

Putting our Customers first

Customer Feedback Report

Complaints, compliments and suggestions

Quarter 1,
2018/19

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 any 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 1, 2018/19 (1 April 2018 to 30 June 2018). As feedback can highlight opportunities for operational improvement, 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 1, 2018/19, we received 149 suggestions.
4. 37% of the suggestions received related to either waste collection and disposal (31 suggestions) or clean and green (25 suggestions).
5. Although we consider every suggestion, not all of them can be implemented. For example, we regularly receive suggestions that propose changes to our road system. However, when looked at in the context of countywide traffic flows, many would have knock on effects to the traffic flows elsewhere if they were to be implemented.
6. A sample of suggestions received during quarter 1, 2018/19 and their outcomes is attached at Appendix 1.

Customer feedback relating to our policies and procedures

7. Our service provision reflects our policies and procedures, and during quarter 1, 2018/19, we received 85 items of feedback as a direct consequence of carrying out actions in line with those policies and procedures. We use this feedback to inform our policies and procedures at their review.
8. 82% of this feedback can be attributed to our household waste policies and procedures. The most frequent topic (41 contacts, accounting for almost 50% of the

contact relating to our policies and procedures) was dissatisfaction that we did not empty or we permanently removed a bin due to contamination.

9. Other contacts relating to household waste policies and procedures covered a wide range of issues in small numbers. These included; only providing residents with an additional bin if the household has six or more people permanently living there; not collecting side waste; not collecting recycling in black bags; not allowing customers to dispose of another person's waste at our HWRCs and the requirement to leave bulky waste at the designated Bin Collection Point.
10. The remaining contacts covered a range of areas including; removal of street lights as part of our Street Lighting Energy Reduction Programme, our winter policy and procedures and our empty property charge.

Customer feedback relating to decision making

11. 45 contacts objected to decisions we had made, almost all of which related to operational decisions. The most frequent topic related to enforcement (11 contacts). The remaining contacts related to a variety of topics in small numbers such as planning decisions or decisions relating to highway works.

Customer feedback relating to our fees and charges

12. 11 contacts related to our fees and charges, which we review annually and allow us to provide local services that might not otherwise be possible.
13. Nearly all (9 contacts) cited dissatisfaction with waste charges. The majority (eight) were unhappy with the £20 charge for either a replacement bin or a bin for a new build property. The remaining contacts were objections to the charge for bulky waste collections (one) and the higher pest control charges for landlords (two).

Compliments

14. 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.
15. During quarter 1, 2018/19, we received 224 compliments, 55 in relation to social care services and 173 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.

16. 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.
17. Our Clean and Green Team received the most compliments (38) with customers appreciating our efforts to keep their local environment clean and tidy. We also received several compliments about our wildflower planting schemes.
18. 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.
19. A small sample of compliments received is attached at Appendix 2.

Customer Satisfaction (CRM)

20. 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 25 service requests. A list of these service requests is attached at Appendix 3.
21. Between 1 April 2018 and 30 June 2018, we received 1,271 completed questionnaires through which customers answered a series of questions in relation to their experience.
22. 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	92%
..were informed of the length of time it would take to resolve	53%
..were provided with clear information	82%
..were treated with dignity and respect	90%
..were informed of progress	70%
..felt their request was handled in a knowledgeable and effective manner	91%
..were satisfied with how their initial contact was handled	86%
..were satisfied with service delivery	95%
..were satisfied with the time taken to complete their request	80%

23. Although performance is positive, in order to drive further improvement we asked those customers who were dissatisfied the reasons why. More than one quarter of respondents cited lack of contact, not being informed of timescales or the action that would be taken. Other comments included:
- Not completing the task to the customer's satisfaction, or where there were multiple strands to the service request, not completing all
 - Not being able to find the exact option on the website for reporting, so having to choose the 'best fit' option
 - Being slow to respond often resulting in the customer having to progress chase
 - Using alternative addresses to those provided by the customer.
24. 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?
25. We received 639 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	175	27%
I prefer to use a different method	133	21%
It was an urgent enquiry	106	17%
I tried online but had problems with the system	92	14%
I didn't know it was available online	63	10%
Difficulties accessing the internet	28	4%
It isn't available online	24	4%
Other	13	2%
I don't think my data will be handled securely	5	1%
TOTAL RESPONSES	639	

Customer Satisfaction (Assisted Digital Support)

26. Since 1 October 2017, we have asked customers who needed additional support to progress their online claim for Universal Credit to feedback through a short survey. To date, 639 customers have responded and the results show:
- 99.5% were either 'extremely satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the level of service they received
 - 25% had heard about our service through Durham County Council channels (website/leaflets/CAPs) and 57% through their job centre work coach
 - 27% gave additional comments on their experience – see examples below:
 - Could not have managed without support given
 - The advisor was extremely helpful
 - Fantastic help from the council. Clear and precise info given
 - Very helpful, explained everything to me in detail which was great
 - Extremely happy with the service I received.
27. The survey has also enabled us to capture information about Universal Credit claimants needing digital assistance:
- Almost half of claimants own a smartphone (49%). 16% own a laptop and 14% a tablet computer. 30% do not own an electronic device
 - 50% do not have access to the internet at home
 - 75% are aware of the different locations where customers can access the internet or use self-serve devices.

Customer complaints

28. 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.
29. 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

30. During, quarter 1, 2018/19, Children's Social Care Services received 34 statutory complaints, 21% more (+6) than quarter 1, 2017/18. One complaint received in

quarter 1 progressed directly to independent investigation (Stage 2) at the request of the complainant's advocate, and following due consideration by managers.

31. Of the 32 complaints completed, 22 (69%) were resolved within their prescribed timescale, and 10 complaints (31%) were resolved outside their prescribed timescale. Of the 32 complaints: 21 were not upheld (66%), five were upheld (16%) and six partially upheld (19%).
32. During quarter 1, 2018/19, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints, including:
 - Re-allocating cases as appropriate to ensure there is no 'drift and delay' when staff leave or are absent from work for any reason
 - Ensuring families are 'formally' informed when a case is closed or re-allocated
 - Consideration should be given to 'contactable times' when social workers are available to answer and return calls and messages. Many complaints commence by persons being unable to contact the social worker or Team Manager; or by not knowing who the current social worker is due to not having been formally informed of changes.

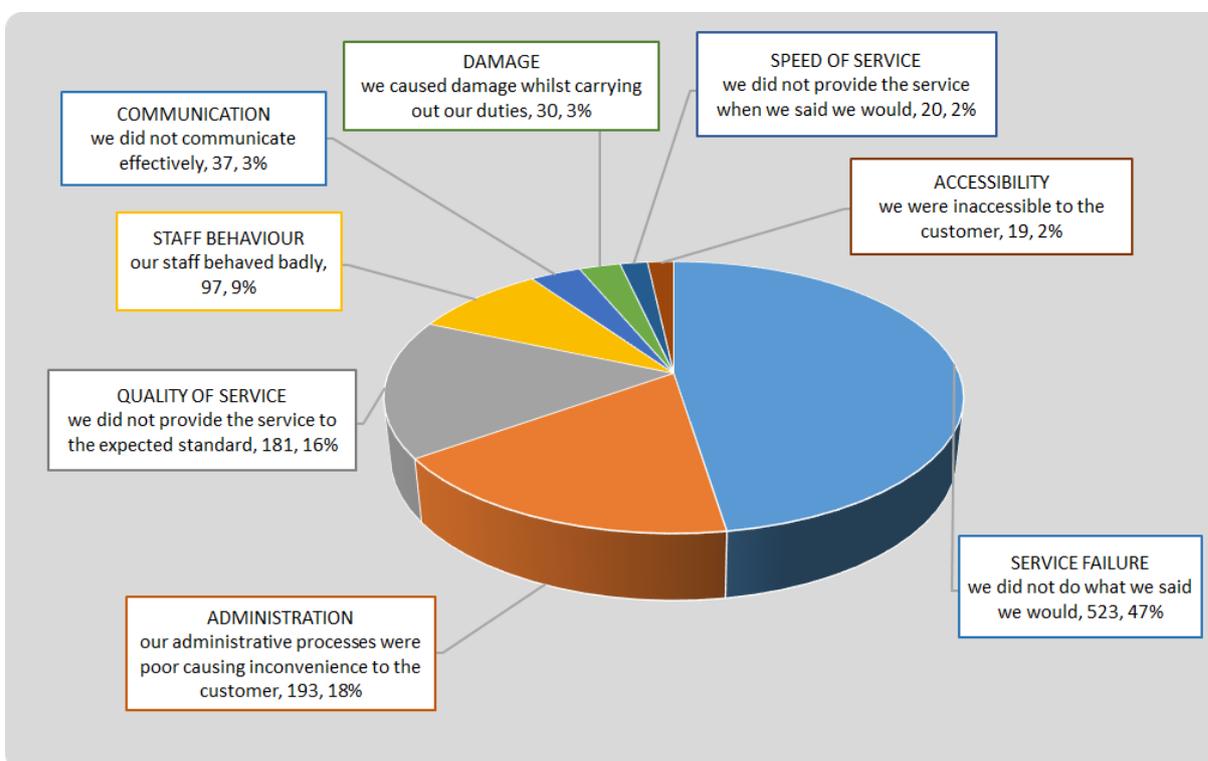
Statutory Complaints: Adult Social Care Services

33. During quarter 1, 2018/19, Adult Care Services received 24 statutory complaints, 14% fewer (-4) than quarter 1, 2017/18.
34. Older People / Physical Disabilities / Sensory Impairment received the most complaints (10) followed by Commissioning (seven). The most common reason for complaint was the standard of care linked to care agencies whose services have been commissioned by the Council (seven).
35. 22 complaints were responded to during quarter 1, 2018/19, all but two within their agreed timescale. Of these 22 complaints: 12 were not upheld (55%), two were upheld (9%) and eight partially upheld (36%). Seven complaints received during the quarter are still being investigated at the time of writing this report.
36. During quarter 1, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints including:
 - Reminding staff to check review dates when cases are transferred to them to ensure reviews are completed within a six week timescale.

Corporate Complaints: Key Messages

37. During quarter 1, 2018/19, we received 1,100 corporate complaints. This is a significant increase compared to quarter 1, 2017/18, during which we received 423 complaints.

38. We have completed investigations into 1,081 of these complaints and 75% were upheld (fully or partially). This increase is partly due to a four fold increase in complaints relating to missed collections (+359) compared to quarter 1, 2017/18. This is directly linked to a change in the process for recording disputed missed collections. Under the previous approach where we had recorded on Bartec that the bin had not been presented, was contaminated or was too heavy, and a customer disputed that this was the case, a dispute process was initiated and investigated outside of the complaints policy. However, to support service improvement and consistency of approach we now log these disputes as complaints and consequently the number has increased.
39. There were eight main reasons for complaint. The following graph shows the split by volume.



40. During quarter 1, our waste collection service completed more than 3 million refuse and recycling collections, 400,000 garden waste collections and 8,000 bulky collections. It also received 746 complaints (67% of the total). It received 93% of all service failure complaints (mainly missed collections), 69% of administration complaints (mainly incorrectly addressed contamination notices), 42% of all staff behaviour (mainly altercations arising from access issues [parked cars, inappropriate road use], a third of all quality of service (mainly not returning bins to their collection points and spillages).
41. Across all services, the most frequent category of complaint was service failure. The vast majority (469 complaints), equating to almost 90% of the category and 40% of all

corporate complaints, was due to missed collections. We have completed investigations into 586 of these complaints and 87% were upheld.

42. The remaining service failure complaints related to us not actioning the customer's service request (45), mainly not repairing or delivering a bin, stickers or recycling box (30 complaints). During quarter 1, we received in the region of 75,000 service requests.
43. The second most frequent cause for complaint was administration. The majority (129) were from customers unhappy to have received a contamination notice that they believed should have been sent to somebody else. In many of these cases, the bin was either not presented or was emptied as usual and no contamination sticker was placed on the bin. We have completed investigations into 125 of these complaints and all were upheld. Recycling assistants are now accompanying bin crews on their rounds and consequently we are identifying more contaminated bins. It is often difficult, especially in back streets to identify the house to which the bin belongs. Consequently, mistakes are made but are rectified as soon as we become aware.
44. The remaining administration complaints mainly related to billing or payment issues (45 complaints), the majority (26 complaints) questioning our accuracy but we also received a small number relating to issues with direct debits (four complaints) or receiving refunds (four complaints).
45. Quality of Service (181 complaints) was the third most frequent cause for complaint and more than half of these complaints originated from our frontline services of refuse and recycling (63 complaints) or clean and green (39 complaints).
46. Of the 181 received, one-third (64 complaints) were due to staff practices, mainly due to refuse and recycling crews not returning the customer's bin to the Bin Collection Point (41). Other staff practices that resulted in customer dissatisfaction included staff making a mess whilst carrying out their duties, refuse and recycling crews leaving gates open or staff working in what the customer perceived as being a dangerous manner.
47. A quarter of quality of service complaints (49 complaints) related to our maintenance activities. 16 complainants felt we were neglecting specific areas and / or allowing standards to deteriorate to an unacceptable level, and related to the general condition of council assets, for example, the condition of highways, car parks, cemeteries, playgrounds (eight complaints), or the condition of the customer's local environment, for example, cleanliness standard of streets, back alleys or areas of derelict land (eight complaints). A further 33 complainants felt that when we did carry out maintenance activities, for example, cutting the grass, repairing the highway, the standard of our work was inadequate.

48. The other main topics for quality of service were spillages (10 complaints) or not permanently resolving an issue (14 complaints). The vast majority relating to spillages occurred during household waste collection; mainly broken glass. We have reminded refuse and recycling crews to clean up any spillages that occur. Not permanently resolving an issue mainly involved enviro-crime, anti-social behaviour or parking. Although we responded to the request for service, we did not implement a long-term solution to prevent it re-occurring. Often complainants are asking for increased enforcement.
49. We received 97 complaints relating to staff behaviour, of which one third originated from our frontline refuse and recycling services.
50. There were three broad areas of complaint. The first was that our staff behaved in an aggressive or intimidating manner, for example, swearing or shouting at customers who approach them in the street (34 complaints). The second was 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 or not appearing to listen properly to a customer query (30 complaints). A third area, complaints that our staff were driving council vehicles in a dangerous manner, for example, speeding, tailgating, near miss, using a mobile phone, or parked a council vehicle in a dangerous manner received 19 complaints. Following these complaints, some staff have undergone additional training.
51. 87% of communication complaints were due to one of three issues. The first related to us giving advice that was inaccurate, misleading, confusing or caused upset (15 complaints). The second was not giving customers any information (10 complaints). The third was not giving customers advance warning of a change (six complaints).

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

52. During quarter 1, 2018/19, 39 complainants requested that we escalate their complaint to the next stage. We agreed it would be appropriate that 30 of these be subject to an independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team. This was based on the service response, remedy already offered and the reasons given by the customer for the escalation. We completed investigations into 19 complaints of which seven were upheld (six partially and 1 fully), as shown in the table below:

Complaint	Action to be taken
<p>The complainant was dissatisfied with pre-application advice provided by our planning team</p>	<p>We have acknowledged that the advice was inadequate.</p> <p>We have apologised for any stress and inconvenience caused, and offered an appropriate refund.</p> <p>We have also modified our process to ensure a reliable and consistent approach.</p>
<p>The complainant requested and paid for a replacement rubbish bin. Although, the damaged bin was replaced, we also removed the garden waste bin in error</p>	<p>We have replaced the garden waste bin and refunded the original replacement bin charge in recognition of the inconvenience caused.</p>
<p>The complainant arranged and paid for a bulky waste collection. However, the collection team came on an unscheduled date and the gate was locked.</p> <p>As the mattress has stood outside for several months, the customer was advised we would no longer collect it</p>	<p>We have collected the mattress.</p>
<p>We incorrectly applied the customer's earnings to their claim for housing benefit and council tax reduction</p>	<p>We have apologised and the customer's claim has been corrected.</p> <p>We are considering a recommendation to write off the majority of the overpaid housing benefit.</p>
<p>We are pursuing the complainant for a Council Tax debt for the period 29/12/14 to 24/01/15. The complainant states this is not their liability and wishes us to stop</p>	<p>Although, there was no fault in the assessment to hold the complainant responsible for this debt, we should have advised the complainant of the regulations we followed and that if they disagreed with our decision, then they have the right to a Valuation Tribunal (independent appeals body).</p> <p>Whilst we acknowledge that if this information was provided, any appeal which may or may not have been made, would not detract the complainant from their legal obligation to pay in accordance with bills and reminder notices that had been issued up until this time.</p> <p>It is recommended that we cease to pursue the collection of this debt.</p>

Complaint	Action to be taken
The complainant feels that we have not reacted or enforced an encroachment issue on Council land	The issue of the hoarding was deemed to be acceptable according to Highways legislation and whilst an encroachment was identified, the nature of the hoarding and the severity of the impact was not deemed to be severe enough to warrant action to remove the fence. However, the length of time the hoarding has stood does represent a concern. A request to remove the hoarding and replace with suitable permanent fencing, within the owners land, will be requested.
The complainant disputes the ownership information of a property which has had planning permission granted for a change of use	Although, we did not review the information to the extent of ascertaining a leasehold on the property, the granting of a planning application is according to material planning considerations and not ownership.

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

53. During quarter 1, 2018/19, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 22 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants and supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers.
54. Of these complaints, three were found to be outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, the ombudsman declined to investigate 10, one was referred back to the council to deal with under our complaints procedure, four were not upheld and no further action was proposed in two cases.
55. The Ombudsman upheld two complaints as detailed below:

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
The Council was not at fault pursuing recovery of council tax when the complainant is disputing liability. But the Ombudsman has recommended the Council confirms how the complainant may appeal.	The Council has notified the complainant of his right of appeal to the Valuation Tribunal.

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
<p>The Council acknowledged the complaint about care provision and whilst it arranged a meeting with the care agency, it did not do enough to address the poor care. The problems with the care agency caused anxiety. A new care agency is now in place and an appropriate remedy is agreed.</p>	<p>The Council apologised for its failings and paid £350 in recognition of the delay in arranging a review and the distress caused. The service area was asked to review the service user's experiences in order to identify where the Council can better support others in similar circumstances so that any concerns about the standard of care are addressed promptly and the steps being taken to improve matters are communicated effectively to the service user and/or their representatives.</p>

Appendix 1: Sample of suggestions received during quarter 1, 2018/19

You said	We did
<p>To use our Customer Access Points to advertise local events and inform residents on what is going on in their local town. Customer suggests bigger notice boards or something more clear for members of the public to see.</p>	<p>We are always happy to advertise local events in our access points and in addition to our leaflet racks and plasma screens do place posters and notices in prominent locations. We will review this request with our facilities team to review further options.</p>
<p>There needs to be improved signage for the new exhibition space at the Gala Theatre. The building's smoked glass windows mean people can't see in so the exhibitions are going unnoticed. A poster in the window would be simple and immediate.</p>	<p>The tinted glass is essential to protect the artworks against sun damage. Without this, we wouldn't be able to attract touring exhibitions. However, we agree that the signage needs to improve. We have an agreed design but production of the vinyl signage was delayed. This was partly due to a large vinyl causing a window further down the foyer to crack, and needing to understand why this occurred before more could be applied, as the result would be both dangerous and costly. There is now a full height vinyl on the gallery window promoting the latest exhibition.</p>

You said	Reason for non-implementation
<p>Include the 'help@durham.gov.uk' e-mail address under the 'Contacts' section on the DCC website.</p>	<p>It was a strategic decision to remove our email address from the website. Requests received by e-mail, which often don't include all the information we need to progress, need to be logged onto our system by a member of staff. To remove this double input and improve our response times, we are encouraging customers to use our online web forms/customer portal. This allows customers to log and track their requests, and as the information is entered straight into the system, requests are instantly transferred to the work queue, even outside working hours.</p>
<p>Remove the recorded 'do it online' message from the phone system as it takes up too much time and leaves the customer on the phone too long when they don't use the internet.</p>	<p>We use our telephony messaging service to give out key information to our customers. Some queries can be dealt with using our online systems and therefore it is beneficial to remind customers of the alternative methods of contacting us. Whilst we appreciate this method isn't a preferred method for everyone, it has reduced some calls and has allowed us to focus on our customers who do need to speak to us. We are constantly reviewing our services and will discuss this at our next telephony review meeting.</p>

Appendix 2: sample of compliments received during quarter 1, 2018/19

Customer's Comments
<p>Customer would like to say how brilliant the Clayport CAP is. Our officer put him at ease over the past few years dealing with his HB and CT and is really easy to get along with and is a credit to the council and would like management to know how grateful he is for all the help since the customer moved here from London.</p>
<p>Customer would like to put a compliment in regarding the street cleaner in Crook. He does a marvellous job and thinks he needs a good pat on the back and a good well done he has been out and cleared her street of dog fouling also.</p>
<p>I would like to thank your officer for all of her help when I made my universal credit claim in the office, she really helped me a lot and went above and beyond to ensure I understood everything and that my claim was submitted successfully.</p>
<p>I rang the main switchboard this morning to speak to someone regarding a repair request. The lady who answered the phone, I'm sorry I don't remember her name, dealt with my enquiry. She took the relevant details, putting me on hold for a few minutes to make enquiries. When she returned she apologised for the wait and had solved the issue, advising me she would need to contact me later in the day to let me know when the repair would be carried out. Within 2 hours a man arrived and completed the repair. I would like to say thank you for such prompt action and hope my appreciation is passed on to the lady in question.</p>
<p>Customer had permit about a month ago for the tip at Hett Hills, he would like to say he was more than pleased with the service he received. They asked would he like some help and from that moment on he hardly had to move they sorted everything out for him so he would like to pass this message on and a big thank you for all the help he received.</p>
<p>I spoke to your officer yesterday and wanted to bring to your attention what amazing customer service he gave after a prior awful call to someone in the LA in another department. He really was the complete opposite. I am very grateful to him for spending the time explaining the potential 80% and further 20% exemption of rates as we are College for young people with special needs (registered charity). His help, support and guidance was much appreciated. He is friendly, professional, knowledgeable but above all you took time to explain fully what the requirements are, he is a true asset to the local authority!</p>
<p>I would just like to say, I am 59 years young and have up until December 2016 lived in Gateshead area. I am very impressed with Durham County council, main roads are cleared in winter, dog waste bins are provided, and emptied! Grass is now being cut, pot holes in roads get sorted.</p> <p>Thank you, more people should appreciate what they have. I hope it all continues.</p>
<p>Customer would like to express her appreciation for the Care Connect service, it gives her great comfort knowing it is there.</p>
<p>I would just like to say a big thank you to the men that collected our bulky items this morning. It was done before 8am, quickly and with little to zero noise. Very reliable service will definitely use again.</p> <p>Thank you</p>

Appendix 3: satisfaction questionnaires are applied to the following service requests

- Abandoned shopping trolleys
- Bin – request help with your bin
- Bonfires
- Bus stop and shelters
- Complaints
- 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
- Noise
- 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