

Putting our
Customers first

Customer Feedback Report

Complaints,
compliments and
suggestions

Quarter 2,
2018/19

Altogether better



Background information

1. Customer feedback is a valuable tool. It not only helps us understand what is important to service users and what we are doing well, it can also indicate any issues and offer us the opportunity to put things right and improve our services.
2. Covering a range of customer feedback, this report highlights the main themes throughout quarter 2, 2018/19 (1 July 2018 to 30 September). As feedback can highlight opportunities for operational improvement, the report includes a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes, an overview of comments relating to our decision-making and a summary of customer satisfaction through compliments and surveys. It also summarises our performance in dealing with complaints, identifies any lessons learned and states what remedial action we have taken, or plan to take, to put things right and ensure similar mistakes are avoided in the future.

Recent developments

3. During quarter two, there were several advancements to improve the customer experience. These included: new online forms for the 'single person discount' and 'Move in and Move out'; e-ticketing for the gala theatre directly to mobile phones; electronic waste permits for use in our Household Waste Recycling Centres; and, paperless billing for council tax (an additional 2,500 residents signed up).
4. In addition, as part of our Business Intelligence Programme, we have developed an automated performance dashboard for customer feedback. The dashboard is not only reducing the time officers spend collecting and analysing data, it is driving real operational improvement.
5. During quarter 3, we will continue to develop the members' portal: a 'one-stop shop' for accessing information, reporting issues, receiving progress updates and completing administrative tasks, e.g. training and expenses; SMS mass bulk-messaging to keep customers informed and reduce avoidable contact; Eckoh voice recognition for enhanced call routing and increased first call resolution (understanding the words customers use to ask for services will also help inform the search facility within our website) and a locality based working group to improve service delivery by removing internal barriers.
6. We are currently seeking views on how we use digital technology and the areas we need to develop as part of our Digital Strategy. [Consultation](#) will take place until 25 November.

Customer Suggestions

7. We believe suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of our services, and carefully consider all received. During quarter 2, 2018/19, we received 128 suggestions.
8. Almost half of the suggestions related to either waste collection and disposal (45 suggestions) or clean and green (16 suggestions).
9. Although we consider every suggestion, not all of them can be implemented. For example, we regularly receive suggestions that propose changes to our road system. However, when looked at in the context of countywide traffic flows, many would have knock on effects to the traffic flows elsewhere if they were to be implemented.
10. A sample of suggestions received during quarter 2, 2018/19 and their outcomes is attached at Appendix 1.

Customer feedback relating to our policies and procedures

11. Our service provision reflects our policies and procedures, and during quarter 2, 2018/19, we received 37 items of feedback as a direct consequence of carrying out actions in line with those policies and procedures. We use this feedback to inform our policies and procedures at their review.
12. 68% of this feedback can be attributed to our Refuse and Recycling Collection Service policies and procedures. The most frequent topic (15 of 37 contacts, accounting for 60% of the contact relating to our policies and procedures) was dissatisfaction that we did not empty a bin due to contamination.
13. Other contacts relating to Refuse and Recycling Collection Service policies and procedures covered a wide range of issues in small numbers. These included; the requirement to leave bulky waste at the designated bin collection point; not collecting side waste; the garden waste policy and procedure and refusing the request for an additional bin.
14. The remaining contacts covered a range of areas including; HWRC not allowing customers to dispose of another person's waste; HWRC not allowing specific vehicles to dispose of waste; the requirement to separate waste and our empty property charge.

Customer feedback relating to decision making

15. 57 contacts objected to decisions we had made, the majority of which related to operational decisions. The most frequent topic related to enforcement (14 contacts). The remaining contacts related to a variety of topics in small numbers such as planning decisions, decisions relating to highway works or waste collection.

Customer feedback relating to our fees and charges

16. 24 contacts related to our fees and charges, which we review annually and allow us to provide local services that might not otherwise be possible.
17. The majority (17 contacts) cited dissatisfaction with waste charges. 14 were unhappy with the £20 charge for either a replacement bin or a bin for a new build property. The remaining contacts were objections to; the charge for garden waste collection (one); trade waste (one) and other waste charges (one).

Compliments

18. We also receive many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide, and we believe that understanding what is working well and valued is as important as knowing what is not working as well.
19. During quarter 2, 2018/19, we received 255 compliments, 46 in relation to social care services and 209 in relation to other services. These compliments recognise not only the motivation, dedication and hard work of our staff but also the high standard and value of the services we provide. The majority of the compliments related to satisfaction with service provision but a number of compliments conveyed thanks to specific individuals.
20. Customers were particularly complimentary about our frontline staff and service provision, the most common themes being standard of work, prompt service and how polite, pleasant and helpful staff are.
21. Our Clean and Green Team received the most compliments (46) with customers appreciating our efforts to keep their local environment clean and tidy. We also received several compliments about our wildflower planting schemes, pest control and staff from the recycling centres.
22. Many of the compliments received were from customers who wished to express their gratitude where staff have gone the extra mile. As far as we are able, we have passed these thanks onto the individuals concerned.
23. A small sample of compliments received is attached at Appendix 2.

Customer Satisfaction (CRM)

24. Our customers now have the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to both contact and service delivery as part of the closure process within the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Since 31 October 2017, a satisfaction questionnaire has been applied to 25 service requests. A list of these service requests areas is attached at Appendix 3.

25. Between 1 July 2018 and 30 September 2018, we received 565 completed questionnaires through which customers answered a series of questions in relation to their experience.
26. Further analysis, by question, has been completed on the returned questionnaires and the results shown below:

% of respondents who..	
..found it easy to contact the right service in the council	88%
..were informed of the length of time it would take to resolve	59%
..were provided with clear information	72%
..were treated with dignity and respect	85%
..were informed of progress	57%
..felt their request was handled in a knowledgeable and effective manner	92%
..were satisfied with how their initial contact was handled	79%
..were satisfied with service delivery	50%
..were satisfied with the time taken to complete their request	72%

27. Although performance is positive, in order to drive further improvement we asked those customers who were dissatisfied the reasons why. Almost one third of respondents reported finding it difficult to find the exact option they wanted on the website. Other reoccurring comments included:
- (a) Being slow to respond, often resulting in the customer having to chase enquiries
 - (b) Not completing the task to the customer's satisfaction
 - (c) Customer being unclear who to contact
 - (d) Not being informed of timescales or the action that would be taken
 - (e) Lack of contact
 - (f) Members of the public not wanting to complete online forms or register
28. In order to further engage with customers over their appetite for online transactions, we asked customers who did not request service through our website the following question: You can request many of our services online through the council's website. Why did you choose another method?
29. We received 241 replies as shown in the following table;

Response	No. of responses	% of total responses
I thought it would be easier or quicker using another method	65	27%
I prefer to use a different method	15	6%
It was an urgent enquiry	51	21%
I tried online but had problems with the system	48	20%
I didn't know it was available online	21	9%
Difficulties accessing the internet	14	6%
It isn't available online	8	3%
Other	15	6%
I don't think my data will be handled securely	4	2%
TOTAL RESPONSES	241	

Customer Satisfaction (Assisted Digital Support)

30. Since 1 October 2017, we have asked customers who needed additional support to progress their online claim for Universal Credit to feedback through a short survey. To date, 924 customers have responded and the results show:
- (a) 99.6% were either ‘extremely satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the level of service they received
 - (b) 22% had heard about our service through Durham County Council channels (website/leaflets/CAPs) and 59% through their job centre work coach
 - (c) 24.4% gave additional comments on their experience – see examples below:
 - (i) Could not have managed without support given
 - (ii) The advisor was extremely helpful
 - (iii) Fantastic help from the council. Clear and precise info given
 - (iv) Very helpful, explained everything to me in detail which was great
 - (v) Extremely happy with the service I received.
31. The survey has also enabled us to capture information about Universal Credit claimants needing digital assistance:
- (a) Over half of claimants own a smartphone (53.5%). 18.7% own a laptop and 13.1% a tablet computer. 25.4% do not own an electronic advice
 - (b) 46% do not have access to the internet at home

- (c) 82% are aware of the different locations where customers can access the internet or use self-serve devices.

Customer complaints

32. Within this document there are two types of complaint; statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority and corporate complaints that cover all other complaints. As each complaint type is subject to its own processes and policy, they are reported separately.
33. The first stage in the corporate complaints process enables service areas to resolve the issue in the first instance, providing a service response. Should the customer remain dissatisfied with the service response they can escalate to the Customer Feedback Team, who will either progress with an independent investigation, or advise the service user to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman). Independent investigation of statutory complaints is arranged by the statutory complaint teams.

Statutory Complaints: Children's Social Care Services

34. During quarter 2 2018/19, Children's Social Care Services received 38 statutory complaints, 12% more (+4) than quarter 1, and 58% more (+14) than quarter 2, 2017/18.
35. Of the 38 complaints completed, 27 (71%) were resolved within their prescribed timescale, and 11 complaints (29%) were resolved outside their prescribed timescale. Of the 38 complaints: 25 were not upheld (65.8%), seven were upheld (18.4%) and six partially upheld (15.8%).
36. During quarter 2, 2018/19, a number of learning opportunities were identified from complaints actioned. These included:
 - (a) Providing foster carer training in relation to appropriate relationships when caring for children and young people.
 - (b) Ensuring cases are allocated (or re-allocated) promptly to social workers.
 - (c) Undertaking phone checks to ensure phones have appropriate diverts set up, are not 'logged out', voicemail is regularly updated and listened to, calls / text to work mobiles and noted and returned

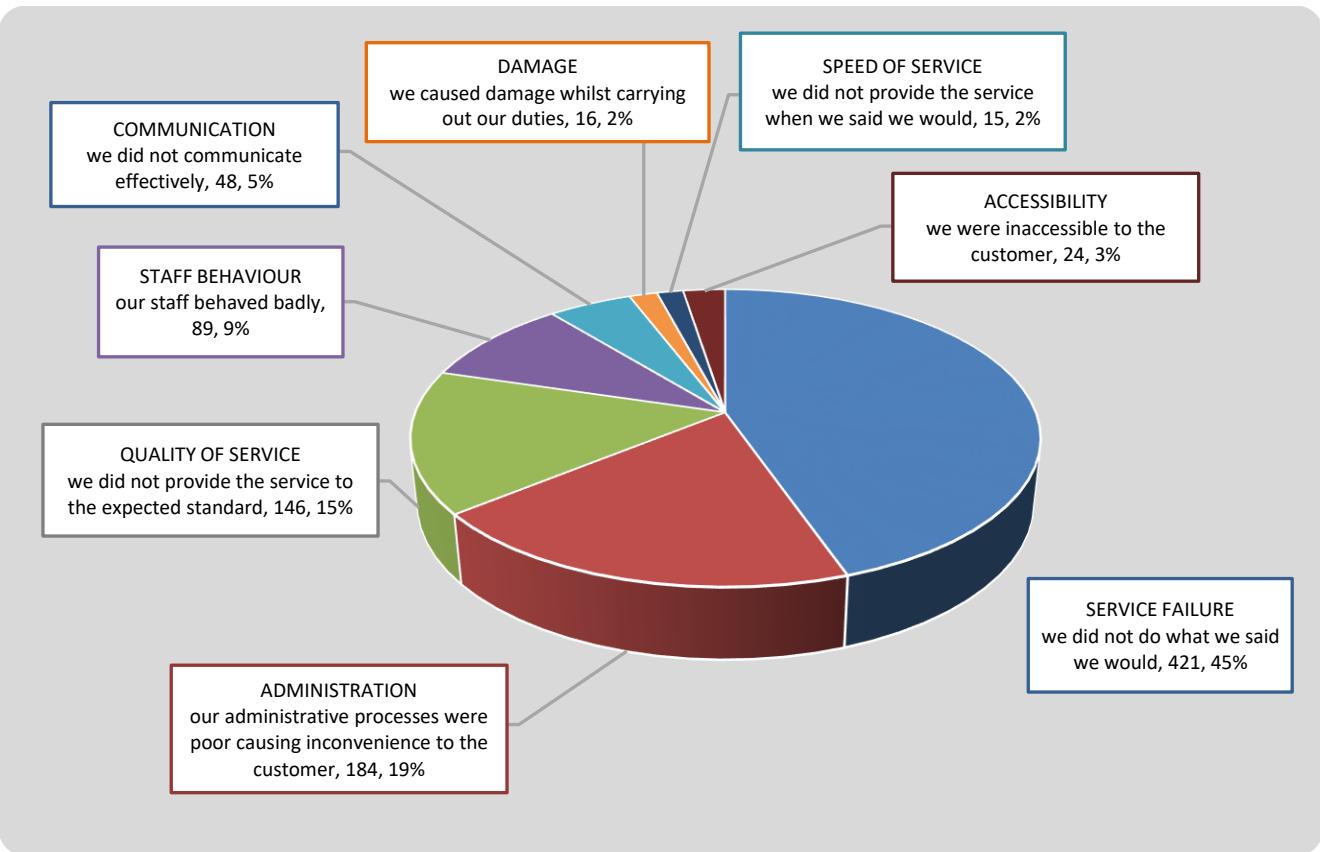
Statutory Complaints: Adult Social Care Services

37. During quarter 2, 2018/19, Adult Care Services received 24 statutory complaints, 14% fewer (-four) than quarter 2, 2017/18.

38. Older People / Physical Disabilities / Sensory Impairment received the most complaints (17) followed by Learning Disabilities / Mental Health / Substance Misuse (four). The most common reason for complaint was twofold – a lack of communication where no information had been received (seven) and a disputed decision where the service user disagreed with an explanation or decision (seven).
39. 23 complaints were responded to during quarter 2, 2018/19, all within agreed timescales. Of these 23 complaints: seven were not upheld (30.4%), three were upheld (13%) and 12 partially upheld (52.2%). One complaint was declined as the complainant did not have the service user's authority to make a complaint on their behalf (representing 4.3% of the overall total). One complaint received during the quarter was still being investigated at the time of writing this report.
40. During quarter 2, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints including:
 - (a) Reminding social work staff to complete reviews in a timely manner to ensure good communication (particularly when different services are involved) and afford the service user an opportunity to discuss their concerns.
 - (b) Reminding staff to ensure personal details are correct on the Social Services Information Database (SSID).
 - (c) Staff were reminded of the need to complete the property disregard spreadsheet.

Corporate Complaints: Key Messages

41. During quarter 2, 2018/19, we received 943 corporate complaints. This is a significant increase compared to quarter 2, 2017/18, during which we received 515 complaints.
42. We have completed investigations into 876 of these complaints and 72% were upheld (fully or partially).
43. This increase is partly due to a fourfold increase in complaints relating to missed collections (+250) compared to quarter 2, 2017/18. This is directly linked to a change in the process for recording disputed missed collections. Under the previous approach where we had recorded on Bartec that the bin had not been presented, was contaminated or was too heavy, and a customer disputed that this was the case, a dispute process was initiated and investigated outside of the complaints policy. However, to support service improvement and consistency of approach we now log these disputes as complaints and consequently the number has increased.
44. There were eight main reasons for complaint. The following graph shows the split by volume.



45. During quarter 2, our waste collection service completed more than 3 million refuse and recycling collections, 400,000 garden waste collections and 8,000 bulky collections. It also received 495 complaints (52% of the total). It received 73% of all service failure complaints (mainly missed collections), 49% of administration complaints (mainly incorrectly addressed contamination notices) 36% of all quality of service (mainly around not returning bins to their bin collection point) and 30% of all staff behaviour complaints (mostly staff attitudes and issues with driving).
46. Across all services, the most frequent category of complaint was service failure. The vast majority (421 complaints), equating to 81% of the category and 32% of all corporate complaints, was due to missed collections. We have completed investigations into 586 of these complaints and 92% were upheld.
47. The remaining service failure complaints related to us not actioning the customer's service request (45). The majority of these (15) relate to street cleaning - including enviro-crime clean up. During quarter 2, we received in the region of 75,000 service requests.
48. The second most frequent cause for complaint was administration (184 complaints). The majority (121) were from customers unhappy to have received a contamination notice that they believed should have been sent to somebody else. In many of these cases, the bin was either not presented or was emptied as usual and no contamination sticker was placed on the bin. We have completed investigations into 114 of these complaints and 110 were upheld. Recycling assistants are now accompanying bin crews on their rounds and consequently we are identifying more contaminated bins. It

is often difficult - especially in back streets - to identify the house to which the bin belongs. Consequently, mistakes are made but are rectified as soon as we become aware.

49. The remaining administration complaints (31) mainly related to billing or payment issues. Of these; nine complaints questioned our accuracy; six related to issues obtaining a refund; four concerned issues relating to direct debits and the majority (twelve) concerned various other billing / payment issues.
50. Quality of Service (146 complaints) was the third most frequent cause for complaint. 46% of these complaints originated from our frontline services of refuse and recycling (53 complaints) or clean and green (14 complaints).
51. Of the 146 received, more than one-third (54 complaints) were due to staff practices - mainly due to refuse and recycling crews not returning the customer's bin to the Bin Collection Point (40). Other staff practices that resulted in customer dissatisfaction included staff making a mess whilst carrying out their duties (6), refuse and recycling crews leaving gates open (2) or staff working in what the customer perceived as being a dangerous manner (2).
52. Almost a quarter of quality of service complaints (35) related to our maintenance activities. 16 complainants felt we were neglecting specific areas and / or allowing standards to deteriorate to an unacceptable level, and related to the general condition of council assets, for example, the condition of highways, car parks, cemeteries, playgrounds (10 complaints), or the condition of the customer's local environment, for example, cleanliness standard of streets, back alleys or areas of derelict land (6 complaints). A further 19 complainants felt that when we did carry out maintenance activities, for example, cutting the grass, repairing the highway or footway, the standard of our work was inadequate.
53. The other main topics for quality of service were spillages (8 complaints) or not resolving an ongoing issue to the customer's satisfaction (14 complaints). The vast majority relating to spillages occurred during household waste collection; mainly broken glass. We have reminded refuse and recycling crews to clean up any spillages that occur. Not permanently resolving an issue mainly involved enviro-crime, parking and planning decisions.
54. We received 89 complaints relating to staff behaviour, of which 30% originated from our frontline refuse and recycling services.
55. There were three broad areas of complaint. The first was that our staff were rude, unhelpful or dismissive of the customer's issue or query, for example, ignoring customers who approach them in the street or not appearing to listen properly to a customer query (27 complaints). The second was that our staff behaved in an aggressive or intimidating manner, for example, swearing or shouting at customers who approach them in the street (26 complaints). A third area, complaints that our staff

were driving council vehicles in a dangerous manner - for example, speeding, tailgating, near miss, using a mobile phone, or parked a council vehicle in a dangerous manner received - 11 complaints. Following these complaints, some staff have undergone additional training.

56. There were 48 complaints made relating to communication covering 3 areas; we gave advice that was inaccurate, misleading, confusing or caused upset (24 complaints); not giving customers advanced warning of change (16 complaints) and providing a lack of information (8 complaints).

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

57. During quarter 2, 2018/19 43 complainants requested that we escalate their complaint to the next stage. We agreed it would be appropriate that 19 of these be subject to an independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team. This was based on the service response, remedy already offered and the reasons given by the customer for the escalation. We completed investigations into 17 complaints, of which seven were upheld (three partially and four fully), details of which are attached at Appendix 4.

Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

58. During quarter 2, 2018/19, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 18 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants and supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers.
59. Of these complaints no further action was proposed in ten cases, four were found to be outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, two were referred back to the council to deal with under our complaints procedure and one was not upheld.
60. The Ombudsman upheld one complaint as detailed below:

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
The Council issued an allotment tenancy agreement with an incorrectly spelled name, then failed to deliver the promised agreement clarifying responsibility for external boundaries of the allotment site.	The Council recognised errors and has now issued the corrected agreement which makes it clear who has responsibility for external boundaries. Therefore, the Ombudsman finds the Council acted with fault but has remedied the fault.

Appendix 1: Sample of suggestions received during quarter 2, 2018/19

You suggested	We did
That bin crews delay emptying bins on the streets around schools at drop off /pick up times when roads are busy, causing gridlock.	We have now completed route risk assessments for all routes. This includes setting collection restrictions in areas such as schools at busy times.
As a ward Councillor I use the report it online facility quite a lot. It is user friendly, quick, and easy. As a suggestion, would it be possible to have an end report for each request so we can feed back to constituents highlighting how and when the request was dealt with?	This information is to be included in the new members portal.

You suggested	Reason for non-implementation
That recording cameras be placed in areas frequented by fly tippers in order to catch them and try to get a stop to fly tipping across the county.	We review recorded flytips as a matter of course and deploy cameras to hotspots. Each location is reviewed for suitability taking into consideration the ability to deploy and aspects like collateral intrusion.

Appendix 2: sample of compliments received during quarter 2, 2018/19

Customer's Comments
Customer advised that the wild flowers that have been planted around the area are stunning and a pleasure to look at and thanks DCC for doing this.
Customer called to say thank you to Neighbourhood Wardens for their recent response to fly tipping on private land, which was very quick and prompt.
I have to say that the staff at Annfield Plain HWRC are superb. We moved 6 weeks ago into Durham county and are refurbishing our new home so have made numerous trips to this centre with household and garden waste. The staff at this centre are the best I've ever known ... The staff are courteous, professional and soooooo helpful and a credit to the council. It's not the nicest job and some residents are very difficult but the staff remain calm and still challenge when appropriate.
I would just like to compliment the gentleman from the Pest Control Team who attended my property The gentleman who attended was such a lovely man, nothing was too much trouble and he was very friendly even when my children were plaguing him with questions!
Customer was very happy with the work done to cut down dangerous tree and how quickly this was arranged. They would like to compliment the crew for their efficiency.
I phoned last week about some potholes on the main road. I would like to express my thanks to the Highways operatives who came out and carried out the repair work. I was much impressed by how swiftly the potholes were treated as well as the quality of the work. I'm sure everyone in the area who uses the road will have appreciated the council's work.
Thank you so much for organising the free multisport activities for the kids this summer and the snacks that you provided for them! My son enjoyed himself greatly and it helped me by adding to my planned activities to entertain him! Thanks again; it was much appreciated.
On Saturday I was a guest at the Hotel Indigo in Durham for the 'Big Meeting' celebration. The day was excellent and showed our unique heritage and traditions to great advantage and we thoroughly enjoyed reliving aspects of our childhood. Obviously, with such a well-supported event there was a large amount of litter, most of it in bags or in bins, but some on the road and pavements on Old Elvet. Then at an appropriate time DCC litter transport lorries began clearing away the litter both efficiently and effectively with workers sweeping pavements at the same time. It was an excellent operation and I wish to compliment everyone involved in the entire process. Congratulations all round on a job very well done. Thank you very much.
I just wanted to pass on how amazing the craft and storytelling at Blackhall Library was on 17 August 2018. The staff were fantastic reading the story, getting all the children and were brilliant making sure everyone was involved in all the crafts and no child was missing out. The effort they had gone to decorating the library - even making a boat - was outstanding. The team at Blackhall are a credit to the library service, my little girl loves going and that is thanks to the friendliness of the staff.
I wanted to write to you direct to thank you for the efficient way in which you dealt with our planning application. I always felt I was dealing with a sympathetic professional who wanted to achieve the best result for us within the planning laws. Thank you very much.
Lady would like to thank Care Connect for their concern during the night when she pressed her pendant by mistake and would especially like to thank mobile responder who attended - the customer thought she was a lovely lady.

Appendix 3: satisfaction questionnaires are applied to the following service requests

- (a) Abandoned shopping trolleys
- (b) Bin – request help with your bin
- (c) Bonfires
- (d) Bus stop and shelters
- (e) Complaints
- (f) Dead animal removal
- (g) Dog bins and litter Bins
- (h) Dog fouling
- (i) Flyposting
- (j) Fly tipping
- (k) Garden Waste
- (l) Graffiti
- (m) Grass cutting, shrubs and flower beds
- (n) Litter
- (o) Needles and drug paraphernalia
- (p) Noise
- (q) Roads or footpath obstruction – vehicular
- (r) Roadworks
- (s) Rubbish in gardens and yards
- (t) Seating and Benches
- (u) Spilt Rubbish
- (v) Street lighting
- (w) Traffic lights and crossings
- (x) Tree or hedge pruning, removal
- (y) Waste permits

Appendix 4: Independent Investigations by Customer Feedback Team where corporate complaints were upheld

Complaint	Action to be taken
The complainant was unhappy with the information supplied in relation to a link road and the impact of this on their ability to object and provide comment. They were also unhappy with the time they were allocated to make verbal representation to the Planning Committee and the overall impact of the proposal on their daily life and property (in terms of structure and value)	<p>We acknowledge that the complainant's email should have been subjected to further scrutiny and clarification provided.</p> <p>However, the element that consulting on the planning application, mainly the link road, has been inhibited was not upheld.</p> <p>The complainant will be consulted when the application for the link road is submitted.</p>
The Planning Department did not present an application to a Planning Committee.	<p>We acknowledge that the planning department should have referred the application for assessment under a planning committee and have apologised for any stress and inconvenience caused.</p> <p>However, the service area has provided a satisfactory explanation regarding the decision taken and new procedures introduced are to be applied by all planning officers across the service area to ensure a reliable and consistent approach.</p>
Dissatisfaction with the termination of a school transport contract and the way in which this was handled.	Complaint upheld. We have apologised for any stress and inconvenience caused and offered financial recompense.
Dissatisfaction with the actions of a Senior Environmental Health Officer	Although we have apologised for an administrative error, we found that the Senior Environmental Health Officer acted in accordance with internal protocols to reach their decision.
Dissatisfaction with initial standard of repairs near their property and the actions of staff pouring tar down the drain.	<p>A DCC subcontractor was asked to investigate the complaint. They advised that a barrel of bitumen emulsion (not tar) was placed down the drain.</p> <p>Both DCC and the subcontractor have inspected the drain to ascertain whether there has been contamination. Whilst nothing was immediately noticeable, we requested that a gully motor perform a full jetting on drain to ensure it is clear and flowing.</p> <p>We have apologised.</p>
Ongoing issue with missed garden waste collections.	The bin has now been emptied. Crews had misinterpreted a map provided but the bin collection point has now been clarified.

Complaint	Action to be taken
<p>Handling of an enquiry and subsequent actions.</p>	<p>Although we were unable to progress the complaint through the Corporate Complaints Process, we should have advised the complainant of this.</p> <p>We should have also informed them that a referral had been made to the council's insurance section and supplied them with the paperwork required to submit a claim.</p>