

# Customer Feedback Report: Complaints, compliments and suggestions Quarter 1, 2015/16



*Altogether better*

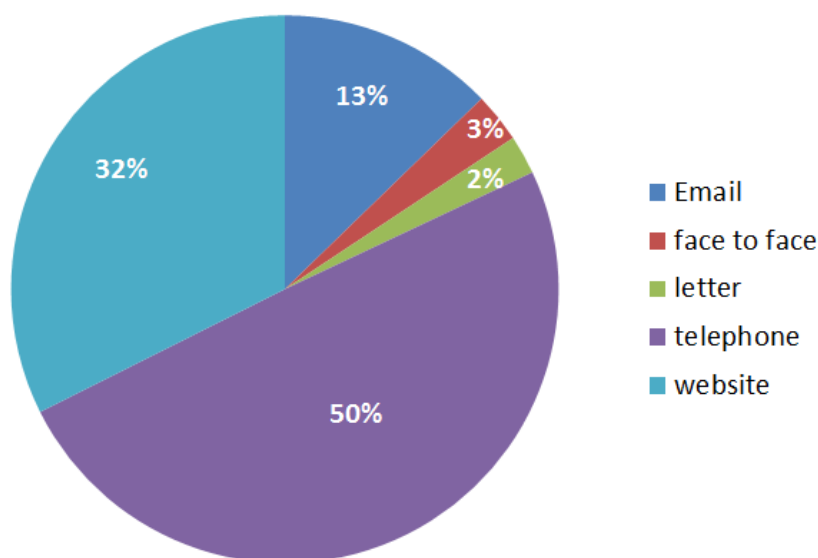


## Introduction

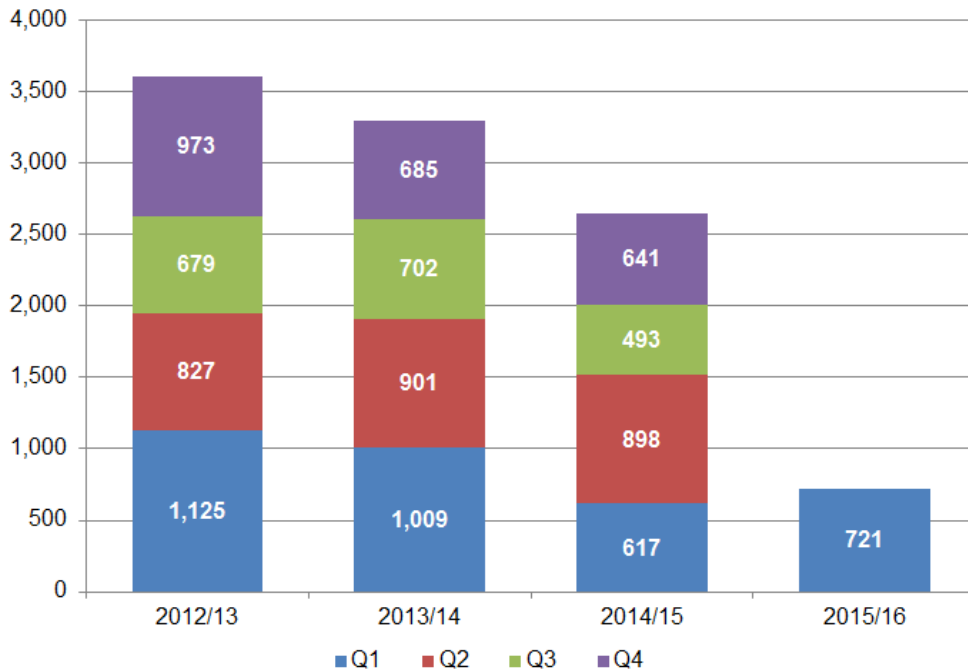
1. This report provides information and learning in relation to Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions for all Council Services during Q1, 2015/16. Complaints being:
  - Statutory - a complaint arising from the duties placed on a local social services authority to provide assessments and care services under the provisions of relevant adult and children's social care legislation.
  - Corporate - all other complaints

## Section 1: Overview of Quarter 1, 2015/16

2. Between 1 April and 30 June 2015, Durham County Council (DCC) received 721 stage 1 corporate complaints, 256 compliments and 91 suggestions. 57 complaints were escalated to stage 2 and complaints handling performance showed:
  - 90% of stage 1 and 93% of stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days;
  - 85% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days;
  - 46% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within 20 working days.
3. During the quarter, there were 45 complaints and 100 compliments received in relation to adult and children's social care statutory services. Statutory complaints handling performance showed:
  - 100% of stage 1 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt
  - 56% of the 45 statutory complaints about adults and children's social care services were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 20 working days. Of the remaining 20 stage 1 complaints, 6 were resolved after 20 working days and 14 were ongoing at the quarter end.
4. Customers are using a variety of access channels to complain, with the telephone remaining the preferred channel:

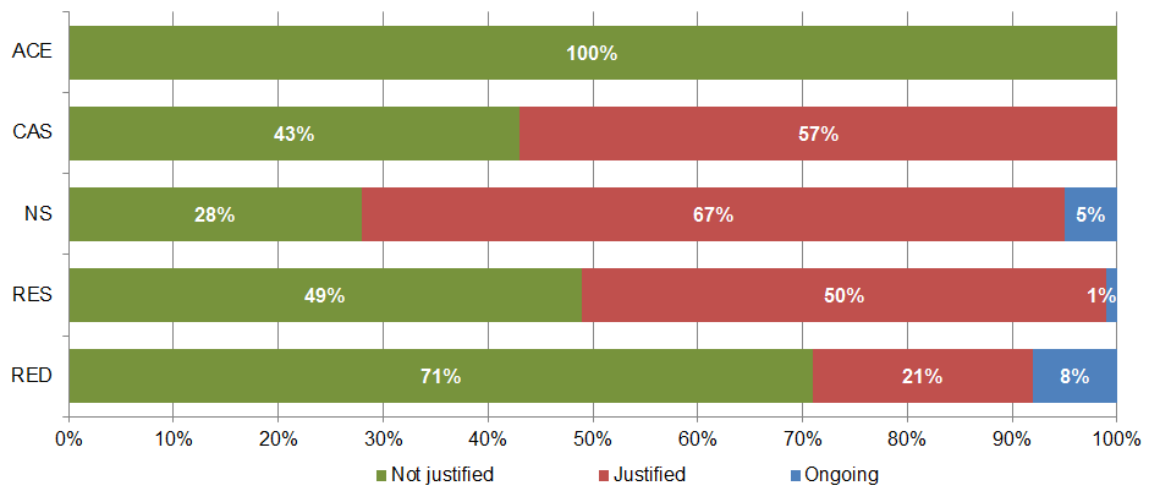


5. The graph overleaf shows the number of complaints received across all service groupings since 2012/13. There has been a 17% increase in complaints received this quarter when compared with the same quarter last year. Details of the improvement areas for each service grouping are outlined in section two of the report.



### Investigation of complaints: Outcomes

6. Of the stage 1 complaints processed during Q1, 35% were not classed as justified. This indicates that, although service users were dissatisfied, the service had acted properly and followed the correct procedures. The Service Grouping breakdown of this categorisation is shown below:



## Section 2: Detailed report for each service grouping for quarter 1, 2015/16

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

#### Overview

7. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

ACE	13/14	Number Received									
		14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	9	1	2	2	4	9	2	-	-	-	2
Compliments	49	8	5	31	13	57	16	-	-	-	16
Suggestions	24	1	2	3	3	9	1	-	-	-	1

#### Complaints

8. One complaint related to concerns over the allocation of £500k to the Crook Community Partnership/Slam bid and the extension granted to the project. A response was sent to the customer addressing the themes raised. The other complaint related to the non-delivery of Durham County News, caused by Royal Mail. Both complaints have now been resolved.

#### Compliments and Suggestions

9. 11 of the 16 compliments were in relation to the County Records Office, thanking staff for their help with various family and local history queries, including help and assistance given to obtain a grandfather's war medals. The other compliments thanked the AAPs for their help and support and for grants to help community projects.
10. The suggestion related to advertising and promoting DCC through motorsport sponsorship. A reply was sent advising that due to the current financial climate, DCC were unable to help with this type of sponsorship.

### Children and Adults Services (CAS)

#### Corporate Complaints Overview

11. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

CAS	13/14	Number Received									
		14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	54	6	8	7	11	32	7	-	-	-	7
Compliments	184	55	51	45	111	262	42	-	-	-	42
Suggestions	5	0	4	1	0	5	1	-	-	-	1

#### Complaints

12. Of the 7 complaints received, all were acknowledged within 2 working days and 6 were responded to within the target timescale of 10 working days. The remaining complaint was resolved outside of timescales due to lack of engagement with the service by the complainant.

13. Three complaints were not upheld and four upheld. The upheld complaints were in relation to staff attitude, poor communication, speed of service, confidentiality and a change in services. As a result of the upheld complaints, the following actions have been taken:
- Officers in the First Contact and Intervention services were reminded of the need to ensure that individuals submitting a referral remain anonymous when this has been requested
  - A telephone caller was kept on hold for an excessive period, when checked it was identified that there were problems with the telephone system and this was rectified.

### Compliments and suggestions

14. 42 compliments were received, 13 fewer than the corresponding period in 2014. 34 related to Children's Services (One Point – 13, Youth Offending service – 21) and 8 related to Education (School Places and Admissions service – 7, School and Governor Support service – 1).

### Children and Adult Services statutory complaints, compliments and comments

15. The number of statutory complaints, compliments and comments increased from 141 in Q4, 14/15 to 145 in Q1, 15/16. However, when comparing with the corresponding period last year there has been a 29.6% decrease.

Statutory	Number Received										% change*
	14/15					15/16					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	
Complaints	58	41	33	45	177	45	-	-	-	45	-22.4%
Compliments	148	130	135	96	509	100	-	-	-	100	-32.4%
Comments	0	2	0	0	2	0	-	-	-	0	no change
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>688</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>-29.6%</b>

\*Q1 figure 2015/16 compared with Q1 figure 2014/15

### Children's Services statutory complaints, compliments and comments

Comparison of Children's Services complaints received by quarter						
Complaint type	Q1 14/15	Q2 14/15	Q3 14/15	Q4 14/15	Q1 15/16	DoT from previous quarter
Stage 1	29	21	20	30	29	↓
Stage 2	1	0	2	2	0	↓

16. Of the 29 stage 1 complaints received, all were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt. 15 (51.7%) were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 20 working days, 6 were resolved after 20 working days and 8 were ongoing at the quarter end (4 of which are outside timeframe). No complaints were taken to stage 2 during the quarter.

### Declined complaints

17. Six complaints were declined in the quarter. Three on the grounds that the issues of complaint had already been considered as part of court proceedings, one due to the complainant not having Parental Responsibility so the complaint matter could not be considered, one due to there being concurrent criminal proceedings against the complainant and one related to matters that occurred outside of the 1 year timescale (1999) and had been dealt with at that time

## Category of complaints

18. *Lack of service – Communications/Information* was the category with the highest number of complaints (11). *Professional Conduct of Staff* received 10 complaints, followed by *Disputed Decision* in 5 complaints. It is possible for a complaint to fall within more than one category.

## Outcome of complaints

19. Of the 21 complaints completed in Q1, 7 were not upheld, 11 were partially upheld and 3 were upheld. The categories of the 3 upheld complaints were *Confidentiality*, *Lack of Service – Communications/Information*, and *Provision of Service – Assessment*.

## Action as a result of statutory complaints

20. The following are examples of actions taken as a result of concluded statutory complaints:
- The Social Resource Centre (which provides drivers to taken children to and from contact sessions) was informed of a complaint about their service and alternative transport arrangements were put in place.
  - The process between First Contact and social work teams has been reviewed and updated to ensure families are contacted more promptly after a referral has been received.
  - Monitoring arrangements have been introduced to ensure improved performance and compliance with regard to Single Assessment timescales.

## Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

21. During the quarter, the LGO contacted the service in relation to the following 2 cases within children's social care services:
- An enquiry was received regarding a case where the Council is responsible for facilitating indirect contact between parents and their adopted children.
  - A draft decision was received in which the LGO recommended that the Council reviews the actions taken in this complaint and provide a statement to the complainants with regard to the management of a child protection investigation. The Local Authority has provided a draft statement and awaits the LGO's final decision.

## Compliments

22. There were 74 compliments received in Q1, an increase of 7 compared to the previous quarter.

## Adults Services statutory complaints, compliments and comments

Comparison of complaints received by quarter						
Service Area	Q1 14/15	Q2 14/15	Q3 14/15	Q4 14/15	Q1 15/16	DoT from previous quarter
Adult Care	28	20	13	15	16	↑

23. Of the 16 complaints received, all were acknowledged within 2 working days. 10 complaints were completed within the quarter, all within the target timescales. The remaining 6 cases were ongoing and within timescales at the quarter end.
24. Older People/Physical Disability & Sensory Support service received 8 complaints. Commissioning (3). County Durham Care and Support (2) and Learning Disabilities/Mental

Health/Substance Misuse service (2). The Emergency Duty Team received 1 complaint in relation to an adult case.

### Declined complaints

No complaints were declined in the quarter.

### Category of complaints

25. 4 complaints recorded in the category of *Lack of Service – Communication/ Information*, 3 complaints recorded in the category of *Professional Conduct of Staff* and *Lack of Service* and a further 3 in *Restricted Choices of Current Services* category. It is possible for a complaint to contain more than one category.

### Outcome of complaints

26. Of the 10 complaints completed in the quarter, 8 were not upheld, 1 was partially upheld and 1 was upheld. The one upheld complaint was recorded in the categories of *Lack of Service – Communications/ Information* and *Quality of Service – Missed Domiciliary Care Calls*.

### Action as a result of statutory complaints

27. As a result of the one complaint which was upheld during the quarter an alternative domiciliary care provider was quickly contacted to take over from the provided which had cancelled their provision at late notice.

### Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

28. During the quarter, the LGO made one enquiry in relation to an adult social care case. The LGO is currently still considering the information which the Council has provided. The complaint to the LGO was that a service user's complaints to the Local Authority had not been looked into or responded to and notes were not kept about incidents which the service user had reported.

### Compliments

29. 26 compliments were received in Q1, 3 fewer when compared to the previous quarter.

## Neighbourhood Services (NS)

### Overview

30. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

NS	Number Received										
	13/14	14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	2,230	447	691	339	463	1,940	563	-	-	-	563
Compliments	506	129	161	152	153	595	161	-	-	-	161
Suggestions	248	52	49	45	92	238	77	-	-	-	77

## Complaints

### Key Challenges

- Changes to the garden waste service: 201 complaints (36% of total received) related to various aspects of the scheme including; the introduction of a charge for the service, bins not being collected and delays or non-receipt of documentation or bins. In some instances, delays have led to customers not receiving the full number of prescribed collections. The most frequent complaint (72%) related to non-collection of bins. In some cases, customers' bins were missed on multiple occasions. A number of improvements are being implemented to address the issues, including improved communications and system enhancements.
- Crew not returning bins to original collection point after emptying: 18 complaints were received, which is a 44% increase when compared with 14/15. Complaints of this nature cover all refuse and recycling collection services, including the garden waste service.
- Attitude of refuse and recycling crews: Complaints have increased by 33% when looking at the same period last year and includes complaints from customers who have approached the crew regarding missed collections, disagreements between customers and crew over access issues and crew using inappropriate language

### Key Improvements

- Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs): 16 complaints (a 48% decrease when compared with Q1, 14/15) were received regarding a number of issues including tighter control of the waste being put through the sites, waste permit issues and staff attitude.
- Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project: Almost 25,000 LED street lights, covering approximately 100,000 households, have now been retrofitted, and although customers still express concern over lighting in residential areas, complaints of this nature are declining and only 4 complaints were received during Q1, 15/16. Key actions implemented as a result of these complaints include 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.
- Contaminated waste: Customers submitted 9 complaints regarding various aspects of the contamination process, a 31% reduction when compared with Q1, 14/15. Complaints include customers who did not consider they were responsible for the incorrect items in their bin and customers who were not aware that the items they had placed in their bin would cause contamination. Campaigning and enforcement activity has been carried out to educate residents on recyclable materials and reduce the amounts of contamination.
- Charge for a replacement bin: 19 complaints were received from residents objecting to the £20 charge to replace lost or stolen bins. As customers become more aware of the policy to charge for this service, complaints of this kind continue to reduce.
- Missed Recycling and Household Waste Bins: 60 complaints were received regarding missed bins during Q1, 15/16, a 37% decrease when compared with the same period in 14/15. 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.



## Compliments and Suggestions

31. 161 compliments were received during Q1, 15/16, the majority of which related to the helpfulness of staff and recognition of their support by resolving customer enquiries in a professional and timely manner. In each instance, feedback is passed to the relevant team or member of staff by their line manager.
32. 77 suggestions were received; a number of these related to double yellow lines being applied to the Pity Me area to prevent cars parking inappropriately and hindering the flow of traffic. Suggestions also suggested extending the garden waste collection scheme into November, increasing the volume of the customer services telephone menu and improving access to library services.

## Regeneration and Economic Development (RED)

### Overview

33. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

RED	Number Received										
	13/14	14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	412	67	78	67	55	267	48	-	-	-	48
Compliments	185	15	27	54	44	140	23	-	-	-	23
Suggestions	40	8	5	8	5	26	10	-	-	-	10

### Complaints

#### Key Improvements

34. 48 complaints were received, a decrease of 28% on the same period in the previous year and a 13% decrease on the previous quarter.
- 67% of stage 1 complaints were responded to in 10 working days;
  - 2 complaints are ongoing and in target time
  - 2 complaints were escalated to stage 2
35. The proportion of complaints found to be justified or part justified is 22% compared to 50% at Q4, 14/15. It is a significant improvement than the average 43% for 14/15.
36. Detailed analysis of the complaints received during shows that two areas of the service grouping account for 59% of complaints received.
- Planning Development: (11 complaints) mainly in connection to planning decisions and building control. This is a significant decrease (60%) on the same period last year. One complaint was escalated to stage 2
  - Strategic Traffic: (18 complaints) majority related to residential parking matters. This is an increase from same period last year (80%) and Q4, 14/15 (100%).

### Compliments and Suggestions

37. The service grouping received 23 compliments. These are generally thanks to staff for service they have provided.
38. Eight suggestions were received covering a wide range of topics and service areas, including parking and the move of 'The Journey' sculpture.

## Resources (RES)

### Overview

39. A summary of customer feedback since 2013/14 is shown below:

RES	Number Received										
	13/14	14/15					15/16				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints	592	96	118	78	108	400	101	-	-	-	101
Compliments	79	32	40	33	34	139	51	-	-	-	51
Suggestions	19	6	1	5	8	20	2	-	-	-	2

### Complaints

40. During Q1, 15/16, 101 complaints were received; this represents a 6% decrease since Q4 14/15, but a 5% increase compared to the equivalent quarter in 14/15. The majority of complaints related to the Revenues & Benefits Service.
41. The proportion of complaints responded to within the 10 days corporate target slightly deteriorated from 88% in Q4 to 86% in Q1 15/16.
42. Of the 101 complaints received, 49.5% were either justified or part justified (49% in Q4), 48.5% were not justified (40% in Q4) and 2% were unresolved at the point of reporting (11% in Q4).

### Key Improvements

43. Detailed analysis of customer feedback received during Q1 reveals that 97% of the complaints are attributable to the following:
44. Revenues and Benefits Service: There were a total of 85 complaints received in Q1, 15/16 a 12% decrease on the previous quarter and a 3% reduction in the number of complaints received in Q1, 14/15 when 88 complaints were received.
45. The Assessment Team is responsible for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction claims. The majority of complaints relate to the customers' perception of service failure, the way in which claims were handled, or the outcome of the application. 'Service failure' is a very broad generic descriptor and further detailed analysis failed to identify any specific trends or deficiencies in the claims administration process. In all cases, the claims were reviewed to ensure that the correct law, process and procedure have been applied and that in areas where discretion had been applied, that a sound decision making rationale was adopted.
46. The Awards Team received a total of 17 complaints; a reduction of 37% on the previous quarter. The majority of these complaints concerned discounts or exemptions. In each of these instances council policy, process and procedure was correctly applied.
47. The Collections Team received a total of 17 complaints; this represents a 39% reduction against the previous quarter. The majority of these complaints related to recovery action i.e. summons, final notices and enforcement action. In all cases, consideration is given to the Council's Debt Management Strategy and customers are sign-posted to free support agencies as appropriate.
48. Legal & Democratic Services: complaints this quarter have more than doubled since Q4, 14/15.
49. However, of the 13 complaints lodged, 9 were as a direct result of the Parliamentary Election. Those complaints covered a range of issues such as lack of disabled access at a polling station,

people discovering they were not eligible to vote and people having not received postal votes.

50. Although the disabled access complaint was officially logged following a call from a member of the public on Polling Day, the local County Councillor had already contacted the Elections Team earlier in the day to highlight the issue. The Elections Team worked immediately with the Polling Station Staff to try to overcome the problem and the Elections Manager will work with the venue to ensure that similar issues do not occur in future years.
51. Another complaint, although logged following an email from a member of the public, had actually already been sent to the local MP, who in turn raised the complaint with the Corporate Director, Resources. The complaint was from a mother whose daughter was studying abroad and it was alleged that the Council had neglected to make the necessary proxy voting arrangements. A formal response was sent from the Corporate Director to the MP.
52. It is worth noting that of all the arrangements on polling day, the number of electors casting votes, the number of electors eligible to vote, the number of polling venues, postal voters, candidates etc., it is encouraging that the Parliamentary Election generated only 9 complaints

### **Compliments and Suggestions**

53. There were 51 compliments received by the Resources service grouping in Q1, 15/16.
54. The Revenues and Benefits service received 7 compliments for the excellent service provided by individual members of staff. There were also 2 suggestions:
  - Landlord CT liability exemption for 1 month from when a tenant moves out, to allow time for the landlord to find another tenant
  - Details of CAPs to be provided on letters requesting further evidence. Letter refers to accessing a CAP but no further details.
55. The Revenues and Benefit Service is governed by prescriptive legislation and therefore it is not always possible to adopt customers' suggestions particularly regarding Council Tax. Suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of the service, and any suggestions regarding internal processes and procedures are considered as part of the ongoing reviews
56. 21 compliments related to employees within Advice and Guidance in Human Resources & Organisational Development; and 10 compliments within HR Operations and Data. Legal & Democratic Services continue to receive compliments (11) arising from conducting wedding ceremonies and 1 compliment was for assistance provided by a member of the Electoral Services team on Polling Day. ICT Services received 1 compliment this quarter

## **Section 3: Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Activity**

57. During Q1 the LGO made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 33 matters. Decisions were delivered on 22 investigations and another 18 are ongoing.

### **Decisions Delivered – Part Investigation**

58. During the quarter the LGO notified the Council of the outcome in relation to 8 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. The investigations related to Planning, garden waste, insurance, benefits and adult care services. 4 were found to be outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and 4 were no fault by the council.

## **Decisions Delivered – Full Investigation**

59. The Ombudsman delivered decisions on 14 matters which had been subject to investigations.
60. In 6 of these cases the Ombudsman found no fault on the part of the Council. These cases related to a number of service areas including: Environmental Services, Planning, Adult services. One case was outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.
61. In 5 of the cases investigated by the Ombudsman found both maladministration and injustice to the complainant and 1 with maladministration but no injustice. All investigations were closed as the Council agreed to various actions to remedy the issues raised in the complaints; four of these cases included a financial settlement.

## **Ongoing Enquiries**

62. We are still waiting for a decision for 18 cases subject to LGO enquiries.

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

63. Following adoption of the new Complaints Process, work has been undertaken to implement the new way of working across the Council. All services, excluding Neighbourhood Services, have moved over to the new process from 1 July 2015. NS will be in place by October 2015.
64. As part of the change, the reporting process is also being reviewed to ensure that information on Customer Feedback is useful and aligns with continuous improvement.

## **Recommendation**

65. To note the contents of the report

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