

**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board**

25 October 2021

**Customer Feedback Report, Quarter 1,
2021/22**



Report of Corporate Management Team

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources (interim)

**Councillor Susan McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Digital
and Customer Services**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report brings together a wide range of information collected from our customers to describe their experiences of using our services over the last 12 months, to the period ending 30 June 2021, compared to the same period in the previous year.

Executive summary

- 2 Information, as to whether customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with our services, as well as their general experience when accessing services and support, is an important resource for improving customer service and determining our actions in line with customer needs.
- 3 This report covers the range of feedback that can be summarised as follows:
 - (a) an overview of contact through our Customer Services team;
 - (b) a summary of customer satisfaction outcomes through completed surveys and compliments received;
 - (c) a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes;
 - (d) an overview of comments relating to our policies, procedures, and decision-making;

- (e) our performance in dealing with complaints (both statutory and non-statutory corporate complaints); and
 - (f) recent developments that enhance the customer experience.
- 4 The ongoing response to COVID-19 continues to shape our customer service offer in terms of new and existing services delivered and the ways in which our customers and residents can contact and interact with us.
 - 5 Throughout the 12 months ending 30 June 2021 we received almost 1.6 million contacts through our customer services team. The telephone remains the most frequently used channel for contacting us, with nearly eight in every ten customers choosing this method.
 - 6 Call volumes decreased by a fifth during the period 1 April to 30 June 2021, with 6,758 fewer calls received compared to the same period last year. This was mainly due to a reduction in COVID-related enquiries, which fell from 6,557 to 998 contacts.
 - 7 Although the telephone remains popular overall, we continue to see an increasing volume of customers who choose to interact with us via our digital channels.
 - 8 During first quarter of this financial year, 22,000 more residents signed up for an online account - taking the number of residents who can engage with us through this method to 225,000. This equates to 142,000 unique properties.
 - 9 Generally, just over a quarter of all contact leads to the creation of a service request in our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The remaining three quarters are from customers seeking advice or more information, wanting to be transferred to another team, booking an appointment, or requesting a progress update.
 - 10 Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a steady increase in the number of service requests received (+27% / +96,000 over the 12 months ending 30 June 2021).
 - 11 To support the monitoring of delivery timescales of service requests logged within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, we have applied performance standards within the system where possible.
 - 12 We do not apply performance standards if the process is not fully managed within the CRM. We also did not apply performance standards to many of the COVID-related service requests, partly due to the speed of the set-up, but also due to the complexity and unknown elements of

the request which often resulted in required modifications as the pandemic progressed.

- 13 75% of service requests processed during the 12 months ending 30 June 2021 were assessed against a performance standard. Of these, the standard was met in 59% of cases – slightly lower than the 60% recorded for the same period last year.
- 14 Those service requests that are logged within our CRM system but are not currently assessed against a performance standard will be the focus of a detailed review over coming months. We will also be conducting additional analysis at an individual service request level and will aim to provide an update in future reports.
- 15 Our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System enables customer satisfaction surveys (CSS) to be automatically sent to the customer when their service request (SR) is closed.
- 16 Over the 12 months ending 30 June 2021 we sent 273,148 surveys to our customers and received 14,817 responses (5.4%) which was an increase on the previous period where 8,163 responses (3.8%) were received.
- 17 From the feedback received, 79% of customers were satisfied with the level of service they received, a reduction of 4% points on the same period in the previous year, where 83% of customers were satisfied.
- 18 Increased levels of dissatisfaction are mainly linked to not keeping customers informed of progress, not explaining our decision making and taking too long to complete tasks and respond. It is important to note that the ongoing response to the pandemic and increased demand have led to extended service delivery times over the reporting period. These areas will be the focus of a more detailed review over coming months.
- 19 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2021, we received 2,691 corporate complaints – 327 or 14% more than the previous year. Of those investigated, 51% were upheld, which, is on par with previous years. The increase in complaints coincided with an increase in service requests over the same period.
- 20 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2021, 211 complainants were dissatisfied with the response to their complaint (52 of these relate to the period 1 April to 30 June 2021) and asked for it to be escalated to independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team.
- 21 Analysis of a sample of these investigations highlights that 84% could have been avoided through either timelier or more comprehensive

updates from the services and or completion of the agreed action in the first instance.

- 22 We continue to monitor our performance for statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority.
- 23 As of 30 June 2021, around 18,000 adults and 3,900 children and young people were being supported by Adult and Health Services (AHS) and Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) respectively.
- 24 AHS received a total of 78 complaints over the reporting period, a 1.3% increase on the previous year with 16% of these upheld and 24% partially upheld. This correlates with an increase in adults open to services (18,753 compared to 16,746 last year).
- 25 The most frequent reasons for making a complaint were dissatisfaction with charges (17 complaints) and 'COVID-19 related' (16 complaints). Notably, there were no "COVID-19 related" complaints during the period 1 April to 30 June 2021 .
- 26 CYPS received a total of 46 complaints over the reporting period, a 38% decrease on the previous year with 11% upheld and 28% partially upheld. This contrasts with an increase in children receiving social care (3,902 compared to 3,596 last year).
- 27 During the 12 months ending 30 June, the most frequently recorded reason for making a statutory complaint (18 complaints) was disagreement (with action/ assessment/ decision/ recorded information). Communication featured in 16 complaints, supervised contact (family time) in 12 complaints, and staff behaviour in 12 complaints.
- 28 During the 12 month period to 30 June 2021, the Ombudsman delivered decisions relating to 79 complaints, of which 19 were upheld. Of the 21 decisions delivered during quarter one, five were upheld (24%).
- 29 Despite the pandemic, we have continued to act on feedback from our customers and conduct focused service improvement activity which has led to the implementation of a range of developments to enhance their experience. We continue to measure the impact of this activity and analyse and utilise feedback to support ongoing improvements.

Recommendation(s)

- 30 Corporate overview and scrutiny management board is recommended to note the content of the report.

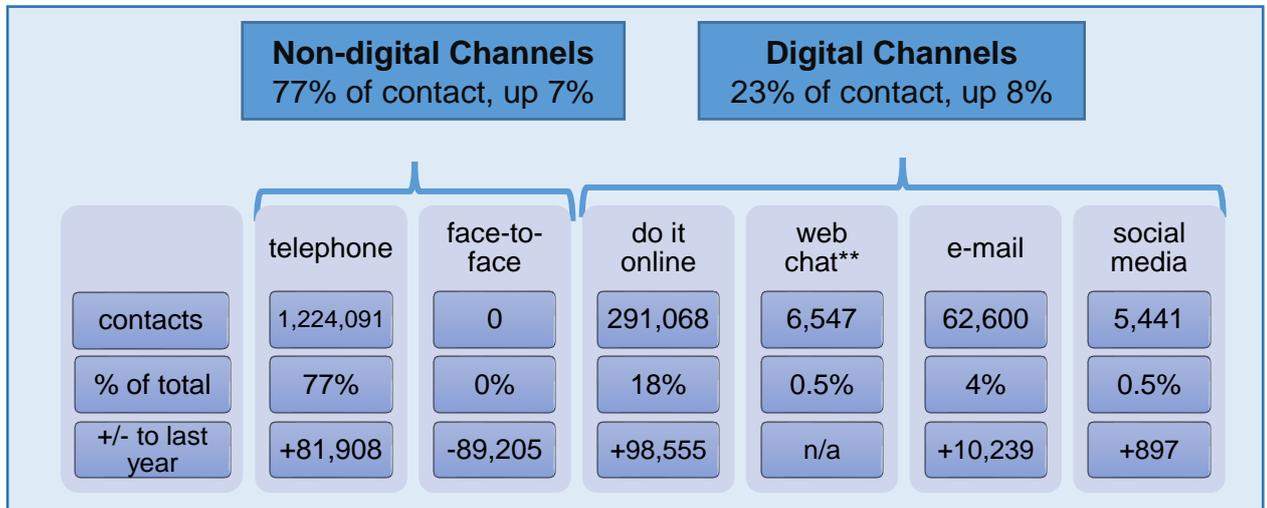
Background

- 31 Successful organisations understand their customers and one way to gain this valuable insight is by gathering and utilising customer feedback.
- 32 The customer feedback report brings together a wide range of information collected from our customers which describes their experiences of using our services.
- 33 Information, as to whether customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with our services, as well as their general experience when accessing services and support, is an important resource for improving customer experience and determining our actions in line with customer needs.
- 34 The report covers the range of feedback that can be summarised as follows and is detailed in the sections below:
- (a) an overview of contact through our Customer Services team;
 - (b) a summary of customer satisfaction outcomes through completed surveys and compliments received;
 - (c) a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes;
 - (d) an overview of comments relating to our policies, procedures, and decision-making;
 - (e) our performance in dealing with complaints (both statutory and non-statutory corporate complaints); and
 - (f) recent developments that enhance the customer experience.

Contact through our customer services team

- 35 The ongoing response to COVID-19 continues to shape our customer service offer in terms of new and existing services delivered and the ways in which our customers and residents can contact us.
- 36 Having closed all council buildings including our Customer Access Points at the start of the pandemic, we were hoping to resume face-to-face contact in line with the government's roadmap to recovery on 19 July 2021. However, although most council buildings have now reopened, the re-opening of our Customer Access Points (CAPs) has been delayed until the end of September 2021. This is due to CAP staff needing to be deployed to support other critical services impacted by staff absences / self-isolation.

37 Throughout the 12 months ending 30 June 2021, we received almost 1.6 million contacts through our customer services team. This contact, through both non-digital and digital channels is summarised in the infographic below.



Non-Digital Channels

- 38 The telephone remains the most frequently used channel for contacting us, with nearly eight in every ten customers choosing this method. Whilst reported call volumes appear to have increased during the pandemic, this is in the main a result of our ongoing initiative to increase and enhance the volume and quality of data we hold and report on through the transfer of non-ACD lines to our ACD system.
- 39 Broadly speaking, telephone calls we receive are either through our Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system, which routes calls to groups of agents based on a first-in-first-answered criteria, or directly to a telephone extension (non-ACD).
- 40 Historically, only calls received via our ACD system have been included in our telephone statistics. However, as part of our initiative to develop a customer-focused, one-council approach to service delivery, we are transferring non-ACD lines into the ACD system. This change supports the development of a holistic view of telephony demand and performance across the council and allows us to monitor and identify opportunities to improve and enhance the customer experience.
- 41 Our data shows that call volumes decreased by a fifth during quarter one (6,758 fewer calls) compared to the same period last year – mainly because of covid-related enquiries dropping from 6,557 to 998 contacts (5,559 fewer).

Digital Channels

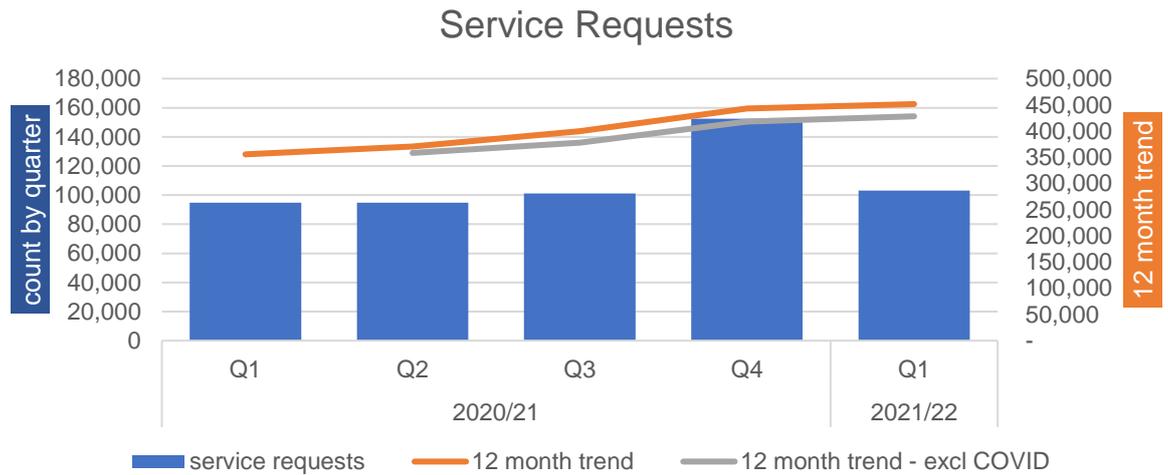
- 42 Although the telephone remains by far the most popular method overall, we continue to see an increasing volume of customers who choose to interact with us via our digital channels.
- 43 During quarter one, 22,000 more residents signed up for an online account - taking the number of residents who can engage with us through this method to 225,000. This equates to 142,000 unique properties – almost 60% of the total households across the county.
- 44 If we look at the contact channels chosen by customers who want to log a service request within our CRM system, we can see a clear shift from telephone to online.

		proportion of service requests logged by channel – 12 months ending 30 June	
		2020	2021
Non digital	Telephone	34%	28%
	Face-to-face	2%	0%
	Total	36%	28%
Digital	Do it online portal	57%	65%
	Other digital	7%	7%
	Total	64%	72%

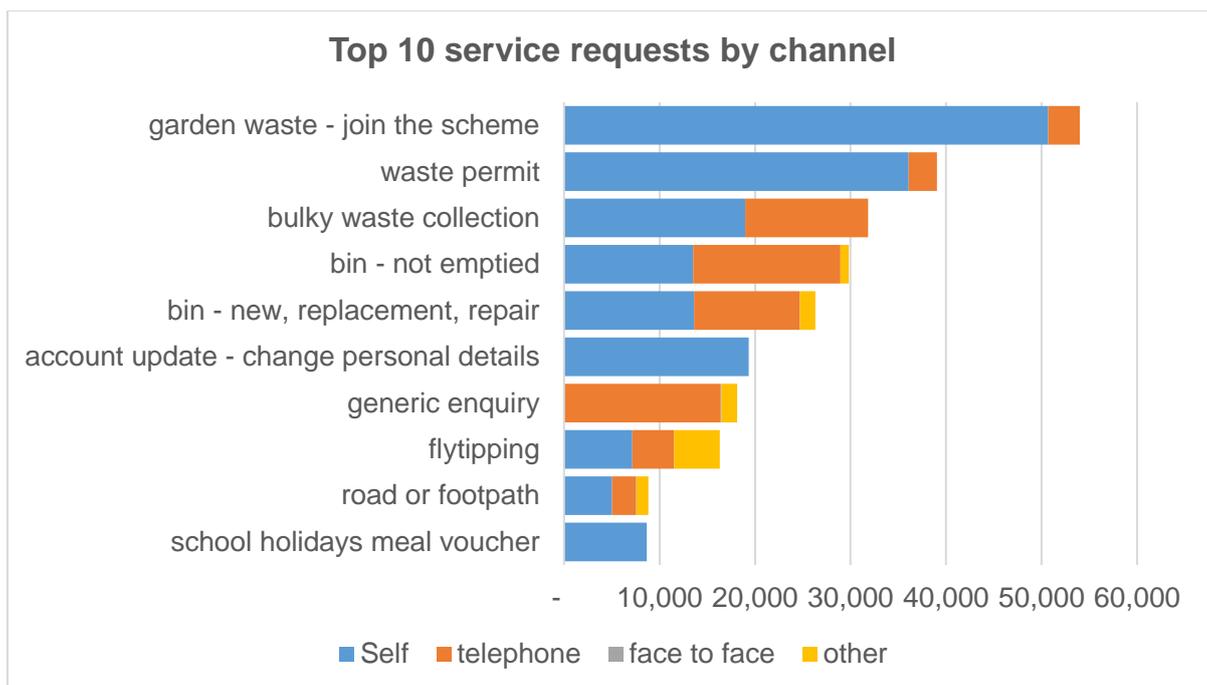
- 45 In addition to their online account residents can contact us, at their convenience, through additional digital methods which includes social media (Facebook and twitter), web chat and through virtual appointments.
- 46 Our webchat service was launched in May 2020 and is now available across more than 30 web pages. Whilst there has been a quarter-on-quarter decrease in webchat interactions, this correlates with a reduction in customers accessing COVID-19 specific support and advice.

	Q4, 2020/21	Q1, 2021/22	Change
Webchat interactions	2,572	1,295	-1,277
COVID related	1,438	756	-682
Non-COVID related	1,134	539	-595

- 47 Generally, just over a quarter of all contact leads to the creation of a service request in our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The remaining three quarters are from customers seeking advice or more information, wanting to be transferred to another team, booking an appointment, or requesting a progress update.
- 48 Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a steady increase in the number of service requests received (+27%, +96,000 over the 12 months ending 30 June 2021).



- 49 This increase reflects the impact of the pandemic across many areas of the organisation with additional residents contacting us to seek financial help (both personal and business related) or report issues arising from spending more time at home (especially environmental issues such as litter and fly-tipping, and anti-social behaviour issues such as noise complaints), and the need to enforce various COVID-19 restrictions.
- 50 Over the 12 months ending 30 June, the ten most frequently requested services were:



- 51 To support the monitoring of delivery timescales of service requests logged within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, we have applied performance standards within the system where possible.
- 52 We do not apply performance standards if the process is not fully managed within the CRM. We also did not apply performance standards to many of the COVID-related service requests, partly due to the speed of the set-up, but also due to the complexity and unknown elements of the request which often resulted in required modifications as the pandemic progressed.
- 53 75% of service requests processed during the 12 months ending 30 June were assessed against a performance standard. The standard was met in 59% of cases – slightly lower than the 60% recorded for the same period last year. However, it should be noted that over the same period, service requests increased by 27%.
- 54 Those service requests that are logged within our CRM system but are not currently assessed against a performance standard will be the focus of a detailed review over coming months. We will also be conducting additional analysis at an individual service request level and will aim to provide an update in future reports.

Customer satisfaction - surveys and compliments

- 55 Our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System enables customer satisfaction surveys (CSS) to be automatically sent to the customer when their service request (SR) is closed.
- 56 We initially applied this survey to 25 service request types in October 2017. Today, it is available across an additional 92 service request types, giving more customers the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to both their experience of contacting us and their satisfaction with the handling of the service request / delivery. The number of service request types that the CSSs are applied to is summarised below:

Position at 31 October 2017	Position at 30 June 2020	Position at 30 June 21
25	105	117

- 57 This provides us with the potential to reach customers linked to approximately 70% of the service request types recorded in our CRM. It is important to note that we are only able to do this if a valid email address is provided and as a result, we currently contact around 55% of customers and continue to deliver a range of activity to increase the number of valid email addresses and other contact information we hold.
- 58 As can be seen in the table below, our overall survey response rate as a proportion of service requests is low – albeit improved over the last two years, as we have linked the survey to more service requests and captured more customer email addresses.

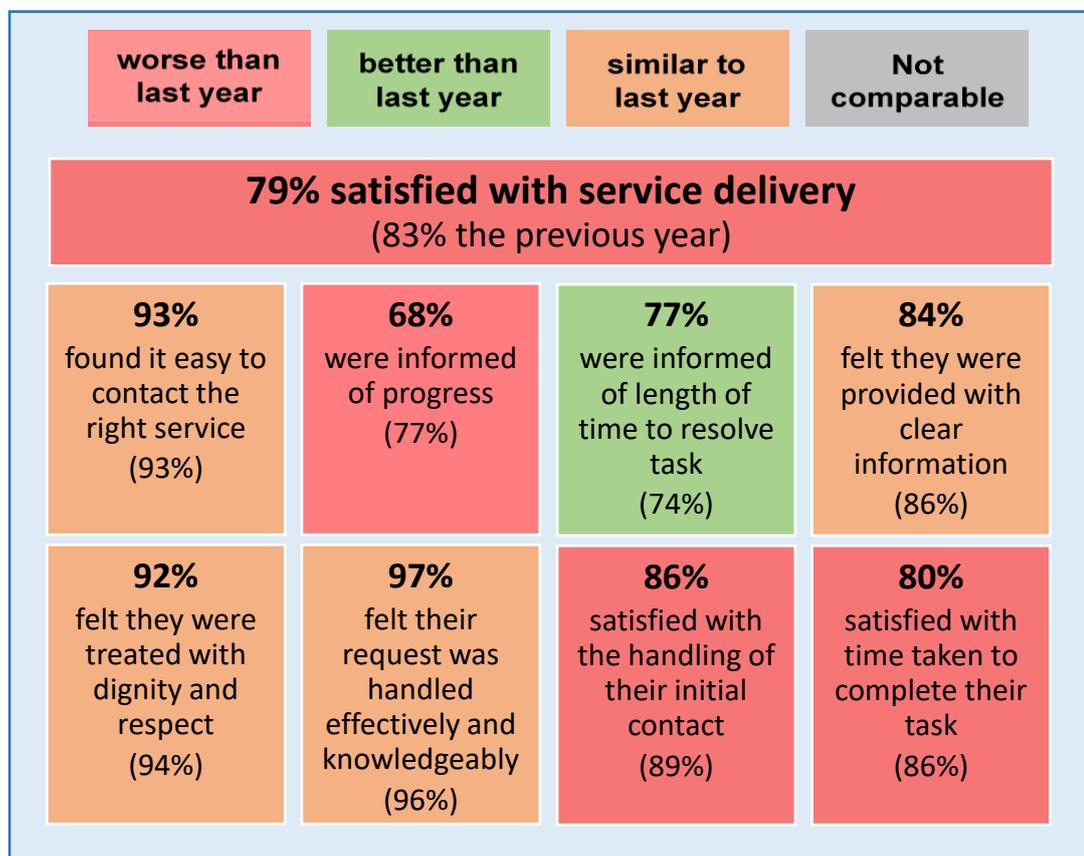
Service requests linked to our customer satisfaction survey		
Number	1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020	1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021
Service Request types	105	117
Service Requests received	289,498	348,595
Surveys emailed to customer	214,049 (74%)	273,148 (78%)
Responses to survey	8,163 (3.8%)	14,817 (5.4%)
Response as a % of service requests	2.8%	4.2%

- 59 Whilst would like to gather feedback from all customers submitting a service request, we recognise that linking the survey to every request will not necessarily add value to our processes, e.g., surveying parents who use our form to add their children to the waiting list for swimming lessons is unlikely to lead to an improved process, nor will adding the survey where established mechanisms for collecting satisfaction data already exist.
- 60 It is also important to note that due to the speed at which we set up our COVID-specific service requests, we were unable to add any survey methodology. We are now considering options for retrospective surveying those we helped through the pandemic to determine if there was anything we could do differently or better if similar circumstances present again.
- 61 Whilst the satisfaction survey is linked to 117 service request types, 90% of survey responses received during the 12 months ending 30 June related to 21 service request types (see appendix five), with two thirds relating to one of seven service request types.

	Response Rate	
	Surveys returned / total SRs	
	1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020	1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021
Bin: missed collection	Not available	19.2% 5,712 / 29,804
Complaint	5% 223 / 4,101	15.9% 786 / 4,950
Fly-tipping	5% 617 / 13,637	5.7% 922 / 16,317
Join the garden waste scheme	3% 370 / 34,903	1% 479 / 54,008
Road or footpath	8% 497 / 6,072	7.2% 635 / 8,826
Street lighting	10% 633 / 6,198	12% 797 / 6,632
Tree or hedge pruning/ removal	10% 461 / 4,611	10.3% 459 / 4,455

- 62 Whilst increased response rates have been achieved over 12 of the 21 service request types, there was also significant variance in response rates ranging from 19% to 0.5%. This can be linked to both the volume of requests we receive for different types of request and the nature of the requests themselves. We continue to identify options to reduce this variance and additional ways to capture feedback.

63 Having analysed all survey responses received during the 12 months ending 30 June 2021 against our nine key measures, we can see that overall: one improved, four remained the same and four reduced (compared to the same period last year):



64 It is important to acknowledge that satisfaction rates vary significantly across different service request types and satisfaction needs to be considered in line with the volume of service request and volume of responses (see appendix five).

65 Further analysis has been completed to support an understanding of satisfaction with service delivery based on service request type. Our council tax account (96%), council tax change of payment method (93%), early help referral (96%) and birth death and marriage certificate requests (93%) attracted the highest levels of satisfaction. With new bin replacement/repair (44%), dog and litter bins (62%) and service level complaints (55%) recording the lowest levels of satisfaction.

66 Increased levels of dissatisfaction are mainly linked to not keeping customers informed of progress where requests fall outside of agreed delivery timeframes, not explaining our decision making, taking too long to complete tasks and requests being closed as resolved yet the matter is still outstanding. These areas will be the focus of a more detailed

review which will inform our service improvement activity with related services over coming months.

- 67 We continue to develop the quality of our customer satisfaction data to inform our first point of contact offer. We are in the process of updating the survey to reflect our recently refreshed Customer Charter and Standards which now align with recent changes to our customer service offer and operating model and better reflects how we will work with our customers across all contact channels.
- 68 We are also carrying out more detailed analysis of our data to better understand our customers' experiences and put actions in place to improve their experiences. Over the next three to six months, we will focus on deep dives of our satisfaction data (and link back to service provision) and customer suggestions. We will include our findings in the quarter two and quarter three, customer feedback reports.

Customer Compliments and Star Rating Feedback

- 69 During the 12 months ending 30 June, we received 1,257 compliments – 20% more (+195) compared to the same period the year before.
- 70 In line with previous reports, most of the compliments related to satisfaction with service provision – although we did also receive praise due to the actions of specific individuals.
- 71 A small sample of the 210 compliments received during quarter one, 2021/22 is attached at Appendix two.
- 72 In addition to compliments, we collect star ratings from customers requesting a service via an online form. This helps us understand the customer's experience when logging their request and identifies opportunities for improvement.
- 73 During the 12 months ending 30 June, we received more than 109,000 ratings, 60% more (+39,707) than the same period last year. Almost half related to five star rated service requests handling.

All Service Request Types 12 months ending 30 June...	Star ratings received	Proportion of star ratings received				
		5-star	4-star	3-star	2-star	1-star
2020	69,501	62%	17%	13%	3%	0%
2021	109,208	66%	19%	8%	2%	5%
Garden waste – join the scheme	20,964	62%	23%	9%	3%	3%
Customer Satisfaction Survey	12,450	60%	19%	8%	3%	9%

All Service Request Types 12 months ending 30 June...	Star ratings received	Proportion of star ratings received				
		5-star	4-star	3-star	2-star	1-star
Waste permit	7,523	85%	10%	3%	1%	2%
Bin: missed collection	6,332	63%	15%	7%	2%	12%
Bulky waste collections	5,561	71%	20%	5%	2%	3%

Customer suggestions

- 74 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2021 we received 572 customer suggestions, 48 fewer than the same period last year.
- 75 Whilst we receive and review a considerable number of suggestions, the majority have been addressed previously and/or considered as part of service development.

Comments relating to policies, procedures, decision-making and fees and charges.

- 76 To understand the impact of our policies, procedures and decision making and to support development in these areas we capture and analyse the comments we receive.
- 77 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2021 we received 195 comments about our policies and/or procedures, an increase of 33 on the previous period. 104 of these related to expressions of dissatisfaction with fees and charges, an increase of 22 and 32 related to objections to decisions reached, a reduction of 65.
- 78 We continue to provide feedback to the relevant service areas and teams to support opportunities for improvement and development of policies and procedures.

32 objections to our decisions (-65)	Eight objections to operating hours or building closures and three for not proceeding with a customer's complaint. The remainder were mainly operational decisions, e.g., road closures.
104 dissatisfied with fees and charges (+22)	Charges most frequently complained related to leisure centres (32 occasions), waste (19 complaints covering replacement bin (13), garden waste (4) and bulky waste (2)), and council tax (13 complaints)

195
comments about
policies /
procedures
(+33)

three quarters of this feedback related to the policies and procedures of our Household Waste Recycling Centres (83 comments, 43%) or Refuse and Recycling Service, e.g., not collecting side waste or contaminated bins (64 comments, 33%)

Priority Correspondence

- 79 During the 12 months ending 30 June, we received 2,113 items of priority correspondence¹.
- 80 Since October 2020, we have been working to streamline the management of incoming priority correspondence and remove duplication from our processes as often a CRM request will have been raised / will be in process in tandem. The new process will provide a single point of contact, achieve a consistent approach in handling of correspondence, capture and store all data in one system and realise efficiencies.
- 81 All incoming enquiries are now managed centrally within our Business Services corporate support team, using a single point of contact email address (with the exception COVID-19 enquiries which are handled separately by the Chief Executive's office). The team is working to a response deadline of 10 working days from receipt of enquiry (the Resources service grouping is the exception – with a response deadline of four working days having been established).

	No. enquiries received	Responded on time	Responded late
Jan – Mar 2021	423	319 - 75%	104 – 25%
Apr – Jun 2021	542	373 - 69%	169 – 31%

- 82 Although the proportion of correspondence responded to within our performance standard decreased in quarter one 2021/22 compared to quarter four 2020/21, the volume of correspondence increased by 28% (+119 additional correspondence over the three-month period).

¹ Priority correspondence relates to correspondence sent directly to the Chief executive, Member of Parliament or Corporate Directors

Our performance in dealing with complaints (both statutory and corporate)

83 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.

Corporate Complaints

84 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2021, we received 2,691 corporate complaints – 327 more (+14%) than the previous year. Of those investigated, 51% were upheld, which is on par with previous years.

85 As shown in the graph below most of the increase occurred in the final quarter of 2020/21 (January to March) and coincided with a significant increase in service requests over the same period. Even so, as of 30 June 2021, the ratio of complaints to service requests was 0.6% or six complaints for every 1,000 service requests.

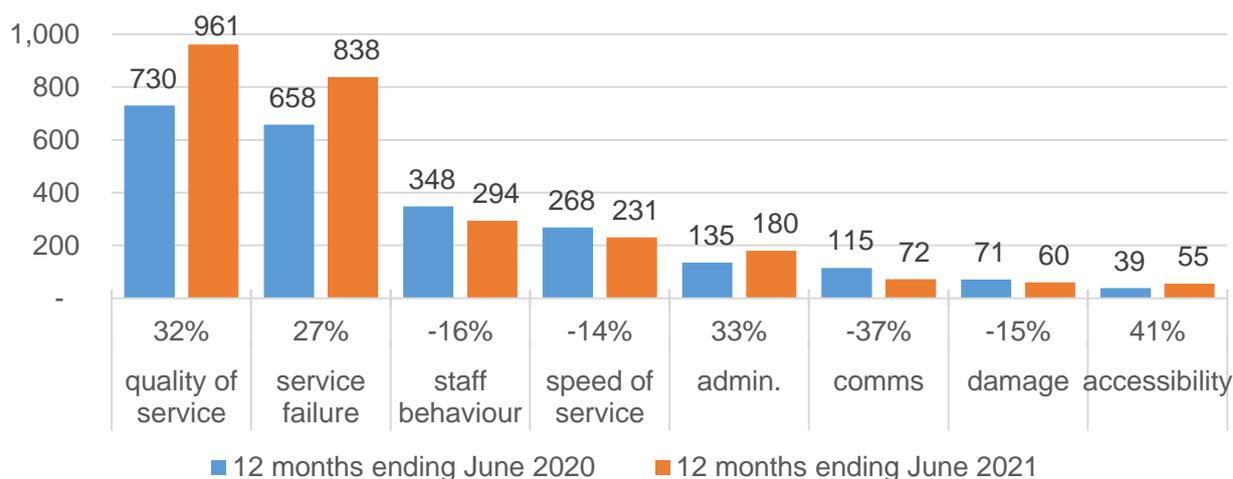


86 81% of service level complaints were completed and responded to within timescale, 19% were responded to outside of timescale. Compared with 89% and 11% the previous year.

87 Broadly speaking, corporate complaints can be categorised across eight specific areas. i.e.

Complaint Area	Complaint Area Description
1. Accessibility	We were inaccessible to the customer
2. Administration	Our administrative processes were poor causing inconvenience to the customer
3. Communication	We did not communicate effectively
4. Staff Behaviour	Our staff behaved badly

Complaint Area	Complaint Area Description
5. Service Failure	We did not do what we said we would
6. Speed of Service	We did not provide the service when we said we would
7. Quality of Service	We did not provide the service to the expected standard
8. Damage	We caused damage whilst carrying out our duties



88 'Quality of Service' (not providing the service to the expected standard) and 'Service Failure' (not doing what we said we would) are the most frequent causes for complaint. Although both categories increased over the last 12 months, it is important to reflect that this also coincides with an increase in demand for services across this period.

89 For example, the main driver behind the increase in service failure complaints was 'not actioning a service request'. This increased from 93 to 193. Given that we received almost 100,000 additional service requests during the same period (when we were dealing with the pandemic and had reduced staffing levels) it is not considered unusual that some progressed to complaints.

90 Furthermore, if we consider complaints as a percentage of service requests (0.6% in the 12 months ending 30 June 2020, compared to 0.7% for the same period the previous year), we can see that proportionally, complaints have not increased.

91 Looking at more specific reasons for complaint. The most frequent cause remains missed bin collections – which continue to make up 20% of all complaints. Of those received and investigated in the 12 months ending 30 June 2021, 77% were upheld. However, it is important to note that whilst we received 561 missed bin complaints in the 12

months ending 30 June, 13 million bins were collected which represents a complaint to delivery ratio of just 0.004%.

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

92 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2021, 211 complainants were dissatisfied with the response to their complaint (52 during quarter one 2021/22) and asked for it to be escalated to independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team. 83% of these were responded to within the performance standard compared to 95% the previous year.

93 Analysis of a sample of these investigations highlights 84% could have been avoided through either timelier or more comprehensive updates from services and or completion of the agreed action in the first instance.



94 Details of complaints upheld by independent investigators during quarter one are included in Appendix three.

Statutory Complaints

95 As of 30 June 2021, around 18,000 adults and 3,900 children and young people were being supported by Adult and Health Services (AHS) and Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) respectively.

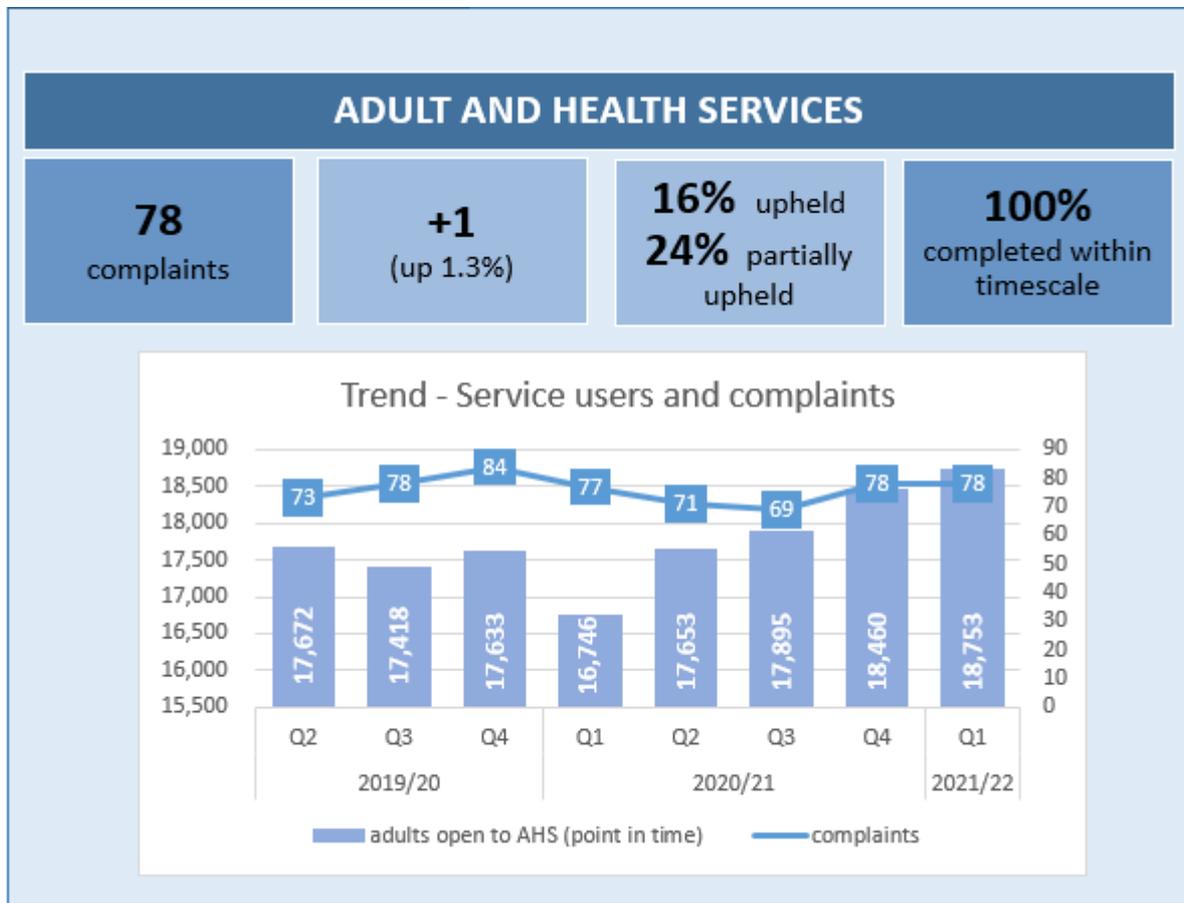
96 Each service has its own distinct statutory complaints procedures, so the complaints made under each of these procedures are not directly comparable. Broadly speaking, users of AHS have voluntarily requested access to the service whereas the involvement of CYPS is primarily due to a child or young person being in need or at risk of significant harm.

97 Statutory complaints have traditionally been logged and tracked through a clerical system, overseen by a complaints officer who monitors progress, adherence to timescales, quality of response and completion of recommended actions.

98 However, new case management systems have now been introduced across social care within both AHS (Azeus) and CYPS (LiquidLogic). Both systems have a complaints module that will allow complaints to be

logged upon receipt and updated in real-time. Quality assurance will remain the responsibility of the complaints officer.

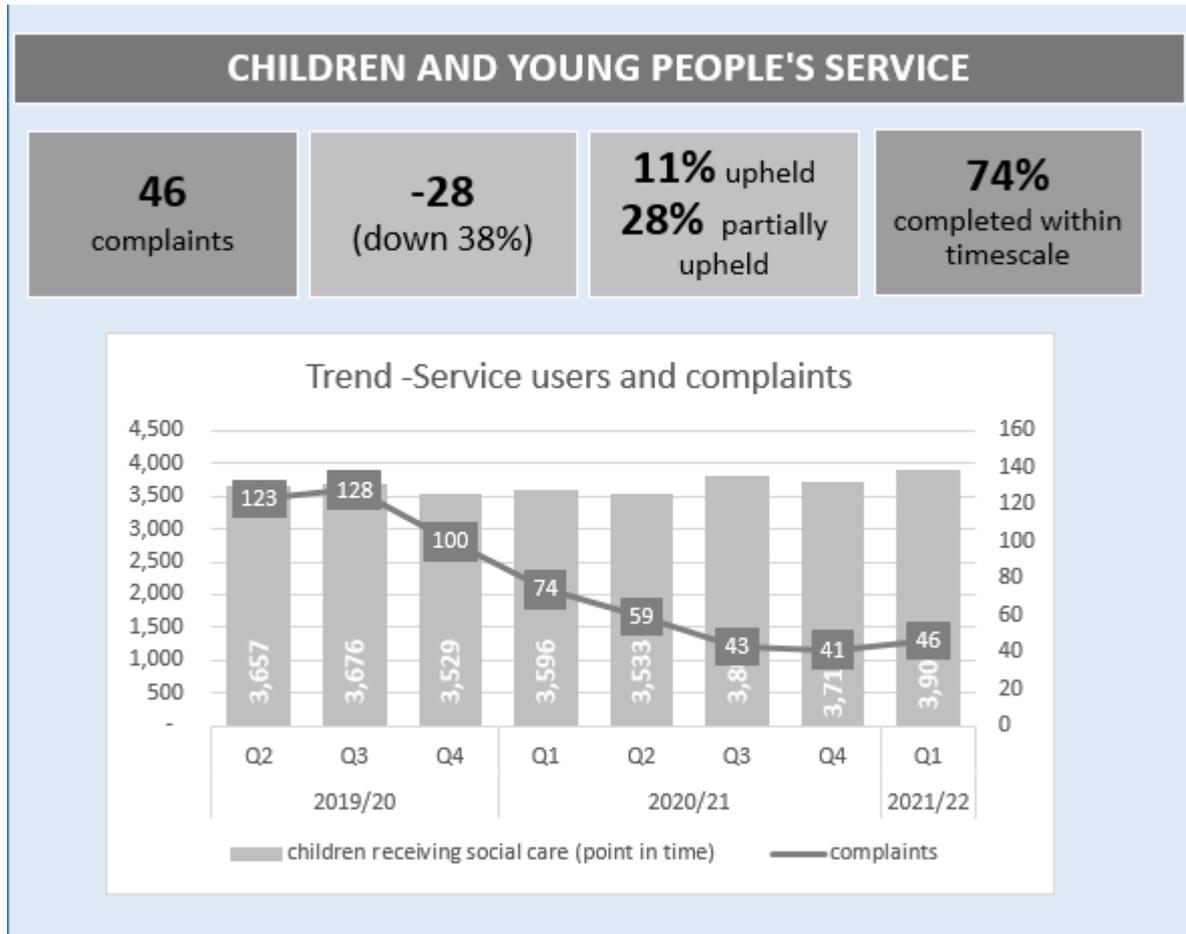
Adult Health Services



- 99 Of the 78 statutory AHS complaints received during the 12 months ending 30 June: 29% related to older people/physical disabilities/sensory impairment (23 complaints), 19% to Transactional Services (15 complaints) which deals with financial assessments/charging, and 18% to learning disabilities/mental health/substance misuse (15 complaints).
- 100 The most frequent reasons for making a complaint were dissatisfaction with charges (17 complaints) and 'COVID-19 related' (16 complaints). Notably, there were no "COVID-19 related" complaints during quarter one 2021/22.
- 101 During quarter one 2021/22, actions taken in response to complaints included:
- (a) reminding care provider staff of the importance of adding information to their IT systems promptly and accurately.

- (b) auditing specific social work cases after identifying a service user's review document to be poor quality.
- (c) refunding three days of service provision costs that should have been covered by COVID-19 funding.

Children and Young People's Services



- 102 Of the 46 statutory CYPS complaints received during the 12 months ending 30 June: 74% (34 complaints) related to the Families First teams – responsible for children in need, child protection plans, child, and family assessments (in cases of parental dispute), 22% (10 complaints) were spread across teams relating to Looked After Children, and 4% (2 complaints) related to the Children with Disabilities team.
- 103 Due to the complexity of these complaints, up to 3 reasons can be recorded for each. During the 12 months ending 30 June, the most frequently recorded reason for making a complaint (18 complaints) was disagreement (with action/ assessment/ decision/ recorded information). Communication featured in 16 complaints, supervised contact (family time) in 12 complaints, and staff behaviour in 12 complaints.

- 104 During quarter one, actions taken in response to complaints included:
- (a) Paying money owed to a family and friends' carer from when they had first taken a young person into their care.
 - (b) Updating an assessment report with corrected information.
 - (c) Allocating a new social worker to improve communication with a parent.

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

- 105 During the 12 months ending 30 June 2021, the Ombudsman delivered decisions relating to 79 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants, and in some instances, supplemented with contextual information from council officers.
- 106 Of the 21 decisions delivered during quarter one, five (24%) were upheld – details are including in Appendix four.
- 107 Additional information regarding complaints escalated to the Ombudsman is available [here](#).

Recent developments that enhance the customer experience

- 108 Despite the pandemic, we have continued with developments that enhance the customer experience.
- 109 Extending channel choice is a core element of our digital transformation programme, and we have included new modern communication channels on platforms such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp within our refreshed Unified Communications Programme.
- 110 We continue to drive improvements across customer services through our Integrated Customer Service initiative which will develop a unitised model for customer service across the council. This will be achieved by implementing consistent first point of contact principles in line with the following three main workstreams:
- (a) **Standardisation:** Unifying and standardising our technology platform to support an agile and flexible workforce in delivering high quality services to customers, wherever and whenever they are needed.
 - (b) **Harmonisation:** Using technology and data to gather more robust and wide-reaching demand, quality, and satisfaction data to support a holistic view of our customer.

- (c) **Unitisation:** delivering all first point of contact interactions through a single unitised customer service function to ensure consistency when responding to customers and improving the overall customer experience.
- 111 As we move to new modern ways of working in line with our transformation programme, it essential we ensure that agents have the right tools to do the job.
- 112 Over the last six months, we have extensively tested a new softphone-based telephony platform within the corporate contact centre. This platform gives users access to contact centre features from their laptop allowing them to work from any location with an adequate internet connection.
- 113 During quarter one 2021/22, this solution has been deployed beyond corporate customer services and into our Care Connect out of hours service, Durham Music Service, County Durham Offending Service, Social Care Direct administration team, and within the Environmental Health and Consumer Protection administration team, with all the remaining contact centres due to be standardised by 31 December 2021.
- 114 During quarter one 2021/22, we reviewed our Customer Access Point operating model in readiness for reinstating face-to-face interactions. The revised model has an additional focus on digital inclusion through access to devices and assisted self-service support.
- 115 Upon reinstatement, all face-to-face interactions will be 'appointment only', freeing up time for officers to provide fully supported self-serve sessions with those customers who need it.
- 116 These changes are now included in our revised Customer Service Charter and Standards and reflect our customer service ethos and the changing needs and expectations of our customers. We are also in the process of updating our customer satisfaction survey and will provide an update in the next report
- 117 Throughout the quarter we continued to migrate telephone lines to our Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system². Migrating these lines enables us to see an enhanced view of demand and performance statistics for all telephony contact, and thereby allows us to identify opportunities to improve the customer experience.

² Broadly speaking, we receive telephone calls either through our Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system, which routes calls to groups of agents in line with 'first-in-first-answered' criteria, or directly to a telephone extension (non-ACD).

- 118 42% of services have now been fully migrated to the ACD technology – with the County Durham Offender Service, Wolsingham Leisure Centre, Durham Music Services, Care Connect out of hours, Blue Badge administration and Environmental Health and Consumer Protection customer support teams migrating in quarter one 2021/22.
- 119 Following improvements to our process for dealing with priority correspondence, we are now reviewing other channels of incoming correspondence with a view to further project scoping to determine future requirements.
- 120 We are also continuing to work with service teams and our customers to act on their feedback, understand their changing expectations and identify new ways for them to contact, request services and report issues.
- 121 The following CRM improvements were delivered during quarter one 2021/22 following customer feedback:
- (a) improved anti-social behaviour information, which ensures customers correctly report incidents to the most appropriate service; and
 - (b) improvements to the pest control appointment reminders process, ensuring that reminders are timely and at appropriate times of the day.
- 122 In addition, the following new online forms and processes were developed and delivered / made live:
- (a) Deaf or hearing impairment - application for registration;
 - (b) Grant for new school shoes and coats;
 - (c) COVID-19 Lateral Flow Tests;
 - (d) Environment Awards;
 - (e) Bishop Auckland and Seaham Food Festival trader application;
 - (f) Temporary road closure, street name and numbering.

Conclusion

- 123 Information as to whether customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with our services, as well as their general experience when accessing services and support, is an important resource for improving customer service and determining our actions in line with customer needs.

- 124 The ongoing response to COVID-19 continues to shape our customer service offer in terms of new and existing services delivered and the ways in which our customers and residents can contact us.
- 125 Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a steady increase in the number of service requests received and this has impacted the volume of complaints received as well as overall customer satisfaction.
- 126 However, despite the pandemic, we have continued with range of new customer focused developments aimed at enhancing user experience and continue to analyse and utilise feedback to support opportunities for improvement.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- Previous Customer Feedback reports presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Author(s)

Debra Kitching

Tel: 03000 268158

Sarah Welsh

Tel: 07768 994343

Victoria Murray

Tel: 03000 267707

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.

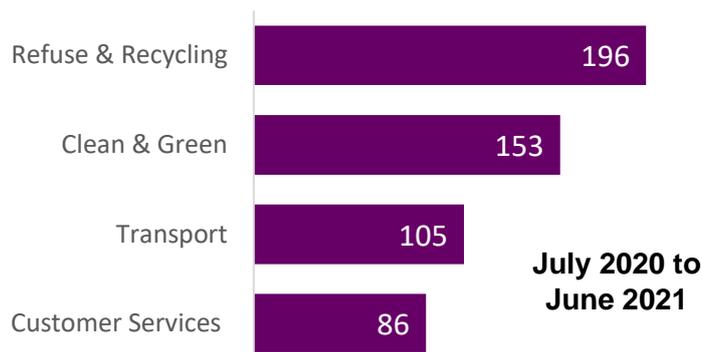
Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

Appendix 2: Sample of compliments received during quarter one, 2021/22



I have just spoken to Customer Services and would like to say how excellent their customer service was. So helpful / polite and very engaging.

Customer wanted to pass on her thanks for helping her after her fall yesterday

Thanks for very quick service

Litter collector and bin emptier, Seaham Harbour, area around Tommy statue. Young man does a great job, very polite and cheerful, always says hello

so friendly and polite and extremely helpful

A heartfelt thanks for sorting sort out the problem we were having, what a truly lovely and caring person, who presented herself well. She made sure that everything was working properly before leaving us.

Thanks to the staff at Thorpe Road Cemetery for the work there do like keeps cemetery beautiful

Thanks for clearing up the significant mess left after an illegal encampment.

would like to congratulate the lads who have started to cut the grass at Sudbury Avenue and

Customer dropped his keys down the drain and a crew came straight out to get them out for him. Customer very grateful and wanted to thank crew.

The pest control officer was the most polite, helpful, nicest man the customer has had come out to her property.

Thanks for sorting voucher.

the service is fantastic, ALL staff, are very professional, lovely, and friendly

Ref Rowley footpath. We visited this area today and were amazed and over the moon to see the improvements and the quality of work carried out to repair this bridge and footpath.

the bin crew is fabulous, today was recycling day - they are "poetry in motion" they work so well together, they are pleasant, they tidy up and the young man (not the driver) always smiles and waves. The driver is an older gentleman and is also pleasant. Would like the bin men to know how good they are!

huge thank you to the crews of the rubbish collection for working in the atrocious weather this morning. A heavy rain and a hailstone shower at Newton Hall left the guys absolutely drenched. I still got a friendly wave

would like to compliment and thank the team of litter pickers who keep the grass at Seaham Marina entrance and North Terrace so clean and tidy despite the large number of visitors and associated rubbish. A job very well done and appreciated by both local residents and the many visitors who come to the area.

They were an excellent communicator, very helpful with a reassuring, calm voice and I felt they would ensure that the matter would be resolved.

Thanks for help with the attendance allowance form, which was successful. Can't thank them enough

Appendix 3: Independent investigations by Customer Feedback Team where corporate complaints were upheld

Complaint upheld	Recommendation
Customer dissatisfied that bins are emptied earlier than advertised collection times and the way the initial complaint was handled	Apologise that the initial complaint was not fully addressed. The area manager to rectify the issue of early collections
Customer dissatisfied with lack of communication from the refuse and recycling team following missed collections.	Apologise to the customer. The service is recommended to note the importance of timely communication and the requirement to respond fully to all elements of the complaint

Complaint partially upheld	Recommendation
Customer dissatisfied with the outcome of complaint regarding highways maintenance works.	Apologise for the time taken to resolve the matter. Identify any additional training and review the process to determine why the information supplied was not passed to relevant team.
Customer dissatisfied with the way initial complaint was logged and the issues were not addressed.	Apologise to the customer for failing to log all elements of the complaint and for not explaining processes clearly during discussions with officers.
Customer dissatisfied with the decision not to carry out extensive tree pruning/ removal.	Apologise for the delay in responding to enquiries and for lack of detail in the responses.
Customer dissatisfied that highways works could continue.	Apologise for not contacting with the outcome of an associated highways inspection.
Customer dissatisfied with the handling of their calls regarding council tax	Apologise to customer for not providing the expected of level of service.

Appendix 4: Complaints upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
The council was at fault in how it handled an appeal following a decision not to award a concessionary bus pass.	No action necessary
The council was at fault for refusing home to school transport to the only school named in an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan	The council should make clear, in all new and amended EHC plans, whether the school named was the parent's preference - and if there is a nearer suitable school, clarify that the family is responsible for any extra transport costs
The council was wrong to conclude that putting a property into Trust had been to avoid care and support charges (deprivation of assets).	The council should review its decision to determine if, considering the information, deprivation of assets occurred, in line with what has been set out in the Care Act and its Statutory Guidance.
The council failed to keep complainant informed of its visits and actions, and left materials behind which led to damage to contents of the property.	To apologise, and to pay £250 to acknowledge the complainant's distress, time, and trouble.
The council was at fault for not fully assessing the complainant's care needs.	To apologise for the faults identified, and to undertake a fresh assessment with appropriate persons involved.

Appendix 5: Customer Satisfaction Survey: response rates and satisfaction with service delivery

	Response Rate		Satisfaction with service delivery		Main reason(s) for dissatisfaction
	Surveys returned / total SRs		(change is only significant if it is =>2pp)		
	12 months ending		12 months ending		
	30 June 2020	30 June 2021	30 June 2020	30 June 2021	
Anti-social behaviour	4.1% 95 / 2,335	3.5% 101 / 2,852	79%	81%	The issue has not been resolved long term
Bin: new, replacement or repair	0.5% 121 / 22,597	0.5% 142 / 26,324	43%	44%	not keeping customers informed of progress and taking too long to complete task
Bin: missed collection	Not available	19.2% 5,712 / 29,804	58%	76%	Time taken to return for the bin
Birth, death, or marriage certificate	6.1% 178 / 2,937	8.8% 319 / 3,644	97%	93%	Time taken to respond
Complaints	5% 223 / 4,101	15.9% 786 / 4,950	54%	55%	not keeping customers informed of progress nor providing them with clear information. Also taking too long to complete task.
Council tax – change of payment method	10.6% 530 / 4,992	11% 598 / 5,422	94%	93%	Communication issues
Council tax account	6.6% 1,343 / 20,427	7.8% 550 / 7,044	96%	96%	Communication issues
Dog bins or litter bins	8% 120 / 1,534	6.2% 113 / 1,825	80%	62%	not explaining our decision when unable to install/ relocate/ renew bin. Also not completing task when we agreed to action in line with our existing schedule.

Appendix 5: Customer Satisfaction Survey: response rates and satisfaction with service delivery

	Response Rate		Satisfaction with service delivery		Main reason(s) for dissatisfaction
	Surveys returned / total SRs		(change is only significant if it is =>2pp)		
	12 months ending		12 months ending		
	30 June 2020	30 June 2021	30 June 2020	30 June 2021	
Dog fouling	9.3% 187 / 2,013	8.6% 179 / 2,092	64%	73%	The issue remains unresolved
Drainage and flooding	6.7% 155 / 2,315	7.6% 175 / 2,316	74%	78%	The issue remains unresolved
Early help referral	5.4% 41 / 754	10.5% 197 / 1,883	98%	96%	
Fly-tipping	5% 617 / 13,637	5.7% 922 / 16,317	85%	85%	The issue remains unresolved
Free school travel - apply	8.5% 121 / 1,311	13% 243 / 1,874	99%	99%	NA
Garden waste – join the scheme	3% 370 / 34,903	0.9% 479 / 54,008	96%	94%	
Litter	8.9% 276 / 3,116	4.4% 186 / 4,188	70%	66%	The issue remains unresolved
Road or footpath	8% 497 / 6,072	7.2% 635 / 8,826	73%	81%	The issue remains unresolved
Rubbish in gardens and yards	3.2% 133 / 4,167	4.3% 200 / 4,693	81%	83%	The issue remains unresolved
Street lighting	10% 633 / 6,198	12% 797 / 6,632	86%	85%	The issue remains unresolved
Tree or hedge pruning, removal	10%	10.3%	66%	68%	The issue remains unresolved

Appendix 5: Customer Satisfaction Survey: response rates and satisfaction with service delivery

	Response Rate		Satisfaction with service delivery		Main reason(s) for dissatisfaction
	Surveys returned / total SRs		(change is only significant if it is =>2pp)		
	12 months ending		12 months ending		
	30 June 2020	30 June 2021	30 June 2020	30 June 2021	
	461 / 4,611	459 / 4,455			
Warm homes	8% 63 / 786	12.4% 205 / 1,655	92%	73%	Nobody contacted the customer
Waste permit	0.5% 149 / 31,005	0.5% 179 / 39,046	94%	96%	