

## Standards Committee

18 November 2011



## Performance Report for Quarter 2, 2011/12: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions

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### Report of Terry Collins- Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services

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#### Purpose of the Report

1. To present performance in relation to complaints, compliments and suggestions for quarter 2, 2011/12.
2. To highlight any learning outcomes resulting from the complaints, compliments and suggestions received.
3. To update Standards Committee of developments in the collection, monitoring and management of complaints.

#### Background

4. Durham County Council strives to provide high quality services. However, we realise that sometimes we get things wrong and people are not always happy with what we do. As part of the cycle of continuous improvement and to ensure we meet the needs and expectations of the residents of the County, we analyse data received through the complaints, compliments and suggestions system to determine if we can further improve processes and thereby service delivery.
5. There are 2 types of complaint used throughout this report,
  - **Statutory.** A complaint which arises from the duties placed on a local social services authority to provide assessments and care services under the provisions of relevant adult and children's social care legislation. The process for managing such complaints is prescribed in Regulations.
  - **Non-Statutory.** All other complaints
6. Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions are monitored by the corporate complaints team which is part of customer services and contained within the Neighbourhood Services service grouping. They can be defined as follows;
  - **Complaint.** An expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Council, its staff or contractors/agents providing services on behalf of the Council affecting an individual customer or group of customers.
  - **Compliment.** An expression of satisfaction with a service the Council provides. This could be satisfaction with an individual member of staff, team or particular service area
  - **Suggestion.** A remark made about a particular aspect of service which can be used to improve service delivery

7. Non-Statutory Complaints can be classified as Stage 1, Stage 2 or Stage 3.
  - **Stage 1:** complaint that can not be resolved at the first point of contact and so has been passed to Customer Services in order to 'champion' the complaint on behalf of the complainant.
  - **Stage 2:** complaint that can not be resolved at Stage 1 and so has been sent to the relevant director to investigate in conjunction with customer services
  - **Stage 3:** complaint that can not be resolved at Stage 2 and so has been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) which will carry out an independent assessment on behalf of the complainant.
8. This report contains information on all complaints received by the Authority and logged on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system or Social Services Information Database (SSID). All complaints received and reported relate to Durham County Council internally run services only. The overview section refers to the numbers of non-statutory complaints received across the Council. Details of the statutory complaints for Adults, Wellbeing & Health and Children & Young People's Services are provided in the section appropriate to that service grouping.
9. The corporate complaints team, and the Council as a whole, work to specified service standards, previously agreed by Cabinet for non-statutory complaints, and so have a number of targets to achieve, for example, acknowledging all complaints within 2 working days, and responding to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days and stage 2 complaints within 20 working days.
10. Performance updates are reported on a quarterly basis and this is the second routine report for 2011/12.

### **Data Quality**

11. Previous work on data quality of complaints, compliments and suggestions highlighted a number of issues in relation to recording mechanisms in CRM, e.g. service requests being categorised as complaints or complaints being recorded as compliments or suggestions. This could result in flawed data analysis and incorrect conclusions reached. Work is continuing to correct the situation through the corporate complaints group. Service groupings are carrying out data cleanse exercises to ensure the correct recording of complaints, compliments and suggestions within the CRM.

### **Progress of the Complaints Handling Review**

12. Work is continuing to further improve the 'complaints, compliments and suggestions' process and the outcomes for service users.
13. To ensure the corporate complaints unit remain impartial, to streamline the process and ensure more timely response to the customer, it has been proposed that service groupings respond directly to stage 1 complaints, rather than drafts being sent via the corporate complaints unit. NS's performance and improvement team is working with the corporate complaints unit to create a set of process notes which will outline responsibilities. Work is also being undertaken to ensure officers dealing with complaints have sufficient IT permissions to utilise CRM appropriately, to close down complaints, attach correspondence etc. Once the process notes are complete and have been agreed by, discussions will be held with service groupings in relation to implementation dates.

14. A corporate group, made up of officers from customer services and the corporate improvement team, has been established. During September, a survey was sent to 707 people who had submitted a non-statutory complaint. 204 responses were received and the results are currently being analysed. An update will be provided to the next standards committee. Other progress to date includes;
- A new policy has been drafted and will be presented to Corporate Management Team (CMT) at the end of December.
  - A number of options are being considered in relation to a new IT system; including the use of the property database system, an in-house system with no licence implications.
  - Training guides have been reviewed and revised
  - Throughout October, a pilot is being carried out in relation to complaints received regarding Direct Services, a service area within Neighbourhood Services. This is aimed at resolving more complaints at first point of contact by empowering staff and increasing the amount of contact the customer has with the service areas. This should have the effect of decreasing the number of complaints and an increasing the number of service requests received. As complaints are much more resource intensive and do not provide the best outcome for the customer, it is hoped that this will not only increase customer satisfaction but also reduce officer workload. This pilot is being monitored by the corporate improvement team and the results will be included in the standards committee report.

#### **Format of this report**

15. This report is divided into 2 main sections.

Section 1: Overview of Quarter 2, 2011/12

Section 2: Detailed Quarter 2, 2011/12 report from each service grouping

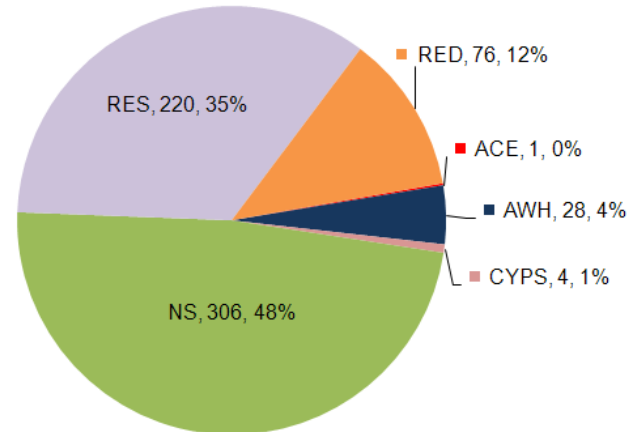
- Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)
- Adults, Wellbeing and Health (AWH)
- Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)
- Resources (RES)
- Neighbourhood Services (NS)
- Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

## Section 1: Overview of non-statutory complaints, Q2, 2011/12

16. Between 1 July 2011 and the 30 September 2011, 635 non-statutory complaints, 325 compliments and 119 suggestions were received by Durham County Council.

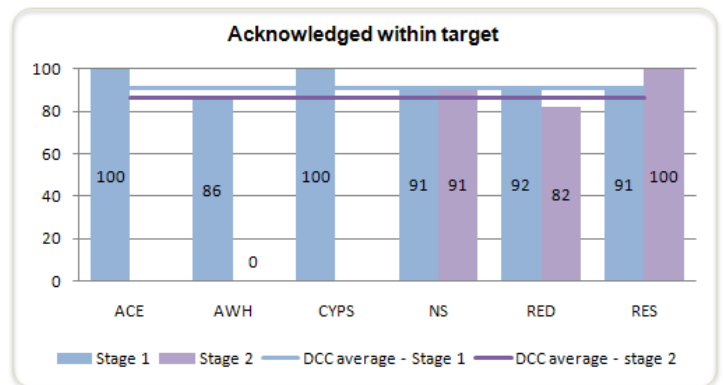
17. The chart on the right shows a breakdown of non-statutory complaints by service grouping.

18. The majority of complaints (48%) were received by Neighbourhood Services (NS). This is consistent with the trend over the 2010/11 financial year, however the proportion assigned to NS has decreased (it is usually around 58%). This is due to an overall increase in complaint numbers caused by an increase in the number received by the Resources service grouping.



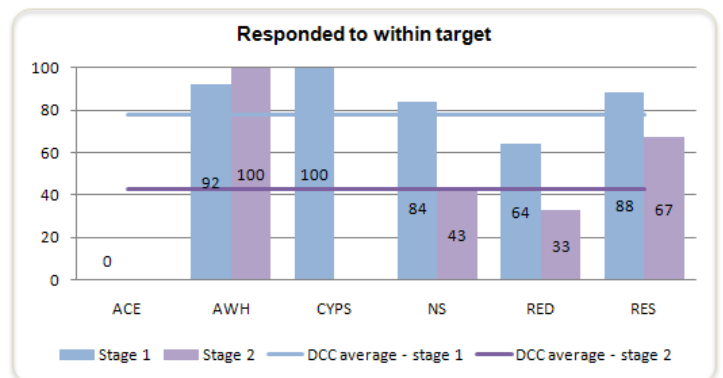
19. The increased volume of complaints within resources has arisen from delays being experienced by customers in relation to benefits applications

20. The corporate complaints unit, which is part of NS, has responsibility for acknowledging complaints within the target of 2 working days.



21. During quarter 2, 91% of stage 1 complaints and 86% of stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within target.

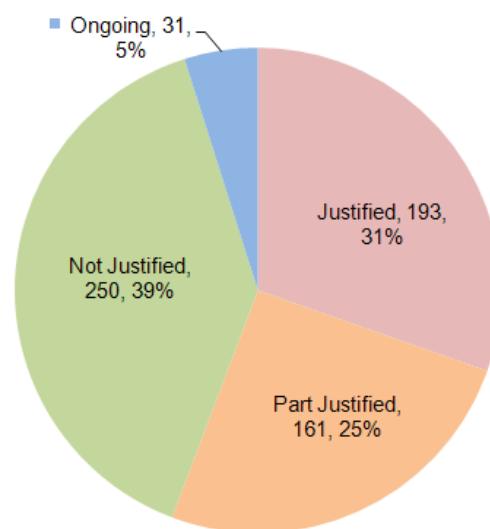
22. Although, complaints are acknowledged by the corporate complaints unit, variation does exist between service groupings.



23. In addition, there is a responded to target time of 10 working days for stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage 2 complaints. Service groupings are able to influence the response time.

24. On occasions when complaints are received and we have not been able to respond within the timescales holding letters are sent out explaining the reasons for the delays.

25. Further investigation of the 635 non-statutory complaints received during the quarter 2 shows that there were 250 occasions (39%) when the complaint was not upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.



26. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 354 (56%) justified complaints, 193 fully and 161 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning.

27. In addition to complaints, we also analyse compliments and suggestions to determine if we can further improve processes, and thereby service delivery.

28. During quarter 2, a total of 635 complaints, 192 compliments and 123 suggestions were recorded on the CRM.

29. During quarter 2, for every compliment received, 1.9 complaints were recorded.

30. For every suggestion received, 5.3 complaints were recorded

Service Grouping	Number			Ratio	
	Complaints	Compliments	Suggestions	Complaints: Compliments	Complaints: Suggestions
ACE	1	2	6	0.5	0.2
AWH	28	107	8	0.3	3.5
CYPS	4	38	2	0.1	2.0
NS	306	97	74	3.2	4.1
RED	76	41	15	1.8	5.1
RES	220	40	14	5.5	15.7
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>5.3</b>

31. More detail in relation to learning outcomes can be found in each service grouping's dedicated section of the report.

## Section 2: Detailed Q2, 2011/12 report from each service grouping

32. The following sections provide more detail of the types and numbers of statutory and non-statutory complaints received across the service groupings during quarter 2 of 2011/12:

### Assistant Chief Executive's (ACE)

33. The ACE service grouping consists of 3 service areas and between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011, 1 complaint, 2 compliments and 6 suggestions were received.

Abbreviation	Service Area
PCE	Partnerships and Community Engagement
PP	Planning and Performance
PC	Policy and Communications

34. During quarter 2, 1 complaint was received by Partnerships and Community Engagement.

#### Partnerships and Community Engagement

35. 1 complaint was received from an attendee at an AAP meeting in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny process. Following a detailed response at stage 1 and advice from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), the complainant informed the Council that they did not wish to progress the matter any further and the complaint was subsequently closed.
36. The complaint was found to be unjustified.

#### Compliments and Suggestions

37. During quarter 2, ACE received 2 compliments. Both of these were in Partnerships and Community Engagement and related to assistance given at AAP meetings.
38. During quarter 2, ACE received 6 suggestions to Policy and Communications. Of these, 1 offered historic photographs, 1 promoted a historic website, 3 highlighted errors / insufficient information on the DCC website, and 1 related to inadequate directions on a DCC leaflet
39. Following the above suggestions, the historic photographs were forwarded to the County Record Office and the service grouping is reviewing the other suggestions received.

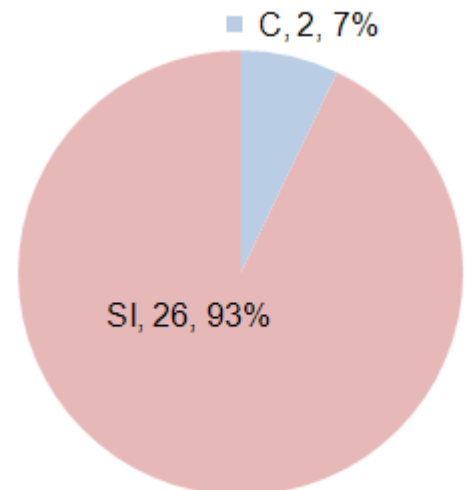
## Adults, Wellbeing and Health (AWH)

### Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Non-statutory Complaints

40. The AWH service grouping consists of 5 main service areas and between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011, 28 non-statutory complaints, 107 compliments and 8 suggestions were received.
41. During quarter 2, 92% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days.
42. The majority of complaints, 26 (92.9%), were received by the Social Inclusion Service Area. Of these, 15 (53.6%) were as a result of a single issue; a period of four weeks when the internet service at Peterlee Library was disrupted.
43. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 2, shows that there were 10 occasions (35.7%) where the complaint was not upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.
44. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, AWH is left with 17 complaints, 15 (53.6%) "fully" and 2 (7.1%) "partly justified".
45. Peterlee Library adjoins the now derelict East Durham College which has been repeatedly vandalised resulting in the disruption of the internet and telephone service which lead to the 15 justified complaints. Financial provision was made and the Library now has a separate cabling system; overnight security was put in place in a bid to stop the problem from happening again and the third party responsible for carrying out the repairs were pressed to complete them as a matter of urgency. This information, as well as apologies for the failure of service, was offered to all complainants in writing and this matter is now resolved.
46. In all complaints, information, explanations and apologies were provided to complainants which resolved the enquiries satisfactorily. However due to the variety of issues raised within the complaints there were no key trends identified as learning outcomes for the Service to apply.

Abbreviation	Service Area
AC	Adult Care
C	Commissioning
F	Finance
PP&P	Policy, Planning & Performance
SI	Social Inclusion



#### Non-statutory Compliments and Suggestions

47. During quarter 2, AWH received 107 compliments. These were comprised of 5 for Commissioning (all relating to the service provided by the Records Office) and 102 for Social Inclusion. Of these 102, 78 related to Welfare Rights, 22 for the Adult Learning Service and 2 regarding Libraries.

48. AWH received 8 comments/suggestions during the quarter, all within Social Inclusion. Of these, 1 was made to the Travellers Liaison Service suggesting that the rights of gypsies and travellers be restricted instead of providing services for them. The remaining 7 all related to various aspects of library services, examples of which are given below. No key trends were identified.
- An anonymous suggestion was made that the Record Office reconsider their prices as the user believed that some people would be unable to use this service as a result. The Record Office believe their pricing structure is essential to cover its running costs and pointed out that people can visit the office, look at documents, take notes and make tracings for free. Costs are only incurred for such things as copying as this must be carried out by staff members due to the fragile and rare source material.
  - An author who used Durham City Library to research his book wanted to donate a copy to the service. The Manager of the service contacted him personally to arrange for this to happen.
  - A partially sighted user suggested that standard books were replaced with e-books to free up space for more large-print and audio books as they found the selection limited. The Manager of the service wrote to the user to explain that the publishers only offered a limited selection. There are higher production costs for these books and usually only produced for popular titles that would sell in large numbers. The Manager also explained the large licensing fees that Durham County Council would have to pay to enable it to lend e-books.
  - Two comments were made by users regarding how essential they found the Mobile Library Service and hoped that it would continue amid the spending review. In both cases the Manager of the service wrote to the users to explain, that a strategy was being developed and that there would be a consultation before any decisions were made.

### Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

49. During the quarter, 39 complaints were received. This is a 34% increase on the previous quarter. Details of the quarterly performance are shown below.

Comparison of Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q2 10/11	Q3 10/11	Q4 10/11	Q1 11/12	Q2 11/12	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Adult Social Care	34	40	35	29	39	↑↑

50. There were 97% complaints acknowledged within 3 working days. One complaint, however, was not acknowledged for 16 days due to it being incorrectly forwarded to the Locality Office by the Finance Team, rather than to the Central Administrative Team as stated in the procedure. After a lengthy period when the complainant received no acknowledgement he made further enquiries about his complaint and the error came to light. To prevent reoccurrence, all relevant staff have been reminded of the standards within the procedure.
51. Of the 39 complaints, Complaints Resolution Plans (CRP) were completed in all cases. There were 30 complaints completed, 29 of which were within the timescales agreed within the CRP. In the case where the CRP response date was exceeded, the Service Area, Commissioning had been prompted to respond within timescale but had failed to do so. When this did not occur attempts were made to contact the complainant to



discuss the delay but no response was received and an extension could not therefore be agreed. An apology was issued and the complainant has now been provided a response. The remaining 9 cases were not concluded within the quarter but have not breached their agreed completion timescales.

52. As with the last quarter, Older People Services received the most complaints with 19, a 36% increase. The number of complaints against the functions of the Financial Services Team has also increased to 8, from the 2 received last quarter. These complaints were largely concerned with the newly-introduced charges for day care and were not upheld as the financial charges had been accurately assessed.

Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers)	5 (12.8%)	8 (27.6%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons/ Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	19 (48.7%)	14 (48.3%)
Finance	8 (20.5%)	2 (6.9%)
County Durham Care and Support	3 (7.7%)	2 (6.9%)
Commissioning	3 (7.7%)	3 (10.3%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	39 (100%)	29 (100%)

53. Of the 30 complaints completed in the quarter 19 were not upheld. This is 137.5% rise on the 8 complaints not upheld in the previous quarter. Of the remaining 11 complaints, 1 was partially upheld and 10 were upheld. The following table details the breakdown of findings per Service Area.

Outcome of complaints completed in the quarter					
Service Area	Number				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
County Durham Care and Support	2	0	1	0	3
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers)	3	1	1	0	5
Social Work Teams (Older Persons/Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	5	0	5	9	19
Commissioning	1	0	2	0	3
Finance	7	0	1	0	8
Policy, Planning & Performance	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	19	1	10	9	39

54. Quality of Service – Personal Finance Issues was the highest category of complaint with 14 recorded. These related to the newly-implemented charging policies for day care services or difficulties in accessing Direct Payments. The next highest category of complaint related to Conduct or Attitude Of Staff. Where complainants had issues about charging policies there was frequently a linked element of the complaint about the conduct of staff. Investigations showed, however, that it was the fact that staff were communicating information that the client was unhappy with rather than their conduct.

Complaints by Classification	
Classification	Number
Quality of Service – Personal Financial Issues	14
Conduct or Attitude Of Staff	11
Lack of Service - Other	5
Application of Service Guidance/Procedures	3
Lack of Service – Contact/Visits/Service	2
Lack of Service - Restricted Choices Of Current Services	2
Provision of Service - Assessment	2
Provision of Service - Equipment	2
Quality of Service – Work Of Other Agencies	2
Special Case – Protection Investigations	2
Lack of Service - Communications/Information	1
Quality of Service - Personal Care	1
Quality of Service - Transport	1
Quality of Service – Rules/Sanctions	1

*NB. A complaint may have more than one classification recorded against it*

#### **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

55. Durham County Council (DCC) received 1 new referral from the LGO. This was a case that the LGO had declined to investigate in January 2011 but has now been re-opened for consideration into a possible investigation. A client was assessed as 100% Continuing Health Care eligible and the responsibility for the care package lay with NHS County Durham and Darlington. The Ombudsman was provided with further evidence that the Trust had made various attempts to implement the care package but there has been no engagement from the client's daughter.
56. The LGO completed four complaint reviews and provided decisions to the Council.
- In one case the Ombudsman declined to investigate the complaint on the grounds of delay of 3 years.
  - In the second case the Ombudsman discontinued the investigation as there was insufficient evidence of maladministration. The client wanted a walk-in shower installed but did not meet the criteria for such an adaptation.
  - In the third case the Ombudsman determined that there were no grounds to pursue the complaint further. The complaint related to a Declaration of Trust that the client had created and whether the capital invested in the client's share of the property should have been disregarded for the purposes of financial assessment for permanent residential care.

- In the fourth case the Ombudsman determined that the investigation be discontinued. The Council had agreed to the proposal that a payment be made for reimbursement in legal fees that the complainant had legitimately expended. A further payment would also be paid to the complainant to reflect the frustration and distress she had experienced. These payments were approved under delegated powers by the Chair of Standards Committee and the Head of Corporate and Legal Services. In addition the Ombudsman has supported the Council's proposal that independent mediation be arranged in this case and has encouraged the complainant to participate.

## Compliments

57. There were 155 compliments received in the quarter compared to 86 in the previous quarter (see table below). The ratio of compliments to complaints is 4:1, compared to 3:1 in the previous quarter.

Compliments Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
County Durham Care and Support	132 (85%)	57 (67%)
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers	2 (1%)	2 (2%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	21 (14%)	24 (28%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Finance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Commissioning	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>155</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>86</b> <b>(100%)</b>

58. No suggestions relating to statutory functions were received during the quarter.

### Actions as a result of statutory representations

59. The following recommended operational actions have been noted as a result of statutory complaints, compliments or suggestions received during the quarter:
- When the Safeguarding Adults Inter-Agency Procedure is next reviewed communication between referrers, advocates, families and service users is to be given greater emphasis.
  - Staff are to be reminded of the importance of detailed recording of issues, timescales and actions.
  - All staff are to be reminded that the opinions of service users and their family/carers must be given suitable weight in the assessment and observation process. This will also be discussed in the Staff sessions on Professional Practice.

## Children and Young People's Services

### Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Non-statutory Complaints

60. Since 1 April 2011 CYPS has been reduced from 6 to 5 service main service areas.

Abbreviation	Service Area
AS	Achievement Services
CWS	County Wide Services
EI&PS	Early Intervention and Partnership Services
F	Finance Services
SaSS	Safeguarding and Specialist Services

61. Between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011, 4 non-statutory complaints, 38 compliments and 2 suggestions/comments were received.
62. During quarter 2, all 4 non-statutory complaints were resolved locally and informally to the complainants' satisfaction. This meant they did not need to be taken to Stage 1 of the Council's corporate complaints procedure. All 4 (100%) were acknowledged within 2 working days.
63. During quarter 2, 100% of complaints were responded to *informally* within 10 working days.
64. 50% of complaints were received by County Wide Services, and 50% by Achievement Services.
65. Two complaints were about the non-issue of school bus passes, one was about charges for music lessons, and one was about issues surrounding the building of Consett Academy.
66. None of the 4 non-statutory complaints received during quarter 2 were upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.
67. No key trends or learning outcomes have been identified from the non-statutory complaints received during quarter 2.

#### Non-statutory Compliments and Suggestions

68. During quarter 2, CYPS received 38 compliments which were not about social care services. These included 21 for County Wide Services, 15 for Achievement Services and 1 each for Early Intervention and Partnership Service and Finance Services.
69. 2 suggestions were submitted regarding non-social care issues. The suggestions were both about Sure Start activity sessions, and both have been implemented.

## Actions as a result of non-statutory representations

70. In all cases information and explanations were provided to complainants which resolved the enquiries satisfactorily. There were no key trends or learning outcomes.

## Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

### Statutory complaints

71. During quarter 2, 10 statutory complaints were received by the CYPS service grouping which were actioned at Stage 1. In addition, a further 21 statutory complaints were resolved locally and informally to the complainants' satisfaction. Details of the quarterly performance of Stage 1 complaints is shown below:

Comparison of Statutory Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q1 10/11	Q2 10/11	Q3 10/11	Q4 10/11	Q1 11/12	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Safeguarding and Specialist Services	9	3	4	7	10	↑↑

72. All 10 complaints were acknowledged within two working days maintaining performance at 100%.
73. Of the 10 Stage 1 complaints received in the quarter, 3 investigations were completed within the 20 working day timescale for response. The remaining cases were not breached the response timescale.
74. Safeguarding Children (Seaham and Peterlee teams) received the most complaints this quarter:

Statutory Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Family Pathfinder (The Dales)	-	1 (14%)
Fostering and Adoption	-	-
Initial Response Team	2 (20%)	-
Looked After Children (Aycliffe)	-	1 (14%)
Safeguarding Children (Aycliffe)	1 (10%)	-
Safeguarding Children (Chester-le-Street)	1 (10%)	-
Safeguarding Children (Crook)	1 (10%)	1 (14%)
Safeguarding Children (Peterlee)	2 (20%)	1 (14%)
Safeguarding Children (Seaham)	2 (20%)	2 (28%)
Safeguarding Children (Spennymoor)	-	1 (14%)
Safeguarding Children (Stanley 2)	1 (10%)	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10 (100%)</b>	<b>7 (100%)</b>

75. Of the 3 Stage 1 complaints resolved in the quarter, 1 was not upheld, 1 was partially upheld and 1 was upheld. The following table details the breakdown of findings per team:

Outcome of Statutory Complaints completed in the quarter					
Service Area	Number				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
Initial Response Team	1		1		2
Safeguarding Children - Aycliffe				1	1
Safeguarding Children – Chester-le-Street		1			1
Safeguarding Children - Crook				1	1
Safeguarding Children - Peterlee				2	2
Safeguarding Children - Seaham				2	2
Safeguarding Children – Stanley 2				1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>

76. The complaints can be classified as shown in the table below. ‘Poor Service and Conduct or Attitude of Staff’ was the highest category of complaint. In all 3 cases, the complainant was unhappy with the actions of their children’s Social Worker, and this in turn led to them feeling that the Social Worker had given a poor level of service. All 3 of these complaints are still in the process of being resolved.

Statutory Complaints by Classification	
Classification	Number
Poor service	2
Conduct or attitude of staff	0
Decision regarding service	2
Poor service and conduct or attitude of staff	3
Poor service and decision regarding service	2
Poor service and conduct / attitude of staff and decision regarding service	1

77. In addition, 2 statutory complaints were taken to Stage 2 in quarter 2, to be investigated by independent Investigating Officers. Stage 2 statutory complaints have a 25 – 65 working day timescale for response.

### Compliments

78. During quarter 2, CYPS received 36 compliments about social care services. These compliments were all about Safeguarding and Specialist Services (SaSS), which is the only service within CYPS which provides social care services.
79. SaSS received 24 compliments in the previous quarter (see table below). The ratio of compliments to formal complaints is 2.75:1, compared to 3.43:1 in the previous quarter.

Compliments Received by Service Area		
Service Area within SaSS	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Children's Homes	2 (5.6%)	12 (50% of total for Q1)
Children Looked After - Aycliffe	1 (2.8%)	1 (4.4% of total for Q1)
Community Support Team	13 (36.0%)	0
Disabled Children and Families Team	3 (9.1%)	3 (12.5% of total for Q1)
Emergency Duty Team	1 (2.8%)	0
Pathfinder service	3 (9.1%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Durham	9 (25.0%)	0
4Real Team	4 (11.0%)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	

## Suggestions

80. One suggestion was received during the quarter regarding social care services. A Foster Carer suggested that a full list of social care offices in Durham, with telephone numbers, should be provided to Foster Carers. A response was given that the suggestion was welcomed and will be implemented as soon as possible.

## Actions as a result of statutory representations

81. The following actions have occurred as a result of statutory complaints received this quarter:
- 3 complaints have resulted in a different Social Worker being allocated to the case in the hope that the families will engage more positively with the service
  - In one complaint, support to a child was reviewed, and service changed from Community Support to Disabled Children and Families Team
  - One complaint resulted in a young person's placement being extended for a further year
  - One complaint resulted in regular contact sessions being arranged between a young person and extended family members
82. A number of service improvements identified from statutory complaints received during the quarter have been recommended to SaSS.

## Neighbourhood Services

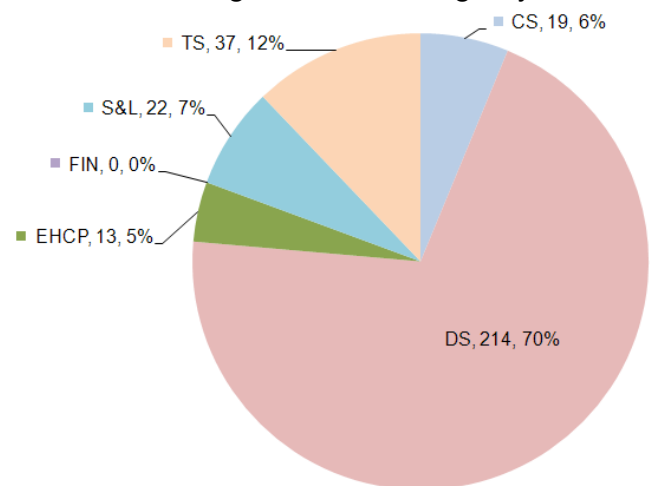
83. The NS service grouping consists of 5 main service areas and between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011, 306 complaints, 97 compliments and 74 suggestions were received.

Abbreviation	Service Area
CS	Customer Services
DS	Direct Services
EHCP	Environmental Health & Consumer Protection
S&L	Sport and Leisure
TS	Technical Services

84. 84% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within the target of 10 working days. 43% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within the target of 20 working days

85. The majority of complaints (70%) were received by Direct Services.

86. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 2 shows that there were 123 occasions (40%) where the complaint was not upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures



	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	80	60	123	0	42	305
% of total received	46%		40%	-	14%	-

87. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, NS is left with 140 (46%) justified complaints, 80 fully and 60 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning
88. The following section provides further analysis of complaints, by service area, and the associated learning outcomes:

### Customer Services (CS)



89. During quarter 2, 19 complaints were received in relation to CS

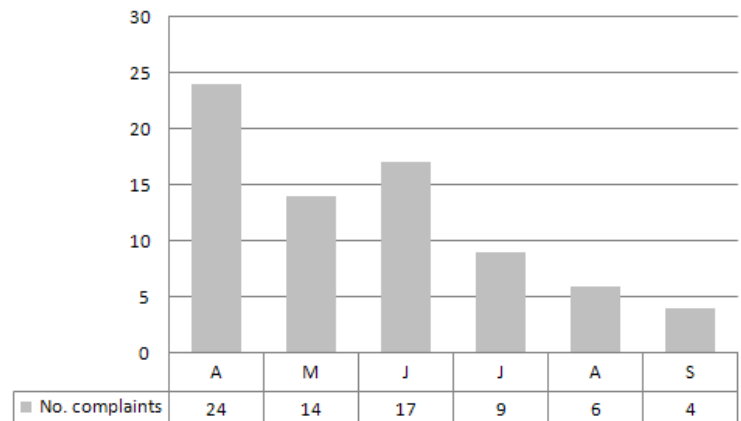
	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	7	5	4	0	3	19
% of total received	63%		21%	-	16%	-

90. Since 1 April 2011 CS has received 74 complaints.

91. The graph to the right shows that since April 2011, there has been a steady decrease in the numbers of complaints received.

92. Further analysis (below) shows that the almost 40% of complaints received since April relate to call waiting times. However, comparison of quarter 1 and quarter 2 data shows that an 83% reduction in this type of complaint was seen during quarter 2. This reduction is most likely due to the processes put in place since quarter 1. Initiatives include the use of skills based routing, call diversion from offices with high call volume to those with a lower call volume and diverting staff from face to face duties to telephone answering duties.

**CS: complaints per month 2011/12**



COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA						TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S		
Condition of local area: detritus	1						1	1.4%
Customer Service: call waiting time	9	6	9	2		3	29	39.2%
Customer Service: customer cut off	1		2	1	1		5	6.8%
Customer Service: long queuing time	1	1					2	2.7%
Customer Service: staff attitude	5						5	6.8%
Incorrect / insufficient information given	1	1	1			1	4	5.4%
Lack of action		1					1	1.4%
No communication / missed appointments	2	1	4				7	9.5%
Other	1	1	1	4	3		10	13.5%
Other: staff attitude	1	2					3	4.1%
Refuse: charges	1						1	1.4%
Refuse: missed collection				1			1	1.4%
Refuse: special collections	1				1		2	2.7%
Refuse: staff attitude		1		1			2	2.7%
Website					1		1	1.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>74</b>	

93. Decreases in numbers of complaints can also be seen in queuing times and communication issues.

94. Work is continuing to implement a single telephony network across the Council and 2 important projects are underway
- The project to virtualise and harmonise customer services' contact centres is due for completion 31 March 2012. Improved call handling should result.
  - The 'Revenues and Benefits' project is due for completion 31 December 2011. This will harmonise front line service delivery.

### Direct Services (DS)

95. During quarter 2, 214 complaints were received in relation to DS.

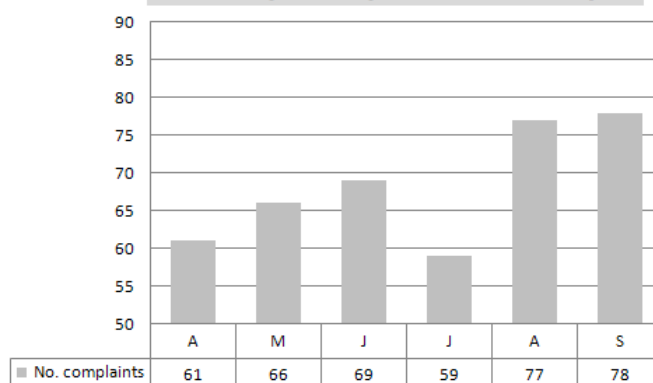
	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	60	44	84	0	26	214
% of total received	49%		39%	-	12%	-

96. Since 1 April, DS has received 410 complaints. Of these 214 (52%) were received during quarter 2.

97. The graph to the right shows that since April 2011, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of complaints received (except during July)

98. Analysis (below) shows that almost one third of complaints received since April related to missed collections. Further analysis shows that the breakdown of complaints relating to missed bins by operational area to be as follows;

**DS: complaints per month 2011/12**



Operational Area	% of total complaints received: missed bins
North	46%
South	7%
East	47%

99. 93% of complaints received in relation to missed bins related to either the north or east operational areas.
100. Fewer complaints are received in relation to the south operational area. This can be attributed to the use of the Bartec System which is installed in refuse wagons in the South (former Sedgefield Area). This system enables crews to report non-presentations, i.e. the bin has not been left for collection. Customer Services has this information to hand when residents telephone to report missed collections. They are then able to make an informed decision as to whether it is a legitimate complaint or

whether the customer did not present their bin in time. DS is looking to introduce this system across the entire authority area.

101. The following table highlights the number of complaints received year to date by category.

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA						TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S		
Condition of local area: detritus	1					1	2	0.5%
Condition of local area: fly-tipping		1		1	2		4	1.0%
Condition of local area: grass cutting	1	2	3	6	2	4	18	4.7%
Condition of local area: litter			1				1	0.3%
Condition of local area: overhanging hedges	1	1		3	1	2	8	2.1%
Condition of local area: parks / open space	1				1	1	3	0.8%
Condition of local area: weeds		1	2	1	2	1	7	1.8%
Customer Service: call waiting time	2	1					3	0.8%
DCC fleet: drivers on mobile	1			1		1	3	0.8%
DCC fleet: driving issues	2		1				3	0.8%
DCC fleet: inappropriate parking	1		1				2	0.5%
DCC fleet: staff attitude	1						1	0.3%
Enforcement				2		2	4	1.0%
Housing Repairs			2			1	3	0.8%
Incorrect / insufficient information given	3	1	1				5	1.3%
Lack of action	7	1			4		12	3.1%
No communication / missed appointments	1	3	3	2	1	0	10	2.6%
Other	1		2	6	4	5	18	4.7%
Other charges	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.3%
Other: staff attitude			2	1	2	2	7	1.8%
Other: damage caused by council	3	5	1	3	1	4	17	4.4%
Other: staff making a mess	2			1			3	0.8%
Outdoor Leisure (excl. countryside)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.3%
Pest Control: charges			3		1	1	5	1.3%
Refuse: business waste	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.3%
Refuse: charges	6	4	8	4	8	5	35	9.0%
Refuse: missed collection	11	20	26	19	24	25	125	32.3%
Refuse: non-delivery of bin / container	4	12	5	1	7	6	35	9.0%
Refuse: special collections	0	0	0	0	3	2	5	1.3%
Refuse: staff attitude	4	4	2		2	4	16	4.1%
Refuse: staff making a mess	4	0	0	0	4	5	13	3.4%
Refuse: staff not returning bins / containers	1	4	2	3	2	3	15	3.9%
response to ASB	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.3%
TOTAL	58	61	65	56	71	76	387	100%
comment	1	1	2	1	2	1	8	-
Not NS					1		1	-
service request	2	4	2	2	3	1	14	-

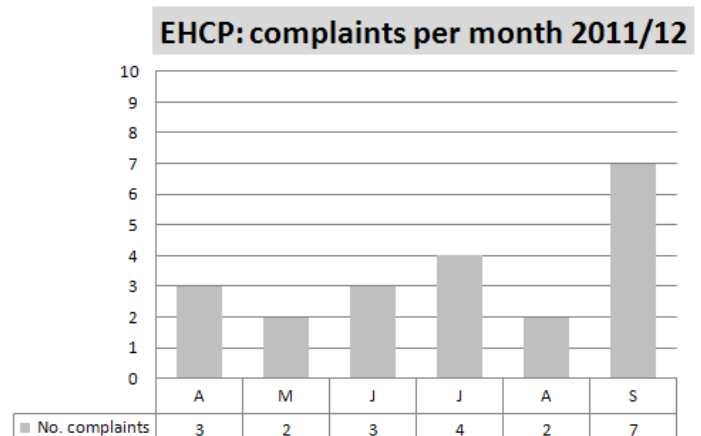
102. It can clearly be seen that the majority of complaints (245 equating to 63%) relate to our refuse collection service. This is unsurprising as waste collection is a visible front line service that is provided to every resident in the authority area. Collecting from over 214,000 properties, since 1 April, crews have made more than 8 million collections of household waste.
103. Throughout October, a pilot is being carried out in relation to complaints received regarding Direct Services. This is aimed at resolving more complaints at first point of contact by empowering staff and increasing the amount of contact the customer has with the service areas. This should have the effect of decreasing the number of complaints and an increasing the number of service requests received. As complaints are much more resource intensive and do not provide the best outcome for the customer, it is hoped that this will not only increase customer satisfaction but also reduce officer workload. This pilot is being monitored by the corporate improvement team and the results will be included in the standards committee report.
104. Complaints are discussed at DS's management meetings, not only to ensure they are being dealt with in a timely and effective manner, but to identify any trends and put appropriate action in place, e.g. we are reviewing the delivery of wheeled bins in the former Durham City area and anticipate discussions will ensue shortly.
105. The number of complaints received as a consequence of introducing a £20 charge to replace missing or stolen bins is continuing to be monitored. There has been little change since quarter 1.
106. As mentioned previously, NS has recently changed the reporting mechanism for complaints and has undertaken detailed analysis of all complaints received since 1 April. Consequently, a number of complaints were highlighted as meriting further investigation to determine if they are truly a complaint or have been incorrectly categorised. This project should be complete in time for quarter 3 reporting. A small number (23 since April and 11 during quarter 2) have been highlighted as possible errors across DS. Small numbers have also been highlighted in other service areas.

### Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (EHCP)

107. During quarter 2, 13 complaints were received in relation to EHCP.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	0	5	0	7	13
% of total received	8%		38%	-	54%	-

108. Since 1 April, EHCP has received 21 complaints. Of these 13 (60%) were received during quarter 2.
109. Although the graph to the right indicates an increase in the number of complaints received during September, due to the small number of complaints received, it is not possible to state if this is a significant increase. However, the numbers received will continue to be monitored.



110. The following table highlights the number of complaints received year to date by category.

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA						TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S		
Highway: issues with						1	1	5.6%
Lack of action	1					1	2	11.1%
No communication / missed appointments	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5.6%
Other			1	2	2	1	6	33.3%
Other charges	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	11.1%
Other: staff attitude	1	1	1	1	0	2	6	33.3%
TOTAL	3	1	2	4	2	6	18	100%
service request		1	1			1	3	-

111. The number of complaints received by EHCP remains relatively low. The complaints tend to be specific and as such, learning outcomes are difficult to identify. However, the service continues to monitor all complaints in order to identify any emerging trends. The distinction between a genuine complaint and a service request still appears to be an issue but EHCP are endeavouring to resolve at an earlier stage.

**Finance (FIN)**

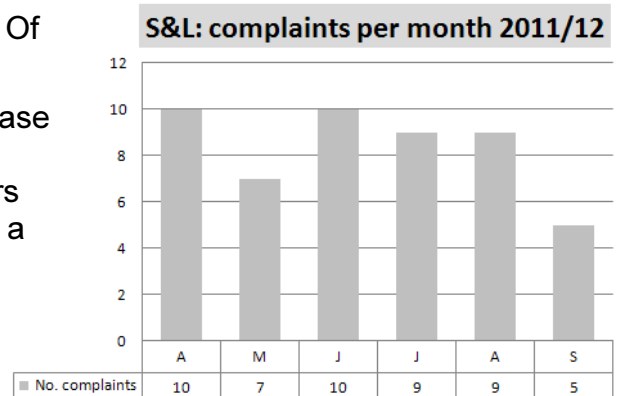
- 112. During quarter 2, no complaints were received in relation to FIN.
- 113. Since 1 April 4 complaints have been received, 2 in April and 2 in June.

**Sport and Leisure Services (S&L)**

114. During quarter 2, 23 complaints were received in relation to S&L.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	4	4	12	0	3	23
% of total received	35%		52%	-	13%	-

- 115. Since 1 April, S&L has received 50 complaints. Of these 23 (46%) were received during quarter 2.
- 116. The graph to the right appears to show a decrease in the number of complaints received during September. However, due to the small numbers involved, it is not possible to determine if this is a significant decrease. However, the numbers received will continue to be monitored.



117. The following table shows the number of complaints received year to date by category

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA						TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S		
Condition of local area: litter			1				1	2.1%
Condition of local area: parks / open space	3	2					5	10.6%
Customer Service: staff attitude		1					1	2.1%
Indoor Leisure: accidents		1					1	2.1%
Indoor Leisure: broken equipment	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2.1%
Indoor Leisure: cancellation of classes			1				1	2.1%
Indoor Leisure: charges (excl. gym member	1			1	1		3	6.4%
Indoor Leisure: membership fees	2	1	1	2	1		7	14.9%
Indoor Leisure: other	1			2	3	3	9	19.1%
Indoor Leisure: staff attitude	1		1	1			3	6.4%
Indoor Leisure: under 8s policy			1				1	2.1%
No communication / missed appointments		1	1	2			4	8.5%
Other	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	6.4%
Other: staff attitude			1				1	2.1%
Outdoor Leisure (excl. countryside)	1	0	0	1	1	1	4	8.5%
Website			1		1		2	4.3%
TOTAL	10	7	10	9	7	4	47	100%
comment					2		2	-
Not NS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
service request						1	1	-

118. More than half of all complaints received by S&L (55%) relate to our indoor leisure facilities. This is unsurprising as this is a front-facing service area that many residents come into contact with. However, it should be noted that the complaints included in this report are complaints logged on the central CRM system. The majority of complaints received by our indoor leisure facilities are resolved informally by the centre manager. Consequently, this report does not contain every complaint received. Work is being undertaken to roll out the use of the CRM to all leisure facilities; this will allow us to closely monitor all complaints and enable trends to be identified.

119. In response to complaints received during quarter 2, the following actions have been implemented;

- Centre managers are ensuring all programme changes are accurately reflected on our website
- Remedial works have begun at Chester-le-Street's squash courts and discussions have been held with staff in relation to cleanliness
- Discussions have been held with staff at Chester-le-Street in relation to the behaviour of children within the centre.
- The manager of the Riverside Sports complex has written to DCC's parking services manager requesting the introduction of 10 minutes free parking to aid customer drop off and collection.
- Comments in relation to armed forces personnel using our facilities free of charge will be included in the pricing review. In addition, S&L is working with the Armed Forces in relation to corporate gym membership.
- Staff have been asked to ensure all members at point of cancellation fully understand our fair cancellation policy
- The process in relation to swimming lesson refunds has been reiterated to all staff.

### Outdoor Leisure

- 120. 3 complaints received during quarter 2 have been forwarded to Direct Services for response.
- 121. The charging policy for allotments is being reviewed and Finance is investigating the feasibility of allowing telephone payments.

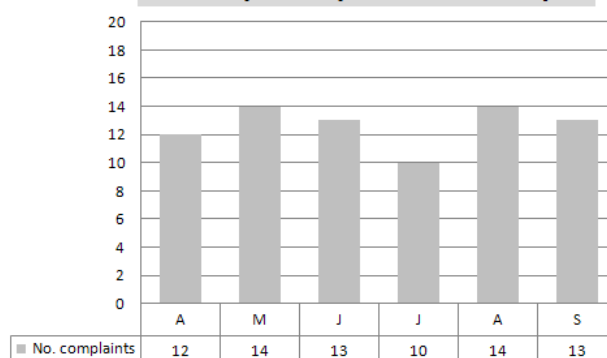
### **Technical Services (TS)**

- 122. During quarter 2, 37 complaints were received in relation to TS.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	8	7	18	0	4	37
% of total received	41%		49%	-	11%	-

- 123. Since 1 April, TS has received 76 complaints. Of these 37 (49%) were received during quarter 2.
- 124. The number of complaints received by TS has remained consistent since 1 April. However, as the year progresses, and the weather deteriorates and street lights burn for longer hours due to dark nights, it is expected that the number of complaints in relation to winter maintenance and street lighting will increase. These areas will be monitored to ensure the number of complaints remain manageable.

**TS: complaints per month 2011/12**



- 125. The following table highlights the number of complaints received year to date by category

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA						TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S		
Customer Service: customer cut off					1		1	1.4%
DCC fleet: staff attitude		1					1	1.4%
Highway: issues with	5	9	4		2	2	22	31.4%
Highway Maintenance: damage	1		2	2			5	7.1%
Highway Maintenance: other				2	1	1	4	5.7%
Lack of action	1			2	4	1	8	11.4%
No communication / missed appointments	0	0	3	1	1	2	7	10.0%
Other	1	1		1	1	2	6	8.6%
Other charges	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1.4%
Other: staff attitude			1				1	1.4%
Other: damage caused by council	0	0	0	1	1	2	4	5.7%
Other: staff making a mess				1			1	1.4%
Parking	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2.9%
Street Lights	1	1	1		2	2	7	10.0%
TOTAL	10	12	11	10	14	13	70	100%
comment							0	-
Not NS	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	-
service request		2	2				4	-

126. During quarter 2, the number of complaints received was evenly split between highway operations and strategic highways.
127. Examples of complaints received by strategic highways during quarter 2 are;
- Surface dressing (5): lack of communication or chippings left on road
  - Road closures (2): lack of consultation
  - Speed Humps (2): too high or in the wrong place
  - Drainage problems (2)
  - Encroachment (1):
  - Lack of school crossing patrol (1)
  - Lack of funding for scheme (1)
128. Examples of complaints received by highway operations during quarter 2 are;
- Flooding (6): blocked drains / gullies
  - Street lighting outages (3): response times
  - Communication (3)
  - Damage to property (1)
  - Traffic signals (1)
  - Potholes (1)
  - Condition of footway (1)
129. Strategic Highways include complaints for discussion at team meetings to ensure early, appropriate response.
130. As part of the MTFP efficiencies, both gully cleansing frequency and response time to street lighting outages have been reduced. Due to these efficiencies and other budget pressures, there is the possibility that an increased number of complaints will be received in the future. The impact of any change in service provision is being monitored and where appropriate action will be taken.



## Compliments and Suggestions

131. Within NS the focus has been ensuring complaints are correctly recorded and actioned. Consequently, compliments and suggestions have not received the recognition they deserve. However, as processes improve, more emphasis will be placed on compliments and suggestions.

132. During quarter 2, NS received 97 compliments and 74 suggestions.

### Compliments

133. Although staff respond to compliments with thanks, they tend not to record them on the central CRM system. Consequently, there are many compliments that are not included in reports such as this. It is hoped that as the process for reporting compliments improves, the number recorded on the CRM will increase and staff can be given the recognition they deserve.

134. The breakdown of compliments is shown on the right

135. A large proportion of compliments relate to staff in recognition of their support and help in resolving the customer's concerns and issues. On each of these occasions, the individual officer is notified of the compliment and thanked by their line manager. Many of these relate to the professionalism, politeness and general helpfulness of staff.

136. Other compliments relate to service provision, examples include

- Standard of work, e.g. installation of a path and gate at an allotment
- Speed of work, e.g. removal of fly-tipping, clearing up untidy areas
- Extra work, e.g. removing additional waste

137. Compliments are now handled in the same manner as complaints, i.e. routed via the CRM to an appropriate officer, whereas previously they were sent to Head of Service PAs.

138. Display boards continue to be set up at key locations throughout the County. Thank you posters will be displayed on these boards and any compliments received will be highlighted.

### Suggestions

140. The breakdown of suggestions received is shown on the right

141. Examples of suggestions received during quarter 2 include

- Changing the format of the cemeteries policy consultation to make it easier for respondents to complete / understand.
- Extending the recycling scheme to include food waste and to collect recycling weekly and residual waste fortnightly.

Compliments		
Service Area	Number	% of total
CS	24	25%
DS	52	54%
EHCP	2	2%
S&L	2	2%
TS	17	17%

Suggestions		
Service Area	Number	% of total
CS	9	12
DS	41	55
EHCP	4	5
S&L	7	9
TS	13	18

- Implementing a bin cleaning service
- Installing 'post boxes' in access points to reduce waiting times
- Introducing a 'ring back' service for those worried about the cost of phone calls
- Reducing tree height at Wharton Park so children can see the trains passing by.
- Amending the traffic lights at the A19 flyover at Peterlee so that they are only in use during busy periods.
- Replacing metal drain /manhole covers with plastic ones

142. All suggestions have been forwarded to the relevant team for consideration.

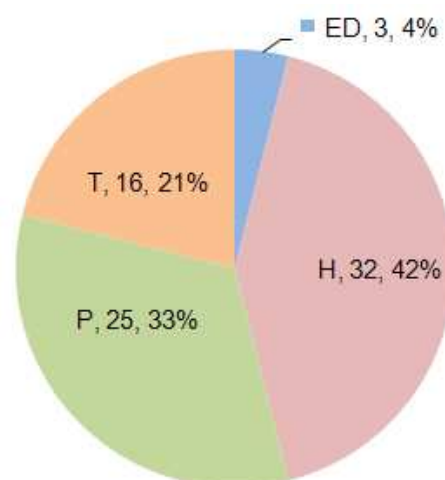
143. Work is continuing to re-route suggestions in the same manner as complaints and compliments. However, the routing is more complex so there is a delay in progressing this. Once this has been implemented, teams will receive these suggestions directly and will be able to action them in a more timely manner.

## Regeneration and Economic Development

144. The RED service grouping consists of 5 services of which four provide front-facing services and are thus liable to receive feedback from service users. Between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011, 76 complaints, and 56 compliments / suggestions were received.

Abbreviation	Service Area
ED	Economic Development
H	Housing
P	Planning and Assets
T	Transport

145. The majority of complaints received for RED are by the Planning and Housing services, these services have by far the most contact with residents and despite having large customer bases, the total complaints are relatively low in comparison to other services in the Council



146. The table below shows that the number of complaints has actually fallen overall since the last quarter for RED but has actually risen in the Planning Service.

Service Area	2010/11	2011/12				Total
	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Economic Development	2	2	0			2
Housing	104	32	28			60
Planning	145	32	37			69
Transport	46	18	11			29
<b>RED Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>76</b>			<b>160</b>

### Economic Development (ED)

147. During quarter two, no complaints were received by the Economic Development service
148. As the numbers of complaints received by the Economic Development service are small it is difficult to identify any underlying trends. Any future complaints will be monitored to enable and trends to be identified.

### Housing (H)

149. During quarter two, 28 complaints were received in relation to Housing, a reduction of 4 from the previous quarter. One complaint moved to stage 2 relating to overdue housing repairs.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	5	6	15	0	2	28
% of total received	39%		54%	-	7%	-

150. Of the 28 complaints received, 19 related to Durham City Homes (14 in relation to repairs and decent homes; four in relation to Housing Management and one concerning rents). Supported Housing had four complaints (three about Care Connect and one about CCTV) and the Housing Solutions service received two complaints (one in relation to Advice and Assistance and one about Durham Key Options). The Renewal and Improvement service and the Strategic Housing service received no complaints.
151. One customer of Durham City Homes was awarded £10 compensation for the service not meeting repairs standards. Changes have been made to the service process in response to a complaint about water damage from a door 'raining in'. A contractor was also contacted to ensure neighbours are not subjected to loud noises early in the morning.

152. In response to an incident where the service was concerned about the response times to a customer (of Supported Housing) who had fallen and needed attention, measures have been implemented to address this issue including amending procedures and staff have been given additional guidance on actions to take when call handling procedures are put in place.

### Planning and Assets (P)

153. During quarter two, 37 stage one and 6 stage two complaints were received in relation to the Planning and Assets service.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	3	3	25	0	6	37
% of total received	16%		68%	-	16%	-

154. Of the 37 Planning and Assets related complaints received at stage one, 19 were related to the quality of service. Six complaints progressed to stage two during the quarter out of a total of 7 for the whole of RED.
155. Some of the complaints allocated to Planning have been identified as actually being aligned to Economic Development, a review of these complaints is going to be taken during Q3, including those where they have been closed off to ensure that they have been assessed correctly.
156. In response to complaints about a lack of information or clarity on Planning issues, the Planning service has been increasing and improving the level of engagement and consultation at community forums/ meetings to enable residents to be better informed. The Service is also seeking to improve engagement with residents and has been implementing a flexible approach where it will adapt planned consultation based on feedback from communities and groups of interest.

### Transport (T)

157. During quarter two, 18 complaints were received in relation to the Transport service which represents a decrease of 7 from the previous quarter

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	3	1	5	0	2	11
% of total received	36%		45%	-	18%	-

158. Nine out of the eleven complaints were about the quality of service
159. The three justified complaints related to bus services (2) and another relating to services at Durham Bus station. All three have been considered by the service and remedial action put in place.

- 160. A complaint (part justified) relating to the accessibility arrangements for Durham Market Place (re. children crossing the road) has been followed up by the strategic manager for Network Management which has involved meeting wider groups than just those affected by the original complaint and recently involved meeting the Durham branch of the RNIB
- 161. There has been a reduction of complaints relating to bus services, which was a significant concern from last quarter, during this quarter the Transport service has engaged again with the bus operators to ensure that the public can be made aware of future changes in service provision.

### Compliments and suggestions

- 162. During quarter two, RED received 56 compliments and suggestions.
- 163. The majority of the compliments received are in relation to the Planning Service (33). The 33 compliments represent the importance customers attach to our timely, helpful and problem solving approach to Planning. It is also good to see that although Planning receives the most complaints, it also receives the most compliments in RED.
- 164. Four compliments for the Housing Service were received for Care Connect and three for Housing Solutions, these all praised the customer care given by officers.
- 165. A number of suggestions for traffic management are still open as officers are giving these due consideration before making a decision, some of these are useful feedback on schemes which have been implemented to improve traffic flow but where customers are suggesting that they may not have worked.

## Resources

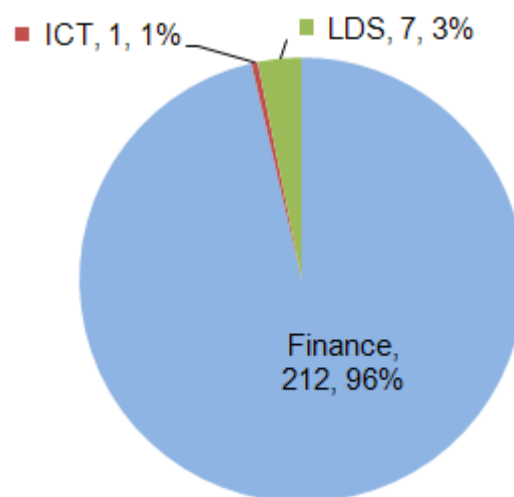
- 166. The Resources service grouping consists of 4 main service areas.

Abbreviation	Service Area
F	Finance
HR	Human Resources and Organisational Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LDS	Legal and Democratic Services

- 167. Between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011 the number of complaints rose by 53%, from 144 in Q1 to 220 in Q2. This continuing rise in complaints was generally expected and is attributed to the delays being experienced by our customers in relation to benefit applications caused by the implementation of our new computer system. Whilst we are doing everything we can to alleviate the worst hardships for our most vulnerable customers, it was inevitable that complaints would rise. Compliments also increased by 53% (40 in Q2) and 15 suggestions were received.
- 168. During quarter 2, 88% (83% in Q1) of complaints were responded to within 10 working days.
- 169. Following the pattern of recent quarters, the vast majority of Resources' Q2

complaints (96%) related to Finance, namely the Revenues and Benefits service.

170. Further analysis of Q2 complaints reveals that 38% were justified (up from 27% in Q1), 36% were partly justified (Q1, 25%) and 23% were not justified (42% in q1), and 3% are yet to be categorised. It is therefore disappointing although not unexpected, to report that 74% of our complaints fall into the categories of justified/partially justified. Those complaints that were not justified arose where it was found that customers, whilst dissatisfied with the service they received, had been subject to the appropriate application of council processes and procedures by Resources' staff.



171. Q2 complaints for Resources have been dominated by the increased volume arising from delays being experienced by our customers in relation to benefits applications. Our staff are working very hard to process claims during periods when the new system is operational, but the process to deliver the necessary countywide ICT benefits system requires periods of complete shut down while data from the former district systems are merged onto the new CIVICA system. This is resulting in delays but every effort is being made to mitigate the impact upon our most vulnerable customers and the reduced level of service to our customers. Plans are in place to improve processing rates during Q4 of 2011/2012 with mitigating actions in the meantime.

### Finance (F)

172. During quarter 2, 212 (139 in Q1) complaints were received in relation to Finance.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	76	74	62	0		212
% of total received	71%		29%	-	-	-

### BENEFITS

173. When undertaking their quarterly check of complaints the Chair and vice chair of the Standards committee were very concerned with regard to the problems in this area. There were genuine cases of extreme hardship amongst many complaints, from both tenants and landlords – many tenants facing the threat of eviction. The system, the increase in the numbers of people claiming benefit together with the numbers of complaints are having an adverse effect on the process.

174. The majority this quarter related to delays in the assessment of claims for benefit or responses to correspondence. There has been a significant increase with around half of the complaints received in the month of September. Other trends related to problems in contacting the service by telephone specifically in the former Easington area. As in the previous quarter there were a number of complaints relating to administration issues; several of these complaints related to the requests being

made for information that had already been provided.

- 175. Delays in the assessment of claims have occurred due to the system downtime as part of the implementation of the new computer system. There has also been a significant increase in work volume due to increased caseload and changes in customer circumstances, many as a result of the current economic climate. The problems with contacting the service by telephone are a direct result of increased levels of customer contact arising from delays in assessment of claims. Duplication of requests for information have been due to backlogs in the scanning and referencing of documents whilst the system has been unavailable.
- 176. Benefits processing is subject to regular reporting to Corporate Management Team. The Service has arranged a number of meetings throughout the quarter with private landlords and social landlords to update them on the position and inform them of actions being taken. We have also formed a landlord working group to identify and resolve issues by working together.
- 177. Investigations are being made to look at the specific reasons for the increase in the volumes of complaints. Now that the majority of the former districts are on the merged computer system, customers are able to contact other area offices to deal with their enquiry. Leaflets with contact details for all area offices are issued with notification letters to customers. Delays in the scanning and referencing of documents is being addressed with additional internal resources to clear the outstanding backlog.

**REVENUES**

- 178. Half of this quarter’s complaints related to quality of service; the remainder concerned service failure, administration, council policy, speed of delivery, and communication. The number of complaints reduced since the last quarter although it is still higher than the same period last year.
- 179. Across the service, the complaints were predominantly directed at Billing and at Income. As we continue to implement the new Revenues & Benefits system processing delays are to be expected although every effort is made to cause as little disruption to the customer as possible. Five former districts are now merged to one unitary system and the remaining two districts have migrated to a standalone system before they are also finally merged.
- 180. Additionally, we continue to improve the ICON cash receipting and income management system. More than 140,000 items of correspondence have been issued to our customers over these recent months to keep them informed of changes relating to revenues and banking. Procedures and practices continue to be reviewed and improved as we move forward with the new systems. Communications with our colleagues and particularly our customers is also being continually improved with some good results.

**Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

181. During quarter 2, 1 complaint was received in relation to ICT.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	0	0	1	0	0	1

% of total received	-	100%	-	-	
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182. With 1 complainant it was not possible to assess any trend. However we continue to consider and learn from any complaints we receive.

### Legal and Democratic Services (LDS)

183. During quarter 2, 7 complaints were received in relation to LDS. The types of complaints received related primarily to quality of service, service failures and administration.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	0	4	0	2	7
% of total received	14%		57%	-	29%	100%

184. One complaint concerned a request for copies of death certificates in relation to an historical event in 1847. The General Register Office handbook states that names should be provided, and in the absence of names, we were not able to assist. All registration authorities have the same format and procedures for searching certificates and so the complainant would have received the same response. The complainant was directed to the county archivist as a starting point for further information.
185. Another complaint arose from the increased charge for ceremony fees following a booking made in August 2010. The fees are reviewed annually by the council and increased on 1 April each year. However due to the VAT increase in January 2011, the council took the decision to increase fees from 4 January 2011. Details were posted on the council's website from the 4 January 2011. The council has the discretion to review and increase ceremony fees and tries to limit the increase wherever possible. The fees needed to be reviewed and increased so that the council was more comparable with other Registration Authorities across the country.
186. A complaint arose from an individual who claimed to have tried twice to have details removed from the electoral register after moving out of the area. It was found that a delay occurred because the complainant had used an email address that was no longer in use; relevant details were supplied the matter was resolved
187. An inadvertent data breach led to a complaint and resulted in an internal investigation and the removal of the information that caused the breach.

### Compliments and Suggestions

188. During quarter 2, Resources received 40 compliments and 15 suggestions.
189. Compliments were received in relation to conducting weddings and renewal of vows ceremonies, and benefits staff for being professional, polite and helpful whilst carrying out their duties. All staff involved made aware of compliments received
190. Suggestions related to poor levels of customer service due to lack of resources,



payments via the internet, customer contact and council policy. All have been reported to relevant service managers. Ease of payment for customers, particularly via the internet, is being reviewed for improvements but not only as a result of suggestions received.

### Local Government Ombudsman (LGO): current activity

191. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made initial enquiries/ initiated investigations into 10 matters:
- **School Admissions.** Of the 5 cases, the outcome of 1 case is awaited. Of the remaining 4 cases, LGO
    - returned a finding of 'No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration' in 1 case,
    - decided to discontinue the investigation of 1 case
    - decided not to initiate an investigation into 2 cases
  - **Planning and Building Control.** Investigations are ongoing and the outcomes of 2 cases are awaited.
  - **Overhanging Tree.** The investigation into a single case is ongoing and the outcome awaited
  - **Adult Social Care.** 1 case is under investigation and the outcome is awaited.
  - **Planning Enforcement.** LGO discontinued this investigation.
192. The LGO delivered decisions on 17 matters which were subject to investigations initiated prior to quarter 2.
- **School Admissions Issues.** LGO discontinued 2 investigations
  - **Planning.** LGO exercised discretion in one case
  - **Housing.** LGO exercised discretion in one case
  - **Children's Services.** LGO exercised discretion in one case
  - **Planning and Development.** LGO discontinued 2 investigations
  - **Environmental Services, Public Protections and Regulation.** LGO discontinued the investigation into 1 case.
  - **Planning and Building Control.** Case concluded as a local settlement
  - **Adult Social Care.** LGO discontinued 4 investigations, in one case this was because the injustice was remedied.
  - **Noise Nuisance / Anti-Social Behaviour.** Case concluded as a local settlement
  - **Environmental Health.** Although there were 3 complainants, there was a single case. This was concluded as a local settlement.
193. During quarter 2, the Ombudsman notified the Council of the outcome in relation to a range of matters which were not subject to full investigation. The Ombudsman's investigators reached their decisions on the basis of the details supplied by complainants, supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers. These matters can be summarised as follows:
- **Planning & Building Control.** 1 case, investigation discontinued
  - **Adult Care Services.** 1 case was out of jurisdiction and 2 investigations were not initiated

- **School Transport.** Investigation was not initiated
- **Planning and Development.** Investigation was discontinued
- **School Admissions.** Investigation not initiated

### **Learning Outcomes**

194. The following learning outcomes /recommended actions have been noted by officers on completion of LGO reviews:
- In relation to several school admissions cases, various learning outcomes and actions were identified;
    - Training is to be given to staff to ensure the correct drafting of notes relating to school admission appeals
    - Training provided to staff reiterating the procedure to be followed and clarity provided as to what a 'qualifying measure' is
    - Training provided on expanding reasoning and explanations and to improving the quality of written statements.
  - In relation to the planning case while no maladministration was found the referral of the case to the LGO has sought to reinforce the importance of ensuring that relevant statutory requirements policies and procedures are considered fully and adhered to where necessary

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND REASONS**

195. Members of the Standards Committee are asked to:
- Note the report
  - Discuss the requirements/areas of further development in relation to the complaints handling process

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**Contact: Neil Green**

**Tel: 01388 761933**

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