

**Putting our
Customers first**

Customer Feedback Report

**Complaints,
compliments and
suggestions**

**Quarter 3
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 3 (1 October to 31 December 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 two 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 first stage in the corporate complaints process enables service areas to resolve the issue in the first instance, providing a service response. Should the customer remain dissatisfied with the service response they can escalate to the Customer Feedback Team, who will either progress with an independent investigation, or advise the service user to contact the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).
5. Independent investigation of statutory complaints is arranged by the statutory Complaints Teams.

Summary: Quarter 3

6. We completed initial service reviews into 516 corporate complaints. The average time to complete each review was eight working days and of these complaints, 348 (67%) were upheld (partially or fully). The most frequent mechanisms for registering corporate complaints remain the telephone (48%) and our website (41%).
7. We also completed independent investigations into 17 corporate complaints. The average time to complete each review was 24 working days and of these complaints, seven (41%) were upheld (fully or partially).
8. We received 51 statutory complaints, of which 88% were acknowledged within 2 working days. 40 complaints were resolved within the quarter; 34 within timescale (85%). Of the

40 complaints, 47% were upheld (partially or fully). One complaint progressed to independent investigation.

9. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) delivered decisions into 18 matters. Of these, one was upheld.
10. We also received 240 compliments, 113 suggestions and 66 comments in relation to our decision making.

Statutory Complaints – Children’s Services

11. During quarter 3, Children’s Services received 30 statutory complaints, 15% more (+4) than quarter 2 and 15% more (+4) than the same period last year. No complaints progressed to independent investigation during the quarter.
12. Of the 30 complaints, 26 were acknowledged within two working days of receipt.
13. 26 complaints were resolved during the quarter, 21 within their prescribed timescale and five outside their prescribed timescale. Investigations into the remaining four complaints are continuing and all remain within their target timescale. Of the resolved complaints; 11 were not upheld (42%), two were upheld (8%) and 13 partially upheld (50%).
14. Two complaints were declined due to; being part of ongoing court processes (one case); and the complainant not deemed as having sufficient interest (one case).
15. During quarter 3, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints, including:
 - Reminding staff that the Local Safeguarding Children Board’s pack ‘Information for Parents, Carers, Children and Young People’ must be issued prior to an Initial Child Protection Conference: the pack contains information on how to make a complaint.
 - Making staff aware of the publicity material available to prospective complainants, including the Council’s website, CYPS factsheet and a leaflet specifically designed for children.
 - Reminding staff of expectations in relation to managing telephone calls.
 - Reminding staff to notify those with parental responsibility when a case is closed and to record that this action has been taken.

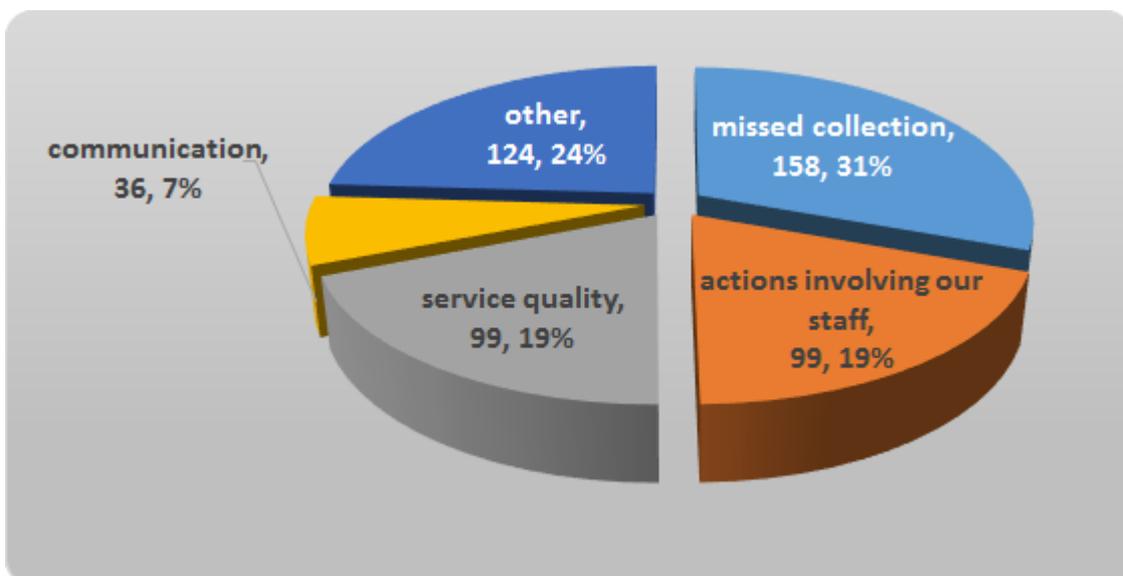
Statutory Complaints – Adult Care Services

16. During quarter 3, Adult Care received 21 statutory complaints, 12% fewer (-3) than quarter 2 and 40% more (+6) than the same period last year.
17. 19 of the 21 complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt.

18. 14 complaints were resolved during the quarter, 13 within their agreed timescale. Investigations into the remaining seven complaints are continuing. Of the 14 resolved complaints, 10 were not upheld (71%), one was upheld (7%) and 3 partially upheld (21%).
19. One complaint was declined as the complainant was not deemed as having sufficient interest.
20. During quarter 3, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints including:
 - Undertaking a project looking at the issue of service user capacity, recording and the conducting of formal capacity tests.
 - Reminding staff of the need to discuss the charging policy with service users and their families.
 - Putting in place more robust arrangements for communication between a service user's representative and their social worker to ensure a prompt and clear response to any concerns about the care received.

Corporate Complaints

21. During quarter 3, we addressed 516 corporate complaints. Analysis has shown that although the downward trend of the last three years is continuing, the number received during quarter 3 was 15% more (+66) than quarter 2.
22. The average time to close these complaints was eight working days, two working days longer than during quarter 2, and 67% were upheld (fully or partially) compared to 56% during quarter 2.
23. Further analysis has identified four key topics that collectively account for 76% of these complaints.



Missed Collections

24. In line with previous quarters, 'missed collections' continues to rank as the most frequent cause for complaint across the council. There was an 8% increase (+12) in complaints of this type compared to quarter 2.
25. Of the 158 complaints: 108 related to kerbside refuse and recycling (+35 compared to Q2), 32 to garden waste (-18 compared to Q2), 15 to bulky collections (-8 compared to Q2) and three to trade waste (+3 compared to Q2): 88% were upheld.
26. The majority of complaints (63%) originated in areas of the county where changes to household refuse and recycling collection routes were introduced. Missed collections peaked in October but reduced as crews and customers became acquainted with their new collection rounds.
27. A cross-service working group has been established to reduce missed collections by reviewing operational practices, contact handling, software systems, policy and service standards as well as benchmarking.
28. When considering these complaints, it is important to note that every quarter our crews complete more than 3.2 million refuse and recycling collections, 400,000 garden waste collections and 8,000 bulky collections.

Complaints involving our staff

29. 99 complaints, almost one fifth of all complaints addressed during quarter 3, involved our staff. This is an increase of 5% compared to quarter 2.
30. Of these 99 complaints: 62 related to behaviour (+28 compared to Q2), 27 to attitude (-3 compared to Q2) and 10 to damage caused by a lack of care and attention (-20 compared to Q2).
31. Four main themes accounted for 85% of staff behaviour complaints. Residents unhappy that bins were not returned to their collection point (30); crews not clearing up spillages (mainly broken glass) from roads and pavements (11); inappropriate driving (7) which included four near misses and three reports of driving whilst on a mobile phone; and, dissatisfaction at how the local area was left following highway maintenance work (5). The main reasons for the increase between quarters 2 and 3 were not returning bins to their collection points and not cleaning up spillages.
32. Of the 27 staff attitude complaints, 11 claimed staff were deliberately unhelpful, obstructive or unreasonable, 11 alleged staff were rude and / or aggressive, and five that they were subjected to foul or obscene language / behaviour. 41% of complaints were in relation to our refuse and recycling crews but it is important to note that every quarter our

crews complete more than 3.2 million refuse and recycling collections, 400,000 garden waste collections and 8,000 bulky collections.

33. The basis of 10 complaints was that staff had damaged property, either theirs or the Council's, due to a lack of care and attention whilst undertaking their duties. These complaints covered a wide variety of incidents in small numbers including damage to; kerbside recycling boxes by refuse and recycling crews, grassed areas by council vehicles, private property following collision with a council vehicle, the highway by diesel spillages.

Service quality

34. 99 complaints, equating to a fifth of the complaints addressed during quarter 3, involved the quality of our service provision. This is a 20% increase (+16) compared to quarter 2.
35. The complaints specifically related to our lack of action (72), not receiving an agreed call back (13), time taken to action their request, resolve their issue or answer their query (10) or the condition of the highways (four).
36. Of the 72 complaints citing lack of response, 75% related to street lighting repairs (21), delivery of a replacement bin or repair to an existing bin (13) or our response to antisocial behaviour or environmental concerns (20).
37. Of the 10 complaints unhappy with the time taken; half related to benefit claims, two to street lighting repairs, one to issuing a concessionary bus pass, one to waiting time in a Customer Access Point and one to the time to receive planning permission.
38. Of the four complainants unhappy with our highway maintenance schedule, two felt we are not doing enough to maintain the roads and footpaths and two believed we are not clearing and cleaning the drains adequately.

Communication

39. 36 complaints, 7% of the total, related to communication, a slight increase (+4) compared to quarter 2.
40. There were three main themes; being given inaccurate or conflicting information (13), not receiving information (12) or difficulties contacting the council (five).
41. Nearly all of these complaints related to either Highways or Revenues and Benefits. The main topic of highway complaints concerned road closures or diversions. The majority of revenues and benefits complaints were the result of staff not following processes and procedures. In all cases, appropriate remedial action was taken by managers.

42. The remaining 24% of corporate complaints related to a wide variety of issues received in smaller volumes.

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

43. During quarter 3, 34 complainants requested their complaint be escalated to the next stage; we declined to investigate seven of these complaints. During the same period, we completed investigations into 17 complaints, of which seven (41%) were upheld (fully or partially). The following table provides detail of upheld complaints:

Outcome	Complaint	Action to be taken
Upheld	Garden waste bin was not emptied on the scheduled dates on many occasions.	The customer's address has now been flagged as 'priority' thereby ensuring it is collected
	Lack of clarity in relation to the process for transferring rights of a grave. When the customer received the form, it contained a third party's name.	Council has apologised for any distress caused, refunded the £70.00 charge and put a more robust process in place to prevent administrative errors such as this.
	Service received from Care Connect	Council to amend its policies to clearly define 'an emergency', set out the steps in the call process and clarify when emergency services should be called. Council to amend its procedures in relation to accessing master keys and ensuring personal contact details are kept up to date.
Partially upheld	Inadequate response to customer complaint about staff attitude	Council accepts that our response to the initial complaint contained an inadequate level of detail. An additional check to ensure the quality of responses has been added to the existing process.
	Not updating our Council Tax system when we were informed of a change in circumstances thereby incorrectly applying the single person discount.	Council has corrected the bill and apologised that the initial response did not adequately explain why the complainant received credits to their account.

Outcome	Complaint	Action to be taken
	Our processes for dealing with fly-tipping on private land	Working practices have been amended to include a courtesy email acknowledgement in situations such as this, which will set out our responsibilities in relation to fly-tips on private land.
	Delay in Disabled Facilities Grant assessment.	Council has apologised for the delay experienced by the complainant and has amended its policies and procedures for dealing with unexpected absences and the reallocation of cases.

Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

44. During quarter 3, the LGO delivered decisions in relation to 18 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants and supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers.
45. The 18 complaints related to a number of service areas including planning, refuse and recycling, and child care. Of these complaints; the LGO declined to investigate 10; two were found to be outside the LGO's jurisdiction; one was closed due to local resolution; and four were referred back to the council to deal with under our complaints procedure. The LGO upheld one complaint as detailed in the following table;

Category	Complaint	LGO's final decision
Maladministration and Injustice	Council delayed investigating concerns about breaches of confidentiality by a social worker and failed to involve the complainant and his nephew in a visit to the complainant's mother's care home, as agreed.	Council to apologise and draw up a formal procedure for dealing with complaints of breaches of confidentiality.

Compliments

46. 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.

47. During quarter 3, we received 240 compliments, 56 in relation to social care services and 184 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.
48. However, we are aware that many compliments remain unrecorded and so the overall count is not a true reflection of customer appreciation of our staff and services. Many customers now choose to provide feedback through our social media accounts. Although we currently only record complaints in relation to social media, we are investigating how we can extend this to include other feedback including compliments.

Feedback relating to our policies and procedures

49. During quarter 3, we received 66 comments which consisted of objections to; our policies and procedures (50), our fees and charges (15) or being issued with an enforcement notice (1).
50. Almost 70% of objections to our policies and procedures related to waste collection (25) or revenues and benefits (nine). The remaining 30% were in connection to many different policies and procedures in small numbers including upgrading street lights with LED light fittings, Household Waste Recycling Centre procedures, gritting of public footpaths and the provision of school crossing patrols.
51. 18 of the 25 objections to our waste policies were due to not emptying / permanently removing bins due to contamination. The remaining complaints related to not providing an additional / larger bin, being unable to amend a bulky waste collection, not allowing customers to place black bags directly into a refuse vehicle or not taking side waste.
52. Eight of the nine comments relating to our revenues and benefits service related to subjecting all unoccupied properties to council tax. The remaining comment related to council tax procedures.
53. 14 of the 15 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 final comment related to the charge for bulky waste collections.
54. One resident was unhappy to have received a Fixed Penalty Notice.

Suggestions

55. We believe suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of our services, and carefully consider all received. During quarter 3, we received 113 suggestions, 40% of which related to the Garden Waste Collection Scheme.
56. The most frequent suggestion involved the timings of the Garden Waste Collection Scheme. Some of which suggested we start earlier and some of which suggested we finish later; the scheme now finishes in November.
57. Within the Revenues and Benefits service, one customer suggested that we amend our procedure for suspending housing benefit to protect against malicious tip-offs. Unfortunately, we are unable to do this as regulations require us to suspend benefit if there is doubt to entitlement to avoid potential overpayments. Another customer suggested we visit elderly claimants who have received a benefit overpayment rather than issue a letter. Due to a combination of regulations setting out the procedure we must follow and the high number of elderly claimants this suggestion is not feasible.
58. We also received a suggestion to expand our current Park and Ride scheme to more than three sites. This has previously been considered by the service but was not progressed due to the cost. However, an extension has recently been completed at Howland's Park and Ride site to increase capacity, along with an extended service being offered on a Thursday evening due to longer opening hours of shops within the city centre.