

**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny  
Management Board**

**3 December 2021**

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



---

**Report of Corporate Management Team**

**Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources**

**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 and describes their experiences of using our services. The information contained in this report relates to the 12 months to 30 September 2021 (1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021), and compares performance to the same period in the previous year.

**Executive summary**

- 2 Information, such as our customers' satisfaction / dissatisfaction with and general experiences of the services and support we provide, is an important resource for improving customer service and aligning our actions with customer need.
- 3 This report covers the following range of feedback:
  - (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 In the twelve month period ending 30 September 2021 the Council received almost 1.7 million contacts through its various reported channels. Although the telephone remains the most frequently used channel for contacting us, with nearly eight in every ten customers choosing this method, we continue to see an increasing volume of customers who choose to interact with us via our digital channels.
  - 5 During the second quarter of this financial year, 9,000 more residents signed up for an online account - taking the number of residents who can engage with us through this method to more than 234,000. This equates to almost 157,000 unique properties.
  - 6 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.
  - 7 Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a steady increase in the number of service requests received. (+26% / +95,000 over the 12-month period ending 30 September).
  - 8 To support the monitoring of delivery timescales of service requests logged within our CRM system, we have applied performance standards within the system where possible.
  - 9 76% of service requests processed during the 12 months ending 30 September 2021 were assessed against a defined performance standard. The performance standard was met in 74% of cases. This is an increase of 15 percentage points on the previous quarter and just slightly lower than the 77% recorded for the 12 month period ending 30 September 2020. However, it should be noted that over the same period, service requests increased by 26%.
  - 10 A detailed review of all service requests within our CRM system that are not currently assessed against a performance standard is currently underway. We have completed the initial phase of this activity and have identified a range of service improvements linked to systems, data and reporting, training, and member experience. An update of these improvements will be provided within the quarter three report.

- 11 Our CRM System enables customer satisfaction surveys (CSS) to be automatically sent to the customer when their service request (SR) is closed.
- 12 Over the 12 months ending 30 September 2021 we sent 104,814 surveys to our customers and received 15,691 responses (15%) which was an increase on the previous period where 10,039 responses (4.7%) were received.
- 13 The highest levels of satisfaction with service delivery were received by seven areas – each of which attained more than 90%. These areas were early help (97%), bulky waste collections (96%), waste permit requests (96%), birth death and marriage certificate requests (95%), garden waste - join the scheme (95%), council tax account (94%), and council tax change of payment method (93%).
- 14 Six areas recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction (less than 70%). These were requesting a new bin replacement/repair (42%), service complaints (53%), dog and litter bins (61%), clearing litter (64%), tree or hedge pruning / removal (67%), and warm homes (67%).
- 15 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 detailed review over coming months.
- 16 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, we received 2,683 corporate complaints – 303 more (+13%) than in the same period last year. Of those investigated, 49% were upheld, which is on par with previous years.
- 17 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, 197 complainants were dissatisfied with the response to their complaint (45 of these relate to the period 1 July to 30 September 2021) and asked for it to be escalated to independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team.
- 18 Analysis of a sample of these investigations highlights that 24% could have been avoided through either timelier or more comprehensive updates on the initial complaint handling, and/or completion of the agreed action in the first instance.
- 19 We continue to monitor our performance for statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority.

- 20 As of 30 September 2021, around 19,000 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.
- 21 AHS received a total of 82 complaints over the reporting period, a 11% increase on the previous year with 18% of these upheld and 31% partially upheld. This correlates with an increase in adults open to services (18,753 compared to 16,746 last year).
- 22 The most frequent reasons for making a complaint were dissatisfaction with charges (17 complaints), lack of communication – no information received (15 complaints) and speed of service (15 complaints).
- 23 CYPS received a total of 43 complaints over the reporting period, a 27% decrease on the previous year with 7% upheld and 35% partially upheld. This contrasts with an increase in children receiving social care (3,902 compared to 3,596 last year).
- 24 Due to the complexity of CYPS complaints, up to three reasons can be recorded for each. During the 12 months ending 30 September, the most frequently recorded reason for making a complaint (17 complaints) was communication. Fifteen complaints featured disagreement (with action/ assessment/ decision/ recorded information) and staff behaviour in 13 complaints.
- 25 During the 12 months to 30 September 2021, the Ombudsman delivered decisions relating to 74 complaints, of which 19 were upheld. Of the 14 decisions delivered during quarter two, two were upheld (14%).
- 26 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)**

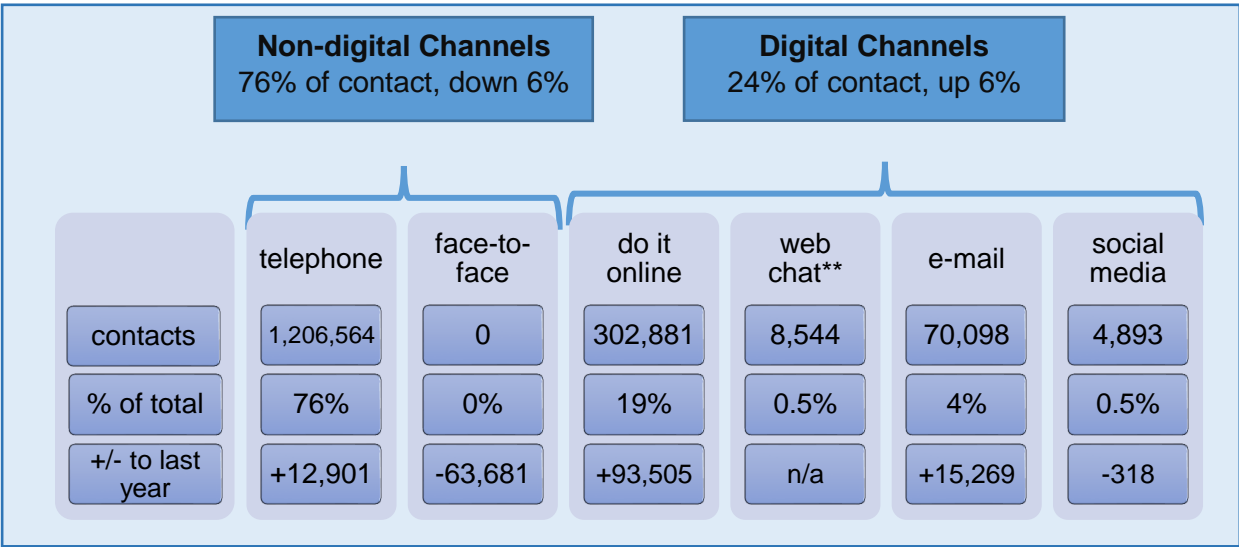
- 27 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board is recommended to note the content of the report.

## Background

- 28 Successful organisations understand their customers and one way to gain this valuable insight is by gathering and utilising customer feedback.
- 29 The customer feedback report brings together a wide range of information collected from our customers which describes their experiences of using our services.

## Contact through our customer services team

- 30 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.
- 31 Our Customer Access Points (CAPs), closed along with all council buildings at the start of the pandemic, re-opened to the public on 30 September 2021. Early indications suggest demand for face-to-face contact is low – an update will be provided in the quarter three report.
- 32 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, we received almost 1.7 million contacts through our reported channels with over 900k being handled by our corporate customer services team. This contact was through both non-digital and digital channels and is summarised in the infographic below.



## Non-Digital Channels

- 33 In line with previous reports, the telephone remains the most frequently used channel for contacting us, with nearly eight in every ten customers choosing this method.

- 34 Broadly speaking, we receive telephone calls 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).
- 35 Only calls received via our ACD system are included in our telephone statistics. Therefore, 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 will allow us to see a more holistic view of telephony demand and performance across the council, and to monitor and identify opportunities to improve and enhance the customer experience.
- 36 Therefore, although reported call volumes appear to have increased over the last 12 months, this is mainly due to us transferring our non-ACD lines to our ACD system. During quarter two, five telephone lines were transferred to ACD: Pest Control, Clean and Green, Litter, and MyView support.

**Digital Channels**

- 37 Although the telephone remains the most popular method overall, more customers are choosing to interact with us via our digital channels.
- 38 During quarter two, an additional 9,000 residents signed up for an online account - taking the number of residents who can engage with us through this method to more than 234,000. This equates to almost 157,000 unique properties.
- 39 The movement from non-digital to digital channels is particularly noticeable across customers logging service requests within our CRM system. A clear shift from telephone to online can be seen, as per the table below:

		<b>proportion of service requests logged by channel – 12 months ending 30 Sep</b>	
		<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Non digital	Telephone	34%	27%
	Face-to-face	4%	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>27%</b>
Digital	Do it online portal	57%	67%
	Other digital*	5%	6%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>73%</b>

\*social media (Facebook and Twitter), web chat, e-mail, virtual appointments

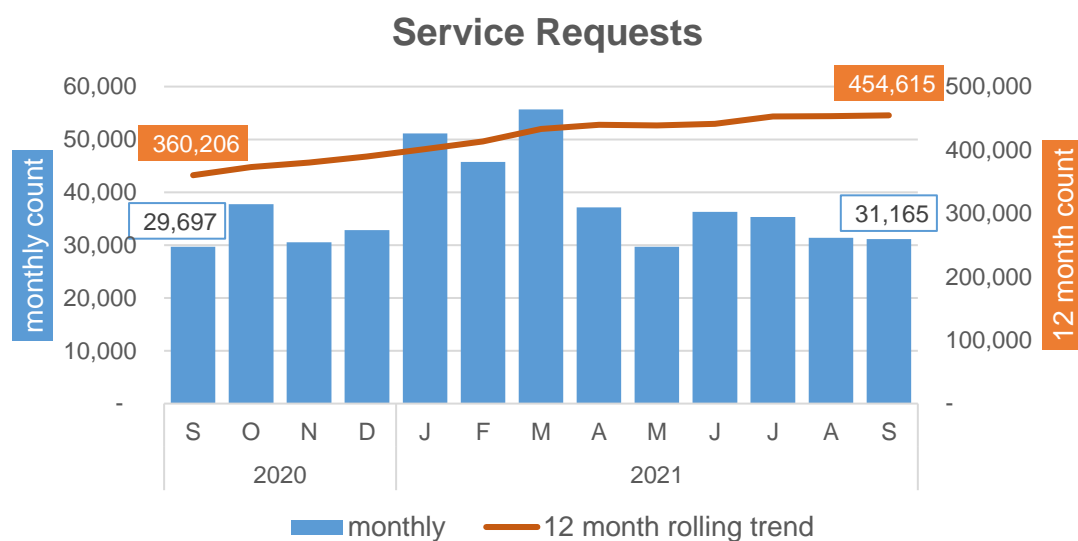
- 40 Our webchat service, now available across more than 30 web pages, had previously shown a quarter-on-quarter decrease. However, this was reversed during quarter two with a 41% increase.

	Q1, 2020/21	Q2, 2021/22	Change	
Webchat interactions	1,420	1,997	+577	+41%
COVID related	756	1,039	+283	+37%
Non-COVID related	664	958	+294	+44%

- 41 The increase was mainly driven by more chats across the areas of benefits and council tax (1,039, +60%), COVID-19 support (368, +37%) and general enquiries (542 +31%).

### Service Requests

- 42 Around 25% of customer contact leads to the creation of a service request in our CRM system. The remaining 75% relates to customers seeking advice or more information, wanting to be transferred to another team, booking an appointment, or requesting a progress update.
- 43 Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a steady increase in the number of service requests received. Almost 95,000 additional service requests were received in the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, than in the 12 months to 30 September 2020, an increase of 26% on the previous year.



- 44 The increase reflects the impact of the pandemic on council services, with residents contacting us for financial support (both personal and business related), reporting issues such as litter, fly-tips and noise in greater numbers (arising from people spending more time at home / within their local area) and requesting us to enforce specific COVID-19 restrictions.
- 45 Although the number of service requests continued to increase during quarter two, the rate of increase has slowed.
- 46 Over the 12 months ending 30 September, the ten most frequently requested services were:



**Performance Standards**

- 47 To enable us to monitor delivery timescales of service requests logged within our CRM system, we have applied performance standards within the system where possible.
- 48 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.
- 49 As a result, 76% of service requests processed during the 12 months ending 30 September 2021 were assessed against a performance standard. The performance standard was met in 74% of cases – slightly lower than the 77% recorded for the same period last year. However, it



should be noted that over the same period, service requests increased by 26%.

- 50 We are undertaking a detailed review of all service requests within our CRM system that are not currently assessed against a performance standard. We have completed the initial phase of this review and have identified a range of service improvements linked to systems, data and reporting, training, and member experience. An update of these improvements will be provided within the quarter three report.

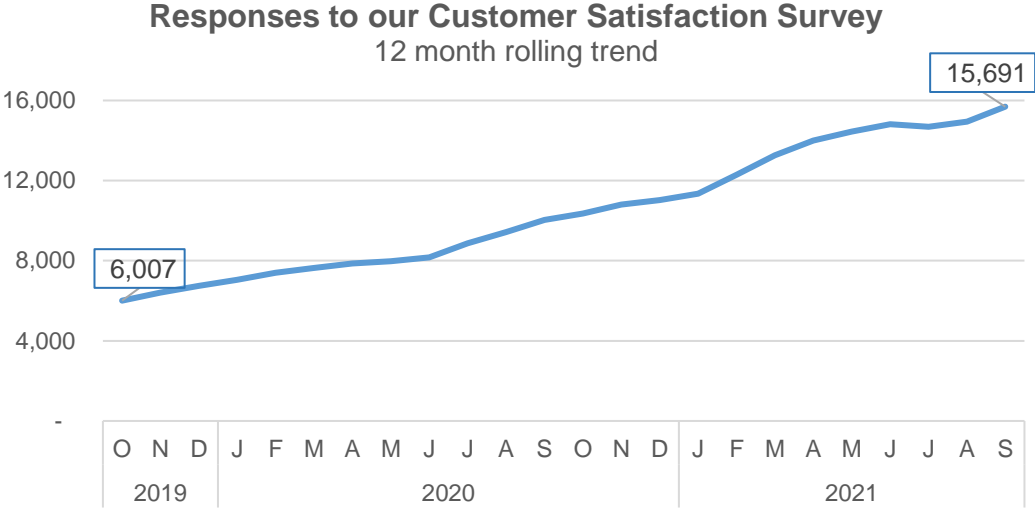
## Customer satisfaction - surveys and compliments

- 51 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.
- 52 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.
- 53 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.

<b>Service requests linked to our customer satisfaction survey</b>		
<b>Number</b>	<b>1 Oct 2019 to 30 Sep 2020</b>	<b>1 Oct 2020 to 30 Sep 2021</b>
Service Request types	105	117
Service Requests received	289,498	342,533
Surveys emailed to customer	214,049 (74%)	104,814 (31%)
Responses to survey	10,039 (4.7%)	15,691 (15.0%)
Response as a % of service requests	3.5%	4.6%

- 54 During quarter two, fewer surveys were emailed to our customers due to essential system configuration work that was undertaken during the period. This work has now been completed and we expect the number of surveys issued to increase accordingly going forward.

55 Despite fewer surveys being emailed to customers, more responses were received. This is due to our continuing work to link the survey to more service requests and capture more customer email addresses. Over the last two years, the number of responses has increased by 60%.



56 Whilst the satisfaction survey is linked to 117 service request types, 90% of the survey responses received during the 12 months ending 30 September related to only 21 service request types (see appendix five). Eight service request types, summarised in the table below, made up 70% of total responses.

	Response Rate	
	Surveys returned / total SRs	
	1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020	1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021
Bin: missed collection	<b>6.3%</b> 1,477 / 23,347	<b>19%</b> 5,667 / 29,909
Bulky Waste	<b>0.1%</b> 14 / 25,247	<b>3.0%</b> 953 / 32,085
Complaint	<b>5.5%</b> 236 / 4,283	<b>15.8%</b> 858 / 4,781
Council tax – change of payment method	<b>11.2%</b> 584 / 5,205	<b>10.6%</b> 563 / 5,309
Fly-tipping	<b>4.5%</b> 666 / 14,712	<b>6.4%</b> 943 / 14,803
Join the garden waste scheme	<b>1.1%</b> 381 / 35,005	<b>0.9%</b> 477 / 54,351

	Response Rate	
	Surveys returned / total SRs	
	1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020	1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021
Road or footpath	8.4% 459 / 5,458	7.3% 671 / 9,233
Street lighting	10.5% 668 / 6,351	11.4% 760 / 6,640

57 Whilst increased response rates have been achieved over five of the eight service request types, there was significant variance in response rates ranging from 0.9% to 19%. This is 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.

58 We have analysed all survey responses received during the 12 months ending 30 September 2021 against our nine key measures as per the infographic below.



59 Satisfaction rates vary significantly across different service request types and must be considered in line with the volume of service requests and volume of responses (see appendix five). Further analysis

has been completed to support an understanding of satisfaction with service delivery based on service request type.

- 60 The highest levels of satisfaction with service delivery were received by seven areas – each of which attained more than 90%. These areas were early help (97%), bulky waste collections (96%), waste permit requests (96%), birth death and marriage certificate requests (95%), garden waste - join the scheme (95%), council tax account (94%), and council tax change of payment method (93%).
- 61 Six areas recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction (less than 70%). These were requesting a new bin replacement/repair (42%), service complaints (53%), dog and litter bins (61%), clearing litter (64%), tree or hedge pruning / removal (67%), and warm homes (67%).
- 62 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.
- 63 Further analysis of the reduction in levels of customer satisfaction regarding interactions with these six areas as identified the following:
- *New bin replacement/repair* – bin supply issues remain a challenge for the service who are unable to fulfil requests for new bins or replacements for damaged bins. With stock not expected until January 2022, the service will likely remain an area with low customer satisfaction.
  - *Dog and litter bins* – impacted by the bin supply issue.
  - *Service level complaints* – timeliness of acknowledgement and responses from service areas is the biggest driver for dissatisfaction.
  - *Clearing litter* – although staffing levels have been impacted by COVID, the team are consistently cleaning the same areas within towns and villages within the same timescales as standard. There has been a notable increase in the volume of litter being seen in verges due to litter being thrown from vehicles. Investment has been made in litter signage with these being placed in hotspot areas across the county and moved frequently to maintain impact.
  - *Tree or hedge pruning/removal* – There has been no change to the programme, however the team have identified a notable increase in the volume of requests where the responsibility for maintenance does not lie with Durham County Council.

- *Warm homes* – lack of contact with the customer generated from two key issues. The first was linked to enquires routed through the CRM portal being configured to send an automated closure response to the client before contact had been made. Measures have been put in place to delay the auto response time the client has been contacted in advance of the closure response. The second issue involved the launch of a new energy grant for air source heat pumps (ASHP) which was required to commence at pace and without a dedicated portal being in place to accept enquiries. As a short-term temporary solution, the existing Warm Homes online portal was used and as a result this required contact to be forwarded to a separate team with any delays reflecting on the warm homes team performance. A new and separate portal is being developed for ASHP enquiries.

64 We are in the process of completing more detailed analysis of our data to better understand our customers' experiences and put actions in place to improve their experiences. We are focusing on deep dives of our satisfaction data (and link back to service provision) and customer suggestions. A progress update will be provided in the quarter three report.

### **Customer Compliments and Star Rating Feedback**

65 During the 12 months ending 30 September, we received 1,202 compliments, 35% more (+313) than the same period the previous year.

66 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.

67 A small sample of the 198 compliments received during quarter two, 2021/22 is attached at Appendix two.

68 In addition to compliments, we collect star ratings from customers who request a service via an online form. The rating helps us understand the customer's experience when logging their request and identifies opportunities for improvement.

69 During the 12 months ending 30 September, we received more than 104,000 ratings, 33% more (+25,621) than the same period last year. Almost two thirds related to five star rated service requests handling.

All Service Request Types 12 months ending...	Star ratings received	Proportion of star ratings received				
		5-star	4-star	3-star	2-star	1-star
30 September 2020	78,632	64%	17%	12%	2%	4%
30 September 2021	104,253	66%	19%	8%	2%	5%

70 40% of ratings related to one of five service areas.

All Service Request Types 12 months ending 30-Sept-2021	Star ratings received	Proportion of star ratings received				
		5-star	4-star	3-star	2-star	1-star
Garden waste – join the scheme	20,998	62%	23%	9%	3%	3%
Customer Satisfaction Survey	13,110	60%	19%	8%	3%	9%
Waste permit	7,273	85%	9%	3%	1%	2%
Bin: Not Emptied	5,650	62%	16%	7%	2%	13%
Fly Tipping	3,931	65%	22%	7%	2%	4%

### Customer suggestions

71 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2021 we received 550 customer suggestions, 92 fewer than the same period last year.

72 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 feed and charges.

73 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. We then provide feedback to the relevant service areas / teams to support opportunities for improvement and development of policies and procedures.

74 The following table summarises the feedback received over the 12 months ending 30 September 2021.

<b>27</b> objections to our decisions (-5)	Five objections related to operating hours / building closures and two for not proceeding with a customer's complaint. The remainder were mainly operational decisions, e.g., road closures.
<b>114</b> dissatisfied with fees and charges (+10)	33 related to leisure centres, 18 to waste (mostly replacement bins (14), garden waste (2) and bulky waste (2)), and 13 to council tax.
<b>168</b> comments about policies / procedures	77% related to policies and procedures linked to waste collection and disposal. - 44% related to our Household Waste Recycling Centres (74 comments)

(-27)

- 33% to our Refuse and Recycling Service (55 comments)

## Priority Correspondence

75 During the 12 months ending 30 September, we received 2,645 items of priority correspondence<sup>1</sup>.

76 All teams are working to a response deadline of 10 working days from receipt of enquiry, except the Resources service grouping which is working to a response deadline of four working days.

	No. enquiries received	Responded on time		Responded late	
Apr-Jun 2021	542	373	69%	169	31%
Jul-Sep 2021	532	317	61%	215	39%

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

77 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.

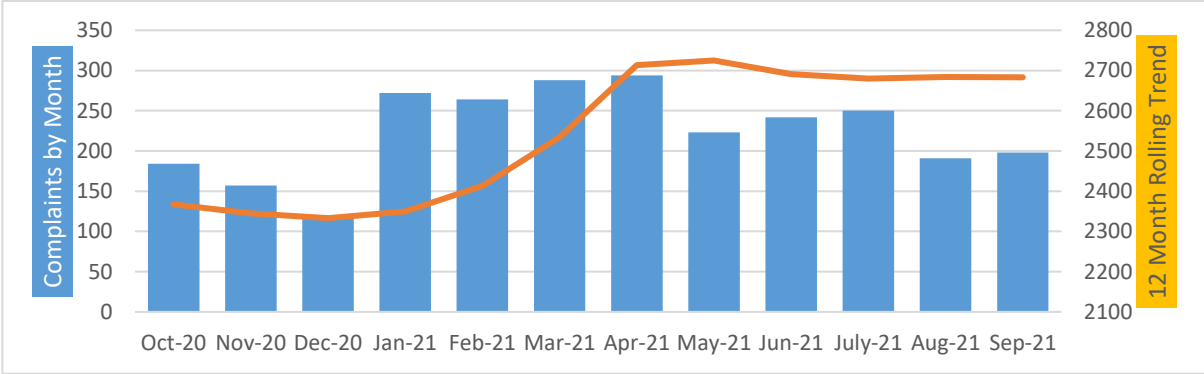
## Corporate Complaints

78 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, we received 2,683 corporate complaints – 303 more (+13%) than the previous year. Of those investigated, 49% were upheld, which is on par with previous years.

---

<sup>1</sup> Priority correspondence relates to correspondence sent directly to the Chief Executive, Member of Parliament or Corporate Directors

79 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 September 2021, the ratio of complaints to service requests was 0.6% or six complaints for every 1,000 service requests.



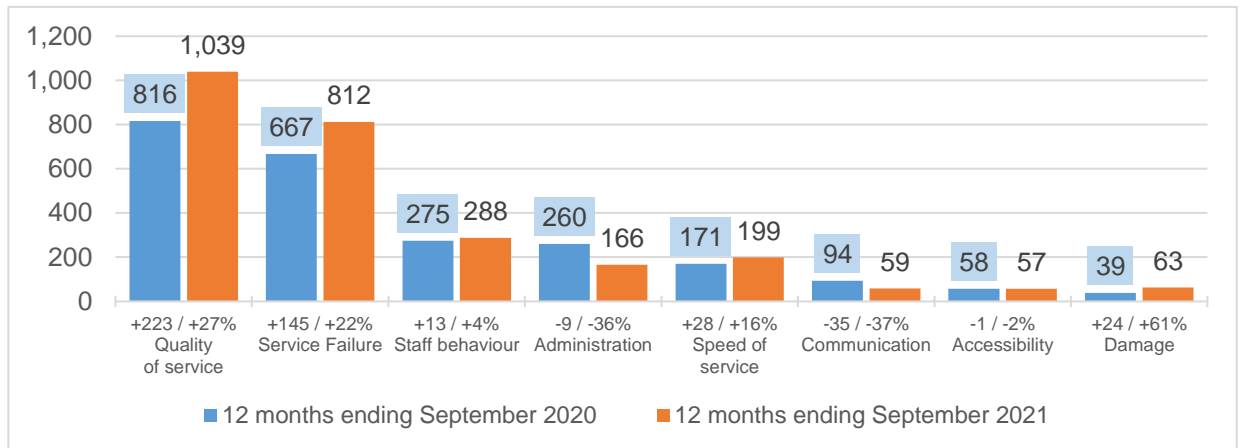
80 54% of service level complaints were completed and responded to within timescale, 46% were responded to outside of timescale. Compared with 51% and 48% the previous year.

81 The areas with the largest proportion of responses outside of the required performance standard for quarter two are Refuse and Recycling, Clean and Green and Highways.

82 Broadly speaking, corporate complaints can be categorised across eight specific areas.

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
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





- 83 'Quality of Service' (not providing the service to the expected standard) and 'Service Failure' (not doing what we said we would) remain 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.
- 84 For example, the main driver behind the increase in service failure complaints was 'not actioning a service request'. This increased from 88 to 211. Given that we received almost 95,000 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.
- 85 Furthermore, if we consider complaints as a percentage of service requests (0.6% in the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, compared to 0.7% for the same period the previous year), we can see that proportionally, complaints have remained broadly the same.
- 86 Looking at more specific reasons for complaint. The most frequent cause remains missed bin collections – which makes up 19% of all complaints. Of those received and investigated in the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, 71% were upheld. However, it is important to note that whilst we received 513 missed bin complaints in the 12 months ending 30 September, 13 million bins were collected which represents a complaint to delivery ratio of just 0.004%.

### Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

- 87 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, 197 complainants were dissatisfied with the response to their complaint (45 during quarter two, 2021/22) and asked for it to be escalated to independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team. 87% of these were responded to within performance standard compared to 83% the previous year.

- 88 The 13% not responded to within performance standard were as a result of the complexity of the complaint extending lead times, in these cases customers were issued a holding response with explanation of the delay, a new response date and new response deadline.
- 89 Analysis of a sample of these investigations highlights that 24% could have been avoided through either timelier or more comprehensive updates from services, and/or completion of the agreed action in the first instance.

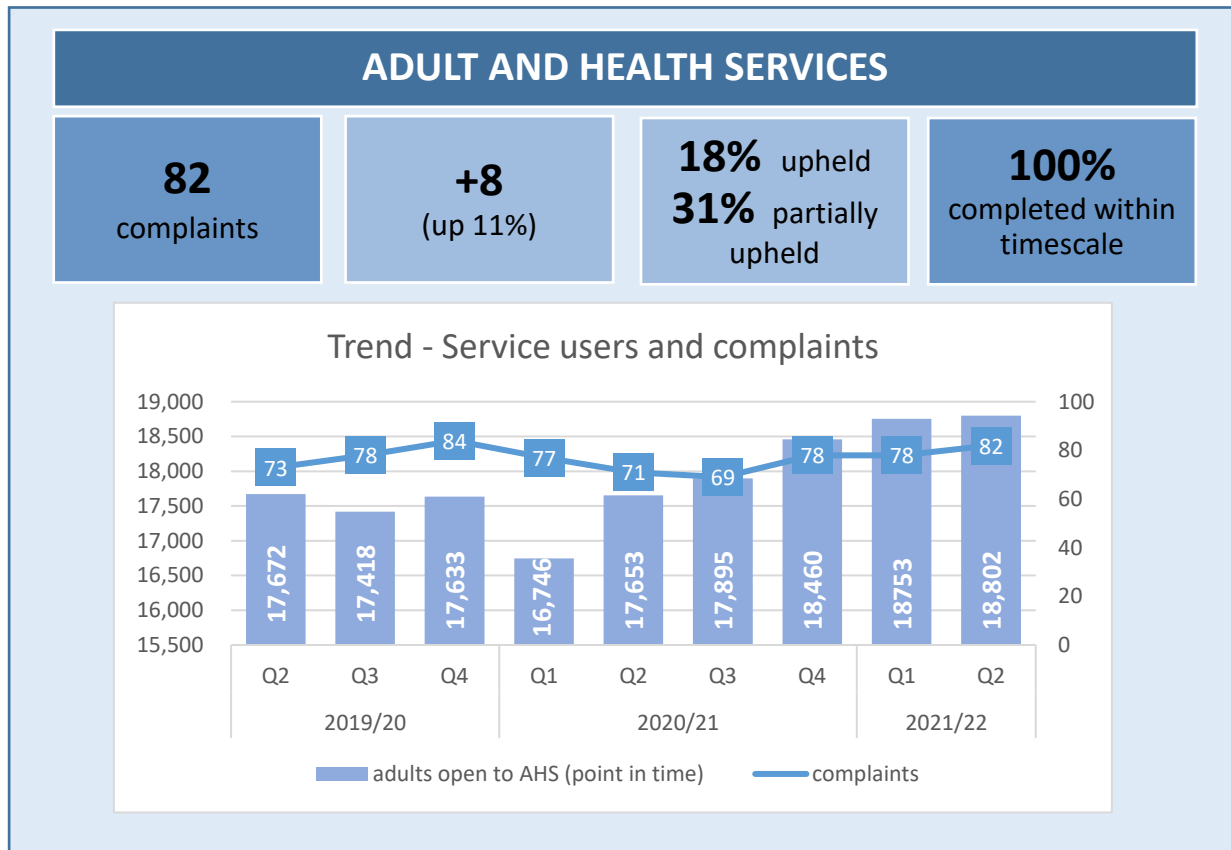


- 90 Details of complaints upheld by independent investigators during quarter two are included in Appendix three.

## Statutory Complaints

- 91 As of 30 September 2021, around 19,000 adults and 3,800 children and young people were being supported by Adult and Health Services (AHS) and Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) respectively.
- 92 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.
- 93 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.
- 94 A new case management system has now been introduced across social care within AHS (Azeus). The system has a complaints module that allows complaints to be logged upon receipt and updated in real-time. CYPS also intends to introduce a new complaints module using their case management system (Liquid Logic). Quality assurance will remain the responsibility of the complaint officers.

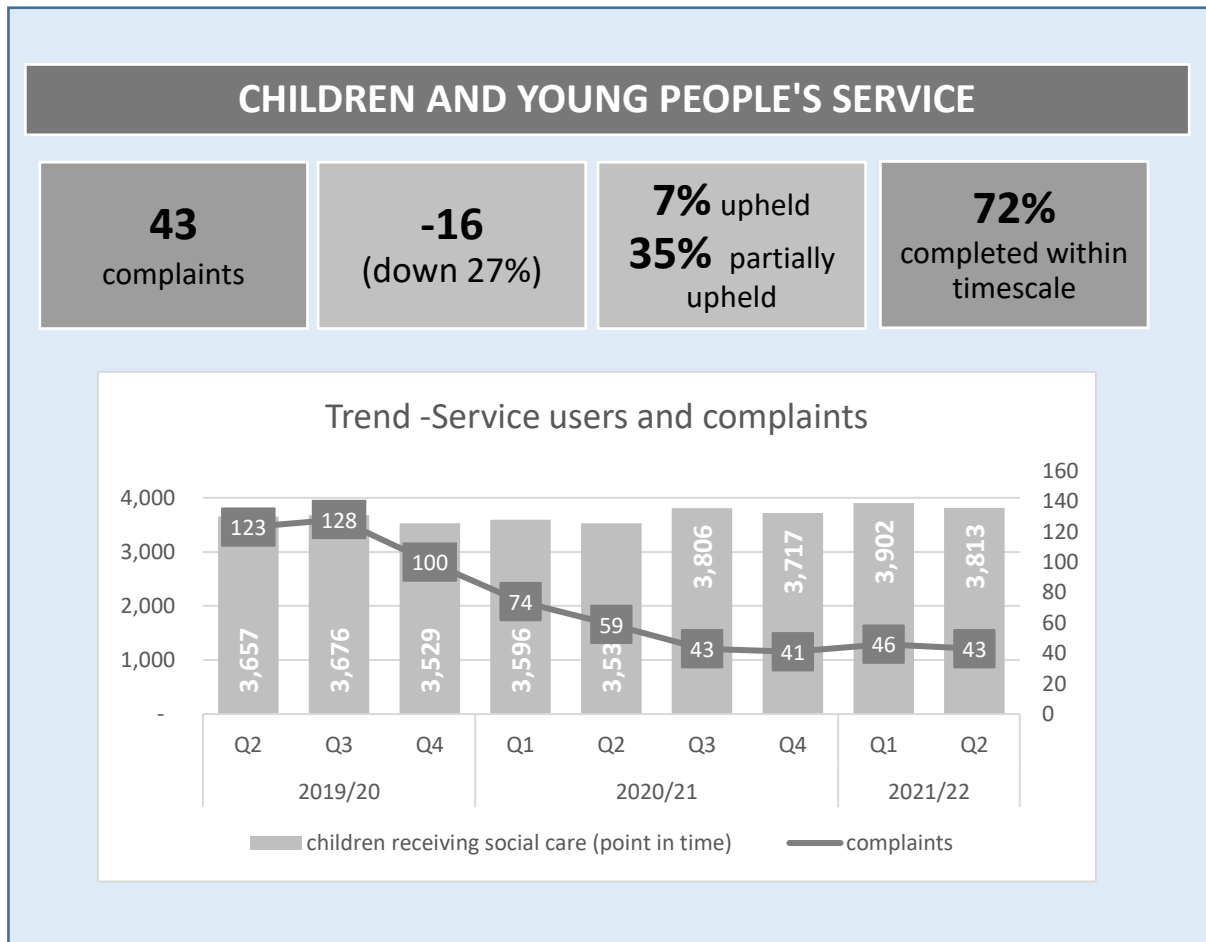
## Adult Health Services



- 95 Of the 82 statutory AHS complaints received during the 12 months ending 30 September: 37% related to older people/physical disabilities/sensory impairment (30 complaints), 22% to learning disabilities/mental health/substance misuse (18 complaints) and 21% to Transactional Services (17 complaints) which deals with financial assessments/charging.
- 96 The most frequent reasons for making a complaint were dissatisfaction with charges (17 complaints), lack of communication – no information received (15 complaints) and speed of service (15 complaints).
- 97 During quarter two 2021/22, actions taken in response to complaints included:
- (a) reviewing decision-making processes, including the use of discretion, relating to calculating a service user's contribution towards the costs of their care and support.
  - (b) Amending correspondence relating to final account invoices to include an apology if delayed and outside the council's normal service standards.

- (c) reminding care provider of their responsibility to inform the council if care calls are consistently delivered in less than the allocated time.

## Children and Young People's Services



- 98 Of the 43 statutory CYPS complaints received during the 12 months ending 30 September: 72% (31 complaints) related to the Families First teams (responsible for children in need, child protection plans, child, and family assessments (in cases of parental dispute)), 19% (eight complaints) related to teams involved with Children Looked After, and 9% (four complaints) related to the Children with Disabilities team.
- 99 Due to the complexity of these complaints, up to three reasons can be recorded for each. During the 12 months ending 30 September, the most frequently recorded reason for making a complaint (17 complaints) was communication. Fifteen complaints featured disagreement (with action/ assessment/ decision/ recorded information) and staff behaviour in 13 complaints.
- 100 During quarter two, actions taken in response to complaints included:

- (a) Working with the commissioning service to provide support services for children with disabilities.
- (b) Apologising to parents for not returning phone calls.
- (c) Issuing the minutes of Team Around the Family meetings.

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

- 101 During the 12 months ending 30 September 2021, the Ombudsman delivered decisions relating to 74 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants, and in some instances, supplemented with contextual information from council officers.
- 102 Of the 14 decisions delivered during quarter two, two (14%) were upheld. Details are included in Appendix four.
- 103 Additional information regarding complaints escalated to the Ombudsman is available [here](#).

## **Recent developments that enhance the customer experience**

- 104 We have continued with developments that enhance the customer experience and drive improvements across customer services through our Integrated Customer Service initiative and Unified Communications Strategy.
- 105 Project SignVideo which sits within the Integrated Customer Service programme will provide access to immediate telephony support for British Sign Language individuals (BSL) to communicate over video telephones and similar technologies with hearing people in real-time, via a sign language interpreter through a Video Relay Service. This project is due for implementation into corporate customer service in quarter four and aims to improve the ease and speed of contact for BSL users at first point of contact.
- 106 Extending channel choice is a core element of our digital transformation programme, having the ability to engage with residents in both new and traditional ways increases our ability to engage with and understand better the needs of our customers.
- 107 Project Bizvu which sits within the Unified Communications strategy is aligned to the enablement of new modern communication channels on platforms such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp into our contact centres and is due for implementation in 2022.

- 108 As we continue to adapt our ways of working, it essential we ensure that customer service agents have the right tools to do the job and deliver services to our residents effectively.
- 109 During quarter two, we continued to roll-out our new softphone-based telephony platform giving users access to contact centre features from their laptop allowing them to work from any location with an adequate internet connection. 14 more teams<sup>2</sup> moved to the new solution meaning the project is 77% complete and on track for all contact centres to be standardised by 31 December 2021.
- 110 During quarter one 2021/22, the Customer Access Point operating model was revised to facilitate a primary focus on digital inclusion through access to devices and assisted self-service support, capacity for officers to provide fully supported self-serve sessions with those customers who need it was created by moving all face-to-face interactions to 'appointment only'.
- 111 These changes were reflected in our revised Customer Service Charter and Standards and reflect our customer service ethos and the changing needs and expectations of our customers.
- 112 We are in the process of updating our customer satisfaction survey to both implement the changes required to reflect the adjusted Charter and Standards and to provide richer customer service. The changes are due to be tested and refined in quarter three with implementation planned by January 2022 to ensure a full data set for quarter four.
- 113 Throughout the quarter we continued to migrate telephone lines to our Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system<sup>3</sup>. 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.
- 114 53% of services have now been fully migrated to the ACD technology – with Bereavement Services, NP Garden Waste, NP Litter, My view, NP Pest Control migrating in quarter two 2021/22.
- 115 The following CRM improvements were delivered during quarter two 2021/22 following customer feedback:

---

<sup>2</sup> Sundry Debtors, Welfare Assistance, Blue Badge, Financial Assessment, Deputy and Appointee, Integrated Transport Unit, Trade Waste, Refuse and Recycling, Payroll Menu, AHS collections and recovery, Enforcement, Bereavement, MyView helpdesk and Pest Control

<sup>3</sup> 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).

- (a) Updated the council tax change of payment method form to allow landlords to submit changes for multiple properties at the same time rather than submitted multiple forms; and
- (b) Added additional information and functionality to the Post-16 travel assistance application to avoid any repeat contact when processing applications.
- (c) In addition, the following new online forms and processes were developed and delivered / made live:
  - Fun and food programme
  - Problem Commercial Land and Properties
  - AAP funding application
  - Covid-19 Community buildings recovery support
  - Research Approval Group Application Form
  - Voluntary Community Sector Alliance process
  - Move – Start your journey! Referral form

## **Conclusion**

- 116 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.
- 117 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.
- 118 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.
- 119 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.

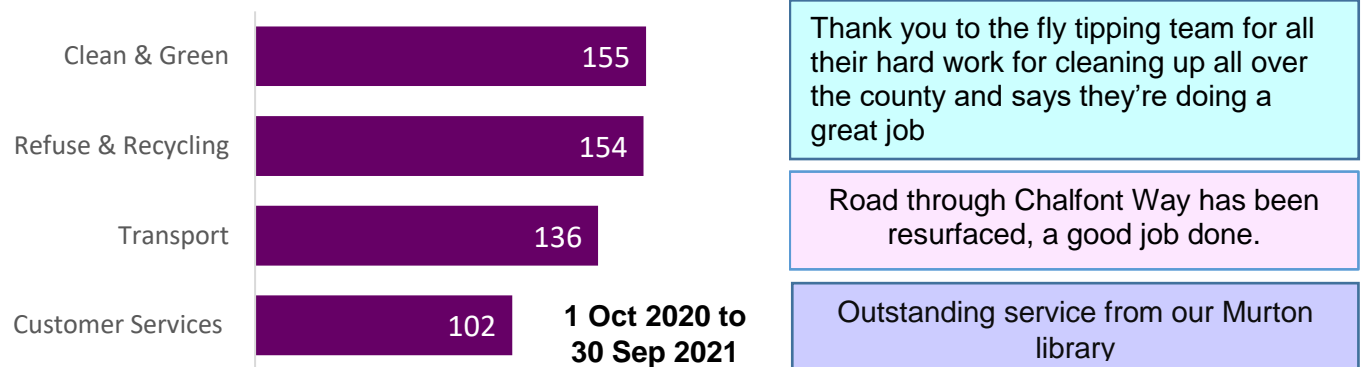
### **Risk**

None.

### **Procurement**

None.

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



Thank you to the fly tipping team for all their hard work for cleaning up all over the county and says they're doing a great job

Road through Chalfont Way has been resurfaced, a good job done.

Outstanding service from our Murton library

Resurfacing work has just recently been carried out on Whitehill Way area Waldrige and wanted to say what a fantastic job was done with very little disruption.

Excellent service on unblocking street Culley

would like to pass on her heartfelt thanks for all the help and support that she has been given from the staff at Care Connect. She said she could not do without them.

Caller very complimentary about flower beds planted in places like Consett, Esh Winning, etc.

praise for quality of our service, Durham County Records Office

I visited the recycling centre and as on previous visits the staff were very pleasant and helpful.

Customer has recently had a pest control officer to his address and was extremely pleased with the service and wanted to thank the officer involved.

Hello there. I am just sending this message to share my thanks and gratitude to the bin collection team.

The BB team were super helpful

Customer wants to thank Staff for all their help re. Sorting out his Blue Badge

Customer is very pleased with how quick the Highways team repaired the potholes outside of her house. She wanted to pass on to her compliments to those involved.

The daughter of this resident phoned to say thanks for the help they provided to her mam. She said their attitude was commendable and we do an "awesome" job. She also complimented the staff saying they were really lovely.

We had a call through this evening from customer at life line, staff had assisted on a fall, the customer called in to say thank you for their assistance and for contacting the district nurse after her fall this morning.

Customer would like management to be aware of how hard the crew work on her round and that her 4-year-old son always waves to the & they wave back which is lovely. When they called today they left a toy recycling truck for the customers son and the customer says this is a lovely thing for them to do.

Customer would like to thank staff for the professional help and information she has been given whenever for she called for information on the service.

Brandon Primary School wanted to express their thanks for the work to get the pool back into operation

Customer wishes to compliment the staff at Thorpe Road Cemetery for the work they do such as keeping the cemetery beautiful

I love the round flower beds at the bottom of Stanley High Street opposite the church. In particular I like the white/grey/orange/purple display.

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

Complaint upheld	Recommendation
Customer moved into a supported living placement and paid for accommodation they believe the council should have paid for as part of the aftercare plan	Customer offered financial remedy to acknowledge the communication fault.
Council failed to arrange a care provider able to provide support identified in customer's care plan.	Council to pay fee and share the lessons learned with staff

Complaint partially upheld	Recommendation
Disagrees with decision not to revoke planning permission	Apologise to customer and offer financial remedy to acknowledge stress caused to the customer
Dissatisfied with action following their reports of odour emanating from a neighbouring property	Apologise to customer
Unhappy with lack of response to initial complaint	Apologise to customer for failing to keep accurate records relating to the customer's concerns
Inadequate feedback in relation to matters raised	Apologise to customer
Dissatisfied with actions taken following the customer's report about the general condition of surrounding areas	<p>Reiterate to the service area, the importance with dealing with service requests in a timely manner</p> <p>Neighbourhood warden to contact the customer and discuss their concerns</p> <p>Council to try to identify and contact the owner to encourage them to bring the property back into use</p>

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

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
<p>There was fault by the Council in its communication about changes to the complainant's accommodation status. This meant the complainant was not aware of their liability for paying accommodation costs after moving from a care home placement</p>	<p>Council to make the agreed payment to cover complainant's rental costs between December 2019 and February 2020.</p>
<p>Fault with the service of care agency</p>	<p>Council to apologise for the faults identified and the distress these have caused</p> <p>Pay £3,640 for not receiving any care support between April 2020 and April 2021, and a further £150 for the 31 missed calls between 20 Feb and 5 April 2020.</p> <p>Share the lessons learned around assessing fluctuating needs with relevant adult social care staff / assessors</p>

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

### Top 24 by number of survey responses – equates to 90% of responses

	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 September 2020	30 September 2021	30 September 2020	30 September 2021	
Anti-social behaviour	<b>4.1%</b> 104 / 2,495	<b>3.6%</b> 86 / 2,398	82%	78%	The issue has not been resolved long term
Bin: new, replacement or repair	<b>0.5%</b> 123 / 23,668	<b>0.5%</b> 138 / 25,592	41%	42%	not keeping customers informed of progress and taking too long to complete task
Bin: missed collection	<b>6.3%</b> 1,477 / 23,347	<b>19%</b> 5,667 / 29,909	74%	75%	Time taken to return for the bin
Birth, death, or marriage certificate	<b>8.1%</b> 245 / 3,039	<b>10.7%</b> 416 / 3,883	97%	95%	Time taken to respond
Bulky Waste Collection	<b>0.1%</b> 14 / 25,247	<b>3.0%</b> 953 / 32,085	57%	96%	Time taken to complete the task
Complaints	<b>5.5%</b> 236 / 4,283	<b>15.8%</b> 858 / 4,781	61%	53%	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	<b>11.2%</b> 584 / 5,205	<b>10.6%</b> 563 / 5,309	95%	93%	Communication issues
Council tax account	<b>7.4%</b> 1,502 / 20,392	<b>9.2%</b> 125 / 1,366	96%	94%	
Dog bins or litter bins	<b>7.6%</b> 110 / 1,442	<b>7%</b> 128 / 1,841	81%	61%	not explaining our decision when unable to install/ relocate/ renew bin.

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

### Top 24 by number of survey responses – equates to 90% of responses

	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 September 2020	30 September 2021	30 September 2020	30 September 2021	
					Also not completing task when we agreed to action in line with our existing schedule.
Dog fouling	<b>10.2%</b> 198 / 1,945	<b>8.1%</b> 164 / 2,022	66%	76%	The issue remains unresolved
Drainage and flooding	<b>6.9%</b> 140 / 2,024	<b>8.1%</b> 196 / 2,429	73%	74%	The issue remains unresolved
Early help referral	<b>6.4%</b> 73 / 1,135	<b>9.8%</b> 180 / 1,843	96%	97%	
Fly-tipping	<b>4.5%</b> 666 / 14,712	<b>6.4%</b> 943 / 14,803	85%	86%	The issue remains unresolved
Free school travel - apply	<b>12.4%</b> 205 / 1,651	<b>13.2%</b> 230 / 1,743	99%	97%	
Garden waste – join the scheme	<b>1.1%</b> 381 / 35,005	<b>0.9%</b> 477 / 54,351	95%	95%	
Litter	<b>7.9%</b> 243 / 3,070	<b>4.9%</b> 208 / 4,253	69%	64%	The issue remains unresolved
Road or footpath	<b>8.4%</b> 459 / 5,458	<b>7.3%</b> 671 / 9,233	78%	80%	The issue remains unresolved

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

### Top 24 by number of survey responses – equates to 90% of responses

	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 September 2020	30 September 2021	30 September 2020	30 September 2021	
Rubbish in gardens and yards	<b>3.7%</b> 163 / 4,382	<b>3.8%</b> 173 / 4,519	79%	80%	Not keeping customer informed of progress. The issue remains unresolved
Street lighting	<b>10.5%</b> 668 / 6,351	<b>11.4%</b> 760 / 6,640	88%	83%	The issue remains unresolved
Tree or hedge pruning, removal	<b>10%</b> 463 / 4,615	<b>10.5%</b> 475 / 4,537	67%	66%	The issue remains unresolved
Warm homes	<b>9%</b> 116 / 1288	<b>15.2%</b> 221 / 1,457	90%	67%	Nobody contacted the customer
Waste permit	<b>0.5%</b> 152 / 31626	<b>0.6%</b> 236 / 39,207	95%	96%	The time taken to receive the permit