

## Standards Committee

17 February 2012



## Performance Report for Quarter 3, 2011/12: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions

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

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#### Purpose of the Report

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

#### Background

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

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

### **Data Quality**

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

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

12. Work is continuing to further improve the 'complaints, compliments and suggestions' process and the outcomes for service users. As part of the wider Customer First Strategy implementation plan and the overall Corporate improvement programme, a review of the existing corporate complaints policy and procedure (non-statutory) continues to move forward and is based upon a number of key factors:-
  - Customer Feedback – what do our customers know about the procedures and do they think they are effective.
  - Staff Feedback – what problems do we have with the current procedures and how can we improve them.
  - Pilot Studies
  - Performance Reports – how do we collate data, is it accurate, how do we use it to change the way we do things and where is the information presented.

### **Format of this report**

13. This report is divided into 2 main sections.

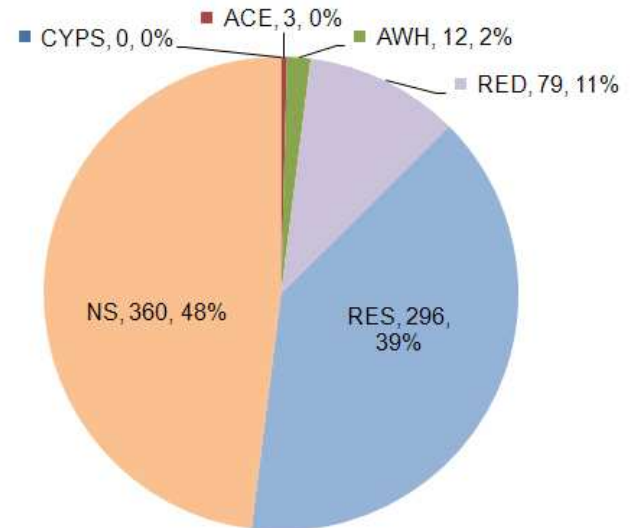
Section 1: Overview of Quarter 3, 2011/12

Section 2: Detailed Quarter 3, 2011/12 report from each service grouping

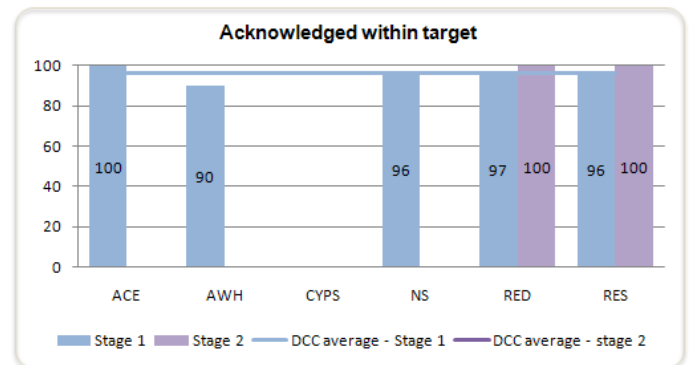
- Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)
- Adults, Wellbeing and Health (AWH)
- Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)
- Resources (RES)
- Neighbourhood Services (NS)
- Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

## Section 1: Overview of non-statutory complaints, Q3, 2011/12

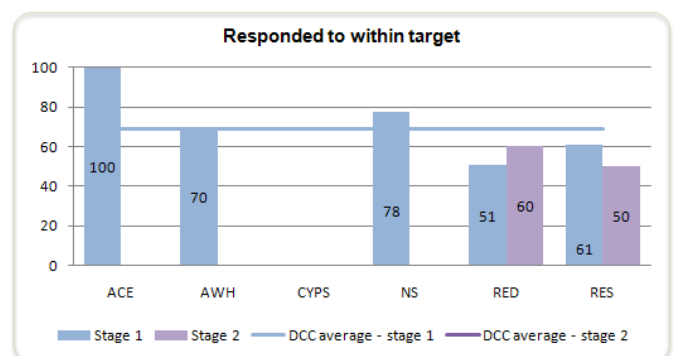
14. Between 1 October 2011 and the 31 December 2011, 750 non-statutory complaints were received by Durham County Council.
15. The chart on the right shows a breakdown of non-statutory complaints by service grouping.
16. The majority of complaints (48%) were received by Neighbourhood Services (NS). This is consistent with the trend over the 2010/11 financial year, however the proportion assigned to NS has decreased (it is usually around 58%). This is due to an overall increase in complaint numbers caused by an increase in the number received by the Resources service grouping.



17. The increased volume of complaints within resources has arisen from delays being experienced by customers in relation to benefits applications
18. The corporate complaints unit, which is part of NS, has responsibility for acknowledging complaints within the target of 2 working days.
19. During quarter 3, 96% of stage 1 complaints and 100% of stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within target.



20. In addition, there is a responded to target time of 10 working days for stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage 2 complaints. Service groupings are able to influence the response time.
21. On occasions when complaints are received and we have not been able to respond within the timescales holding letters are sent out explaining the reasons for the delays.



22. Further investigation of the 750 non-statutory complaints received during the quarter shows that there were 281 occasions (37%) when the complaint was not upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.
23. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 430 (57%) justified complaints, 237 fully and 193 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning.

24. In addition to complaints, we also analyse compliments and suggestions to determine if we can further improve processes, and thereby service delivery.
25. Between 1 October 2011 and the 31 December 2011, 750 non-statutory complaints, 302 compliments and 270 suggestions were received by Durham County Council.
26. During quarter 3, for every compliment received, 2.5 complaints were recorded.
27. For every suggestion received, 2.8 complaints were recorded
28. More detail in relation to learning outcomes can be found in each service grouping's dedicated section of the report.

Service Grouping	Number			Ratio	
	Complaints	Compliments	Suggestions	Complaints: Compliments	Complaints: Suggestions
<b>ACE</b>	3	24	6	0.1	0.5
<b>AWH</b>	12	95	2	0.1	6.0
<b>CYPS</b>	0	7	1	-	-
<b>NS</b>	360	118	216	3.0	1.7
<b>RED</b>	79	46	31	1.8	2.6
<b>RES</b>	296	12	14	24.7	21.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	750	302	270	2.5	2.8

## Section 2: Detailed Q3, 2011/12 report from each service grouping

29. The following sections provide more detail of the types and numbers of statutory and non-statutory complaints received across the service groupings during quarter 3 of 2011/12:

### Assistant Chief Executive's (ACE)

30. The ACE service grouping consists of 3 service areas and between 1 October 2011 and 31 December 2011 ACE received 3 complaints, 24 compliments and 6 suggestions.

Abbreviation	Service Area
<b>PCE</b>	Partnerships and Community Engagement
<b>PP</b>	Planning and Performance
<b>PC</b>	Policy and Communications

### Planning and Performance

31. During quarter 3, 2 complaints were received by Planning & Performance.

32. 1 complaint was received regarding quality of service as a result of a lack of response to an FOI request. On investigation it was found that initial attempts to forward the information had been unsuccessful. On receipt of the information the complaint was withdrawn at the customer's request.
33. 1 complaint was received which queried why equality monitoring questions are asked following a response to a consultation exercise on waste management. The customer did not require a response however a full explanation is held on file explaining why the information is requested and how it is used. The complaint was found to be not justified.

### **Policy and Communications**

34. During quarter 3, 1 complaint was received by Policy and Communications.
35. The complaint to Policy and Communications referred to incorrect information on the DCC website in relation to times and charges for Durham City car parks. The complaint was re-allocated to Regeneration and Economic Development so that the pages on the DCC website could be updated where appropriate. On further investigation it became apparent that, in this instance, the operators responsible for the car parks in question had failed to notify Durham County Council of changes in times and tariffs. Where an operator repeatedly fails to advise of changes, their information may be removed from the Durham County Council website to avoid providing the public with incorrect and/or confusing information. A full explanation has been sent to the customer.
36. All 3 complaints received by ACE during quarter 3 were acknowledged within 2 working days.

### **Compliments and Suggestions**

37. During quarter 3, ACE received 24 compliments. All 24 compliments were in support of the work of the County Durham Area Action Partnerships and their staff.
38. During quarter 3, ACE received 6 suggestions - 4 to Policy and Communications and 2 to Partnerships and Community Engagement.
39. Of the 4 suggestions to Policy and Communications, 2 highlighted incorrect spellings on DCC website; 1 suggested the inclusion of bin collection dates with council tax bills, and 1 identified an incorrect contact centre address in the Durham County News.
40. As a result, the 2 spelling errors on the DCC website have been corrected and the inclusion of bin collection dates with council tax bills is currently under consideration. However, the contact centre address was found to be correct therefore the suggestion was invalid.
41. The 2 suggestions to Partnerships and Community Engagement related to a Gay Pride event in Durham and a new survey in Castleside.
42. As a result the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transexual Steering Group agreed to consider, at its next meeting in February, the possibility of organising a small scale Gay Pride activity (depending on resources).
43. And the AAP Co-ordinator will soon be visiting Healeyfield Parish Council and youth club in a supporting role and will recommend that the young people are involved in the new survey as it will be a valuable learning project.

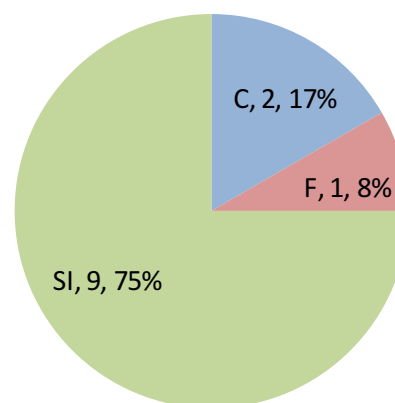
## Adults, Wellbeing and Health (AWH)

### Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Non-statutory Complaints

44. The AWH service grouping consists of 5 main service areas and between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011, 12 non-statutory complaints, 95 compliments and 2 suggestions were received.
45. During quarter 3, 100% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days.
46. The majority of complaints, 9 (75%), were received by the Social Inclusion Service Area with 2 (16.7%) against Commissioning and 1 (8.3%) for Finance.
47. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 3, shows that there were 9 occasions (75%) where the complaint was not justified, indicating that although Service Users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.

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



48. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, AWH is left with 3 complaints, 1 (8.3%) fully and 2 (16.7%) partly justified.
49. In all complaints, information, explanations and apologies were provided to complainants, which resolved the enquiries satisfactorily. However due to the variety of issues raised within the complaints, and the fact that only 3 were partially or fully upheld, there were no key trends identified as learning outcomes for the Service to apply.

#### Non-statutory Compliments and Suggestions

50. During the quarter, 95 compliments were received. These were 6 for Commissioning, thanking the staff in the Record Office for their level of service. The remaining 89 related to Social Inclusion, 65 were complimenting the work of Welfare Rights and 24 the Adult Learning Service.
51. AWH received 2 comments/suggestions during the quarter, both within Social Inclusion. Of these, 1 was made to the Safer Communities Service and 1 to the Library Service, both detailed below. No key trends were identified.
- A number of residents of Neville Street in Durham wanted a CCTV camera installed to combat Anti-Social Behaviour on their street. At the time of the complaint an

AWH lead consultation regarding CCTV cameras was underway and they were urged to contribute to this. The complaint was also logged to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team in Neighbourhoods who looked into the wider issues raised regarding the disruptive behaviour.

- A member of the public was disappointed that Belmont Library would not sell tickets for an upcoming brass festival on his behalf. It was explained that having monies on site that staff were unable to monitor using the usual electronic systems would result in them being liable for any shortfall. As a result, and in accordance with Durham County Council's auditing procedures, they were unable to agree to sell tickets. However the Library Service apologised for not being able to do this and offered to display a poster for the festival and for staff to direct interested members of the public to a venue where tickets could be purchased instead.

## Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

52. During the quarter, 35 complaints were received. This is a 10% decrease on the previous quarter. Details of the quarterly performance are shown below.

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

53. As with last quarter, 97% of complaints were acknowledged within 3 working days with one complaint taking 4 working days to acknowledge. This was as a result of a complaint being received by a Locality Office and the Quality Standards Team not being immediately notified, (as the complaint was sent through the internal mail rather than being faxed or otherwise notified). This occurred despite the previous quarter's reminder regarding the correct procedure to all Adult Care Operations Managers, Strategic Managers in Commissioning and Policy, Planning and Performance and an item being added to the Business Support Team meeting agendas.
54. Of the 35 complaints, Complaints Resolution Plans were completed in all cases. There were 26 complaints completed, all 26 of which were within the timescales agreed within the CRP. The remaining 9 cases were not concluded within the quarter but are still within their agreed completion timescales.
55. As with the last quarter, Older People Services received the most complaints with 20, followed by Financial Services with 7. Of the financial complaints, 6 of these primarily related to assessment of charges and 4 were not upheld as the financial charges had been accurately assessed. Table Two Annex 4 illustrates the full breakdown of complaints received by Service Area.

Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Social Work Teams	3 (8.6%)	5 (12.8%)



(Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers)

Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons/ Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	20 (57.1%)	19 (48.7%)
Social Work Teams (Safeguarding)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)
Finance	7 (20.0%)	8 (20.5%)
County Durham Care and Support	2 (5.7%)	3 (7.7%)
Commissioning	2 (5.7%)	3 (7.7%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.6%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35 (100%)</b>	<b>39 (100%)</b>

56. Of the 26 complaints completed in the quarter 11 (42%) were not upheld compared to 19 (54%) in the previous quarter. Of the remaining 15 completed complaints, 4 were partially upheld and 11 were upheld.

Outcome of complaints completed in the quarter					
Service Area	Number				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
County Durham Care and Support	1	1	0	0	2
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers)	0	0	1	2	3
Social Work Teams (Older Persons/Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	5	2	9	4	20
Social Work Teams (Safeguarding)	0	0	0	1	1
Commissioning	1	0	1	0	2
Finance	4	1	0	2	7
Policy, Planning & Performance	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>35</b>

57. Lack of Service – Communications/Information was the highest category of complaint with 8 recorded. This was closely followed by Conduct or Attitude of Staff, Lack of a Service – Other and Quality of Service – Personal Financial Issues which each had 6 complaints recorded against them.

Complaints by Classification	
Classification	Number
Lack Of Service - Communications/Information	8
Conduct Or Attitude Of Staff	6

Lack Of Service – Other	6
Quality Of Service – Personal Financial Issues	6
Provision Of Service – Equipment	4
Quality Of Service – Work Of Other Agencies	3
Lack Of Service – Contact/Visits/Service	2
Provision Of Service - Placement Provision	2
Lack Of Service - Restricted Choices Of Current Services	1
Provision Of Service – Assessment	1
Provision Of Service – Handling Of Complaint	1
Special Case – Confidentiality	1
Special Case – Protection Investigations	1
Quality Of Service – Personal Care	1

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

### Actions as a result of statutory representations

58. The following recommended operational actions have been noted as a result of statutory complaints, compliments or suggestions received during the quarter:
- External independent organisations that provide activities for day centre clients have been asked to ensure both the provider and clients are made aware of external events (in this case a client was given a letter which had details of an evening event which he did not pass on to the staff where he lived and in consequence missed out on the event. If the Day Centre provider had been aware of the arrangement they could have ensured that the detail could have been communicated appropriately).
  - A briefing note was issued to Team Managers/Safeguarding Leads in Older People’s Services to remind them of the need to ensure service users views were explicitly sought and recorded in relation to safeguarding matters.

### Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

- During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made preliminary enquiries into 3 matters– the outcome is awaited on all of these cases, all currently under consideration:
- The LGO did not deliver any decisions during the quarter.

### Compliments

59. There were 82 compliments received in the third quarter of 2011-2012 (see table below). Although this constitutes a decrease of 22% research has found that this directly relates to inaccurate recording of compliments within the Shared Lives Scheme linked to feedback forms. The ratio of compliments to complaints is 2.3:1, compared to the 4:1 seen in the second quarter of 2011-2012.

Compliments Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter

County Durham Care and Support	57 (70%)	82 (78%)
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	24 (29%)	21 (20%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Finance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Commissioning	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	00 (100%)	105 (100%)

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

## Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)

### Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Non-statutory Complaints

61. Between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011, no non-statutory complaints, 7 compliments and 1 suggestion was received.

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

#### Non-statutory Compliments and Suggestions

62. During quarter 3, CYPS received 7 compliments which were not about social care services. These were all about County Wide Services.

63. The suggestion was one which was sent by an individual living in the West Midlands to all English local education authorities, that the school curriculum should be expanded to include Citizenship Education, and parents and families should be engaged in this. The response to this was that in Durham, Citizenship Education *is* currently on the school curriculum.

64.

### Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Statutory complaints

65. During quarter 3, 5 statutory complaints were received by the CYPS service grouping which were actioned at Stage 1. In addition, a further 22 statutory complaints were resolved locally and informally to the complainants' satisfaction. Details of the quarterly performance of Stage 1 complaints is shown below:

Comparison of Statutory Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q3 10/11	Q4 10/11	Q1 11/12	Q2 11/12	Q3 11/12	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Safeguarding and Specialist Services	3	4	7	10	5	↓ ↓

66. All 5 complaints were acknowledged within two working days maintaining performance at 100%.
67. Of the 5 Stage 1 complaints received in the quarter, 3 investigations were completed within the 20 working day timescale for response. The remaining cases were not and breached the response timescale.

68. Safeguarding Children (Peterlee team) received the most complaints this quarter:

Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Disabled Children and Families Team	1 (20%)	0
Safeguarding Children - Peterlee	2 (40%)	2 (20%)
Safeguarding Children – Stanley 1	1 (20%)	0
Tow Law Children’s Home	1 (20%)	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5 (100%)</b>	

69. Of the 3 Stage 1 complaints resolved in the quarter, none were upheld. The following table details the breakdown of findings per team:

Outcome of Statutory Complaints completed in the quarter					
Service Area	Number				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
Disabled Children and Families Team				1	1
Safeguarding Children - Peterlee	2				2
Safeguarding Children – Stanley 1	1				1
Tow Law Children’s Home				1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

70. The complaints can be classified as shown in the table below. ‘Poor Service’ was the highest category of complaint. Neither complaint was upheld as it was found that in both cases, the Social Worker had been carrying out their professional role as required, however the complainants had not agreed with their words and actions.

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

## Compliments

71. During quarter 3, CYPS received 66 compliments about social care services. These compliments were all about Safeguarding and Specialist Services (SaSS), which is the only service within CYPS which provides social care services.
72. SaSS received 36 compliments in the previous quarter (see table below). The ratio of compliments to formal complaints is 13.2:1, compared to 2.75:1 in the previous quarter, a huge improvement.

Compliments Received by Service Area		
Service Area within SaSS	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Children's Homes	2 (3.0%)	2 (5.6%)
Children Looked After - Durham	2 (3.0%)	0
Community Support Team	9 (13.6%)	13 (36.0%)
Disabled Children and Families Team	2 (3.0%)	3 (9.1%)
Pathfinder service	24 (36.4%)	3 (9.1%)
Safeguarding Children – Peterlee	1 (1.5%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Stanley 2	2 (3.0%)	0
4Real Team	23 (34.9%)	4 (11.0%)
To all of SaSS	1 (1.5%)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	

## Suggestions

73. No suggestions were received during the quarter regarding social care services.

## Actions as a result of statutory representations

74. No actions have been identified as a direct result of statutory complaints received or completed during this quarter. A continuing theme from complaints is that complainants appear not to understand (or accept) the intervention of SaSS, and/or the explanations/actions of children's Social Workers.

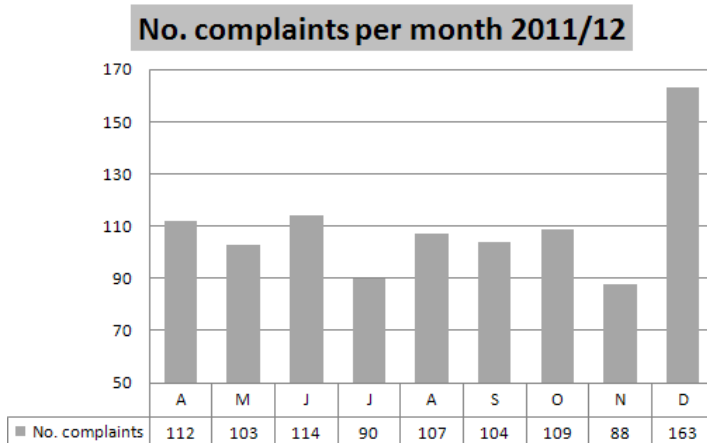
## Neighbourhood Services (NS)

75. The NS service grouping consists of 5 main service areas and between 1 October 2011 and 31 December 2011, 360 complaints, 118 compliments and 216 suggestions were received.

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

76. An analysis of all complaints received by NS and logged on the CRM shows that during quarter 3, 360 complaints were recorded. This compares to 301 during quarter 2 and 329 during quarter 1

77. Although there tends to be a slight monthly variation, the number of complaints received does not vary dramatically. However, during December there was a noticeable increase in the number received. Analysis shows that this increase is mostly due to complaints (55) received in relation to missed bins on the 30 November 2011 – the day of industrial action by public sector workers.

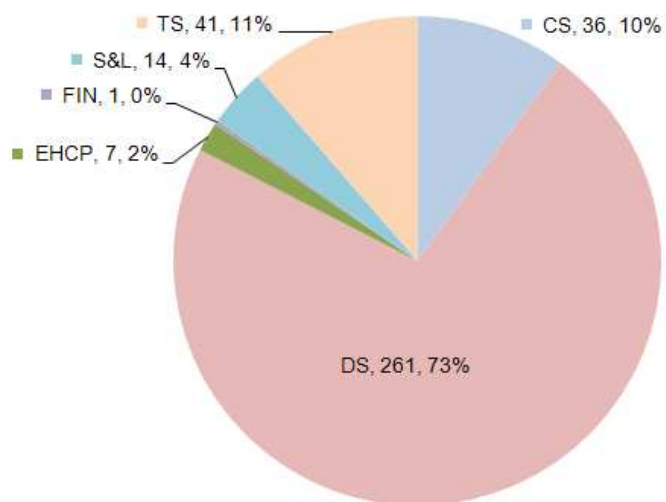


78. Direct Services received the majority of complaints (73%) which is in line with previous trends and reflects the front facing nature of the service area.

79. 96% of stage 1 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days

80. 78% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within the target of 10 working days.

81. Further investigation of the complaints received shows that there were 164 occasions (46%) where the complaint was not upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.



	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	78	67	164	51	360
% of total received	40%		46%	14%	-

82. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, NS is left with 145 (40%) justified complaints, 78 fully and 67 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning

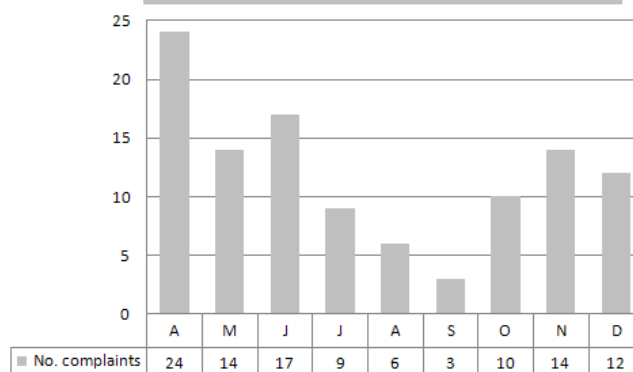
### Customer Services (CS)

83. Between 1 April and 31 December 2011, 109 complaints were received in relation to CS

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	35	37	29	8	109
% of total received	66%		27%	7%	-

84. 33% of the 109 complaints were received during quarter 3.
85. Further analysis (below) shows that almost a third of the complaints received since April related to call waiting times. However, this type of complaint has reduced throughout 2011/12, most likely due to the processes put in place since quarter 1. Initiatives include the use of skills based routing, call diversion from offices with high call volume to those with a lower call volume and diverting staff from face to face duties to telephone answering duties.

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



86. A corporate project is underway to virtualise and harmonise our access points and this will improve performance in relation to call handling. This project is due to be completed by the end of March 2012.

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA									TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D		
Condition of local area: detritus	1									1	0.9%
Customer Service: call waiting time	9	6	9	2		2	2	5		35	32.7%
Customer Service: customer cut off	1		2	1	1		1			6	5.6%
Customer Service: long queuing time	1	1						1	1	4	3.7%
Customer Service: staff attitude	5									5	4.7%
Incorrect / insufficient information given	1	1	1			1				4	3.7%
Lack of action		1					2		1	4	3.7%
No communication / missed appointments	2	1	4							7	6.5%
Other	1	1	1	4	3		2	6	3	21	19.6%
Other: staff attitude	1	2							1	4	3.7%
Refuse: charges	1						1	1	1	4	3.7%
Refuse: missed collection				1				1		2	1.9%
Refuse: non-delivery of bin / container							2			2	1.9%
Refuse: special collections	1				1					2	1.9%
Refuse: staff attitude		1		1						2	1.9%
Refuse: strike action									2	2	1.9%
Street Lights									1	1	0.9%
website / communication					1					1	0.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100%</b>
Not NS									2	2	-

87. 6 complaints received concerned customer services' handling of benefit and council tax issues. The new Revenues and Benefits computer system was implemented in December and no further downtime has been scheduled. The harmonisation of frontline service delivery for the Revenues and Benefits service is scheduled to be completed by the end of January 2012. The completion of these 2 projects should reduce the number of complaints received.
88. A reminder has been sent to all customer services staff reiterating the need to update Civica notes / CRM with details.
89. In response to specific complaints;
- A member of staff has been given further training by their supervisor in relation to setting up direct debits and will also undertake customer first training.
  - The process in relation to street lighting faults has been reiterated to all staff.
  - The policy relating to replacement of bins is to be included in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) which will be issued to all customer services staff as part of the twin bin project.



- Staff have been reminded to check the DCC website and supporting information to ensure the information they give out is correct

90. In response to suggestions received

- Work is on-going to improve the staff directory
- It was suggested that we provide a geographical number (0191) for those who have to pay for 0300 numbers. Unfortunately, this is not feasible. The majority of our customers will benefit from this change and this is why the ICT unit will change all numbers within the council to 0300 over the telephone project period. A capital and monthly fee will be incurred by the council if we are to keep or indeed create a 0191 number.

### Direct Services (DS)

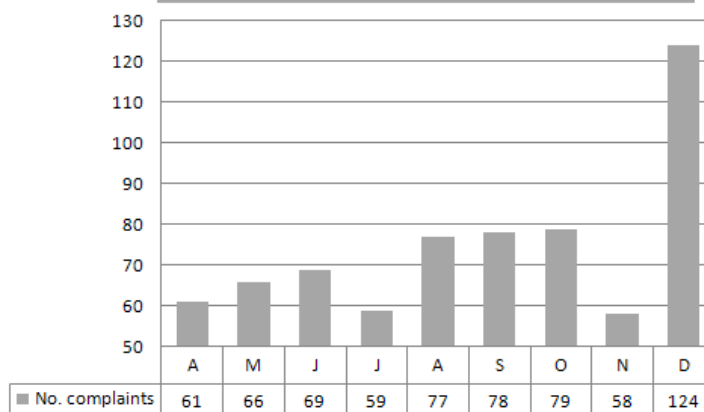
91. Between 1 April and 31 December 2011, 671 complaints were received by DS

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	171	135	324	41	671
% of total received	46%		48%	6%	-

92. Of these complaints, 261 (39%) were received during quarter 3.

93. The number of complaints received by DS each month is shown in the graph to the right. Although there is variation, the number received remains relatively consistent at between 60 and 80 (affected by seasonality). The large increase in December can be attributed to industrial action that occurred on 30 November; 53 complaints were recorded, all in response to the suspension of refuse collection. If these complaints were excluded from the total, then 71 complaints would have been received by DS which is in line with expectations.

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



94. Compared to the previous 2 years, the winter so far has been mild. However, as 2011/12 progresses, there is an expectation that the weather will deteriorate and the number of complaints in relation to winter maintenance will increase.

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

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA									TOTAL	% of total	
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D			
Condition of local area: detritus	1					1					2	0.3%
Condition of local area: dog fouling							2	1	1		4	0.6%
Condition of local area: fly-tipping		1		1	2		1				5	0.8%
Condition of local area: grass cutting	1	2	3	6	2	4					18	2.8%
Condition of local area: litter			1					2			3	0.5%
Condition of local area: overhanging hedges	1	1		3	1	2	3			2	13	2.1%
Condition of local area: parks / open space	1				1	1	3				6	0.9%
Condition of local area: weeds		1	2	1	2	1	2				9	1.4%
Customer Service: call waiting time	2	1						1			4	0.6%
DCC fleet: drivers on mobile	1			1		1					3	0.5%
DCC fleet: driving issues	2		1				3				6	0.9%
DCC fleet: inappropriate parking	1		1				1			1	4	0.6%
DCC fleet: staff attitude	1						1			1	3	0.5%
Enforcement				2		2	3	1			8	1.3%
Housing Repairs			2			1					3	0.5%
Incorrect / insufficient information given	3	1	1								5	0.8%
Lack of action	7	1			4		8	3	6		29	4.6%
No communication / missed appointments	1	3	3	2	1		2				12	1.9%
Other	1		2	6	4	5	3	4	6		31	4.9%
Other charges				1				1	1		3	0.5%
Other: staff attitude			2	1	2	2	1	1	1		10	1.6%
Other: damage caused by council	3	5	1	3	1	4	4	1	2		24	3.8%
Other: staff making a mess	2			1							3	0.5%
Outdoor Leisure (excl. countryside)						1					1	0.2%
Pest Control: charges			3		1	1					5	0.8%
Refuse: business waste				1							1	0.2%
Refuse: charges	6	4	8	4	8	5	7	10	5	57	9.0%	
Refuse: missed collection	11	20	26	19	24	25	14	12	22	173	27.3%	
Refuse: non-delivery of bin / container	4	12	5	1	7	6	8	5	3	51	8.1%	
Refuse: special collections					3	2				1	6	0.9%
Refuse: staff attitude	4	4	2		2	4	2	1	3		22	3.5%
Refuse: staff making a mess	4				4	5	1	5	4		23	3.6%
Refuse: staff not returning bins / containers	1	4	2	3	2	3	6	4	5		30	4.7%
Refuse: strike action								1	52		53	8.4%
response to ASB		1									1	0.2%
website / communication									2		2	0.3%
TOTAL	58	61	65	56	71	76	75	53	118	633	100%	
comment	1	1	2	1	2	1		3	5		16	-
Not NS					1		1	1	1		4	-
service request	2	4	2	2	3	1	2				16	-

96. It can clearly be seen that the majority of complaints (418 equating to 62%) relate to our refuse service. This is unsurprising as waste collection is a visible front line service that is provided to every resident in the authority area. These are detailed in the table below

<b>Overarching Complaint Category</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of total</b>
<b>Refuse Collection</b>	Missed Collection	173	41%
	Industrial Action	53	13%
	Staff not returning bins / containers	30	7%
	Staff making a mess	23	6%
	Special collections	6	1%
	HWRC	2	0%
	Business Waste	1	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Charges</b>		<b>57</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Lack of Action: Non-delivery of bins and containers</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Staff Attitude</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>418</b>	

97. Collecting from over 214,000 properties per week, since 1 April, crews have made more than 10 million collections of household waste. Only 173 of these collections have resulted in a complaint that their bin has been missed.
98. When a bin is reported as being missed, we will try to collect that bin in line with pre-determined service standards which is to return to the property and empty the bin by the end of the next working day. Whilst in the majority of cases this is achieved, there are a number of overdue requests. Investigations have revealed these overdue requests are mainly due to the late submission of paperwork and missing dates from paperwork received. To resolve this problem, a working group has been established and daily reports produced.
99. Complaints (57) have been received as a consequence of introducing a £20 charge to replace missing or stolen bins. This is a policy decision, therefore in each of these cases the complainant is informed of the existence of a policy, made aware of the process surrounding policy changes and reassured that their comments will be retained and fed into the process when that policy is reviewed. However, changes have been made to this policy and where appropriate, residents are allowed to pay for their replacement wheeled bin in 2 instalments within a 3 week period. On receipt of the first payment (£10) arrangements are made for bagged rubbish to be collected from the property. On receipt of the second instalment (£10) the wheeled bin is delivered to the address and the wheeled bin collections resume.
100. 3 complaints were received stating DCC staff had been seen driving DCC vehicles whilst using a mobile phone. In each of these instances, the drivers were spoken to by their managers and the appropriate action taken.
101. A review of our pest control service has started. This review will harmonise the manner in which pest control inspections are carried out. Early indications suggest the utilisation of an appointment system which will give customers the opportunity to arrange a convenient time to meet with a pest control officer.
102. All complaints are discussed at Direct Service's management meetings, not only to ensure they are being dealt with in a timely and effective manner, but to identify any trends and put appropriate action in place.

## Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (EHCP)

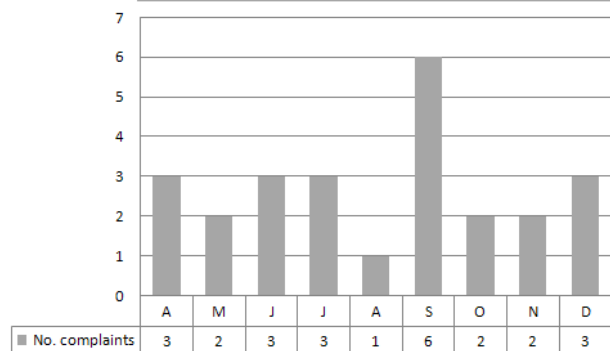
103. Between 1 April and 31 December 2011, 25 complaints were received in relation to EHCP

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	3	3	11	8	25
% of total received	24%		44%	32%	-

104. Of these complaints 7 (28%) were received during quarter 3.

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

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



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

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA										TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D			
Highways: other						1					1	4.5%
Lack of action	1						1			2	4	18.2%
No communication / missed appointments	1										1	4.5%
Other			1	2	1	1			2		7	31.8%
Other charges				1		1					2	9.1%
Other: staff attitude	1	1	1			2	1			1	7	31.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>	
comment							1				1	-
service request		1	1								2	-

## Finance (FIN)

107. During the first half of 2011/12, 5 complaints were received in relation to FIN

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	0	4	0	5
% of total received	20%		80%	-	-

108. During quarter 3, 1 complaint was received in relation to FIN. This complaint was found to be justified.

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

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA										TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D			
Customer Service: call waiting time	1										1	20.0%
Lack of action			1								1	20.0%
Other	1										1	20.0%
Other: staff attitude			1								1	20.0%
Other: damage caused by council									1		1	20.0%
TOTAL	2		2						1		5	100%

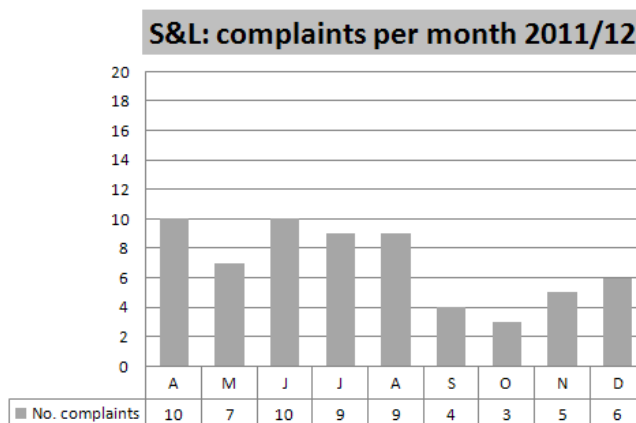
## Sport and Leisure Services (S&L)

110. Between 1 April and 31 December 2011, 63 complaints were received by S&L

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	13	9	38	3	63
% of total received	35%		60%		5%

111. Of these 14 (22%) were received during quarter 3.

112. Due to the small numbers involved, it is not possible to determine if this is a significant decrease. However, the numbers received will continue to be monitored.



113. The following table shows the number of complaints received by category

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA									TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D		
Condition of local area: litter			1							1	1.6%
Condition of local area: parks / open space	3	2								5	8.2%
Customer Service: staff attitude		1								1	1.6%
Indoor Leisure: accidents		1						1		2	3.3%
Indoor Leisure: broken equipment			1						0	1	1.6%
Indoor Leisure: cancellation of classes			1							1	1.6%
Indoor Leisure: charges (excl. gym member)	1			1	1			1	2	6	9.8%
Indoor Leisure: membership fees	2	1	1	2	1			1		8	13.1%
Indoor Leisure: other	1			2	3	3	2	2	2	15	24.6%
Indoor Leisure: staff attitude	1		1	1						3	4.9%
Indoor Leisure: under 8s policy			1							1	1.6%
No communication / missed appointments		1	1	2						4	6.6%
Other	1	1	1	0		0	1	0	1	5	8.2%
Other: staff attitude			1							1	1.6%
Outdoor Leisure (excl. countryside)	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	5	8.2%
website / communication			1		1					2	3.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>
comment					2					2	-

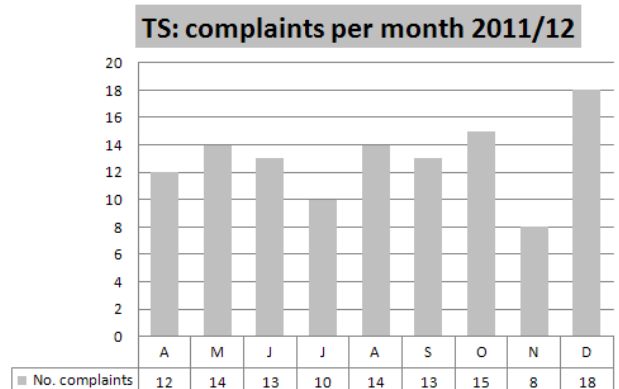
114. To improve the availability of up to date pricing information within facilities and ensure staff are fully aware of all pricing variations, specific S&L customer care training has been sourced. However, before this training can be arranged, it needs to be approved by NS's central training team.
115. Refund processes are to be reviewed as a result of the delays with 2 customer refunds. One refund relates to the MRM system configuration from the former Durham City Leisure Centre and this is currently being corrected.
116. The 2 complaints received about cleanliness (at Freeman's Quay and Woodhouse Close) have been fed into the review of cleaning and housekeeping schedules.

### Technical Services (TS)

117. Between 1 April and 31 December 2011, 117 complaints were received in relation to TS

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	14	27	69	7	117
% of total received	35%		59%	6%	-

118. Of these 41 (35%) were received during quarter 3.
119. The number of complaints received by TS has remained relatively consistent since 1 April. There was a slight increase in December but this can be attributed to a number of complaints (5) that were received in relation to gritting.
120. As 2011/12 progresses, and the weather deteriorates and street lights



burn for longer hours due to dark nights, it is expected that the number of complaints in relation to winter maintenance and street lighting will increase. These areas will be monitored to ensure the number of complaints remain manageable.

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

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA									TOTAL	% of total
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D		
Customer Service: customer cut off					1					1	0.9%
DCC fleet: driving issues							1			1	0.9%
DCC fleet: inappropriate parking							1			1	0.9%
DCC fleet: staff attitude		1								1	0.9%
Highways: lack of communication		1	1	2		1	1			6	5.6%
Highways: condition of carriageway	1						2			3	2.8%
Highways: condition of footway		1								1	0.9%
Highways: damage caused by DCC	1	2	2	2						7	6.5%
Highways: drainage					1					1	0.9%
Highways: length of time carrying out repairs		1					1		2	4	3.7%
Highways: other						1			3	4	3.7%
Highways: street furniture	4	3	3		2	1			1	14	13.1%
Lack of action	1	1		2	5	2	1	4	4	20	18.7%
No communication / missed appointments			3	1	1	2		1		8	7.5%
Other	1	1		1	1	2		2	1	9	8.4%
Other charges					1					1	0.9%
Other: staff attitude			1						1	2	1.9%
Other: damage caused by council				1	1	2	2			6	5.6%
Other: staff making a mess				1						1	0.9%
Parking	1					1	1	1		4	3.7%
Street Lights	1	1	1		1		2		1	7	6.5%
winter maintenance: gritting									5	5	4.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100%</b>
comment							1			1	-
Not NS	2									2	-
service request		2	2			1	2			7	-

122. Considering the size and scope of TS the number of complaints received remains low and between 20 and 25% result from a policy / strategic decision, e.g. gritting routes, brightness of street lights, parking. In each of these cases the complainant is informed of the existence of a policy, made aware of the process surrounding policy changes and reassured that their comments will be retained and fed into the process when that policy is reviewed. Due to the small numbers and diversity of the remaining complaints, it is not possible to identify trends and devise appropriate actions in response.

123. However, a technical fault has come to our notice which helps to explain the number of complaints in relation to street lighting. Reported street lighting faults are recorded within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and this triggers a service request to the street lighting team. The street lighting team then repairs the light. If the fault is intermittent and subsequent calls are received, customer services re-open the previous record. However, it has been noted that service requests are not being automatically generated and so the street lighting team are not aware of the issue and no repair is made. Customer Services staff are now aware of this issue and new service requests will be created for repeat problems with street lights.

## Compliments

124. Between 1 October and 31 December, NS received 118 compliments which covered a wide range of subjects and service areas.

	Q3, 2011/12	Comparator Data		
		Q2 2011/12	variance	Direction of travel
Number of compliments	118	97	+21	✓

125. The breakdown of compliments received by NS and recorded on the CRM is shown on the right
126. A large proportion of compliments (42%) relate to staff in recognition of their support and help in resolving the customer's concerns and issues. On each of these occasions, the individual officer is notified of the compliment and thanked by their line manager. Many of these relate to the professionalism, politeness and general helpfulness of staff.
127. The remaining compliments relate to our service provision, examples include

Compliments		
Service Area	Number	% of total
CS	15	13
DS	65	55
EHCP	13	11
S&L	1	1
TS	24	20

- Standard of work, e.g. keeping local areas clean and tidy, carrying out remedial work, road improvements
- Speed of work, e.g. repair to street lights, filling in pot holes.

## Suggestions

128. Between 1 October and 31 December, NS received 216 suggestions which covered a wide range of subjects and service areas.

	Q3, 2011/12	Comparator Data		
		Q2 2011/12	variance	Direction of travel
Number of suggestions	216	74	+142	✓



129. The breakdown of suggestions received is shown on the right. All suggestions are forwarded to the relevant team for consideration

Suggestions		
Service Area	Number	% of total
CS	88	41
DS	28	13
EHCP	3	1
S&L	85	39
TS	12	4

130. 155 (72%) of the suggestions received during quarter 3 related to consultation

- A standard letter was circulated by those who opposed the closure of Glenholme Leisure Centre. This letter stated that approximately £70 of council tax is used for the provision of Glenholme. If Glenholme is to close then a portion of that £70 should be refunded (for the period when there is no leisure provision). 77 such letters were received.
- 78 suggestions were received in response to the HWRC consultation. The following 74 oppose the closure
  - Hett Hills (28)
  - General opposition (19)
  - Stainton Wood / Cragwood (14)
  - Todhills (7)
  - Broomsdene (6)
- In addition there was one suggestion for income generation. A resident asked if it was viable to have a specific time slot available for small commercial vehicles to use the HWRCs for a small 'per visit' charge. This would raise income and reduce the temptation to fly-tip.
- This suggestion has been considered and an independent review undertaken by BREW as to the potential to do this on all sites. The result being that there are only a few sites that are "appropriate" due to size restrictions but it is possible. However the current licence for the sites excludes commercial waste so this would need to be renewed at considerable expense. Additionally there are health and safety issues with throwing waste from high pickups and flat beds as personnel doing this would be above the hand rails and could fall into skips; this is the reason it is suggested we ban flat bed trailers as part of our HWRC review/consultation. As an alternative we are considering offering the same principal at our Waste Transfer Stations which have weighbridges so accurate weight and charge per weight could be applied but Premier Waste is not prepared to work with us on this. Therefore this will be considered as part of our new waste contract. The Commercial trader depositing the waste has a duty of care to dispose of it legally and at an appropriate facility; our disposal costs are £100 per tonne so the suggested charge of £15 per visit is unlikely to be viable.

131. Examples of the remaining suggestions received during quarter 3, together with our response include

- It was suggested that we provide a geographical number (0191) for those who have to pay for 0300 numbers. Unfortunately, this is not feasible. The move to the 0300 number system is a central government initiative that ensures all government and charitable organisations can provide a consistent numbering system to customers, whereby geographical charges do not apply. E.g. as a unitary authority everyone outside the 0191 range e.g. 01388, 01833 would have incurred a charge, this would mean that the entire south and western parts of the county would pay a fee. For all landline calls, the 0300 number range will ensure that all calls will be charged at a local rate. In addition, most mobile packages now provide free calls to 01, 02 and

03 number ranges. In effect the vast majority of our customers will benefit from this change and this is why the ICT unit will change all numbers within the council to 0300 over the telephone project period. A capital and monthly fee will be incurred by the council if we are to keep or indeed create a 0191 number.

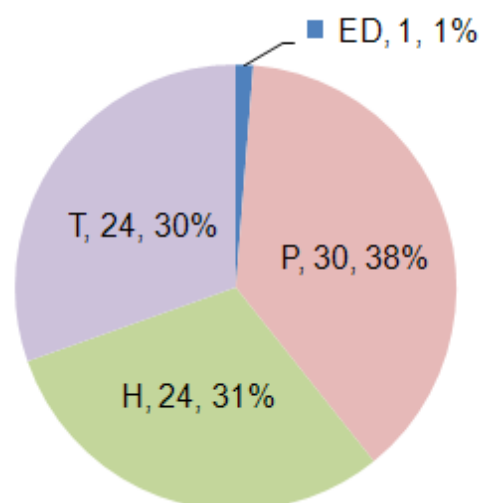
- A resident was having difficulty finding activities for pre-school age children on our website. The under 5s is an important group for the authority and we do offer a range of activities across the county to cater for their needs. We are concerned that this information is not within easy reach of parents and are looking improving the packaging and promotion of these activities to aid parents in their search for suitable activities for their children.
- A Ferryhill resident suggested that footpaths throughout the county should be gritted as they are dangerous and that salt bins were not sufficient. Footways are an important part of the network and the Winter Service Plan includes provision via partnerships, e.g. Ferryhill Town Council to treat priority footpaths
- A visitor to Durham suggested that the city centre needed greater lighting at night both for safety and aesthetic reasons. They also commented that some of the trees on the river need to be cut back. Street Lighting is installing more efficient lighting with the aim of saving money and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. There is also a scheme underway to floodlight the Castle and Cathedral, this supports the World Heritage Site Management Plan to enhance visitor experience and develop tourism in the city. Street scene staff are currently involved in the Riverside Project which will tidy up the riverbanks including cutting down overgrown trees.

## Regeneration and Economic Development

132. The RED service grouping consists of 5 services of which four provide front-facing services and are thus liable to receive feedback from service users. Between 1 October 2011 and 31 December 2011, 79 complaints, 46 compliments and 31 suggestions were received.

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

133. The majority of complaints received for RED are by the Planning and Housing services



134. The table below shows

Service Area	2010/11 Total	2011/12				Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Economic Development	2	2	0	1		3
Housing	104	32	28	24		84
Planning	145	32	37	30		99
Transport	46	18	11	24		53
<b>RED Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>79</b>		<b>239</b>

### Economic Development (ED)

135. During quarter 3, one complaint was received by the Economic Development service

136. As the numbers of complaints received by the Economic Development service are small it is difficult to identify any underlying trends. Any future complaints will be monitored to enable and trends to be identified.

### Housing (H)

137. During quarter three, 24 complaints were received in relation to Housing,

138. Of the 24 complaints received, 19 related to Durham City Homes (13 in relation to repairs and decent homes and 6 in relation to Housing Management), Supported housing received 3 complaints, the Housing Renewal and Improvement Service received 1 complaint as did the Housing Solutions Service.

139. Feedback from Durham City Homes complaints has been used as part of ongoing efforts to implement new systems designed to improve communication between staff whilst the complaints for Supported Housing and Housing Solutions have been discussed with relevant officers as part of appraisals and one-to-ones.

140. The Housing Renewals and Improvement complaint has led to internal procedures being reviewed and proposed changes have been suggested to the regional partnership responsible for administering the scheme.

### Planning and Assets (P)

141. During quarter 3, 30 Stage 1 complaints and 7 Stage 2 complaints were received in relation to the Planning and Assets service.

142. Of the 30 Planning and Assets related complaints, 11 were in relation to planning decisions, 6 were in relation to planning enforcement, 9 were in relation to the planning service, 2 were in relation to planning policy and 2 were in relation to Assets.

143. The majority of the complaints with regard to planning decisions were from members of the public who disagreed with planning permission being granted on particular developments.

144. The remainder of the complaints cover very different areas of the planning service and it is difficult to identify trends within these complaints. However, it is felt that improvements to communications can be made and these will be investigated during quarter 4.

### Transport (T)

145. During quarter 3, 24 Stage 1 complaints and 1 Stage 2 complaint were received in relation to the Transport service

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	4	8	12	0	24
% of total received	50%		50%	0%	-

146. There has been a significant increase in the number of complaints received by the Transport Service. Half of the complaints relate to bus services with the remainder in connection to parking services.
147. It was anticipated that the numbers of complaints would increase after the changes to the bus network came into force.
148. The one Stage 2 complaint received was the result of the issue of a parking ticket.
149. No improvements have been identified due to the variety of issues raised without any specific trend.

### Compliments and suggestions

150. During quarter two, RED received 46 compliments and 31 suggestions.
151. The majority of the compliments received were for the Planning Service and were expressions of thanks for the service received
152. The majority of the suggestions received were for the Transport Service and covered a wide range of issues.

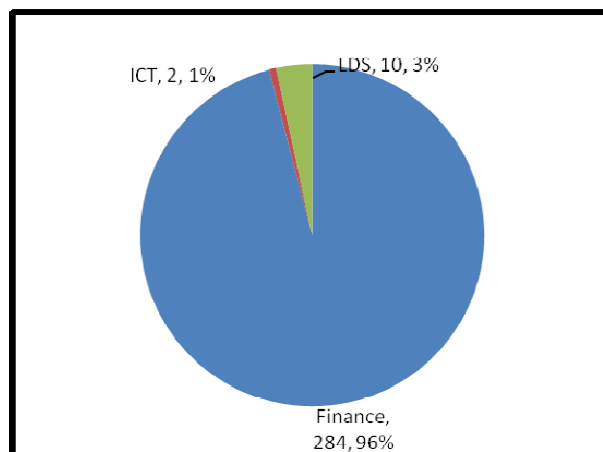
## Resources

153. The Resources service grouping consists of 4 main service areas

Abbreviation	Service Area
F	Finance (Corporate Finance/ Financial Services) including the Revenues and Benefits Service
HROD	Human Resources and Organisational Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

154. Between 1 October 2011 and 31 December 2011 the number of complaints rose by 35%, from 220 in Q2 to 296 in Q3. This represents a continuation of the rise in complaints we have seen over recent quarters due to delays in processing benefit claims during the implementation period for our new computer system. We have done everything possible to alleviate the worst hardships for our most vulnerable customers during this difficult period. The new system went live on 5 December and staff are currently working to bring down the backlog and improve processing to acceptable levels. During the same period, 12 compliments and 14 suggestions were made.

155. During quarter 3, 73% of complaints (83% in Q1 and 88% in Q2) were responded to within 10 working days. Whilst this is outside of acceptable tolerance, it is a result of the volume of complaints, and the unprecedented increase in resources needed to respond to them, particularly for the Revenues and Benefits service.



156. Following the pattern of recent quarters, the vast majority of Resources' Q3 complaints (96%) related to finance, namely the Revenues and Benefits service

157. Further analysis of Q3 complaints reveals that 45% were justified (up from 27% in Q1, and 38% in Q2), 32% were partly justified (Q1, 25%, Q2, 36%) and 15% were not justified (42% in q1, 23% in q2), and 8% are yet to be categorised. It is therefore disappointing to report that 77% of our complaints fall into the categories of justified/partially justified. Those complaints that were not justified arose where it was found that customers, whilst dissatisfied with the service they received, had been subject to the appropriate application of council processes and procedures by Resources' staff.

### Finance

158. During quarter 3, 284 (139 in Q1, 212 in Q2) complaints were received in relation to Finance.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	132	95	37	0	20	284
% of total received	80%		13%	-	7%	-

### BENEFITS

159. Q3 complaints for Resources have again been dominated by the increased volume arising from delays being experienced by our customers in relation to benefits applications. The new ICT system has been live since 5 December and our staff are working very hard to process claims and bring down the backlog as quickly as possible. The previous deterioration in our processing times has levelled out and plans are in place to improve processing rates during Q4 of 2011/2012 with prioritisation for the most vulnerable in the meantime.
160. The majority of Q3 complaints related to delays in assessment of claims for benefits. However, although we saw an increase in the third quarter, the majority of complaints were received in October when the position peaked, and a gradual decrease was evident in November and December. This falling off of increased numbers of complaints appears to correspond with the levelling out of our performance for processing claims; previously deteriorating performance during the ICT system implementation levelled off at this time and we are now in a position where improvements can start to be realised
161. The Benefits service continues to prioritise processing cases where customers are at risk of eviction, with over 700 cases prioritised during this quarter. At the same time, service managers continue to meet regularly with private and social landlords to update them on the service position and inform them of actions being taken. New procedures and prepayment checks have also been put in place to ensure payments are made to the correct person.
162. All actions that are being taken to address the backlog of claims and improve the processing times continue to be subject to fortnightly reports to Corporate Management Team.
163. Further trend analysis of this quarter's complaints identified issues that have led us to take action. For example on three occasions customers received the benefit award letter of another customer in the same envelope as their own. To avoid this happening in future, all relevant staff have been made aware of the seriousness of these errors, for the authority, and for the individual customers.

## REVENUES

164. In line with analysis at Q2, approximately half of this quarter's revenues complaints related to quality of service. Of those that were justified or partly justified, 9 complaints arose due to direct debits being taken one day early. The Council accepted full responsibility for this human error which resulted in 9 complaints and affected 21,000 customers. Procedures in respect of direct debits were further reviewed and improved and internal controls have been strengthened to avoid any further errors relating to the submission of direct debits.
165. Other complaints where a discernible trend was identified related to the implementation of the new Revenues and Benefits system such as the Council issuing new account numbers. Duplicate account numbers arose with the amalgamation of the 7 former systems and there was no alternative for the Council but to issue new account numbers.

166.

### Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

167. During quarter 3, 2 complaints were received in relation to ICT.

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

168. With 2 complainants assigned to ICT it was not possible to assess any trend. Further investigation revealed that one of these complaints arose from a service request being wrongly assigned to ICT; lack of communication back to the customer to let them know it had been passed elsewhere and was being dealt with resulted in a complaint. A review of the incident highlighted the need to keep customers informed when service requests are redirected.
169. We continue to consider and learn from any complaints we receive.

Legal and Democratic Services (LDS)						
	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 <sup>st</sup> point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	2	1	5	0	2	10
% of total received	30%		50%	-	20%	

170. During quarter 3, 10 complaints were received in relation to LDS. The types of complaints received related primarily to quality of service and service failure.
171. Complaints this quarter covered a wide range of issues from wedding ceremonies, payment for certificates, electoral canvassers, assisted car purchase scheme etc. Whilst it was not possible to identify any trends that would lead to wider action, one complaint resulted in information being passed to the helpdesk for future reference.
- A customer was told that there was no facility within the council to provide an official signature and stamp; this was needed to verify that the customer was entitled to a pension from another European country. It was subsequently ascertained that this service is available from the Elections Manager and the helpdesk were informed of the availability of this service

### Compliments and Suggestions

172. During quarter 3, Resources received 12 compliments and 14 suggestions.
173. Compliments were received in relation to members of both Revenues and Benefits staff for their assistance, to our registrars for the service provided in conducting wedding ceremonies. All staff involved have been made aware of compliments received.
174. Eight suggestions related to leisure facilities at Ferryhill and requested a reduction in council tax liability. Other suggestions related to the informality of addressing members and staff by their first names in meetings and envelopes from the council not being adequately sealed.

### Local Government Ombudsman – Current Activity

175. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 14 matters relating to a range of complaints concerning:
- 2 X Housing Benefits Issues – investigations ongoing, outcomes awaited.
  - 4 Planning Issues – In one of the cases the Ombudsman decided to discontinue the investigation, the remaining 3 investigations are ongoing.
  - 3 X Adult Care Services issues – all investigations are ongoing, outcomes awaited.
  - 1 X Planning/Environmental Health issue – Investigation ongoing, outcome awaited.
  - 1 X Housing issue – Investigation is ongoing, outcome awaited.
  - 2 X School Admissions issues – in one case the Ombudsman discontinued the investigation, the remaining investigation is ongoing.
  - 1 X School Transport Issue – Investigation ongoing, outcome awaited.
176. The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 2 matters which had been subject to investigations that had been initiated prior to the beginning of the quarter. These matters can be summarised as follows:
- 1 X Education and Children Services Issue – the Ombudsman discontinued the investigation.
  - 1 X Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation Issue – The Ombudsman discontinued the investigation.
177. During the quarter the Ombudsman also notified the Council of the outcome in relation to a range of matters which were not subject to full investigation. The Ombudsman's investigators reached their decisions on the basis of the details supplied by complainants, supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers. These matters can be summarised as follows:
- 1 x Compulsory Purchase Order Issue – Out of Jurisdiction.
  - 2 x Benefits and Tax Issues – Investigations were not initiated.
  - 1 x Housing Issue – Investigation not initiated.
  - 1 x Planning and Development issue – Investigation not initiated.
  - 1 x Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation Issue – Investigation not initiated.

### Learning Outcomes

178. No learning outcomes have been reported during the quarter.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND REASONS

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



