

Standards Committee

16 September 2011



Performance Report for Quarter 1 2011/12: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions

Report of Terry Collins- Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services

Purpose of the Report

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

Background

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

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

Data Quality

11. Previous work on data quality of complaints, compliments and suggestions highlighted a number of issues in relation to recording mechanisms in CRM, e.g. service requests being categorised as complaints or complaints being recorded as compliments or suggestions. This could result in flawed data analysis and incorrect conclusions reached. Steps have been taken to correct the situation through the corporate complaints group.

Progress of the Complaints Handling Review

12. An earlier review of the complaints handling process identified a number of relatively straightforward changes that could be introduced to improve service delivery. A number of these actions have now been delivered including:
 - The launch of new website pages
 - The availability of a re-drafted complaints form in 'pdf' format which allows copies to be printed as and when required
 - The completion of a survey of past complainants to gauge their views in relation to our complaints procedure. Results are being analysed and an update will be provided in the next standards report
 - The completion of testing the current complaints system. This is to be followed by an evaluation exercise and a report will be submitted to the Customer Focus Board during August outlining proposals to simplify current procedures.

13. In addition, a more detailed review of the complaints system is being undertaken and a report will be presented to the council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) in November 2011. This report is based on a pilot study of complaints received by Direct Services, a service area within Neighbourhood Services. Direct Services was chosen for this study as it receives the greatest number of complaints of any service area. During quarter 1, it received a third of all complaints received by DCC. Key actions to be delivered include:
- Revising the Corporate Complaints Policy and promoting its use
 - Revising the Corporate Complaints Procedure ensuring there is value at each step
 - Improving the CRM system to reduce the time taken to input cases
 - Ensuring Heads of Service take an active role in the complaint handling process and ensuring learning outcomes are incorporated into service delivery
 - Monitoring of the system by the Customer Focus board each month.
14. Progress against all actions will be included in future standards committee reports

Format of this report

15. This report is divided into 2 main sections.

Section 1: Overview of Quarter 1, 2011/12

Section 2: Detailed Quarter 1, 2011/12 report from each service grouping

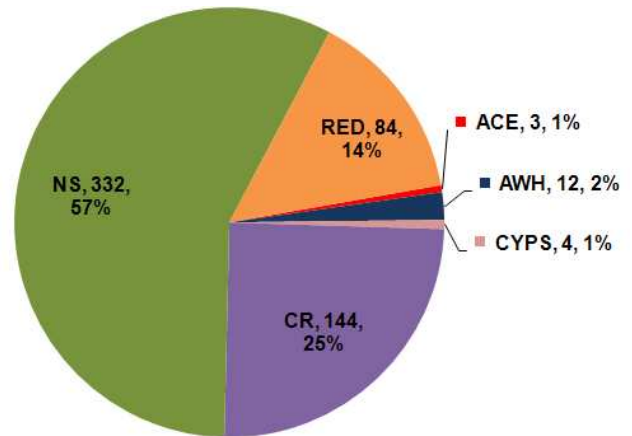
- Assistant Chief Executive's Office (ACE)
- Adults, Wellbeing and Health (AWH)
- Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)
- Resources (R)
- Neighbourhood Services (NS)
- Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

Section 1: Overview of non-statutory complaints, Q1, 2011/12

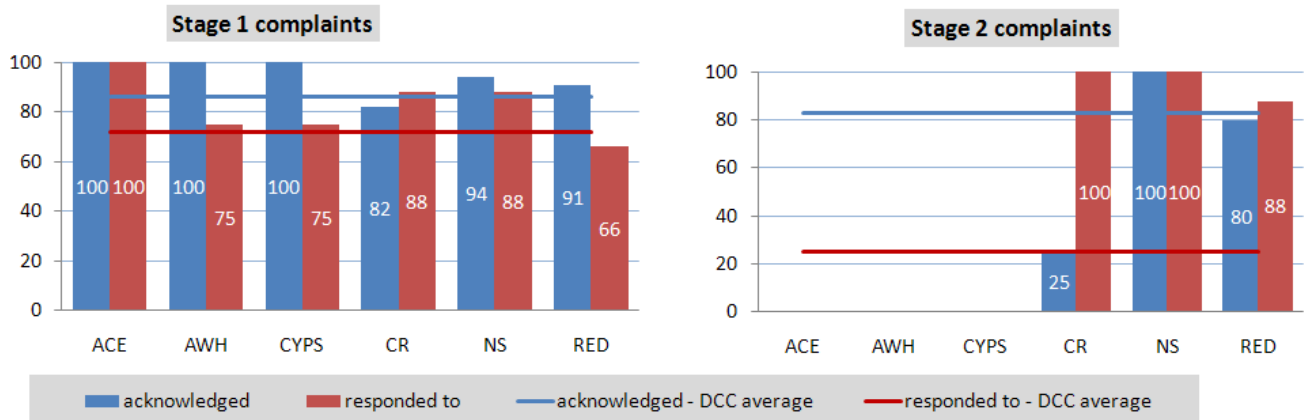
16. Between 1 April 2011 and the 30 June 2011, 579 non-statutory complaints, 433 compliments and 144 service suggestions were received by Durham County Council.

17. The chart on the right shows a breakdown of non-statutory complaints by service grouping.

18. The majority of complaints (57%) were received by Neighbourhood Services (NS). Consistent with the trend over the 2010/11 financial year, this is expected due to the front-facing nature of this service grouping.



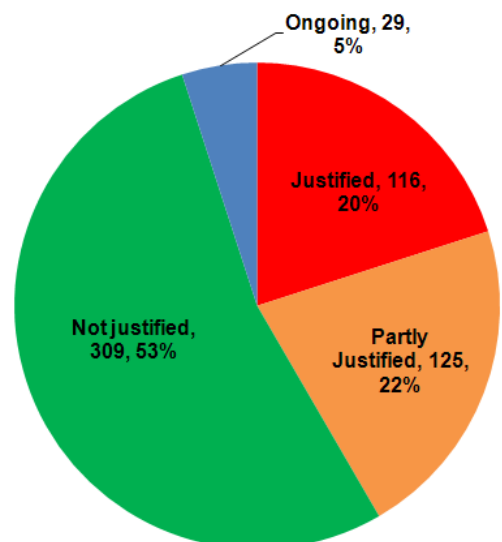
19. For all complaints there is an acknowledgement target of 2 working days. In addition, there is a responded to target time of 10 working days for stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage 2 complaints. The following graphs show the average response times throughout 2010/11.



20. 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.

21. Further investigation of the 579 non-statutory complaints received during the quarter 1 shows that there were 309 occasions (53%) when the complaint was not upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.

22. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 241 (42%) justified complaints, 116 fully and 125 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning.



23. Complaints can be classified as belonging to one of 8 categories. The following table shows the breakdown of the justified complaints received during quarter 1, 2011/12. As can be seen the majority of complaints have been categorised as either quality of service (48%) or service failure (28%).

Complaint Category	Fully Justified	Partly Justified	Total	
			Number	% of total
Administration	7	5	12	5
Communication	4	4	8	3
Council Policy	2	1	3	1
Environmental Impact	3	0	3	1
Planning	0	1	1	1
Quality of Service	47	69	116	48
Service Failure	38	30	68	28
Speed of Delivery	7	9	16	7
Staff Attitude	8	6	14	6
TOTAL	116	125	241	

24. In addition to complaints, we also analyse compliments and suggestions to determine if we can further improve processes, and thereby service delivery.

Service Grouping	Complaints	Compliments	Suggestions
ACE	3	2	4
AWH	12	114	1
CR	144	26	16
CYPS	4	161	4
NS	332	91	103
RED	84	39	16
Total	579	433	144

25. Overall, the ratio of compliments to complaints is 0.75 and for every 4 complaints received, we receive a suggestion for improved service delivery.
26. More detail in relation to learning outcomes can be found in each service grouping's dedicated section of the report. However, the following is a list of some of the lessons learned and changes implemented as a result of complaints, compliments and suggestions.
- In response to concern about the introduction of charging for replacement wheeled bins and following consultation with the portfolio holder changes have been implemented to the procedure. If a resident reports their wheeled bin stolen for a second time within a year of a first report, a replacement bin will be provided free of charge.
 - During times of peak volume, Customer Services staff divert calls to area offices where call volumes are lower

- Leisure service pricing on the website has been amended to make it clearer
- Signage has been improved at Chester-le-Street Riverside.
- Since most benefits complaints are from landlords, meetings have been held with housing providers and private landlords to look at ways to enable better working together, and additional funding has been provided to outsource some of the processing to external providers during implementation.
- Resource has been temporarily increased at Seaham contact centre to help deal with benefits calls and processing of claims.
- Following a number of issues around the sale of some land, as a goodwill gesture Assets arranged for improved transfer of keys and for the land to be clear of unauthorised animals before completion of the sale.

Section 2: Detailed Q1, 2011/12 report from each service grouping

27. The following sections provide more detail of the types and numbers of statutory and non-statutory complaints received across the service groupings during quarter 1 of 2011/12:

Assistant Chief Executive's (ACE)

28. The ACE service grouping consists of 3 service areas and between 1 April 2011 and 30 June 2011, 3 complaints, 2 compliments and 4 suggestions were received.

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

29. During quarter 1, 3 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days with all 3 complaints were responded to within 2 working days.
30. During quarter 1, 1 complaint was received by Partnerships and Community Engagement and 2 by Policy and Communications.
31. Of the complaints received, 1 complaint was justified, two were unjustified.

Partnerships and Community Engagement

32. One complaint was received from an AAP forum member in relation to the cost of a consultation exercise and how projects were funded. Whilst the complaint did not ask a specific question, a full written response was sent to the complainant explaining the purpose of the exercise and offering to provide full details of how projects were identified. The complaint was not justified.

Policy and Communications

33. Two complaints were received in relation to Durham County News

- 34. One complaint was about non-delivery of the news bulletin. The Corporate Communications team is working closely with distributors to improve delivery.
- 35. The second complaint related to the tone of an article in Durham County News about the AV referendum. A response was provided explaining that the article was intended to encourage voters to register and not to influence their vote. No further action was taken.
- 36. No key trends or learning outcomes have been identified from the above complaints.

Compliments and Suggestions

- 37. During quarter 1, ACE received 2 compliments. Both of these were in Policy and Communications.
- 38. Four suggestions were submitted, 3 relating to information on the Council’s website and 1 relating to the County Durham Flag.
- 39. Following these suggestions, the project to create a new DCC web site includes an action to ensure that information is reviewed and updated more frequently and accurately.

Adults, Wellbeing and Health (AWH)

Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

Non-statutory Complaints

- 40. The AWH service grouping consists of 5 main service areas and between 1 April 2011 and 30 June 2011, 12 non-statutory complaints, 114 compliments and 1 suggestion were received.

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

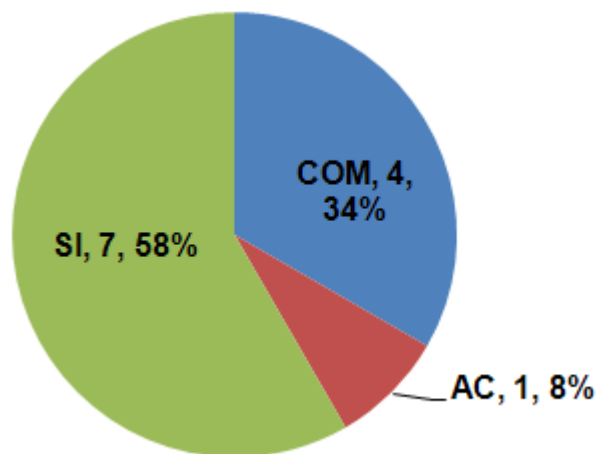
- 41. During quarter 1, 100% of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days and 75% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days
- 42. The majority of complaints 7 (58%) were received by the Social Inclusion service area.

43. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 1, shows that there were 4 occasions (33%) 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.

44. If the 'not justified' complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, AWH is left with 7 complaints, 4 (33%) fully and 3 (25%) partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning.

45. No key trends or learning outcomes have been identified from the complaints received.

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



Non-statutory compliments and suggestions

47. During quarter 1, AWH received 114 compliments. These included 113 for Social Inclusion (which included 99 for Welfare Rights and 11 for WorkAble Solutions) and 1 for Commissioning.

48. 1 suggestion was submitted to Adult Care.

Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

Statutory Complaints

49. During quarter 1, 29 statutory complaints were received by the AWH service grouping. This is a 17% decrease on the previous quarter. Details of the quarterly performance are shown below.

Comparison of Statutory Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q1 10/11	Q2 10/11	Q3 10/11	Q4 10/11	Q1 11/12	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Adult Social Care	16	34	40	35	29	↓↓

50. All 29 complaints were acknowledged within three working days maintaining performance at 100% and Complaints Resolution Plans (CRP) were completed in all cases.

51. Of the 29 complaints received in the quarter, 19 were completed - all within the timescales agreed within the CRP. The remaining 10 cases were not concluded within the quarter but have not breached their agreed completion timescales.

52. Older People Services received the most complaints with 14 followed by 8 complaints in the Learning Disabilities Service. This reflects the type of service offered and should be noted that both areas have shown a decrease from the previous quarter.

Statutory Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers)	8 (28%)	10 (29%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons/ Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	14 (48%)	18 (51%)
Finance	2 (7%)	4 (11%)
County Durham Care and Support	2 (7%)	0 (0%)
Commissioning	3 (10%)	3 (9%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	29 (100%)	35 (100%)

53. Of the 29 complaints received in the quarter, 8 were not upheld, 1 was partially upheld and 10 were upheld. The following table details the breakdown of findings per team.

Outcome of statutory complaints completed in the quarter					
Service Area	Number				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
County Durham Care and Support	1	0	0	1	2
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers)	1	1	2	4	8
Social Work Teams (Older Persons/Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	5	0	5	4	14
Commissioning	0	0	2	1	3
Finance	1	0	1	0	2
TOTAL	8	1	10	10	29

54. The complaints can be classified as shown in the table below. 'Application of Service Guidance/Procedures' and 'Quality of Service – Personal Financial Issues' (both 6) were the joint highest category of complaint. Both categories are linked to the application of procedures in the current review processes although the volume of these types of complaint have decreased since the last quarter.

Statutory Complaints by Classification	
Classification	Number
Application of Service Guidance/Procedures	6
Quality of Service – Personal Financial Issues	6
Conduct or Attitude Of Staff	4
Lack of Service – Contact/Visits/Service	3
Quality of Service – Work Of Other Agencies	3
Provision of Service Assessment	2
Lack of Service - Communications/Information	2
Quality of Service - Personal Care	2
Lack of Service - Restricted Choices Of Current Services	2
Lack of Service – Changes to a Clients Service As Per Care Plan	1
Provision of Service – Placement Provision	1
Provision of Service – Handling of Complaint	1

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

55. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) referred 1 complaint back to Durham County Council as the complainant had not given the Authority the opportunity to respond. Upon investigation the complaint was not upheld.
56. There are 4 complaints still being investigated by the LGO at the time of writing this report.
57. The Ombudsman concluded a case that had been received in the previous quarter. This case involved a person who was persistently requesting services but successive assessments had shown that the complainant did not meet the eligibility criteria. A stage two investigation had been concluded and not upheld four years previously on a similar issue. In the intervening period, assessments were always conducted when these were requested and if there was dispute about outcomes, second opinion assessments were conducted. However, none had concluded that the eligibility criteria were met. The LGO found no evidence of maladministration in this case.
58. Although there have been no key trends or outcomes identified, where complaints have been upheld or partially upheld examples of remedies include:-
- Where clients/relatives have complained about the changes of care providers resulting in the loss of familiar carers, Direct Payments have been facilitated to enable clients to commission their own service and choose their preferred provider.
 - In two cases, complaints were made about delays in the assessment process and this was immediately remedied by assessments being conducted.
 - Apologies were given and explanations were provided or reiterated where communication had been poor.

Statutory Compliments and Suggestions

59. There were 86 compliments received in the quarter compared to 114 in the previous quarter (see table below). The ratio of compliments to complaints is 3:1, compared to 3.25:1 in the previous quarter.

Statutory Compliments Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
County Durham Care and Support	57 (67%)	80 (70%)
Social Work Teams (Learning Disability /Mental Health/Carers	2 (2%)	5 (4%)
Social Work Teams (Older Persons /Mental Health Services Older Persons /Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment & Sensory Support)	24 (28%)	27 (24%)
Policy, Planning & Performance	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Finance	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Commissioning	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	86 (100%)	114 (100%)

60. One suggestion was received towards the end of the quarter regarding contacting Social Care Direct. When attempting to email Social Care Direct the person received an 'out of office' reply and therefore wanted a postal address instead. This is not available on the corporate website and the person suggested that it should be added. The suggestion has been forwarded to Social Care Direct for consideration

Children and Young People's Services

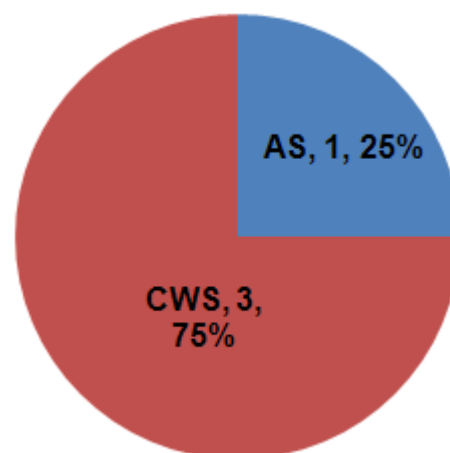
Non-statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

Non-statutory Complaints

61. Since 1 April 2011 CYPS has been reduced from 6 to 5 service main service areas. Between 1 April 2011 and 30 June 2011, 4 non-statutory complaints, 161 compliments and 4 suggestions were received.

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

62. During quarter 1, 100% of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days.
63. During quarter 1, 75% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days
64. The majority of complaints, 3 (75%), were received by the County Wide Services.
65. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 1 shows that none of the complaints were upheld, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.
66. No key trends or learning outcomes have been identified from the complaints received.



Non-statutory Compliments and Suggestions

67. During quarter 1, CYPS received 161 compliments which were not about social care services. These included 151 for County Wide Services, 4 each for Achievement Services and Early Intervention and Partnership Services, and 1 each for Finance Services and former Extended Services.
68. 4 'suggestions' were submitted which took the form of comments which did not warrant a response.

Actions as a result of non-statutory representations

69. In all cases information and explanations and apologies were provided to complainants which resolved the enquiries satisfactorily.

Statutory complaints, compliments and suggestions

Statutory Complaints

70. During quarter 1, 7 statutory complaints were received by the CYPS service grouping. This is a 43% increase on the previous quarter. Details of the quarterly performance are shown below

Comparison of Statutory Complaints Received by Quarter						
Service Area	Q1 10/11	Q2 10/11	Q3 10/11	Q4 10/11	Q1 11/12	Direction of Travel from previous quarter
Safeguarding and Specialist Services	10	9	3	4	7	↑↑

71. All 7 complaints were acknowledged within two working days maintaining performance at 100%.
72. Of the 7 complaints received in the quarter, 6 investigations were completed within the 20 working day timescale for response, with the remaining case breaching the response timescale.

Statutory Complaints Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Family Pathfinder – The Dales	1 (14%)	0 (0%)
Fostering and Adoption	0 (0%)	2 (50%)
Looked After Children Aycliffe	1 (14%)	1 (25%)
Safeguarding Children - Crook	1 (14%)	0 (0%)
Safeguarding Children - Easington	1 (14%)	1 (25%)
Safeguarding Children - Seaham	2 (28%)	0 (0%)
Safeguarding Children - Spennymoor	1 (14%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	7 (100%)	4 (100%)

73. Of the 6 complaints resolved in the quarter, 2 were not upheld, 2 were partially upheld and 2 were upheld. The following table details the breakdown of findings per team.

Outcome of Statutory Complaints completed in the quarter					
Service Area	Number				
	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	TBC	Total
Family Pathfinder – The Dales	1				1
Looked After Children Aycliffe			1		1
Safeguarding Children - Crook			1		1
Safeguarding Children - Easington		1			1
Safeguarding Children - Seaham		1		1	2
Safeguarding Children - Spennymoor	1				1
TOTAL	2	2	2	1	7

74. When categorised, 'Decision regarding Service' has the highest number of complaints. This can mean that either the complainant was not given (eligible for) a service s/he wanted, or that s/he was given a service which was felt to be unnecessary (as is often the case when social care services intervene in a family's life).

Statutory Complaints by Classification	
Classification	Number
Poor Service	1
Conduct or Attitude Of Staff	2
Decision regarding Service	3
Poor Service and Decision regarding Service	1

Statutory Compliments and Suggestions

75. During quarter 1, CYPS received 24 statutory compliments. These compliments were all about Safeguarding and Specialist Services (SaSS) and are in relation to social care services.
76. The ratio of statutory compliments to statutory complaints is 3.43:1, compared to 5.75:1 in the previous quarter.

Compliments Received by Service Area		
Service Area	Number	
	Current Quarter	Previous Quarter
Aycliffe Secure Services	1 (4.2%)	8 (34.8%)
Children Looked After - Aycliffe	0 (0%)	1 (4.4%)
Children Looked After - Durham	0 (0%)	1 (4.4%)
Development Support Unit	0 (0%)	1 (4.4%)
Disabled Children and Families Team	3 (12.5%)	1 (4.4%)
Fostering and Adoption Service	3 (12.5%)	0 (0%)
Full Circle	0 (0%)	2 (8.7%)
Initial Response Team	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.4%)
Safeguarding Children – Bishop Auckland	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.4%)
Safeguarding Children – Chester le Street	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)
Safeguarding Children – Newton Aycliffe	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)
Safeguarding Children – Peterlee	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.4%)
Safeguarding Children - Seaham	0 (0%)	1 (4.4%)
Children's Homes	12 (50%)	5 (21.7%)
Total	24	23

Suggestions

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

Actions as a result of statutory representations

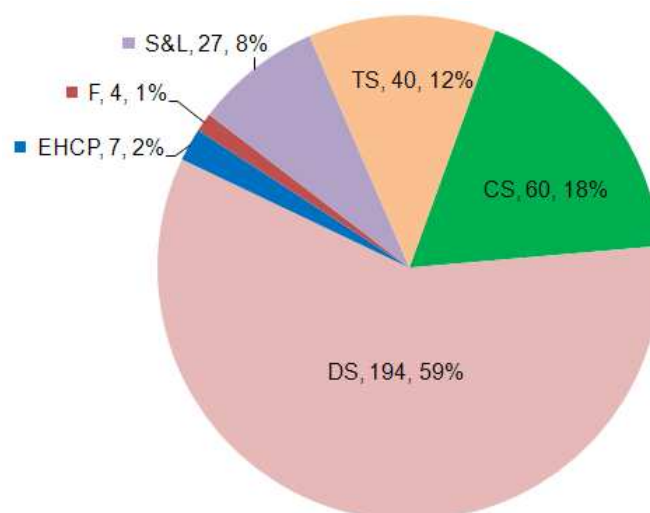
78. There have been no key trends or outcomes identified this quarter; the two complaints which were upheld had learning which was very particular to them. They were about a Social Work report to an Adoption Panel, and a placement transfer. One complaint which was partially upheld was about reports not having been shared in a timely manner, and this information has been communicated across the Service.

Neighbourhood Services

79. The NS service grouping consists of 5 main service areas and between 1 April 2011 and 30 June 2011, 332 complaints, 91 compliments and 103 suggestions were received.

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

80. 94% of stage 1 complaints and 100% of stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days
81. 88% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within the target of 10 working days. 100% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within the target of 20 working days
82. The majority of complaints (58%) were received by Direct Services.
83. Further investigation of the complaints received during quarter 1 shows that there were 171 occasions (51%) 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
84. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, NS is left with 137 (41%) justified complaints, 67 fully and 70 partly justified, from which there is possibility of learning
85. The following section provides further analysis of complaints, by service area, and the associated learning outcomes:



Customer Services (CS)

86. During quarter 1, 60 complaints were received in relation to CS.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	15	22	20	0	3	60
% of total received	62%		33%	-	5%	-

87. Complaints received during this period were fairly wide ranging but related to one of the following 7 areas:

Delays in handling telephone calls within contact centres

88. 25 complaints related to either delays in answering the phones or technical faults with the phone lines themselves. The overarching issue in relation to call answering is its complexity. DCC has 14 different telephone systems supporting the customer services teams across the Council. However, we are making progress in joining the Mitel contact centre systems together and this is reflected in the increase in the percentage of calls answered (77% of calls are answered within one minute, 4 percentage points higher than quarter 4, 2010/11)

Technical faults on telephone systems

89. Although technical faults do add to the problem, such faults are becoming more and more infrequent. However, it is difficult to determine whether callers are facing problems due to sheer volume of calls or actual technical failures. Either way this is not the level of service to which we aspire and a solution must be put in place as soon as possible. The Head of ICT has commissioned the procurement of a single telecommunications solution and the process is ongoing with a view to identifying a provider by September 2011.

Staff Attitude

90. Any complaint regarding staff attitude is taken extremely seriously and is dealt with by managers. In addition, training requirements have been explored to support staff in dealing with difficult customers and 3 of the staff in question have taken part in the Council's customer care training course. Others are scheduled to do so later in the year.

General comments on poor service

91. General comments relating to poor customer service cannot be linked to specific trends and usually are as a result of an error on the officer's part. However, where we have failed to deliver upon our service requirements, the problem is rectified as soon as possible and the customer provided with a full explanation.

Lack of response to requests for service from service teams

92. This is a relatively new trend identified during quarter 1, 2011/12 and this trend will be monitored. If a specific team or service is identified as a contributor to the problem, the issue will be addressed as part of the service improvement process.

Changes to cash collection service

93. In April 2011, the council introduced a new policy in relation to accepting cash payments for council services. As a result, we have received some complaints from customers. We are monitoring the situation, explaining to customers wishing to make cash payments of the changes and providing full details of alternative methods of payment.

Inconsistent / Out of date web-site information

94. On occasions when a complaint is received in relation to either lack of information or the provision of out of date information, the specific service team responsible are informed and asked to correct the information (if appropriate). The introduction of the web strategy in July will provide direction of this access channel.

Direct Services (DS)

95. During quarter 1, 194 complaints were received in relation to DS.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	44	39	96	0	15	194
% of total received	43%		50%	-	7 %	-

96. The majority of complaints (45%) related to our refuse (31 complaints), recycling (26 complaints) and garden waste (31 complaints) collection services. Whilst we take complaints very seriously we need to be mindful that refuse and recycling crews collect at least 1 household wheeled bin from 215,000 properties every week as well as a selection of bins, bags and boxes of recycling every other week. Therefore, the number of complaints received is relatively small.
97. 20 of the 31 waste collection complaints (64%) refer to missed collections. This is in line with previous trends. As soon as we become aware that a bin has been missed we do our best to rectify the situation: If vehicles are in the area they will return and collect missed bins. If we are aware of a recurrent problem with bin collection, crews are issued new instructions to ensure they are aware of properties they have to make a collection.
98. A further 22 complaints (11%) were received in relation to the £20 replacement charge for wheeled bins, which will be effective as of 1 April 2011. This charge was introduced to alleviate the £120,000 annual cost to the authority of replacing missing wheeled bins. Following consultation with the Portfolio Holder, changes have been made to this policy. Resident who have had their wheeled bin stolen for a second time within a year of a first report will be provided with a replacement bin free of charge. We encourage residents to report all stolen bins to the police.
99. Other complaints related to, for example, grass cutting (5%), bulky waste collections (2.5%), pest control (1.5%), trees (1%), anti social behaviour (2%), recycling centres (1.5%).
100. Refuse and Recycling Managers meet on a regular basis to discuss harmonising services and part of this meeting focuses on improvements. If an emerging trend has been identified, an action plan will be developed in order to address and implement improvements. Streetscene Managers also meet regularly to discuss in detail each service section under their remit e.g. Clean and Green, Education and Enforcement etc.

Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (EHCP)

101. During quarter 1, 7 complaints were received in relation to EHCP.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	0	4	0	2	7
% of total received	14%		57%	-	29%	-

102. 2 complaints are still being investigated, 1 relates quality of service provided and the other, environmental impact relating to a light nuisance.

103. Due to the small number and variation in complaints received, it has not been possible to identify any trends or learning outcomes.

Finance (FIN)

104. During quarter 1, 4 complaints were received in relation to FIN.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	0	3	0	0	4
% of total received	25%		75%	-	-	-

105. The following details complaints received by Finance, detailing any learning outcomes and action taken as a result

Complaint about the finance department

106. The complainant defaulted on an arrangement to repay debt to the Council, hence our calls to the complainant. We have written to the complainant, via email at their request, and agreed not to contact them at work in the future: future contact will be via email

Overdue invoice

107. This complaint could relate to any service area of the council and insufficient information was provided which would allow further investigation. NS has a short term plan to rectify the non-payment of invoices; however, this is a corporate issue. We ensure all invoices received are paid, however there are delays due to non conformance. In this case it is unclear whether this invoice relates to NS.

Damage caused by pothole

108. The complainant is unhappy about a decision made by the Council's Insurance Claims Handlers. As the Council employs claims handlers to manage and handle claims on their behalf, once they have been referred the Council can no longer enter into communication regarding liability. To do so would void the council's insurance policy as claims handlers have been approved by insurers. Therefore, we feel that this should

not be dealt with as a complaint. We have communicated with the complainant and advised him that, as the insurance claim is being dealt with by the Council's claims handlers, we are limited in the action we are able to take to resolve this issue. We advised that in the event of being unhappy with the decisions made by claims handlers, should he choose to do so he could take independent legal advice.

Sport and Leisure Services (S&L)

109. During quarter 1, 27 complaints were received in relation to S&L.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	5	4	17	0	1	27
% of total received	33%		63%	-	4%	-

110. Examples of complaints received are;

- Conflict with a Park Superintendent of a Parish Council park at Murton.
- Of those received by Indoor Facilities, 9 were classed as not justified. Two related to Council Policies i.e. the under 8s policy for swimming pools and the pricing policy for gym membership.
- Of those received by Outdoor Sport and Leisure, 5 were classified as not justified.
- The complaint received by Countryside classified as not justified.

111. Indoor Facilities received the largest number of complaints. They are detailed below;

Indoor Facility	Issue	Solution
Freeman's Quay	Adjustments to the programme were met with resistance	Longer lead in times with appropriate consultation and communication.
	Pricing on the website was deemed as being unclear / misleading	Rectified
Spennymoor	Under 8s policy	Staff checking that customers understand the policy, especially if customers enquiring about pool opening times
	Membership sales	Clearly communicating options available to ensure the best value memberships are highlighted.
	Interruptions to normal programme	Improving communication to customers, especially customers for whom we keep contact details, e.g. swimming lesson customers
	Access Controls	Improve way in which we use access controls helping customers with small children in and out, as appropriate
Chester-le-Street	Class cancellations	Improved communication. These have been discussed at staff meetings and will be addressed within the facility improvement plan
	Equipment breakdown	
	Online booking service	

112. The need for a closer working relationship was highlighted within outdoor sport and leisure. This remains an area for improvement as far as play areas are concerned. In response to three complaints, signage has been improved at Chester-le-Street, Riverside.
113. Complaints intelligence will be fed into facility improvement plans. Complaints against policy will be noted for future reference.
114. The need for S&L and DS's Clean and Green team to have regular meetings has been highlighted.

Technical Services (TS)

115. During quarter 1, 40 complaints were received in relation to TS.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	5	31	0	3	40
% of total received	15%		78%	-	7%	-

116. It should be noted that of the 40 complaints allocated to TS, 10 (25%) were wrongly allocated as follows

- Outside of Technical Service (8) – were re-allocated to RED
- Outside Bodies (2). One related to Seymours – Contractor and one to Network Rail

These complaints have been re-assigned to the correct service area in line with council procedure

117. The remaining complaints can be allocated to service area as follows:-

- Strategic Highways (17)
- Highways Operations (12)
- Design Services (1)

118. Of the 17 complaints received by Strategic Highways, 14 were deemed not justified, 2 part-justified and 1 justified. They can be grouped as follows;

- Neighbourly Dispute (1): Private road dispute between neighbours
- Manhole replacement (1): Passed to Northumbrian Water Limited (NWL) but no action
- Surface Dressing (5): Tar sprayed on vehicles or chippings left on road
- Speed Humps (6): Speed humps too high or in wrong place
- Speeding problems (1): Excessive speed on 'A' road
- Street Names (1): Problems with name given to new properties
- Traffic Lights (1): Traffic lights should be part-time
- Street Lights (1): Street lights too bright

119. Learning outcomes for Strategic Highways centre around the need for timely and robust consultation both before and during any works. Inclusion of the public is shown to be crucial when developing new schemes and schedules. Further early consultation will be factored into the summer surfacing contracts with more public information available on speed humps and traffic calming measures.

120. Of the 12 complaints received by Highways Operations there is no key theme evident, 7 were deemed not justified, 3 part-justified and 2 justified. They can be grouped as follows;
- Street Lighting (1): Time taken to repair an outage as a consequence of a major fault
 - Condition of carriageway /footway (5); 3 potholes and 2 footway condition
 - Project duration (2): Frustrations from residents over delays due to roadworks
 - Staff behaviour (2): Both minor issues that have been addressed
 - Missing sign (1): Poor communication between Strategic Highways and Highways Operations
 - Dropped kerb (1): Neighbourly dispute
121. The greatest number of complaints for Highways Operations relate to the condition of carriageway / footway (5). Bearing in mind the pressures currently on our revenue budget this is likely to increase in the future
122. One complaint was received by Design Services relating to planning permission of Shotley Papermill Footbridge. Planning permission was dealt with by the Head of Planning as it did not justify being dealt with by the Planning Committee. The complainant said this denied them the opportunity to make representations to the Planning Committee. The complaint has been closed and no further representations from the complainant have been received. Site works by Highways Operations are ongoing.

Compliments and Suggestions

123. During quarter 1, NS received 91 compliments and 103 suggestions.

Compliments

124. A large proportion of compliments related 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.
125. Other compliments relate to service provision, e.g. 3 compliments were received as a result of prompt action from the street lighting team and 3 from repairing of potholes
126. A number of compliments were received in response to a presentation delivered by our Civic Pride Officers (North) at Park View Community School in Chester-le-Street. During the Pride Team's visit an informative DVD (Open Your Eyes) was played and the team facilitated a quiz to ensure that young people from years 7 and 8 were aware of the environment and the impact discarding litter had on it. Pupils appeared to enjoy the quiz and the Head Teacher approached the Civic Pride Team and requested they return to the school shortly after the summer holidays to continue with this type of education.
127. Within NS the focus has been to ensure that complaints are correctly recorded and actioned. Consequently, compliments have not been given the attention they deserve. Compliments tend to be accepted but not recorded and it is hoped that as the process for reporting complaints improves, service areas will increase the number of compliments recorded on the CRM so they can be given the attention they deserve.
128. The NS link officer group has reviewed CRM licences across the service grouping to ensure all appropriate people can access and update the system. Discussions are taking place in relation to training provision and this will result in greater accuracy of

not only the recording of compliments but the recording of and response to complaints and suggestions.

129. Display boards are being set up at key locations throughout the County. Thank you posters will be displayed on these boards and any compliments received will be highlighted.

Suggestions

130. NS receives a comparatively high number of suggestions due to the front-facing nature of our service delivery. However, it should be noted that suggestions often have an element of complaint within them. The process for dealing with suggestions was discussed at the last NS correspondence group. Following agreement from Heads of Service, the mechanism for routing suggestions will change during quarter 2. Previously, PAs to Heads of Service received the suggestions as part of their CRM work queue. However, it has become apparent that there are delays in reading and actioning suggestions due to time and training constraints. In the future, the suggestions will be routed in the same manner as complaints: they will be transferred to the appropriate link officer for that area. If an officer feels a suggestion should really be a complaint, it will be converted by contacting the corporate complaints team. The resulting complaint will then be subject to the complaints procedure.

131. Examples of suggestions received during quarter 1 include

- Customer Services received 8 suggestions detailing how we might improve the telephone systems. These have been considered as part of the procurement process for the single telephone system.
- Greater leniency should be applied in response to requests to additional waste (over and beyond the capacity of bins and boxes)
- 24 suggestions were received in relation to the proposed leisure centre closures. These were all included in the consultation process.

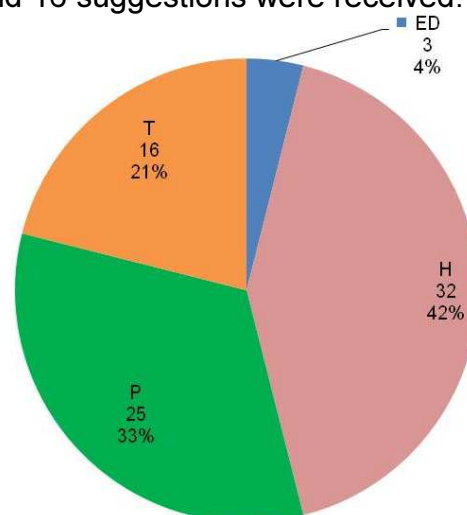
132. Not all suggestions can be implemented, for example: -

- The request for more payments to be accepted through the Automated Payments System. This is not possible due to system limitations.
- The suggestion to reduce the number of disabled parking bays at Seaham. This is not possible as the number is required to meet equality legislation.

Regeneration and Economic Development

133. The RED service grouping consists of 4 main service areas and between 1 April 2011 and 30 June 2011, 84 complaints, 39 compliments and 16 suggestions were received.

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



134. Housing received the greatest number of complaints, with 32 (42%)

Economic Development (ED)

135. During quarter 1, 2 complaints were received in relation to ED

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	1	0	1	0	0	2
% of total received	50%		50%	-	-	-

136. As the numbers of complaints received by the Economic Development service are small it is difficult to identify any underlying trends. The 2 complaints received during this quarter were in connection with works being undertaken at North Bailey, Durham City and the planned closure of the Tourist Information Office in the City. Any future complaints will be monitored to enable trends to be identified.

Housing (H)

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	2	7	22	0	1	32
% of total received	28%		69%	-	8%	-

137. Of the 32 complaints received by the Housing Service, 24 of them were in connection with repairs and maintenance and housing management of Durham City Homes. Supported Housing received 4 complaints, Housing Solutions 3 and the Renewal and Improvement service 1. An analysis of the Durham City Homes complaints has shown that when customers request call backs for example to re-schedule appointments, sometimes the contact details held on record are not up to date, which leads to staff not being able to contact the customer and delays in resolving issues. To improve this situation a new procedure has been agreed to ensure customer contact details are correct.

Planning and Assets (P)

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	2	0	28	0	2	32
% of total received	6%		88%	-	6%	-

138. Of the 32 Planning and Assets related complaints received, 25 were related to Planning issues and 7 were in relation to Asset Management. Of the 25 planning

related complaints many were based on customers not being happy with a planning decision and others relate to customer expectations of delivering a responsive and helpful service. None of the Planning related complaints were found to be justified providing comfort as to the solidity of procedures and the quality of work output.

Transport (T)

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	2	4	12	0	0	18
% of total received	33%		67%	-	-	-

139. The majority of the Transport related complaints were in relation to public transport services and the cuts to subsidised services. The cuts, albeit they are at times where less people travel, do affect a great number of people's access to services. Whilst the complaints were anticipated due to the severity of the cuts there is little opportunity to reinstate services due to lack of funding. However, work continues with bus operators to optimise the Public Transport network.

Compliments and suggestions

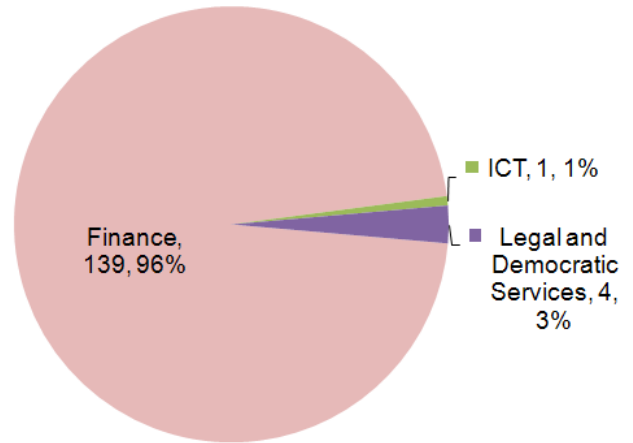
140. During quarter 1, RED received 39 compliments and 16 suggestions.
141. 33 of the compliments relate to Planning and represent the importance customers attach to a timely, helpful and problem solving approach to Planning. Of the comments and suggestions received, a number of the Housing related comments are to be considered and a Transport suggestion has been put to the bus operator who considers it not feasible to implement.

Resources

142. The Resources service grouping consists of 4 main service areas and between 1 April 2011 and 30 June 2011, 144 complaints, 26 compliments and 16 suggestions were received.

Abbreviation	Service Area
F	Finance
HR	HR and Organisational Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LDS	Legal and Democratic Services

143. During quarter 1, 82% (84% in Q4) of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days with 88% (83% in Q4) of complaints were responded to within 10 working days.
144. The vast majority of Resources Q1 complaints (96%) related to Finance, namely the Revenues and Benefits service.
145. Further analysis of the Q1 complaints reveals that 27% were justified, 25% were partly justified and 42% were not justified. In these instances, whilst complainants were dissatisfied with the service they received, Resources staff had followed appropriate council procedures.
146. The main trend identified is the continued increase in complaints relating to our Benefits Service. Complaints have increased due to delays with processing benefits applications over the last year. Problems with processing are due to a number of factors including staff turnover, the economic down turn, but more importantly, the implementation of a new countywide ICT system. While the 7 former district council systems are converted into an appropriate format and merged onto the new system, processing benefits is interrupted. The result is significant backlog and reduced service to our customers. Plans have been put in place to improve processing rates and we should see significant improvements during 2012. Every effort is being made to mitigate the impact upon our most vulnerable customers.



Finance (F)

147. During quarter 1, 139 complaints were received in relation to Finance.

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	36	41	60	0	18	139
% of total received	55%		43%	-	2%	-

148. Of the complaints received this quarter about Benefits, the majority related to delays in the assessment of claims for benefit (35). Other trends related to payments being issued incorrectly to the tenant instead of the landlord (8) problems in contacting the service by telephone (7). There were a number of complaints relating to the administration issues but there were no key trends to these issues and were as a result of errors being made in the calculation of entitlement.
149. Delays in the assessment of claims have occurred due to increased workload as a result of the rise in caseload and system downtime as part of the implementation of the new computer system. The failure to make payments to landlords has highlighted the need to review our procedures. The problems with contacting the service by telephone are due to the increased volumes of calls due to the delays in assessment of claims.
150. As the majority of complaints were from landlords we have recently held meetings with housing providers and private landlords to discuss the current situation and look to ways we can work together during this difficult period. Additional funding has also been

provided to outsource some processing to external providers during the implementation period.

151. The circumstances under which payments can be made to landlords is currently being reviewed taking account of suggestions made at the meetings with the private landlords.
152. The complaints about contacting the service by telephone are at sites where the benefit service still provides front line customer services. There is insufficient resource at these sites to deal with the volume of calls whilst also trying to process claims to reduce delays in assessment. We have however, increased the resource at the Seaham contact centre on a temporary basis.
153. Of the complaints received this quarter about Revenues, 23 were due to quality of service (one of which is still open), there were 16 due to service failure (with one still open), 5 in respect of administration and 1 in respect of council policy. 21 complaints were deemed to be unjustified, 14 were classed as justified, 8 complaints were partly justified (2 still open).
154. The number of complaints has reduced slightly since the last quarter. Historically we would expect to see a higher number of complaints in the first quarter due to the annual billing for Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates. That coupled with the implementation of the new cash and income management system (ICON), plus the implementation of the new Revenues and Benefits system (3 former district councils merged to a unitary system within this 1st quarter) it is surprising that there are only 2 more complaints this year than for the same period last year.
155. With regard to a trend, 17 of the complaints related to problems with paying and payments, which is not unexpected given the fact that the ICON project was and still is so substantial, and, the sheer volume of payments that we receive as a unitary council.
156. Finally, the cash offices closed within this quarter with only 2 formal complaints being received.
157. We continue to review resources on a weekly basis to maintain as high a service standard as we can and cause as little disruption to customers as possible as we move forward with the merger to one unitary system.
158. No recovery action was taken during this period and as much resource as possible was directed to the ICON project and the initial teething problems with the payments themselves and the allocation.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

159. During quarter 1, 1 complaint was received in relation to ICT.

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

160. With 1 complainant it was not possible to assess any trend. However, as part of learning from complaints, we will continue to remind our customers of the best way to log issues with ICT Services.

Legal and Democratic Services (LDS)

161. During quarter 1, 4 complaints were received in relation to LDS

	Justified	Partly Justified	Not justified	Resolved at 1 st point of contact	Ongoing	Total
Number	2	0	2	0	0	4
% of total received	50%		50%	-	-	-

162. The type of complaint has been the quality of service, service failure and staff attitude.

163. One complaint arose following the handling of a sale of land which had been dealt with by assets and the conveyancing team. There had been delays in dealing with certain aspects of the sale which was hindered by issues involving stray animals, incomplete set of keys etc. The staff involved in the sale responded to all correspondence and had taken action where needed. As a goodwill gesture assets arranged for workmen to remove and add locks as deemed appropriate. The council had listed the services of other service groupings and private contractors to ensure the land was clear of unauthorized animals etc prior to the completion of the sale.

164. A query with the registry office resulted in a member of the public disputing the price of a copy birth certificate. The complainant exclaimed that the price was ridiculous and then alleged the member of staff put the phone down. At the time of the complaint the registrar's office was having problems with the BT line and the lack of a message system. This exacerbated the situation as well as the complainant confirming that the certificate needed had originally been registered in Newcastle. It appears there was a misunderstanding as to who had put the phone down, but it seems that the phone line problem had been the main issue.

165. A customer complained about getting through to an answer phone message when ringing to register a death. The customer commented that this type of service is not appropriate when people are distressed. The complaint was resolved at first point of contact. The service area tries to respond to messages as soon as possible to alleviate causing further distress to the public.

166. A customer reported being unable to get through to a registry office to arrange to register a birth. The complaint was responded to and resolved.

Compliments and Suggestions

167. During quarter 1, Resources received 26 compliments and 16 suggestions. Some expressed gratitude to Benefits staff for their assistance with handling benefits claims. Others related to experiences with family history searches and at wedding ceremonies. These were passed on to relevant managers and staff. Suggestions were noted by the relevant services.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO): current activity

168. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 15 matters:

- **Planning and Building Control.** The Ombudsman returned a finding of 'No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration' in relation to 2 cases which are now

closed. The outcome of a third case is awaited.

- **Planning and Environmental Health.** The investigation into a single case is ongoing.
- **Adult Social Care.** 4 cases are under investigation and the outcomes are awaited.
- **Children Services.** 1 case is under investigation and the outcome awaited.
- **Noise Nuisance / Anti-Social Behaviour.** 2 investigations are taking place and outcomes awaited.
- **Housing / Regeneration.** 1 case is under investigation and the outcome awaited.
- **School Admissions.** 3 cases are being investigated and the outcomes awaited.

169. The LGO delivered decisions on 12 matters which were subject to investigations initiated prior to quarter 1.

- **Planning and Building Control.** 6 decisions were delivered. 'No Evidence of Maladministration' was the result in 4 of these cases, the LGO exercised discretion in one case and the final case was concluded as a local settlement.
- **Adult Social Care.** 2 decisions were delivered. The LGO exercised discretion in both of these cases.
- **Housing.** 2 decisions were delivered. Both cases were concluded as local settlements.
- **Benefits.** 1 decision was delivered. The case was concluded as a local settlement.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour.** 1 decision was delivered. The LGO exercised discretion in this matter.

170. During quarter 1, the Ombudsman 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:

- **Planning & Building Control.** 1 case, no maladministration
- **Housing.** 1 case, no maladministration
- **Household Waste.** 1 case, no maladministration
- **Agricultural issue.** 1 case, LGO's discretion
- **Local Taxation/Public Finance.** 2 cases. 1, no maladministration/ 1 LGO's discretion.

Learning Outcomes

171. The following learning outcomes /recommended actions have been noted by officers on completion of LGO reviews:

- In relation to a Planning and Building Control issue which was closed at the Ombudsman's discretion, the LGO criticised the Council for not consulting the complainant. However there were three applications for permission relating to this site. Although DCC's planning division failed to consult the complainant in relation to the first application, the complainant became aware of the application during the consultation process and submitted comments. Although DCC files show the complainant was notified of the later applications, the complainant claims not to have received these letters. As the letters were not returned by Royal Mail the case officer assumed that they had been delivered. It is not possible to determine if letters have been delivered unless they are returned by Royal Mail. In practical terms the only way to undertake public consultation is by Royal Mail and the Council cannot verify delivery due to the large number of letters sent out.
- In relation to a Planning and Building Control issue which was closed with a verdict of No Maladministration, the complainant alleged that the Planning Committee

failed to properly consider the planning application and were misled as to the law relating to the Council's consideration of its own policies, and that the Committee reports summary of consultee advice was selective and misleading. No new learning outcomes were identified as a result of the investigation. Earlier intervention to avoid the complaint reaching the LGO would not have been appropriate in this case, as DCC was unable to reach agreement with the complainants in relation to the main issues. Therefore, the intervention of the LGO Ombudsman was welcomed as a means of drawing the matter to a close. No action has been taken as it is considered that the procedures in place, in terms of referral of committee reports to the Council's Legal Section in advance of their publication, seeks to ensure that the likelihood of maladministration occurring as a result of the misapplication of law or policies is unlikely to arise.

- The LGO's decision relating to a complaint of noise nuisance from agricultural premises where the Ombudsman concluded No Maladministration, refers to a lack of structure in the investigation and therefore a lack of information being passed to the complainant. There is now a written noise investigation procedure which contains standard letters to be sent to complainants at various times of the investigation to keep them up to date.
- The following learning outcomes have been identified in relation to a housing complaint where the Ombudsman found maladministration by the Council with a recommendation of a compensatory payment:
 - Wherever a person presents to the Council in circumstances where there is reason to believe that that person is homeless then a referral should be made to the Council's Housing Solutions Service.
 - Wherever there is reason to believe that a person is homeless the Housing Solutions Service must take an application and carry out the statutory investigations to ascertain whether a duty is owed to that person and, if so, the extent of that duty.
 - Improved communication between services is needed to ensure that there is no prejudice to the service user.
 - Procedures in relation to the banding of applications need to be followed in all cases.

In addition the following actions pre-date the complaint but are relevant and it is hoped would mean that the same case will not arise again.

- Procedures in relation to Band F are in the process of being revised.
- Training has been delivered to Durham City Homes and all other partners in Durham Key Options in relation to Band F (January 2011).
- Training has been delivered to all Housing Solutions Officers on decision making in homelessness cases (July 2010).

In addition to the above there is a recommendation for training to be provided to customer services officers on how to identify whether a person may be homeless in order that the appropriate referral can be made to Housing Solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND REASONS

172. Members of the Standards Committee are asked to:

- Note the report
- Discuss the requirements/areas of further development in relation to the complaints handling process

Contact: Neil Green

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