

**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board**

22 October 2019

**Quarter One 2019/20
Customer Feedback Report**



Report of Corporate Management Team

John Hewitt, Corporate Director of Resources

Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships

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 Report for quarter one, 2019/20 (full report attached at Appendix 2).

Executive Summary

- 2 This report brings together a range of information collected from our customers which highlights their experiences of using our services. Unless otherwise stated, all information relates to the 12 months ending 30 June 2019, compared to the same period last year.
- 3 The report includes; an overview of customer contact; recent customer developments; a summary of customer satisfaction through surveys and compliments; a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes; an overview of comments relating to our policies, procedures and decision-making and our performance in dealing with complaints (both statutory and corporate). The report also highlights recent developments that enhance the customer experience.
- 4 We will use this information to further develop our services, inform policy decisions and our transformation programme, and support the use of digital tools, techniques and processes to improve the customer experience.

- 5 We will continue to work, throughout 2019/20, to improve the consistency and quality of the data in this report, as well as the range of customer feedback.
- 6 Much of the information contained within this report is extracted from our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and in most cases relates to our Customer Services Team. Over the coming months, we will be working with teams across the authority to expand the report to better reflect the entire council.

Recommendation

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

Background

- 8 Successful organisations understand their customers and one way to gain this valuable insight is by gathering and utilising customer feedback. This information, provided by customers as to whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with our services and about their general experience, is a resource for improving customer experience and determining our actions in line with our customers' needs.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- Previous Customer Feedback reports

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Customer Relations Team Manager	
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Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager	

Appendix 1: Implications

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.

Climate Change

We have declared a climate change emergency and consider the implications of climate change in our reports and decision-making.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

None

Procurement

None

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Appendix 2

Putting Our
Customer First

Customer Feedback Report

Quarter one,
2019/20

Altogether better



REVIEW OF CUSTOMER CONTACT

- 573,921 calls
- 98% answered

Customer Services (ACD)



- 335,185 calls
- 93% answered

Other ACD lines



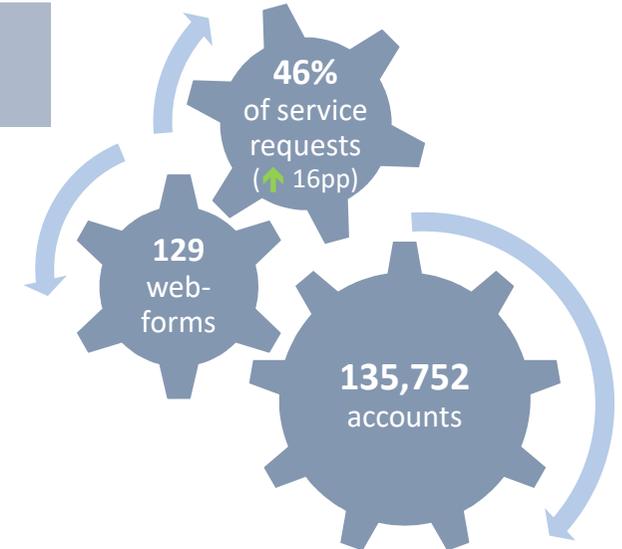
'Do it online' self-serve requests

164,000 self-serve requests logged

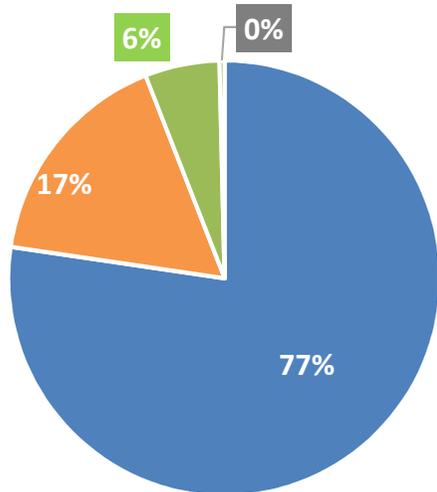
73% of waste permits

92% of garden waste joins

34% of bulky waste collections



Contact through customer services



social media: 2,898	↓ 34%
email: 41,373	↓ 15%
face to face: 124,062	↓ 17%
telephone: 573,921	↓ 10%

e.g. cultural events: timings, ticket availability, prices / recycling: what can be recycled, what can be taken to HWRC / costs & prices: bulky waste, pest control

e.g. new claims, change of circumstances, discounts

e.g. bills / payments / unclear correspondence / arrears

Customer services: top actions

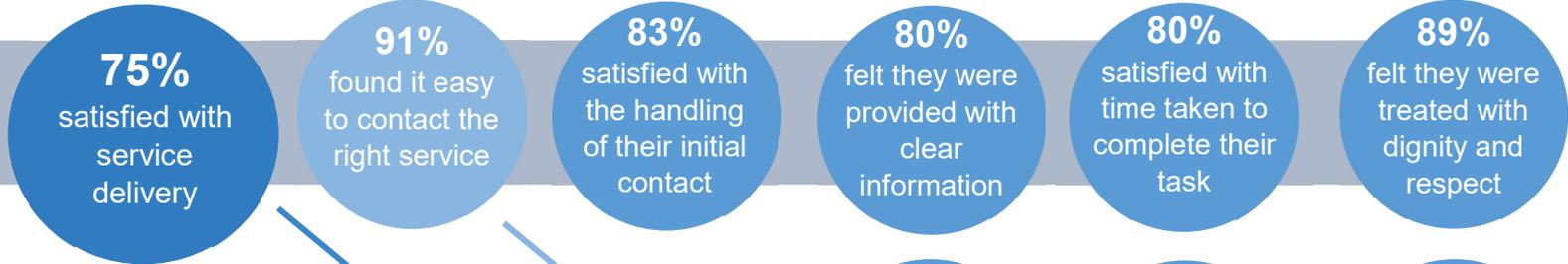
logging service requests	transferring calls	providing information	actioning CT requests	answering queries	providing progress updates	booking appointments
193,000	130,000	120,000	100,000	80,000	21,000	17,500

Recent Customer Developments

- 1 Through our transformation programme, we are aiming to improve our understanding of the needs of our customers through improved use of Business Intelligence and integrated methods of assessment to focus the council's resources in the most effective way whilst improving the journey of vulnerable clients through our processes and systems.
- 2 We are also continuing to use digital tools, techniques and processes that make our internal procedures more efficient and effective, and our integrated customer services initiative, to develop a customer-focused, one-council approach to service delivery, is underway.
- 3 Having fully mapped our First Point of Contact (FPOC) telephony offer, we are now widening our use of Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) technologies. This will standardise our telephony channel (including messaging and call routing), provide a strong foundation for the implementation of new technologies, and enhance reporting enabling us to develop a deeper understanding of customer demand and service performance.
- 4 We will launch our new digital strategy, which sets out how we will use digital technology and the areas we will develop, in the autumn.
- 5 We held our first Digital Customer Feedback event in June 2019. A small focus group of six residents, who had all volunteered, provided some very insightful feedback that mirrors that gained from our satisfaction surveys and star rating. We are using feedback such as this to develop our website's home page and online forms. We are currently working on online forms in a pilot area (street lighting) and will provide a further update once completed, which is expected to be in September. Key milestones relating to the home page of the website will be provided in the quarter two report.
- 6 We have also enhanced the updates customers receive at the different stages of their service request. Most online forms now generate automatic summary e-mails or text messages which detail the action we are planning to take, the team responsible and an estimated timescale. In some instances, we also send reminders to customers who have appointments booked, need to provide information or renew applications. These features are now standard on any new forms created and should help to improve customer satisfaction.
- 7 We are working with the Institute of Customer Service, of which we are a member, to develop our Customer Strategy. We have also recently developed a fresh approach to customer service training that will equip staff with the skills and tools to put the customer at the heart of everything we do. Initially, this will be trialled with the new intake of apprentices in September 2019, before it is rolled out across the organisation.

SUMMARY

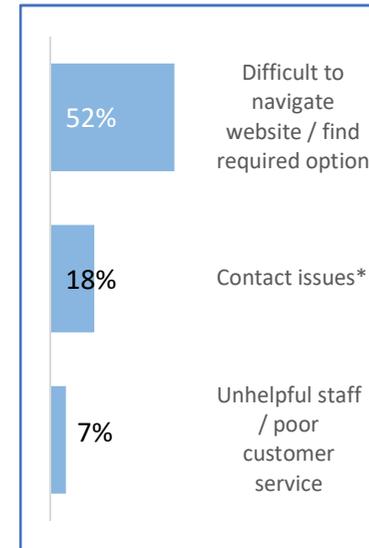
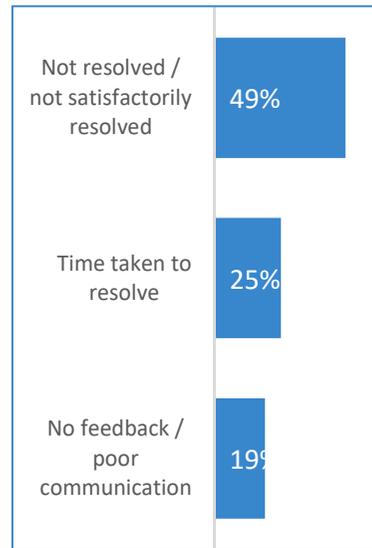
Customer Satisfaction:
from the CRM closure process
(based on 4,093 responses)



Customer Feedback: from the CRM including compliments, suggestions and complaints

915 compliments (-116)	488 suggestions (-17)	177 comments about policies and procedures (-138)
182 objections to our decisions (-103)	123 dissatisfied with fees and charges (+76)	3,048 corporate complaints (+236) 3,018 investigated & 69% upheld*
220 statutory complaints (+17) 140 CYPs: 37% upheld 80 AHS: 54% upheld	177 independent investigation requests	84 decisions from the Ombudsman 13 complaints upheld (15%)

Reasons for dissatisfaction



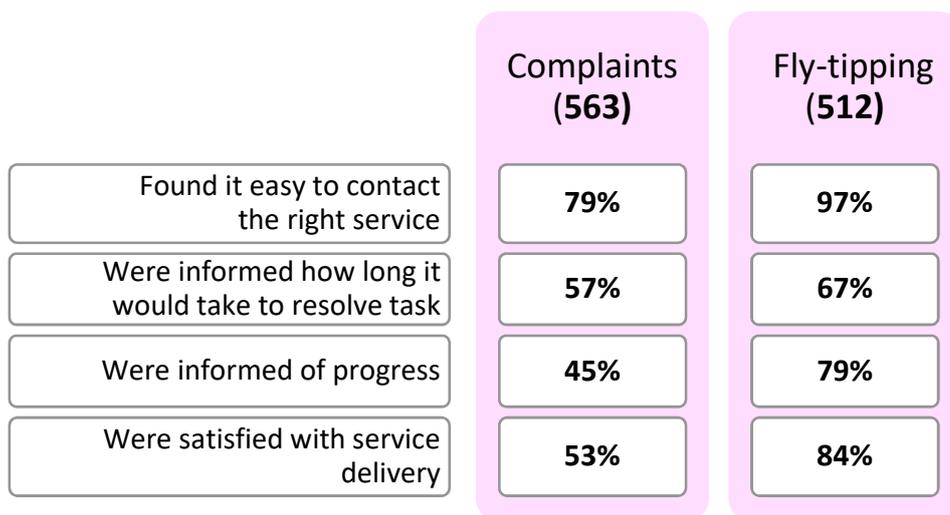
Customer experience of completing online request
(based on 25,797 customers)

☆☆☆☆☆ - 61%
 ☆☆☆☆ - 21%
 ☆☆☆ - 10%
 ☆☆ - 3%
 ☆ - 5%

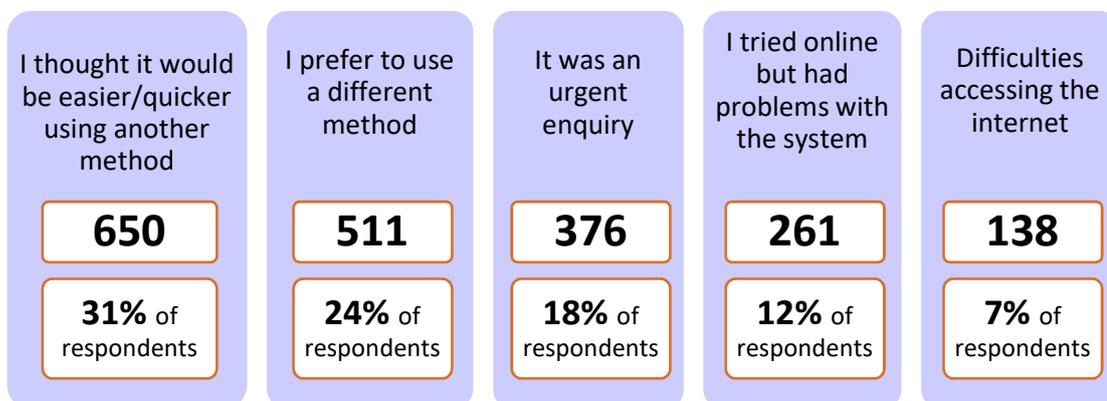
*including; being unable to contact department direct; being transferred between departments; not receiving a promised call back; being unable to speak to person required

Customer Satisfaction

- 8 Customers can now provide feedback relating to their experience for 73 different service requests (listed at Appendix 3). This is eight more than at quarter four, 2018/19.
- 9 Of 4,093 responses received, more than a quarter related to two specific service areas;



- 10 We believe this is because some requests are more emotive than others and this encourages greater participation. However, to increase feedback across all request types we are working to understand the reasons why customers engage with us and what stops them providing feedback.
- 11 To further engage with customers over their appetite for online transactions, we asked customers who did not request services through our website the reason why. 92% of the 2,094 replies fit into one of five key categories, listed below:



Customer Compliments

- 12 Most of the 915 compliments received related to satisfaction with service provision, but others related to specific individuals.
- 13 A small sample of compliments from quarter one, 2019/20 is attached at Appendix 1.

Customer Suggestions

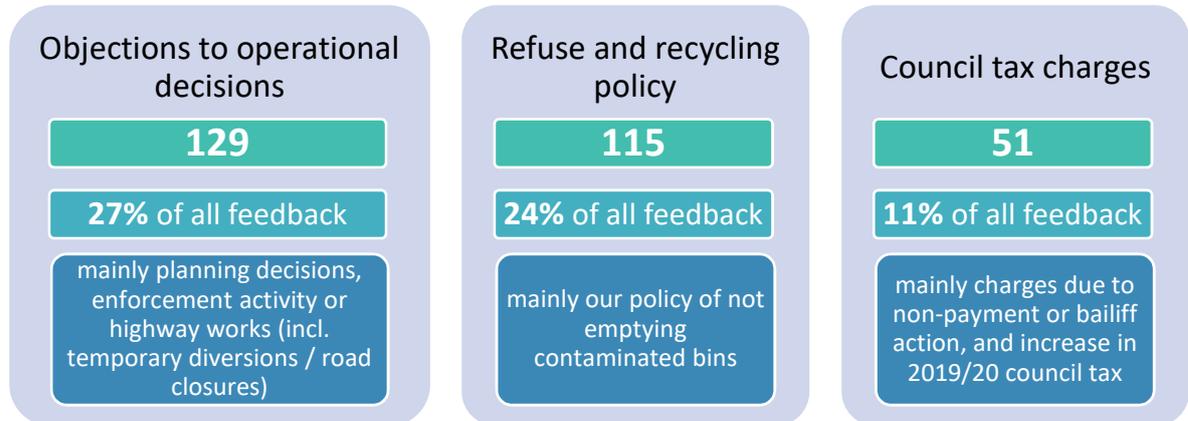
- 14 Of the 488 suggestions received, almost two fifths related to our household waste collection service. However, the majority of those submitted have been addressed previously and/or considered as part of service development, for example;

Proposal	Our response
Smaller bins be made available for smaller households.	Considered on an individual basis (where for example there are access issues) but we would not simply swap a bin for reasons of size due to the associated cost.
Bins have locks to keep bins closed on windy days.	There are operational issues if locks are put on bins. These include the increased time it would take to unlock and relock the bin which would impact on the collection crew and round finish time. The cost of fitting locks is also cost prohibitive.
Rather than a separate container to collect glass, can bins be fitted with an insert.	Different options for collection containers were looked at prior to alternate weekly collections being introduced. This was one of them, however it was calculated that a caddy, (or insert) would reduce the capacity in the blue-lidded recycling bin when we needed extra capacity to cater for the average household's recycling.

- 15 A sample of new suggestions received during quarter one and our response is attached at Appendix 2.

Comments about our policies and procedures, objections to our decision making and dissatisfaction with fees and charges

16 Almost two thirds of this feedback related to one of the following three areas:



Customer complaints

17 Within this document each of the complaint types (statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority and corporate complaints that cover all other complaints) is subject to its own processes and policy, so is reported separately.

Statutory complaints

18 Over the last 12 months approximately **18,500** people received an Adult Health Service care package and, at any one time, our statutory social care teams support approximately **3,800** children and young people.

Children and Young People's Services

19 The majority of these complaints (75%) related to Families First teams (105).

20 During quarter one, in response to complaints received, we:

- (a) reminded staff that, in cases going to court for Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship Orders, documents must be shared in a timely manner to allow potential carers as much opportunity as possible to understand the decisions they are making.
- (b) reviewed our policy relating to mileage payments for parents and carers attending contact.
- (c) reviewed our procedures in relation to trafficked young people.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

STATUTORY COMPLAINTS

Children and Young People's Services

140

+ 25 (↑ 22%)

79% completed within timescale

Adult and Health Services

80

- 11 (↓ 12%)

98.8% completed within timescale

Reasons for complaint

Unreturned phone calls / texts 26

Staff attitude 28

Disagreement with explanation / decision 37

Staff attitude 12

Finance-charging policy 14

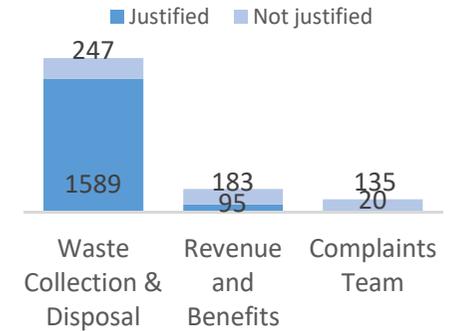
Disagreement with explanation / decision 25

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

Corporate Complaints (12 months ending...)



Top 3 Complaint Service Areas



52% of complaints relate to 3 issues:

Missed collections

- 938
- 84% upheld (↓ 1pp)
- 31% of all complaints

Correspondence issues

- 476
- 92% upheld (↓ 5pp)
- 16% of all complaints

Staff practices

- 172
- 85% upheld (no change)
- 6% of all complaints

10.5 days average time to respond to complaints

49 independent investigations requested (quarter one)

5 Ombudsman complaints upheld (quarter one)

Missed collections



Adult and Health Services

- 21 Almost half (45%) of these complaints related to Older People / Physical Disabilities / Sensory Impairment (36) and a further 26% to Learning Disabilities / Mental Health / Substance Misuse (17). Nine complaints (11%) related to external providers.
- 22 During quarter one, in response to complaints received, we:
- (a) carried out an audit to ensure a care home provider complied with its falls policy.
 - (b) consulted domiciliary care providers on the most appropriate way to report concerns about service users, and how to communicate these consistently to family and the council (social worker).
 - (c) changed our procedure for 'ended' cases so they are now picked up by the whole team rather than one individual.
 - (d) reminded social workers about the importance of regular communication with service users and family members, including planning for occasions when an allocated worker is away from the office.

Corporate Complaints

- 23 Although 60% of complaints related to our waste collection service, with missed collections continuing to be the most frequent cause of complaint, it should be noted that this highly visible frontline service completes more than 12 million refuse and recycling collections, almost a million garden waste collections and 32,000 bulky collections annually.
- 24 During 2018/19, recorded missed collection complaints almost doubled (+657) compared to 2017/18. This increase was a consequence of a change to the complaints process in November 2017 which re-categorised disputed missed collection service requests as complaints.
- 25 This change increased visibility of this complaint type, allowing us to identify hotspots and key trends and drive discussions with the refuse and recycling team. By addressing and better managing the disputed missed collections (which mainly related to contamination) we have been able to reduce the number of complaint investigations carried out by the operational team, thereby freeing up more operational capacity, and maintain a downward trend in contact of this type throughout 2018/19 and into quarter one, 2019/20.

- 26 Of the correspondence complaints, the majority were from customers who had received a contamination notice they believed should have been sent to somebody else (due to, for example, the bin in question not being presented or being emptied as usual with no contamination sticker placed on it).
- 27 This rise has followed increased activity to reduce contamination. In addition to campaigns, door-knocks and sessions with community groups, recycling assistants are now accompanying bin crews on their rounds. Consequently, more contaminated bins are being identified. Of the 15,825 contamination notices issued during the 12 months ending 30 June 2019, 96% reached the correct recipient. The disputed 4% arose from difficulties, more noticeable in back streets, identifying the house to which the bin belongs. Mistakes are rectified as soon as we become aware.
- 28 Staff practice complaints mainly related to Refuse and Recycling crews not returning bins to bin collection points (113 complaints).

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

- 29 During the year, 177 complainants remained dissatisfied with their response (49 during quarter one) and requested that we consider escalating their complaint to the Customer Feedback Team for independent investigation.

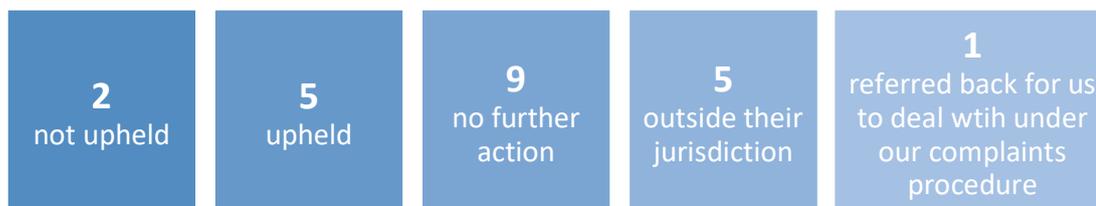


**all investigations should be completed within 30 days*

- 30 Details of complaints upheld by independent investigators during quarter one are included in Appendix 4.

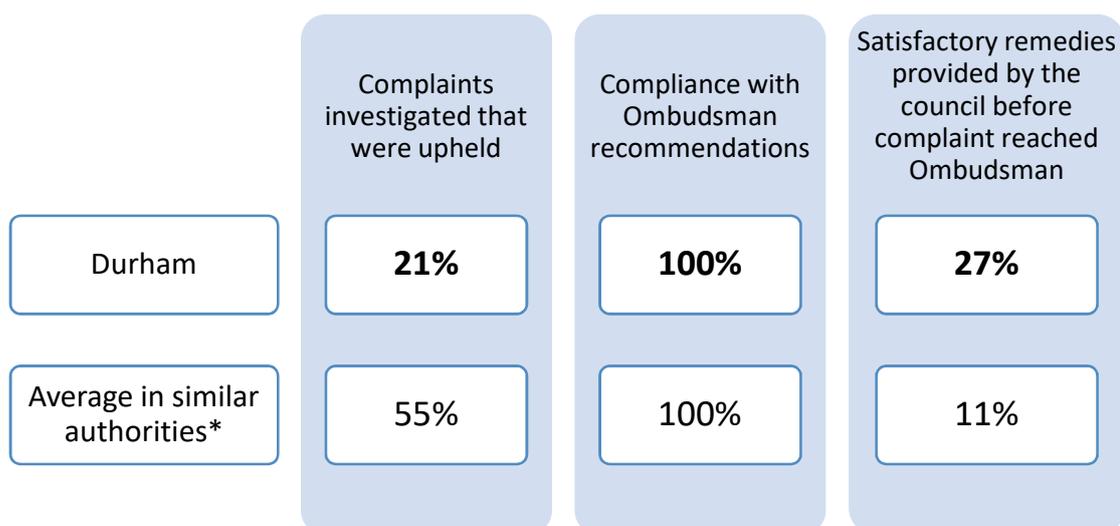
Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

- 31 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2019, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 84 complaints (22 during quarter one). Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants, and in some instances, supplemented with contextual information from council officers.



- 32 Details of complaints upheld by the Ombudsman during quarter one is included in Appendix 5.

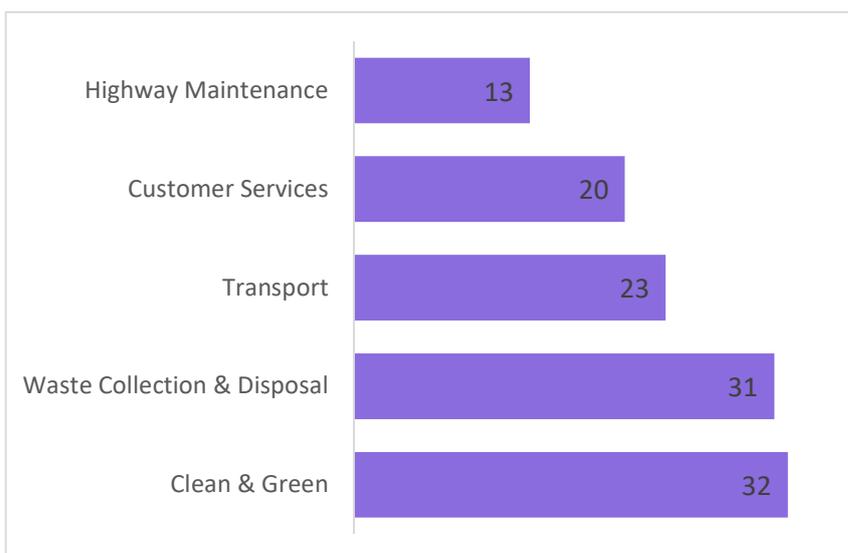
- 33 The Ombudsman published local authority performance data for 2018/19, including benchmarking against similar authorities, 31 July 2019:



**as defined by the Ombudsman*

- 34 Additional information regarding complaints escalated to the Ombudsman is available [here](#).

Appendix 1: Sample of compliments received during quarter one, 2019/20



Customer thanked Care Connect for the help and support they gave after a fall.

Customer thanked Street Lighting Team for fixing the light outside their property. They feel safer going out at night with their dog as the area is now well lit.

I would like to compliment the staff involved in the improvement to the area near to Binchester Roman Fort which was having problems with subsidence. It looks really good and hopefully will prevent further road closures happening so often.

Thanked staff at Chester-le-Street Customer Access Point for helping them with their council tax form.

Pest Control. Amazing service today - thank you. Booked online and here within the hour. Your team member was friendly, efficient, reassuring and obviously takes great pride in the work.

Customer advised that the staff at the Horden HWRC site are very polite, kind and are extremely helpful. Customer advised they use the site regularly and asked us to pass on their thanks.

Asked for compliments to be passed on to Clean and Green Team Leader for their prompt response to a service request to prune a dead tree. Customer was updated about progress and were very pleased with the service.

Customer rang to say what a great job staff had done widening the road to their property. Area was left clean and tidy and it is a great improvement.

The staff at Spennymoor leisure centre swimming pool are knowledgeable about disability access and extremely helpful; even assisting with transfer into the pool.

Thank you for providing access to a swimming pool in a welcoming environment.

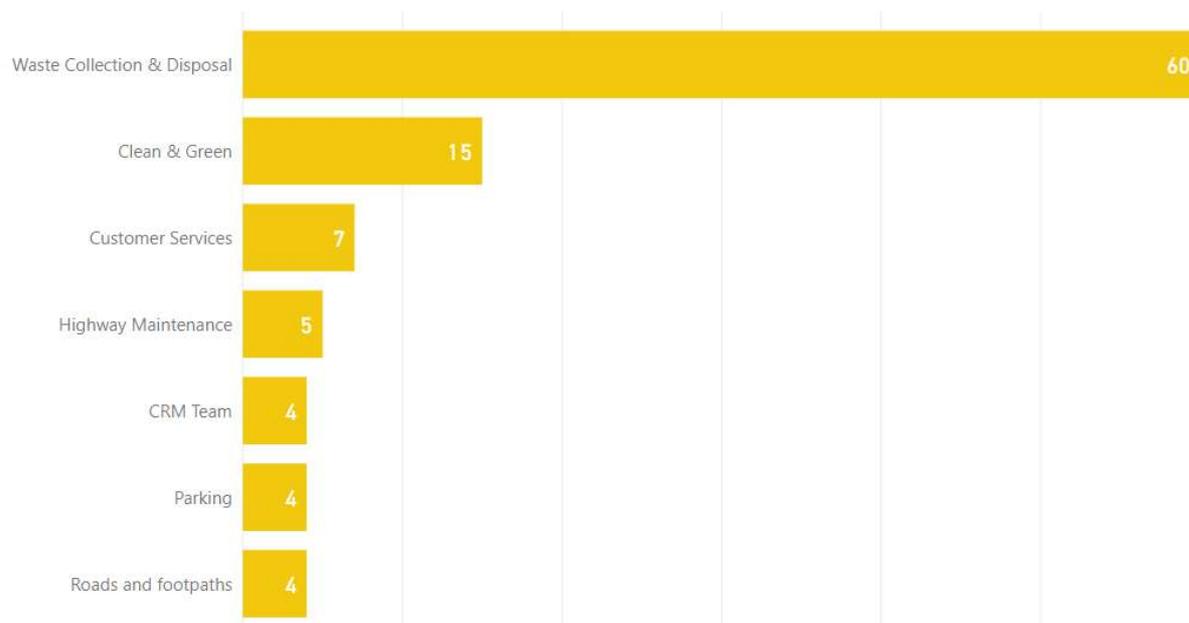
Thanked Traffic Management for recent works carried out at the junction at Beech Court and May Terrace, Langley Park. These works are an elegant solution to the potential sight-line hazard.

Compliments to the Drainage Team from customer who was very pleased with the speedy action and found the team very helpful.

Compliment regarding fast response and removal of reported fly-tip.

Appendix 2:

Sample of suggestions received during quarter one, 2019/20



You said: Customer suggested a bin is installed next to the bus stop adjacent to the Salvation Army building at Langley Moor to reduce amount of litter on the grass and pavement near this bus stop.

We did: We welcomed this suggestion and have made arrangements for a bin to be installed.

You said: Customer has suggested that when someone rings before or after opening times this is made obvious before all the other announcements as they were held on the phone for some time before this was made clear.

We did: We are currently reviewing, standardising and harmonising all messages at first point of contact to support a consistent experience for customers who contact us by telephone.

You said: Customer would like to suggest that we add onto the garden waste calendar that the bin needs to be presented at bin collection point for 7.00am to make people who may be unaware that this is the policy.

We did: This information is included within the terms and conditions section of the garden waste web page and we will consider including on next seasons calendar.

You said: Suggestion that system is introduced to register births online rather than at the registry office in Durham.

Our response: The qualified informant is required by law to give information regarding the baby in person, via direct questioning with a registrar and then sign a register page. As the statutory requirements are laid down in law within the Births and Deaths Registration Act, we do not have the power to change the process.

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

- Abandoned shopping trolleys
- Abandoned vehicles
- Access bus
- Allotments
- Animals
- Anti-social behaviour
- Archaeology day – order tickets
- Barriers
- Bin – new, replacement, repair
- Bin – waste collections for businesses
- Bin – request help with your bin
- Bollards
- Bonfires
- Built structures
- Bulky waste – white goods collection
- Bus stop and shelters
- Care Connect – apply
- Care Connect – VAT exemption
- Complaints
- Council tax account
- Council tax paperless billing
- Council tax – change of payment
- Customer Services appointment
- Dead animal removal
- Dog bins and litter bins
- Dog fouling
- Drainage and flooding
- Dropped kerbs and disabled ramp access
- Durham employment and Skills
- Durham Institute of Sport
- Flyposting
- Fly-tipping
- Free school travel – apply
- Garden waste – appeal /exchange your bin / join the scheme
- Generic enquiry
- Graffiti
- Grass cutting, shrubs and flower beds
- Gritting or snow clearance – request
- Gypsy, roma and traveller sites
- Invite our chairman to your event
- Litter
- Manhole and utility covers
- Needles and drug paraphernalia
- Noise complaint
- Public Rights of Way and countryside paths
- Road markings
- Road or footpath
- Roads or footpath obstruction – non-vehicular
- Roads or footpath obstruction – vehicular
- Road or pavement – spillage
- Road signs
- Roadworks
- Rubbish in gardens and yards
- Safety Advisory Group (SAG)
- Salt bins
- Sandbags
- School crossing patrol service – report an issue
- Seating and benches
- Spilt rubbish
- Stray dogs
- Stray horses
- Street lighting
- Street name plates
- Taxis – report an issue with a driver
- Taxi licencing - driver
- Taxi licencing – vehicle
- Traffic safety and traffic calming schemes
- Traffic lights and crossings
- Tree or hedge pruning, removal
- Walls and fences
- Waste collection for businesses
- Waste permits
- Ways to wellbeing

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

Complaint	Action to be taken
Complainant unhappy with planning decision and lack of response from planning authority.	Although we acted appropriately in waiting to see whether the new application was granted planning permission, we acknowledge that the complainant should not have needed to progress chase.
Complainant dissatisfied with our response regarding Executive Rights of Burial and our failure to supply requested information.	We are satisfied that the register would not be updated without completion of necessary paperwork and correct payment being made, however complaint is partially upheld due to lost information.
Complainant is unhappy that a payment was incorrectly taken from their bank account, they were not provided with the correct phone number to contact Arriva and that calls to school transport service are not recorded.	We apologised that the payment was taken. We accept that we should have provided the specific telephone number required rather than the general Arriva customer services number. We are exploring the possibility of recordings calls to this service. Bus pass procedure refresher training will be provided for all staff.
Complainant is unhappy that we issued an incorrect suspension notice in the first instance, then sent a letter stating we were 'satisfied that the reasons which lead to the suspension no longer exist', confirmed an appointment which did not exist (although complainant was accommodated on arrival nonetheless), lack of contact regarding the notice and financial loss suffered as a result.	Regarding the response issued, we have issued appropriate instruction and reminders to the team to ensure this does not occur again. We are considering alternative ways to communicate suspension notices with drivers.

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

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
<p>Complainant unhappy that the council delayed sale of joint property, causing unnecessary accumulation of council tax arrears.</p> <p>The Ombudsman found there was fault on the part of the council.</p>	<p>We apologised unreservedly for anxiety caused by delays we were responsible for, and applied a backdated exemption for council tax arrears.</p>
<p>Ombudsman found no fault in the way we dealt with roadworks, but there was fault in the way we handled the complaint.</p>	<p>We have apologised for the way the complaint was managed.</p>
<p>Complainant unhappy with; how quickly we discharged their parent from a care home, the high turnover of staff, lack of communication from social worker and the care received after two falls.</p>	<p>We have apologised for the gaps in contact from the social worker and care home, and agreed to pay £500 to recognise the distress this caused.</p> <p>We have reminded staff of the importance of regular communication and will carry out an audit to ensure the care home is applying its falls policy correctly.</p>
<p>Ombudsman found that we delayed moving a homeless family from a B&B and delayed providing a decision regarding their homelessness – denying them the opportunity to ask for the suitability of their accommodation to be reviewed. A child in the family with SEN also missed 6 weeks of school due to the delay arranging school transport.</p>	<p>We have apologised and agreed to pay the family £1,550.</p>
<p>Ombudsman agreed it was unreasonable to stop paying a family SGO allowance, despite knowing their finances were strained.</p>	<p>A financial settlement to be made, considering all relevant information when assessing whether the family's circumstances are exceptional and merit further financial support.</p>