

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.
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**TITLE OF REPORT: COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) FULL REPORT
– 1 APRIL 2011 TO 31 MARCH 2012**

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) received by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and its contractors for the period 01st April 2011 to 31st March 2012.
- 1.2 The report shows that the number of complaints received by the council has continued to reduce in line with the downward trend since 2007 and the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) has once again found no evidence of maladministration in any cases referred to him during the period.
- 1.3 A summary of the key aspects of the Council's 3Cs procedure is shown in Appendix A

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council places high importance and value on running an effective 3Cs procedure, which supports our key corporate priorities of working with our communities and living within our means, by ensuring that we respond effectively to customer feedback and continue to deliver fit for purpose services that our customers value whilst achieving value for money. To support this we ensure that we:
 - Respond to complaints within an appropriate time and in a courteous and efficient manner
 - Listen to our customer's feedback, taking measures where appropriate to improve services and learn and share from what our customers tell us we are doing well
 - Clearly publicise our complaints procedure to our customers
 - Have an effective training and complaints management system enabling a consistent and responsive approach
 - Comply with Local Government Ombudsman requests in a timely and efficient manner

- Ensure that the 3Cs system continues to be robust and effective in line with ISO 10002/2004 – The internationally recognised quality standard for a complaints management system

4. 3Cs RECEIVED, SUMMARY AND PERFORMANCE

3Cs Received - Summary

- 4.1 In the twelve month period, 01st April 2011 to 31st March 2012, the Council received approximately 665,000 contacts; this figure is made up of the following:
- All telephone calls into the Council via direct lines to officers and the customer service centre (CSC)
 - All emails into the CSC
 - Visitors to our Gernon Road office
- 4.2 During the twelve month period a total of 2560 3Cs were received by the Council directly, of which 339 were complaints. This figure equates to 0.38% of the 665,000 contacts made to the Council.
- 4.3 3Cs are received and recorded in a number of ways, the majority are received directly by the council and are recorded on the Lagan CRM system, enabling effective tracking and reporting. Museums and Resource Centres record 3Cs locally in visitor books at each location. The Council also receives some 3Cs which relate to third parties such as Hertfordshire County Council. These are recorded on the CRM and passed to the appropriate body for processing.
- 4.4 It is important to note also that the figure of 2560 3Cs will include contacts from customers who have made comments or complaints on more than one occasion, therefore the figure represents the number of 3Cs and not the number of customers who have made a 3C.
- 4.5 Additionally some customers report 3Cs directly with the contractors that provide the services on our behalf, so in addition to the 2560 reports received directly by the Council a further 1189 3Cs were reported directly to the contractors, more information on the contractor reports is included later in the report

Key headlines

- 4.6 Further detail is provided throughout the report however the key headline information is as follows:
- The number of 3Cs received directly by the council has remained consistent with the previous twelve months with 2560 recorded for 2011/12 and 2454 in 2010/11, with a decrease in complaints and an increase in compliments
 - The number of compliments received about the Council has increased with 1788 received in comparison to 1643 for the previous twelve month period
 - The number of complaints received about the council has continued to decrease with 339 received in comparison to 343 in the previous twelve month period

- A total of 665,000 contacts were made to the council by telephone, email or in person of which 0.05 % have formally complained
- Of the 339 complaints received, 321 were Stage 1 complaints of which 18 were escalated to Stage 2
- Four customers escalated their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)
- The LGO has once again found no evidence of maladministration by the council in any cases investigated during this period
- 34 of the 3Cs (31 comments and 3 complaints) included in the report relate to 3rd parties, Hertfordshire Highways, The Police, North Herts Homes and Hertfordshire County Council

4.7 Response and Acknowledgments

Key performance targets

The key performance targets for the 3Cs process are:

Description	Achieved 2011/12
Complaints should be acknowledged within 4 working days of receipt	92%
Complaints should be resolved within 10 working days of receipt	62%
Response to LGO enquiries should be made within 28 days	100%

- 4.8 The report shows that just 92% of complaints were acknowledged within timescale, however all complaints were acknowledged within four working days but in a few cases the system was not updated correctly at the time of logging. This has been addressed and closer monitoring of this will take place going forward.
- 4.9 Ideally complaints should be responded to in full within ten working days however in some cases this is not possible due to the complexity of the complaint. It is not unreasonable for a complaint to take more than ten days to resolve, the important action in these cases is that the complainant is kept informed of the progress of the complaint and aware of when a resolution may be forthcoming.

- 4.10 The following table provides a breakdown of the time taken to respond where the response was issued after ten days, this is shown as a percentage of the total number of complaints that took more than ten days to resolve.

Total number of days to respond	Breakdown of time taken to resolve complaints over ten days
Between 11 and 15 days	36%
Between 16 and 20 days	26%
Between 21 and 30 days	27%
Between 31 and 40 days	8%
Over 40 days	7%

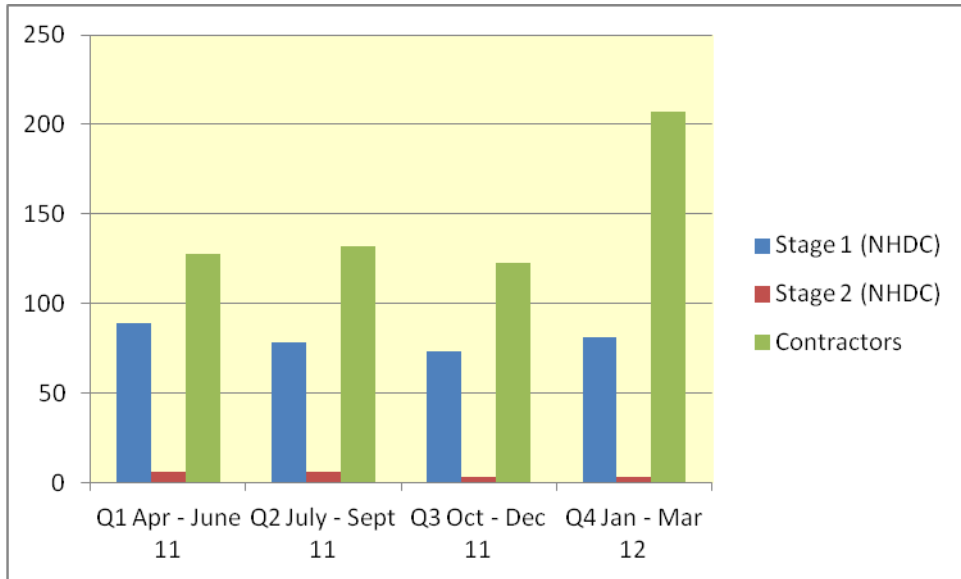
- 4.11 The percentages add up to more than 100% because some complaints have been re-opened once closed, resulting in them being reported as more than one complaint.
- 4.12 The numbers of complaints being re-opened once closed has increased which impacts on reporting, this will be addressed through a series of briefing sessions with responsible officers to ensure that the correct logging process is followed and that complaints are closed correctly in the first place.
- 4.13 NHDC continues to give a high profile to the 3Cs process via our website, press releases and leaflets that tell residents how easy it is to make a comment, compliment or complaint. It is important that we hear from residents about their views of the service we provide, in order that we can continuously seek to improve, and therefore we should not be concerned if overall volumes do not continue to decrease.

3Cs received by NHDC and Contractors

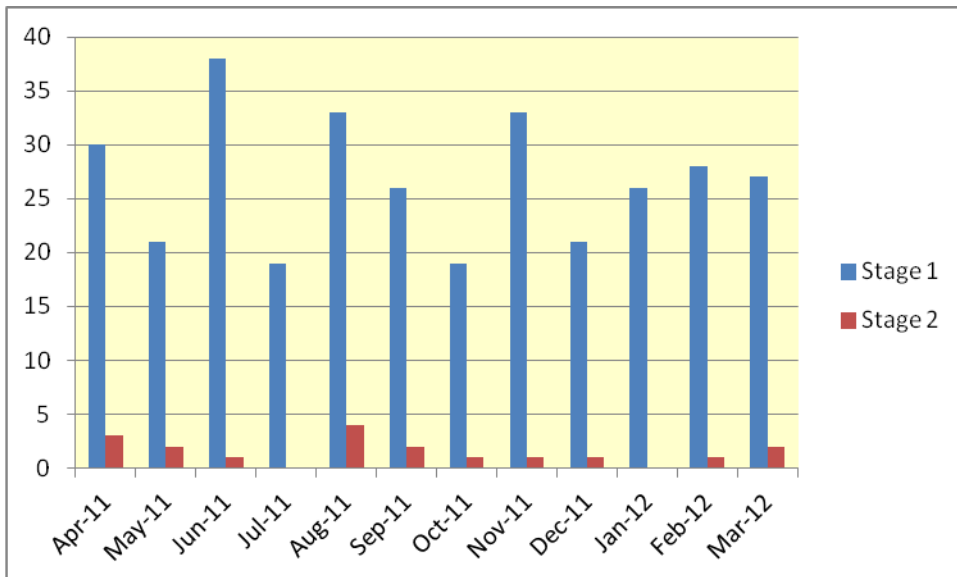
- 4.14 The number of 3Cs received either by NHDC or its contractors are broken down in the chart below, which shows that the largest volumes of complaints relate to services that our contractors provide, more detailed information is provided later in the report. The largest volumes of compliments received relate to the services that are provided directly by NHDC and in particular 77% of the compliments are received at the museums, demonstrating a high level of satisfaction in that area.

2011 / 2012	NHDC	Contractors	3 rd Party
Comments	402	233	31
Compliments	1788	385	0
Complaints (Stage 1 and 2)	336	571	3
Total	2526	1189	34

4.15 The chart below shows the quarterly breakdown of NHDC stage 1 and stage 2 complaints and contractor complaints. An increase in contractor complaints was received in the last quarter (January to March) for waste and leisure services, some of this increase will be related to the colder weather during this time, which impacted on service delivery for example: frozen bins impacted on collection schedules.



4.16 The chart below shows a monthly breakdown of complaints received, highlighting a spike in complaints in June this is mainly attributed to an increase in waste complaints received directly by the council. It is a typical trend for the service area to see an increase in complaints following a bank holiday resulting in changes to collection schedules.



What were customers unhappy about?

- 4.17 A total of 339 complaints were received for the twelve month period and the chart below shows the highest areas of dissatisfaction. More than one reason can be selected per complaint so the totals shown can add up to more than 100% for that reason.

Reason for complaint (Stage 1)	% of complaints with this reason
Failure to deliver a service	32%
Incorrect dealing with enquiry	32%
Quality of service	44%
Staff conduct	12%
Disagreement with policy or decision	12%

Of the 18 complaints that escalated to a Stage 2 the key areas of dissatisfaction are shown below

Reason for complaint (Stage 2)	% of complaints with this reason
Quality of service	39%
Failure to deliver a service	28%
Disagreement with policy or decision	28%

What were customers happy about?

- 4.18 77% of compliments received were for our Museums and Resource Centres. Appendix B shows the compliments received by service area as well as a break down of comments and complaints by service area.

3Cs reported directly to contractors providing services on our behalf

- 4.19 The table below shows a breakdown of 3Cs by contractor

	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
John O'Conner Ltd (grounds maintenance)	0	0	58
Veolia Ltd (waste contractors)	0	65	283
North Herts Leisure centre	124	147	146
Hitchin swim centre	61	98	61
Royston swim centre	48	56	23
Markets	0	19	0
Totals	233	385	571

John O'Conner - Grounds Maintenance

- 4.20 John O'Conner received 58 complaints in the twelve month period, compared to 61 in the same period last year and 93 the year before. 5 of the 58 complaints were justified and the complaints related to grass and hedge cutting and cemeteries.
- 4.21 Examples of an unjustified complaint would be things that would fall outside of John O'Connors responsibility that would be passed on the responsible party, i.e. Hertfordshire Highways, or matters that are outside of the work programme such as a request to have the grass cut more frequently.

Veolia Ltd - Waste Management

- 4.22 Veolia received 283 complaints in the twelve month period, compared to 293 in the same period the previous year and 490 the year before.
- 4.23 The majority of complaints relate to non collection of containers, incorrect returning of boxes and spillages. It is worth noting that an average of 385,400 collections are undertaken each month by Veolia resulting in an average of 23 complaints per month, which is a very low error rate.

Markets

- 4.24 There were a total of 19 compliments recorded directly with the markets for the period with no complaints.

Leisure Centres

- 4.25 The following leisure centres are included in this report;
- North Herts Leisure Centre including Letchworth Outdoor Pool and Fearnhill Sports Centre
 - Hitchin Swim Centre and Archers
 - Royston Leisure Centre
- 4.26 A total of 230 complaints were received across all Leisure centres, compared to 236 for the same period in the previous year. Key areas of dissatisfaction across all Leisure Centres continues to be cleanliness, however this should not be a surprise given the high amount of visitors to each centre.
- 4.27 Each site has reported that all complaints are responded to within 10 days where a response is required and that complaints are addressed during management and staff meetings with appropriate corrective action taken

4.28 In all centres there is a close management focus on cleanliness which includes unannounced site inspections as part of the contract monitoring process. The table below shows the volume of 3Cs per centre and includes the number of visitors each site receives.

	North Herts Leisure Centre	Hitchin Swim Centre	Royston Swim Centre
Comments	124	61	48
Compliments	147	98	56
Complaints	146	61	23
Number of visits per annum	465,808	370,281	360,355
% of visits resulting in complaint	0.03%	0.01%	0.006%
Reasons for complaint	Cleanliness, programming & maintenance	Policy and staff, equipment and maintenance, maintenance (shower and pool temperatures)	Cleanliness, programming, equipment and staff,

Justified Complaints

4.29 The number of justified complaints has decreased. For this twelve month period just 4.4% were recorded as being justified, a decrease in comparison to the previous year at 15% and 7% and 5% for the previous two years.

4.30 A complaint is classified as being justified when NHDC has investigated and has accepted that a clear mistake has been made. That is not to say that all complaints are not valid but the term in this case is use to distinguish clear errors. Managers review all complaints for their area and ensure appropriate corrective action is taken.

Channels used to report a 3C

4.31 Interestingly, the channel used to report a 3C varies depending on the type of 3C as shown in the table below:

Type of 3C	Main channel used	2 nd channel used
Stage1 complaint	Email	telephone
Stage 2 complaint	Email	letter
Comments	Councillor surgery	email
Compliments	3Cs form	email

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

- 4.32 Four complaints were escalated to the LGO, one of which was not investigated as the LGO found no reason to use exceptional power to investigate. Of the three that were investigated the LGO has once again found no evidence of maladministration by the council.

Enquiries and complaints received by the LGO for NHDC 01st April 2011 to 31st March 2012

Type of enquiry / complaint	09/10	10/11	11/12
Premature complaint	2	6	3
Advice Given	3	3	4
Forwarded to investigative team (resubmitted pre matures)	2	1	0
Forwarded to investigative team (new)	10	8	3

Investigative team – Decisions

- 4.33 The 3 complaints that were escalated to the LGO related to the following service areas (as categorised by the LGO):
- Benefits and Tax
 - Environmental services and public protection
 - Planning and development
- 4.34 The three complaints were closed due to No or minor injustice and other. This means the LGO has used its general power to discontinue the investigation. This can be for a variety of reasons but the most common is that any injustice caused does not justify the public expense of pursuing the matter further.

Corporate 3Cs work

- 4.35 NHDC has been accredited in previous years to ISO 10002/2004, the internationally recognised quality standard for complaints management systems.
- 4.36 As the complaints management system is embedded and working effectively with robust management and reporting processes in place, the accreditation process was not carried out in 2011 which resulted in savings of £2,500

- 4.37 Staff have access via the Learning Management System to bespoke training relating to 3Cs – two separate courses cover behavioural training and also system training. The Customer Services Manager has reviewed the behavioural training and updated it to ensure it covers all that NHDC is looking to achieve over the coming years. This programme is now delivered by the Customer Services Manager.
- 4.38 Complaint information is reported to managers on a regular basis. The Customer Services Manager also discusses complaints with service managers as part of an ongoing review process.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is no legal requirement to operate a complaints system. However, the legal consequence of failing to address a complaint through the 3Cs procedure could be significant. Best practice illustrates that complaints dealt with at an early stage reduce escalation, potentially to a legal claim.
- 5.2 Customers have the right to ask the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to investigate a complaint. Under the Local Government Act 1974 section 25 (5)(a) the LGO, prior to proceeding to investigate a complaint, shall satisfy himself that the Council has had the opportunity to investigate and respond. NHDC does this through the Council's complaints procedure if this has not been done prior to receiving the referral, and this is a clear benefit of operating such a procedure. However, under section 26 (5)(b) if it is not reasonable for such a procedure to be followed (this will generally be if the complaint is sufficiently serious), the LGO can choose to investigate immediately. An explanatory leaflet 'How to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman' is available at our Customer Service Centre or on our website www.north-herts.gov.uk, stating which complaints the LGO can and cannot investigate.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 If the Council fails to follow the 3Cs procedure a justified complaint may not be resolved, causing further complaint to the Ombudsman and negative press coverage damaging our reputation as a council, not just a single service.
- 6.2 Claims for damages and compensation could be significant should the 3Cs procedure not be followed. Although no specific provision is made for compensation/costs, outside of insurable claims, any costs are found within existing budgets.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has well established and effective training events to ensure that staff receive behavioural and procedural training specifically for the requirements of the 3Cs procedure.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The new Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010, a major piece of legislation bringing together all the current discrimination laws into one. The Act creates a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on 5 April 2011.

8.2 In line with the Public Sector Quality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct provided by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (this can mean removing or minimising disadvantage; meeting people's needs; taking account of disabilities; encouraging participation in public life.
- Foster good relations between those people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (such as tackling prejudice and promoting understanding)

8.3 The contents of this report do not directly impact on equality, in that it is not making proposals that will have a direct impact on equality or access or outcome for diverse groups. However, individual comments, complaints or compliments may have an equalities impact in terms of providing the service in a better or more equitable manner in which case this will be addressed within the remedial action of that particular issue.

9. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

9.1 Not applicable

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the good performance in managing 3Cs between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012.

10.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the continued reduction in complaints to the Council and the reasons for this.

10.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the LGO did not find any cases of maladministration against the Council.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 This report allows corporate consideration of the 3Cs received by the organisation as a whole and by key services to allow issues raised formally by our customers to be understood and the positive action taken by the Council to be reviewed. This is also a requirement of ISO 10002/2004.

11.2 Listening to our citizens to deliver responsive, high quality, value for money and customer focused services is a key action in support of all that we seek to achieve through our core values.

12. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

12.1 Not applicable

13. APPENDICES

13.1 Appendix A : Summary of 3Cs process

13.2 Appendix B: 3Cs by service area

14. CONTACT OFFICERS

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15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None