

3 April 2023

**Customer Feedback Report,
Quarter Three, 2022/23**



Report of 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 To present an overview of the wide range of information collected from our customers that describe their experiences of using our services.
- 2 The report covers performance in quarter three 2022/23, covering the period October to December 2022.

Executive summary

- 3 Customer feedback such as satisfaction with, and general experiences of the services and support we provide, is an important aid to improve customer service and align our actions with customer need.
- 4 Performance is reported on an exception basis with key messages under three summary sections of going well, areas which require attention and using feedback to inform learning.
- 5 The legacy of COVID-19 can still be seen within our performance reporting, so performance data relating to the last two financial years is not representative for many areas. Therefore, wherever possible, we have compared current performance against pre-pandemic data.
- 6 However, the greatest challenge for our residents, local businesses and the council is the current cost-of-living crisis which has steadily worsened

over the last 12 months. High inflation, currently at 10.5%¹, has largely been driven by the rise in the cost of fuel and energy bills, which is being impacted significantly by world events, including the war in Ukraine.

7 The cost-of-living crisis is impacting our contact with our customers in three key ways:

- Demand for financial support and advice services. High inflation is outstripping wage and benefit increases, so income is falling in real terms. This has been further exacerbated by the rising costs of mortgages, energy, and food. This is driving demand for services which help support people facing financial hardship or who are in crisis.

We are receiving more contact from households seeking financial assistance, and we are continuing to see high volume of applications for Welfare Assistance and Discretionary Housing Payments. We are continuing to support residents through the crisis with various initiatives and funds.

- As we continue to administer support schemes provided through Government funding, customer contact increases as residents make enquiries in relation to their own circumstances. The Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme resulted in significant increases in customer contact as residents make enquiries and also need support to progress claims (Non Direct Debit payers).

There could be additional contact when the council starts administering £400 payments to people who do not have a direct relationship with an energy provider (Energy Bill Support Scheme – Alternative Funding).

- As resources are allocated to enable the implementation of additional support, this can impact the performance and delivery of mainstream services which can prompt further contact and potentially complaints.

Recommendation(s)

8 That Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board notes the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter three performance, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic recovery and the external international factors driving inflation and cost-of-living on the councils' performance.

¹ UK Consumer Price Index for 12 months to December 2022. Indicative [modelled consumer price inflation estimates](#) suggest that the CPI rate would have last been higher in October 1981, where the estimate for the annual inflation rate was 11.2%.

Background

- 9 Successful organisations listen and respond to their customers and one way to gain this valuable insight is by gathering and utilising customer feedback. This should then be used to inform learning and continuous improvement across services.

Analysis of Customer Feedback

Going well

- 10 Around 22% of customer contact² is now digital, up from 15% at the beginning of the pandemic. More customers have digital accounts: an extra 42,000 have do-it-online accounts (up 32%), an additional 46,000 have open portal system accounts (up 137%) and a further 35,000 receive council tax bills via e-mail (up 98%).
- 11 Both the number of corporate complaints and the proportion which has been upheld are static compared to pre-pandemic volumes (six fewer complaints and 62% upheld).
- 12 Of customers who requested a service through our Customer Relationship Management System and who responded to our satisfaction survey³, 82% stated they were satisfied with overall service delivery. The main driver for dissatisfaction continues to be timeliness (of both acknowledgment and response), insufficient progress updates and service requests being closed without being actioned, which in most cases is due to the request being added to a future work programme.
- 13 In addition, of customers visiting our theatres and cinemas who responded to our survey, 92% rated their 'whole experience' as 'good' or 'very good'.
- 14 During quarter three, we progressed with our Chatbot project, to reduce avoidable contact and provide digital customer service 24/7 via the council's website. We also increased functionality within the Eckoh system, including developments to send customer satisfaction surveys via text message at the end of telephone calls and incorporating real time information within the system.

² received through the ACD, face to face through our customer access points, do-it-online, webchat, social media and email.

³ satisfaction survey is automatically e-mailed to the customer when their service request is closed within the CRM.

Areas which require attention

- 15 Customer contacts through our reported channels⁴ continue to be skewed by the transfer of telephone lines to our automatic call distribution system. However, we estimate a 'true' increase in customer contact since the pre-pandemic year of around 5% (an additional 62,000 contacts), mainly driven by increased levels across council tax and benefits, the emergency duty team, and welfare assistance.
- 16 Although more customers are contacting us digitally – a change driven by the pandemic which accelerated the availability of service requests available through do-it-online, and the launch and increasing popularity of webchat – and more are registering to use our digital tools, contact through our Customer Access Points (CAPs) has fallen and is now around two-thirds of its pre-pandemic volume. We started consulting on our [proposal to reduce the hours in four of our least used CAPs](#) at the end of January 2023. Consultation closes on 9 March.
- 17 60% of all CRM service requests received during quarter three can be assessed against a performance standard. Although 81% met the performance standard overall, 11 service areas (which accounted for 4.5% of requests received during quarter three) met the standard for fewer than 50% of requests. We are analysing the data in more detail and discussions are ongoing with services regarding improvement opportunities.
- 18 Of the 241 requests relating to Freedom of Information / Environmental Information Regulations received during quarter three, 80% were responded to within 20 working days, lower than the target of 95%. This was due to a combination of volume, bottlenecks within certain services and staff shortages.
- 19 77% of first stage complaint responses met their performance standard, compared to 85% pre-pandemic. If first stage responses were timelier or more comprehensive, up to 23% fewer complaints would have been escalated to independent investigation (up to 50 complaints over 12 months). We are providing training to service areas to help resolve this and our ongoing complaints review will help streamline, improve and enhance the process.
- 20 The report in Appendix 2 provides the detailed update on Customer Feedback during quarter two 2022/23 and the actions put into place as a result.

⁴ contacts received through the ACD, face to face through our customer access points, do-it-online, webchat, social media and email.

Using feedback to inform learning

- 21 We are continuing with our data analytics project which will provide interactive dashboards and combine data at a person level to give new insights about our residents and service users. This data driven approach will results in better services for customers, better value for money, and more joined up service delivery. Social care has been prioritised and we expect new reports to go live in these areas in the new year.
- 22 During quarter three, we worked with services to ensure that customer feedback is being used to better understand the experience of accessing council services from the perspective of the customer.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

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

Author(s)

Debra Kitching

debra.kitching@durham.gov.uk

Sarah Welsh

sarah.welsh@durham.gov.uk

Mary Readman

mary.readman2@durham.gov.uk

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.

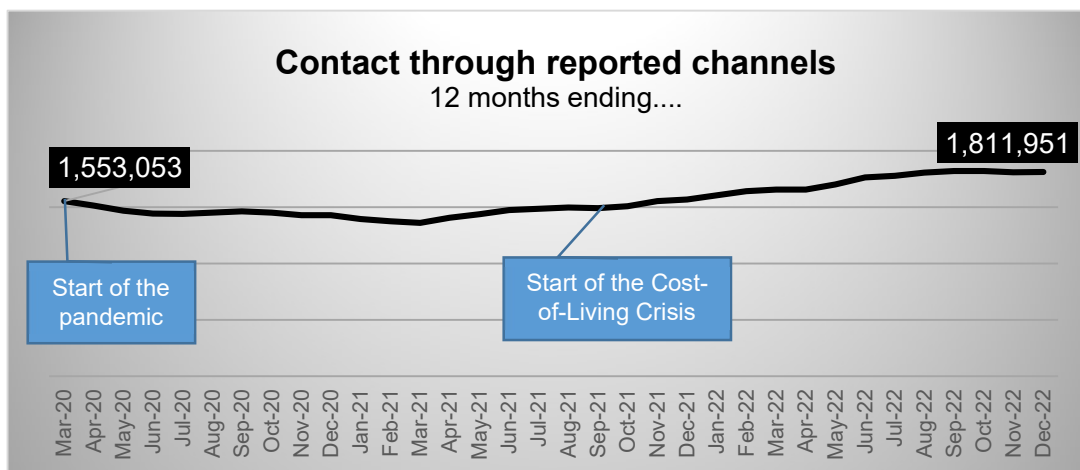


Durham County Council Customer Feedback Report Quarter Three, 2022/23



Contact through our reported channels⁵

- 1 Over the last 12 months we received more than 1.8 million contacts, almost 260,000 more than the pre-pandemic year⁶. This equates to a 17% increase.

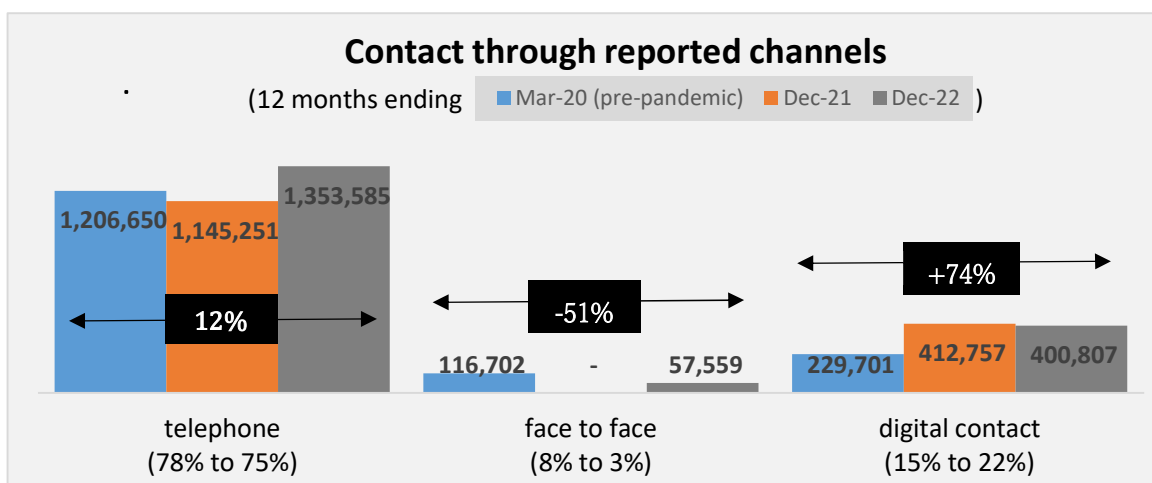


- 2 However, the main reason for this increase, accounting for around half of the additional contact, is transferring telephone lines to our automatic call distribution (ACD) system⁷. As we can't migrate past data, the transferred lines create artificial increases in call volume.
- 3 If we adjust call volume by removing those telephone lines for which we do not have a pre-pandemic comparison, then contact through our reported channels over the last 12 months is around 62,000 higher than pre-pandemic year (+5%).
- 4 Services experiencing increased levels of contact compared to the pre-pandemic year include council tax and benefits, the emergency duty team, and welfare assistance.
- 5 Although most contact is non-digital (by telephone or face-to-face), the proportion of contact that is digital has increased over the last two years.

⁵ Through our ACD telephone system, Customer Access Points, Do-It-Online, webchat, e-mail to customer services, social media

⁶ 12 months ending 31 March 2020

⁷ Telephone calls are received either through our ACD system, which routes calls to groups of agents on a first-in-first-answered criteria, or directly to a telephone extension non-ACD. Only calls received via our ACD system are included in our telephone statistics. When we transfer non-ACD lines into the ACD system, there is no past data. Consequently, it appears that call volume has increased.



6 Most of this change was driven by the pandemic with more service requests available through do-it-online, and the launch and increasing popularity of webchat. In addition, more customers are registering to use our digital tools.

Account		Pre-pandemic volume	12 months ending 31 December		Change since pre-pandemic	
			2021	2022		
Do-it-online (CRM)		129,876	158,763	171,550	+41,674	+32%
Revenues & Benefits	Open Portal	33,876	39,344	80,133	+46,257	+137%
	Council tax e-bills	36,193	33,714	71,640	+35,447	+98%

7 Conversely, contact through our Customer Access Points (CAPs) has yet to return to pre-pandemic volumes – it is currently around 64%. We are currently consulting on our [proposal to reduce the hours in four of our least used CAPs](#).

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

8 The following table summarises feedback received over the 12 months ending 31 December 2022.

37 objections to our decisions (-6)	Covered a range of service areas in small numbers such as waste (5), and culture and sport (4).
49 dissatisfied with fees and charges (-18)	Just over 60% related to replacement bins (15), leisure centres (9) or council tax (6). Remaining feedback was across a wide variety of service areas in smaller numbers

85 comments about policies / procedures (+24)

Three quarters related to waste: refuse and recycling services (39) and HWRC policies / procedures (26). The remainder covered a range of other policies and procedures.

Performance Standards

- 9 60% of service requests received and recorded in our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system during quarter three can be assessed against a performance standard. Of these, 81% met the performance standard.
- 10 Thirteen service areas met the performance standard for at least 80% of requests. This included: assisted bin collection (100%); waste permits (96%); dog bins or litter bins (89%); joining the garden waste scheme (88%) and street lighting (81%).
- 11 However, 11 service areas met the performance standard for fewer than 50% of requests. This included: road or footpath obstruction (47%); abandoned vehicles (43%); rubbish in gardens and yards (40%); tree or hedge pruning, removal (37%) and business waste collections (36%).
- 12 Action taken in response to performance standards of less than 50%, including exploring customer journeys and implementing new customer and service improvement meetings. The information will also be used to inform our Business as Usual activity for process review.

Customer suggestions

- 13 Whilst we receive and review all suggestions, most have been addressed previously and/or considered as part of service development.
- 14 A small sample of customer suggestions received during the latest quarter is attached at Appendix three.

Customer Compliments and Star Rating Feedback

- 15 Although most compliments relate to satisfaction with service provision, we continue to receive praise specific to the actions of our staff.
- 16 There were recurring themes in the feedback received through the star rating system⁸. 91% of respondents (67,013) rated the service as three star or above and provided positive feedback in relation to the following

⁸ initial contact and the online experience

services: bins: new, replacement, repair (speed of service, efficiency); bulky waste, white goods collection (courtesy, accessibility); garden waste - join the scheme (helpful scheme) and waste permits (conveniently designed).

- 17 Nine percent of respondents rated the service as one star or two stars (6,774) and provided negative feedback in relation to the following services: the customer satisfaction survey; joining the garden waste scheme (website impractical and difficult to navigate); missed bin collections (difficult to report); bin – new, replacement, repair (cost of service); street lighting (communication) and council tax – change of payment method; customer document submission (issues with file size limit).
- 18 A small sample of the compliments and star rating feedback received during the latest quarter is attached at Appendix four and five.

Customer satisfaction through the CRM⁹

- 19 Overall, 82% of respondents to our satisfaction survey (which is automatically e-mailed to the customer when their service request is closed within the CRM) stated they were satisfied with overall service delivery.
- 20 Service requests attaining an overall satisfaction rating of at least 90% related to: bulky waste collections; domestic pest control; birth, death or marriage certification; waste permits; garden waste scheme; free school travel and Care Connect.
- 21 Service requests attaining an overall satisfaction rating of less than 70% related to: generic enquiries; complaints; tree/hedge pruning and removal; dog fouling; dog bins and litter bins; drainage and flooding and noise complaints.
- 22 The main driver for dissatisfaction during quarter three was timeliness (of both acknowledgment and response), insufficient progress updates and service requests being closed without being actioned, which in most cases is due to the request being added to a future work programme
- 23 The survey also showed that overall:

⁹ Customer satisfaction surveys are automatically e-mailed to the customer when their service request is closed within the CRM. The response rate has improved over the last two years and is currently around 5.4% of service requests. As the results are taken from a sample survey, we are carrying out further work to determine if the results are statistically relevant.

- 97% felt their request was handled knowledgeably and effectively,
- 92% found it easy to contact the right service,
- 86% were satisfied with our handling of the initial contact,
- 78% were informed of how long it would take to complete the task,
- 73% were kept informed of progress,
- 82% were satisfied with the time taken to complete the task,
- 81% felt they were treated with dignity and respect,
- 87% were provided with clear information,
- 82% of respondents who were satisfied with overall service delivery.

Customer satisfaction theatres and cinemas: Gala, Bishop Auckland Town Hall and Empire¹⁰

24 Across the three venues, respondents rated the following as ‘good’ or ‘very good’:

	Overall	Gala	Bishop Auckland	Empire
Ticket booking experience	96%	95%	95%	97%
Staff welcome	93%	91%	96%	95%
Food and drink facilities	72%	69%	77%	76%
Quality of event	90%	85%	84%	98%
Value for money	92%	88%	91%	98%
Whole Experience	92%	89%	90%	98%

25 Specific customer feedback was received through the satisfaction survey. Recurring issues were poor toilet facilities, long queues for food and drink, and the auditorium temperature (too cold).

26 Also, some customers felt we were under-selling the shows and suggested that events could be better advertised with more information about the event provided.

Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations

27 241 requests were received during quarter three, 10 more (+4%) than the same period last year. We responded to 80% of requests within 20

¹⁰ October to December 2022

working days, lower than the target of 95%. This was due to a combination of volume, bottlenecks within certain services and staff shortages.

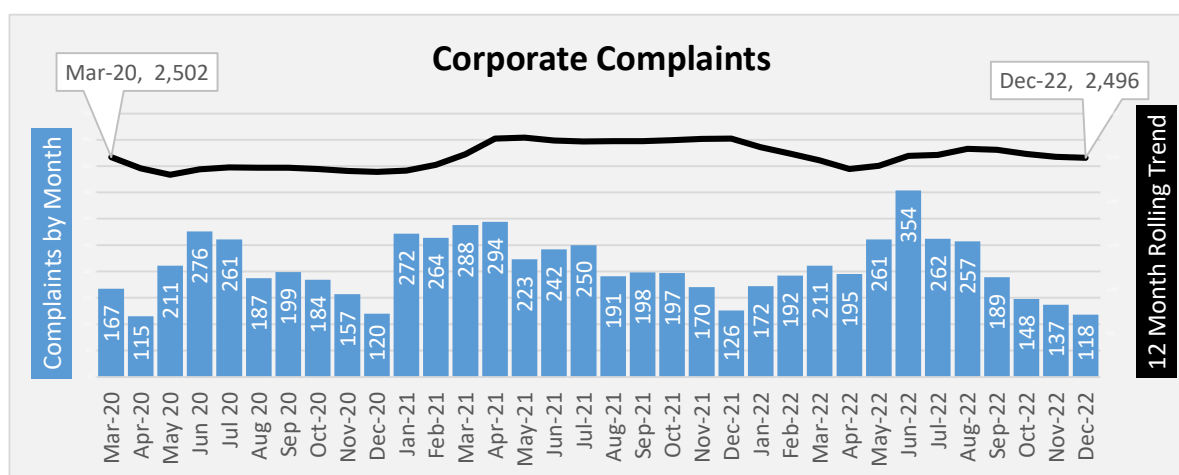
Priority Correspondence

- 28 During the 12 months ending 31 December 2022, we received 2,287 items of priority correspondence and responded to 1,498 within the performance standard (66%).
- 29 The main topics during quarter three were enquiries relating to housing and planning, council tax and energy rebate, and anti-social behaviour.

Complaints¹¹

Corporate Complaints

- 30 Corporate complaints have remained static compared to pre-pandemic volumes (six fewer). Of those investigated, 62% were upheld, on par with the pre-pandemic year.



- 31 The most frequent cause for complaint continues to be missed bins with around 78% of these complaints being upheld. However, although missed bins account for 14% of all complaints, as this equates to only 0.003% of bins scheduled for collection this is not a major service area concern.
- 32 Other areas of complaint were bulky waste; contamination letters; billing/payment issues; maintenance activities and staff practices.

¹¹ statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority and corporate complaints that cover all other complaints

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

- 33 During quarter three, 76% of independent investigations were responded to within the performance standard, compared to 79% the same period last year.
- 34 Analysis suggests that up to 23% of complaints escalated to independent investigation could have been avoided if there had been a timelier or more comprehensive update from the service at the first stage response. Training is being provided to service teams to help reduce the number of complaints escalated and our ongoing complaints review will help streamline, improve and enhance the process.
- 35 Details of complaints upheld by independent investigation during quarter three are included in Appendix six.

Statutory Complaints: Adult Health Services (AHS)

- 36 98 statutory complaints received by AHS during the 12 months ending 31 December 2022. 89% of the complaints related to the following areas: 35 to older people/physical disabilities/sensory impairment (36%), 30 to financial assessments and charging (31%), and 22 to learning disabilities/mental health/substance misuse (21% complaints).
- 37 The most frequent reasons for making a complaint were dissatisfaction with charges (14 complaints), lack of service (14), application of guidance/procedures (11), disagreement with an explanation or decision (11) and speed of service (11).
- 38 During quarter three, in response to complaints received, we communicated the importance of adhering to the complaints policy, and the importance of contacting service users (or their representatives) providing reasons for delays when issuing invoices containing large back-dated amounts.

Statutory Complaints: Children & Young People's Services (CYPS)

- 39 44 statutory complaints were received over the reporting period, 26% more than the same period last year. Of these, 21% were upheld and 28% partially upheld.
- 40 21 complaints (48%) related to the Families First teams (responsible for children in need, child protection plans, child, and family assessments in cases of parental dispute), 16 complaints (36%) related to teams involved

with Children Looked After, 2 complaints (5%) related to the Adolescent Safeguarding & Exploitation team and, 5 complaints (11%) to the Children with Disabilities team.

- 41 Statutory complaints for CYPS are complex and up to three reasons can be recorded for each. Of the 44 complaints, 23 involved communication issues, 12 involved staff behaviour and 10 involved a disagreement.
- 42 During quarter three, in response to complaints received, we ensured young people moving to a new placement are accompanied by a social worker with relevant handover information, ensured social workers withdrawn from a case at a family's request have no future contact, and amended the procedure in relation to carers applying for passports for children in care to remove unnecessary delays.

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

- 43 Two of the 20 decisions delivered during quarter three were upheld (10%). Details are included in Appendix seven. Additional information regarding complaints escalated to the Ombudsman is available [here](#).

Recent developments that enhance the customer experience

- 44 We are continuing with our major project to implement a corporate data analytics solution which will allow us to combine data from our separate IT systems into a single platform. It will provide managers with interactive data dashboards and allow us to combine data at a person level to give us new insights into our residents and service users.
- 45 Social care (adult and children's) has been prioritised and we expect new reports to go live in these areas in the new year. We are reviewing our staffing structures and are developing proposals for a suitable operating model based on the roles, responsibilities and skills needed to meet the demands of a data driven local authority.
- 46 A pilot scheme to explore the potential of increasing customer location accuracy using what3words will commence in March, with a full evaluation in the summer of 2023.
- 47 The Chatbot project, to reduce avoidable contact and provide digital customer service 24/7 via the council's website, progressed during quarter

three. Staff development sessions were held and acquired skills enabled the chatbot to be further developed and configured for business use.

- 48 Additional functionality within the Eckoh system was progressed during quarter three. This included developments to send customer satisfaction surveys via text message at the end of telephone calls and incorporating real time information within the system.

Appendix 3: Sample of suggestions received during quarter three, 2022/23

Suggestion: In this current energy crisis we need more warm spaces for the community.

Our Response: We have provided £200,000 of funding to create a network of 168 warm spaces. We have a dedicated warm spaces section on [our website](#).

Suggestion: Give customers the option to cancel their request for a bin repair.

Our Response: We have added this suggestion to our work programme and will be completed as and when business need / other priorities allow.

Suggestion: Ensure the pool timetables work with any internet browser.

Our Response: We are working to resolve this issue. In the meantime, customers can view the timetable via the following link: <https://leisurehub.durham.gov.uk/LhWeb/en/public/timetable> or through the Thrive Active app.

Suggestion: Offer food recycling for residents at their homes.

Our Response: Almost half of all Local Authorities across England have yet to adopt food recycling and are waiting for the outcome of the Environment Bill, Resource and Waste Strategy. The situation should become clearer in the next few months at which time we will consider our approach.

Suggestion: Introduce 'What 3 Words' for those able to use it.

Our Response: We will incorporate 'What 3 Words' as a trial along with the usual location markers (maps) when residents log an issue.

Suggestion: Give residents a say on the North East Devolution deal?

Our Response: Residents can give their views by completing an [online survey](#); attending an [in-person consultation](#); or an [online meeting](#).

Suggestion: Provide alternative contact channels as speech recognition technology is not working correctly.

Our Response: We have reviewed relevant calls and used this information to inform changes to the voice system. There is a safeguard that allows customers to default to general enquiries thus avoiding speaking to the system. Our webchat function is also available.

Suggestion: Create a blog or page on the council's website so good deeds and kindness can be recognised and appreciated.

Our Response: The council recognises good deeds locally by awarding the Chairman's Medal. However, adding a more open-source feature to our website would help shine a light on the good work done throughout the county so we will investigate how this could function.

Suggestion: introduce card payments in the auditorium of the Empire Theatre and assess stock levels (ice cream, popcorn) for pantomime performances.

Our Response: We are looking to introduce card payments into the auditorium, but this depends on the signal strength in these areas of the venue. Additionally, we are reviewing the required stock levels for pantomime performances prior to the new season beginning later in the year.

Suggestion: Can the council install a camera near the mini roundabout before Newton Cap Viaduct as it may help reduce the number of people self-harming or committing suicide?

Our Response: Work is underway to investigate a range of measures to prevent suicide at Newton Cap Viaduct. The project involves elected members and the local MP.

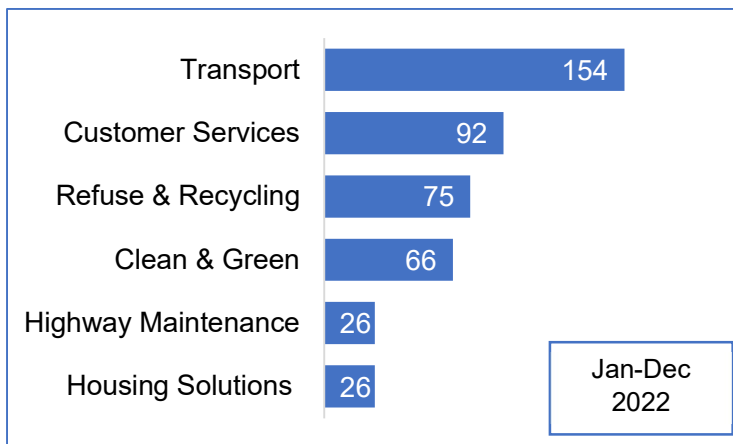
Suggestion: Introduce more swim sessions outside the 9 to 5 working day at Freemans Quay Leisure Centre.

Our Response: Additional sessions were added to the programme in January: Tuesday 06:30-08:00 and Friday 18:00-20:00. Members can also utilise swim sessions at other sites, for example Chester-le-Street has a general swim finishing at 21:00 on Wednesdays.

Suggestion: Increase the number of charging points for electric vehicles.

Our Response: We installed 50 additional charging points in 2022 and have scheduled a further 100 charging points to be installed during 2023.

Appendix 4: Sample of compliments received during quarter three, 2022/23



You have all been lovely every time I call for my blue badge.

I know no system is perfect but from my own experience, Care Connect have been a real help and a godsend to us as a family.

Thank you so much for the help and advice you've given us, we truly couldn't have got through this without you.

I feel compelled to acknowledge the wonderful customer service I received today.

Customer would like to compliment both crews for refuse and recycling in the area as they are excellent and work hard.

I want to place on record the excellent work completed by the clean and green team.

Just had our gas boiler serviced under DCC 'Warm and Healthy Homes Scheme'. The engineer was excellent.

Thank you for all the service I have received over the years. You have been reliable and dependable.

Would not be without this service, it's a lifesaver I have needed them a lot. (Care Connect)

I am writing to send mine and my family's gratitude and respect to DCC's Adult Social Care service.

Thank you to the allotment team. I was over the moon at the weekend to discover that not only had they cleared the rubbish for me, but they had also stripped the vast majority of the grass. I really appreciate their hard work and kindness.

May I take the time to voice my gratitude and appreciation to Consett Town Centre Litter Picking Team, under extreme duress and difficulty with time restraints, what a marvellous job they do, out at the crack of dawn in all weathers. Thank you.

We would like to thank the council and in particular the occupational therapy office. Their work has made a huge difference to our lives.

A good safeguard and having this service certainly makes you feel a lot more confident knowing there is always a contact/help available right away.

Just got care connect last month for my husband for when I go out. I can do the shopping without worrying if he's in a bad way or had a fall. It has changed our lives for the better.

Staff went above and beyond in all correspondence, and I really appreciate all of the work they did for me. With this help I was able to start my new job with support and not worrying about how I could afford my petrol costs to travel to & from work. Thank you to the Employability Team.

I am writing to acknowledge the great work of the social worker that works with the young person I foster. She is always warm and supportive and has always been quick to put in plans to make things easier for him.

Thank the team who came out are sorted the drains in my street. It got tested with heavy rain during this period and have worked perfectly.

Thank you for your work on my case – you really have gone above and beyond as usual and we really value your clear and prompt communication.

Customer would like to thank the team who came out and cut back 100 yards of overgrown path. It has been very well done and is now a lovely walk to go on. Thank you to the team on their proactive work.

It is gratifying to note that several strong, well supported saplings have recently been planted in parts of Peterlee and, no doubt in other parts of the County.

Appendix 5: Sample of comments received with the star ratings during quarter three, 2022/23

<p>5★- Pest Control – “Quick and easy to get an appointment.”</p>	<p>2★- Customer Document Submission – “Have found the forms to be generally intuitive but have had real problems uploading documents.”</p>	<p>5★- Customer Satisfaction Survey – “I was kept up to date via text message, and was made to feel that my issues were being valued.”</p>
<p>2★- Bin – New, replacement and repair – “Tried to contact by phone but all the time you are just talking to a machine. It feels like there is an assumption that everyone has a computer or iPhone.”</p>	<p>3★- Dog fouling – “Not even space for details or explanation.”</p>	<p>1★- Garden Waste – Join the scheme – “£35 is quite a lot of money when you only need it emptied twice a year. Especially considering our the relatively high council tax bill we pay in DCC. “</p>
<p>3★- Littering – “Cannot upload CCTV/video footage of the offence.”</p>	<p>1★- Planning Enquiry – “You cannot proceed without uploading a diagram, and for a preliminary enquiry that is too early. I want to know what can be done not what can't be. “</p>	<p>2★- Street lighting – “Your systems map was not up to date. Please look at adding new-build estates.”</p>
<p>5★- Fly Tipping – “I have reported similar issues in the past and they have been resolved quickly. Let's make sure we keep our community tidy! Thank you.”</p>	<p>4★- Garden waste – Join the Scheme - “Relatively painless but Apple Pay would be a good option for payment.</p>	<p>5★- Bulky waste, white goods collection - “Using this service is a no-brainer. It is cheap and guarantees that the items are disposed correctly instead of them potentially being dumped.</p>
<p>3★- Council tax – Change of payment method – “Slightly confusing and unsure if setting up this account for monthly direct debit will actually work for my late mum's property.”</p>	<p>1★- Dog bins or litter bins – “Would rather speak to someone on the phone. Tried several times and have been on hold for 20</p>	<p>4★- Anti Social Behaviour – “Only hitch was that I was timed out twice, otherwise a good service.”</p>
<p>5★- Garden waste – Join the scheme – “Easy to complete and very convenient. Better than having to submit paper applications or via telephone.”</p>	<p>5★- Waste Permit – “Waste permits in County Durham are excellent. I think they should be adopted in a similar way all over the country to reduce fly tipping. Thank you!”</p>	<p>3★- Tree or hedge pruning, removal – “Not everyone is computer literate. For example, I really struggled with uploading photos for evidence.”</p>
<p>5★- Garden waste – Join the scheme – “Easy to complete and very convenient. Better than having to submit paper applications or via telephone.”</p>	<p>4★- Bin – Not emptied - “Would prefer to speak to someone instead of having to solely report these issues online.”</p>	<p>4★- Bulky waste, white goods collection - “happy with the service but it would be beneficial to optimise the mobile user interface. Found it awkward to manoeuvre and I have a new phone.”</p>
<p>5★- Garden waste – Join the scheme – “Easy to complete and very convenient. Better than having to submit paper applications or via telephone.”</p>	<p>2★- Bin – not emptied – “Website was very slow and clunky today. Not easy for someone aged 86 to use.”</p>	<p>5★- Anti Social Behaviour – “It is reassuring that I have someone who may be able to help me resolve this issue.”</p>

Appendix 6: Independent investigations by Customer Feedback Team where corporate complaints were upheld

Complaint Upheld	Our Response
<p>Following the cancellation of their gym membership, the complainant was informed their direct debit payments remained active. However, a late payment charge was incurred.</p>	<p>We have apologised for any confusion regarding the cancellation process. Agreed to remove the late payment charge and the September payment.</p>
<p>The customer contacted us on multiple occasions to report only one temporary road sign had been removed, instead of two.</p>	<p>We have apologised for failing to escalate the initial request, and acknowledge resolution took longer than expected and communication could have been improved.</p> <p>The second sign has now been removed.</p>
<p>The customer is dissatisfied with our decision not to replace a damaged fence and disputed our view that it is the homeowner's responsibility to replace it.</p>	<p>Our initial response contained incorrect information and we acknowledge we should have waited for further information before responding.</p> <p>We have now clarified the situation and have written to the local Cricket Club to advise them of their responsibilities regarding the fencing and requested the installation of a new fence within 28 days.</p>
<p>The customer is unhappy that their bins are not being returned to the designated collection point after being emptied.</p>	<p>We have apologised to the customer and will monitor the situation during the next four weeks. Any issues encountered will be prioritised.</p>
<p>The customer disagrees that their garden waste bin was contaminated and should have been emptied.</p>	<p>We have apologised to the customer for incorrectly classifying acorns as 'food waste', which led to the escalation of the complaint.</p> <p>We have removed the contamination record against the address and the garden waste bin has been emptied.</p>

Complaint partially upheld	Our Response
<p>The complainant is unhappy with our handling of two planning applications.</p>	<p>The 2016 delegated report was subsequently found to be inaccurate.</p> <p>However, we acknowledge the complainant should have been directly consulted regarding the application and its subsequent variation of conditions. We have apologised and recommend appropriate feedback and training for relevant case officers. We found no fault in the subsequent planning enforcement investigation.</p>
<p>The complainant was unhappy with the works to remove overgrown foliage from their property which they claim damaged their fence.</p>	<p>We apologised to the complainant for not responding to the report in a timely manner, and although the land in question was not council-owned, to remedy our poor communication, we cut back the foliage as a gesture of goodwill.</p> <p>However, as the land is not council owned, we are unable to compensate for any scratches or damage to the fence.</p>
<p>The complainant is disappointed that the council did not notify them in a timely manner that they were no longer entitled to housing benefit, which consequently resulted in a financial loss of universal credit.</p>	<p>We are unable to investigate as there is an alternative appeals process. We have found no fault in the decision as the complainant had ceased to qualify for housing benefit due to an increase in income.</p> <p>However, we acknowledge that we did miss several opportunities to signpost the complainant to make a universal credit claim. Therefore, we have agreed to pay £180.36 - equivalent to the housing benefit the complainant would have been entitled to during the 12 week period in question.</p>
<p>The complainant is unhappy that the council installed a fence without consulting them, and this has caused issues accessing parking facilities.</p>	<p>Although no fault was found in the decision making process, communication could have been improved and a formal written response should have been provided earlier. We have apologised for this.</p> <p>Feedback has been provided to relevant officers.</p>

Complaint partially upheld	Our Response
<p>The complainant is dissatisfied with a planning decision which resulted in a business being able to operate from a residential site.</p>	<p>Although we found no fault with the investigation process, there was a delay in investigating potential breaches of conditions 3 and 5.</p> <p>Feedback will be provided to prevent this from happening again.</p> <p>We have apologised to the customer and initiated a new enforcement case as a remedy for the faults identified.</p>

Appendix 7: 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 how it delayed changing and informing the complainant about the customer's increased care contributions.</p> <p>The council also failed to explain the revised charges in a timely manner. This caused uncertainty, confusion and the time and trouble chasing and complaining.</p>	<p>Apologise to the customer and pay £150 to acknowledge the uncertainty and confusion caused.</p> <p>Provide evidence to the Ombudsman of the implementation of our new online financial assessments (introduction in April 2023)</p>
<p>Customer complained about how the appeal panel considered her appeal for her child at a preferred school.</p> <p>There were some faults in how the panel considered their appeal. As a result, they cannot be satisfied the appeal process was carried out fairly.</p>	<p>Arrange a fresh appeal with a different panel and clerk for the hearing.</p> <p>The panel should use admission figures at the time of the first appeal to ensure the complainant is put back in the position they would have been if the appeal had been properly considered.</p> <p>Ensure admission arrangements are applied in line with statutory guidance, and clear reasons for decisions are recorded.</p>

Data Tables

Key to Symbols

Performance against target and previous performance		Performance against comparable groups		Direction of Travel	
✓	meeting or exceeding	✓	Performance is better than national or north east	↑	higher than comparable period
○	within 2%	×	Performance is worse than national or north east	→	static against comparable period
×	more than 2% behind			↓	lower than comparable period

NB: oldest data in left column

Types of indicators

There are two types of performance indicators throughout the report:

1. Key target indicators – targets are set as improvements can be measured regularly and can be actively influenced by the council and its partners; and
2. Key tracker indicators – performance is tracked but no targets are set as they are long-term and / or can only be partially influenced by the council and its partners.

National Benchmarking

We compare our performance to all English authorities. The number of authorities varies according to the performance indicator and functions of councils, e.g., educational attainment is compared to county and unitary councils, however waste disposal is compared to district and unitary councils.

North East Benchmarking

The North East figure is the average performance from the authorities within the North East region - County Durham, Darlington, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, South Tyneside, Sunderland.

More detail is available from the Strategy Team at performance@durham.gov.uk

Performance Indicator		Latest data (period covered)	Performance compared to:				Direction of Travel - last four reporting periods				updated	
			Period target	12 months earlier	Pre-COVID	N						NE
No. of contacts through reported channels		1,811,951 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	1,567,594	1,553,173	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	Yes
% of contact through reported digital channels		22% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	26%	15%	-	-	↓	→	↓	↓	Yes
% of contact received through reported non-digital channels		78% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	74%	85%	-	-	↑	→	↑	↑	Yes
% of CRM requests meeting performance standard		81% (Oct-Dec 22)	Tracker -	68% ✓	n/a	-	-	↑	↓	↑	↑	Yes
% of respondents who were satisfied with overall service delivery (CRM)		82% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	80% ✓	81% ✓	-	-	↑	→	→	↑	Yes
% of customers who request a service via an online form who give a rating of 4 or 5 stars		85% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	84% ✓	n/a	-	-	↑	↓	→	↑	Yes
Statutory Complaints: Adult and Health Services	No. received	98 (Jan-Dec 22)	75 x	86 x	84 x	-	-	↓	↑	↑	↑	Yes
	% within performance standard	100% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	100% ✓	100% ✓	-	-	→	→	→	→	Yes
	% upheld (fully or partially)	61% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	49% x	44% x	-	-	↑	↑	↓	↑	Yes
Statutory Complaints: Children and Young People's Service	No. received	44 (Jan-Dec 22)	46 ✓	34 ✓	100 ✓	-	-	→	↓	↑	↑	Yes
	% within performance standard	74% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	67% ✓	76% x	-	-	↑	↑	→	↑	Yes
	% upheld (fully or partially)	49% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	44% x	33% x	-	-	↑	↓	↓	↑	Yes

Performance Indicator	Latest data (period covered)	Performance compared to:					Direction of Travel - last four reporting periods				updated
		Period target	12 months earlier	Pre-COVID	N	NE					
No. of corporate complaints	2,496 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	2,715 ✓	2,502 ✓	-	-	↓	↑	↑	↓	Yes
Ratio of corporate complaints to service requests	0.006 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	0.006 ○	0.007 ✓	-	-	→	→	→	→	Yes
No. of independent investigations	207 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	195	192	-	-	↓	↑	↑	↑	Yes
No. of complaints submitted to Ombudsman	69 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	67 x	91 ✓	-	-	↑	↓	↑	↑	Yes
% of complaints responded to within performance standard	77% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	76% ✓	85% x	-	-	↓	→	→	→	Yes
% of corporate complaints investigated which were upheld	62% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	67% ✓	62% ○	-	-	↓	↓	↓	→	Yes
No. of priority correspondence received	2,287 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	1,882	n/a	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	Yes
% of priority correspondence responded to within performance standard	66% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	69% x	n/a	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↓	Yes
% of Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to within 20 working days	80% (Oct-Dec 22)	95% x	73% ✓	86% x	-	-	↓	↑	↓	↑	Yes
% of CRM service requests which were self-serve	72% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	68% ✓	49% ✓	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	Yes
No. of compliments	672 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	916 x	688 x	-	-	↓	↓	↑	↓	Yes
No. of suggestions	485 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	558 x	546 x	-	-	↓	↓	↓	↓	Yes