

Putting our Customers first

Customer Feedback Report

Complaints, compliments and suggestions

Quarter 2
2016/17

Altogether better



Background information

1. Customer feedback is a valuable tool. It not only helps us understand what is important to service users and what we are doing well, it can also indicate widespread issues and offer us the opportunity to put things right and improve our services.
2. Covering a range of customer feedback, this report highlights the main themes throughout quarter 2 (1 July to 30 September 2016), summarises our performance in dealing with complaints, identifies any lessons learned and states what remedial action we have taken, or plan to take, to put things right and ensure similar mistakes are avoided in the future. As feedback can also highlight opportunities for operational improvement even when the service is delivered properly, the report also includes a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes, and an overview of comments relating to our decision making.

Complaints

3. Within this document, there are 2 types of complaint. Statutory complaints which arise from our duties as a local social services authority and corporate complaints which cover all other complaints. As each complaint type is subject to its own processes and policy, they are reported separately.
4. The responsible service area deals wholly with corporate complaints in the first instance, completing the initial service review and, as far as possible, contacting customers by telephone to ensure a more personal approach.
5. Should the customer remain dissatisfied with the service response to a corporate complaint, the complaint can be forwarded to the Customer Feedback Team, to make an assessment on the escalation of that complaint. If the team feels there is no value in progressing with an independent investigation, the service user is advised to contact the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) should they wish to pursue their complaint.
6. Independent investigation of statutory complaints is arranged by the statutory Complaints Team.

Summary: Quarter 2

7. We completed initial service reviews into 450 corporate complaints; 88% of which were reported by either telephone (45%) or via our website (43%). The average time to close these complaints was just over 6 working days and 56% were upheld (partially or fully).

8. We received 50 statutory complaints, of which 94% were acknowledged within 2 working days. 37 complaints were resolved within the quarter; 36 within timescale (97%). Of the 37 complaints, 35% were upheld (partially or fully). No complaints progressed to independent investigation.
9. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) delivered decisions into 14 matters. Of these, 8 were upheld.
10. In addition to complaints, we also received 201 compliments, 46 suggestions and 84 comments in relation to our decision making.

Statutory Complaints – Children’s Services

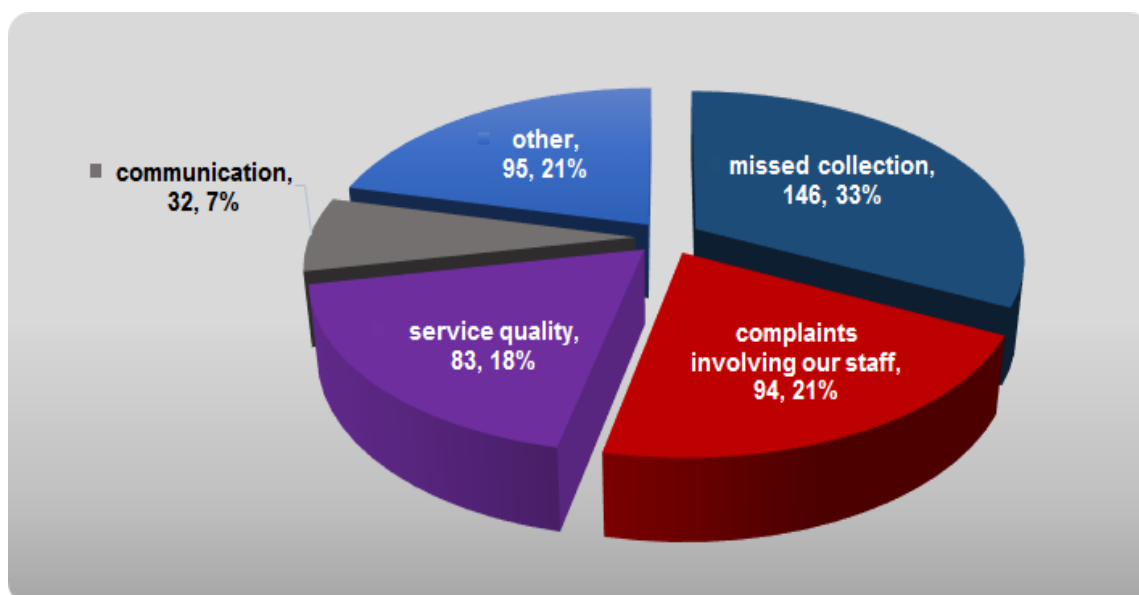
11. During quarter two, Children’s Services received 26 statutory complaints, 13% more (+3) than quarter 1 and 24% fewer (-8) than the same period last year. No complaints progressed to independent investigation during the quarter.
12. All 26 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt.
13. 22 complaints were resolved during the quarter, 20 within their prescribed timescale. Investigations into the remaining 4 complaints are continuing and 3 remain within their target timescale. Of the resolved complaints; 14 were not upheld (64%), 3 were upheld (14%) and 5 partially upheld (23%).
14. 5 complaints were declined due to; being part of ongoing court processes (2 cases); the complainant not deemed as having sufficient interest (2 cases); and concurrent criminal proceedings (1 case).
15. During quarter 2, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints including:
 - introducing a standardised approach of giving feedback to individuals raising concerns relating to children;
 - reminding staff to share birth response plans where appropriate, e.g. with hospital staff;
 - providing staff training in relation to the impact of parental mental illness (diagnosed or undiagnosed) upon children and support staff;
 - reminding staff to inform service users of costs associated with legal advice, the need to include signposting in case files, e.g. for benefit advice, to follow up actions associated with court orders and to provide alternative contact details when staff are away from work.

Statutory Complaints – Adult Care Services

16. During quarter 2, Adult Care received 24 statutory complaints, 9% more (+2) more than quarter 1 and 9% more (+2) than the same period last year.
17. 21 of the 24 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt.
18. 15 complaints were resolved during the quarter, 14 within their agreed timescale. Investigations into the remaining 9 complaints are continuing. Of the 15 resolved complaints, 10 were not upheld (67%), none were upheld (0%) and 5 partially upheld (33%).
19. 1 complaint was declined as it related to matters occurring more than 1 year ago.
20. During quarter 2, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints including:
 - updating procedures to consider Independent Mental Capacity Advocate involvement in cases involving serious family conflict/discord;
 - updating guidance and staff training in relation to setting up and operating pressure mats. Improved working practices are ensuring accurate, appropriate and timely completion of all records, including sleep charts, medical administration records and incident/accident records.

Corporate Complaints

21. Analysis of the 450 corporate complaints addressed during quarter 2 has highlighted 4 key topics which collectively make up 79% of these complaints.



Missed Collections

22. 146 complaints, 33% of the total, related to missed collections; 73 kerbside refuse and recycling, 50 garden waste and 23 bulky collections.
23. A cross-service working group, comprising representatives from refuse and recycling, business support and customer services is working to reduce missed collections by reviewing operational practices, contact handling, software systems, policy and service standards as well as benchmarking.
24. When considering the number of complaints due to missed collections, it is important to note that our crews complete more than 3.2 million refuse and recycling collections, 400,000 garden waste collections and 8,000 bulky collections each quarter.

Complaints involving our staff

25. 94 complaints, 21% of the total received, related to the actions of our staff; 34 to behaviour, 30 to attitude and 30 to damage caused by a lack of care and attention.
26. Of the 34 staff behaviour complaints, 21 were directed at our refuse and recycling crews for not returning bins to their collection point (15) or not clearing up dropped refuse / recycling from roads and pavements (6). 5 complaints concerned staff use of council vehicles; inconsiderate parking (1), near misses (2) or speeding (2). 4 complaints were from residents unhappy at the times staff started or finished work and the remaining 4 were concerns that staff were not fulfilling their duties to the expected standards.
27. Of the 30 staff attitude complaints, the majority (19) referred to staff being rude, aggressive or making inappropriate comments. 8 objected to our staff using foul or obscene language and the remaining 3 complainants felt our staff were unhelpful or obstructive.
28. 30 complaints alleged our staff had damaged property, either theirs or belonging to the Council, due to a lack of care and attention whilst undertaking their duties. More than two thirds related to weed killer (8), road resurfacing (8) or damage caused by our vehicles (5). The remaining complaints covered a wide variety of incidents in small numbers including, inadvertently taking items not for disposal when collecting refuse, damaging private fences or kerb stones and allowing oil drums to leak.

29. As a result of the previous discussions with Members on these issues, a Senior Manager working group is being developed in order to discuss issues in relation to customer care and addressing poor standards of behaviour. The group will also look at a quality assurance framework to support this to ensure that issues are being tackled in a consistent and fair way. The findings of this group will be reported back to Members.

Service quality

30. 83 complaints, 18% of the total received, related to the quality of our service.
31. The majority, 39 complainants (47%), were concerned about the time taken to action their request or resolve their issue. 3 key areas covered more than half of these complaints; delivery of a replacement bin / completing a bin repair (12), delivery of a bin or sticker needed to participate in the garden waste collection scheme (5) and processing a benefit claim (5).
32. 22 complainants (26%) were unhappy not to have received an expected call back or update following their initial contact. Although most of the initial contact related to a submitted service request, about one third was from residents seeking reassurance to their concerns, mainly about the condition of their local environment, or requesting information.
33. 14 complainants (17%) were unhappy with the condition of their local area and felt we were not doing enough to maintain it to an appropriate standard. In instances such as these, if we feel it would be of benefit, we do consider amending our maintenance schedule.
34. 8 complainants (10%) felt the standard of our work was inadequate. Half of these complaints related to the cleanliness of council run facilities: public toilets (2), leisure centre (1), baby change in library (1).

Communication

35. 32 complaints, 7% of the total received, related to communication. There were 3 main themes; being given inaccurate information (10), difficulties contacting the council (8) and not being informed of road closures or diversions (6).
36. The remaining 19% of corporate complaints related to a wide variety of issues received in smaller volumes.

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

37. During quarter 2, 28 complainants requested their complaint be escalated to the next stage. During the same period, we completed investigations into 22 complaints, of which 5 (23%) were upheld (fully or partly). The following table provides detail of upheld complaints:

| Outcome | Complaint | Action to be taken |
|---------------|---|--|
| Upheld | Garden Waste Collection Service: missed collection and the difficulties experienced in obtaining a repeat collection. | For several years the customer's refuse and recycling bins have been emptied from a specific location and the customer naturally used this location for their garden waste bin. However, this location is not their identified bin collection point. A different crew collects garden waste and being unaware of this arrangement assumed the bin was 'not presented'. The Council has apologised for the time and trouble caused to the customer and confirmed with the crew. To date there have been no further missed collections |
| | Pollution from bitumen emulsion leaking onto the road and around a gully cover. | Council removed the pollution which did not enter the watercourse. Poor practices from the contractor have been noted and will now be monitored more closely. In the future, the contractor will remove all such material from site or store it in secure containers. |
| Partly upheld | Lack of intervention by the Building Control Team in relation to required remedial works at the complainant's property by the housing developer | Although no fault was found in service provision, a more robust process is to be put in place in to manage complaints about builders. |
| | Service received from our Planning Team | The Planning team will consider a more holistic approach involving other service teams across the council to ensure all customer queries, not only planning issues, are addressed. |
| | Level of service received in relation to missed refuse and recycling collections. | The Refuse and Recycling Team Leader has met with the customer and reaffirmed the Bin Collection Point and the assist list procedures to be followed. A reminder has been issued to staff dealing with garden waste enquiries to ensure that customers have read and understood the terms and conditions of the scheme. |

Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

38. During quarter 2, the LGO delivered decisions in relation to 14 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants and supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers.
39. The 14 complaints related to a number of service areas including planning, revenues and benefits, and adult care. No maladministration was found in 6 cases. The LGO upheld 8 complaints as detailed in the following table:

| Category | Complaint | LGO's final decision |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Maladministration and Injustice | Council failed to properly explain the nature of a safeguarding investigation, seek the views of the family during the investigation and communicate the outcome of the investigation in a timely way. | Although the Council properly looked into safeguarding concerns about an elderly person's care in a care home, it did not keep the family informed of its enquiries. The Council has already apologised for this, which LGO feels is a suitable remedy for that fault. |
| | Council failed to pay housing benefit directly to a landlord | Financial remedy of £267.04 |
| | The Council was at fault in the way it gave building control approval for works done, partly under a Disabled Facilities Grant, and that the Council has not offered to cover the full cost of putting the work right | The Council accepts it was partly at fault in the way it issued a completion certificate for works at this property. It has offered to refund its fees and pay for some works towards putting matters right. Financial remedy of £612 and a further payment to cover a proposed schedule of works. |
| | The way the Council administered Direct Payments and assessed the complainant's care needs. | Financial remedy of £100 in recognition of the uncertainty caused by the delay in reviewing the complainant's care needs. An apology for failing to record the complainant's contacts with the Council. The Council is to review the way officers record contacts within 3 months. |

| Category | Complaint | LGO's final decision |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Maladministration and Injustice | Council's involvement in the care received by the complainant's mother by a care provider. | <p>The Council was at fault for not considering the complainant's version of events when it acted in response to a safeguarding alert. This led the Council to serve a letter based on an incomplete understanding of the facts, leading to avoidable distress. The Council agrees to apologise and place a statement on its records to reflect the flaws in its investigation.</p> <p>Other complaints about the Council's assessment of the needs of the complainant's mother and its response to the complainant's concerns about a care provider are not upheld</p> |
| | Safeguarding action taken by the Council following accusations against the complainant | <p>Financial remedy of £1,000 to the complainant for the loss of opportunity to challenge the Council's decision to remove her children and the distress caused by other faults identified.</p> <p>An additional financial remedy of £350 for time and trouble, in light of significant delays at independent investigation stage.</p> <p>The Council to place a copy of its independent investigation and LGO's final decision on the children's files and any file held about the complainant</p> <p>Since this complaint, the Council has revised the way it handles safeguarding enquiries to ensure the quality of recording decisions taken at Strategy meetings. It has also ensured information shared between the Council and the Police is improved.</p> |

| Category | Complaint | LGO's final decision |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Maladministration and Injustice | A culvert over a watercourse behind the complainant's home is causing water to pool in the complainant's garden. | <p>Council to apologise and convene a meeting with the complainant and the landowners to consider action to minimise the impact of water pooling. Council to pay one third of the cost of any agreed solution.</p> <p>If any agreed action does not improve the situation within 3 months of implementation, the complainant will commission a land drainage survey. If a connection between water pooling and the culvert is found, the Council will refund 50% of the survey cost and contribute one third of the cost of any recommended further work.</p> |
| | Loss of earnings due to the Council suspending a hackney carriage licence and delaying an investigation into allegations which were later proved to be unfounded. | Financial remedy of £500 |

Compliments

40. We also receive many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide, and we believe that understanding what is working well and valued is as important as knowing what is not working as well.
41. During quarter 2, we received 201 compliments, 83 in relation to social services and 118 in relation to other services. These compliments recognise not only the motivation, dedication and hard-work of our staff but also the high standard and value of the services we provide. The majority of the compliments related to satisfaction with service provision but a number of compliments conveyed thanks to specific individuals. As far as we are able, we have passed these thanks onto the individuals concerned.

Feedback relating to our policies and procedures

42. During quarter 2, we received 84 comments which consisted of objections to; our policies and procedures (63), our fees and charges (16) and being issued with an enforcement notice (5)
43. Almost 76% of objections to our policies and procedures related to waste collection (25), revenues and benefits (14) or Home to School Transport (8). The remaining 24% were in connection to many different policies and procedures in small numbers including planning, upgrading street lights with LED light fittings, required ratio of adults to children for entry to our swimming pools, closure of a bridleway.
44. The main objections to our waste policies were; not emptying / permanently removing bins due to contamination (7); not taking side waste (4); refusing to provide an additional / larger bin (3); and, landlords not being able to utilise household waste services (2). Residents also commented on our decision not to take hard plastics, having to give a vehicle registration number to obtain a waste permit, needing to leave bulky waste at a specific collection point, having to put bin out by 7am and not collecting garden waste all year.
45. Most of the comments relating to our revenues and benefits service concerned our recovery procedures; 9 customers were unhappy to receive a reminder letter about their non-payment of council tax. The other comments were objections to our action to recover housing benefit overpayments (2), subjecting all unoccupied properties to council tax (2), and dissatisfaction at receiving a letter querying the single person discount (1).
46. Home to School Transport accounted for eight comments and mostly related to situations where the pupil is not entitled to free travel under DCC's policy. Reduced provision, introduced in September 2012, was phased in with legacy rights for existing pupils so this is the first school year all secondary pupils are affected. Parents have been relying on the "concessionary spare seats" arrangements and there have been situations where it has not been possible to accommodate all requests.
47. 13 of the 16 comments relating to our fees and charges were objections to the £20 administration and delivery charge to replace a bin lost, stolen or damaged beyond repair. The remaining 3 related to the cost of gym membership, the café prices at Wharton Park and having to pay for a resident parking permit.
48. 5 residents were unhappy to have received an enforcement notice; Fixed Penalty Notice or parking fine.

Suggestions

49. We believe suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of our services, and carefully consider all received.
50. During quarter 2, we received 46 suggestions which covered a wide range of topics.
51. Customers were struggling to identify which Park and Ride bus went to each of our sites from the numbers on the buses. Each bus now issues coloured tickets which correspond to a coloured sign at the front of the bus, e.g. the Belmont service is white.
52. Currently, customers are unable to add additional items to bulky waste collections where they have not met the maximum number of items. However, the feasibility of an online system which would allow customers to amend their collections is being investigated.
53. Not all suggestions can be implemented. 1 resident suggested adding a map to our website which showed the location of containers at our Household Waste Recycling Centres by waste type, thereby helping residents navigate the site and dispose of their waste quickly. However, we do not operate the sites directly and our waste contractor can change the location of containers, without prior notice to ourselves, in line with operational need. In addition, some waste streams are inaccessible to the public with items taken to these containers by staff on site.
54. Another resident suggested extending the garden waste collection scheme to November. However, this is not feasible due to the limited amount of garden waste produced during the winter months.