

# Customer Feedback Report: Complaints, compliments and suggestions 2014/15



*Altogether better*



## Overview

- This report provides the performance information and learning outcomes in relation to Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions received for all Council Services in 2014/15. Complaints are categorised as:
  - Statutory.** A complaint arising 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.
  - “Corporate”.** All other complaints

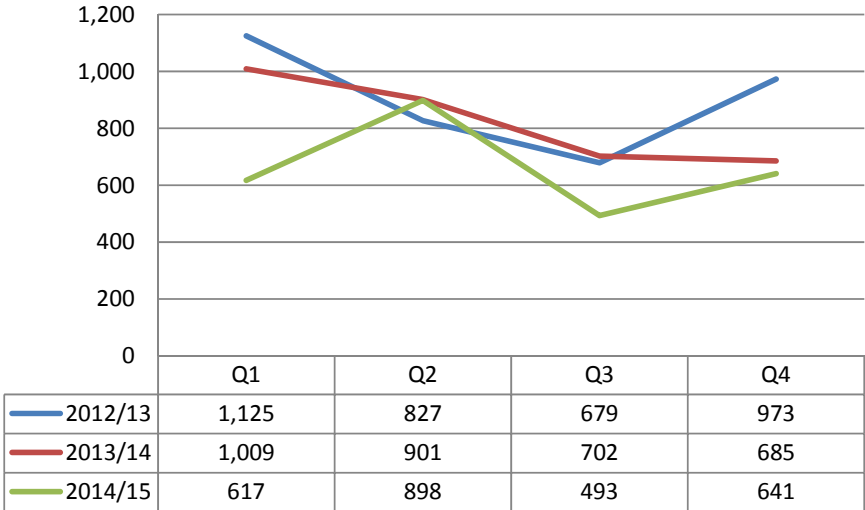
### **PART ONE: Summary of complaints, compliments and suggestions received across the Council during 2014/15**

- Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, Durham County Council received 2,649 stage 1 corporate complaints, 1,193 compliments and 299 suggestions. During the year, 195 complaints were escalated to stage 2.
- During this period, there were 177 complaints and 509 compliments received in relation to adult and children’s social care statutory services
- Complaints handling performance showed:
  - 81% of stage 1 and 92 of stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days;
  - 79% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days
  - 24% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within 20 working days.
- In relation to Statutory complaints the handling performance showed:
  - 100% of Stage 1 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt
  - 77% of the 20 statutory complaints about children’s social care services were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 20 working days. Of the remaining 7 Stage 1 complaints, 2 were resolved after 20 working days and 5 were ongoing at the quarter end.
- The table below shows numbers of complaints received across Service Groupings since 2012/13:

Service Grouping	2012-13 Total	2013-2014					2014-2015				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
ACE	7	3	3	2	1	9	1	2	2	4	9
CAS	33	10	15	18	11	54	6	8	7	11	32
NS	2,398	724	614	446	446	2,230	447	691	339	463	1,940
RED	357	92	128	97	95	412	67	79	67	55	268
RES	809	180	141	139	132	592	96	118	78	108	400
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,604</b>	<b>1,009</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>685</b>	<b>3,297</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>2,649</b>

**Key Improvements**

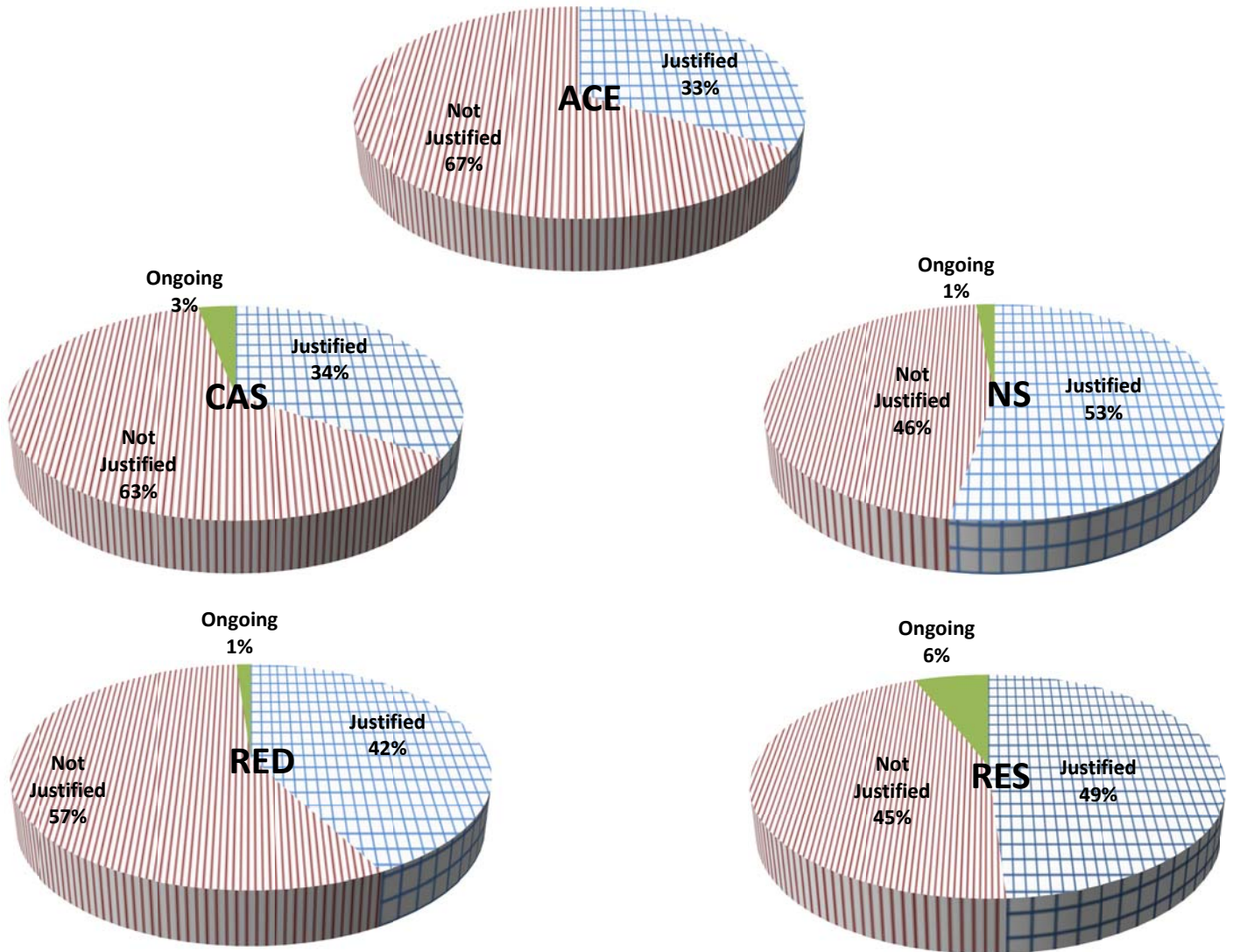
7. There has been a 20% reduction in complaints received this year when compared with 2013/14; this reduction is apparent across all Service Groupings. Details of the improvement areas for each service grouping are outlined in part two of the report.



8. Significant improvement has been made in responding to stage 2 complaints; with the average complaints open at any one time reducing from over 60 at the beginning of 2014/15 to fewer than 20 by the end of the year. These improvements are as a result of a number of key changes including increased training, the implementation of a robust assessment and prioritisation process and an improved quality assurance and performance management framework. The service standard of response within 20 working days remains very challenging for stage 2 complaints as they are often complex and require thorough independent investigation. This is reflected in the 24% performance level; however, this has improved since year end to 39% within target.

**Investigation of complaints: Outcomes**

- 9. Following categorisation of stage 1 complaints, for the year 2014/15 there were 1,255 occasions (47% of complaints processed) where the complaint was not upheld. This indicates that, although service users were dissatisfied, the service had acted properly and followed the correct procedures.
- 10. If the not justified complaints and those that are ongoing are removed, DCC is left with 1,359 (51%) justified complaints, from which there is possibility of learning.
- 11. The Service Grouping breakdown of this categorisation is shown overleaf.



### Compliments and Suggestions

12. The table below shows compliments and suggestions received during 2014/15.

Service Grouping	Compliments	Suggestions
ACE	57	16
CAS	262	5
NS	595	238
RED	140	26
RES	139	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,193</b>	<b>305</b>

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.

## PART TWO: Detailed report for each service grouping for 2014/15

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

#### Overview

14. A summary of Customer feedback since 2012/13 is shown below:

Service Grouping ACE	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14				13/14 Total	14/15				14/15 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	7	3	3	2	1	9	1	2	2	4	9
Compliments	25	3	9	25	12	49	8	5	31	13	57
Suggestions	9	3	3	4	14	24	1	2	3	10	16

#### Complaints

15. There were no trends identified for ACE in terms of complaints received in 2014/15 as they related to a variety of issues including:
- Deleted and banned postings on DCC's Facebook page
  - Response time regarding a Freedom of Information (FOI) request
  - Non-delivery of Durham County News
  - Poor maintenance of a Community centre which has subsequently caused damp in a neighbouring private property
  - The Freedom of Information Act not listed on the council's A to Z website menu
  - Free parking over Christmas festival period
  - Delivery of an information leaflet to the wrong area
16. Seven out of the nine complaints (79%) were resolved within 10 working days.
17. Of the 9 complaints received during 2014/15, only 3 were justified, indicating that although service users were dissatisfied with the service received, the service had in fact acted properly and followed appropriate procedures.

#### Compliments and Suggestions

18. The majority of compliments related to the helpfulness of staff and the efficiency of service provided across all service areas within ACE.
19. During 2014/15, ACE service grouping received 10 suggestions covering a variety of subjects, relating mostly to communication and publications. Although no learning outcomes were identified due to the specific nature of each suggestion, all suggestions are passed to the relevant service area where they are reviewed and monitored in order to identify any emerging trends and to inform their service improvement.

## Children and Adults Services (CAS)

### Corporate Complaints Overview

20. A summary of the feedback since 2012/13 is shown below:

Service Grouping CAS	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14				13/14 Total	14/15				14/15 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
<b>Complaints</b>	<b>33</b>	10	15	18	11	<b>54</b>	6	8	7	11	<b>32</b>
<b>Compliments</b>	<b>547</b>	88	42	47	7	<b>184</b>	55	51	45	111	<b>262</b>
<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>26</b>	0	0	1	4	<b>5</b>	0	4	1	0	<b>5</b>

### Complaints

21. From 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, 32 corporate complaints were received for CAS; a 41% reduction from 2013/14. A breakdown by service area is shown in the table below:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
<b>Adult Care</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Children's Services</b>	2	1	1	9	13
<b>Commissioning</b>	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Education</b>	4	6	4	2	16
<b>Planning &amp; Service Strategy</b>	0	0	2	0	2
<b>Public Health</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>

22. Of the 32 complaints received, 97% were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt, 56% were responded to within 10 working days, and 1 was still ongoing at year-end. 11 of these complaints were categorised as justified.
23. Corporate complaints about CAS are diverse in nature and the issues raised within them are unique to the complainant; there are no particular identifiable themes for 2014/15.
24. Learning from those corporate complaints which were upheld has led to :
- Staff within the One Point service being reminded of good practice in relation to managing sensitive issues linked to safeguarding.
  - Staff who work directly with families who need financial information being reminded to signpost to the Council's Welfare Rights Service.

### Compliments and suggestions

25. During 2014/15, 262 compliments were received; an increase of 42% compared to 2013/14, which can in part be due to regular reminders to staff about the importance of reporting positive comments. These relate to the following services:
- Children's Services received 189 compliments
  - Education received 71 compliments
  - Planning and Service Strategy received 2 compliments
26. Most of the compliments relate to the helpfulness of staff and training/briefing courses being well received

## Statutory Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Overview 2014/15

27. A regulatory requirement in the management of statutory complaints, compliments and comments is the production of an annual report. The report for 2014/15 will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Corporate Issues Committee on 28 September 2015.

## Neighbourhood Services (NS)

### Overview

28. A summary of feedback since 2012/2013 is shown below:

NS	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14 Total	14/15 split by quarter				14/15 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	2,398	724	614	446	446	2,230	447	691	339	463	1,940
Compliments	402	126	134	125	121	506	129	161	152	153	595
Suggestions	215	62	57	41	88	248	52	49	45	92	238

### Complaints

#### Key Improvements

29. Analysis shows that when compared to 2013/14, the number of complaints received has reduced by 13%, mainly due to:
- Changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):** We received 80 complaints regarding HWRCs during 2014/15, which is a 65% decrease when compared with 2013/14. Complaints related to a number of issues including tighter control of the waste being put through the sites, waste permit issues, opening hours at sites and staff attitude. Complaints of this nature peaked in Q2 2013/14 following changes to the management of the service in June 2013. Close working with the contractor ensures that issues are addressed; this has included delivery of customer care training.
  - Telephone lines busy / customer cut off:** Complaints of this nature have reduced by 76% when compared with 2013/14. This is due to service improvements in relation to performance management and staff training and also close working with ICT to resolve issues in relation to the telephony system.
  - Charge for replacement bins:** During 2014/15, 57 complaints were received regarding the policy to charge for lost or stolen bins. This is a 42% reduction when compared to the same period last year. Also during 2014/15, 2,102 paid for bins were delivered to customers. Customers are more aware of this policy as it has now been in place for a number of years and while some customers remain dissatisfied with the charge, complaints are steadily reducing.
  - Libraries:** We received 9 complaints regarding various aspects of the library service, which is a 74% reduction when compared to the previous year. Complaints related to a variety of issues, such as limited or unavailable stock, staff assistance and

computer facilities at our sites. Complaints of this nature have continued to reduce since 2012.

- **Crew not returning bins to collection point:** 61 complaints were received from customers who were unhappy that refuse crews are not returning bins to their original collection point after emptying. This is a 27% decrease when compared with 2013/14. We have seen a reduction in complaints of this nature due to increased monitoring and discussions through team briefings.
- **Missed Bins:** 477 complaints were received regarding missed bins during 2014/15, which is a slight increase (3%) when compared with 2013/14. However, 28% of these missed bins related solely to the impact of strike action in July 2014. If we exclude complaints resulting from strike action there has been a reduction in the number of complaints of this nature. This improvement can be attributed to a number of factors including the 'bedding in' of the Alternate Weekly Collection service; the new 'Repeat Missed Container' Process; improved communications in relation to bank holiday collection dates and the implementation of the incab 'Bartec' system which provides better operational information capture.

## Challenges

- **Garden waste scheme:** During 2014/15 we received 102 complaints from customers unhappy with the changes to the garden waste service. These complaints relate to both the introduction of a charge for the service and also following implementation we have received a number of complaints regarding various operational aspects of the scheme including bins not being delivered and emptied, and delays or non-receipt of documentation. Between 17 March 2015 and 27 April 2015, we received 99 complaints regarding this service. 67% of these complaints were from customers whose garden waste bins had not been emptied.

So far, over 58,000 customers have signed up to the scheme. The service is implementing a number of improvements actions to address the issues which have been raised by customers, including improved communications and system enhancements.

- **Contaminated waste:** Customers submitted 51 complaints regarding various aspects of the contamination process. This is a 67% increase when compared with 2013/14. Complaints from customers related to their bin being incorrectly logged as contaminated and customers who did not consider themselves to be responsible for the incorrect items in their bin. Although previous work has been carried out to educate residents on recyclable materials, this campaign and enforcement activity has been necessary to reduce the amounts of contamination within the recycling collection.
- **Changes to Street Lighting:** Following the introduction of new LED street lighting in June 2014, 23 complaints were received during the latter half of 2014/15. Customers felt that residential areas were now poorly lit and expressed concerns for safety. We have now completed the retrofit of over 20,000 LED street lights to date as part of the Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project, covering over 85,000 households.

A number of key actions have been identified and implemented as a result of learning from these complaints including improved communication regarding the scheme;



desktop reviews and on-site lighting levels checks to ensure lighting levels were within the design criteria. All reviews and checks carried out confirmed that the lighting was operating to the British Standard for street lighting. We are continuing to monitor complaints of this nature.

### Compliments and Suggestions

30. 595 compliments were received during 2014/15. The majority of compliments related to the helpfulness of staff and recognition of their support by resolving customer enquiries in a professional and timely manner.
31. 238 suggestions were received; a number of these related to locks or catches being fitted to waste bins to prevent waste spillage in high winds. There were also suggestions received regarding more frequent street cleaning, more proactive campaigning to prevent dog fouling and empty bins being laid down following collection to prevent loss or damage in windy weather.
32. Previous suggestions which have been actioned include all refuse and recycling crews carrying a brush and shovel on the vehicle, to clear up items dropped during collection and the installation of additional dog poo bins in the Chester-Le-Street area

## Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

### Overview

33. A summary of feedback since 2012/2013 is shown below.

Service Grouping RED	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14 Total	14/15 split by quarter				14/15 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	357	92	128	97	95	412	67	79	67	55	268
Compliments	125	34	27	85	39	185	15	27	54	44	140
Suggestions	33	11	6	13	10	40	8	5	8	5	26

### Complaints

#### Key Improvements

34. Analysis shows that when compared to 2013/14, complaints have reduced by 35%; this reduction is apparent across a number of services within RED as detailed below:
  - **Durham City Homes:** 87 complaints were received, mainly regarding the handling of repairs and maintenance issues. This is a significant decrease (42%) from the previous year when 149 complaints were received.
  - **Planning Development:** 79 complaints received which were mainly regarding planning decisions; a decrease of 21% compared to the previous year when 100 complaints were received. There are no identifiable trends and the nature of this service can involve decision making in relation to sensitive and contentious

applications, although in 2014/15, we received 207 fewer applications in total compared to 2013/14.

During 2014/15 the government's Planning Portal was launched and is advertised on the Council's website. The portal gives residents greater and improved access to information and services relating to planning applications, building regulations, appeals, legislation and policy. This, in turn, affords customers the opportunity to research their issues in great detail and easily accessible way.

- **Strategic Traffic:** 41 complaints were received in the year, which covered a range of different issues such as parking. This is a decrease of 44% from the previous year when 73 complaints were received. The reduction can be largely attributed to a number of factors including the transfer of the road works team to Neighbourhoods. 14% of the complaints received in 2013/14 were in relation to this service. Also, in 2013/14, we received a number of complaints regarding traffic management as a result of the Lumiere event held in Durham City.

## Compliments and Suggestions

35. The service grouping received 140 compliments in 2014/15, 60 of which were for Planning Development and 47 for Care Connect. These are generally thanks to staff for the service they have provided.

## Resources (RES)

### Overview

36. A summary of feedback since 2012/2013 is shown below:

RES	Number Received										
	12/13 Total	13/14 split by quarter				13/14 Total	14/15 split by quarter				14/15 Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Complaints	809	180	141	139	132	592	96	118	78	108	400
Compliments	69	14	10	17	38	79	32	40	33	34	139
Suggestions	24	3	5	3	8	19	6	1	5	8	20

### Complaints

37. In line with previous trends, during 2014/15, 358 complaints related to Financial Services (specifically the Revenues and Benefits Service), 1 for Corporate Finance, 5 for ICT, 4 for Human Resources and 32 for Legal & Democratic Services. While the majority of complaints related to Revenues and Benefits, across 2014/15 there was a significant reduction in complaint activity in this service.
38. The proportion of complaints responded to within the 10 day standard was 86% across 2014/15 which was a significant improvement when compared to the previous year, when 69% of responses met the standard. The proportion responded to within the 10 day standard during quarter 4 reached 88%.

## **Key Improvements**

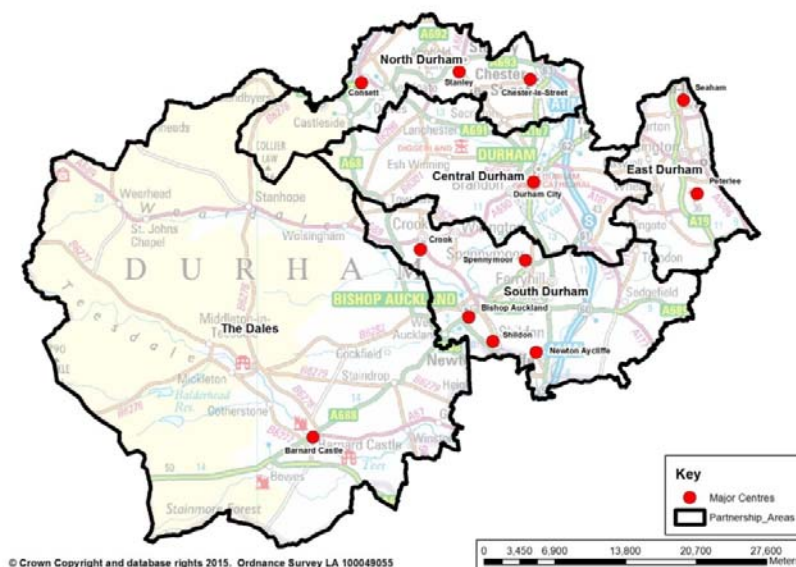
39. As a result of ongoing improvements to practices & procedures to ensure the maximum level of service is being achieved as well as working with its software suppliers to ensure that the service functions as efficiently as possible the Revenues and Benefits Service has seen a significant reduction in the number of complaints received.
40. The Assessment Team, responsible for the administration of Housing Benefit and the Council's Council Tax Reduction scheme, received 142 complaints. This is a 40% reduction when compared with last year. Of these complaints, 22% were submitted by landlords or agents regarding issues with payments, such as payments being made directly to tenants instead of themselves, or the frequency of payments. Complaints from claimants covered a range of issues, such as suspension of claims, disputes over calculations of benefit entitlement and delays receiving payments.
41. The Awards and Collection teams received 205 complaints during 2014/15, which is a 32% decrease when compared with the previous year. Recovery action has escalated in the past year with a stricter schedule of collection and in-year action has reached the most serious of the recovery stages in quarter 4. During 2014/15, over 12,000 cases have been issued to our enforcement/debt collection agents. This is the most contentious of recovery routes and can be attributed to the increase in the number of complaints over the course of the year. There have also been changes to the Tribunal, Courts and Enforcement Act with regard to enforcement action (bailiffs) and it was speculated that this may result in more complaints.
42. The service has regular meetings with key stakeholders including landlords to improve information flows, communication and working relationships. Likewise regular liaison meetings are held with Customer Services to ensure that processes and procedures are continually reviewed. As well as an ongoing review of recovery processes, bailiff action is monitored and reviewed at regular meetings with the three appointed bailiff companies to enable them to develop effective processes and procedures.

## **Compliments and Suggestions**

43. Over the year, 139 compliments were received from satisfied customers. The majority of the compliments related to the conduct of wedding ceremonies; others highlighted excellent service provided by the Revenues and Benefits Service and Human Resources Organisational Development Officers.
44. Over the same period 20 suggestions from customers / residents were considered. In the majority of cases, the suggestions made related to council practice that is covered by prescriptive legislation, and it was not therefore possible to adopt the suggestion. However, all feedback is essential to the ongoing development and delivery of our services.

## **Analysis of data across County geographies**

45. In order to provide an analysis by area of complaints, 8,551 complaints received between April 2012 and March 2015 were geocoded (ie pinpointed to a specific location within the county) and included in this geographic analysis, which considers complaints by Strategic Partnership Areas as shown overleaf:



46. Even using larger geographical units to aggregate data can still present comparative problems because some services are not universally delivered throughout the county. For example, Durham City Homes (DCH) complaints have been managed by the Council's process, whereas other Housing Providers have been responsible for their own and remained outside of this report. Over the last three years there have been 378 complaints relating to DCH, 362 of which were made from addresses in Central Durham.
47. The table below shows relative complainant rates, excluding DCH complaints, and also as a rate per 1,000 households at Strategic Partnership Area over the last three financial years. Complainants are used in preference to complaints to reduce the influence of a small number of people making many complaints in a specific area.

**Complainant rate per 1,000 households (excluding DCH complaints)<sup>1</sup>**

	Number of Complainants (excluding DCH)			Rate per 1,000 Households		
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	Rate 2012-13	Rate 2013-14	Rate 2014-15
<b>Central Durham</b>	579	569	447	13.3	13	10.2
<b>East Durham</b>	466	413	378	11.3	10	9.1
<b>North Durham</b>	743	606	547	12.5	10.2	9.2
<b>South Durham</b>	586	530	557	9.1	8.2	8.6
<b>The Dales</b>	124	110	104	8.4	7.4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2498</b>	<b>2228</b>	<b>2033</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9.1</b>

<sup>1</sup> Using a complainant rate enables some indicative statistical significance testing to be undertaken. This was determined by the observation of non-overlapping confidence intervals, which were themselves derived using Byar's method. This is explained in detail in the APHO Technical Briefing on Commonly Used Public Health Statistics and their Confidence Intervals <http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=48457>.

48. Although this information does not present the complete picture, it does provide some indication of the relative prevalence of numbers of local complainants. It is acknowledged that the capability of the existing CRM is limited in terms of producing informative customer insight reports. Procurement of a new CRM system will enable the Council to not only support the delivery of complaints responses but also to build a better suite of Business Intelligence reporting which will enable improved analysis of complaints to a much more local level.

### **Complaints by Service**

49. Part of the limitations of complainant analysis is that it is very resource intensive to determine the specific issue of complaint. Complaints can often be complex covering a number of aspects that can defy simple categorisation. However, some level of inference can be made by comparing the number of complaints allocated to each service.
50. Analysis of complaints by service and area reveals that there are few large differences in the breakdown of complaints between areas. The most notable was that there were proportionally a slightly higher level of complaints from North Durham dealt with by Neighbourhood Services (NS). Over three quarters of complaints in Central Durham (78%) and North Durham (76%) were dealt with by NS compared to 72%% of all complaints overall.
51. Furthermore, for some differences there tends to be an underlying reason. For example, both East Durham and South Durham have relatively high levels of Resources related complaints. (both 24% of complaints vs 19% overall). This is likely to be because Resources contains the Benefits team and so these higher levels are likely to be the result of East and South Durham both having higher levels of benefits take up generally compared to other areas in County Durham. The Dales had a relatively high proportion of their complaints dealt with by Regeneration and Economic Development at 12%% compared to 7% overall.

### **Conclusions**

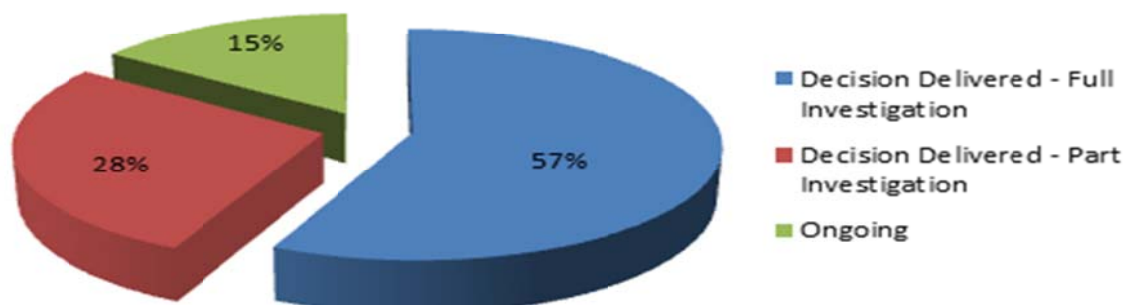
52. While initial analysis indicates that complaints are higher in Central Durham random variation is also present in these data, therefore trends and comparisons should be treated with caution. Especially as a significant proportion of complaints are excluded because they cannot be geocoded. Overall the number of complaints is declining up to 2014-15 and falls are largest in areas with relatively high rates.
53. A further factor to this locality analysis is that the socio-economic make-up of an area's population may influence the likelihood that residents will engage with the council. Previous research by the Local Government Ombudsman has highlighted that complaints can vary with so-called 'Blue Collar Communities'<sup>2</sup> being least likely to complain.

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<sup>2</sup> A term describing ONS Output Area Classification system. A socio-demographic segmentation tool used to analyse socio-economic diversity between communities. Analysis from Customer Demographic Research conducted by the Local Government Ombudsman, summarised here <http://www.lgo.org.uk/downloads/About%20us/Commission%202011/1522-Commission-minutes-22-November-2011.pdf>

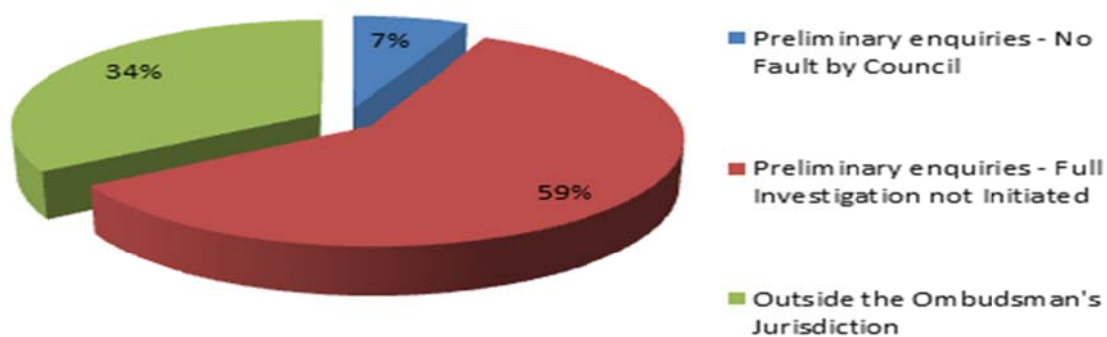
## Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Activity

54. During 2014/15 the LGO made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 130 matters. A summary of the activity across this period is shown in the graph below:



### Decisions Delivered – Part Investigation

55. During the year the LGO 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:



56. Five cases relating to children's services were closed following preliminary enquiries; all were closed on the basis that no maladministration or fault had been found.
57. Following preliminary enquiries, the ombudsman decided that a full investigation should not be initiated in 44 cases, which were then subsequently closed:
- 20 Environmental services issues
  - 6 Planning issues
  - 4 Benefits issues
  - 4 Highways issues
  - 4 Corporate issues
  - 3 Children's services issues

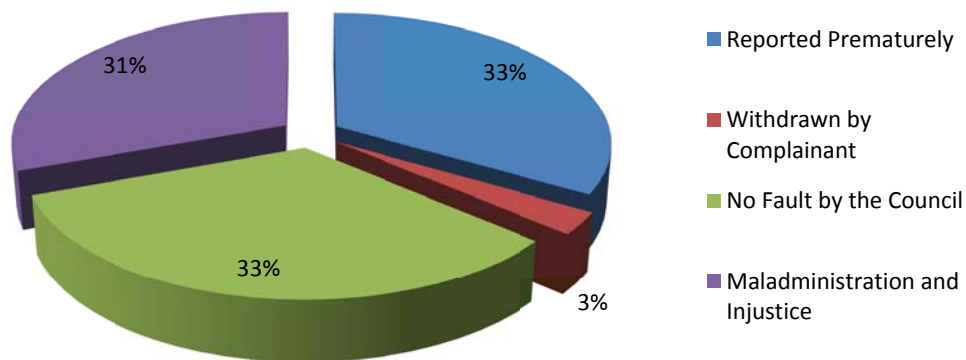
- 2 Adult care issues
- 1 Housing issue

58. 25 cases were determined to be outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman. These cases related to the following matters:

- 6 Environmental services issues
- 5 Corporate issues
- 5 Benefits issues
- 4 Children’s services issues
- 2 Housing issues
- 1 Planning issue
- 1 Adult care issue
- 1 Highways issue

**Decisions Delivered – Full Investigation**

59. The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 36 matters which had been subject to investigations during 2014/15. A summary out the outcomes is shown in the graph overleaf:



60. Twelve investigations were discounted as they were reported prematurely and were referred back to the Council to be dealt with under the complaints procedure:

- 3 Corporate issues
- 3 Education issues
- 2 Benefits issues
- 2 Environmental issues
- 1 Planning
- 1 Adult care issues

61. In one case that related to a housing issue, the complainant withdrew their complaint.

62. In 12 of these cases the Ombudsman found no fault or maladministration on the part of the Council. These cases related to a number of service areas including; Planning, Adult Care, Highways, Corporate Services and Environmental Services.

63. Eleven of the cases investigated by the Ombudsman found both maladministration and injustice to the complainant. All investigations were closed as the Council agreed to various actions to remedy the issues raised in the complaints; five of these cases included a financial settlement. These cases related to the following areas:

- 3 Children's services issues
- 2 Benefits issues
- 1 Planning issue
- 1 School admission issue
- 1 Adult care issue
- 1 Highways issue
- 1 Corporate issue
- 1 Environmental services issue

### **Ongoing Enquiries**

64. We are still waiting for a decision for 19 cases subject to LGO enquiries as follows:
- 9 Planning issues
  - 5 Adult care issues
  - 2 Environmental health issues
  - 1 Benefit issue
  - 1 Children's services issue
  - 1 Corporate services issue
65. One case relating to planning issues is on hold pending legal proceedings.

### **Review of the Complaints Policy and Process**

66. Following the refresh of the Council's Customer First Strategy in 2014, a review of the current Corporate Complaints Policy and Process was instigated to address the commitments made to use customer feedback to inform learning.
67. The new policy and process, approved at June's Cabinet meeting, sets out to improve:

- **Ownership of stage 1 complaints.** The involvement of the Corporate Complaints Team at this stage was resulting in some duplication of effort and lack of relationship between the complainant and the service area. Following consultation with service users who had previously complained to the council the elements of service delivery they wished to :
  - Be able to speak to someone who understands the complaint and can resolve it;
  - Be able to speak to someone from the relevant service who has the authority to make the required changes to ensure that mistakes do not reoccur;

The revised process will mean service areas taking full account of this feedback.

- **Training and Guidance for staff on handling complaints.** A training programme and detailed guidance will be provided to all staff dealing with customer feedback
- **Handling of vexatious and persistent complainants.** The Policy sets out the Council's approach moving forward

### **Recommendation**

68. To note the contents of the report

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