

Putting our Customers first

Customer Feedback Report

Complaints, compliments and suggestions

Quarter 3, 2017/18

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, 2017/18 (1 October 2017 to 31 December 2017). As feedback can highlight opportunities for operational improvement even when the service is delivered properly, the report includes a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes, an overview of comments relating to our decision making and a summary of customer satisfaction through compliments and surveys. It also 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.

Customer Suggestions

3. We believe suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of our services, and carefully consider all received. During quarter 3, 2017/18, we received 86 suggestions.
4. Almost 40% of the suggestions received related to our waste collection and disposal service (34 suggestions). The most common theme was introducing ways to tell customers when we planned to do something, e.g. repair a bin (so customer can put the bin out), return for a missed collection (so bin is not left out for days and those on assisted collection can unlock gates etc.), pick up a bulky collection (thereby limiting the time the goods are left out). We already have plans in place, as part of the Bartec project work, to implement this suggestion.
5. Customers also suggested allowing the customer to choose the collection point for bulky collections as the Bin Collection Point is not always the most appropriate place.
6. Extending the garden waste scheme or reconfiguring the collections so they start later and finish later was also proposed. We reviewed the timings of the garden waste scheme last year and amended in line with customer feedback.
7. We received several suggestions relating to the wheeled bins used for household collection, e.g. making smaller bins available for those with limited space, using heavier lids or catches so they do not blow open in windy conditions. Others suggested changes to our procedures, e.g. don't follow up a sticker on a contaminated bin with a letter if it's the first occurrence, implement weekly recycling collections. The suggestion relating to contamination stickers and letters is to be considered as part of the contamination process review.

8. Some suggestions related to our Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). For example, implementing mechanisms that would allow waste permits to be printed at home, customers to be informed of the wait time whilst waste is being compacted, display opening times at site entrances.
9. We are currently developing a new project to look at the options around digitising waste permits. In relation to compaction, measures have been in place since 2013 when the compaction of skips was introduced on site. In addition to signs outside the site entrance, site operatives should be outside the site and informing customers of waiting times and alternative sites, and compaction will cease temporarily if queues become excessive. We already display opening times at every site entrance.
10. One customer, although finding our online booking system for leisure centre activities well laid out and user friendly, was disappointed that the booking portal for the following week did not open until the current week's class was about the start, by which time telephone bookings will have been made and the class could be full. The suggestion was to open the portal earlier. Following this suggestion, and similar feedback, the portal has now been re-configured. The 'too soon to book' restriction for the following week has now been removed and bookings for the following week can be made at any time during the day. The seven days in advance policy is in place to avoid sessions being block booked by customers who subsequently do not attend.
11. Another customer proposed changes to the manner in which we inform customers of changes to the public swim timetable. Improved processes are now in place. All swimming galas and lane closures are now advertised as far in advance as possible via notices in several locations throughout the building, not just the customer information board, in addition to the website. Any closure is now advertised immediately as soon as the booking is confirmed. In addition, reception staff are briefed on these situations and duty officers are fully informed well in advance and have the information readily to hand. Reception is always staffed by two people at busy times to prevent missed calls.
12. A resident suggested that we stop teachers from accepting gifts at the end of term. The resident felt this would remove the stress and financial pressure placed on poorer families. However, schools are self-governing so the local authority has no control over their policies or procedures.

Customer feedback relating to our policies and procedures

13. Our service provision is reflected in our policies and procedures, and during quarter 3, 2017/18, we received 43 items of feedback as a direct consequence of carrying out actions in line with those policies and procedures.
14. Our household waste policies and procedures (19 contacts) were the most frequent cause for contact: not emptying or permanently removing bins due to contamination

(eight instances), not collecting side waste (three instances), only providing residents with an additional bin if the household has six or more people permanently living there (two instances), not collecting recycling in black bags (two instances), the requirement to leave bulky waste at the Bin Collection Point (one instance), not leaving a missed bin out until collected (one instance), closing Household Waste Recycling Centres whilst compacting rubbish (one instance) and needing to provide details of the waste to be disposed of when applying for a permit (one instance).

15. Nine residents used the complaints system to register dissatisfaction with our winter maintenance policy. The main issue was the customer's perceived lack of gritting.
16. We also received five comments relating to our Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project (SLERP) with residents objecting to the removal of street lights.
17. The remaining contacts covered a range of areas including, our policy not to collect dead animals from private homes, to only remove trees and hedges if they meet the criteria set out in our tree policy and the start times of our school crossing patrols.

Customer feedback relating to our fees and charges

18. Twelve contacts related to our fees and charges, which we review annually and allow us to provide local services that might not otherwise be possible.
19. Four residents cited dissatisfaction with the £20 replacement bin charge, four were unhappy with the garden waste charge, two with library charges (one related to the cost of photocopying and one to the charge for overdue books), one to the café prices at locomotion and one to parking charges in Durham City.

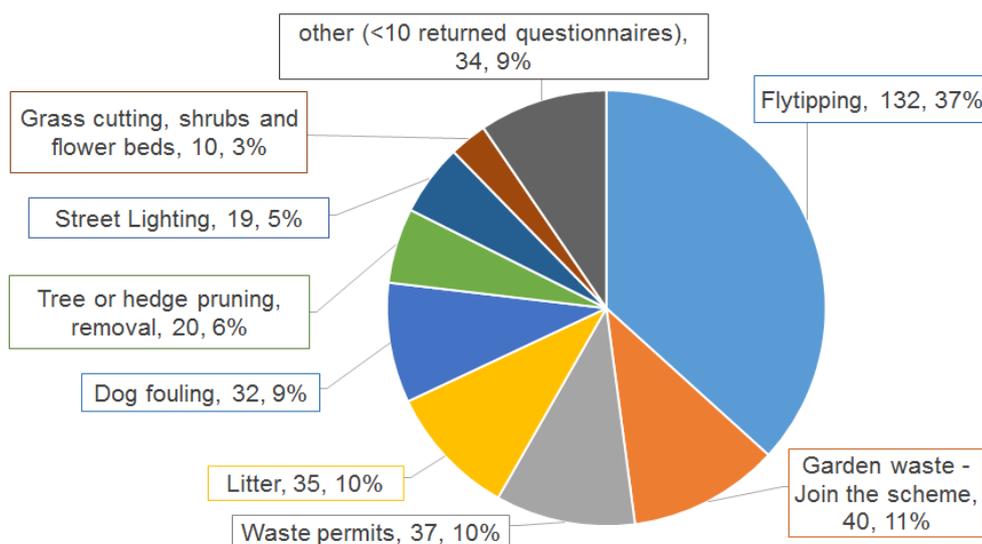
Compliments

20. 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.
21. During quarter 3, 2017/18, we received 277 compliments, 81 in relation to social care services and 196 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.
22. Customers were particularly complimentary about our frontline staff and service provision, the most common themes being standard of work, prompt service and how polite, pleasant and helpful staff are.

- 23. Our Clean and Green Team received the most compliments, almost 13% of all received, with customers appreciating our efforts to keep their local environment clean and tidy. We also received several compliments about our wildflower planting schemes.
- 24. Other frontline services that received customer recognition were our refuse and recycling service, both the household collection service and the Household Waste Recycling Centres, our Highway Maintenance Team, Customer Services, the Durham County Record Office and Care Connect.
- 25. Many of the compliments received were from customers who wished to express their gratitude where staff have gone the extra mile. As far as we are able, we have passed these thanks onto the individuals concerned.
- 26. A small sample of compliments received is attached at Appendix 1.

Customer Satisfaction (CRM)

- 27. Our customers now have the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to both contact and service delivery as part of the closure process within the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Since 31 October 2017, a satisfaction questionnaire has been applied to 23 service requests. A list of these service requests is attached at Appendix 2.
- 28. Between 31 October 2017 and 31 December 2017, we received 359 completed questionnaires through which customers answered a series of questions in relation to their experience. The following graph shows the split by service request.



29. Further analysis, by question, has been completed on the returned questionnaires and the results shown below:

% of respondents who found it easy to contact the right service in the council							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	323	138	128	47	8	1	1
Performance	96%	98%	95%	89%	100%	100%	100%

% of respondents who were informed of the length of time it would take to resolve							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses*	270	114	101	46	8	-	1
Performance	52%	52%	61%	46%	75%	-	100%

*issues reported by 89 respondents were dealt with immediately

% of respondents who were provided with clear information							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	359	155	135	59	8	1	1
Performance	91%	87%	96%	86%	100%	100%	100%

% of respondents who were treated with dignity and respect							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	359	155	135	59	8	1	1
Performance	94%	92%	99%	92%	100%	100%	100%

% of respondents who were informed of progress							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	359	155	135	59	8	1	1
Performance	82%	81%	85%	83%	63%	100%	100%

% of respondents who felt their request was handled in a knowledgeable and effective							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	143	-	135	-	8	-	-
Performance	97%	-	96%	-	100%	-	-

% of respondents who were satisfied with how their initial contact was handled							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	343	147	135	52	8	1	1
Performance	87%	85%	94%	73%	100%	100%	100%

% of respondents who were satisfied with service delivery							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	337	146	127	56	6	1	1
Performance	85%	84%	91%	80%	33%	100%	100%

% of respondents who were satisfied with the time taken to complete their request							
	Overall	online	By telephone	By e-mail	Face to Face	Letter	Via local councillor
Number of responses	332	145	126	53	6	1	1
Performance	88%	89%	90%	85%	67%	100%	100%

30. Although performance is positive, in order to drive further improvement we asked those customers who were dissatisfied the reasons why. Their comments included:
- Although we actioned the service request, we did not inform the customer of any enforcement action or what we intend to do to prevent the issue reoccurring
 - Difficulty hearing the messages on our telephone system
 - Not being able to determine which service area to use
 - Having to report an issue through our website when they've already reported through fixmystreet.com
 - We did not deliver in line with our stated timescales and in some cases informed the customer we had completed the task when we hadn't

31. In order to further engage with customers over their appetite for online transactions, we asked customers who did not request service through our website the following question: You can request many of our services online through the council’s website. Why did you choose another method?
32. We received 314 replies as shown in the following table;

Response	No. of responses	% of total responses
I thought it would be easier or quicker using another method	90	29%
I prefer to use a different method	75	24%
I tried online but had problems with the system	41	13%
I didn’t know it was available online	39	12%
It was an urgent enquiry	25	8%
Difficulties accessing the internet	18	6%
Other	14	4%
It isn’t available online	10	3%
I don’t think my data will be handled securely	2	0%
TOTAL RESPONSES	314	

Customer Satisfaction (Assisted Digital Support)

33. Where customers have needed additional support to progress their online claim for Universal Credit, through the Assisted Digital Support provided by Customer Services, staff have captured customer feedback through a short survey. The results so far (147 customers) show:
- 89% were ‘extremely satisfied’ with the level of service they received
 - 37% of customers said they needed other help and were provided with advice on how to access the Welfare Assistance Scheme, Food Banks, Housing Solutions and the Money Advice Service.
 - 29% had heard about our service through Durham County Council channels (website/leaflets/CAPs) and 44% through their job centre work coach.
 - 27% gave additional comments on their experience – see examples below:
 - *Extremely satisfied with the level of service and help and support given. Excellent service. Thank you couldn't of done it alone.*
 - *Excellent help from Digital Support*
 - *Staff very helpful as could not have managed without help*

- *I consider myself as disabled and dyslexic, customer service staff has been excellent very patient. He knows his job and is great with customers, he has exceeded all expectations.*
- *Very helpful and made the process easier for me*

34. The survey has also enabled us to capture information about Universal Credit claimants needing digital assistance:

- The most popular electronic device used by claimants is a smartphone at 49%. 24% do not own an electronic device.
- 46% do not have access to the internet at home
- 72% are aware of the different locations where customers can access the internet or use self-serve devices
- 89% do not require help with their personal budgeting

Customer complaints

35. Within this document, there are two types of complaint. Statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority and corporate complaints that cover all other complaints. As each complaint type is subject to its own processes and policy, they are reported separately.

36. 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 and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman). Independent investigation of statutory complaints is arranged by the statutory complaint teams.

Statutory Complaints: Children's Social Care Services

37. During quarter 3, 2017/18, Children's Social Care Services received 27 statutory complaints, 10% fewer (-3) than quarter 3, 2016/17. One complaint received in quarter 2 progressed in quarter 3 to independent investigation, the same number as in quarter 2, 2016/17.

38. Of the 27 completed complaints, 24 were resolved within their prescribed timescale (89%) and three outside their prescribed timescale (12%). Of the 27 complaints: 17 were not upheld (63%), none were upheld (0%) and 10 partially upheld (37%).

39. Three complaints were declined, two for being about matters to be considered at court, and one due to concurrent criminal investigations.

40. During quarter 3, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints, including reminding staff:
- that 'Written Agreements' are not legally binding and their purpose should be more thoroughly explained to parents.
 - that it is their responsibility to answer complaints thoroughly, including after staff involved have left the local authority.
 - to give appropriate weight to any positives within a case, and not appear to be solely looking at the negatives.
 - to be mindful of regularly reviewing cases in an open-minded and child-centred way, to ensure that the correct path is being followed.

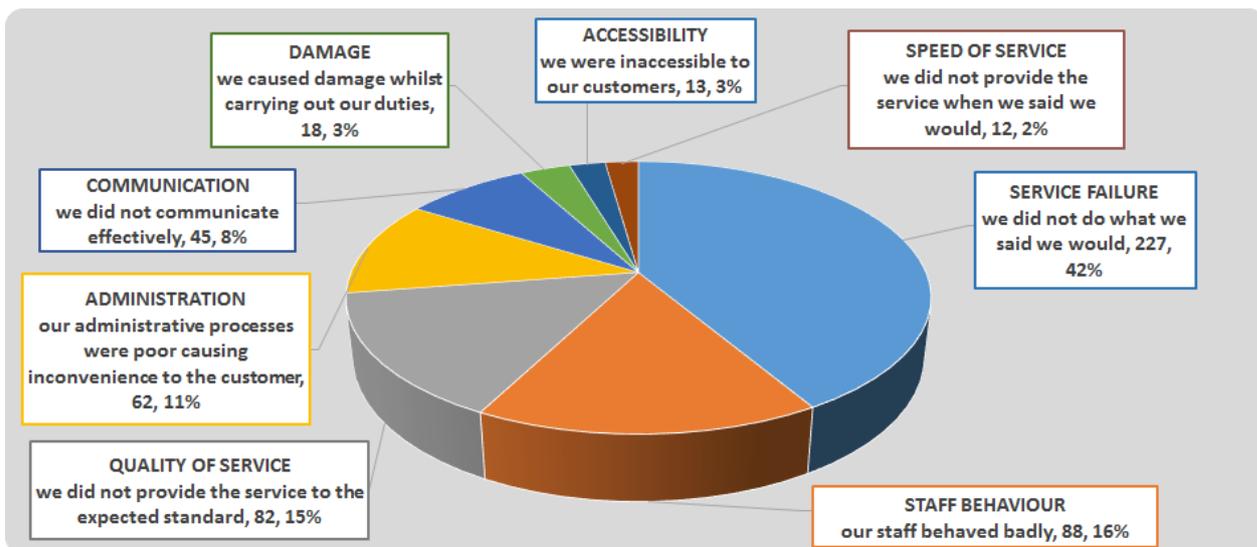
Statutory Complaints: Adult Social Care Services

41. During quarter 3, 2017/18, Adult Social Care Services received 21 statutory complaints, the same number as in quarter 3, 2016/17.
42. Almost half of these complaints related to Older People / Physical Disabilities / Sensory Impairment (10) with Learning Disabilities / Mental Health / Substance Misuse being the second most complained about service area (seven). The most common reason for complaint was a disputed decision where a service user disagrees with the outcome of an assessment (five).
43. 27 complaints were responded to during quarter 3, 2017/18, all within their agreed timescale. Of these 27 complaints, 18 were not upheld (67%), two were upheld (7%) and seven partially upheld (26%).
44. During quarter 3, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints, including reminding staff:
- to seek clarification with service users and their families as to their preferred method of communication.
 - of the referral process for the handy person scheme with particular reference to the cut off time for referrals at 4pm, to allow for requests to be actioned the next working day.

Corporate Complaints: Key Messages

45. During quarter 3, 2017/18, we received 547 corporate complaints, 31 more than the same quarter last year. We have completed investigations into 475 of these complaints and 63% were upheld (fully or partially).

46. There were eight main reasons for complaint. The following graph shows the split by volume.



47. Our waste collection service received half of all complaints, most notably 70% of all service failure complaints (mainly missed collections), a third of all staff behaviour (mainly altercations arising from access issues [parked cars, inappropriate road use], refuse wagons blocking the highway or not collecting bins due to contamination) and a third of all quality of service (mainly not returning bins to their collection points and spillages). It also received a third of all communication complaints from customers unhappy not to have received advance notification of a change to their bin collection days.

48. However, this information should be considered within the context that during quarter 3, our waste collection service completed more than 3 million refuse and recycling collections, 200,000 garden waste collections and 8,000 bulky collections.

49. Missed collections (157 complaints) remains the most frequent cause for complaint, representing almost 30% of all complaints received across the council. Of those investigated, 85% were upheld and these customer addresses have been flagged as 'priority' to prevent the issue reoccurring.

50. Those missed collection complaints that were not upheld were mainly due to confusion over Bin Collection Points that have now been clarified with customers, but also confusion over policies, for example, not realising assisted collection does not automatically transfer to new properties.

51. The remaining service failure complaints related to either not actioning the customer's service request (54), for example repairing a faulty streetlight or delivering a replacement bin, or not providing an update or response to the customer's service request (14). During quarter 3, we received in the region of 76,000 service requests.

52. We are aware that some customers received email confirmation that their request was complete prior to the task being carried out, leading the customer to believe we had not

done what we said we would. This was caused by records being closed when the job was allocated rather than when the job was completed. Record closure triggers the automatic email confirmation. We have reminded teams of the correct procedure.

53. Staff behaviour (88 complaints) remains the second most frequent cause for complaint and half of these complaints originated from our frontline services of refuse and recycling and highway services. There were three broad areas of complaint, received in equal measures. Complaints that our staff were rude, unhelpful or dismissive of the customer's issue or query, for example, ignoring customers who approach them in the street, not appearing to listen properly to a customer query. Complaints that our staff behaved in an aggressive or intimidating manner, for example, swearing or shouting at customers who approach them in the street. Complaints that our staff were driving council vehicles in a dangerous manner, for example, speeding, tailgating, near miss, using a mobile phone. Following these complaints, some staff have undergone additional training.
54. Almost half of the quality of service complaints were due to: a customer feeling their issue has not been satisfactorily resolved (15 received), these mainly related to our response to a report to anti-social behaviour, enviro-crime or inappropriate parking; not returning the customer's bin to its collection point or leaving gates open on assisted collection (14); spillages caused by our staff (9); or the condition of their local environment, highways and footways (9).
55. Three quarters of administration complaints related to either inaccurate billing (28 complaints) or using an incorrect addressee or address (15 complaints). Most of the complaints related to Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction. These teams process in the region of 7,000 new claims and 70,000 changes each quarter. All of the errors were corrected as soon as the issues were raised. All staff involved have been made aware of the errors and reminded of the correct procedures. We also seek to minimise the risk of error by automating processes to reduce manual interventions and carrying out quality assurance interventions. We use any identified trends and patterns to further develop training plans and inform process reviews.
56. The introduction of Open Channel forms should further reduce complaints. These are customised web-based forms that collect information, which is then validated and used to automatically update Council Tax accounts, in real time. The forms will update when a customer moves into, out of or within the area and for single person discount. These forms will be rolled out to customers via the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) to allow self service.
57. Almost 70% of communication issues were due to us giving incorrect, conflicting or misleading advice (16 complaints) or not receiving advance warning of a change. Two complaints related to the council's twitter messages. One progressed to independent investigation and is detailed in paragraph 59. The other related to the following message, tweeted on a Sunday, 'visiting Durham this weekend? Consider using 1 of our 3 park & ride car parks'. However, this service only operated on the Saturday and not Sunday. We

inadvertently scheduled the tweet for the wrong day. Wording of future tweets will be sure to reflect factual information.

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

58. During quarter 3, 2017/18, 36 complainants requested that we escalate their complaint to the next stage. We agreed it would be appropriate that 26 complaints be subject to an independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team. We based this decision on the service response, any remedy already offered and the reasons given by the customer for wanting to take the complaint to the next stage. Where we declined to conduct an independent investigation, we informed the customer that their next step would be to seek advice from the Ombudsman.
59. During the same period, we completed investigations into 19 complaints. Of these, four were partially upheld, as shown in the table below:

Complaint	Action to be taken
The customer checked My Durham to see if they would be affected by the change in bin collection days but no collection information existed for their property.	The information on My Durham has been updated
Dissatisfaction with our live Twitter feed, specific to the Teaching Assistant report considered by County Council.	Although the twitter feed was a factual representation of what occurred at the meeting, it did not present alternative views. We are reviewing our methods of communication and considering alternatives such as live streaming. This would eradicate any perceived perceptions that the Council does not reporting impartially.
No response to the customer's service request to clear a cycle lane	The work requested, whilst partially completed, did not appear on the Clean and Green maintenance schedule. We are now checking that all cycle paths are included within our internal systems so are suitably maintained.
Time taken to secure an appropriate lease on a DCC property.	We needed to prioritise tasks due to resources. Consequently, the premises in question were not occupied sooner.

Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

60. During quarter 3, 2017/18, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 11 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants and supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers.
61. The 11 complaints related to a number of service areas including refuse and recycling, planning, parking penalties, council tax and education. Of these complaints, no further action was proposed in all cases. The Ombudsman upheld no complaints

Appendix 1: sample of compliments received during quarter 3, 17/18

Customer's Comments
<p>I want to congratulate the staff of the Parks and Gardens Departments for the wonderful display of flowers throughout the city and the County during 2017. Also for the inspirational sowing of roundabouts with wild flowers, which are absolutely perfect. Top marks to all concerned, and our very grateful thanks to a huge team of very talented and dedicated people. Well done!</p>
<p>thanks to the crew/team for clearing away the litter, bottles, cans etc. and they did a fantastic job by going above and beyond to ensure the area was clean and tidy.</p>
<p>called to compliment Highways team and contractors on how well they have resurfaced their street, the work is brilliant, they were well organised and very helpful with the residents in the street when people were needing to be in and out.</p>
<p>I would like to say a HUGE THANK YOU to one of your employees who helped me today. Whilst on route to the garage, my car broke down at the South Church roundabout near Bishop Auckland, in morning rush hour. One of your employees was working on the roundabout and he came to my aid. He managed to get the car going and I got safely to the garage. I was so grateful for this act of kindness. Please pass on my thanks again. He is a star and a absolute credit to Durham County council.</p>
<p>I am getting in touch to share how impressed I was with the wheelchair accessibility at the visitors entrance of Durham County Hall. I visited for the first time in many years earlier this week. I was very impressed with the level access, automatic doors, accessible toilet so close to the entrance and low reception desk.</p>
<p>Customer would like to thank all Care Connect staff for the help and support that they provided to her dad and family when his alarm was activated on numerous occasions. It meant a great deal to have reassurance that someone was always there to help her dad when needed. You all deserve to be praised as you do a brilliant job.</p>
<p>Having visited HWRC at Tudhoe today on a very cold morning, can I just pass on praise to the staff. They are all so very friendly, happy and helpful. This is not the first time Ive visited this recycling centre, and its not the first time Ive had the same fabulous service. Well done to the staff, they are a credit.</p>
<p>A close friend of my family recently suffered the anxiety of a bereavement. This was compounded by an issue within the cemetery which does not need to be elaborated upon at this stage. I felt it necessary to write however, to praise your staff member for the professionalism, sincerity and decorum that he showed when dealing with with the person in question. He appeared knowledgable, compassionate and helpful throughout all of the dealings which we had with him, making a difficult and sensitive issue much more manageable. If all of your staff aspired to operate at the same level as this officer then you certainly wouldn't go far wrong! Well done.</p>
<p>Just want to say, the bin men who do my area are fantastic, cant fault them at all, always very helpful, I read a lot of bad stuff from people on social media regarding bin men, but weve never had an issue with the ones round Westway. Please thank them for all the hard work</p>
<p>I'm writing in the hope that the Council can officially pass on the thanks of many local residents to a gentleman who picks litter and empties litter bins, replaces with new bags around the estates and streets of Murton. He is a most hard working gentleman, really pleasant to chat to him as I'm out with the dog on a morning . He has a quiet, positive attitude and demeanour in all weathers . He is a credit to the Council. His work is very appreciated by the folks I meet on the dog walks and who live around the estates . So please pass on our thanks and kind regards .</p>

Appendix 2: satisfaction questionnaires are applied to the following service requests

- Abandoned shopping trolleys
- Bin – request help with your bin
- Bonfires
- Bus stop and shelters
- Dead animal removal
- Dog bins and litter Bins
- Dog fouling
- Flyposting
- Fly tipping
- Garden Waste
- Graffiti
- Grass cutting, shrubs and flower beds
- Litter
- Needles and drug paraphernalia
- Roads or footpath obstruction – vehicular
- Roadworks
- Rubbish in gardens and yards
- Seating and Benches
- Spilt Rubbish
- Street lighting
- Traffic lights and crossings
- Tree or hedge pruning, removal
- Waste permits