

**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny  
Management Board**

**18 March 2019**

**Quarter 3, 2018/19  
Customer Feedback Report**



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**Report of Corporate Management Team**

**John Hewitt, Corporate Director of Resources**

**Councillor Joy Allen, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Transformation**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To present to Members the Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions report for quarter three, 2018/19 (full report attached at Appendix 2).

**Executive summary**

- 2 During quarter three, there were several advancements to improve the customer experience. These included development of: our new digital strategy; an online booking management system for Customer Access Point appointments; a voice recognition system for call transfers; and continued development of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.
- 3 Corporate complaints increased (+179) compared to the same period last year (quarter 3, 2017/18) and there was a small decrease in the number of statutory complaints.
- 4 The significant increase in corporate complaints is partly due to receiving more than double the number of complaints relating to missed collections (+184) compared to quarter 3, 2017/18. This is directly linked to a change in the process for recording disputed missed collections. We expect that there will be a further increase in missed

collection complaints in quarter 4, 2018/19 as due to adverse weather conditions in January we did not complete all collection rounds.

- 5 The largest complaint category during quarter 3, 2018/19 was service failure. This category also produced the single most frequent reason for complaint: not collecting a bin/bulky waste.
- 6 While our Refuse and Recycling service (including garden waste) received the most customer complaints, it also received the most suggestions and compliments.

## **Background**

- 7 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.
- 8 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 (corporate complaints) or the Statutory Complaint Teams (statutory complaints), who will either progress with an independent investigation, or advise the service user to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman).

## **Recommendation**

- 9 Members are recommended to note the information in the report.

## **Background papers**

- None

## **Other useful documents**

- Previous Customer Feedback reports

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**Contact:** Victoria Murray

Tel: 03000 267 707

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Not applicable.

### **Finance**

Information on financial remedies in relation to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is included within the report

### **Consultation**

None

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

Complaints regarding any equality and diversity aspect are handled in consultation with the Council's Equality Team.

### **Human Rights**

None

### **Crime and Disorder**

None

### **Staffing**

None

### **Accommodation**

None

### **Risk**

None

### **Procurement**

None

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# Putting our customers first

## Customer Feedback Report

# Complaints, compliments and suggestions

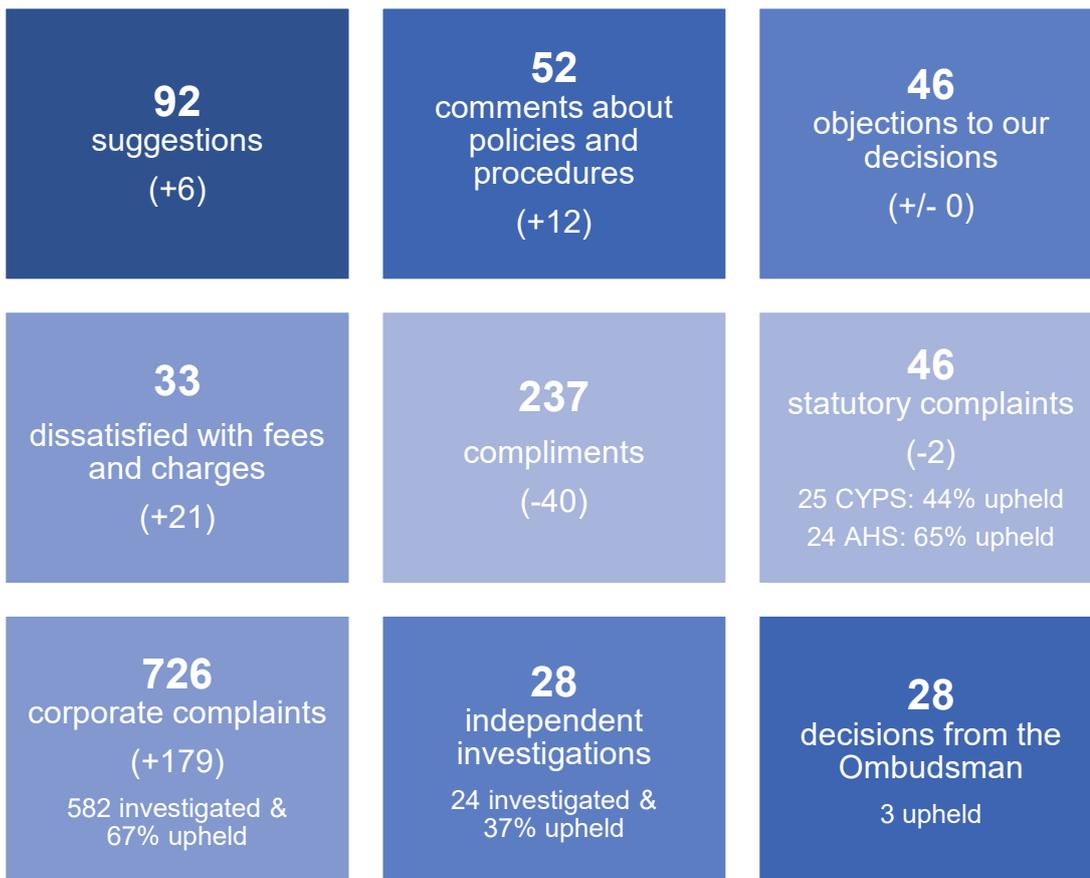
Quarter 3,  
2018/19

*Altogether better*



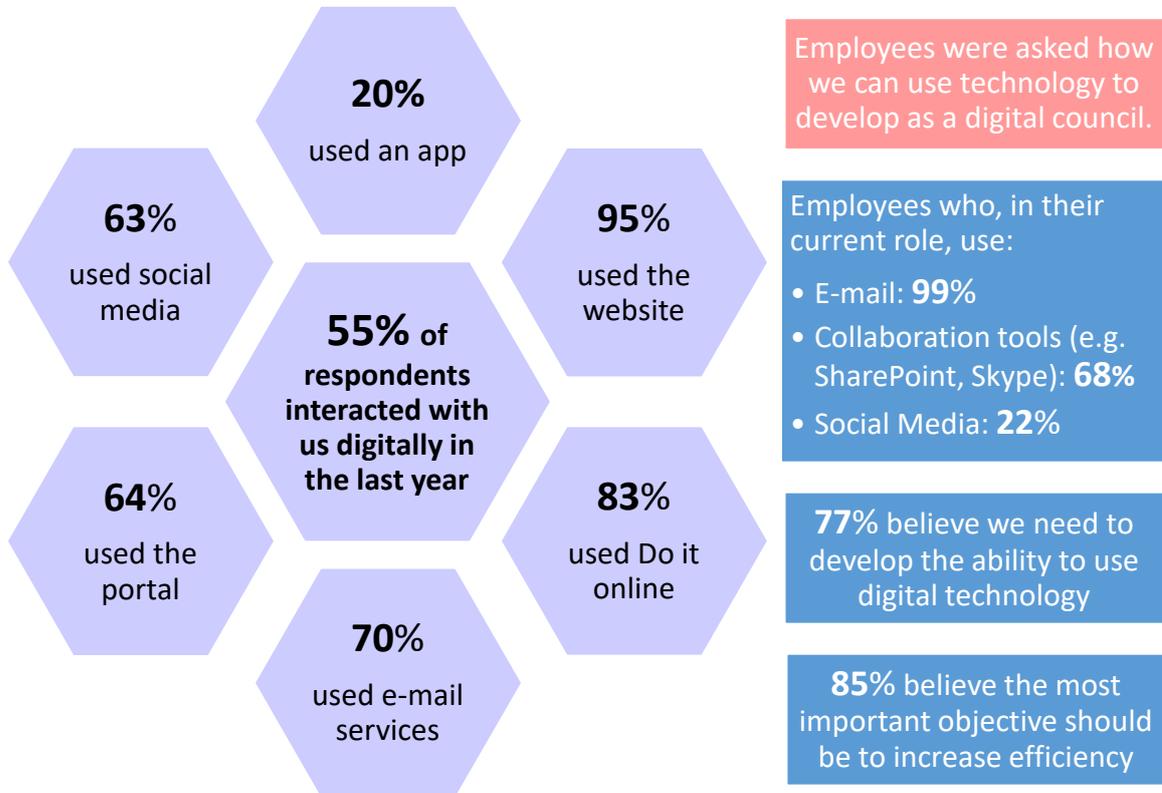
## Background Information

- 10 Customer feedback is a valuable tool. It not only helps us to 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.
- 11 Covering a range of customer feedback, this report highlights the main themes identified throughout quarter three, 2018/19. 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.
- 12 The following summarises customer feedback for quarter three, compared to the same period last year:



## Recent Customer Developments

- 13 During quarter two, we sought views on how we use digital technology and the areas we need to develop. 179 members of the public and 130 employees participated in the consultation.



- 14 Feedback from the consultation will be used to inform our new Digital Strategy which will be in place by April 2019.
- 15 We are continuing to develop our Customer Relationship Management system to enhance the customer experience, and almost 113,000 customers use an online account to request services. Each quarter, more services become available online, for example, landlord accreditation and taxi licences will soon go live.
- 16 Customers will soon be able to book, cancel and amend appointments for our Customer Access Points online. The new system will automatically generate text message reminders which we hope will reduce the number of missed appointments.
- 17 Our new voice recognition system for call transfer will go live by March 2019.

## **Customer suggestions**

- 19 We believe suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of our services and carefully consider all received. During quarter three, we received 92 suggestions.
- 20 Almost half (48%) of these suggestions related to our Waste Collection and Clean and Green teams.
- 21 Although we consider every suggestion, not all can be implemented. For example, during quarter three, a customer suggested that to relieve tailbacks at a specific roundabout, we split the road into two lanes. However, as the current road layout is designed to reduce road traffic accidents, this change is not possible. Removing the £20 replacement bin charge for customers subscribing to our garden waste scheme is not possible as the garden waste charge only covers the service, not the actual bin.
- 22 A sample of suggestions received during quarter three and our response is attached at Appendix 1.

## **Customer feedback relating to our policies and procedures**

- 23 Our service provision reflects our policies and procedures, and during quarter three, we received 52 items of feedback as a direct consequence of carrying out actions in line with these policies and procedures. We use this feedback to inform our policies and procedures at their review.
- 24 Almost 70% of this feedback (36 contacts) can be attributed to our Refuse and Recycling Service, a third of which was due to us not emptying bins due to contamination.
- 25 Other contact 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; refusing a request for an additional bin and not collecting recycling in black bags.

## **Customer feedback relating to our decision making**

- 26 46 contacts objected to decisions we had made, the majority of which related to operational decisions. These were mainly enforcement decisions, planning decisions or decisions relating to highway works.

## Customer feedback relating to our fees and charges

- 27 33 contacts related to our fees and charges, which we review annually and allow us to provide local services that might not otherwise be possible.
- 28 Almost all feedback related to either dissatisfaction with council tax charges (18 contacts) or the £20 charge for a replacement bin / new bin for a new build property (11 contacts).

## Compliments

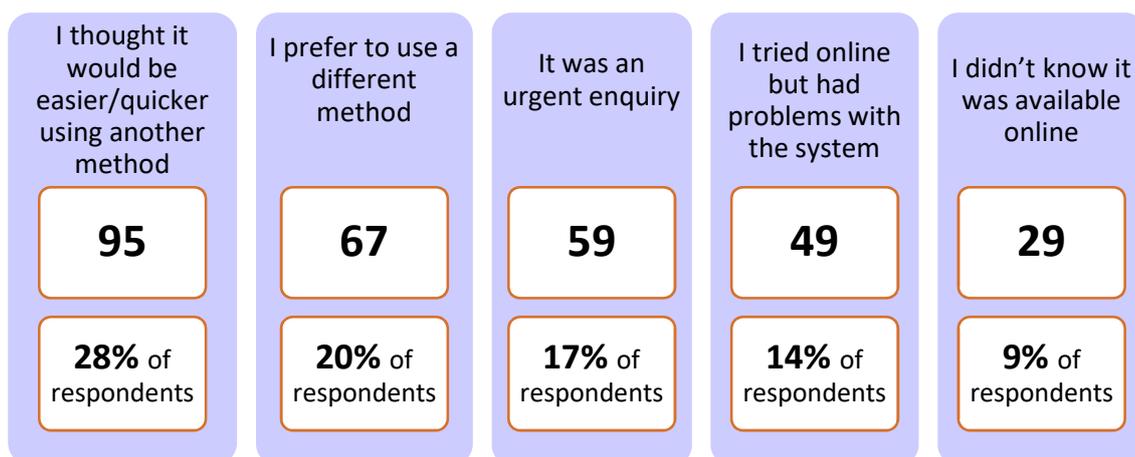
- 29 We also receive many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide, and we believe that understanding what is working well and valued is as important as knowing what is not working as well.
- 30 During quarter three, we received 237 compliments; 72 in relation to social care service and 165 in relation to other services. Most related to satisfaction with service provision, but others related to specific individuals.
- 31 A small sample of compliments is attached at Appendix 2.

## Customer Satisfaction

- 32 Our customers can now provide feedback, in relation to both contact and service delivery for 25 different service requests, as part of the closure process within the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. These are listed at Appendix 3.
- 33 Between 1 October 2018 and 31 December 2018, we received 623 completed questionnaires through which customers rated their experience. High level results are shown below:

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>90%</b> found it easy to contact the right service           | <b>65%</b> were informed how long it would take to resolve task | <b>78%</b> were provided with clear information                      |
| <b>87%</b> were treated with dignity and respect                | <b>67%</b> were informed of progress                            | <b>94%</b> felt request was handled knowledgeably and effectively    |
| <b>81%</b> satisfied with the handling of their initial contact | <b>73%</b> satisfied with service delivery                      | <b>75%</b> were satisfied with the time taken to complete their task |

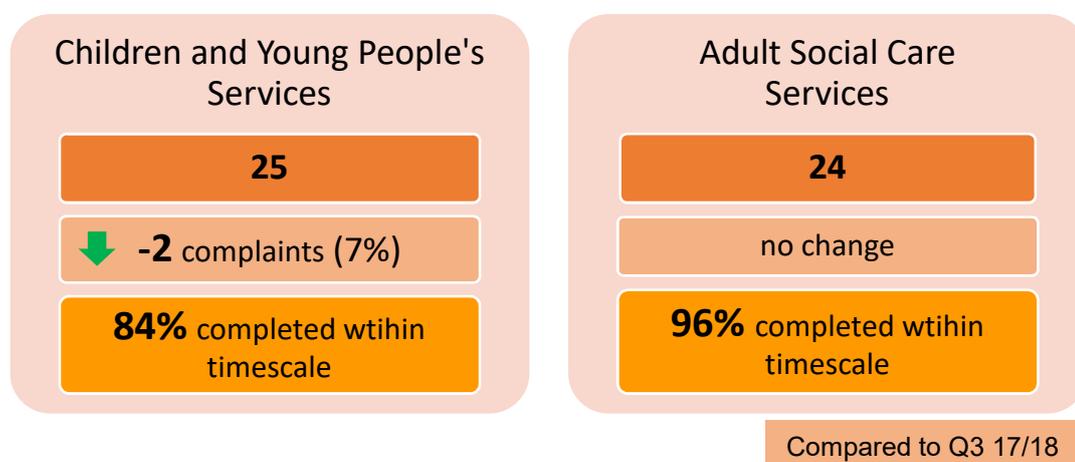
- 34 To drive further improvement, we asked customers who were dissatisfied the reasons why. More than one third of respondents reported difficulties finding the exact option they required on the website. Other comments included:
- (a) Being slow to respond, often resulting in the customer having to progress chase
  - (b) Not completing the task to the customers satisfaction
  - (c) Lack of contact / being unable to talk to the specific person they required.
- 35 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?
- 36 We received 339 replies, 88% of which fit into one of five key categories, listed below:



## Customer complaints

- 37 Within this document there are two types of complaints; 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.

## Statutory complaints (arising from our duties as a local social services authority)



### Children and Young People's Services

- 38 During quarter two, we received complaints relating to phone calls not being answered or returned. During quarter three, we implemented phone checks to ensure phones are logged in, diverts are set up as appropriate, voicemail greetings are relevant, and messages are listened to.
- 39 During the quarter, actions were taken in response to complaints received including;
- (a) Reminding social work staff to inform parents of their right to seek legal advice prior to signing a Section 20 agreement (a voluntary, temporary agreement for a child to be accommodated)
  - (b) Reiterating, to relevant staff, the process relating to Special Guardianship Allowance payments to reduce delays.

### Adult and Health Services

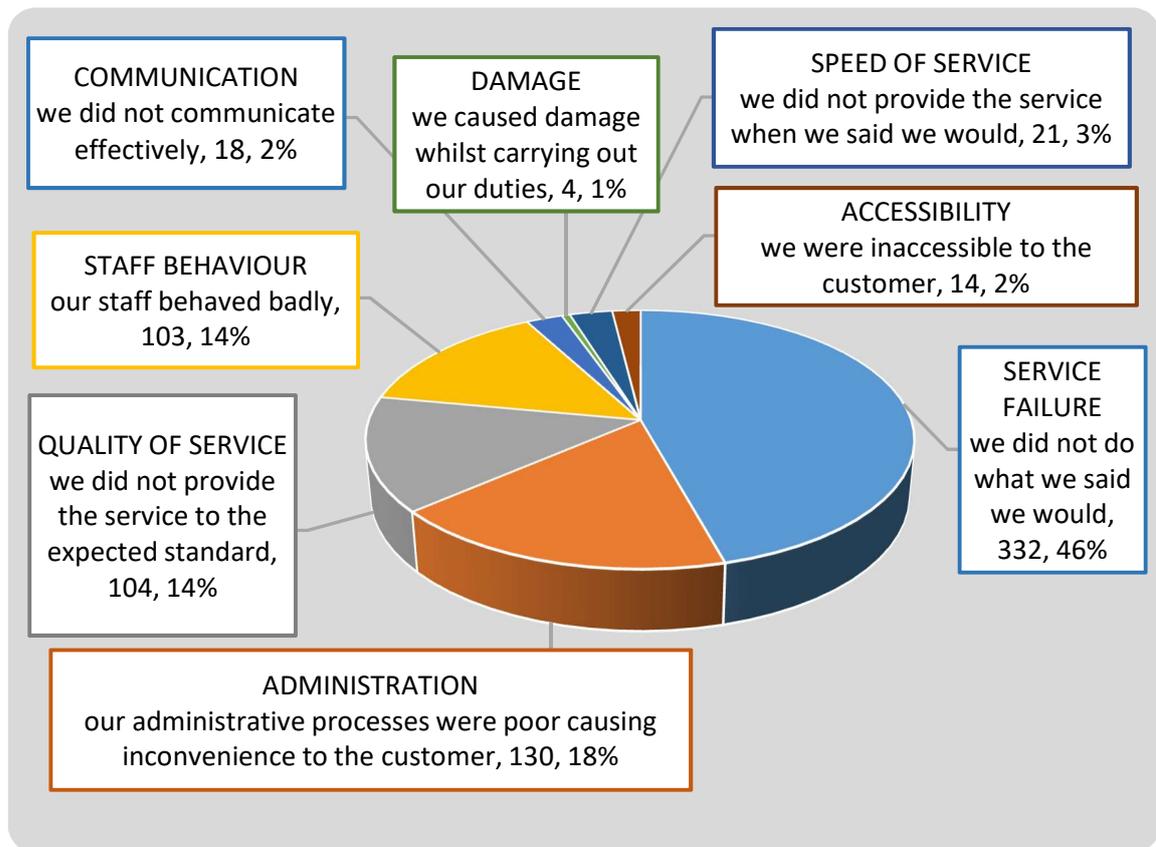
- 40 Learning Disabilities / Mental Health / Substance Misuse received the most complaints (nine) followed by Older People / Physical Disabilities / Sensory Impairment (seven). The most common reason for complaint was a disputed decision where a service user disagreed with an explanation or decision (eight) followed by a dissatisfaction following refusal of a service.

- 41 During the quarter, actions were taken in response to complaints received including;
- (a) Reviewing a care provider's systems, service delivery and record keeping and compiling an action plan with required areas for improvement.
  - (b) Reminding a care provider that daily logs must be removed from service user's property and securely retained once a period of care has ended.
  - (c) Modifying the reference template and accompanying covering letter which are used to assist service users recruit staff via a Direct Payment, to ensure our role is clear.
  - (d) Reminding staff that they must carry out appropriate checks to confirm when a service user is eligible for Section 117 funding (free help and support available to some people held under the Mental Health Act after they leave hospital).

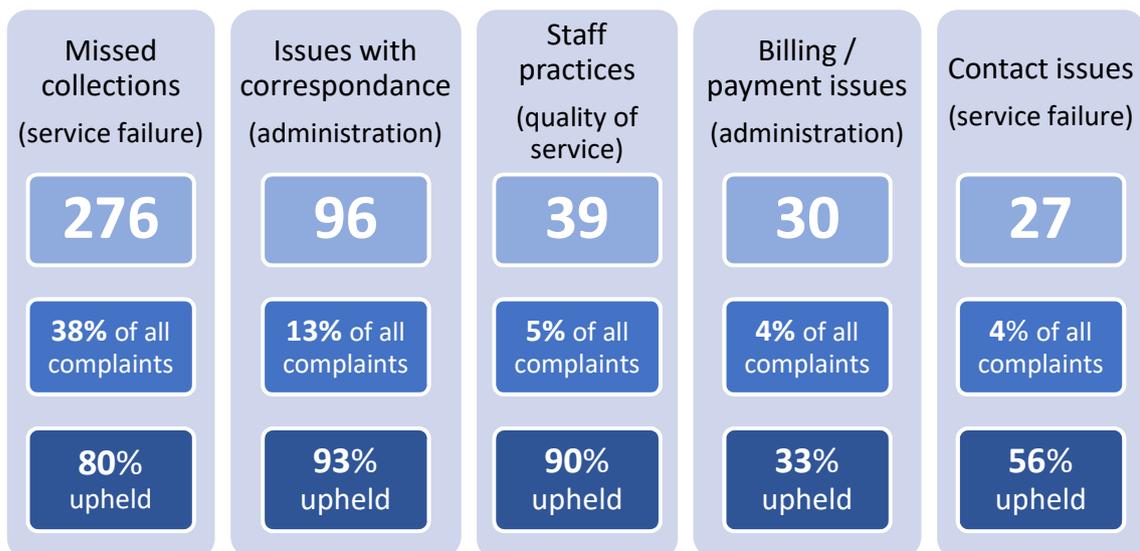
### **Corporate Complaints**

- 42 During quarter three, we received 726 corporate complaints. This is an increase compared to quarter three, 2017/18, during which we received 547 complaints (+179 complaints).
- 43 The increase is partly due to a 75% increase in complaints relating to missed collections (+119 compared to quarter three, 2017/18) which is due to a change to the process for recording disputed missed collections.
- 44 We have completed investigations into 80% of these complaints and 67% were upheld (fully or partially).

45 There were eight main causes for complaint as shown in the following graph:



46 During the quarter, five specific issues received 64% of all corporate complaints.



- 47 Of the 96 complaints we received regarding issues with correspondence, 90 were from customers receiving a contamination notice they believed should have been sent to somebody else (for example, as the bin in question was not presented or was emptied as usual and no contamination sticker was placed on it). Upon investigation, 54% (49 complaints) were found to be justified. Recycling assistants now accompany 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. This has resulted in some mistakes being made, but these are rectified as soon as we become aware.
- 48 Staff practice complaints were mainly from customers unhappy that Refuse and Recycling crews had not returned their bin to the Bin Collection Point (29 complaints).
- 49 The main complaint about billing/payment issues related to customers receiving an incorrect bill or payment (10).
- 50 All complaints relating to contact issues were from customers unhappy not to have received a progress update.

### **Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation**

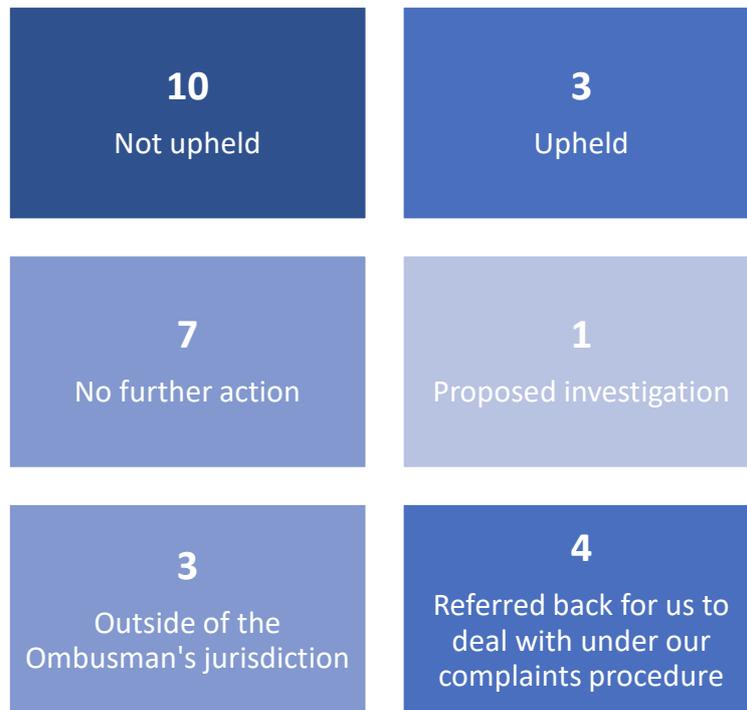
- 51 During quarter three, some complainants remained dissatisfied with their response and requested that we consider escalating their complaint to the Customer Feedback Team for independent investigation. Consideration was based on the service response, remedy already offered, and the reasons given by the customer for the escalation.



- 52 See Appendix 4 for details of complaints upheld by independent investigators.

## Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- 53 During quarter three, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 28 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants and supplemented in some instances with contextual information from council officers.



- 54 See Appendix 5 for details of complaints upheld by the Ombudsman.

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

### Top 5 Customer Service Areas



**You said:** Our website does not state black plastic is not allowed in the recycling bin.

**We did:** The 'what goes where' recycling page on our website has been updated accordingly.

**You said:** Our response to street lighting faults should be more specific, for example, advising the customer it has been transferred to a work queue, referred to Northern Power Grid etc.

**We did:** We now provide more meaningful updates to customers

**You said:** Our GIS mapping tool for reporting streetlights is difficult for customers to use.

**We did:** We have developed the GIS functionality so customers can now report faults with select specific streetlights (even if they do not know the number)

**You said:** Use the empty window at the Town Hall in Durham city to advertise events.

**We did:** Although the amount of space available for community information was reduced when the Town Hall was developed as a visitor attraction, other city centre venues, including Clayport library and Freeman's Quay Leisure Centre, provide display space community information.

**You said:** Don't take payment for the garden waste collection scheme until nearer the start date.

**Our response:** We are unable to store bank details to take later.

**You said:** Use glass collection boxes that fit inside recycling bins.

**Our response:** We did consider this but a caddy inside the bin would reduce the amount of recyclable material that can be stored, they tend to overflow inside the bin causing issues with sorting, they make it difficult for larger items to be placed in the bin and can make the bin top heavy.

**You said:** Allow customers to order more than one waste permit online

**Our response:** each permit needs a separate QR code, so we can track its status and monitor waste type more accurately, thereby reducing the number of customers turned away. Customers can receive their first 12 permits (each calendar year) instantly if they choose to receive by e-mail or collect from a CAP as soon as they log the request.

**You said:** Would like a Customer Access Point in Peterlee

**We did:** A weekly surgery is held each Wednesday 10am to 4pm at East Durham Homes office.

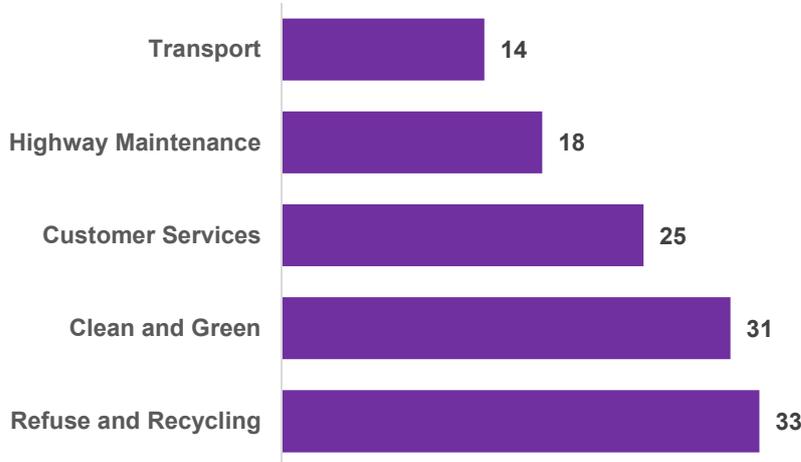
**You said:** Provide updates to the customer via their online request.

**We did:** Our 'do it online' self-serve portal enables customers to receive acknowledgements and updates via email and by logging into their account.

## Appendix 2:

### Sample of compliments received during quarter three, 2018/19

#### TOP 5 SERVICE AREAS:



Customer thanked the team for dealing with his missed bulky collection **quickly** and **efficiently**. They called to report this and the crew returned a few hours later to collect the items. Thank you very much.

As a regular user of Chester-Le-Street park, I would like to pass on my thanks to the team who **maintain** the park all year around. They keep it looking **good** and **clean** for all to enjoy.

Thank you to the team who came out this morning and cut the hedges back from the footpaths. A **prompt** and **efficient service**.

I just want to say **thank you** to the team who collected my domestic waste this morning. I had forgotten to put out my very full bin and when the team saw me trying to drag the bin after them, they **came to my rescue** with a smile. They could not have been more **helpful**.  
**Excellent customer service.**

Customer came into reception at Crook CAP for a bus pass. They were made to feel **very welcome** and had **great help** from staff.

Customer complimented staff for recent work carried out at Newton Hall. The gentleman who did the work have made a **really good job** and, without exception, were **hard-working, professional, friendly** and most **accommodating** throughout the whole process. Please pass on my compliments.

I have recently moved to the area and have had plenty of **help** and **advice** from my local recycling centre in Newton Aycliffe. I would just like to say a big thank you to them all for helping me dispose of my items for recycling.

Customer rang to thank Care Connect for the **help** they gave when a family member had a fall. The two members of staff were **fantastic**.

Crew working on tarmacking in back street have been **very pleasant** and **helpful**. Have taken bins to the top of the street on collection day and have done a **very good job**.

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### **Appendix 3: Satisfaction questionnaires are applied to the following service requests**

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- Abandoned shopping trolleys
- Bin – request help with your bin
- Bonfires
- Bus stop and shelters
- Complaints
- Dead animal removal
- Dog bins and litter Bins
- Dog fouling
- Flyposting
- Fly-tipping
- Garden Waste
- Graffiti
- Grass cutting, shrubs and flower beds
- Litter
- Needles and drug paraphernalia
- Noise
- Roads or footpath obstruction – vehicular
- Roadworks
- Rubbish in gardens and yards
- Seating and Benches
- Spilt Rubbish
- Street lighting
- Traffic lights and crossings
- Tree or hedge pruning, removal
- Waste permits

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

| Complaint   | Action to be taken  |
|---|---|
| <p>The complainant was unhappy that we did not make them aware that our officer had arrived at their property, thereby resulting in a missed appointment.</p> | <p>We have refunded the customer £20.</p> <p>As customers provide a contact number when booking, we are considering amending our process by giving these to the attending officer, so they can make customers aware of a visit.</p>   |
| <p>The complainant felt they should have received a partial council tax refund due to our actions following a missed collection.</p>                          | <p>We have acknowledged that our actions fell short of expectations and our lack of response left the customer with uncollected refuse and the inconvenience of multiple contacts to try and resolve the issue.</p> <p>We have resolved the issue and apologised to the customer for the inconvenience.</p> |
| <p>The complainant experienced multiple missed collections of garden waste.</p>   | <p>We have apologised and refunded the customer.</p> <p>Procedures are now in place to ensure that the garden waste is collected on the designated day.</p>   |
| <p>The complainant was unhappy that their recycling bin was incorrectly logged as contaminated.</p>   | <p>We accept that the bin was incorrectly logged. We have apologised, arranged for the bin to be emptied and removed the contamination record from their property.</p>  |
| <p>The complainant was unhappy with the planning process and our response to their concerns.</p>  | <p>We acknowledge that poor communication caused the complainant prolonged stress and uncertainty and have apologised.</p> <p>However, we did not find fault with other areas of the complaint.</p>   |

| <b>Complaint</b>  | <b>Action to be taken</b>   |
|---|---|
| <p>The complainant was dissatisfied with our response and perceived lack of action after they reported damage to a vehicle.</p>   | <p>We have apologised to the customer.</p> <p>We will review our current process for logging damage / injury reports to ensure customer expectations are managed.</p>   |
| <p>The complainant was dissatisfied with our process for reporting vehicle damage, and our subsequent lack of action.</p>   | <p>We have apologised for the delay which was caused by incorrectly actioning the initial contact.</p> <p>Staff have undertaken additional training.</p>  |
| <p>The complainant was dissatisfied with multiple missed collections, containers not being returned to the Bin Collection Point (BCP) and our lack of communication.</p>        | <p>We have apologised to the customer for the inconvenience caused.</p>   |
| <p>The complainant was unhappy that our standard contamination letter does not adequately explain what constitutes contamination. They were also unhappy with our response.</p> | <p>We have changed our website to make clear that black plastic cannot be recycled.</p> <p>We will consider the customer's suggestion that those with no history of contamination have their bin emptied, are sent a letter explaining that reason for contamination and are asked to ensure it does not reoccur.</p> |

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## Appendix 5: Complaints upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

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| Ombudsman's final decision  | Agreed action  |
|---|--|
| <p>The council has been at fault as it has not regularly monitored a site which has had repeated warnings and notices because of the untidy land. The complainant does not live next to the site, but looks at it daily when they pass, so the direct injustice to them is minimal.</p> | <p>That the council visit the site to investigate whether carpets and other rubbish is a contravention of the notice within one month of the date of the decision.</p> <p>That the council monitor the site monthly after the initial visit until the Community Protection Notice expires.</p> |
| <p>There was fault in the care agency's actions when the care worker attended the client's home and could not gain entry. The council has already remedied the injustice and addressed any service improvements.</p>  | <p>The council has apologised to the client for the fault and addressed service issues that became known because of the complaint.</p> <p>Decision to be shared with Care Quality Commission so they can consider this information in any further reports regarding the agency.</p>            |
| <p>The council were at fault as – even though they did not take enforcement action for breach of planning control - they did not have a procedure in place to alert the Non-Domestic Rates Service about a change of use to a building.</p>   | <p>Investigation completed as no injustice caused.</p>   |