

Customer Feedback report: Complaints, compliments and suggestions Quarter 3 2013/14



Altogether better



Overview

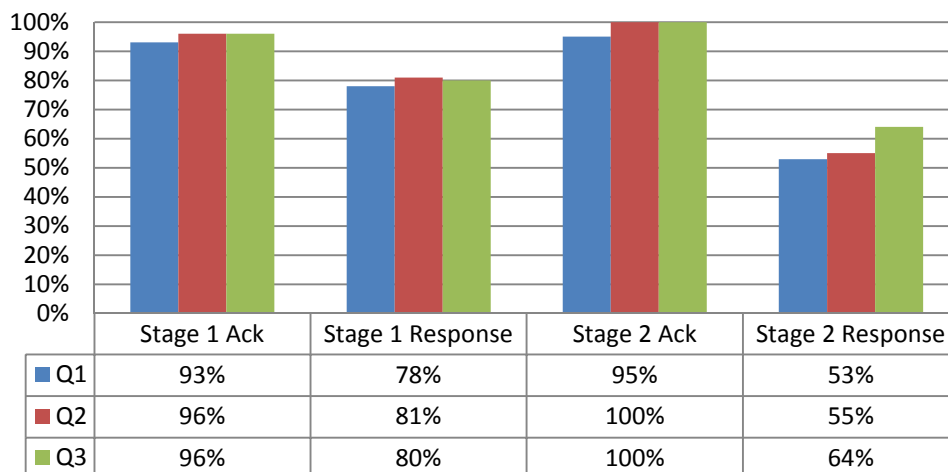
1. This report provides the performance information and learning outcomes in relation to complaints, compliments and suggestions across the Council. Information on complaints relates to the 2 types of complaint the Council deals with:
 - **Statutory.** A complaint which arises from the duties placed 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
2. The council’s service standards for dealing with non-statutory complaints are:
 - Acknowledging all complaints within 2 working days;
 - Responding to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days
 - Responding to stage 2 complaints within 20 working days.
3. The report is divided into 2 main parts; overall performance summary and the detailed information for each service grouping in relation to the complaints, compliments and suggestions received across the Council during Quarter 3, 2013/14

PART ONE: Summary of Complaints, compliments and suggestions received across the Council during Quarter 3, 2013/14

4. Between 1 October 2013 and 31 December 2013, Durham County Council received 707 non-statutory complaints, 299 compliments and 58 suggestions.

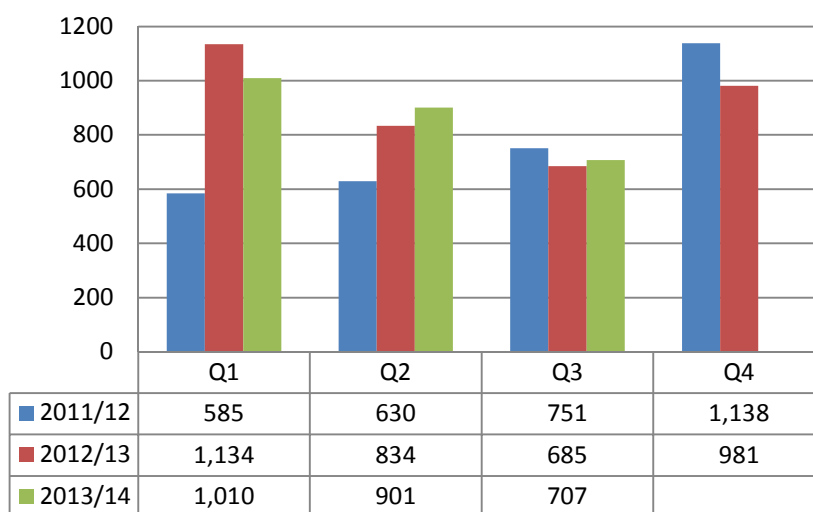
Complaints

5. The graph below shows a comparison of the performance in relation to responding to complaints across the Council for 2013/14.



6. The graph illustrates a steady improvement in performance throughout the year with a 9% increase in the number of stage 2 complaints responded to within the agreed timescales as a result of service improvement activity.

7. The graph below shows a comparison of the total numbers of complaints received across the Council since April 2011. Complaints received in this quarter have increased by 3% in comparison with the same period last year.



8. The table below shows a breakdown of complaints received across Service Groupings since 2011/12, showing increases in quarter 3 compared to the same period last year across all Services with the exception of Resources:

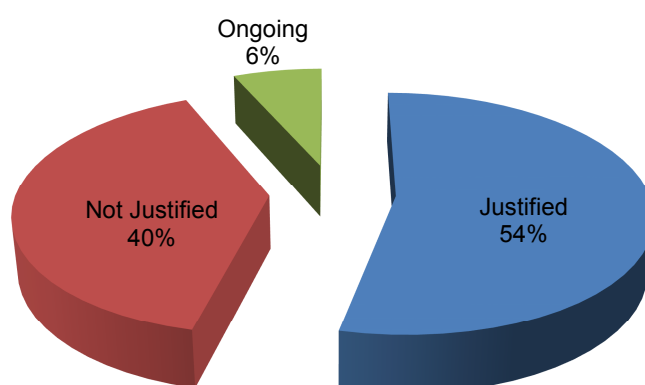
Service Grouping	2011-12 Total	2012 - 2013					2013 - 2014				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
ACE	10	0	2	0	5	7	3	3	2		8
CAS	83	4	15	4	10	33	10	15	24		49
NS	1,589	737	537	431	693	2,398	724	614	446		1784
RED	327	94	95	93	105	387	93	128	96		317
RES	1,095	299	185	157	168	809	180	141	139		460
TOTAL	3,104	1,134	834	685	981	3,634	1,010	901	707		2618

9. Analysis of the data shows that the highest numbers of complaints received during the quarter were due to:

- Refuse and Recycling Service:**
 90 complaints were received regarding missed bins during quarter 3 2013/14. This is a 30% decrease when compared with quarter 2 2013/14.
- Changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):**
 We received 48 complaints regarding HWRCs, which is a 37% decrease when compared with quarter 2 2013/14. Contract changes leading to tighter control of the waste put through the sites and customer liaison are the main reasons for these complaints
- Revenues and Benefits Service:**
 The Benefits service received 47 complaints of which 6 (13%) were made by landlords or agents either about speed of processing or disputing payments made directly to tenants. Analysis of the complaints indicates that 32 (68%) related to the amount of evidence requested in support of claims which, customers see as, causing a delay in their claim being processed or updated.

The Revenues service received 75 complaints this quarter, with 25% of these relating to delays in processing changes or responding to correspondence. 11% related to changes to council policy and the charging of council tax on empty properties, 24% related to recovery action with 7 of these being complaints regarding bailiffs.

10. Further investigation of the stage 1 complaints received shows that during quarter 3, 2013/14 there were 280 occasions (40% 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.
11. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 381 (54%) justified complaints, from which there is possibility of learning.



Compliments and Suggestions

12. The following table shows the numbers of compliments and suggestions received across service groupings during quarter 3:

Service Grouping	Compliments	Suggestions
ACE	25	4
CAS	47	1
NS	125	41
RED	85	9
RES	17	3
TOTAL	299	58

13. 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 3, 2013/14

14. The following sections provide details for each Service Grouping in relation to complaints compliments and suggestions received in quarter 3 and the learning outcomes applied to improve service delivery for those complaints which were justified

Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)

Overview

15. The ACE service grouping received 2 complaints, 25 compliments and 4 suggestions between 1 Oct 2013 and 31 Dec 2013.

Service Grouping ACE	Number Received										
	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	2	-	8
Compliments	24	3	3	7	12	25	3	9	25	-	38
Suggestions	14	0	1	1	7	9	3	3	4	-	12

Feedback areas and learning

16. The two complaints received in quarter 3 concerned the AAPs and both have been escalated to Stage 2. One related to a project funded by an AAP and the second concerned a delay in responding to an AAP funding application and refusal to give information. Both investigations have now concluded and the complaints identified as not justified.

Compliments and Suggestions

17. 16 compliments out of the 25 received were in relation to Partnerships and Community Engagement, thanking staff for their efforts around the successful AAP Forum events. 8 compliments were for the County Records Office and one was received by Policy and Communications.

All 4 suggestions received by Policy and Communications related to council web pages and have been passed onto relevant teams for action

Children and Adults Services (CAS)

Corporate Complaints Overview

18. During quarter 3, CAS received 20 complaints, 47 compliments, 4 comments and 1 suggestion in relation to corporate representations.
19. The overall number of corporate representations received by CAS has increased from the previous quarter (from 57 in quarter 2 to 68 in quarter 3), however there has been a 54% decrease when compared to the corresponding quarter in 2012/13.

20. Complaints have increased by 5 in comparison with quarter 2 and by 16 when compared to the same quarter in 2012/13. 10 complaints received in quarter 3 were in relation to Children and Young People and 10 were in relation to Adult Services. Complaints were received in the following Service Areas:

- Children’s Services received 4 complaints
- Education received 6 complaints
- Planning & Service Strategy received 8 complaints
- Adult Social Care received 2 complaints

Service Grouping CAS	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	83	4	15	4	10	33	10	15	20	-	45	+400%
Compliments	158	149	150	145	103	547	88	42	47	-	177	-68%
Suggestions	24	15	0	0	11	26	0	0	1	-	1	-
Total	265	168	165	149	124	606	98	57	68	-	223	-54%

*Q3 figure 2013/14 compared with Q3 figure 2012/13

21. Of the 20 complaints received, 100% were acknowledged within 2 working days and 19 were responded to within 10 working days. Of the 20 complaints received, 7 were upheld, 12 were not upheld and 1 was partially upheld.

Feedback areas and learning

22. The following actions are being taken in response to learning from complaints in the quarter:
- Service Users are given an alternative contact for the One Point service when staff are on leave.
 - The Occupational Therapy Service is to conduct a review of the application of the Blue Badge criteria, following complaints about assessment outcomes for renewals.
 - Raised awareness of Fire Evacuation procedures in a Care Day Centre following a recent practice drill.

Compliments and Suggestions

23. During the quarter, 47 compliments were received, a reduction of 68% in comparison to the corresponding period in 2012/13. Children’s Services received 29 compliments (13 for the Youth Offending Service, 13 for the Pathfinder Service and 3 for the One Point Service), and Education received 18 (12 for the Education Development Service, 5 for Educational Psychology Services and 1 for the School and Governor Support Service). It should be noted that many compliments were received by the newly transferred Welfare Rights service and is likely to be a factor in the lower numbers of compliments received in this quarter.
24. Four comments were received regarding the closure of Roseberry School and one suggestion was received regarding dance/musical theatre classes in primary schools.

CAS Statutory Representations Overview

25. The total number of representations has decreased from 265 in quarter 3 of 2012/13 to 140 in quarter 3 of 2013/14. This represents a 47% decrease. The number of statutory

complaints and compliments has also decreased in quarter 3 in comparison to the corresponding period in 2012/13 and also between quarter 2 and quarter 3 of 2013/14.

Service Grouping CAS	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	251	72	66	84	54	276	64	75	43	-	182	-49%
Compliments	399	152	226	181	199	758	155	100	97	-	352	-46%
Suggestions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0
Total	650	224	292	265	253	1034	219	175	140	-	534	-47%

*Q3 figure 2013/14 compared with Q3 figure 2012/13

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

26. During quarter 3, a total of 23 complaints were received in relation to children's social care services. There were 6 complaints managed informally (e.g. within a short timescale usually by phone or in person, without the need for a management intervention or investigation), 16 complaints managed at Stage 1 of the statutory procedure and 1 complaint managed at Stage 2 of the statutory procedure. There was a reduction of 3 formal complaints in quarter 3 in comparison to quarter 2 of 2013/14.
27. All 16 Stage 1 complaints received were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt. Six complaints were resolved within the prescribed timescales (37.5%) and 2 outside of the timescales. The remaining 8 complaints remain on-going, 7 of these are outside of the timescales due to the complex nature of the complaints.
28. Maximum efforts are made to resolve complaints informally. When complaints cannot be resolved informally, they will proceed to Stage 1 where an investigation will be undertaken by a manager of the service.
29. Continued efforts to improve performance in the number of Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2 of the Statutory Complaints Procedure include a focus on improving responses at stage 1. Complaints received, by team, are shown below:

Complaints received by Teams in the quarter		
Teams	Current Q3	Previous Q2
Aycliffe Secure Services	0	1
Disabled Children and Families Team	0	1
Initial Response Team	4	0
Looked After Children - Aycliffe	0	0
Looked After Children - Durham	0	1
Safeguarding Children - Aycliffe	1	0
Safeguarding Children Bishop Auckland	0	4
Safeguarding Children Crook	0	4
Safeguarding Children Chester-le-Street	1	5
Safeguarding Children - Durham	2	0
Safeguarding Children Easington	1	0
Safeguarding Children - Peterlee	1	0
Safeguarding Children Seaham	4	0
Safeguarding Children Spennymoor	0	1
Safeguarding Children Stanley 2	1	1
Young People's Service - South	1	2
Total	16	20

30. No complaints were declined in the quarter.

Category of Complaint

31. 'Poor Service' was an element in 13 of the 16 Stage 1 complaints received. The categories with the next highest number of complaints were 'Disputed Decision' which formed all or part of the reason behind 5 complaints and 'Professional Conduct of Staff' which was an element in 2 complaints. This is concurrent with themes in the previous quarter. It is possible for a complaint to relate to more than one category.

Outcome of complaints

32. Of the 8 complaints completed in the quarter, 6 were not upheld, 2 were partially upheld and none were upheld as the table below outlines:

Outcome of Children's Complaints received in the Quarter				
Team	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Total
Initial Response Team	3	1	0	4
Safeguarding Children Aycliffe	1	0	0	1
Safeguarding Children Seaham	1	0	0	1
Safeguarding Children Stanley 2	0	1	0	1
Young People's Service - South	1	0	0	1
Total	6	2	0	8

Action taken as a result of statutory complaints

33. As a result of all complaints received and concluded during the period the following actions have been undertaken:
- Where service users ask to remain anonymous in referrals, this will be recorded and actioned; and
 - Where Social Workers are asked to return service users calls, they will do so in a reasonable timeframe, recording where this has not been possible

Stage 2 complaints

34. During the quarter, 1 complaint was escalated to Stage 2.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

35. During the quarter the LGO made preliminary enquiries in 1 case and issued Final Decision letters about 2 further cases, neither of which were upheld.

Compliments

36. 33 compliments were received in quarter 3, an increase of 16 from the previous quarter.

Teams	Compliments Received	
	Current Q3	Previous Q2
Community Support Team	22	9
Disabled Children and Families Team	2	1
Looked After Children	1	2
Initial Response and Prevention	0	0
Specialist Services	6	2
Safeguarding Services	2	3
Total	33	17

Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions – Adults

37. During the quarter, a total of 20 complaints were received in relation to adult social care services, representing a 5% decrease in comparison to the previous quarter.

Comparison of Complaints received by quarter					
Service Area	Q4 12/13	Q1 13/14	Q2 13/14	Q3 13/14	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Adult Care	19	26	21	20	↓

38. All complaints received were acknowledged within 2 working days. Complaints Resolution Plans (CRPs) were completed for all 20 complaints; 16 were completed within the quarter and timescales set out in the CRP. The remaining 4 cases were ongoing at the quarter end but are still within their agreed completion timescales.
39. 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 10, followed by 6 in the Commissioning Service Area as shown below:

Complaints received by Service Area in the quarter		
Service Area	Current Q3	Previous Q2
Adult Social Work Teams: Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services	10	13
Adult Social Work Teams: Learning Disabilities, Mental Health, Substance Misuse services	3	2
Commissioning	6	3
County Durham Care and Support	0	1
Safeguarding and Practice Development	1	2
Total	20	21

Declined Complaints

40. Four complaints were declined in the quarter, 2 as they were beyond DCC's jurisdiction and 2 as they had previously been investigated and responded to.

Category of Complaint

41. 'Lack of Service – Communications/Information' and 'Disputed Decision' constituted the categories with the highest number of complaints recorded at 5 each. The categories with the next highest number of complaints were *Provision of Service – Equipment* with 4 complaints and *Finance – Charging Policy* with 3 complaints.

Outcome of Complaints

42. Of the 16 complaints completed in the quarter, 12 were not upheld, none were partially upheld and 4 were upheld.

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	5	0	3	8

Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services				
Adult Social Work Teams: Learning Disabilities, Mental Health, Substance Misuse services	1	0	1	2
Safeguarding and Practice Development Team	1	0	0	1
Commissioning	5	0	0	5
Total	12	0	4	16

Actions as a result of statutory complaints

43. Investigation into complaints relating to the new stair lift maintenance policy has shown there was a lack of clarity on when the lift maintenance would cease for people who had been assessed as no longer meeting the eligibility criteria for stair lift provision. The Commissioning Department has now written to service users and clarified that DCC maintenance would cease from 31 March 2014.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

44. During the quarter the LGO has made preliminary enquiries in 1 case and commenced an investigation into 2 cases.
45. In a case from a previous quarter, the LGO has issued a Final Decision which stated that the Council was not at fault for its consideration of a safeguarding referral highlighting concerns about the quality of care in a nursing home. The same investigation by the LGO into the Council's response to limits placed on the complainant's visits to the care home was referred to the Court of Protection.

Compliments

46. 64 compliments were received in the quarter, representing a decrease of 19 in comparison to the previous quarter.

Service Area	Compliments Received	
	Current Q3	Previous Q2
County Durham Care and Support	36	54
Social Work Teams: (Older Persons /Mental Health Services for Older Persons/Physical Disability/ Sensory Support services)	26	28
Social Work Teams (Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/Substance Misuse Services)	1	1
Planning & Service Strategy	1	0
Total	64	83

Neighbourhood Services (NS)

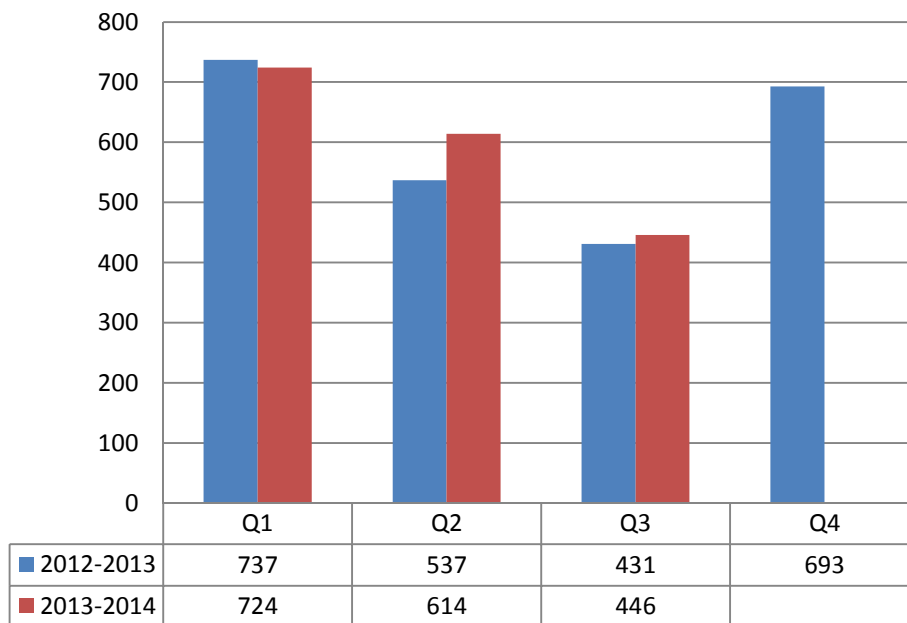
Overview

47. For quarter 3 of 2012/13, 2013, 446 complaints, 125 compliments and 41 suggestions were received. A summary of feedback since 2011/12 is shown in the following table

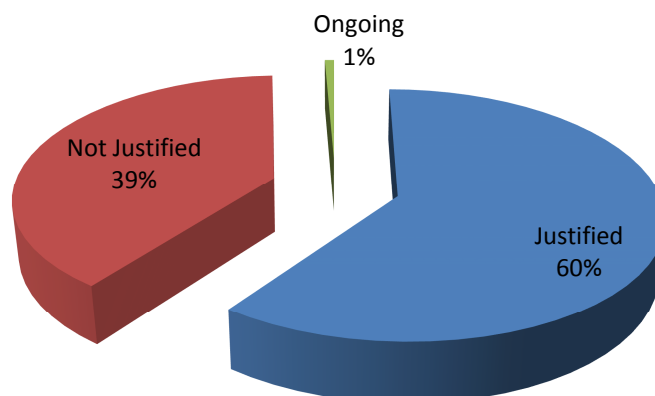
NS	Number Received											%* Change
	11/12 Total	12/13 split by quarter				12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14	
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	1,589	737	537	431	693	2,398	724	614	446	-	1,784	+3
Compliments	419	75	67	108	152	402	126	134	125	-	385	+16
Suggestions	415	71	55	49	40	215	62	57	41	-	160	-16

*Q3 13/14 compared to the same period last year

48. The number of complaints received by NS in quarter 3 has increased by 3% in comparison to the same period last year. Analysis of the data shows that there has been an increase in complaints regarding the changes to HWRCs, with an additional 43 complaints received and the implementation of new LED Street Lighting; 15 complaints in relation to this were received in this quarter.
49. There has however, also been a reduction in some of the most common complaints received. The highest reductions relate to drainage issues, showing an 85% decrease; charges for replacement wheeled bins have reduced by 31% and there has been a 47% reduction in relation to complaints concerning damage caused by the council; this includes damage to residents cars either by the refuse wagon or by the bins hitting cars when being pulled out and damage to grass verges when driven on by council vehicles.



50. Further investigation of the complaints received shows that during quarter 3, 2013/14, there were 175 occasions (39%) where the complaint was not upheld, indicating that, although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.



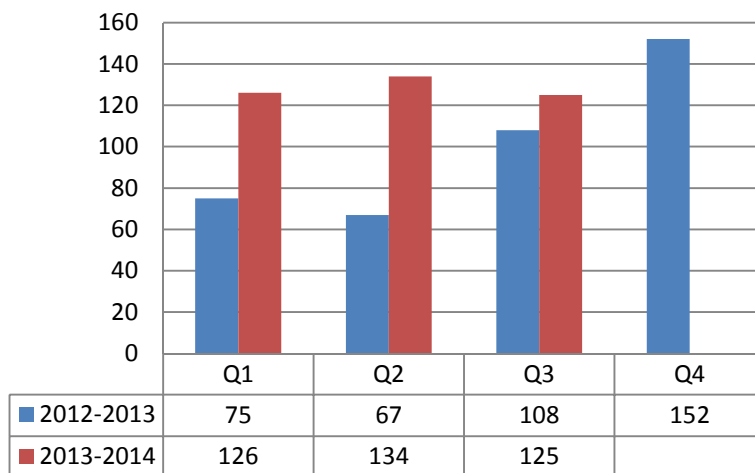
Key Areas and Learning

51. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during quarter 2 shows that 43% can be attributed to the following:
- **Missed Bins:** 90 complaints were received regarding missed bins during quarter 3 2013/14, a 30% decrease when compared with quarter 2 2013/14.
 - **Changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres:** We received 48 complaints regarding HWRCs during this quarter. Although, complaints of this nature remain high there has been a steady decrease in the number received; with a 37% decrease when compared to quarter 2 2013/14. Contract changes leading to tighter control of the waste put through the sites and customer liaison are the main reasons for these complaints
 - **Charges for replacement wheeled bins:** 25 complaints were received from residents objecting to the £20 charge for replacement bins. Complaints of this kind have reduced by 31% when compared with the same quarter in 2012/13
 - **Attitude of refuse crews:** 23 complaints were received from customers unhappy with the attitude of their refuse crew; a 43% increase when compared with quarter 2 2013/14.
 - **Refuse staff not returning bins/containers:** 20 complaints were received from residents regarding refuse bins/containers not being returned to the correct location. This is a 30% increase when compared with quarter 2 2013/14 and a reduction of 17% when compared with the same quarter in 2012/13
 - **Street lighting energy reduction project:** Since the introduction of the new street lighting policy during quarter 3, 15 complaints were received from customers regarding the installation of the new LED street lighting in their area. Customers had concerns regarding reduced lighting in residential areas.
52. A regular meeting, with a range of staff from Direct Services and Customer Services, named the "Customer Experience", continues to meet to exchange data, including complaints and suggestions, in order to make improvements in relation to our contact with customers. Some of the improvement actions include:
- Implementation of a strengthened "Repeat Missed Container" Monitoring Process, to reduce repeat missed bin complaints.
 - Introduction of a new streamlined process for managing customer requests for sand bags, including making requests online.
 - Implementation of a new process for managing and monitoring enquiries and complaints in relation to the street lighting energy reduction project.
 - Development of web forms for all Street Scene Service Requests, to allow customers to access services online.
 - Development of the booking engine and web payment facility for replacement bin requests to enable customers to access this service online.

53. In relation to HWRC's, further engagement has taken place with the contractor and customer care training has been delivered to all of their staff to address complaints regarding staff attitude and complaints have reduced as a result.

Compliments and Suggestions

54. Compliments received by NS in quarter 3 2013/14 compared to quarter 3 2012/13 have increased by 16% as illustrated in the graph below



55. 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, many of these relate to the professionalism, politeness and swift responses from staff.
56. The remaining compliments relate to service provision, including the standard of work, e.g. keeping local areas clean and tidy, carrying out work on hedges and trees, road improvements and speed of work, e.g. footpath repairs, returning to collect missed bins
57. Suggestions related to a number of issues, including:
- Extension to the garden waste scheme collection dates. This feedback will be considered as part of the review.
 - Improvements to customer access points (seating, privacy, etc.). A number of improvements have been made including a new reception desk at the Durham CAP To improve the stocks of books in our libraries

Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

Overview

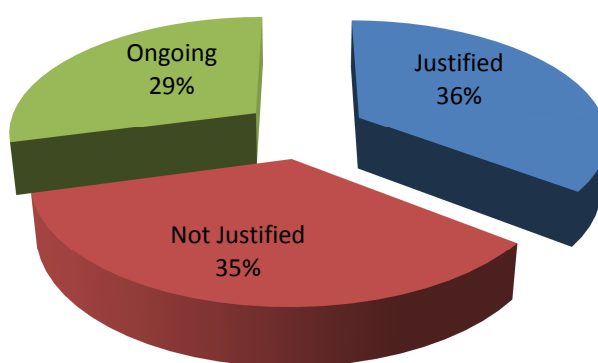
58. Between 1 October and 31 December, 96 complaints, 85 compliments and 9 suggestions were received
59. The table below shows the level of compliments and suggestions received by RED has reduced slightly (3%) when compared to Q2. When compared with previous quarters in

12/13 and 13/14 numbers remain consistent suggesting the normal trend has resumed following a reduction of complaints in relation to Durham City Homes.

Service Grouping RED	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	336	94	95	93	105	387	93	128	96	-	316	+3
Compliments	122	38	39	37	11	125	34	27	85	-	148	+130
Suggestions	48	9	11	10	3	33	11	6	13	-	30	+30

*13/14 compared to the same period last year

60. During quarter 3, 35% of complaints were not upheld; in these cases, although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.



Key Areas and Learning

61. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during quarter 3 shows that 69% of these can be attributed to the following:
- **Durham City Homes:** 36 complaints were received in relation to Durham City Homes, particularly in regard to the handling of repairs and maintenance issues and the associated contractors. This shows a 25% reduction in the number of complaints received compared to the previous quarter.
 - **Planning and Building Control:** 17 were in relation to Planning Development mainly in connection to planning decisions and building control. This shows a significant reduction of 48% from the previous quarter.
 - **Strategic Traffic:** 13 were received by Strategic Traffic, the majority are parking and road works related. This shows a 41% reduction from the previous quarter.

Compliments and Suggestions

62. The service grouping received 85 compliments in quarter 3; these are generally thanking staff for the service they have provided. There has been a significant increase in the numbers received by Planning Development - 63 were recorded in Quarter 3 from 17 in Quarter 2. All compliments have been passed to the relevant staff and teams highlighting the importance of a positive customer focus.

63. RED received 13 suggestions during quarter 3 covering a wide range of subjects and service areas, including building control, transport information and improvements to Durham City and Stanley

Resources (RES)

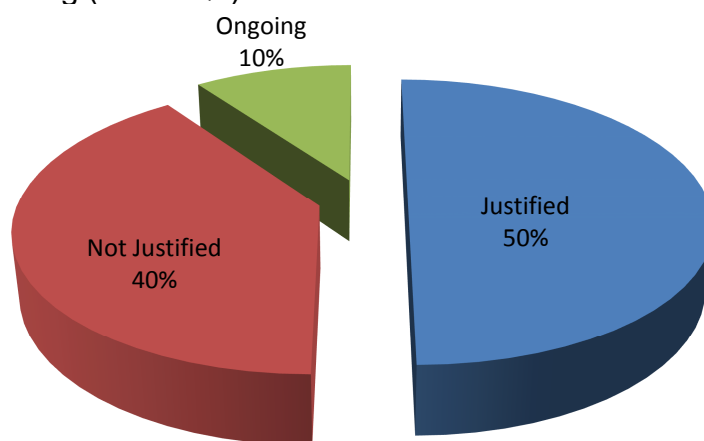
Overview

64. In the third quarter of 2013/14, Resources received 139 complaints; this represents a 1% decrease since quarter 2, and an 11% reduction compared to quarter 3 2012/13.

RES	Number Received										%* Change	
	11/12 Total	12/13				12/13 Total	13/14					13/14
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Complaints	327	299	185	157	168	809	180	141	139	-	460	-11
Compliments	69	16	21	15	17	69	14	10	7	-	41	-53
Suggestions	24	11	7	0	6	24	3	5	3	-	11	-

*% change compared to Q3 2012/13

65. The majority of quarter 3 complaints (122) related to the Revenues & Benefits Service.
66. The proportion of complaints responded to within the 10 days standard improved from 54% in Q2 to 85% in Q3 2013/14.
67. Of the 139 complaints received in Q3 for Resources, 50% were either justified or part justified (56% in Q2), 40% were not justified (35% in Q2) and 10% were unresolved at the point of reporting (9% in Q2).



Key Areas and Learning

68. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during quarter 3 shows that 98% of these can be attributed to the following:
- **Benefits Service:** The Benefits service received 47 complaints of which 6 (13%) were made by landlords or agents either about speed of processing or disputing payments made directly to tenants. Analysis of the complaints indicates that 32 (68%) related to the amount of evidence requested in support of claims which, in the eyes of the customer, caused a delay in their claim being processed.

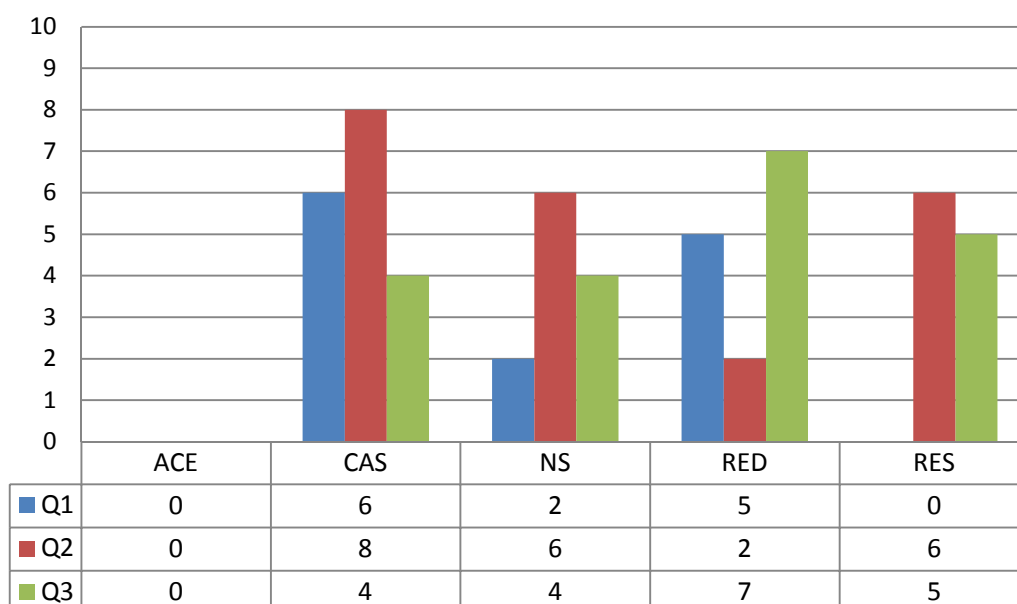
- Revenues Service:** The Revenues service received 75 complaints this quarter. Analysis suggests that 25% of complaints related to delays in processing changes or responding to correspondence. 11% related to council policy and the charging of council tax on empty properties. 24% related to recovery action with 7 of these being complaints regarding bailiffs. All complaints regarding the attitude of the bailiff officers are referred to the respective company for investigation. However, given the contentious nature of their role, most are unfounded whereby being 'firm' is construed as being aggressive. However, all complaints, whether justified or not, are recorded against each individual bailiff and so it would be apparent should a pattern emerge. In any instance where a bailiff may attend an incorrect address, for whatever reason, our records and those of the relevant company are checked for any errors or failures and these issues are dealt with appropriately.
- Contacting the Registration Service:** Five complaints related to difficulties making contact with staff at Registration Offices. Three complaints related to issues with Electoral Services, 2 of which were as a result of the complainant's not understanding correspondence which they had received. The remaining 2 complaints were in respect of land related issues. Both were allocated across the council for input and the Legal Service was asked to contribute to both responses.

Compliments and Suggestions

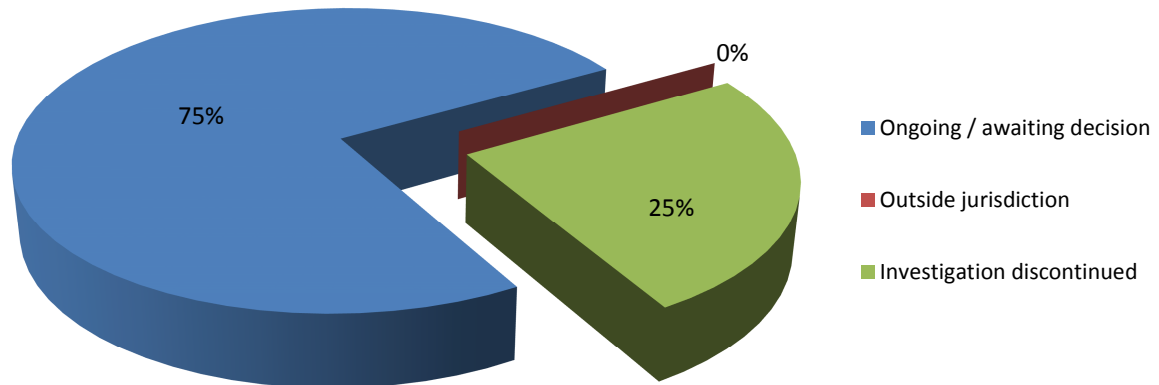
- There were 17 compliments received into the Resources service grouping in quarter 3 2013/14. The majority of these (13) were for the Registrars Service for conducting wedding ceremonies and the excellent service provided by individual members of staff in Revenues and Benefits. Four compliments this quarter were for the involvement of members of staff in Finance (Financial Services) and Legal & Democratic Services who assisted in running an Area Action Partnership participatory budget consultation event.
- Three suggestions were received this quarter; one for Revenues and Benefits recommended a review of the Single Persons Discount policy regarding inherited properties and two in relation to policy and procedures and the North East jobs portal.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO): current activity

- The graph below outlines the number of complaints received by the LGO, for each Service Grouping during 2013/14:



72. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 20 matters. The chart below illustrates the position of these investigations.



73. Of the 20 complaints:

- 3 are subject to ongoing investigation and relate to benefits/council tax issues
- 12 have been subjected to enquiries from LGO and we await the outcome. These relate to:
 - Adult Social Care (3)
 - Children's Services (1)
 - Planning and Development (1)
 - Rights of Way (1)
 - housing relating to Home Improvement Grant (1)
 - Housing Solutions relating to homelessness (1)
 - Recruitment of fleet driving instructors (1)
 - Anti-social behaviour (1)
- LGO decided not to initiate a full investigation into 4 complaints and discontinued their involvement. These relate to:
 - Benefits/Council Tax (2)
 - Property damage (1).
 - Committee complaint relating to Highways Committee (1)
- LGO found no fault by the Council in respect of 1 complaint and discontinued their involvement; the complaint related to Environmental Health

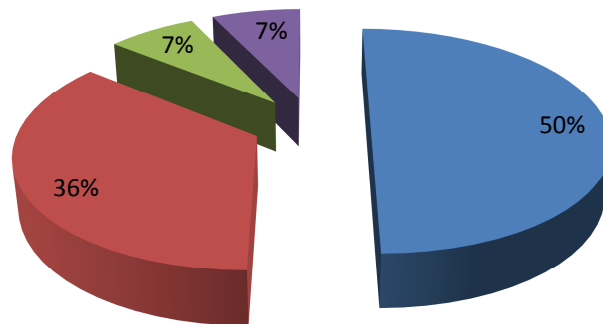
74. LGO delivered decisions on 14 matters which had been subject to investigations initiated prior to the beginning of quarter 3. Of these 14 matters:

- LGO completed their investigations into 9 complaints and concluded there was no fault by the Council. These relate to:
 - Adult Care Services (2)
 - Highways (2)
 - Benefits and Tax (1)
 - Planning and Development (1)
 - Fixed Penalty Notice/Stray Dog (1)
 - School Admission Appeals (2)

- LGO identified some fault by the Council in relation to 5 complaints but closed the investigation on the basis that the Council would complete specific action(s).
 - noise nuisance/antisocial behaviour relating to a skate park (1)
 - Environmental relating to the closure of a watercourse (1).
 - Housing / Building Control (1). The actions included a financial settlement.
 - Housing Repairs (1)
 - Children’s Services (1). The actions included a financial settlement.

75. The chart below illustrates the decision outcomes of the investigations, showing 57% of complaints investigations were either discounted or LGO found no fault by the Council.

- No fault by the Council
- Closed - DCC agreed actions to remedy
- Fault - No injustice
- Discounted involvement



76. During the quarter LGO also notified the Council of the outcome in relation to a range of matters which were not subject to full investigation. LGO 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:

- Investigation was not initiated in 4 cases. These related to:
 - Data Breach (1)
 - Garage Rents (1).
 - Highways & Transport (1)
 - Benefits & Tax (1)
- 2 complaints were reported to LGO prematurely and were therefore referred back to the Council to deal with under the complaints procedure. These related to
 - Planning (2)
- 2 matters were determined to be outside the jurisdiction of the LGO. These related to:
 - Children’s Services (1)
 - Commercial premises lease (1)

Learning Outcomes/Actions Taken

77. In respect of the Housing Repairs complaint which was closed during the period, the Housing Regeneration Team did report on learning outcomes/actions taken, further to the Ombudsman’s final decision. Comments made were as follows:-

Learning Outcomes

“It is felt that the Housing Regeneration Team did everything it could to resolve the issues raised within reasonable timescales. The complaints were responded to in a professional and timely manner. However, we believe that we should have set up a central file early in the process as we had to pull information for the complaint from a variety of sources. It would have been easier and more efficient if all correspondence had been held in a more central/accessible location.

Action taken

“Spoken with staff members and advised that if any future complaints are received then, in the first instance, we should log them and set up a central file containing all copies of correspondence and only close it as and when the complaint is resolved”.

78. For one of the Highways complaints which were closed during the period, the Traffic & Community Engagement Team did report on learning outcomes/actions taken, further to the Ombudsman’s final decision. Comments made were as follows:-

Learning Outcomes

“When the complainant was responded to by letter, it is possible that the plan accompanying the letter became detached from the letter prior to posting although the complainant did not raise this for a number of months.

A new process has been put in place to ensure that relevant attachments are included with correspondence”.

Recommendations and Reasons

79. That the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive the report and consider any issues arising there from.

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