

**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board**

16 December 2019

**Quarter Two, 2019/20
Customer Feedback Report**



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 Report for quarter two, 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 September 2019, compared to the same period last year.
- 3 The report includes; an overview of Customer Services 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	
Tom Gorman	Tel: 03000 268 027
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

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

None

Procurement

None

Appendix 2

Putting Our
Customer First

Customer Feedback Report

Quarter two,
2019/20

Altogether better



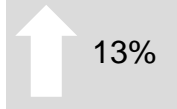
REVIEW OF CUSTOMER SERVICE CONTACT

Top 3 service request methods

'Do it online' self-service portal



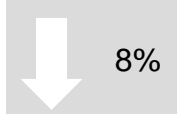
168,878



Telephone



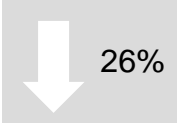
112,173



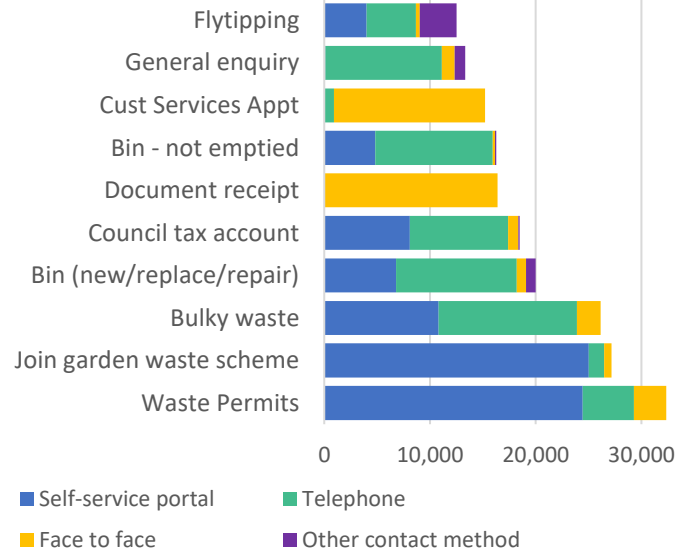
Face-to-face



43,147



Top 10 Service Requests by channel



Non Service Request Contact

Our Customer Services Team also responded to more than **550,000** non-service requests from our customers. This included:

- providing general policy advice
- transferring calls to the appropriate department / organisation
- booking appointments
- providing updates about service requests

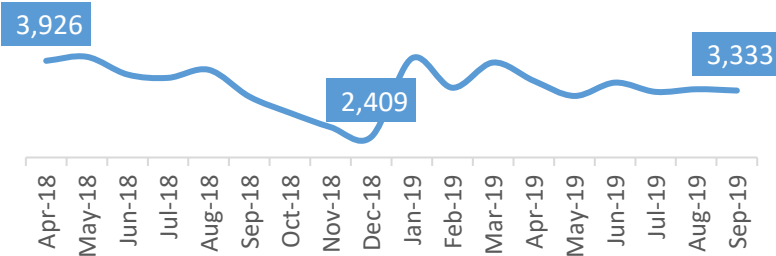


143.8k accounts in use

47% of all service requests via self-service portal

23% of all contact via self-service portal

Number of 'do it online' self-service account creation requests



Customer Services (ACD)



- 567,997 calls
- 98% answered
- 95% answered within 3 minutes

Other ACD lines

- 470,997 calls
- 93% answered
- 91% answered within 3 minutes



Top 5 requests

16,389 document receipts

14,299 Customer Services Appts (c/tax & housing benefit)

3,069 waste permits

2,240 bulky waste, white goods collection

1,211 general enquiries

Recent Customer Developments

- 1 We have launched our new [Digital Strategy](#) which sets out our digital ambitions to improve access to our services, expand digital connectivity and provide new efficient ways of working. Planned action includes using assistive technologies in adult social care, extending mobile working for frontline services, supporting online access and safety among communities, and seeking funding opportunities to ensure technologies, such as superfast broadband and 5G networks, can be rolled out.
- 2 We are continuing to help customers and members use our online portal. Staff at our Customer Access Points (CAPs) are available to guide customers through the online processes. The members portal is now available for use and we continue to provide individual training through Member Support.
- 3 Our Eckoh system (voice recognition for call transfer) is now live. The new system will not only increase customer satisfaction by quickly directing callers to the most appropriate place for their needs, it will also divert low-value calls away from our staff which will allow us to better respond to peaks in demand and free-up staff time for more complex cases. We will be assessing the impact of the new system in the coming months.
- 4 As part of our integrated customer services initiative to develop a customer-focused, one-council approach to service delivery, we are continuing to widen our use of Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) technologies. During quarter two, we transferred the welfare rights advice line and extended the hours during which the service can be accessed, thereby enhancing the service offer to some of our most vulnerable customers. We also transferred first point of contact telephony for housing solutions.
- 5 We have also introduced a new system that allows Care Connect staff to answer calls when lines are busy, log and prioritise calls, and redirect those that are urgent. This followed concerns that the Emergency Duty Team, which responds to urgent calls about vulnerable children and adults, were handling non-urgent and mis-directed calls, for example missed bins, resulting in callers with more urgent safeguarding enquiries being diverted to voicemail.
- 6 Our new approach to customer services training, delivered to the new intake of apprentices in September, will be rolled out across the organisation following positive feedback.

- 7 National Customer Service week (7-11 October) gave us a week-long opportunity to raise awareness of customer service and the vital role it plays. A summary of highlights from the week is available [here](#)¹.

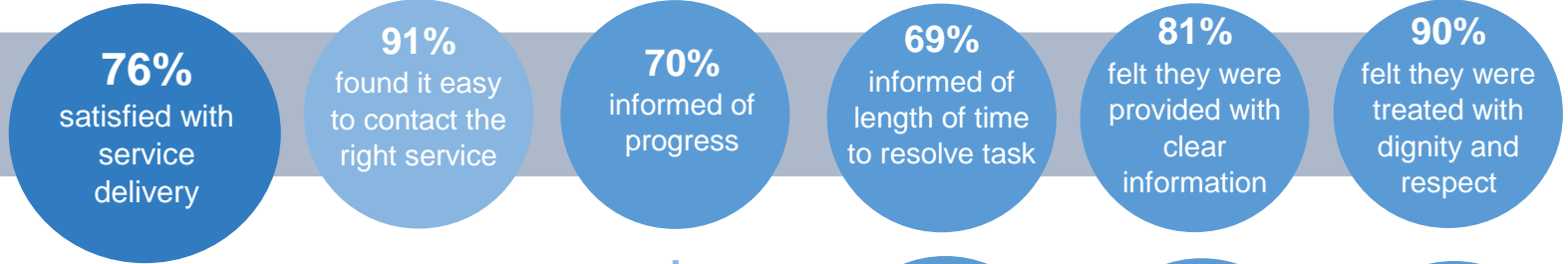
Future Customer Developments

- 8 We are continuing to explore the potential of new technologies and are currently looking at web chat and multi-channel licensing to support our first point of contact team to handle contacts via telephone, e-mail and web chat.
- 9 From 30 September, first point of contact telephone calls relating to 'Blue Badge enquiries and applications' and 'fostering and adoption advice' will be managed by the Customer Services Team.
- 10 We are undertaking work to review and redesign our website to support more self-managed customer journeys. Our online forms pilot for street lighting will go live during quarter three.
- 11 During the 12 months ending September 2019, more than 16,000 customers visited a CAP to hand in a document. We are now undertaking a document receipting review to reduce traffic into our CAPs, offset avoidable travel for customer and enhance the customer journey.
- 12 69% of customers who responded to our customer satisfaction survey once their CRM service request was closed (see Appendix 3 for list of service requests this survey is applied to) said they were advised about the time it would take to resolve their task. We intend to complete detailed analysis of this area to understand the root cause of this problem and implement actions to improve.

¹ This is also available by e-mailing performance@durham.gov.uk

SUMMARY

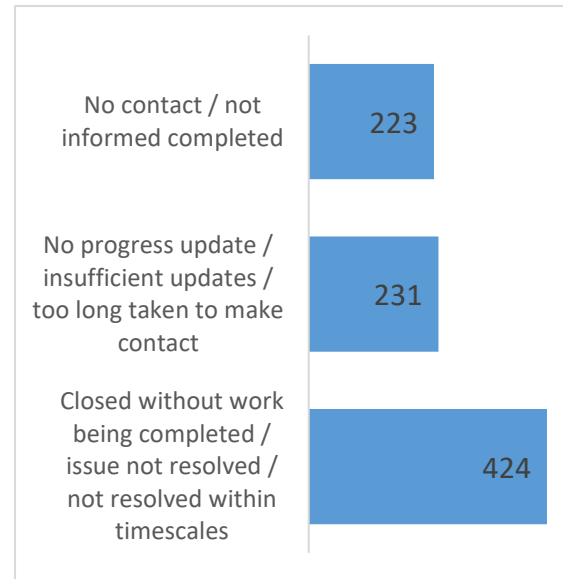
Customer Satisfaction:
from the CRM closure process
(based on 5,426 responses)



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

1,108 compliments (+34)	519 suggestions (+10)	186 comments about policies and procedures (-182)
173 objections to our decisions (-89)	143 dissatisfied with fees and charges (+83)	2,742 corporate complaints (-528) 98% investigated & 65% upheld*
196 statutory complaints (-20)	179 independent investigation requests	83 decisions from the Ombudsman 17 complaints upheld (20%)

Reasons for dissatisfaction



Customer experience of completing online request
(based on 46,204 customers)

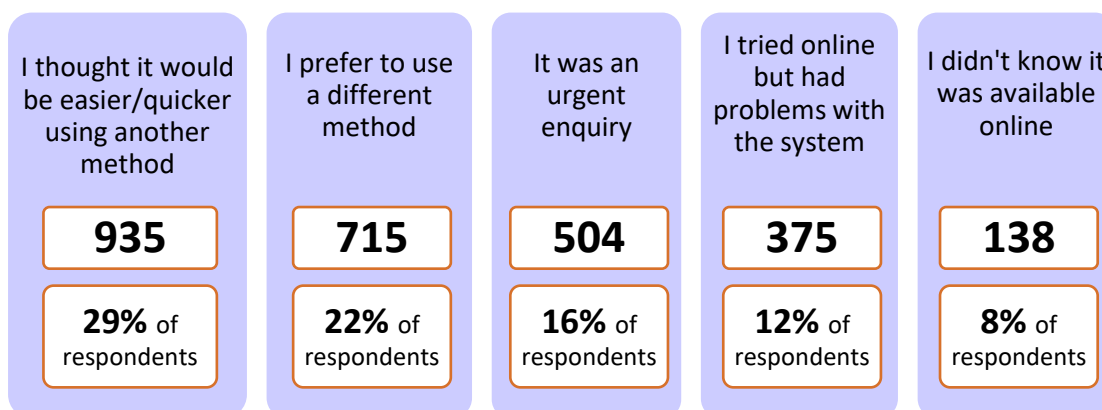
- ☆☆☆☆☆ - 62%
- ☆☆☆☆ - 20%
- ☆☆☆ - 10%
- ☆☆ - 3%
- ☆ - 5%

Customer Satisfaction

- 13 Customers can now provide feedback relating to their experience for 78 different service requests (listed at Appendix 3). This is five more than at the end of quarter one, 2019/20.
- 14 However, we are aware of significant variation in both feedback and satisfaction levels across the different service requests. During September 2019, only 8% of customers responded to the survey and of the 5,426 responses received over the last 12 months, a third related to three specific service areas:

	Council Tax (729)	Fly-tipping (597)	Complaints (500)
Found it easy to contact the right service	95%	96%	78%
Were informed how long it would take to resolve task	78%	69%	59%
Were informed of progress	85%	78%	45%
Were satisfied with service delivery	93%	83%	53%

- 15 We believe this variation is due to more emotive requests encouraging 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.
- 16 To understand our customers' appetite for online transactions, we asked customers who did not request services through our website the reason why. 87% of the 3,201 replies fit into one of five key categories, listed below:



Customer Compliments

- 17 Most of the 1,108 compliments received related to satisfaction with service provision, but others related to specific individuals.
- 18 Children and Young People's Services received 116 more compliments compared to the same period last year.
- 19 A small sample of compliments from quarter two, 2019/20 is attached at Appendix 1.

Customer Suggestions

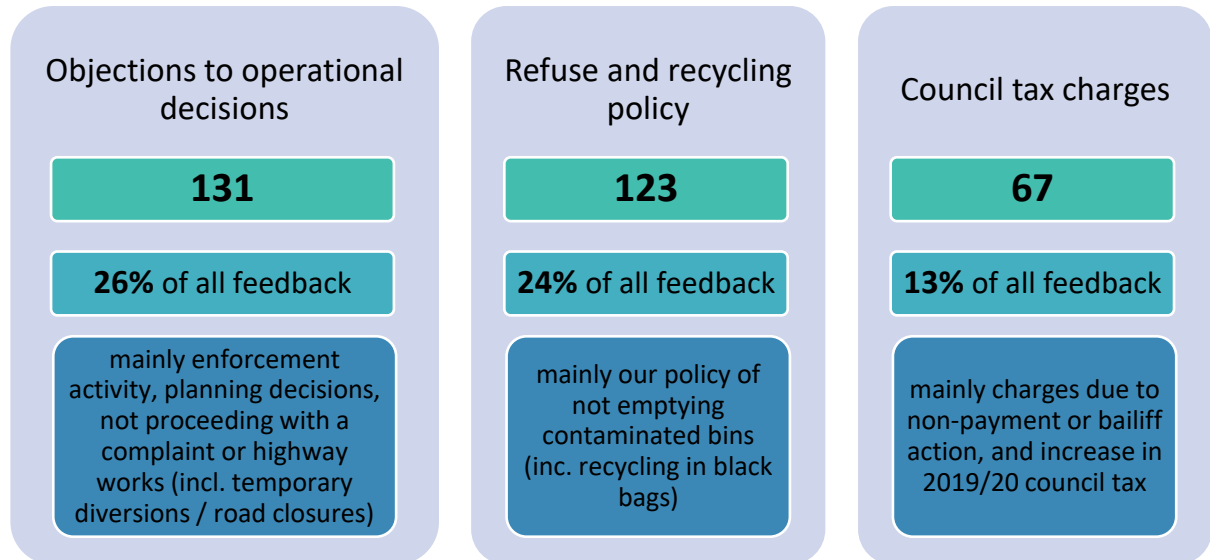
- 20 Of the 519 suggestions received, more than a quarter related to our household waste collection service. However, the majority of those submitted have been addressed previously and/or considered as part of service development, for example:

Proposal	Our response
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.
Remove charge for garden waste collections.	Due to continuing financial pressure, we must charge a fee for the garden waste collection service to ensure that it can continue.

- 21 Other regular suggestions involve changes to our road system. However, when looked at in the context of countywide traffic flows, the suggested change would have a knock-on effect to traffic flows elsewhere.
- 22 A sample of new suggestions received during quarter two 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

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



Customer complaints

24 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

25 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.

26 Complaints about these services are not comparable. Generally Adult Health Service users request access to the service we are providing, whereas many Children and Young People Service (CYPS) service users are involved as intervention is required as part of the safeguarding / legal process.

27 Complaints often cover a wide range of issues that are pertinent to individual families.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

48% of complaints relate to 3 issues:

Missed collections

- 722
- 77% upheld
- 26% of all complaints

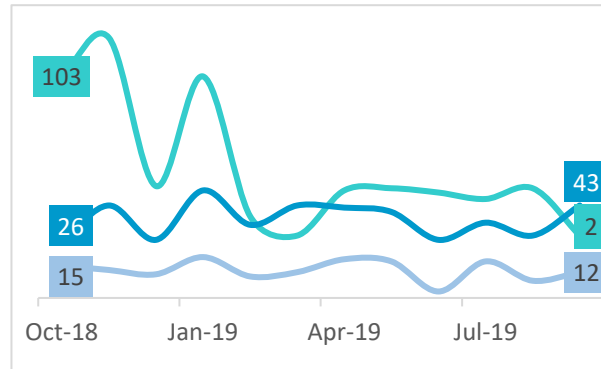
Correspondence issues

- 439
- 92% upheld
- 16% of all complaints

Staff practices

- 155
- 79% upheld
- 6% of all complaints

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS



Average time to respond to complaints **8.5 days**

88% complaints responded to within agreed timescale

65% of all complaints were upheld

Top 3 complaint service areas:

Waste Collection and Disposal 83% upheld	Revenues and Benefits 33% upheld	Complaints 12% upheld
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Month	Justified	Not justified
SEP-19	110	92
AUG-19	122	70
JUL-19	155	84
JUN-19	116	74
MAY-19	158	95
APR-19	147	94
MAR-19	131	67
FEB-19	117	71
JAN-19	230	77
DEC-18	113	59
NOV-18	206	88
OCT-18	181	74
SEP-18	196	67
AUG-18	264	73
JUL-18	251	87
JUN-18	253	80
MAY-18	279	102
APR-18	288	84

STATUTORY COMPLAINTS

Children and Young People's Services

123

- 6 (↓4.7%)

78.1% completed within timescale

13% upheld & **24%** partially upheld

73 Lack of communication

Disputed decision **38**

26 Staff attitude

Adult and Health Services

73

- 14 (↓16%)

98.6% completed within timescale

11% upheld & **42%** partially upheld

27 Disputed decisions

Finance charging policy **17**

12 Lack of service – denied service

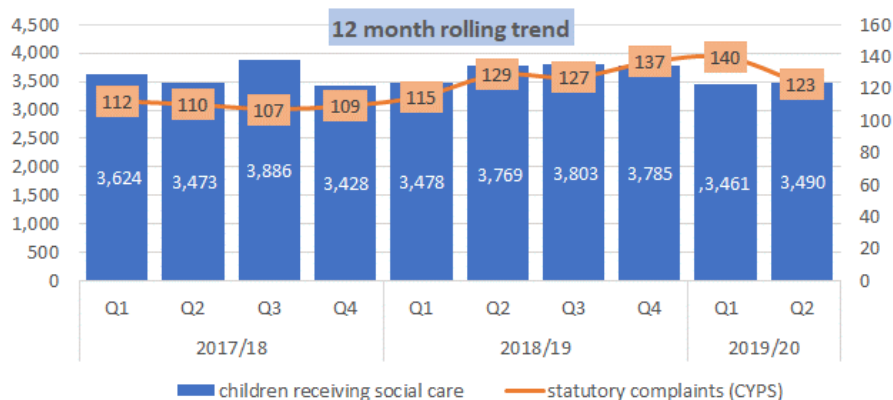
45 independent investigations requested (quarter two)

5 Ombudsman complaints upheld (quarter two)

Children and Young People's Services

28 The majority of these complaints (81%) related to Families First teams (99).

29 We have noted an increase in the number of statutory complaints received over the last 18 months and believe it to be a reflection of the increased demand for service across this area.



30 During quarter two, in response to complaints received, we reminded staff to:

- (a) make referrals for mental health services in a timely manner;
- (b) look at the 'big picture' when deciding whether communication is required, rather than solely thinking about their statutory responsibilities;
- (c) give regard to the tone of written communication – 'put yourself in the recipient's shoes'.

Adult and Health Services

31 Of the 73 complaints received, 40% related to Older People / Physical Disabilities / Sensory Impairment (29). A further 26% related to Learning Disabilities / Mental Health / Substance Misuse (19).

32 Seven complaints related to external providers.

33 During quarter two, in response to complaints received, we:

- (a) addressed practice concerns with staff and reviewed how we manage the work of staff members who are unexpectedly absent.
- (b) provided additional training to staff when required.
- (c) emphasised the importance of informing the family, or nominated representatives, of service users with learning disabilities of any incident that occurs in respite care. Explicit instructions have been added to Care and Support Plans to reinforce this message.

Corporate Complaints

- 34 Although almost 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.
- 35 Missed collection complaints reduced by more than a third (-481) and there was a seven percentage point decrease in the number of complaints found to be justified compared to the same period last year. This is the main reason for the overall reduction in both the number of complaints received and the percentage justified.
- 36 This reduction followed a change to the complaints process which re-categorised disputed missed collection service requests as complaints. This change increased visibility of this complaint types which allowed us to identify hotspots and key trends and drive discussions with the refuse and recycling teams. By addressing and better managing the disputed missed collections (which mainly related to contamination) we have successfully reduced contact of this type. Our Complaints Team have also completed work with the service area to assess whether complaints are categorised as justified / not justified and support the effectiveness of responses.
- 37 In addition, where we are able, if our crews are unable to collect a bin due to, for example, access issues, we will send text messages to the affected households informing them of the situation and what we will do to resolve it.
- 38 In line with previous reports, the majority of the correspondence complaints 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).
- 39 This rise has followed increased activity to reduce contamination. In addition to campaigns, door-knocks and sessions with community groups, recycling assistants continue to accompany bin crews on their rounds. Consequently, more contaminated bins continue to be identified. Of the 15,667 contamination notices issued during the 12 months ending 30 September 2019, 98% reached the correct recipient (an increase of two percentage points compared to the figure reported in quarter one). The disputed 2% continue to be mainly due to difficulties identifying the house to which the bin belongs, which is more noticeable in back streets. Mistakes are rectified as soon as we become aware.

40 Staff practice complaints mainly related to refuse and recycling crews not returning bins to bin collection points (89 complaints).

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

41 During the year, 179 complainants remained dissatisfied with their response (45 during quarter two) and requested that we consider escalating their complaint to the Customer Feedback Team for independent investigation.

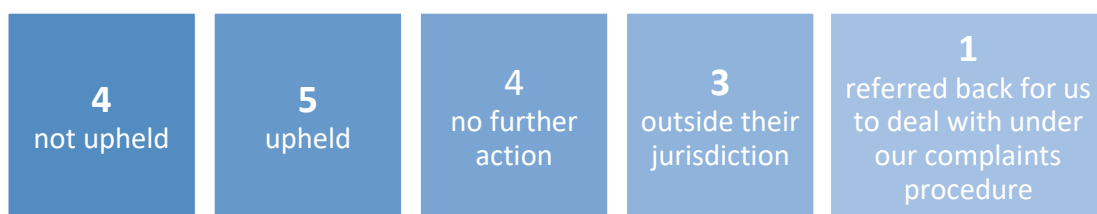


**all investigations aim be completed within 30 working days*

42 Details of complaints upheld by independent investigators during quarter two are included in Appendix 4.

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

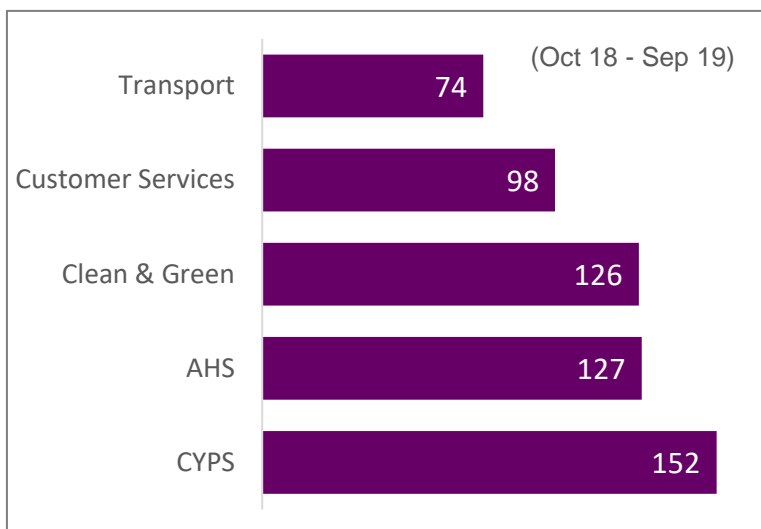
43 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2019, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 83 complaints (17 during quarter two). Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants, and in some instances, supplemented with contextual information from council officers.



44 Details of complaints upheld by the Ombudsman during quarter two are included in Appendix 5.

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

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



Customer (who is on assisted collection list) rang to thank the bin crew in their area for the fantastic job that they do. They always make sure the bin is returned to the correct place once emptied and make sure the gate is shut before they leave.

Customer complimented the street cleansing team for the amazing job they did cleaning up the litter etc. following the Miners Gala.

When they returned to the city centre on Sunday morning there was no sign that the event had taken place.

We recently moved to here after living in Gateshead for many years We have looked after grandchildren here and have always been impressed with services and facilities provided, but after moving we are even more impressed. There have been many things to compliment you on. Our grandchildren loved the free activities in Chester-le-Street yesterday (amazingly they were given a free packed lunch!). We couldn't believe we got a free bus pass, refuse collection is good and the flower arranging on green areas is very attractive. Just a few examples We would like to thank you for the excellent services in what are difficult times for any council. Keep up the good work!

Customer came to Crook CAP to add their carer to their bus pass and was very happy with the exceptional service and friendliness of the staff

I wanted to say congratulations on the wildflower grass verges. More please

Visited Clayport Library today. Gentleman who dealt with our query was friendly, efficient and a credit to the county.

Customer thanked staff at Thornley HWRC for all the help they have given each time they've been to the centre.

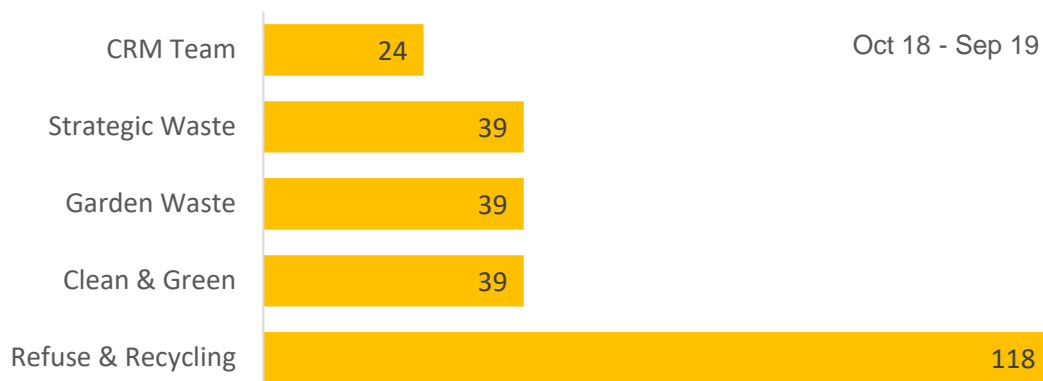
Customer rang to thank the crew who cut back the high hedge which backs on to their property. Customer advised that they have done a very good job and carried the job out quickly from the request being logged.

Customer thanked Care Connect staff who have been involved with their parent since the installation of equipment – particularly control staff and wardens. Service has been a massive support and they really appreciate it.

I had a small problem with a damaged bin and contacted your rubbish and recycling team to ask if they were able to help. I was really impressed with the help I got. From a very helpful and polite telephone conversation to a speedy, effective solution to my problem. Well Done.

Customer wanted to thank staff for the excellent job they have done tidying up the green area at the back of their property.

Appendix 2: Sample of suggestions received during quarter two, 2019/20



You said: Can you provide a two hour appointment slot or phone call when the pest control officer is on their way rather than AM/PM appointments?

We did: We are unable to provide a more specific time period as the AM / PM slots provide us with greater flexibility to plan routes so that we are reducing travelling times. If we changed this, we would not be able to fit in the same number of appointments each day, which would mean we could not deliver the service without increasing the charge that customers have to pay. We are, however, examining ways of reducing the length of time that customers have to wait around by sending a series of automated text messages on the day of the appointment to provide periodic updates on our estimated time of arrival.

You said: Suggestion that customers signing up to the garden waste scheme part way through the year should only pay 50% of the initial fee and not the full charge.

We did: The price is a fixed charge of £35 for the year (31 March to November) regardless of when you join the service in 2020. You will only receive the remaining collections up until the scheme end. This is due to the administration costs associated with processing the requirements to join the scheme.

You said: Can recycling bins be installed in Durham City centre.

We did: We previously trialled recycling litter bins in the city centre and Barnard Castle, however they were contaminated. Our ongoing Recycling Matters campaign aims to re-educate residents about what can/cannot be recycled and reduce contamination. We will look to reintroduce this facility in the future.

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

- Abandoned Shopping Trolleys
- Abandoned Vehicles
- Access Bus
- Allotments
- Animal Licence
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Archaeology day - Order tickets (not live yet - picked up when needed)
- Barriers
- Bin - New, replacement, repair
- Bins - Waste collections for businesses
- Bins - Request help with your bin
- Birth, death or marriage certificate
- Bollards
- Bonfires
- Book on Wheels
- Built Structures
- Bulky Waste, white goods collection
- Bus Stops and shelters
- Car Park - Council Managed
- Care Connect - Apply
- Care Connect - VAT exemption
- Children and Young People's Network
- Complaints
- Council tax account
- Council tax paperless billing
- Council Tax - Change of payment
- Customer Services Appointment
- Dead Animal Removal
- Dog bins or litter bins
- Dog Fouling
- Drainage and flooding
- Dropped kerbs and disabled ramp access
- Durham Institute of Sport
- Early Help Referral
- Flyposting
- Fly-tipping
- Free school travel - Apply
- Garden waste - Appeal
- Garden waste - Generic Enquiry
- Garden Waste Exchange your bin
- Garden waste - 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
- Join your Area Action Partnership
- Litter
- Manhole and utility covers
- Needles and drugs paraphernalia
- Noise Complaint
- Road Markings
- Road or Footpath
- Road or Footpath obstructions - non vehicle
- Road or footpath obstruction - vehicle
- Road or pavement - spillage
- Road signs
- Roadworks
- Rubbish in gardens and yards
- Salt bins
- Sandbags
- Seating benches
- Spilt rubbish
- Stray dogs
- Stray horses
- Street Lighting
- Street name plates
- Taxis - Report an issue with a driver
- Taxi Licencing - Vehicle
- Taxi Licencing - Driver
- Traffic lights and crossings
- Traffic safety and traffic calming schemes
- Tree or hedge pruning, removal
- Walls and fences
- Warm Homes
- Waste Permits
- Ways to Wellbeing

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

Complaint	Action to be taken
Complainant dissatisfied with our Deputy and Appointee Team.	Complaint partially upheld. We have apologised and changed our practice when carrying out property visits.
Complainant dissatisfied with the process followed regarding repair and emptying of their refuse bin.	Complaint partially upheld. We should have clarified whether the customer's comments constituted a request to escalate the complaint. We will undertake additional staff training and review information made available to Customer Services Agents.
Complainant dissatisfied with our decision to seek collection of their council tax arrears using enforcement agents.	Complaint partially upheld. Although we did not respond to the complainant's e-mail until a formal complaint was made due to a technical issue, we are satisfied that our formal demand process was followed and find no fault with the actions of the recovery team.
Complainant dissatisfied with the way we processed their claim for housing benefits and council tax reduction following a change in their circumstances. They are also unhappy with the decision to award extended payments and subsequent payments to their landlord.	Complaint partially upheld. We acknowledged the complainant did not receive the level of service we would usually provide and have apologised for any inconvenience this may have caused. We accept that extended payments should have been applied to their claim earlier and that we did not effectively manage expectations regarding the complainant's request to change the payee. However, appropriate action has now been taken by the service area.

Complaint	Action to be taken
<p>Complainant dissatisfied with our decision not to empty their contaminated bin and does not want to sign the pledge required for their recycling bin collections to resume.</p>	<p>Complaint partially upheld.</p> <p>Although we acknowledge the operative did not correctly sticker the bin, we are satisfied that the decision not to empty the bin until a pledge is signed is in accordance with internal policies and procedures.</p> <p>This complaint highlighted a requirement for additional staff training.</p>
<p>Complainant dissatisfied with Pest Control Services as no treatment provided at second visit. They also felt charges were excessive.</p>	<p>Complaint partially upheld</p> <p>Treatments should have been carried out on the second visit in line with our standard process of a minimum of three treatments once bed bugs have been identified.</p> <p>We have completed some regional research and found that, by comparison, we are competitively priced.</p>
<p>Complainant dissatisfied with third stage contamination.</p>	<p>Contamination record removed and property reverted back to stage two.</p>

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

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
<p>Complainant alleged that we mishandled a safeguarding allegation.</p> <p>Complaint partially upheld as we did not immediately tell the complainant about contact restrictions, but no other fault in our actions.</p>	<p>Apology was sufficient for the injustice caused.</p>
<p>Ombudsman found that the panel disregarded evidence the complainant provided in support of their case, raising doubt as to whether the appeal outcome could have been different.</p>	<p>We have agreed to implement Ombudsman's recommended remedy. A new appeal will be held within one month of the Ombudsman's decision.</p>
<p>Ombudsman found no fault in our decision not to take enforcement action, however we were at fault when we did not respond to the complainant's letters.</p>	<p>We have agreed to write to the complainant and apologise for our failure to respond to letters. We have also agreed to review our complaints procedure to ensure complaint letters are responded to within agreed timescales.</p>
<p>There was a delay in responding to a formal complaint.</p>	<p>We will apologise and make a £300 time and trouble payment.</p>
<p>Ombudsman found we were at fault for the way we conducted the planning and enforcement investigation into the reported breach, but not for the way we dealt with the complainant's request for traffic calming measures.</p>	<p>We have agreed to send a copy of the Ombudsman's recommendations to all officers in the Planning Enforcement Team, stressing the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep detailed records when investigating potential breaches of planning control • Scrutinise planning conditions when considering whether there has been a breach • Ensure planning controls are properly validated • Give applicants accurate advice about the type of application they should submit