

## Standards Committee

29 May 2012



### Performance Report for 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 4 and year-end for the financial year 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. 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
5. 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.
6. The Corporate Complaints Unit (CCU), 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.
7. Performance updates are reported on a quarterly basis and this is the final routine report for 2011/12.

## **Format of this report**

8. This report is divided into 3 main sections.

Section 1: Overview of the 2011/12 financial year

Section 2: Overview of Quarter 4, 2011/12

Section 3: Detailed quarter 4, 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)

Neighbourhood Services (NS)

Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

Resources (RES)

## Section 1: Overview of 2011/12

9. Between 1 April 2011 and the 31 March 2012, 3,105 non-statutory complaints, 979 compliments and 670 suggestions were received by Durham County Council.

### Complaints

10. Overall, there has been a 74% increase in the number of non-statutory complaints received and recorded on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

Service Grouping	Number Received						
	10/11	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	% change
ACE	6	3	1	2	4	10	67
AWH	42	14	28	13	12	67	59
CYPS	11	4	4	1	7	16	45
NS	1,069	329	301	360	599	1,589	49
RED	309	77	76	87	88	319	3
RES	350	151	220	296	428	1,104	215
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,789</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>1,138</b>	<b>3,105</b>	<b>74</b>

11. As can be seen in the table above and the graph to the right; there is variation in the number of complaints received by each service grouping and as 2011/12 progressed, the overall number of complaints received each quarter steadily increased.

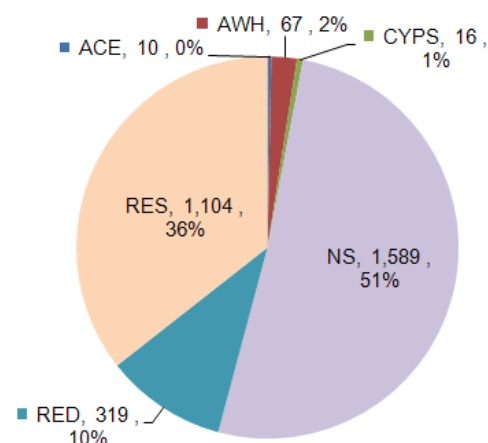
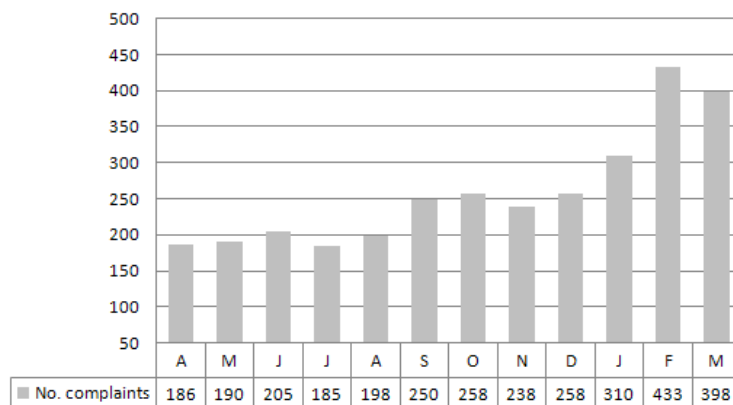
12. Although the number of complaints has increased, this is seen as an indication that the system is working well and that people are willing and able to use it.

13. There are several reasons for this increase in complaints, including;

- Greater use of and improved recording on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- The time taken to process benefits
- Issues relating to call handling
- The introduction of Alternate Weekly Collection (AWC)
- Suspension of services as a result of industrial action on 30 November 2011
- Disagreements with planning decisions

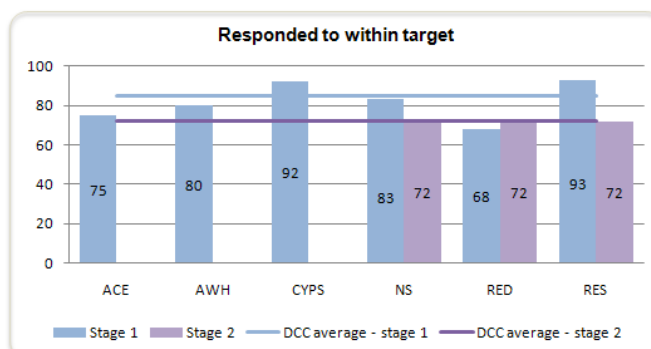
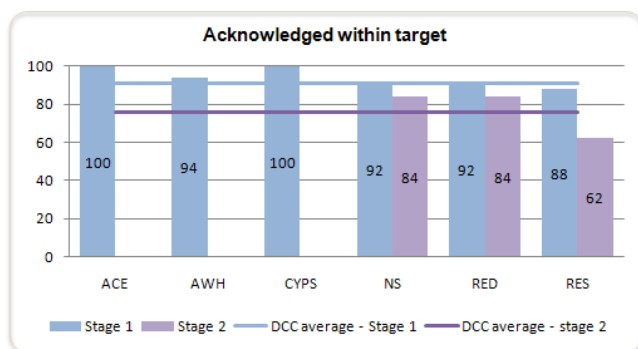
14. The majority of complaints (51%) related to Neighbourhood Services (NS). This is a lower proportion than in previous years. The reason for this change is the increase in the number of complaints

**No. complaints per month 2011/12**



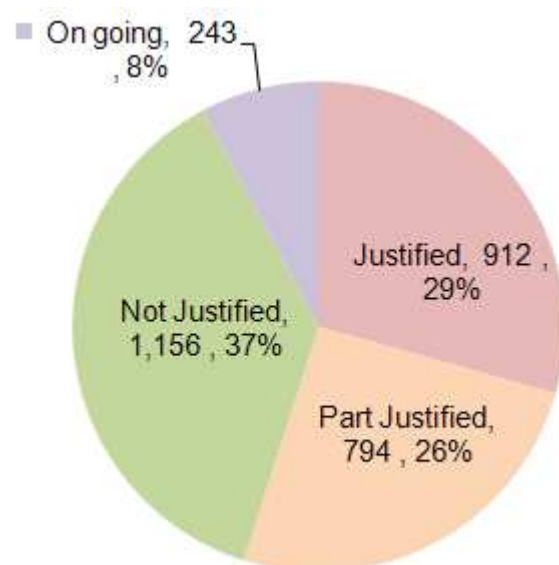
received in relation to the revenues and benefits system (Resources). More detail can be found in this report in the section appropriate to the responsible service grouping.

15. For all complaints there is an acknowledgement target of 2 working days. 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.
16. The following graphs show the average response times throughout 2011/12.



17. The Corporate Complaints Unit (CCU) is responsible for both acknowledging complaints and ensuring complainants receive an appropriate response within set timescales. 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.
18. There is variation in response times throughout the year: turnaround times being dependent upon the number received. Changes in response times are most notable during the council tax billing period, periods of inclement weather and bank holidays. At these times, officers are unable to handle complaints within the desired timescales due to a combination of the volume received and the relevant officers endeavouring to keep services running through these busy periods.
19. During quarter 4, there was an increase in the number of complaints received and this has had a detrimental effect on recent performance. Under normal circumstances the average number of ongoing complaints is about 80; as at 25 April 2012 it was 235.

20. Further investigation of the complaints received shows that during 2011/12 there were 1,156 occasions (40% of complaints processed, i.e. excluding those ongoing) 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.



21. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 1,706 (54%) justified complaints, 912 fully and 794 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning.

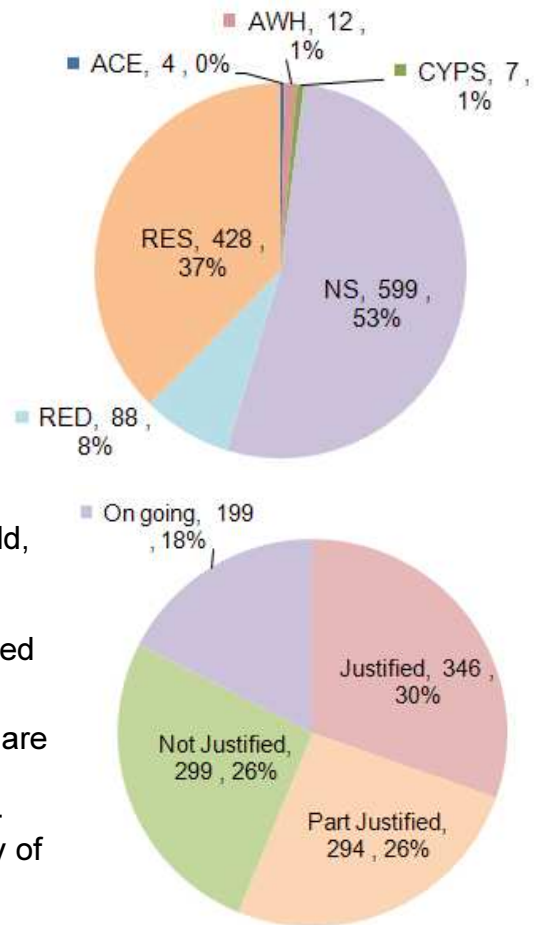
22. In addition to complaints, we also analyse compliments and suggestions to determine if we can further improve processes, and thereby service delivery. The following table is a summary of the compliments and suggestions received throughout 2011/12.

Service Grouping	Compliments					Suggestions				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
<b>ACE</b>	2	2	24	20	48	6	6	8	7	27
<b>AWH</b>	5	107	6	94	212	5	8	2	5	20
<b>CYPS</b>	26	38	0	33	97	16	2	1	0	22
<b>NS</b>	0	97	118	90	305	6	74	216	101	397
<b>RED</b>	91	41	46	30	208	103	15	31	5	154
<b>RES</b>	39	40	12	18	109	13	14	14	9	50
<b>TOTAL</b>	163	325	206	285	979	149	119	272	130	670

23. All correspondence is reviewed and considered. We sent full apologies to complainants in all cases and have continued to tackle staff / suppliers whose attitude / service is called into question, ensuring that our service standards are maintained.

## Section 2: Overview of quarter 4, 2011/12 (non-statutory complaints)

24. Between 1 January 2012 and the 31 March 2012, 1,138 non-statutory complaints, 285 compliments and 130 suggestions were received by Durham County Council.
25. The majority of complaints (53%) related to Neighbourhood Services (NS). This is consistent with the trend over the 2011/12 financial year.
26. Further investigation of the complaints received shows that during quarter 4 there were 299 occasions (32% of complaints processed, i.e. excluding those ongoing) 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.
27. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 640 (56%) justified complaints, 346 fully and 294 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning.
28. In addition to complaints, we also analyse compliments and suggestions to determine if we can further improve processes, and thereby service delivery. The following table is a summary of the compliments and suggestions received throughout quarter 4, 2011/12.
29. More detail, in relation to learning outcomes, can be found in the following sections which provide more detail in relation to the types and numbers of statutory and non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions received across the service groupings during 2010/11:



	Quarter 4	
	Compliments	Suggestions
ACE	20	7
AWH	94	5
CYPS	33	0
NS	90	101
RED	30	5
RES	18	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>130</b>

## Section 3: Detailed quarter 4, 2011/12 report from each service grouping

### Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)

30. The ACE service grouping consists of 3 service areas. Between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012 ACE received 4 complaints, 20 compliments and 7 suggestions.

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

### Partnerships and Community Engagement (PCE)

31. During quarter 4, 1 complaint was received by PCE.
32. The complaint suggested that the temporary closure of Sherburn Hill Community Centre had been undertaken without due consideration of other options. A detailed response and copies of related documents were sent to the complainant outlining the reasons for closure and explaining that the Council had acted under a duty of care as a result of a Health and Safety inspection.

### Policy and Communications (PC)

33. During quarter 4, 3 complaints were received by PC.
34. Two complaints referred to the issue of failure to deliver council publicity materials to residents in Bradbury. The third complaint referred to the distribution company responsible for delivering council publications.
35. Discussions are ongoing with Royal Mail in relation to the problems in Bradbury, and Durham County Council has decided to send copies of Durham County News to Bradbury residents by second class post. The distribution company investigated the complaint about delivery staff and have confirmed that they were acting in good faith.

### Compliments and Suggestions

36. During quarter 4, ACE received 20 compliments
37. 17 compliments were in support of the work of the County Durham Area Action Partnerships and their staff, 3 complimented the Council's "Durham County News" and "Guide to Services"
38. During quarter 4, ACE received 7 suggestions – 5 for Partnerships and Community Engagement and 2 for Policy and Communications.
39. Partnerships and Community Engagement received 5 suggestions, 2 of which were anonymous – both highlighting a lack of youth activities at Woodhouse Close Estate/South Church/Henknowle/AYCC.
40. 1 suggestion was made that Durham County Council funding to AAPs is unfairly distributed.

41. 1 suggestion was made to the County Durham Partnership for help to enlist more volunteers in local communities. A response was sent outlining the development of a Volunteer and Community Sector strategy and action plan by the County Durham Partnership, containing specific objectives around increasing volunteers and the impact of volunteering in local communities with associated actions to implement this in April 2013.
42. 1 suggestion for wind farm funding from Durham Foundation to be allocated based on population e.g. AAP/Town/Parish council basis was acknowledged.
43. Policy and Communications received 2 suggestions, 1 suggesting that survey comments be communicated via text message, and 1 requesting that ward members' names are included alongside ward areas in future "Guide to Services". The suggestion was noted and a learning outcome recorded for more councillor information to be included in the contact directory.

## Adults, Wellbeing and Health (AWH)

### Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Non-statutory Complaints

44. The AWH service grouping consists of 4 main Service Areas and between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012, 12 non-statutory complaints, 94 compliments and 5 suggestions were received.

45. During quarter 4, 83% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days.

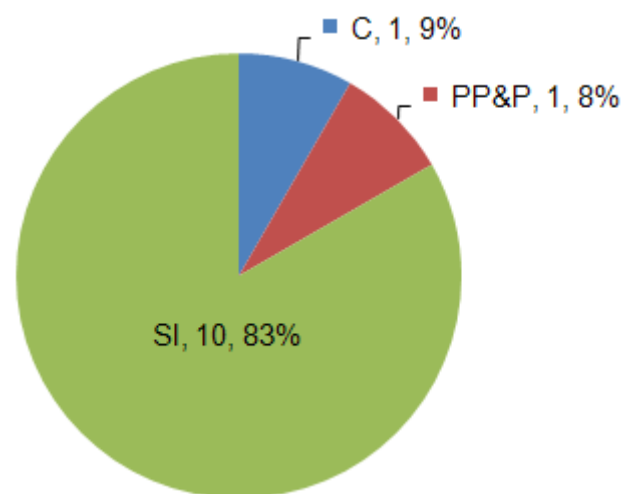
46. The majority of complaints, 10 (83%), were received by the Social Inclusion Service Area with 1 (8.5%) received by Commissioning and 1 (8.5%) by Policy, Planning & Performance.

47. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 4, 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.

48. During the quarter, 3 (25%) were partly justified.

49. In all complaints, information, explanations and apologies were provided to complainants which resolved the enquiries satisfactorily.

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





## Non-statutory Compliments and Suggestions

50. During the quarter, 94 compliments were received. Two were for Commissioning thanking the staff in the Record Office for their level of service and assistance with research; 2 were for Social Inclusion thanking library staff for their assistance. The remaining 90 also related to Social Inclusion with 77 complimenting the work of Welfare Rights and 13 the Adult Learning Service.
51. Five Comments/Suggestions were received, 1 was for Commissioning suggesting that the Shildon Locomotive Museum should be open during the Christmas and New Year period. The remaining 4 were for the library service, for example, suggesting the installation of Wi-fi facilities and possible book stocks. No key trends were identified.

## Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

52. During the quarter, 21 complaints were received. This is a 40% decrease on the previous quarter. Details of the quarterly performance are shown below.

Comparison of Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q4 10/11	Q1 11/12	Q2 11/12	Q3 11/12	Q4 11/12	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Adult Social Care	35	29	39	35	21	↓↓

53. 100% of complaints were acknowledged within 3 working days.
54. Of the 21 complaints, Complaints Resolution Plans were completed in all cases. There were 15 complaints completed, all 15 of which were within the timescales agreed within the CRP. The remaining 6 cases were not concluded within the quarter but are still within their agreed completion timescales.
55. Commissioning Service Area received the most complaints with 12, 9 of which related to Financial Services. Followed by Social Work (Older Persons/Mental Health Services for Older People/Physical Disability/Sensory Support Services) receiving 5 with the remainder being evenly spread across the other service areas.

Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers)	2 (9.5%)	3 (8.6%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons/ Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	5 (24%)	20 (57.1%)
Social Work Teams (Safeguarding)	0	1 (2.9%)
County Durham Care and Support	2 (9.5%)	2 (5.7%)
Commissioning	12 (57%)	9 (25.7%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21 (100%)</b>	<b>35 (100%)</b>

56. Of the 15 complaints completed in the quarter 53% (8) were not upheld, compared to 42% in the previous quarter. Of the remaining 7 completed complaints, 1 was partially upheld and 6 were upheld.

Outcome of complaints completed in the quarter					
Service Area	Number				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
County Durham Care and Support	0	0	1	1	2
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers)	0	0	1	1	2
Social Work Teams (Older Persons/Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	2	1	0	2	5
Social Work Teams (Safeguarding)	0	0	0	0	0
Commissioning	6	0	4	2	12
Policy, Planning & Performance	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>

57. Quality of Service – Personal Financial issues was the highest category of complaint with 9 recorded.

Complaints by Classification	
Classification	Number
Lack Of Service - Communications/Information	2
Conduct Or Attitude Of Staff	2
Lack Of Service – Other	3
Quality Of Service – Personal Financial Issues	9
Provision Of Service – Equipment	1
Quality Of Service – Work Of Other Agencies	2
Quality of Service – Another Resident	1
Finance – Direct Payments	1
Disputed Payments	1

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

### Actions as a result of statutory complaints

58. During the period the following outcomes/actions have been identified from the concluded complaints:
- Staff at Hawthorn House have been reminded that all incoming or outgoing calls relating to a client's needs, bookings or cancellations must be recorded, either on the client's case notes or in the office diary.
  - Care Co-ordinators have been reminded that it is their responsibility to make transport bookings for learning disabilities clients attending respite.

- Learning Disabilities' operational teams are working with respite units to review and improve the booking system.
- The Learning Disabilities' Transitions Team are reviewing current arrangements for detailed mapping of children coming into adult services so that planning for services to meet individuals' needs can be better achieved.

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

59. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made no enquiries.
60. The LGO delivered one decision during the quarter. The LGO did not expect the Council to take further action in relation to a complaint and there were no grounds to justify the public expense of the continued involvement of the Ombudsman

### Compliments

61. There were 118 compliments received in quarter four.

Compliments Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
County Durham Care and Support	83 (70%)	57 (70%)
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers	3 (2.5%)	1 (1%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	29 (25%)	24 (29%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	3 (2.5%)	0 (0%)
Commissioning	0	0 (0%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>118 (100%)</b>	<b>82 (100%)</b>

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

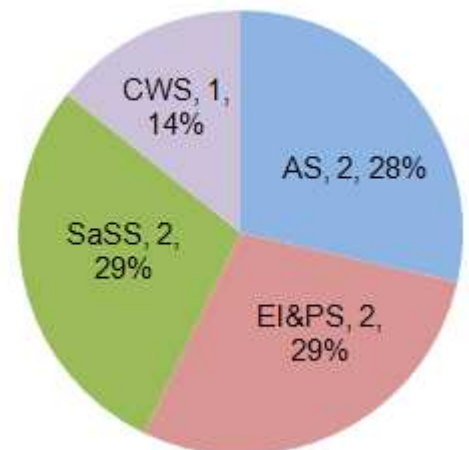
## Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)

### Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Non-statutory Complaints

63. Between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012, 7 non-statutory complaints, 33 compliments and 0 suggestions were received.
64. During quarter 4, 100% of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days.
65. During quarter 4, 29% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days
66. The lowest percentage of complaints was received by County Wide Services.
67. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 4, shows that 2 of the complaints were upheld (justified), 1 was partially upheld and 1 was not upheld.
68. 2 complaints required further information from the complainants before they could be investigated; these are still being looked into, along with a further complex complaint relating to children's social care but which was not made on behalf of a child or young person.
69. No key trends or learning outcomes have been identified from the complaints received due to their diverse nature. However, managers of the services being complained about have been made aware of the issues and where appropriate, these have been discussed with staff to avoid future recurrences.

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



#### Non-statutory Compliments and Suggestions

70. During quarter 4, CYPS received 33 compliments which were not about social care services. The majority of these related to the Early Intervention and Partnership Service, which is unsurprising as the service includes One Point, which encompasses a wide range of customer-facing services.

### Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

#### Statutory complaints

71. During quarter 4, 5 statutory complaints were received by the CYPS service grouping which were actioned at Stage 1. In addition, a further 37 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 Stage 1 Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q4 10/12	Q1 11/12	Q2 11/12	Q3 11/12	Q4 11/12	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Safeguarding and Specialist Services	4	7	10	5	5	↔

72. All 5 complaints were acknowledged within two working days maintaining performance at 100%.
73. Of the 5 Stage 1 complaints received in the quarter, none of the investigations were completed within the 20 working day timescale for response. 2 cases were not and breached the response timescale. This is reflective of the complexity of the relatively few complaints which are actioned at the formal stage. 2 cases are still ongoing and 1 was withdrawn.
74. The table below shows the where the complaints were received this quarter:

Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Areas	Complaints Received	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Looked After Children - Aycliffe	1 (20%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Bishop Auckland	1 (20%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Chester-le-Street	1 (20%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Crook	1 (20%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Easington	1 (20%)	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5 (100%)</b>	<b>0</b>

75. Of the 2 Stage 1 complaints resolved in the quarter, none were upheld. The following table details the breakdown of findings per team:

Outcome of Complaints Completed in the Quarter					
Service Area	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
Looked After Children: Aycliffe				1	1
Safeguarding Children: Bishop Auckland				Withdrawn	1
Safeguarding Children: Chester-le-Street	1				1
Safeguarding Children: Crook	1				1
Safeguarding Children: Easington				1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>

76. The complaints can be classified as shown in the table below. 'Decision regarding service' was the highest category of complaint. This is not surprising given the nature of the service; 3 of the complaints were about placement changes.

Complaints by Classification	
Classification	No. of complaints
Poor Service	0
Conduct or attitude of staff	0
Decision regarding service	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

## Compliments

77. During quarter 3, CYPS received 81 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.
78. SaSS received 66 compliments in the previous quarter (see table below). The ratio of compliments to formal complaints is 16.2:1, compared to 13.2:1 in the previous quarter.

Service Area	Number of compliments received	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Adoption Service	1 (1.2%)	0
Aycliffe Secure Service	24 (29.6%)	0
Children's Homes	1 (1.2%)	2 (5.6%)
Looked After Children - Aycliffe	2 (2.5%)	0
Community Support Team	10 (12.4%)	13 (36.0%)
Disabled Children and Families Team	5 (6.2%)	3 (9.1%)
Pathfinder service	22 (27.2%)	3 (9.1%)
Safeguarding Children – Bishop Auckland	2 (2.5%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Seaham 1	1 (1.2%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Stanley 1	5 (6.2%)	0
Safeguarding Children – Stanley 2	2 (2.5%)	0
Young People's Service	1 (1.2%)	0
4Real Team	4 (4.9%)	4 (11.0%)
To all of SaSS	1 (1.2%)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>66</b>

## Suggestions

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

## Actions as a result of statutory representations

80. No actions have been identified as a direct result of statutory complaints received or completed during this quarter.

## Neighbourhood Services (NS)

### Overview

81. The NS service grouping consists of 5 main service areas and between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012, 599 complaints, 90 compliments and 101 suggestions were received and recorded on the CRM.

82. As can be seen in the table below; there is variation in the number of complaints received throughout the year and 37% of all complaints received and recorded on the CRM during 2011/12 relate to quarter 4.

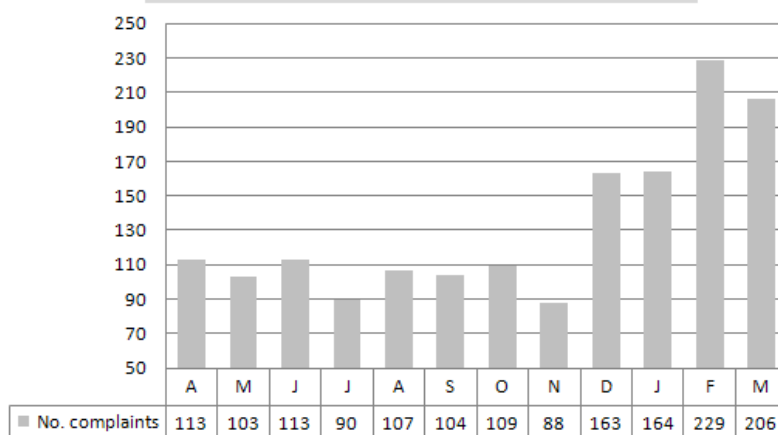
Abbreviation	Service Area
CS	Customer Services
DS	Direct Services
EHCP	Environmental Health & Consumer Protection
S&L	Sport and Leisure
TS	Technical Services

Service Grouping	Number Received						% change
	10/11	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	
NS	1,032	329	301	360	599	1,589	54
% of total	-	21	19	23	37	-	-

83. A monthly breakdown is shown in the graph to the right. Almost half of all complaints were received in the last 4 months of 2011/12 (December to March).

84. The increase in December can be attributed to industrial action that occurred on 30 November; 55 complaints were recorded, 53 of which were in response to the suspension of refuse collection. If these complaints were excluded from the December total, then 108 complaints would have been received by NS which is in line with expectations.

**No. complaints per month 2011/12**



85. The increase in January can be attributed to our refuse collection service. Changes to refuse and recycling arrangements have contributed to an increase in calls. The new collection system (Alternate Weekly Collection) means that recycling will be collected one week and rubbish the next. Changes to collection days have also contributed to the increase in complaints.

86. The increase in February is due to a combination of increased complaints in relation to the works taking place at Thinford Roundabout, outside the Durham Gate Development and the call waiting times experienced when contacting the authority. Longer call waiting times resulted from;

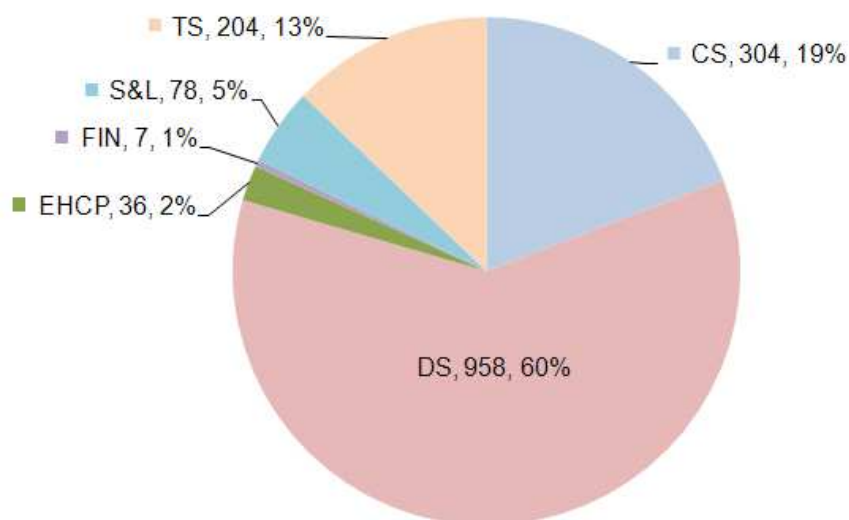
- An increase in the volume and complexity of calls. Mainly as a consequence of issuing all council tax bills at the same time and ongoing enquiries to the revenues and benefits service.
- The introduction of Alternate Weekly Collections (AWC). A number of queries have been received in relation to this scheme.
- An increase in footfall at our access points. Mostly in relation to council tax and benefit queries, resources have needed to be realigned; this has involved moving staff from telephone duties to face-to-face duties.

87. The increase in March was mainly due to a further increase in complaints relating to the call waiting times experienced when contacting the authority; as a consequence of the issues mentioned above.

88. Further detail in relation to these areas can be found in the section of the report dedicated to that service area.

89. Throughout 2011/12, Direct Services received the majority of complaints (60%) which is in line with previous trends and reflects the front facing nature of the service area.

90. Further investigation of the complaints received shows that during 2011/12 there were 654 occasions (46% of complaints processed, i.e. excluding those ongoing) 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	419	343	654	173	1,589
% of total received	48%		41%	11%	-

91. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, NS is left with 762 (48%) justified complaints, 419 fully and 343 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning.



## Customer Services (CS)

92. Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, 304 complaints were received in relation to CS

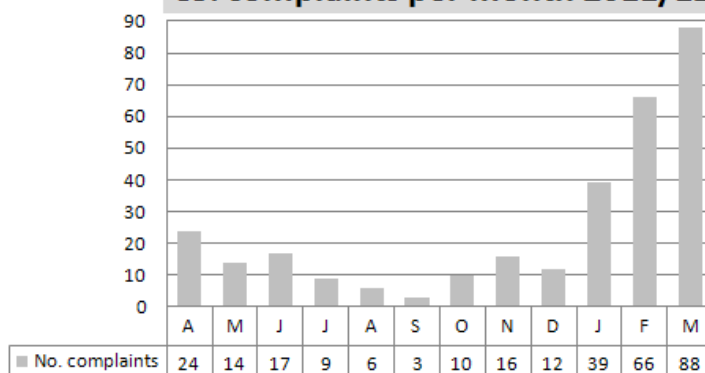
	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	108	81	63	52	304
% of total received	48%		41%	11%	-

93. 63% of the 304 complaints were received during quarter 4; and of these, 56% related to call handling.

94. The main reasons for these complaints are

- An increase in the volume and complexity of calls. Mainly as a consequence of issuing all council tax bills at the same time and ongoing enquiries to the revenues and benefits service.
- The introduction of Alternate Weekly Collections (AWC). A number of queries have been received in relation to this scheme.
- An increase in footfall at our access points. Mostly in relation to council tax and benefit queries, resources have needed to be realigned; this has involved moving staff from telephone duties to face-to-face duties.

CS: complaints per month 2011/12



COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA												TOTAL	% of total	
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M			
Condition of local area: detritus	1												1	0.3%	
Customer Service: call waiting time	9	6	9	2		2	2	5		14	31	15	95	33.0%	
Customer Service: customer cut off	1		2	1	1		1			2	3	43	54	18.8%	
Customer Service: long queuing time	1	1						1	1		2	4	10	3.5%	
Customer Service: staff attitude	5									2	3	5	15	5.2%	
Incorrect / insufficient information given	1	1	1			1				1	6		11	3.8%	
Lack of action		1					2		1	2	1		7	2.4%	
No communication / missed appointments	2	1	4							2	8	2	19	6.6%	
Other	1	1	1	4	3		2	6	3	7	3	11	42	14.6%	
Other: staff attitude	1	2											3	1.0%	
Other: damage caused by council												1	1	0.3%	
Payments: delay											1		1	0.3%	
Refuse: charges	1						1	1	1				4	1.4%	
Refuse: HWRC										5	1		6	2.1%	
Refuse: missed collection				1				1		2	1		5	1.7%	
Refuse: non-delivery of bin / container							2						2	0.7%	
Refuse: special collections	1				1						1	1	4	1.4%	
Refuse: staff attitude		1		1									1	3	1.0%
Refuse: strike action									2				2	0.7%	
Street Lights									1				1	0.3%	
website / communication					1					1			2	0.7%	
<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>9</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>100%</b>	
comment								2	1				3	-	
Not NS									2	1	5	5	13	-	

## Direct Services (DS)

95. Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, 959 complaints were received by DS

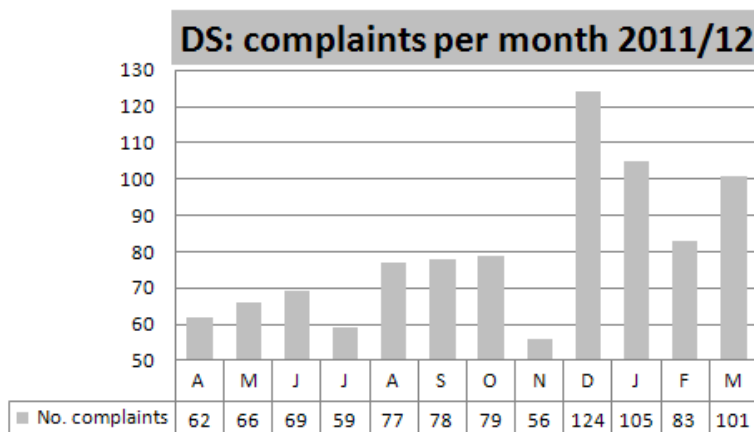
	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	263	208	419	69	959
% of total received	49%		44%	7%	-

96. Of these complaints, 289 (30%) were received during quarter 4.

97. The number of complaints received by DS each month is shown in the graph to the right.

98. With the exception of December, January and March, the number received each month remains relatively consistent at between 60 and 80 (affected by seasonality).

99. 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 December total, then 71 complaints would have been received by DS which is in line with expectations.



100. The increase in January can be attributed to our refuse collection service. Throughout quarter 4, the number of complaints in this area increased, as shown in the table below.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
<b>Missed Collection</b>	58	68	48	107	281
<b>Staff not returning bins / containers</b>	7	8	15	20	50
<b>Staff making a mess</b>	4	9	10	15	37
<b>Staff Attitude</b>	10	6	6	15	37
<b>Special collections</b>	0	5	1	7	13
<b>Total</b>	79	96	80	165	420

101. Changes to refuse and recycling arrangements will have contributed to the increase in calls. The new collection system means that recycling will be collected one week and rubbish the next. Different collection days may have also contributed to the increase in complaints

102. The refuse collection teams collect from over 214,000 properties per week. Since 1 April 2011, crews have made almost 13 million collections of household waste. Only 281 of these collections have resulted in a complaint that their bin has been missed.

103. The increase in March can not be attributed to any one reason. A number of small increases in a variety of disparate areas has resulted in a slightly higher than expected number overall.

104. Compared to the previous 2 years, the winter of 2011/12 was mild. Therefore, if a poor winter is experienced during 2012/13, there is an expectation that the number of complaints received

next year will increase. It is also anticipated that changes to household waste collection routes and days will lead to an increase in the number of missed bins during quarter 1 and this could have the effect of increasing complaints in this area.

105. The following table provides more detail in relation to the complaints received during 2011/12.

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA												TOTAL	% of total	
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M			
Condition of local area: detritus	1					1								2	0.2%
Condition of local area: dog fouling								2	1	1	1	2	2	9	1.0%
Condition of local area: fly-tipping		1		1	2		1			1	1			7	0.8%
Condition of local area: grass cutting	1	2	3	6	2	4								18	2.0%
Condition of local area: litter			1						2		2	1	2	8	0.9%
Condition of local area: overhanging hedges	1	1		3	1	2	3		2	1	3	1	18	2.0%	
Condition of local area: parks / open space	1				1	1	3			1				7	0.8%
Condition of local area: weeds		1	2	1	2	1	2							9	1.0%
Countryside												1		1	0.1%
Customer Service: call waiting time	2	1							1		2			6	0.7%
DCC fleet: drivers on mobile	1			1		1								3	0.3%
DCC fleet: driving issues	2		1				3					1	3	10	1.1%
DCC fleet: inappropriate parking	1		1				1		1			1	2	7	0.8%
DCC fleet: staff attitude	1						1		1				1	4	0.4%
Enforcement				2		2	3	1		2	1			11	1.2%
Highways: condition of footway													1	1	0.1%
Highways: other												1		1	0.1%
Housing Repairs			2			1				3				6	0.7%
Incorrect / insufficient information given	3	1	1											5	0.5%
Lack of action	7	1			4		8	3	6	3	2	5	39	4.2%	
No communication / missed appointments	1	3	3	2	1		2	0	0	2	0	2	16	1.7%	
Other	1		2	6	4	5	3	4	6	2	4	9	46	5.0%	
Other charges				1				1	1				3	0.3%	
Other: staff attitude			2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	13	1.4%	
Other: damage caused by council	3	5	1	3	1	4	4	1	2	0	2	3	29	3.2%	
Other: staff making a mess	2			1							1	1	5	0.5%	
Outdoor Leisure (excl. countryside)						1						2	3	0.3%	
Pest Control: charges			3		1	1							5	0.5%	
Refuse: business waste				1									1	0.1%	
Refuse: charges	6	4	8	4	8	5	7	10	5	5	7	6	75	8.2%	
Refuse: missed collection	12	20	26	19	24	25	14	12	22	40	30	37	281	30.6%	
Refuse: non-delivery of bin / container	4	12	5	1	7	6	8	5	3	3	4	7	65	7.1%	
Refuse: special collections					3	2			1	2	2	3	13	1.4%	
Refuse: staff attitude	4	4	2		2	4	2	1	3	11	2	2	37	4.0%	
Refuse: staff making a mess	4				4	5	1	5	4	10	3	3	39	4.2%	
Refuse: staff not returning bins / containers	1	4	2	3	2	3	6	4	5	8	7	5	50	5.4%	
Refuse: strike action								1	52				53	5.8%	
response to ASB		1									2		3	0.3%	
website / communication									3	5		1	9	1.0%	
TOTAL	59	61	65	56	71	76	75	53	119	105	79	99	918	100%	
comment	1	1	2	1	2	1		1	4			1	14	-	
Not NS					1		1	1	1				4	-	
service request	2	4	2	2	3	1	2				2	1	19	-	

106. It can clearly be seen that the majority of complaints (614 equating to 64%) 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 complaints 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	281	46%
	Industrial Action	53	9%
	Staff not returning bins / containers	50	8%
	Staff making a mess	39	6%
	Special collections	13	2%
	Business Waste	1	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>Charges</b>		75	12%
<b>Lack of Action: Non-delivery of bins and containers</b>		65	11%
<b>Staff Attitude</b>		37	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>614</b>	

107. As previously stated, since 1 April 2011 refuse collection crews have made almost 13 million collections from over 214,000 properties and only 437 of these collections have resulted in a complaint.
108. Complaints (75) 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 the 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 specific 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.
109. 4 complaints have been received from residents who have been refused a garden waste bin. Unfortunately, the garden waste scheme has reached maximum capacity and consequently it is not possible to expand the scheme to encompass additional areas, for example, new housing schemes. However, the scheme will continue to operate in all of the established areas and any residents who previously did not participate in the scheme but now wish to can request a garden waste bin and it will be delivered to their residence free of charge. The Waste Board on 17 April requested a review of green waste provision and a consideration of costs/business case of further extension if it can be demonstrated as being self funding through reduced waste to landfill.
110. All complaints relating to staff attitude and behaviour are taken seriously. In each of these instances, staff were spoken to by their managers and the appropriate action taken.
111. All complaints are discussed at Direct Services' Management meetings, not only to ensure they are being dealt with in a timely and effective manner, but also to identify any trends and put appropriate action in place.

## Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (EHCP)

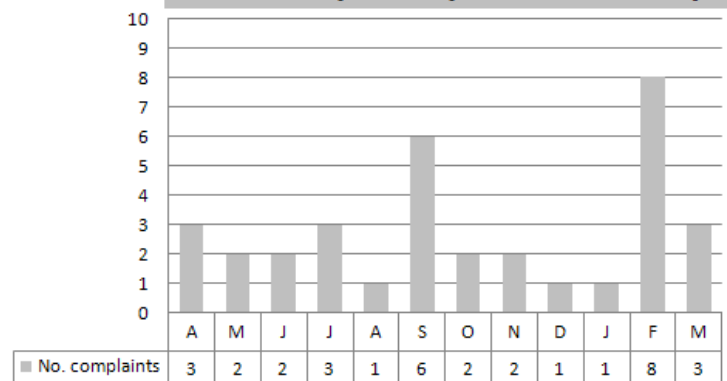
112. Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, 34 complaints were received in relation to EHCP

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	10	4	17	3	34
% of total received	39%		47%	14%	-

113. Of these complaints 12 (35%) were received during quarter 4.

114. 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**



115. 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	J	F	M			
Highways: other						1						2		3	10.3%
Lack of action	1					1								2	6.9%
No communication / missed appointments	1													1	3.4%
Other				2	1	1		2			5	2	13	44.8%	
Other charges				1		1							0	2	6.9%
Other: staff attitude	1	1	1			2	1						1	7	24.1%
response to ASB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3.4%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>			<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>	
comment								1						1	-
service request			1	1						1	1			4	-

## Finance (FIN)

116. Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, 7 complaints were received in relation to FIN.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	0	6	0	7
% of total received	14%		86%	-	-

117. During quarter 4, 2 complaints were received in relation to FIN. Neither of these complaints were found to be justified.

118. The following table shows the complaints received during 2011/12.

COMPLAINT CATEGORY	SERVICE AREA												TOTAL	% of total	
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M			
Customer Service: call waiting time	1													1	14.3%
Lack of action			1											1	14.3%
Other	1													1	14.3%
Other charges										2				2	28.6%
Other: staff attitude			1											1	14.3%
Other: damage caused by council								1						1	14.3%
TOTAL	2		2					1		2				7	100%

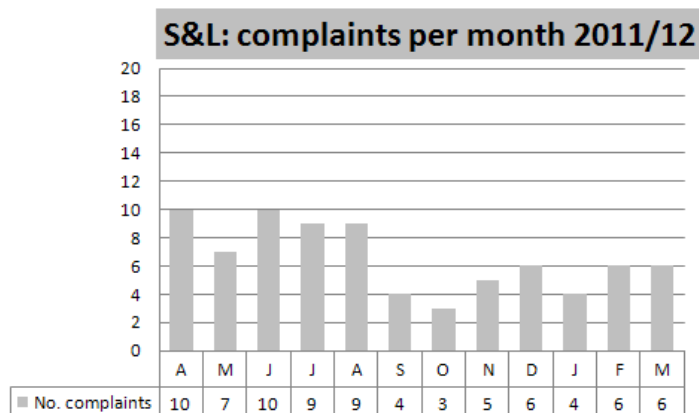
## Sport and Leisure Services (S&L)

119. Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, 79 complaints were received in relation to S&L.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	16	13	47	3	79
% of total received	37%		59%	4%	-

120. Since 1 April, S&L has received 79 complaints. Of these 16 (20%) were received during quarter 4.

121. The number of complaints received by S&L 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.



122. 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	J	F	M			
Condition of local area: litter			1											1	1.3%
Condition of local area: parks / open space	3	2												5	6.6%
Customer Service: staff attitude		1												1	1.3%
Indoor Leisure: accidents		1						1						2	2.6%
Indoor Leisure: broken equipment			1											1	1.3%
Indoor Leisure: cancellation of classes			1								1			2	2.6%
Indoor Leisure: charges (excl. gym member	1			1	1			1	2				1	7	9.2%
Indoor Leisure: membership fees	2	1	1	2	1			1		2			2	12	15.8%
Indoor Leisure: other	1			2	3	3	2	2	2	2	5			22	28.9%
Indoor Leisure: staff attitude	1		1	1										3	3.9%
Indoor Leisure: under 8s policy			1											1	1.3%
No communication / missed appointments		1	1	2										4	5.3%
Other	1	1	1				1		1				1	6	7.9%
Other: staff attitude													1	1	1.3%
Outdoor Leisure (excl. countryside)	1			1	1	1			1				1	6	7.9%
website / communication			1		1									2	2.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100%</b>
comment					2									2	-

123. 5 of the 16 complaints received during quarter 4 resulted in an learning outcome

124. 3 complaints related to the administration of gym memberships. The complaints related to different sites and all have been resolved. As a result of the complaints, we will review our cancellations policy and procedure to ensure a consistent approach is applied across all facilities and headquarters at Northumbria House.

125. 2 complaints were received following changes to courses and activities. Whilst these were at different centres, Teesdale Leisure Centre and Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre, and in comparison the change at Teesdale was a major change (altering swimming lessons from 13 week terms to a continuous rolling programme) we could have reduced the risk of receiving these complaints if we had planned communication more effectively. Consequently, we will ensure communication is better planned when making changes to programmes, courses and activities.

126. During 2012/13, access to the CRM is to be rolled out to all of our leisure centres, allowing all complaints, compliments and suggestions submitted in the centres to be logged, analysed and reported on our central system. Once this change is made, it will appear as if the numbers of complaints, compliments and suggestions have risen. However, any increase is simply due to this improved recording mechanism.

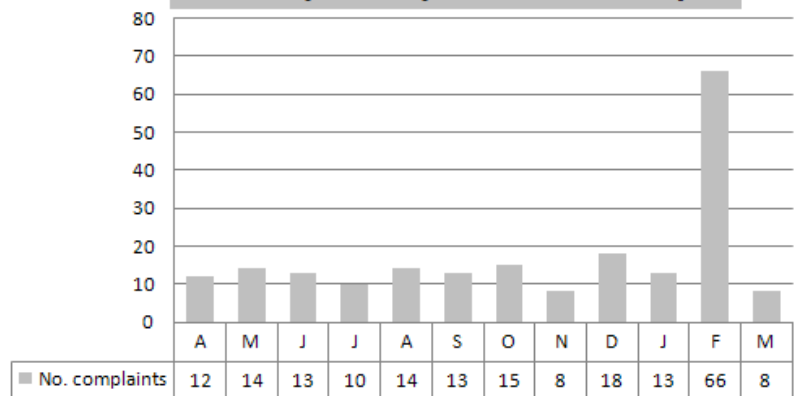
### Technical Services (TS)

127. Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, 204 complaints were received in relation to TS.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	21	37	102	44	204
% of total received	28%		50%	22%	-

128. Of these complaints 87 (43%) were received during quarter 4.
129. The number of complaints received by TS each month is shown in the graph to the right.
130. With the exception of February, the number received each month has remained relatively consistent.
131. The large increase in February can be attributed to complaints in relation to the works taking place at Thinford Roundabout, outside the Durham Gate Development.

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



132. Compared to the previous 2 years, the winter of 2011/12 was mild. Therefore, if a poor winter is experienced during 2012/13, there is an expectation that the number of complaints received next year will increase.
133. 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	J	F	M		
Condition of local area: overhanging hedges / trees											1		1	0.5%
Customer Service: customer cut off					1								1	0.5%
DCC fleet: driving issues							1			2	1	1	5	2.6%
DCC fleet: inappropriate parking							1						1	0.5%
DCC fleet: staff attitude		1											1	0.5%
Highways: lack of communication		1	1	2		1	1			1			7	3.6%
Highways: condition of carriageway	1						2			1	1		5	2.6%
Highways: condition of footway		1									3	1	5	2.6%
Highways: damage caused by DCC	1	2	2	2						1	1	0	9	4.7%
Highways: drainage					1					1			2	1.0%
Highways: policy											1		1	0.5%
Highways: length of time carrying out repairs		1					1		2		1		5	2.6%
Highways: other						1		3	1	41		2	48	24.9%
Highways: street furniture	4	3	3		2	1			1			1	15	7.8%
Lack of action	1	1	0	2	5	2	1	4	4				22	11.4%
No communication / missed appointments			3	1	1	2		1		1	2		11	5.7%
Other	1	1	0	1	1	2		2	1	1	2	1	13	6.7%
Other charges					1								1	0.5%
Other: staff attitude			1						1	1	0	0	3	1.6%
Other: damage caused by council				1	1	2	2				1		7	3.6%
Other: staff making a mess				1									1	0.5%
Parking	1					1	1	1			1		5	2.6%
Street Lights	1	1	1		1		2		1	2	4		13	6.7%
winter maintenance: gritting								5			6		11	5.7%
TOTAL	10	12	11	10	14	12	12	8	18	12	66	8	193	100%
comment							1						1	-
Not NS	2												2	-
service request		2	2			1	2			1			8	-



## Compliments

134. Between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012, NS received 90 compliments which covered a wide range of subjects and service areas.

	Number Received				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
<b>NS</b>	0	97	118	90	305
<b>% of total</b>	0	32	39	29	-

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

137. Between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012, NS received 397 suggestions which covered a wide range of subjects and service areas.

	Number Received				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
<b>NS</b>	6	74	216	101	397
<b>% of total</b>	1	19	54	25	-

138. Many suggestions relate to consultation and during quarter 4, 33 suggestions (33%) were received in response to the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) consultation. All of this correspondence was forwarded to the appropriate team ensuring it was included in the final analysis.
139. The remaining suggestions cover a wide range of topics and have been forwarded to the appropriate service area for response.

## Resources (RES)

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

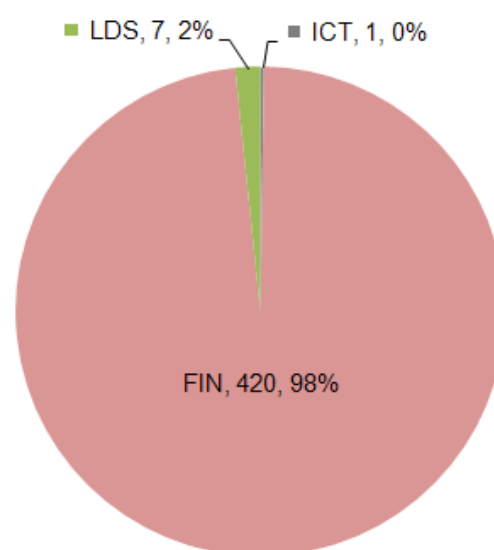
Abbreviation	Service Area
F	Finance (Corporate Finance/ Financial Services) including the Revenues and Benefits Service
HROD	Human Resources and Organisational Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LDS	Legal and Democratic Services

141. Between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012 the number of complaints rose to 428 from 296 in Q3. This rise reflects a continuation of the increase in complaints we have seen over the last year 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. With the new system fully operational since December, staff are successfully reducing the outstanding workload, but claims processing currently remain outside acceptable levels. During the same period, 18 compliments and 9 suggestions were made.

142. During quarter 4, 71% of complaints were responded to within 10 days, while the figure was over 80% in quarters 1 and 2. Whilst this is outside of acceptable tolerance, it is a result of the sheer volume of complaints, and the unprecedented increase in resources needed to respond to them, particularly for the Revenues and Benefits service.

143. Following the pattern of recent quarters, the vast majority of Resources' Q4 complaints (98%) related to finance, namely the Revenues and Benefits service.

144. Further analysis of Q4 complaints reveals that 35% were justified (down from 45% in Q3 and 38% in Q2), 30% were partly justified (Q3 32%, Q2, 36%), and 16% were not justified (42% in Q1, 23% in q2, 15% in q3), and 16% are yet to be categorised. 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

145. During quarter 4, 420 (139 in Q1, 212 in Q2, 284 in Q3) complaints were received in relation to Finance.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	151	130	67	72	420*
% of total received	67%		16%	17%	100%

## Benefits

146. Q4 complaints for Finance continue to be dominated by the increased volumes received by the Benefit Service. The staff continue to work very hard to bring processing times to an acceptable level. Q4 has seen a 20 day drop in the average days to process new claims and 50 day drop in the average days to process changes.
147. Whilst the majority of the complaints continue to be linked to delays in assessment of claims for benefits, there are significant increases in the number of complaints relating to issues customers are having contacting the service.
148. Performance within the Benefits service is monitored weekly and we continue to prioritise processing cases where customers are at risk of hardship or eviction. At the same time, service managers are meeting regularly and working with Customer Services to improve the level of performance customers receive when contacting the Council
149. The Chair and Independent Members have played a proactive role in addressing issues arising from benefit complaints from both tenants and landlords and have challenged officers in this area to ensure that these issues have been appropriately addressed

## Revenues

150. The increase in complaints for Revenues during Q4 can be attributed to the revised policy to increase the Council Tax charge on long term empty properties (the removal of the exemption for second homes).
151. Other complaints arose in relation to difficulties in making contact with the service; this issue is being investigated through joint work with staff from Customer Services.
152. Processing delays arising from the implementation of the new Revenues & Benefits ICT system generated complaints, as did the issue of 2012/13 annual council tax bills. Work is ongoing to closely monitor any correspondence backlog.
153. 9 complaints arose as a result of the continuing harmonisation of direct debit dates.
154. 1 complaint arose as a result of a large direct debit request due to a reclaim of council tax benefit, the customer had received the relevant 14 days notice. In response to this, reports are now being run to identify any potential benefit overpayments from previous years to prevent them being collected by direct debit, unless prior contact has been made with the customer.

## Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

155. During quarter 4, 1 complaint was received in relation to ICT. Staff investigated the complaint and could not replicate the problem the customer had experienced. Staff have been in contact with the complainant and the matter has been dealt with. There are no learning outcomes arising from this complaint.
156. We continue to consider and learn from any complaints we receive.

## Legal and Democratic Services (LDS)

157. During quarter 4, 7 complaints were received in relation to LDS. The types of complaints received related primarily to quality of service and service failure.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Ongoing	Total
Number	2	1	3	1	7
% of total received	43%		43%	14%	100%

158. Complaints this quarter covered a wide range of issues from delays and difficulty contacting or getting responses from Registration Offices, making a change to the electoral register, delays in relation to land charges and licensing.
159. Whilst the nature of this quarter's complaints did not make it possible to identify any trends that would lead to wider action, LDS will in future ensure that all offices are made of office moves so that they can explain any temporary ensuing delays in responding to customers

## Compliments and Suggestions

160. During quarter 4, Resources received 18 compliments and 9 suggestions.
161. Compliments and thanks were received from customers in relation to members of both Revenues and Benefits staff for their assistance with claims or reminder letters etc, to our registrars for the service provided in conducting wedding ceremonies and for thoughtful handling of a death registration. All staff involved have been made aware of compliments received.
162. Nine suggestions were received in quarter 4 related to the Council's website and email addresses, confusing letters and customer contact issues.

## Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

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

163. 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 January 2012 and 31 March 2012, 88 complaints, 30 compliments and 15 suggestions were received.

T	Transport
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**Economic Development and Housing**

	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Compliments	Suggestions
Number	32	1	4	3

164. Of the 32 Stage 1 complaints, 23 of these were in relation to Repairs and Maintenance issues with Durham City Homes properties. Feedback from these issues is being used as part of ongoing efforts to implement new systems designed to improve communications. No further trend information is available on the remaining Stage 1 complaints.
165. The Stage 2 complaint is in relation to the maintenance of a property and is still under investigation
166. Compliments have been passed on to the appropriate officers and suggestions have been investigated

**Spatial Policy, Planning, Assets & Environment**

	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Compliments	Suggestions
Number	30	4	20	2

167. The majority of the Stage 1 complaints received are in connection with the complainants disagreement of planning decisions. No one planning decision has resulted in multiple complainants. None have been found to be justified reinforcing the strength of the existing policies in determination. The Stage 2 complaints are under investigation.
168. Compliments have been passed on to the appropriate officers and suggestions have been investigated

**Transport and Contract Services**

	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Compliments	Suggestions
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Number	26	0	6	10
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169. The Stage 1 complaints under this service area are mainly in relation to bus services and parking issues. Complaints figures for bus services and parking issues have maintained the higher figure as reported at quarter 3. The withdrawal of bus services as a result of bus subsidy cuts together with operators decision to reduce/remove non commercially viable services is an ongoing issue.
170. Compliments have been passed onto the appropriate officers and suggestions have been investigated

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

171. During quarter 4, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) initiated investigations into 6 matters relating to a range of complaints concerning:
- **Planning.** Of the 3 cases, the Ombudsman has decided to discontinue the investigation into one case and the remaining 2 cases are continuing.
  - **Housing Benefit.** Outcome awaited
  - **School Admissions Issue.** Outcome awaited
  - **School Transport.** Outcome awaited
172. The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 16 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:
- **Education and Children Services.** LGO has discontinued all 3 investigations.
  - **Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation.** Based on the preliminary information provided, LGO decided not to initiate an investigation into this case.
  - **Benefits and Tax.** Of the 2 issues, the ombudsman discontinued 1 investigation, the other was finalised as a local settlement. A learning outcome resulted from the latter case and this was to ensure that all customer services staff are adequately trained and receive updates in relation to the Housing Solutions service on a regular basis. An agreement has been reached with the Customer Services Manager that will result in Housing Solutions training being provided to all Customer Services Staff on a rolling basis, ensuring all new members of staff are trained and existing members of staff receive a refresher. The training will be mandatory and be provided throughout 2012 by the Housing Solutions Team.
  - **Housing.** The Ombudsman discontinued the single investigation.
  - **Corporate and other Services.** The Ombudsman discontinued the single investigation.
  - **Adult Care Service.** Of the 2 issues, the ombudsman decided not to initiate an investigation into one case and the other was determined to be a premature complaint so was referred back to the authority to deal with internally.
  - **Planning and Development.** LGO discontinued 4 of the 5 investigations and decided not to initiate an investigation into the remaining complaint. In one combined case, which also related to Environmental Services and Public Protection and Regulation, the Ombudsman found maladministration and injustice. A number of recommendations were instructed by the Ombudsman to remedy the injustices caused and this is now being dealt with by the authority. From this case we identified the following learning outcomes

- Ensure the planning application description matches the development as proposed in its entirety. Therefore, at validation, proposed plans will be examined for all development which may not be included in the description included on the application form. This should include elements which may not be immediately obvious.
- The need for more care and attention to be paid to notifying people of Planning Committees. Therefore, administrative staff were informed of the importance of following procedures and instructions, and the implications of not doing so were highlighted.

173. 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:

- **Adult Care.** The investigation into this single case was not initiated.
- **Corporate.** Of the 2 issues, neither investigations were initiated,
- **Environmental Services and Public Protection.** The investigation into this single case was not initiated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND REASONS

174. Members of Standards Committee note the report.

175. When the current reporting regime for complaints handling was introduced it was on the understanding that refinements/further development would take place as a continuing process. The views of Members as part of this process are always welcome.

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