;
- In 1 case the LGO decided not to investigate.

The 3 enquiries received were in relation to:

- One complaint for which a Draft Decision Notice has not been issued at the time of writing. The complaint had been independently investigated.
- One complaint regarding a service which had not been commissioned by the council.
- One case which the LGO decided to close as 'premature' as it had not been through the council's complaints procedure.

Complaints by complainant type

Relatives (non-parent) constituted the highest category of complainant at 32 complaints (42.1%). This category includes adult children complaining on behalf of their parent, and spouses. This is consistent with trends in previous years. The number of *Parents* making a complaint relating to their adult child was 15 (19.7%) which reflects an increase from the 2013/14 figure of 13.3%. The number of *Clients* who raised complaints on their own behalf was 14 (18.4%); this reflects a decrease when compared to 2013/14 (28.9%). *Advocates* made 8 (10.5%) complaints compared with 3.4% in 2013/14. The overall conclusion is that fewer service users were complaining directly, with more complaints being received from representatives on their behalf.

Age and gender profiles of complainants

The majority (55.3%) of complaints were made by on or behalf of females (19.7% aged 18-64 years, 22.4% aged 65-84 years and 13.2% aged 85+ years). Males accounted for 44.7% of complainants (23.7% aged 18-64 years, 10.5% aged 65-84 years and 10.5% aged 85+ years). This data represents an increase in complaints for males (compared to previous years) and an increase for both males and females aged 85+.

Ethnicity and diversity

Complaints were made by or on behalf of service users, 97.4% of whom were White British and 2.6% Mixed Race Asian (2 separate complaints from one complainant).

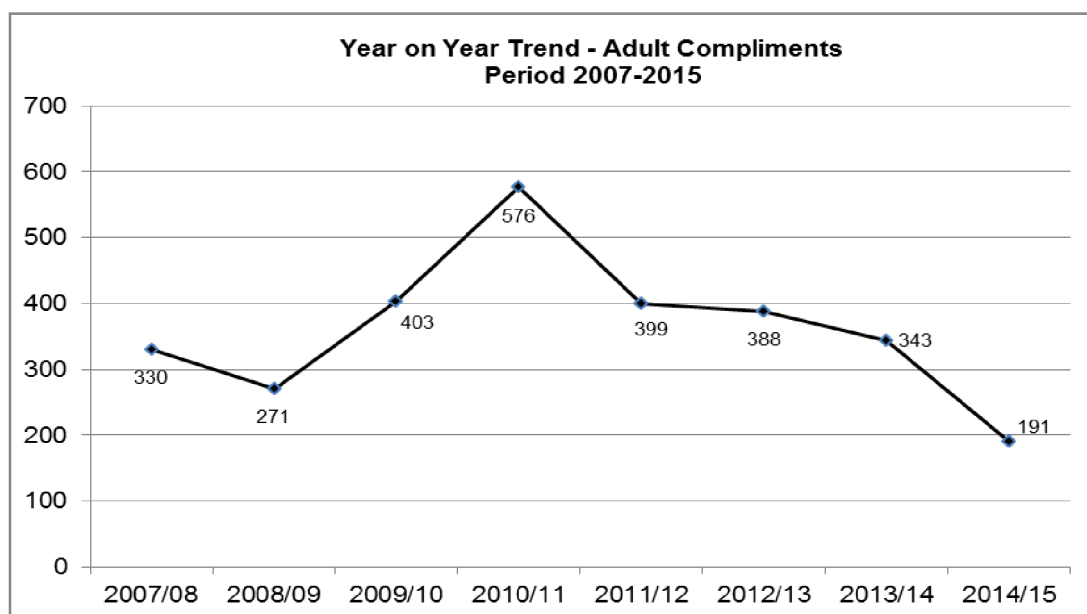
Declined complaints

During the year, 4 complaints were declined. One complaint was declined on the grounds that the service user had not given his permission for his care worker to make a complaint on his behalf, and the issues raised were more than 1 year old. One complaint was declined on the grounds it was a matter to be resolved directly between a care provider and a service user's family. Two complaints were declined on the grounds that the complaints had previously been concluded (in one case the matter having been adjudicated by the Ombudsman). Declined complaints are *not* included in the figure total of 76 complaints received.

Number of compliments received

In the reporting year, a total of 191 compliments were received within the Adult Care service. This represents a decrease of 44.3% from the 343 received during 2013/14. The graph below shows that following a peak in 2010/11, the number of compliments relating to adult's services has fallen year on year, with 2014/15 being the lowest since 2007/08. The reporting year has changes in the type of provision provided by CDCS, a service which has historically received high numbers of compliments.

Graph 10: Year on year trend compliments – 2007-2015



Ratio of compliments to complaints

The ratio of compliments to complaints in 2014/15 was 2.5:1 compared to 3.8:1 in 2013/14 and 4.2:1 in 2012/13.

Compliments by service area

Table 12: Total number of compliments by service area 2014/15

Service	Total Compliments 2014/15	Total Compliments 2013/14	Direction of Travel	% of Total Compliments 2014/15
Older People/ Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment	4	4	-	2.1%
Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers/Substance Misuse	58	99	↓	30.4%
County Durham Care and Support	126	233	↓	65.9%
Commissioning	3	6	↓	1.6%
Planning And Service Strategy	0	1	↓	-
Total	191	343	↓	100%

County Durham Care and Support (CDCS), the in-house provider received 126 (65.9%) of the total number of compliments. The Older People's/ Physical Disabilities/ Sensory Support Service area received 58 (30.4%) of compliments. These percentages reflect those in 2013/14 (67.9% and 28.9% respectively).

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
- Staff's sensitivity and support when dealing with family bereavement
- Being given information in a way that is easy to understand
- The quick responses they have received when requesting assistance

Examples of compliments received

Some examples of compliments received include:

- *(Service user) wanted to compliment the occupational therapy assistant. She could not praise this gentleman high enough. As soon as the occupational therapy assistant was appointed (staff member) appeared the same day. Such speedy service was appreciated. He was absolutely brilliant and got everything sorted and into place, he was friendly and professional and a pleasure to deal with.*
Occupational Therapy
- *The workers who supported me were extremely helpful and very pleasant. They treated me with care and consideration and I have nothing but praise for them. Their support, kindness and professionalism was of the highest standard.*
Integrated Short Term Intervention Service
- *Social Worker (name) has been so helpful and caring to both me and my partner, who is seriously ill. As sole carer I was struggling to cope until (SW) became involved. He organised day care twice a week which has given me a much needed break. (SW) has a unique ability to combine his own caring qualities with professionalism. Nothing seems to be too much trouble to him and he always finds the time to listen and advise. He is an asset to social care.*
Weardale Locality Team
- *You're just the sort of person whose kindness means more than you could ever know. Thank you so much for looking after mam. What a great service you provide. She was happy, safe and well cared for in the six weeks you visited.*
Reablement Durham and Sedgfield
- *(Staff Member) attended my wife today to assess and assist her loss of vision problems. We would like to put on record our appreciation of his understanding, knowledge and the care he took to reassure and provide the best of information and help. We found his visit very helpful and reassuring.*
Sensory Impairment

Part Five - Remedies and learning outcomes 2014/15

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.
- Social Workers were changed in some cases, even where complaints were not upheld, in order to improve working relationships with parents.
- Addendums were added to reports to ensure that discrepancies were recorded in line with parent's wishes.
- Complainants were asked for their agreement to share their 'story' with managers and staff, to aid the learning from their experience. In one case the complainant was invited to meet with a training manager to assist in the creation of a training session.

Adult complaints:

- 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.
- Explanations were provided or reiterated where communication had previously taken place but the client's understanding had not been checked.
- Occupational Therapy and Needs assessments were conducted under second opinion conditions where disputes arose following the original assessments for adaptations or care services.
- Where the client expressed a loss of trust and confidence in an individual worker a different worker was allocated to restore the relationship.

For both adults and children's services complaints, 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.

Compensatory payments were made where the failures constituted maladministration and/or injustice as defined by the Local Government Ombudsman. 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.

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. In each of the concluded complaints in CAS full explanations and where appropriate, apologies were provided.

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:

Policies and procedures

- Ensuring that policies and procedures for foster carers are regularly reviewed, updated and re-published to reflect current working practises.
- Reviewing and amending the procedures relating to the Public Law Outline (PLO) process, to ensure that it is clear for parents whose children are at potential risk of being removed from their care.

Communications

- Staff being reminded to ensure that parents are informed of dates, times and venues of meetings and contact sessions, and any changes to these, in good time.
- Managers and staff should return calls when messages are taken or voicemails
- The need for good communication between colleagues in different teams, or when handing over cases, to ensure that no unnecessary delays are experienced by service users.
- The Full Circle (therapeutic) service agreed to review its published leaflets and amend where necessary.

Reports

- Reminding social workers of the need to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for sharing reports with families for Child Protection Conferences.

Social work practice

- Staff ID badges should always be shown when visiting members of the public and care must be taken regarding how complainants are addressed.
- Staff were reminded to adhere to the procedure for sharing copies of Supervised Contact Records with families.

Adult complaints:

Policies and procedures

- Letters sent to families, in the event of a service user death whilst subject to a Deprivation of Liberties (DOLs) authorisation, should mention that a coroner might *routinely* become involved.

Communications

- Staff in the Older People's service were reminded that Notifications of Service/Change of Circumstance forms must provide clear information, in particular:
 - In relation to medical information that will form the basis of decisions on care or charging
 - Internal jargon (used by social care and health services) must be avoided and plain English should be used
- Staff must ensure that service users are informed if they no longer have an allocated worker with reasons for this. They should be given information about the relevant team's duty system and the contact details.
- Team managers and staff were reminded that they need to ensure that service users and their families understand the purpose of an assessment and why decisions have been made.
- Team managers and staff were reminded that they must clarify to care providers why respite care is required for individual service users.
- When respite care arrangements are made, social workers should ensure that families are informed of and fully understand that possible financial implications.

Social work practise

- Team managers were reminded of the need to act promptly when there are changes made in the type or provision of care for a service user.
- Team managers and staff were reminded of the need to be mindful at all times regarding professionalism and communication skills.
- Team managers and staff were reminded that social workers should where necessary proactively support families, to ensure that they are given accurate advice and assistance in understanding the payment of invoices for care.

Part Six – Developments

Although the complaints function in relation to children's and adults social care complaints is enshrined in statutory regulations, DCC CAS does not simply meet that duty, but continuously strives to achieve and maintain a high level of service in relation to the management of complaints. With this aim in mind, a number of developments have been undertaken during 2014/15. These include:

- Revised procedures for dealing with children and young people's statutory complaints have been made available for staff on DCC's intranet.
- Examples of compliments are shared through the quarterly reports and internal staff publications.
- Managers and staff have received specific training regarding responding to complaints, including 'valuing the apology'.
- Undertaking a full review of the children's complaints process to ensure accessibility and transparency in line with best practice from the LGO.

Key areas that for development in 2015/16 include:

- Continuing and strengthening the monitoring system to ensure actions and learning outcomes arising from complaints are implemented in a timely and effective way and fully embedded.
- Delivering further training sessions to managers and staff who deal with and respond to complaints.
- Reviewing and updating the complaints information that is available for service users.

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 in both of these areas in 2013/14. In 2014/15 the reduction in complaints continued, but compliments relating to children's services, and total compliments increased. Although the number of compliments about adult's services has decreased this year, for every complaint received, over twice as many compliments were received.

As the complaints function has embedded into the quality and development service, it plays a vital role and contributes to shaping the management of quality and assurance across the service. Developments for the future continue to focus on learning from complaints to improve the 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, the service continues to monitor these areas in particular for 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) 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 to 03000 268422 or email CASComplaints@durham.gov.uk .

Appendix 1 - Glossary of abbreviations

CAS	Children and Adults Services
CDCS	County Durham Care and Support
CRB	Criminal Record Bureau
CRP	Complaints Resolution Plan
DCC	Durham County Council
IO	Investigating Officer
IP	Independent Person
LA	Local Authority
LD	Learning Disabilities
LGO	Local Government Ombudsman
MH	Mental Health
NHS	National Health Service
NYAS	National Youth Advocacy Service
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OP	Older People
PDSI	Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment

Children and Adults Services

Annual Statutory Representations Report
Children and Adults Social Care Services
2014/15

Mark Pickering, Complaints Officer
Tel: 03000 266855

Gill Ward, Complaints Officer
Tel: 03000 265762

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altformat.CAS@durham.gov.uk
03000 261 381

Children and Adults Services, CMI Team 2015

Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17 November 2015

Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Attendance Management Working Group Review



Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To present to the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee the Attendance Management Working Group review report.

Background

- 2 At the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 27th March 2014, during consideration of the Quarter 3 Performance Management report, reference was made to performance in respect of sickness absence targets not being met within Durham County Council. At this time questions were raised regarding the sickness absence management policy, the process or recording and managing sickness absence, the role of line managers in reducing sickness levels and the training available to staff. There was also interest in the link between appraisal completion and absence levels.
- 3 The Committee resolved that once the Committee's work on the Medium Term Financial Plan and budget was concluded, a working group would be set up to examine the sickness absence policy.
- 4 At the Corporate Issues OSC meeting on 20 April 2015, agreement was given to the establishment of a Working Group to examine attendance management issues including sickness absence. The Committee agreed that the working group would:-
 - receive an overview of the current policies and procedures including the role of occupational health;
 - Examine statistics relating to attendance management across the Council to gain an insight into trends and opportunities for improvement;
 - consider examples of best practice and research in respect of sickness absence management, and
 - receive information on staff, manager and Trade Union opinions and experiences of the sickness policy and management.

- 5 Evidence was gathered over a series of 5 meetings culminating in a presentation to the group on 28 September 2015 which highlighted key findings from the review and at which members of the group agreed a series of recommendations.
- 6 A copy of the review report is attached at Appendix 2.

Service Grouping Response

- 7 Resources Service grouping welcome the analysis and conclusions contained within the report, and will closely monitor the impact of these once implemented, with reporting back through the established channels.

Recommendation

- 8 Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to agree the report of the Attendance Management Working Group and approve submission for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on the 16 December 2015.

Contact: Stephen Gwilym Tel. 03000 268140

Email: stephen.gwilym@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

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

Scrutiny Review of Attendance Management

October 2015

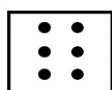
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Chair's Foreword

There is clear evidence that working can be good for your health, well-being, and recovery from illness. A 2009 report ([Fit for Work](#)) released by The Work Foundation, found that well-designed work environments and flexible working arrangements can help people to stay in work or gradually return to work after illness. As well as improving your income, employment can boost your confidence and self-esteem. This applies to adults of all ages, including people with health conditions and disabled people. Our health and well-being affect the people around us, so work can benefit our families and communities as well.



That said, the Council has experienced below target performance when examination of sickness absence figures has been undertaken via the Corporate Issues OSC to an extent that a review of the Council's approach to Attendance Management was agreed as a review topic for the Committee.

As part of its evidence gathering process the Attendance Management Working Group has examined and commented upon the draft attendance management policy including the Mental Wellbeing in the Workplace Policy ; considered a range of attendance management performance information setting out trends; considered the role of managers in managing sickness absence including associated training; reviewed the role of Occupational Health and the promotion of better health at work initiatives.

This report sets a series of recommendations which aim to deliver improvements in workforce attendance whilst also acknowledging the incredible job that our workforce does in ensuring that services continue to be delivered to our customers against continuing pressures being placed upon local government, particularly in respect of funding. The working group has also noted the prevailing health inequalities facing the North East Region and the challenges that they bring in terms of the health and wellbeing of its workforce.

I would like to thank fellow members of the working group and officers from Durham County Council for their valuable time and assistance in providing evidence and supporting the review as well as the contribution to the review from staff, managers and Trade Union representatives.

Councillor John Lethbridge
Chairman
Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Executive Summary

1. At the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 27th March 2014, during consideration of the Quarter 3 Performance Management report, reference was made to performance in respect of sickness absence targets not being met within Durham County Council. At this time questions were raised regarding the sickness absence management policy, the process or recording and managing sickness absence, the role of line managers in reducing sickness levels and the training available to staff. There was also interest in the link between appraisal completion and absence levels.
2. The Committee resolved that once the Committee's work on the Medium Term Financial Plan and budget was concluded, a working group would be set up to examine the sickness absence policy.
3. At the Corporate Issues OSC meeting on 20 April 2015, agreement was given to the establishment of a Working Group to examine attendance management issues including sickness absence. The Committee agreed that the working group would:-
 - receive an overview of the current policies and procedures including the role of occupational health;
 - examine statistics relating to attendance management across the Council to gain an insight into trends and opportunities for improvement;
 - consider examples of best practice and research in respect of sickness absence management, and
 - receive information on staff, manager and Trade Union opinions and experiences of the sickness policy and management.

Focus of the Review

4. The aim of the review was to seek outcomes to improve sickness absence levels and management practices within Durham County Council.
5. The Review Group gathered evidence over 5 meetings between June and September 2015 with evidence provided via presentations and reports from the following officers:

Kim Jobson – Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Resources Directorate

Joanne Kemp – Human Resources Advice and Support Manager, Resources Directorate

Suzanne Weston – Human Resources Business Lead (ACE/RED), Resources Directorate

Bev Stobbart – Policy, Planning and Performance Manager, Resources Directorate

Sanjeev Sangary – Senior Human Resources Officer, Resources Directorate
Dr Phil Wynn, Senior Occupational Health Physician, Resources Directorate
Henk Geertsema – Internal Communications Manager, Policy and Communications, Assistant Chief Executive's
Jenny Haworth - Head of Planning and Performance, Assistant Chief Executive's
Tom Gorman - Corporate Improvement Manager, Assistant Chief Executive's
Stephen Gwilym – Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Assistant Chief Executive's

6. The Review group received evidence in respect of:

- The emerging draft attendance management policy and procedures including :
 - Associated timescales and management practices in relation to both short term and long term absence;
 - The role of Occupational Health and the services that it provides to managers and employees including Counselling, physiotherapy, early intervention;
 - Examples of attendance management policies from other sources to baseline best practice;
 - Information on management and employee awareness and training in this area, and
 - Management of attendance associated with protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010, i.e. disability, pregnancy and maternity.
- Attendance management breakdowns of sickness absence including :
 - Information regarding the profile of sickness absence across age, gender, seniority and how this compares with other organisations
 - Trends in types of sickness absence and length of absence in the short and long terms
 - Whether any correlation between appraisal rates and sickness absence exists
 - Information on the frequency, timeframes and uptake of return to work interviews that are conducted.

- Information from employees, managers and Trade Unions and their experiences in respect of the Council's attendance management policy, procedures and management thereof.

Key findings and conclusions

7. The working group examined the draft Attendance Management Policy and whilst recommending adoption of the proposed policy put forward a number of suggested amendments for consideration at paragraph 33. The current notification of absence arrangements and existing trigger points for sickness absence interviews, whilst considered fit for purpose, should be reviewed if the implementation of the new Attendance Management Policy does not deliver the expected improvements in employee attendance.
8. Performance information in respect of attendance management should be examined against the context of the austerity measures placed upon the Council since 2010. The County Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and service planning processes adopted have identified the need to deliver significant reductions/savings whilst trying to ensure that the quality of service delivery is maintained. Since 2011, a total of 1065 ER/VR applications have been accepted, 501 vacant posts deleted and 524 compulsory redundancies made as part of MTFP savings.
9. Against the backdrop of reducing numbers of employees, the Council's workforce has continued to deliver effective and efficient services and the Council has sought to ensure that it has policies, procedures and programmes in place which contribute to staff wellbeing.
10. Attendance management performance information including trend analysis at a national and council level was considered. Nationally whilst the private sector has seen lower sickness rates than the public sector, this gap has narrowed in the last 20 years. In considering how Durham performs against the national picture, the working group noted that:-
 - The Council has an ageing workforce and that sickness absence increases amongst those employees aged 50+;
 - The Council's workforce is predominantly female (62.9%) and, as identified in Office for National Statistics (ONS) research into sickness absence in the Labour Market, sickness absence is higher amongst female workers (12.7 FTE days lost for female and 10.2 FTE days lost for male);
 - The two highest reasons for sickness absence are mental health and fatigue (25.8%) and musculo-skeletal (23.8%) again in line with the public sector nationally;

- The Council experiences a lower number of long-term sickness absences than short term but that long-term absences account for over 60% of FTE days lost
11. These statistics should be considered against the prevailing health inequalities facing the North East in that it has the lowest life expectancy in England, the highest levels of smoking prevalence, 2nd highest levels of alcohol consumption, low levels of participation in physical activity (lowest percentage of women meeting government recommendations in the country) and the 2nd highest obesity rate.
 12. The draft Attendance Management Policy encapsulates the fundamental principle that managers have access to support and training in respect of the policy and associated sickness management procedures and toolkit. Having examined the support provided to managers through HR and the OHS, the group emphasised that, in light of the identification of the 2 highest causes of sickness absence being mental health and musculo-skeletal injury, HR/OHS training should include stress awareness, manual handling, workstation assessment and annual appraisal awareness. It is also essential that this training be systematically delivered to all managers.
 13. All sickness absence in the Council is managed by the 'My View' computer system. The current automated "reminder triggers" within the system send a reminder to managers after 30 calendar days that a Sickness Absence interview needs to be undertaken in the event that this has not already occurred. Thereafter, further reminders are sent after two further 7 day periods following which it is escalated to a senior manager. Members consider that this is too lengthy and have suggested that the initial reminder be sent after 20 days and the escalation e-mail after a further 7 days.
 14. A range of services are provided by the Council's OH service which support attendance at work. Evidence confirmed the benefits of early referral into the OH service as a key mechanism in facilitating early return to work, particularly for those cases that develop into long-term absences. In acknowledging the 2 highest causes of sickness absence being mental health and musculo-skeletal injury, the working group supported the early referral into OH particularly for such absences. To this end, the group also supported the establishment of a corporate benchmark/target for OHS referrals and asked that HR work with OH to try to forecast any impact from such changes in terms of service capacity.
 15. The existing mechanisms for employee, manager and trade union engagement were found to be fit for purpose. Members were encouraged in particular by the results of the Internal Communications survey of employees. However, the working group noted the opportunity to extend this into a comprehensive Council-wide staff survey which would gather staff opinions on such issues as health and wellbeing; attendance management; appraisals; council policy; training

and development and organisational culture. The group feel that this would provide a richer source of information and a good “barometer” against which to gauge the organisational wellbeing of the Council.

16. The working group have noted the manager and trade union feedback in respect of the draft Attendance Management Policy and would like them to be engaged in the consideration of the proposed suggestions made by the working group, particularly in respect of the sickness absence interview reminders and the development of OH referral targets.
17. The Council has a comprehensive approach to promoting better health at work with numerous excellent initiatives being cited including health and wellbeing policies, physical and mental wellbeing programmes and discounted health and leisure offers within the Council and other employers. The Council has invested significantly to ensure that the promotion of better health and wellbeing of employees is incorporated into core Council policies and procedures.
18. The transfer of public health into the Council in 2012 brought a range of expertise within the organisation in respect of health improvement and wellbeing initiatives which has been utilised to promote better health at work and there remain further opportunities to explore this key area.
19. It now needs to consider whether a more targeted series of campaigns and initiatives would encourage take up amongst members of the workforce less likely to participate in such initiatives.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

20. The Working Group recommends the adoption of the draft Attendance Management Policy subject to those comments identified within paragraph 37 of this review report being considered for inclusion therein.

Recommendation 2

21. The Working Group recommends that the Council continues to target long-term sickness absence as the key cause of below target sickness absence performance.

Recommendation 3

22. The Working Group recommends that upon approval of the draft Attendance Management Policy, compulsory training be given to all DCC managers on the application of the new policy and associated procedures, making the links to such training as stress awareness, manual handling, workstation assessment and annual appraisal awareness and that this is incorporated into the Durham Managers’ Programme.

Recommendation 4

23. The Working Group recommends that the current automated “reminder triggers” within the My View system be amended to send a reminder to managers after 20 calendar days that a Sickness Absence interview needs to be undertaken in the event that this has not already occurred and the escalation to senior manager e-mail after a further 7 days.

Recommendation 5

24. The Working Group recommends that a review of the current OHS referral process be undertaken to include establishing a corporate target for referral into the OHS service of 30 days; an analysis of the impact upon OHS of implementing this target and an immediate referral into OHS for those employees whose absence has been due to mental wellbeing.

Recommendation 6

25. The Working Group recommends that staff, managers and Trade Unions be engaged in the examination of suggested changes to the Attendance Management policy arising from this review in respect of My View Sickness Absence Interview reminders and the development of OHS referral targets.

Recommendation 7

26. The Working Group recommends that a more comprehensive Council-wide staff survey be undertaken to inform organisational development, which would gather staff opinions on such issues as Health and wellbeing; attendance management; appraisals; council policy; training and development and organisational culture.

Recommendation 8

27. The Working Group recommends that that the Council review its current provision for the promotion of “Better Health at Work” and examine the potential to develop a more proactive and targeted approach to health and wellbeing promotion amongst its workforce.

Recommendation 9

28. The Working Group recommends that following implementation of the Attendance Management Policy and in the event that attendance management performance has not shown improvement following sustained monitoring, a review of all trigger points within the policy be undertaken.
29. 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.

Detailed Report

Draft Attendance Management Policy

30. The draft Attendance Management Policy is intended to set out a procedural framework and standards of practice which enable Durham County Council to consistently manage attendance, taking account of business needs, support for absent employees and equalities, in conjunction with the Attendance Management Guidance for Managers.
31. The policy covers all employees except for school-based employees, where schools need to give consideration to their own procedures. Employees absent through industrial injury or disease are subject to this policy. It is not the purpose of the policy to deal with abuse of the self-certification procedure. This should be investigated under the council's Disciplinary Policy.
32. The following principles are to apply to the Council's policy for dealing with attendance management:
 - a. Sickness absence will be dealt with in a way that is non-discriminatory and in accordance with the Equalities Act 2010;
 - b. Good attendance is valued and all opportunities should be taken to acknowledge and recognise such attendance;
 - c. Attendance will be managed consistently and the policy will be fairly applied across the Council;
 - d. Confidentiality will be respected at all times;
 - e. Open communication between managers and employees will be encouraged and promoted.
33. The draft Attendance Management Policy will be monitored and reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet the Council's aims and complies with these principles.
34. The draft Attendance Management Policy provides a procedural framework and standards of practice which supports managers to more effectively manage attendance. Key proposals within the draft policy examined by the working group include:-
 - Better definitions of short term and long term absence;
 - Mandatory targets to manage short term recurrent absences;
 - No requirement for employees to be referred to Occupational Health Service (OHS) before a hearing for Short Term absence where there is no underlying medical conditions confirmed by the employee;
 - Shorter timescales for meetings with management (5 days rather than the previous 7);

- Rehabilitation encouraged at an early stage and Managers to notify HR of all phased returns for recording purposes and to improve consistency of application of this element of the policy.
35. The working group has considered the process adopted by employees for the initial notification of absence with the majority of members agreeing that this initial contact should be with the immediate line manager.
36. The working group examined the proposed triggers for sickness absence interviews within the draft Attendance Management Policy within the context of the Council's corporate target for sickness absence. Whilst the group were advised that there was no evidence of a causal relationship between the trigger points and sickness targets, it was the Group's view that such triggers could be reviewed after an agreed period following implementation of the new Attendance Management Policy should the desired and expected improvements in attendance management not be realised.
37. During examination of the draft Attendance Management Policy the working group commented (relevant Policy references in brackets) that:-
- Return to work interviews should be delegated in the manager's absence (Para 3.1)
 - Reference to holding sickness absence interviews where the employee is absent should be the last bullet (Para 3.3)
 - Referral to OHS for short term absence only where an underlying medical condition - concern about this although managers can refer to OHS if they have concerns about the workplace impact on health or employee health which affects performance (Para 4)
 - Where fit notes suggest absence due to Mental Health and Wellbeing then OHS need to be involved early (Para 4.1)
 - Include explicit reference to the use of Stress Risk Assessments when managing stress related absence – Use of stress management toolkit (Section 5).

Recommendation 1

38. The Working Group recommends the adoption of the draft Attendance Management Policy subject to those comments identified within paragraph 37 of this review report being considered for inclusion therein.

Recommendation 9

39. The Working Group recommends that following implementation of the Attendance Management Policy and in the event that attendance

management performance has not shown improvement following sustained monitoring, a review of all trigger points within the policy be undertaken.

Attendance Management Performance Information

National Trend

40. The general trend across the United Kingdom (UK) economy is that sickness absence has been falling. The average sickness per worker across all sectors in 1993 was 7.2 days. This has fallen to 4.4 days per worker in 2013. Whilst the private sector has always enjoyed lower sickness rates than the public sector, the gap has narrowed over the last 20 years.

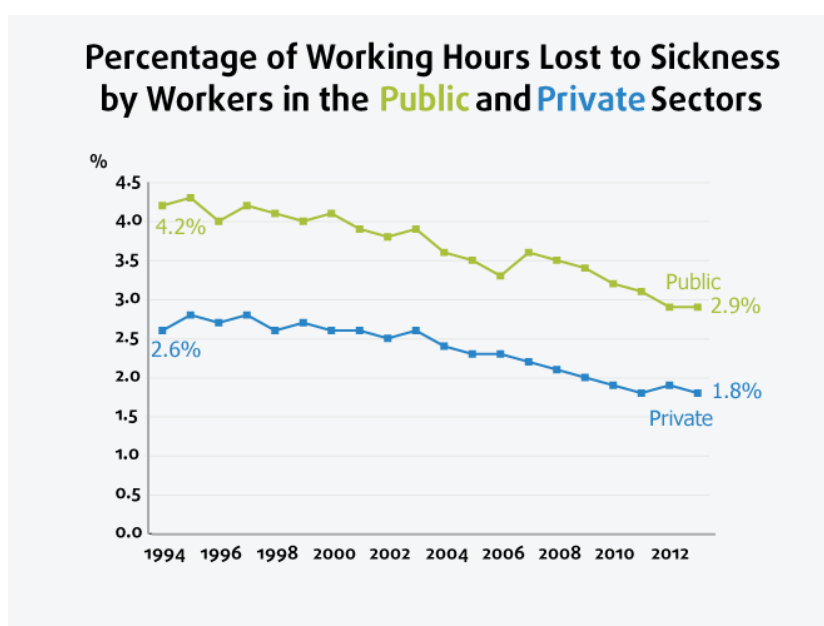


Figure 1: Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics (2014)

41. The council's headline sickness measure of days lost per full-time equivalent is presented both including and excluding school based staff. The former Best Value Performance Indicator included sickness absence of schools based staff and remains the basis of the measure used by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) for benchmarking purposes, and as such is the only existing comparable measure available for local government. However, the council has no management control over schools based staff so the reporting of both measures was introduced at the beginning of 2014/15.

Table 1: Sickness absence days per FTE - some comparisons

	DCC 14/15	CIPD 2013	CBI 2013	LGA 12/13	CIPFA 12/13	Civil Service 2013	ONS 2014

Sickness per FTE							
• All sectors		6.6	5.3		-	-	4.4
• Public sector		7.9	6.9		-	7.4	-
• Local government	9.58	8.2	-	8.8	-	-	-
• Single/upper tier		-	-	9.4	9.2	-	-
Long-term sick as a % of total sickness absence							
• All sectors	-	19%	30%	-	-		
• Public sector	-	28%	39%	-	-		
• Local government	61%	-	-	57%	-		
• Single/upper tier		-	-	56%	55%		

Organisation	Source	Frequency	Base
Office for National Statistics (ONS)	Sickness Absence in the Labour Market 2014	Annual	Quarterly Labour Force Survey datasets and Annual Population Survey
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)	Absence Management Annual Survey Report 2014	Annual	518 respondents including 123 public sector organisations of which 16 were local authorities in the 2014 survey
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	Healthy Returns? Absence and workplace health survey 2013	Annual	153 organisations including 29 public sector organisations in the 2013 survey
Civil Service	Civil service transparency data	Quarterly	All Government departments
Local Government Association (LGA)	Local Government Workforce Survey 2012/13	Annual	151 local authorities responded to the 2012/13 survey
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy	Corporate Services Benchmarking Club – Human Resources	Annual - by subscription (every 2 years in Durham)	36 participating unitary authorities and police forces

Durham County Council Trend

42. Performance information in respect of attendance management should be examined against the context of the austerity measures placed upon

the Council since 2010. The Council's MTFP and service planning processes adopted have identified the need to deliver significant reductions/savings whilst ensuring that the quality of service delivery is maintained. Since 2011, a total of 1065 ER/VR applications have been accepted, 501 vacant posts deleted and 524 compulsory redundancies made as part of MTFP savings.

43. Against the backdrop of reducing numbers of staff, the Council's workforce has continued to deliver effective and efficient services and the Council has sought to ensure that it has policies, procedures and programmes in place which contribute to staff wellbeing.
44. Whilst sickness excluding schools is significantly worse than the measure including schools based staff, the trend is more positive, reducing from a high of almost 13 days at the end of 2010/11, to just over 12 days currently.
45. Three years of improvement targets were set for the current planning period, with the 'including schools' target aspiring to achieve the current CIPD benchmark average for local government by 2016/17.

Table 2: DCC Sickness Absence Targets

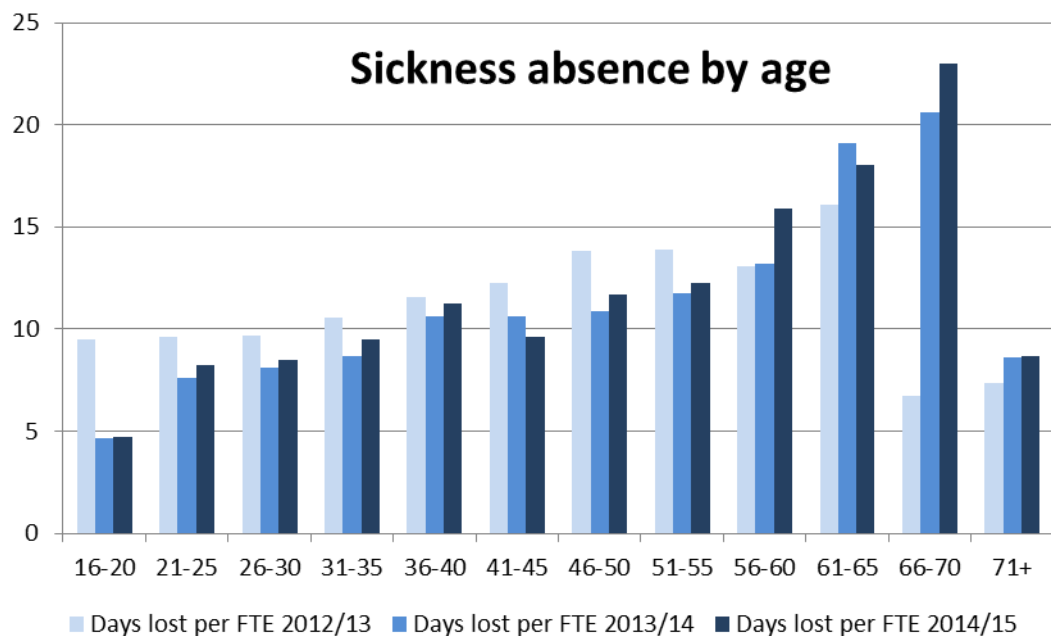
Year	Corporate sickness absence target (per FTE)	
	Including schools	Excluding schools
2014/15	8.7	11.8
2015/16	8.5	11.5
2016/17	8.2	11.2

Nationally – age / gender /occupational category

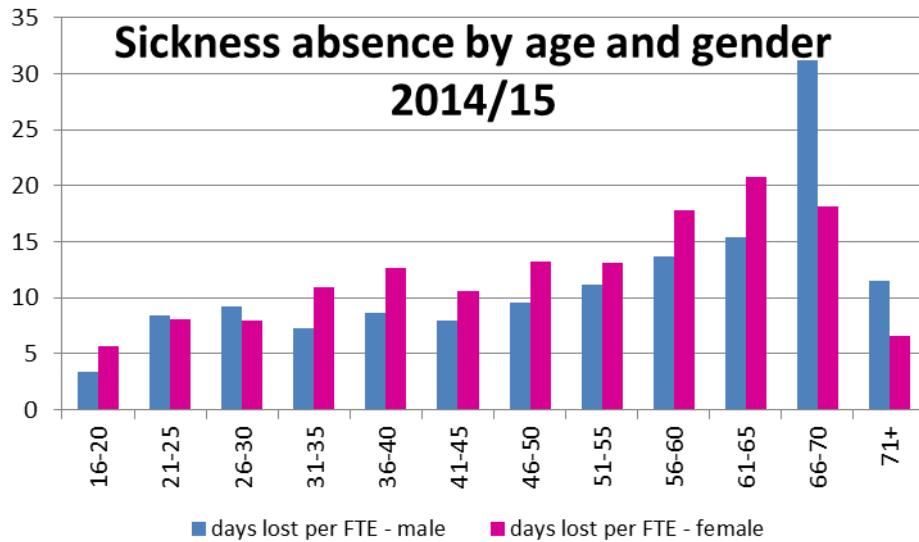
46. Variations in sickness absence across different services may be partly explained by the profile of the workforce. An annual report into sickness absence in the UK labour market from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows a number of trends against which we can compare the profile of our sickness absence to determine whether there are any significant variations.
47. Sickness absence increases with age, reflecting that people develop more health problems at older ages and sickness absence is more prevalent amongst lower graded employees. The ONS reports that workers aged 16-24 are 46% less likely to be off work due to sickness than those aged between 50 and the state pension age.
48. The national trend is that female employees have higher sickness with women being 42% more likely to be off work due to sickness than men nationally. The ONS also reports that sickness is lowest for managers, directors and senior occupational group classifications.

Durham compared to national picture

49. Datasets of all sickness absence for both 2012/13 and 2013/14 excluding schools based staff have been analysed against these variables. In particular analysis has been carried out to establish whether any patterns emerge, how these compare with the national picture, and whether any relevant variations can be identified between different occupational groups; the patterns that emerged are all reflective of the national picture.
50. The picture in the Council is that sickness generally increases with age. The Council has an ageing workforce and in the current financial climate, there is little active recruitment taking place which would naturally see the introduction of younger employees into the workforce.

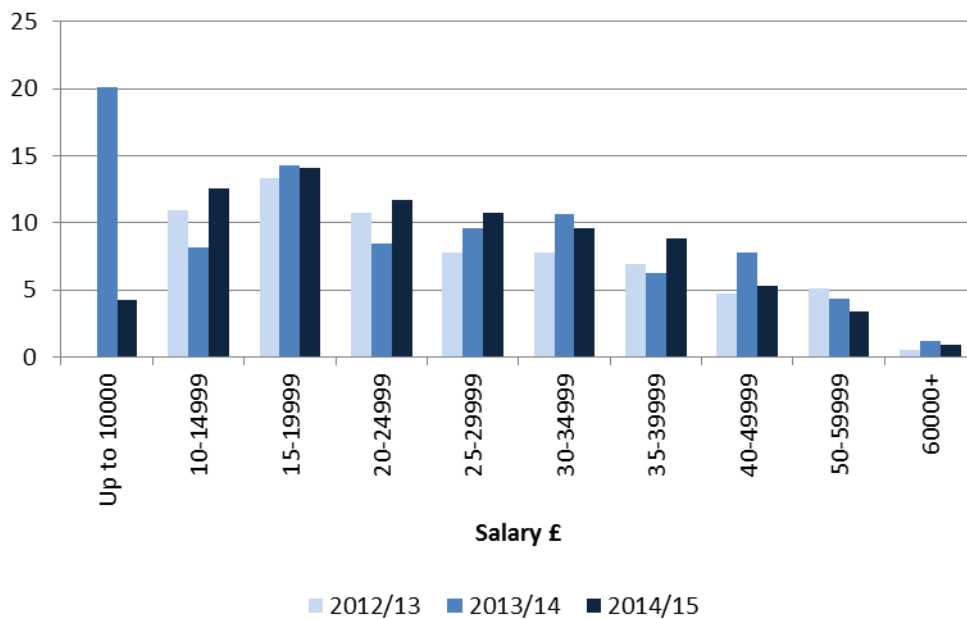


51. Sickness among female workers is higher across almost all age groups and the council's workforce is predominantly female (62.9 of non-schools based staff).



52. You can see from this analysis that female employees have more sickness absence on average than male employees and that sickness absence tends to increase with age. Please note that we have only 48 employees over the age of 65. Data from both 2012/13 and 2013/14 in DCC shows a similar pattern in terms of greater sickness absence for women and sickness absence tending to increase with age.
53. Comparing sickness absence with remuneration levels indicates that lower paid workers tend to incur more sickness absence.

Sickness by FTE salary

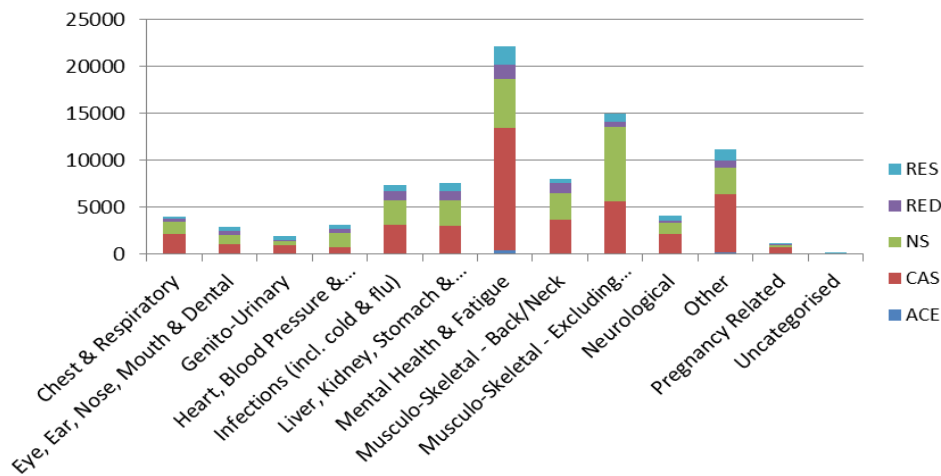


54. All of the patterns within the UK labour market are observed in the DCC workforce. The age profile and predominantly female makeup of the

workforce is typical of other public sector organisations and is one of the reasons public sector sickness is higher than those of the private sector.

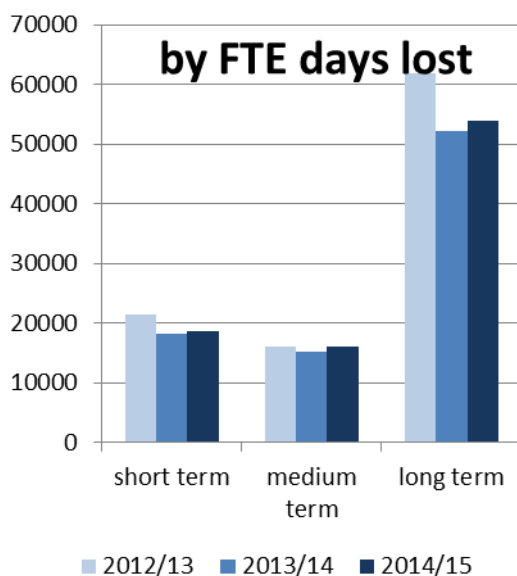
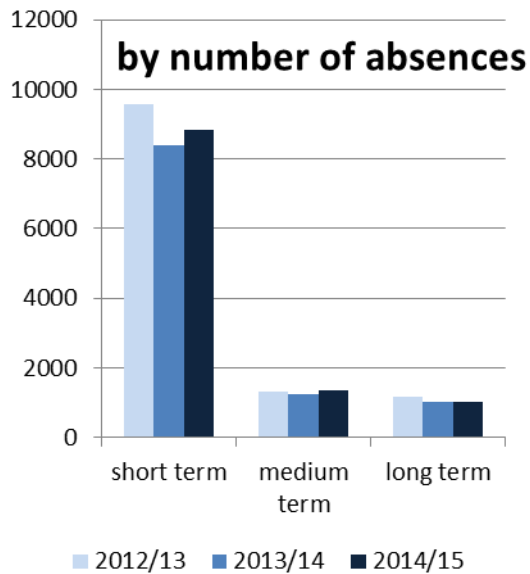
- 55. Regions within the country with the greatest deprivation and poverty also have higher sickness absence rates. The North East together with Wales and the East Midlands have the highest sickness rates in the country (2.4%) whereas London has the lowest (1.8%).
- 56. An analysis of sickness by reason in DCC shows that the two most common categories of sickness are mental health and musculo-skeletal injury which is likewise common to the public sector.

Sickness absence by reason 2014/15



- 57. One trend where DCC differs from the national picture is the proportion of overall sickness which is considered long-term (>20 days).
- 58. In common with all industry sectors the council categorises a period of sickness absence as short-term where it is up to seven days in length and sickness is categorised as long-term when the absence period is greater than 20 days.
- 59. A breakdown of sickness absence within the Council by absence period indicates that the majority of days lost arise from a small number of long-term absences. However, further analysis reveals that the proportion of total sickness absence defined as long-term, whilst remaining the largest category in terms of days lost to sickness, is actually improving.

Length of Sickness Absence



60. Long-term sickness absence accounted for >61% of total sickness in 2013/14. At 2014/15, the proportion reduced slightly to 60.8%. This is higher than the average of approximately 55-57% for local government (CIPFA and LGA). This is despite the fact that there has been an increase from 17 in 2013 to 40 in 2014, in the number of terminations of non-school based employee's contracts on grounds of ill health capability.

Period	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Short-term (<7 days)	21.7%	21.3%	21.0%
Medium-term (7-20 days)	16.1%	17.7%	18.2%
Long-term (>20 days)	62.2%	61.0%	60.8%

61. The North East region has one of the highest sickness absence rates in Great Britain although this should be set in the context of the prevailing health inequalities facing the region also. The North East has the lowest life expectancy in England, the highest levels of smoking prevalence, 2nd highest levels of alcohol consumption, low levels of participation in physical activity (lowest percentage of women meeting government recommendations in the country) and the 2nd highest obesity rate.

Recommendation 2

62. The Working Group recommends that the Council continues to target long-term sickness absence as the key cause of below target sickness absence performance.

Attendance Management – Training for Managers

63. One of the fundamental principles enshrined within the draft attendance management policy is the importance of ensuring that all managers have access to support and training in respect of the Council's attendance management policy and associated sickness management toolkit.
64. In order to better understand the extent of training and support provided to managers, the working group have examined the training provided to managers including the presentation slides which set out:-
- Employee and manager responsibilities within the relevant policies and procedures;
 - My view recording and reporting requirements;
 - Supporting policies covering Mental Health and Wellbeing;
 - Management procedures including triggers and interview processes for both short and long term absences;
 - Support available to employees including phased returns; light duties; modified workloads and redeployment.
65. Human resources provide 1 to 1 training and support to managers that require it including support available from the Occupational Health Service.
66. In light of the identification of the 2 highest causes of sickness absence being mental health and musculo-skeletal injury, the working group recognised the importance of HR/OHS training including stress awareness, manual handling, workstation assessment and annual appraisal awareness.
67. In 2013/14 578 managers received sickness absence training and a further 436 in 2014/15.

Recommendation 3

68. The Working Group recommends that upon approval of the draft Attendance Management Policy, compulsory training be given to all DCC managers on the application of the new policy and associated procedures, making the links to such training as stress awareness, manual handling, workstation assessment and annual appraisal awareness and that this is incorporated into the Durham Managers' Programme.

My View IT System

69. The working group examined the Council's corporate MyView IT system which enables managers to capture data when employees telephoned to inform they were ill. The system also removes the need for paper administration and the forwarding of such information to HR/Payroll now sits with line managers feeding directly into payroll from MyView.
70. MyView system functionality includes employees being able to access their payslips online (effecting a reduction in the expense of producing and mailing paper copies); an ability for staff to update their personal details, such as name, contact and bank details; the submission of expenses and mileage claims (with managers to then authorise as appropriate); the ability for managers to record appraisal information and training requests; and for managers to record absence.
71. The attendance management module within MyView allows for the recording of start and end dates for absences, and the reasons for the absence. It also has the facility to upload copies of fit-notes and to record return to work (RTW) interviews, sickness absence interviews and to set dates for actions thus ensuring that the system is fully auditable.
72. The working group examined the current automated "reminder triggers" within the My View system which sends a reminder to managers after 30 calendar days that a Sickness Absence interview needs to be undertaken in the event that this has not already occurred. Thereafter, further reminders are sent after two further 7 day periods following which it is escalated to a senior manager. Members consider that this is too lengthy and have suggested that the initial reminder be sent after 20 days and the escalation e-mail after a further 7 days.
73. Given the necessity of ensuring synergy between the draft Attendance Management Policy and the existing My View system, the working group considers that, as the draft Attendance Management policy is agreed and implemented, further training must be provided to managers and appropriate consideration given to updating the My View/Workforce training where necessary.

Recommendation 4

74. The Working Group recommends that the current automated “reminder triggers” within the My View system be amended to send a reminder to managers after 20 calendar days that a Sickness Absence interview needs to be undertaken in the event that this has not already occurred and the escalation to senior manager e-mail after a further 7 days.

Occupational Health Services

75. A wide range of services are provided by the Council’s Occupational Health (OH) service to support, assist and encourage employees’ attendance at work. These include pre-employment assessments; disability and reasonable adjustments advice, management concern referrals to OHS and a telephone access point for OH advice. OH provide evidence based interventions to support and enable the management of sickness absence including early intervention for long term sickness and the promotion of early referral into the OHS.
76. Additional OH support services include employee support telephone service; face to face counselling; musculo-skeletal advice/physiotherapy work place assessments, management training, policy advice and guidance, provision of data and trend analysis reports.
77. In examining sickness absence durations, the Working Group found that 92% of sickness was short or medium-term (up to 20 days) which accounted for around 40% of the total sickness absence at the Authority. Whilst only 8% of sickness was classed as long-term, this accounted for around 60% of sickness absence within the Council although this pattern was prevalent across the public sector.
78. OH provide early intervention support and guidance in long-term sickness cases, with evidence of the effectiveness of this being set out in the guidance document from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) on managing long term sickness and incapacity for work. This guidance identified a “window of opportunity” of around 2-6 weeks for referral to OHS where this could prevent longer-term absence.
79. As part of the benchmarking information provided to the working group, comparator information was provided in respect of 8 local authorities including Durham and 3 private sector organisations (Northumbrian Water, Gentoo and Axa.) This showed that amongst local authorities, the Council compared favourably with other peer Councils when examining trigger points for sickness absence interviews, policies to deal with long term sickness absence, phased return to work and occupational health referral timescales.

80. An analysis of work undertaken involving OH and the Council's Adult Service highlighted that Sickness absence rates (% of working days lost) in 2001/2 were 9% working days lost and that it took an average of 100 days to OHS referral whereas in 2010/11 this had reduced to 5.5% working days lost and an average of 50 days to OHS referral. This evidence led members to examine the merit of early referral into OH as a key measure in tackling long term sickness absence.
81. The Working Group identified concerns around the length of time taken to refer into the OH service with evidence indicating some cases to referral being over 300 days, again prompting members to consider the need for earlier and more timely referral into OH.
82. Given that some key interventions available through OH were aimed at tackling the top 2 causes of sickness absence (mental wellbeing and musculo-skeletal), the Working Group were of the opinion that earlier referral into the OH service was essential and that a corporate target or benchmark be set for OH referrals.
83. In view of the Working Group's desire to examine the establishment of corporate benchmarks /targets for referral into OHS, it was also anticipated that this might require HR to work with the Senior OH Physician in order to try and forecast any impact from such a change to policy upon capacity within the service, and therefore help inform Members in their consideration of this.

Recommendation 5

84. The Working Group recommends that a review of the current OHS referral process be undertaken to include establish a corporate target for referral into the OHS service of 30 days; an analysis of the impact upon OHS of implementing this target and an immediate referral into OHS for those employees whose absence has been due to mental wellbeing.

Staff, manager and Trade Union feedback

85. The Council has well-established and robust mechanisms for employee, manager and trade union engagement. Extensive employee engagement includes senior management roadshows; Open Doors corporate suggestions and queries scheme; Great Staff Great Stuff employee recognition scheme and formal communications mechanisms through corporate print and digital platforms.
86. The Council holds annual and seasonal senior management roadshows with 16 events having been held in summer 2015 across 11 venues. Questions and answers are invited both prior to and at events with post-event feedback provided. Over 850 employees attended the latest round of meetings.

87. The Council also hosts its corporate suggestions and queries scheme “Open Doors” which enables employees to ask questions and make suggestions via the intranet, phone, email or post with feedback on issues raised published. To date over 500 questions and suggestions have been processed since roll-out.
88. Over 1,500 employees have been recognised for their efforts through the Council’s “Great Staff Great Stuff” awards which were launched 3 years ago. The 2014 awards received over 150 nominations across categories which included Excellent service; Working Together; Innovation, Apprentice of the Year, Team of the Year and Employee of the Year.
89. The Council uses various digital and print publications with which to communicate and engage with employees. This is not only about transmitting corporate messages, but also sign-posting employees to engagement mechanisms and opportunities, both formal and informal. Examples include the Intranet, Emails to all PC users, Buzz employee magazine, the Employee Update and E-newsletters.
90. The use of social media also features strongly in disseminating information to our staff and the wider community via Facebook (11,758 likes); Twitter (13,535 followers); LinkedIn (3,450 followers of which 1,865 are employees) and Instagram which has been recently launched particularly to engage with young people.
91. Feedback from staff from the 2014 Internal Communications survey indicates that 71% of respondents would speak highly of Council outside work; 77% attended at least 1 team meeting per month; 88% feel recognised and valued at work and 94% feel free to express their views to managers.
92. Whilst acknowledging the positive outcomes from the Internal Communications survey, the Working Group noted the absence of a comprehensive Council-wide staff survey which would gather staff opinions on such issues as health and wellbeing; attendance management; appraisals; council policy; training and development and organisational culture. The group feel that this would provide a richer source of information and a good “barometer” against which to gauge the organisational wellbeing of the Council.
93. Managers and Trade Unions have also been engaged in the production of the draft Attendance Management Policy and have submitted their comments on the emerging policy which were examined by the working group as part of its evidence gathering. It was noted that the Trade Unions had stated that they will work within the proposed Draft Attendance Management Framework but will not signal agreement to it. Trade Unions have also stated that they acknowledge the role of managers in managing attendance as well as the role of HR in informing, supporting and developing managerial skills and competencies in applying the attendance management framework.

94. Trade Unions have proffered views that Management should acknowledge that, with a predominantly female workforce, and with CIPD Research showing women have more incidence of sickness than men, it is unreasonable to try to draw sickness absence comparisons with the Private Sector which has a different workforce make up.
95. Trade Unions are supportive of appropriate and early referral to OHS.

Recommendation 6

96. The Working Group recommends that staff, managers and Trade Unions be engaged in the examination of suggested changes to the Attendance Management policy arising from this review in respect of My View Sickness Absence Interview reminders and the development of OHS referral targets.

Recommendation 7

97. The Working Group recommends that a comprehensive Council-wide staff survey be undertaken to inform organisational development, which would gather staff opinions on such issues as health and wellbeing; attendance management; appraisals; council policy; training and development and organisational culture.

The Council's approach to better health at work

98. During consideration of attendance management performance statistics across the Council, members of the working group felt that a key contributory factor to improving sickness absence would be for the Council to promote better health at work amongst its workforce. Reference was made to a number of initiatives adopted by the Council to promote better health and a report summarising these initiatives was brought to the Working Group.
99. Health and wellbeing of employees is currently incorporated into many Council policies and procedures in addition to a number of provisions and initiatives including:
- Provision of a broad range of Occupational Health Services (OHS) with referral pathways to 'face to face' psychological support sessions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy;
 - Provision of an Employee Care Programme providing 24 hour 365 days a year telephone support on a range of issues both work related and personal;
 - Employee access to a Musculo-skeletal Advisory Service, provided via the OHS by qualified physiotherapists with 'fast track' access to focused advice, support and treatment;
 - A number of targeted health campaigns are arranged throughout the year led by Health and Safety and OHS, such as 'Sun and

skin cancer awareness' for outdoor workers and 'Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome' awareness.

100. The Council's corporate intranet includes a dedicated page entitled "Better Health at Work" and this includes:-

Physical wellbeing

- Lunchtime Walks from County Hall Reception – Walk4life;
- Corporate Health and Fitness Membership Scheme – 18% discount on standard membership at DCC Leisure centres;
- Change4life weight management programme promotion including healthy eating, fitness and weight loss advice.

Mental Wellbeing

- Access to counselling and psychological support services including the Council's employee care assistance programme First Assist;
- The "tackle mental health" website developed by the Shaw Trust and which aims to provide information and easy solutions to help staff deal with mental health issues;
- Promotion of the "Five ways to Wellbeing" campaign offering useful tips on improving mental wellbeing.

Cycling

Accessing a Bicycle

101. The Council offers access to the Cycle to Work Scheme. This is currently provided by Halfords via their Cycle2work scheme. The salary sacrifice scheme offers employees the use of a brand new bicycle, whilst saving money on the cost of the hire. (Actual savings depend on the personal tax situation of the individual).
102. The salary sacrifice is where an employee gives up part of their pay due under their contract of employment. In the case of the Cycle2work Scheme the employee agrees to sacrifice a portion of their salary in return for the employer providing the loan of a bicycle. The monthly gross salary reductions will be made direct from salary through payroll.
103. The Council also offers a cycle loan scheme, which gives employees the opportunity to buy a bicycle using a loan provided by the council. This loan is then paid back through the employee's salary, normally over 12 months.

104. The Council's intranet also includes regular news items related to better health such as promotion of change4life health checks in County Hall for employees; time for sugar swaps via change4life; promotion of No smoking day and the NHS County Durham's Stop Smoking service.
105. The Council's Buzz publication also promotes better health initiatives across the Council's workforce.

Promotion of Employee Wellbeing

106. The business case linking investment in workplace health and wellbeing to reduced absence costs and improved productivity and performance, is now well established, in addition to the strong moral case for such actions. There is currently a plethora of Government sponsored and private industry publications describing effective health and wellbeing initiatives in the workplace. In reviewing this literature the recurring themes appear to be
 - Organisational commitment - Making health and wellbeing a core priority for senior management and ensuring line managers have appropriate training (NICE Guideline June 2015)
 - Robust systems in place to facilitate early intervention, effective management of sickness absence and return to work
 - Employee engagement – this is very closely linked to health and wellbeing
 - Targeted initiatives - based on risk, organisational aims and workforce demographics, such as the 'ageing workforce'
 - Centrally planned, branded and marketed health promotion campaigns aimed at empowering employees to make healthier lifestyle choices with specific initiatives aimed at different worker groups.
107. Sandwell Council reported a reduction in sickness absence from an average of 11.8 days per fte in 2008 to 8.5 in 2013 by running a strategic branded campaign, 'Taking Control – your health'. This included modernising sickness absence processes, ensuring early intervention, and a series of health promotion campaigns.
108. A recent article on the BBC Website entitled "Do you want your company to know how fit you are" showcases the growing number of companies that are using mobile fitness technology to promote healthier lifestyles and wellbeing amongst their workforces.
109. In 2013, about 2,000 companies offered their employees fitness trackers, according to technology research company Gartner. In 2014, this rose to around 10,000. By 2016, the firm predicts that most large companies - those with more than 500 employees - in both the US and Western Europe will offer fitness trackers with their programmes.

110. The article highlights that a lot of companies view [these schemes] as giving them a competitive advantage, ... in that they can improve overall employee wellness through data collection. They're not just making workplaces better, but decreasing unplanned leaves of absence.
111. Another article on the BBC Website explains how five years ago, Liverpool's Walton Centre, a specialist NHS hospital treating injuries to the brain, spine and nervous system, had a problem with staff sickness levels.
112. In order to tackle the issue, the hospital utilised one of its patient rehabilitation gyms to offer netball/exercise sessions for its workforce. One participant explained that "keeping fit and exercising, I think it helps you to eat healthily, just to be physically healthy, mentally healthy. So that definitely contributes to a healthy lifestyle and cutting sickness rates."
113. A netball team was set up a couple of years ago as part of the hospital's response to the high level of staff sickness. With a workforce of around 1,300, sickness rates were running at an average of more than 7% a year. At times, that figure could be much higher, for example during an outbreak of winter flu.
114. Managers and unions decided something needed to be done and the idea of activity and exercise classes took off. Now, as well as netball, there is a staff football team, a running club, pilates classes, massage and aromatherapy, weight management programmes and a host of other schemes and activities. All are designed to increase physical activity, relieve stress and improve the health and wellbeing - physical and mental - of staff.
115. The Walton Centre's success has been reflected in a string of workplace awards and that figure of 7% sickness from 2010 is now just around 4%, on a par with the rest of the NHS in England.
116. The County Council has invested significantly in to ensure that the promotion of better health and wellbeing of employees is incorporated into core Council policies and procedures including the development and delivery of a wide range of County Council promoted better health at work initiatives. It has long since acknowledged the importance of promoting and maintaining a healthy workforce.
117. The transfer of public health into the Council in 2012 brought a range of expertise within the organisation in respect of health improvement and wellbeing initiatives which has been utilised to promote better health at work and there remain further opportunities to explore this key area.
118. The task facing the Council is whether it needs to consider a more targeted series of campaigns and initiatives which would encourage members of the workforce less likely to participate in such initiatives.

Recommendation 8

119. The Working Group recommends that that the Council review its current provision for the promotion of “Better Health at Work” and examine the potential to develop a more proactive and targeted approach to health and wellbeing promotion amongst its workforce.