

Customer Feedback: Complaints, compliments and suggestions Quarter 2 report 2013/14



Altogether better



Overview

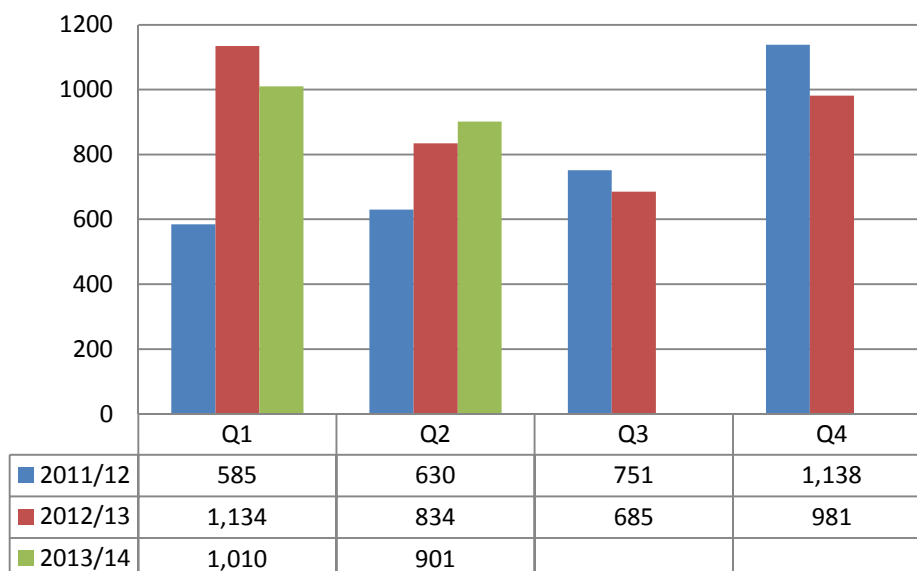
1. This report provides the Quarter 2, 2013/14 performance information and learning outcomes in relation to complaints, compliments and suggestions across the Council.

PART ONE: Summary of Complaints, compliments and suggestions received across the Council during Quarter 2, 2013/14

2. Between 1 July 2013 and 30 September 2013, Durham County Council received 901 non-statutory complaints, 222 compliments and 71 suggestions.

Complaints

3. The graph below shows the total numbers of complaints received across the Council since April 2011 by quarter. The graph shows that, despite an 11% reduction in the number of non-statutory complaints received during quarter 2, compared to those received during quarter 1 this year, there has been an 8% increase in complaints received in quarter 2 compared to the same period last year.



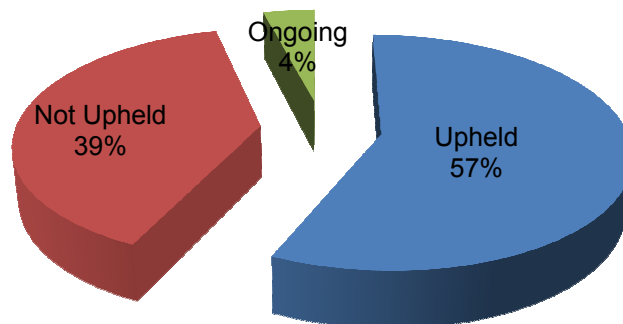
4. The table below shows a breakdown of complaints received across Service Groupings since 2011/12:

Service Grouping	2011-12 Total	2012 - 2013					2013 - 2014				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
ACE	10	0	2	0	5	7	3	3			6
CAS	83	4	15	4	10	33	10	15			25
NS	1,589	737	537	431	693	2,398	724	614			1338
RED	327	94	95	93	105	387	93	128			221
RES	1,095	299	185	157	168	809	180	141			321
TOTAL	3,104	1,134	834	685	981	3,634	1,010	901			1911

5. Further analysis of the data for this quarter shows that the highest numbers of complaints received overall were due to:
 - Refuse and Recycling Service:
 - 129 complaints were received regarding missed bins. This is a 22% decrease when compared with quarter 2 2012/13.
 - Changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):
 - We received 76 complaints regarding HWRCs, which is a 12% increase when compared with quarter 1 2013/14. This rise in complaints is due to ongoing issues relating to change in management at the sites, change in operating hours and staff attitude.
 - Revenues and Benefits Service:
 - The Benefits service received 66 complaints, 7 of which (10%) were received from landlords or their agents, either about speed of processing or disputing payments paid directly to tenants. Detailed analysis indicates that 18 (27%) complaints related to claims processing issues during the summer period.
 - The Revenues Service received 58 complaints, a reduction of 37% on the previous quarter. Analysis indicates that 24% of complaints related to aspects of recovery action. While 10% of quarter 2's complaints related to delays in processing changes or responding to correspondence, this represents a 50% reduction compared to quarter 1.

There was also an increase in complaints in relation to Durham City Homes compared to the previous quarter.

6. Further investigation of the complaints received shows that during quarter 2, 2013/14 there were 353 occasions (39% of complaints processed) 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 the correct procedures.



7. If we remove those not upheld and those that are ongoing, DCC is left with 512 (57%) upheld complaints, from which there is possibility of learning.

Compliments and Suggestions

8. The following table shows the numbers of compliments and suggestions received across service groupings during quarter 2:

Service Grouping	Compliments	Suggestions
ACE	9	3
CAS	42	0
NS	134	57
RED	27	6
RES	10	5
TOTAL	222	71

9. A large proportion of compliments are for 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.

PART TWO: Detailed report for each service grouping for quarter 2, 2013/14

10. The following sections provide details for each Service Grouping in relation to complaints compliments and suggestions received in quarter 2 2013/14

Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)

Overview

11. The ACE service grouping received 3 complaints, 9 compliments and 3 suggestions between 1 July 2013 and 30 September 2013

Service Grouping ACE	Number Received										%* Change	
	11/12 Total	12/13				12/13 Total	13/14					13/14 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	6	0	2	0	5	7	3	3	-	-	6	NA
Compliments	24	3	3	7	12	25	3	9	-	-	12	NA
Suggestions	14	0	1	1	7	9	3	3	-	-	6	NA

*percentage comparisons not applicable due to small numbers

Feedback areas and learning

12. All three complaints received in quarter 2 relate to feedback received from residents in relation to the website and council publications; all three were upheld and have been addressed.

Compliments and Suggestions

13. 3 compliments were received by Partnerships and Community Engagement for the Trimdon Village Pond Improvement Project. 6 compliments were received by the County Records Office; thanking them for family information included in the CRO catalogue, and for going an 'extra mile' for providing help with information.
14. 3 suggestions received related to the involvement of council dignitaries in the design of the county Durham flag; the promotion of Lifestyle gyms, Wolsingham in council publications and the appropriateness of some venues included in the 'What's On in County Durham 2013' magazine. The Culture and Sport Service are considering the latter 2.

Children and Adults Services (CAS)

15. During quarter 2 (1 July to 30 September 2013), 15 complaints, 42 compliments and 0 suggestions were received in relation to CAS Corporate representations.
16. The table below shows that the overall number of corporate representations received by CAS has decreased from the previous quarter (from 98 in quarter 1 to 57 in quarter 2). There has also been a 65% reduction in the number of corporate representations received when compared to the corresponding quarter in 2012/13.
17. Complaints have increased by 5 from quarter 1, although the number of complaints received in quarter 2 is equal to the number received in the corresponding period in 2012/13. The majority of complaints received in quarter 2 (80%) were in relation to Children's Services. Complaints were received in the following Service Areas:
- Children's care received 4 complaints
 - Education received 2 complaints
 - Early Intervention and Involvement received 6 complains (4 regarding One Point and 2 regarding County Durham Youth Offending Service)
 - Planning and Service Strategy received 3 complaints

Service Grouping	Number Received												
	CAS	11/12 Total	12/13 split by quarter				12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14	% Change*
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	83	4	15	4	10	33	10	15	-	-	25	0	
Compliments	158	149	150	145	103	547	88	42	-	-	130	-72	
Suggestions	24	15	0	0	11	26	0	0	-	-	0	0	

*Q2 figure 2013/14 compared with Q2 figure 2012/13

18. Of the 15 complaints received, 100% were acknowledged within 2 working days and 9 were responded to within 10 working days. Of the 15 complaints received, 4 were still

ongoing at the quarter end. Of the remaining 11, those Not Upheld were 9, Partially Upheld 2 and 0 were found to be upheld.

Feedback areas and learning

19. There was limited learning for the service due to only 2 complaints in the quarter being upheld in part. However, the following actions will be taken:
- Use of suitable rooms to speak to clients to ensure confidentiality and privacy;
 - All staff to be reminded that they should introduce themselves to clients and explain their role in the process; and
 - Verification process to be strengthened in relation to accuracy of reports.

Compliments and Suggestions

20. During the quarter, 42 compliments were received which represents a reduction of 72% in comparison to the corresponding period in 2012/13. Early Intervention and Involvement received 39 compliments (37 for the Welfare Rights Service and 2 for One Point), Planning and Service Strategy received 2 and 1 compliment was received for Education. Work is in hand to raise the profile of recording compliments with Service Areas.

Summary of Statutory Representations


21. As set out in the table overleaf, the total number of representations has decreased from 292 in the second quarter 2012/13 to 175 in the second quarter of 2013/14. This represents a 40% decrease. The number of statutory complaints has increased and the number of compliments has decreased in quarter 2 in comparison to the corresponding period in 2012/13. The rise in complaints is attributable to Children's Services (38 total complaints in quarter 1 to 54 in quarter 2).

Service Grouping CAS	Number Received											% Change*
	2011/12 Total	12/13 split by quarter				12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14 Total	
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	251	72	66	84	54	276	64	75	-	-	139	+14
Compliments	399	152	226	181	199	758	155	100	-	-	255	-56
Suggestions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0

*Q2 figure 2013/14 compared with Q2 figure 2012/13

Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions/comments – Children's

22. During the quarter, 54 complaints were received in relation to children's social care services. There were 32 complaints managed informally, 20 managed at Stage 1 of the statutory procedure and 2 managed at Stage 2 of the statutory procedure.
23. Of the 20 formal complaints at Stage 1, a particular service was cited in 13 of these and this information has been raised as a theme with the Strategic Manager for Safeguarding to identify actions to improve. The majority of the complaints received relate to 'Poor Service'.

Comparison of formal Complaints received by quarter					
Service Area	Q3 12/13	Q4 12/13	Q1 13/14	Q2 13/14	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Children's Care	10	5	10	20	

24. Of the 20 formal complaints received, 17 (85%) were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt. Of the 20 complaints received, 6 were resolved within the prescribed timescales (40%) and 9 outside of the timescales. The remaining 5 complaints are still on-going at the quarter end.
25. Maximum efforts are made to resolve complaints informally and at Stage 1. This may include meetings with complainants and can result in final responses taking longer than 20 days. Complainants are kept aware of progress throughout the process. There are continued efforts to improve performance in this area.
26. Complaints by team are broken down as follows:

Complaints received by Teams in the quarter		
Teams	Current Q2	Previous Q1
Aycliffe Secure Services	1	0
Disabled Children and Families Team	1	1
Looked After Children - Aycliffe	0	1
Looked After Children - Durham	1	1
Safeguarding Children Bishop Auckland	4	2
Safeguarding Children Crook	4	0
Safeguarding Children Chester-Le-Street	5	2
Safeguarding Children Easington	0	1
Safeguarding Children Seaham	0	2
Safeguarding Children Spennymoor	1	0
Safeguarding Children Stanley 2	1	0
Young People's Service - South	2	0
Total	20	10

Declined Complaints

27. Two complaints were declined in the quarter; 1 because the issues complained about occurred more than 20 years ago and was therefore out of the timescale to make a complaint and 1 complaint because the complainant did not meet the criteria for making a complaint about a Social Worker.

Category of Complaint

28. 'Poor Service' constituted 12 of the Stage 1 complaints received. The categories with the next highest number of complaints were 'Professional Conduct of Staff' which was an element in 9 complaints and 'Disputed Decision' which formed all or part of the reason behind 8 complaints. This is concurrent with themes in the previous quarter.

Outcome of complaints

29. The table below shows the outcome of the 15 complaints completed in the quarter:

Outcome of Complaints received in the Quarter				
Team	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Total
Aycliffe Secure services	1	0	0	1
Disabled Children and Families Team	1	0	0	1
Looked after Children - Durham	1	0	0	1
Safeguarding Children Bishop Auckland	1	1	0	2
Safeguarding Children Chester-Le-Street	3	1	0	4
Safeguarding Children Crook	2	0	1	3
Safeguarding Children Spennymoor	1	0	0	1
Safeguarding Children Stanley 2	1	0	0	1
Young People's Service - South	1	0	0	1
Total	12	2	1	15

Actions as a result of statutory complaints

30. As a result of all complaints received and concluded during the period the following actions have resulted:

- Residents of Aycliffe Secure Services have been reminded of the need to clean down showers after use, to avoid residues of soap etc. which could result in slips.
- Young People's Services staff have been reminded that non-commissioned placements outside of the County should not be used. A list of approved properties has been set up for future use.
- Children's Care staff have been reminded of the importance of fully reading the case file on commencement of the assessment process.

Compliments

31. There were 17 compliments received in quarter 2 which represents a reduction in comparison to the previous quarter. This decrease is largely attributable to changes in the way compliments are gathered in from the service areas and subsequently reported. This is being looked into for quarter 3 with the aim of increasing the number received.

Teams	Compliments Received	
	Current Q2	Previous Q1
Community Support Team	9	0
Disabled Children and Families Team	1	0
Looked After Children	2	15
Initial Response and Prevention	0	11
Specialist Services	2	2
Safeguarding Services	3	7
Total	17	35

Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions – Adults

32. During the quarter, 21 complaints were received. This represents a decrease of 5 complaints (19%) in comparison to the previous quarter.

Comparison of Complaints received by quarter					
Service Area	Q3 12/13	Q4 12/13	Q1 13/14	Q2 13/14	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Adult Care	28	19	26	21	↓

33. All 21 complaints received were acknowledged within 2 working days. Complaints Resolution Plans (CRPs) were completed in all 21 cases. Of the 21 complaints received, 13 were completed within the quarter and timescales set out in the CRP. The remaining 8 cases were ongoing at the quarter end but are still within their agreed completion timescales.
34. The Adult Social Work Teams (Older Persons/Mental Health Services for Older People/Physical Disability/Sensory Support Services) received the greatest number of complaints at 13, followed by 3 in the Commissioning Service Area as the table outlines overleaf:

Complaints received by Service Area in the quarter		
Service Area	Current Q2	Previous Q1
Adult Social Work Teams: Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services	13	12
Adult Social Work Teams: Learning Disabilities, Mental Health, Substance Misuse services	2	2
Commissioning	3	11
County Durham Care and Support	1	1
Safeguarding and Practice Development	2	0
Total	21	26

Declined Complaints

35. No complaints were declined in the quarter.

Category of Complaint

36. *'Lack of Service – Communications/Information'* constituted the category with the highest number of complaints recorded at 7. The categories with the next highest number of complaints were *'Professional Conduct of Staff'* and *'Disputed Decision'* which both had 3 complaints recorded in this category.

Outcome of Complaints

37. Of the 21 complaints received, 13 were completed in the quarter as shown below:

Outcome of Complaints received and completed in the quarter				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Total
Social Work Teams: Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services	5	0	4	9
Safeguarding and Practice Development Team	1	1	0	2
Commissioning	2	0	0	2
Total	8	1	4	13

Actions as a result of statutory complaints

38. During the period the following actions resulted from concluded complaints:

- The County-Wide Occupational Therapy Services Manager is reviewing the codes of conduct with a view to issuing further advice to staff on what does or does not constitute a conflict of interest.
- The Operations Manager OP/MHSOP/PDSI/SS has issued a reminder to staff to ensure that the assessment/re-assessment process, especially related to hospital discharge, must include a review of the history of a case so that a fullest picture can be obtained and all relevant information informs the process to establish whether a client meets the criteria for intermediate care services.
- The Operations Manager OP/MHSOP/PDSI/SS issued an instruction to all social work staff that the content of medical records should not be discussed with clients or relatives without first checking with the relevant medical personnel the meaning of the medical record, the current health status and whether or not this information has been shared with the patient and/or their relatives.

Compliments

39. There were 83 compliments received in the quarter. This represents an increase of 16 (24%) in comparison to the previous quarter.

Service Area	Compliments Received	
	Current Q2	Previous Q1
County Durham Care and Support	54	52
Social Work Teams: (Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services)	28	15
Social Work Teams (Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/Substance Misuse Services)	1	0
Total	83	67

Neighbourhood Services (NS)

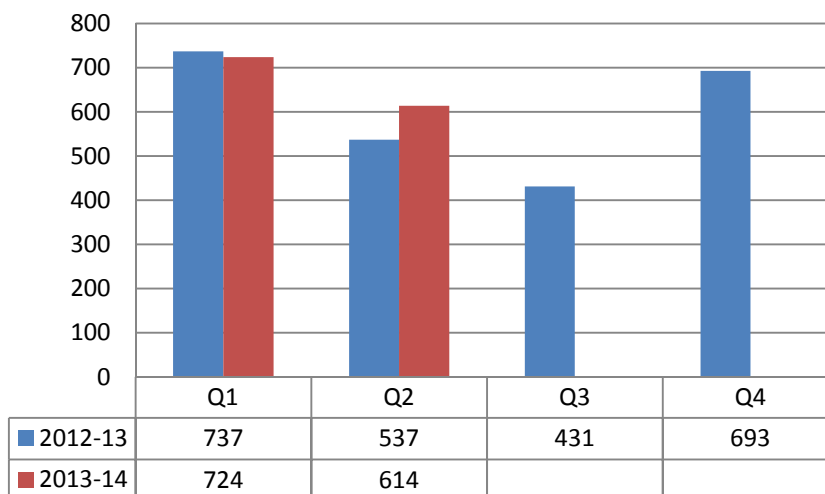
Overview

40. During quarter 2 Neighbourhood Services received 614 complaints, 134 compliments and 57 suggestions. Complaints in quarter 2 have increased by 14% when compared to the same period last year although they are below Q1 levels; compliments have increased by 100%.

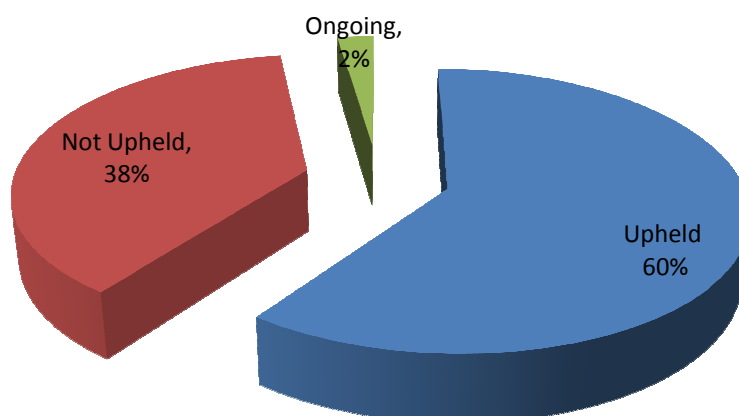
NS	Number Received											%* Change
	11/12 Total	12/13 split by quarter				12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14	
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	1,589	737	537	431	693	2,398	724	614	-	-	1338	-15
Compliments	419	75	67	108	152	402	126	134	-	-	260	45
Suggestions	415	71	55	49	40	215	62	57	-	-	114	-8

*Q2 figure 2013/14 compared with Q2 figure 2012/13

41. Analysis shows that the increase in complaints in quarter 2 compared to the same period last year is related to changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres. Further detailed information is provided under the key areas and learning section of the report. Complaints have reduced by 15% from quarter 1 2013/14. The decrease is in complaints regarding missed collections, bins not being returned to collection points, charges for replacement wheeled bins, staff attitude and telephone waiting times.



42. Further investigation of the complaints received shows that during quarter 2, 2013/14, there were 231 occasions (38%) 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.



Key Areas and Learning

43. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during quarter 2 shows that 43% of these can be attributed to the following:
- **Missed Bins:** 129 complaints were received regarding missed bins during quarter 2 2013/14. This is a 22% decrease when compared with quarter 2 2012/13.
 - **Changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres:** We received 76 complaints regarding HWRCs, which is a 12% increase when compared with quarter 1 2013/14. This is due to changes in management of the HWRCs, permanent closure of some sites and the implementation of new policy for the remaining sites, resulting in reduced or amended opening hours. Complaints relate to dissatisfaction regarding HWRC closures and reduced hours, staff attitude at the sites and communication regarding materials that will be accepted.
 - **Charges for replacement wheeled bins:** 24 complaints were received from residents objecting to the £20 charge for replacement bins. Complaints of this kind have reduced by 8% since quarter 2 2012/13.
 - **Refuse staff not returning bins/containers:** 14 complaints were received from residents regarding refuse bins/containers not being returned to the correct location. This represents a 63% decrease compared to quarter 2 2012/13. Since quarter 1 2013/14, complaints regarding non-return of bins have reduced by 55%.
 - **Attitude of refuse crews:** 13 complaints were received from customers who were unhappy with the attitude of their refuse crew. This is a 24% decrease when compared with quarter 2 2012/13. Complaints of this nature have also reduced by 19% since quarter 1 2013/14.
 - **Customers being told the lines are busy / telephone waiting time:** 9 complaints were received from customers stating that they had been advised that the lines were busy or had experienced a long call waiting time. When compared with quarter 2 2012/13, this type of complaint has reduced by 31%. Complaints regarding busy telephone lines and waiting times have also reduced by 59% since quarter 1 2013/14.
44. A regular meeting, with a range of staff from Direct Services and Customer Services, named the "Customer Experience", has been set up for exchanging data, including complaints and suggestions, in order to make improvements in relation to our contact with customers. Some of the improvement actions delivered to date include:
- Re-categorisation of all complaints previously labelled as 'other'. This will improve our ability to analyse customer feedback and address improvement.
 - Establishment of a Missing Address Data Process in the CRM to enable customer requests to be processed consistently whilst the address file is updated.
 - Development of a booking system on the CRM to enable customer appointments at the first point of contact.

- Streamlining of Refuse and Recycling Service Requests
- Updated staff training and guidance manuals for Refuse and Recycling.

45. Further improvement work is continuing in relation to the work outlined below:

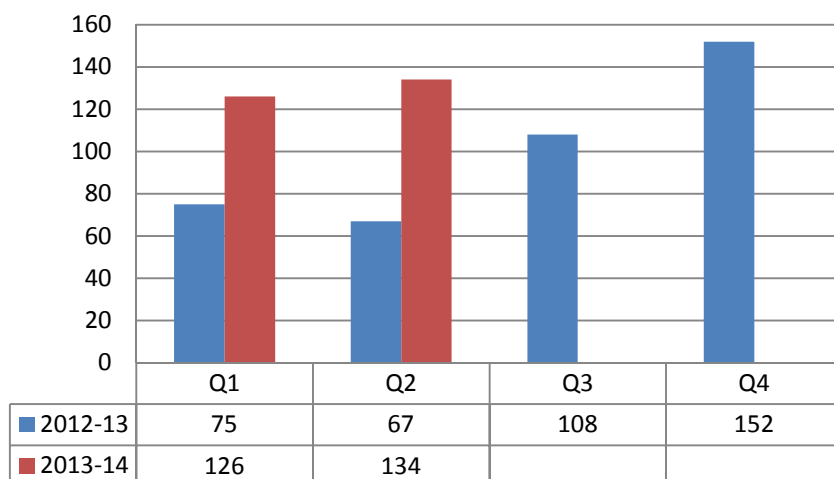
- Integration of the CRM Booking Engine and Web Payment Facility for replacement Bin Requests to enable customers to access this service online.
- Implementation of a strengthened “Repeat Missed Container” Monitoring Process, to reduce repeat missed bin complaints.
- Development of web forms for all Street Scene Service Requests, to allow customer to access services online.
- Review of Contact Logging and Monitoring, to reduce avoidable contact.
- Implementation of the Bartec system and realigned operational procedures that will improve our information systems, in relation to the refuse and recycling collection service.

46. As a part of the learning from complaints received in relation to HWRCs, a number of improvement actions were completed:

- Customers have been informed of the extensive consultation regarding the future of the sites and a revised leaflet on the changes has been distributed to customers.
- Improved signage at sites.
- Complaints regarding staff attitude have been addressed by engagement with the contractor and agreement for their staff to undertake Customer Care training

Compliments and Suggestions

47. Compliments received by NS in quarter 2 2013/14 compared to quarter 2 2012/13 have increased by 50% as illustrated in the graph below



48. The majority of compliments relate to staff from the Refuse and Recycling, Clean and Green and Customer Service teams in recognition of their support and help in resolving customer enquiries. There were a number of compliments regarding helpfulness of staff at HWRCs, despite a significant number of complaints regarding the sites. 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 swift responses from staff.
49. The remaining compliments relate to service provision, including
- 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.
50. A significant portion of the suggestions received relate to aspects of the refuse and recycling service, such as refuse schedules and charges for replacement containers.

Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

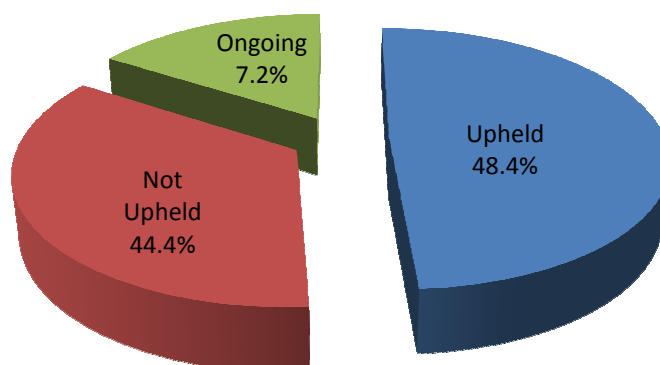
Overview

51. Between 1 July and 30 September, 128 complaints, 27 compliments and 6 suggestions were received
52. As can be seen in the table below, the level of compliments and suggestions received by RED has remained consistent. However, there has been an increase in the number of complaints received in Q2 compared to the same period last year, although below Q1 levels.

Service Grouping RED	Number Received											%* Change
	11/12 Total	12/13 split by quarter				12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14 Total	
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	336	94	95	93	105	387	93	128	-	-	221	+33
Compliments	122	38	39	37	11	125	34	27	-	-	61	-12
Suggestions	48	9	11	10	3	33	11	6	-	-	17	-45

*Q2 figure 2013/14 compared with Q2 figure 2012/13

53. During quarter 1, 44.4% of complaints were not upheld. This indicates that, although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.



Key Areas and Learning

54. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during quarter 2 shows that 81% of these can be attributed to the following:
- Durham City Homes (DCH): 48 complaints were received, with 34 relating to the handling of repairs and maintenance issues and the associated contractors. Of the 34 Repairs and & Maintenance related complaints received, 80% of these were from tenants who had been in touch with the service previously and the complaint was for a missed appointment, work not completed or dissatisfaction with the quality of the work.
 - DCH have in place a suite of performance measures that include repairs and maintenance. During the Q2 period 4,079 responsive repairs appointments were made of which 4,046 were kept, giving a response rate of 99.2%. The average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs was 10 days and the proportion of responsive repairs completed right first time was 99.6% (5,914 right first time from 5,697 jobs completed). Further analysis and monitoring will be undertaken to identify any ongoing issues.
 - Planning and Building Control: 34 were in relation to Planning Development mainly in connection with planning decisions and building control.
 - Strategic Traffic: 22 were received by Strategic Traffic, the majority are parking and road works related.

Compliments and Suggestions

55. The service grouping received 27 compliments in quarter 2. There are generally related to staff for the service they have provided. All compliments have been passed to the relevant staff and teams and have also been raised during team meetings highlighting the importance of a positive customer focus.
56. RED received 6 suggestions during quarter 2 related to the homelessness service, parking and improvements to Durham City.

Resources (RES)

Overview

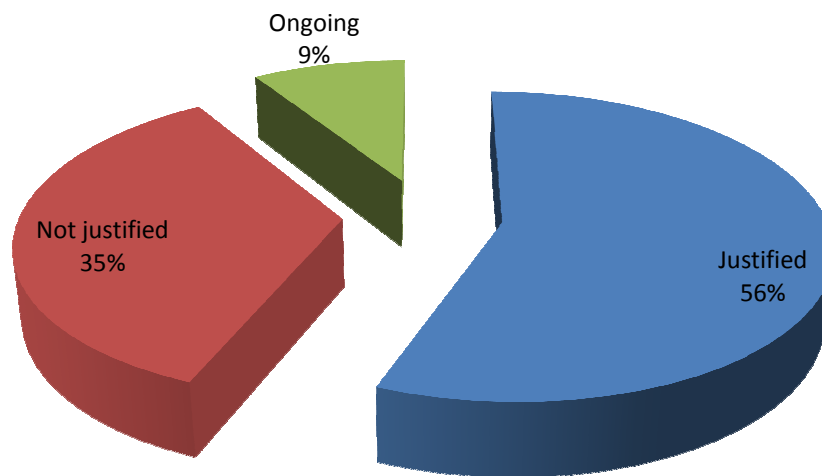
57. In the second quarter of 2013/14, Resources received 141 complaints; this represents a 22% reduction since quarter 1, and a 24% reduction compared to quarter 2 2012/13.

RES	Number Received											%* Change
	11/12 Total	12/13 split by quarter				12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14	
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	327	299	185	157	168	809	180	141	-	-	321	-24
Compliments	69	16	21	15	17	69	14	10	-	-	24	-52

Suggestions	24	11	7	0	6	24	3	5	-	-	8	-29
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*Q2 figure 2013/14 compared with Q2 figure 2012/13

58. The majority of quarter 2 complaints (124) related to the Revenues & Benefits Service and were received in August, a traditionally heavy period for staff taking annual leave
59. The proportion of complaints responded to within the 10 days standard deteriorated from 64% in Q1 to 54% in Q2 2013/14.
60. Of the 141 complaints received in Q2 for Resources, 56% were either justified or part justified (60% in Q1), 35% were not justified (24% in Q1) and 9% were unresolved at the point of reporting (16% in Q1).



Key Areas and Learning

61. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during quarter 2 shows that 94% of these can be attributed to the following:

- **Benefits Service:** The Benefits service received 66 complaints, 7 of which (10%) were received from landlords or their agents, either about speed of processing or disputing payments paid directly to tenants. Detailed analysis indicates that 18 (27%) complaints related to claims processing issues during the summer period. Workloads are very closely monitored to minimise customer disruption wherever possible. The service continues to engage with both internal and external stakeholders including Customer Services, landlords, Department of Work and Pensions, Welfare Rights, other welfare agencies and local authority benchmarking groups.
- **Revenues Service:** The Revenues Service received 58 complaints, a reduction of 37% on the previous quarter. Analysis indicates that 24% of complaints related to aspects of recovery action, with 10% to delays in processing changes or responding to correspondence, representing a 50% reduction compared to quarter 1.
- **Contacting the Registration Service:** Five complaints related to difficulties making contact with staff at Registration Offices. It is anticipated that customer service for Registration Service customers will improve significantly when currently vacant

posts are filled by permanent staff; in the meantime, temporary part-time staff are providing cover. Three complaints related to Committee Services, 2 related to proceedings at committee meetings and one to minutes of a committee meeting.

Compliments and Suggestions

62. There were 10 compliments received into the Resources service grouping in quarter 2 2013/14.
63. The majority of compliments related to the Registration Service for conducting wedding ceremonies and to the excellent service provided by individual members of staff in Revenues and Benefits.
64. Five suggestions were received for Revenues and Benefits regarding a review of Benefit notification letters and the use of stamped addressed envelopes. The service is always looking at opportunities to improve systems and the range of services on offer to customers. Due to legislative requirements Benefits notification letters can be confusing; work has already started to review all notification letters and make amendments where legislation allows.
65. The Revenues and Benefits Service is committed to service improvement and is continually reviewing processes and procedures as well as working with software suppliers to ensure that the service functions as efficiently as possible.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO): current activity

66. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 22 matters relating to a range of complaints concerning:
 - 6 x Benefits/Council Tax issues – Two of the investigations remain ongoing and one was discontinued as it was outside of the Ombudsman jurisdiction. The Ombudsman found no fault by the Council in respect of the other 3 complaints and as such discontinued their involvement.
 - 3 x Adult Social Care issues – One complaint was determined to be outside of the Ombudsman jurisdiction. Investigations into the other 2 complaints were also discontinued.
 - 2 x Children's Services issues – One case was discontinued as it was outside of Ombudsman jurisdiction. The Ombudsman has made initial enquiries on the other case, the outcome of which are awaited.
 - 2 x School Admissions Appeals issues – Enquiries have been made by the Ombudsman on both cases, the outcomes of which are awaited.
 - 1 x Education issue – Enquiries have been made by the Ombudsman, the outcome of which is awaited.
 - 2 x Highways & Transport issues – The Ombudsman has made enquiries in relation to both cases, the outcomes of which are awaited.
 - 1 x Fixed Penalty Notice issue – The Ombudsman has made enquiries, the outcome of which is awaited.
 - 2 x Planning & Development issues – One case closed as it was outside of the Ombudsman jurisdiction, the other case remains ongoing.

- 1 x Noise Nuisance/Anti-Social Behaviour issue – The Ombudsman has made enquiries and the case is ongoing.
 - 1 x Environmental issue (tree removal) - The Ombudsman decided not to initiate a full investigation and as such discontinued their involvement.
 - 1 x Refuse Bin issue – The Ombudsman decided not to initiate a full investigation and as such discontinued their involvement.
67. The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 11 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:
- 2 x School Admission Appeals issues – All three investigations were concluded, the Ombudsman found there was no fault by the Council.
 - 1 x Highways (Rights of Way) issue – The investigation was completed and found no fault by the Council.
 - 3 x Education & Children’s Services issues – the Ombudsman found no fault by the Council in respect of one complaint. The other 2 investigations concluded that there was identifiable fault by the Council and financial remedies were subsequently actioned.
 - 4 x Planning issues – 3 investigations were completed and the Ombudsman concluded that there was no fault by the Council in those cases. The Ombudsman discontinued the investigation in the fourth case.
 - 1 Benefits & Tax issue - The investigation was completed and found no fault by the Council.
68. 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 Highways (pothole) issue – The matter was determined to be outside of the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.
 - 1 x Fly tipping issue – The matter had been reported to the Ombudsman prematurely and was therefore referred back to the Council to deal with under the complaints procedure.
 - 1 x Planning issue – Investigation not initiated.
 - 1 x Environmental (Garden Waste) issue – Investigation not initiated.
 - 1 x Environmental (Flooding) issue – Investigation not initiated.
 - 2 x Environmental (Refuse Bins) issues – Investigations were not initiated.
 - 1 x Council Tax issue – Investigation not initiated.
 - 1 x Welfare Rights issue – Investigation not initiated.
 - 1 x Education & Children’s Services issue - The matter was determined to be outside of the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.
 - 1 x Enforcement issue - The matter had been reported to the Ombudsman prematurely and was therefore referred back to the Council to deal with under the complaints procedure.

Learning Outcomes

69. In respect of one of the Planning complaints which was closed during the period, the Planning department did report on learning outcomes/actions taken, despite the Ombudsman finding of no evidence of maladministration. Comments made were as follows:-

Whilst the Ombudsman did not find any fault the underlying issue related to an engineering drawing which should site levels, the quality of the drawing made it difficult to accurately determine proposed site levels. Officers have been requested to ensure that where drawings showing site levels are submitted with applications that they are closely vetted to ensure that they accurately depict existing and proposed levels.

Review of the complaints process

70. The Council's Customer First Strategy is in the process of being refreshed and includes a review of the current Corporate Complaints Policy and a revised mechanism for capturing learning outcomes. This work cuts across all service areas of the council and is aimed at both streamlining the processes currently in place and implementing an approach to working much more closely with service areas to use customer feedback, and in particular customer demand instigated by service failure, to ensure that improvement actions are implemented. Work is also currently underway to review the way in which complaints are captured on the CRM system to enable the system to capture more detailed information and improve the work flow which should result in better reporting.

Recommendations and Reasons

71. CMT to note the report

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