

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**11 JUNE 2013**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**13**

**TITLE OF REPORT : COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) FULL YEAR REPORT – 1 APRIL 2012 TO 31 March 2013**

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES  
PORTFOLIO HOLDER – COUNCILLOR B. LOVEWELL

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an annual summary of Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) received by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and its contractors for the period 01<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.
- 1.2 The report shows that there has been a significant decrease in the overall number of 3Cs received when compared to the previous year, following the temporary closure of the Museums which traditionally receive a high volume of compliments.
- 1.3 The report also shows that the number of Complaints increased during this year, this can be largely attributed to bad weather in January, covered in more detail later in the report.
- 1.4 The Ombudsman received 13 separate complaints which were either not investigated by the LGO, or for those that were investigated had no fault found.
- 1.5 Further detailed information is provided in Section 8 of this report, however to summarise the key headline information is as follows:
  - The number of 3Cs received has decreased when compared to the previous year, the total, 2946 is made up of 1292 3C's received directly by NHDC, 431 received at the Museums prior to full closure and a further 1223 reported directly to the contractors who provide services on our behalf.
  - There has been an increase in the number of complaints received directly by the Council and by our contractors when compared to the previous year.
  - The Council received approximately 683,000 contacts by telephone, email or in person, of which 0.08% have resulted in a formal complaint.
  - 559 complaints were received at NHDC directly of which 441 were Stage 1 complaints. 18 of those complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the process because the customer was not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint.

- 13 separate complaints were taken directly to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) which were either not investigated by the LGO and those that were investigated had no fault found.
- Five of the 3Cs received (3 comments and 2 complaints) included in the report relate to Third Parties, namely Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Highways.

1.6 A summary of the key aspects of the Councils 3Cs procedure is shown in Appendix A

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the impact the bad weather in January had on key services that lead to an increase in complaints during this year.

2.2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the continued good performance in managing 3Cs between 01<sup>st</sup> April 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

2.3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the Local Government Ombudsman did not find any cases of maladministration against the Council.

## **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 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 part of our quality based approach to complaints management in line with national accreditation systems.

3.2 Listening to our citizens supports us in delivering responsive, high quality value for money and customer focussed services.

## **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

4.1 No alternative options have been considered as this report is an update report for information only.

## **5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

5.1 No general consultation has been carried out as this report is an update report for information only, although the content of this report has been discussed with the relevant portfolio holder. This report has also been presented to the Senior Management Team at NHDC.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

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

## **7. BACKGROUND**

7.1 The Council places high importance and value on running an effective 3Cs procedure which supports our 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 timescale and in a courteous and efficient manner.
- Listen to our customers feedback, taking measures where appropriate to improve services as well as learning 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.

## **8. ISSUES**

### **8.1 3Cs Received, Summary and Performance**

Between 01<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 North Herts District Council received approximately 683,000 contacts, this figure is made up of the following:

- All telephone calls into the Council via the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and direct lines to officers.
- All emails into the CSC
- Face to face customers seen at the CSC

This figure does not include emails direct to officers or calls directly to officers mobiles, neither are contacts and visits made directly with the contractors that supply services on behalf of the Council included.

8.2 During this time a grand total of 2946 Comments, Compliments and Complaints were received, this figure includes all (1292) 3Cs made directly to the Council, (431) to our Museums and (1223) via the contractors that provide services on our behalf.

8.3 The table at 8.5 shows a breakdown of 3Cs by Directorate and by service area. contractor data is also included in this table to provide a complete breakdown of the services that receive 3Cs, contractor data is indicated with an asterix.

8.4 The table also shows five 3Cs included in our figures which relate to Third Parties, as a rule these are not usually taken on behalf of the third party other than in exceptional circumstances, hence the numbers are very low.

## 8.5

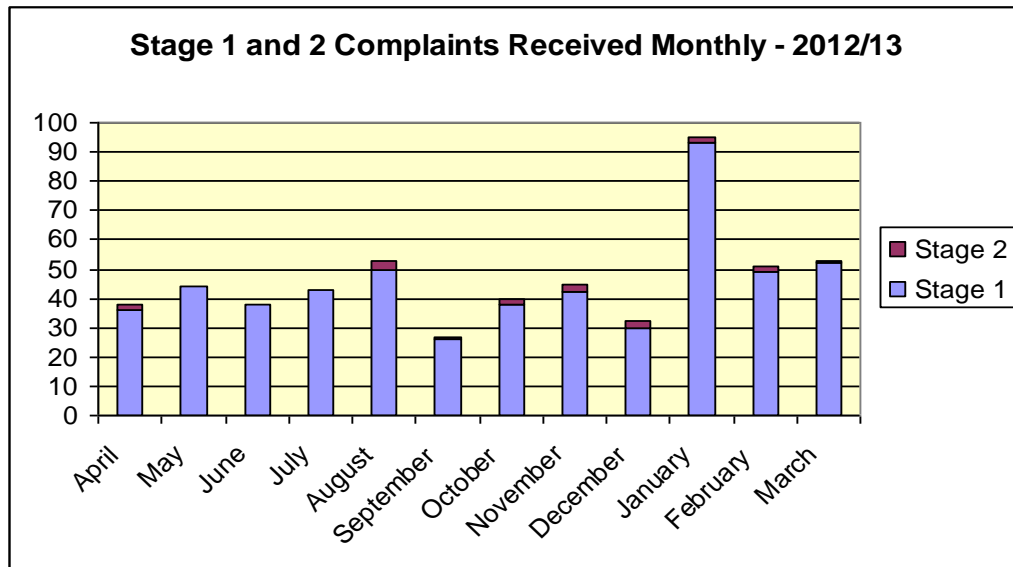
<b>Chief Executive Directorate</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Compliments</b>	<b>Complaints</b>
Democratic Services	2	2	6
<b>Customer Services Directorate</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Compliments</b>	<b>Complaints</b>
Communications Team	4	0	1
Customer Service Centre	2	24	7
Grounds Maintenance	12	40	28
Grounds Maintenance Contractor* (John O'Conner)	0	2	106
Leisure	19	14	28
Leisure Centre Contractors * (North Herts, Hitchin and Royston)	182	313	183
Markets *	3	2	0
Museums	38	393	0
Parking Services	5	2	30
Waste Management	124	16	288
Waste Management * (Veolia)	0	128	305
<b>Finance, Policy &amp; Governance</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Compliments</b>	<b>Complaints</b>
Accountancy Services	1	0	0
Benefits	0	8	17
Community Development	3	187	1
Community Services	2	11	3
Halls	5	5	1
Information Unit	4	1	2
Legal Services	0	0	3
Post & Admin	0	0	1
Performance, Policy & partnership	0	4	1
Property Services	3	0	7
Revenue Technical	1	0	1
Revenues Billing & Recovery	9	8	30
<b>Planning, Housing and Enterprise</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Compliments</b>	<b>Complaints</b>
Building Control	0	2	2
Careline	0	159	1
Enforcement	1	3	4
Environmental Health	3	2	19
Food Health & Safety	0	2	2
Housing Needs	2	0	18
Licensing & Enviro-Crime	2	0	15
Planning Control & Conservation	7	8	20
Planning Policy	11	1	20
Private Sector Housing	0	8	1
<b>Third Party</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Compliments</b>	<b>Complaints</b>
Herts County Council	3	0	1
Highways partnership	0	0	1
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>1345</b>	<b>1153</b>

**8.6 3Cs received directly by the Council**

Of the 3Cs received directly by the Council, 264 were comments, 559 were complaints and 900 were compliments (including museums). Approximately 683,000 contacts were received either via the CSC or calls made to officers direct lines, this figure does not include calls directly to officers mobiles or emails or contacts directly between our customers and contractors. Based on 683,000 contacts the number of complaints received equates to 0.08%.

8.7 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.

8.8 The chart below shows the monthly volume of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received directly by NHDC, highlighting a significant increase in January. Severe weather in January resulted in major disruption to the waste service which saw some collections suspended for a number of days. Complaints regarding the waste service increased from 14 in December to 73 in January.

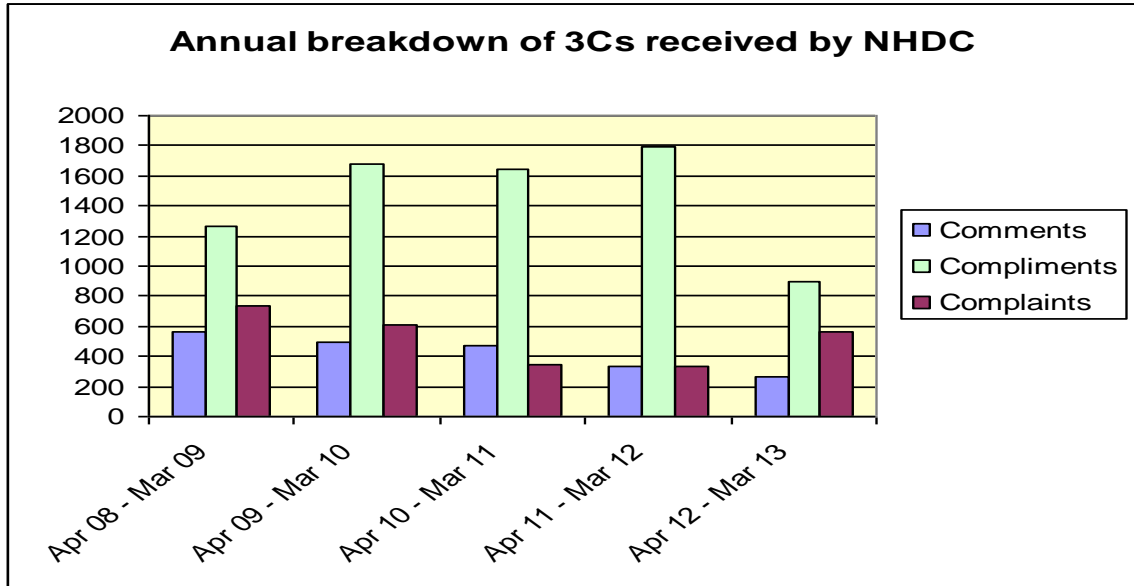


8.9 It is important to note also that the number of 3Cs will include contacts from customers who have made comments or complaints on more than one occasion, for example one customer has submitted 25 3Cs during this period. Therefore the figure represents the number of 3Cs received and not the number of customers who have made a 3C. Officers are currently reviewing the policies and procedures for dealing with vexatious complainants to consider this aspect.

8.10 Additionally some customers report 3Cs directly with the contractors that provide services on our behalf, more information on this is included further in the report.

**8.11 Annual Comparisons**

The chart below shows the annual volumes of 3Cs received by NHDC. The number of complaints had remained similar for 2010/11 and 2011/12 following a decline from 2008, whilst compliments had increased, reaching an all time high in 2011/12.



8.12 Significant changes and influences on key front line services led to a change in the pattern during 2012/13 seeing an increase in complaints, largely as a result of adverse weather which led to service disruptions and a decrease in compliments following the temporary closure of the Museums service which has historically attracted high numbers of compliments.

**8.13 What customers were unhappy about**

The table below shows the categorisation of the complaints that were received directly by NHDC indicating the highest areas of dissatisfaction. Also shown is the percentage of complaints with each reason for complaint, this figure totals more than 100% because a complainant can choose to select more than one reason for a complaint.

The most commonly selected reason for a complaint continues to be 'Quality of Service'.

Reason for complaint (reported to NHDC only)	% of complaints with this reason
Quality of Service	53%
Failure to deliver a service	31%
Other	18%
Staff Conduct	11%
Disagreement with policy or decision	7%

**8.14 What customers were happy about**

Of the 507 compliments received directly, 39% were for Community Services, specifically relating to the Play Ranger services, 31% for Careline and 8% were for Grounds Maintenance.

8.15 When the compliments for the Museum service are combined the number of NHDC compliments increases to 900, with the museum service accounting for 43% of those.

**8.16 Response Performance**

The percentage of complaints responded to in full within 10 working days was 70%, an increase from 62% for the previous year.

8.17 Complaints should ideally be responded to in full within 10 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 10 days to resolve, however it is important that the complainant is kept informed of the progress of their complaint and is made aware of when a resolution can be expected.

8.18 Reports are regularly produced of any complaints that are approaching or have exceeded the 10 days, with update requests sent to service managers.

8.19 NHDC continues to give a high profile to the 3Cs process via our website, press releases and leaflets that tell residents how to make a comment, compliment or complaint. It is important that we continue to hear from residents about their views of the service we provide in order that we can continuously seek to improve, therefore we should not be concerned that we continue to receive complaints despite taking appropriate corrective action.

**8.20 Channels used to report a 3C**

The channel most used to register a 3C directly with NHDC (excluding museums) was email, which was the channel of choice for 42% of 1292 3C's, followed by telephone at 26% and then face to face at 9%. This preference was regardless of the type of 3C as shown in the table below.

Type of 3C	Main channel used	2 <sup>nd</sup> channel used
Stage1 complaint	email	telephone
Stage 2 complaint	email	telephone
Comments	email	telephone
Compliments	email	telephone

8.21 In addition to the 3Cs already detailed in 8.5, additional 3Cs were also received directly by Contractors providing services on our behalf. The number of 3Cs received overall by contractors has increased when compared to the previous year, again the inclement weather in 2012 followed by severe weather in 2013 has resulted in an increase in complaints to John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance and Veolia Ltd whose services were affected as a result.

## 8.22 3Cs reported directly to contractors providing services on our behalf

The table below shows a breakdown of 3Cs by contractor for the year 2012/13 and a comparative breakdown for the previous year.

	Comments		Compliments		Complaints	
	11/12	12/13	11/12	12/13	11/12	12/13
John O'Conner (grounds maintenance)	0	0	0	2	58	106
Veolia Ltd (waste)	0	0	65	128	283	305
Leisure Centres (North Herts, Hitchin & Royston)	233	182	301	313	230	183
Hitchin & Royston markets	0	2	19	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>594</b>

- 8.23 Complaints relating to our contractors are monitored through contract performance meetings and emphasis is placed on addressing complaints and ensuring appropriate corrective action is taken at management and staff meetings.
- 8.24 As the tables show an increase in complaints has been received John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance Ltd, Veolia and North Herts Leisure Centre, information regarding the 3Cs for the Contractors is covered in the following sections.
- 8.25 **John O'Conner – Grounds Maintenance Ltd**  
John O'Conner received 106 complaints during the six month period, compared to 58 for the previous year.
- 8.26 The increase in complaints for John O'Conner reflects the difficult growing season in 2012 and the number of days lost due to inclement weather. Investigation into the type of complaints highlighted concerns with grass arisings left on footpaths and weed growth in shrub borders.
- 8.27 33 of the complaints were considered justified. Unjustified complaints would typically either fall outside of John O'Conner's responsibility; i.e. highways, which would be passed onto the responsible party or matters that are outside of the agreed work programme such as a request for more frequent grass cutting.
- 8.28 Whilst the risk of adverse weather always poses an operational risk due to the seasonal nature of the work, progress has been made to develop new routes, plans and programs to address the issues raised above and have now been in place since the beginning of April. The results so far are very positive and we anticipate an improvement in the future.
- 8.29 **Veolia Ltd – Waste Management**  
Veolia has seen an increase in both the number of complaints and compliments when compared to the previous year. A total of 305 complaints were received, compared to 283 last year and 128 compliments compared to 65 last year.
- 8.30 The majority of complaints typically relate to non collection of containers, incorrect returning of boxes and spillages, however there were two periods of increase in complaints relating to specific service affecting activities that took place during the year.



- 8.31 An awareness campaign took place in August resulting in a significant number of bins being rejected due to contamination of the organic waste stream.
- 8.32 The adverse weather in January resulted in a suspension of services for a number of days due to frozen bins, frozen contents and unsafe road conditions for the heavy vehicles. Subsequently NHDC has developed and implemented a formal policy regarding adverse weather to better manage customer expectations regarding late or deferred collections which were a significant element of this year's complaints to the service; in conjunction with this we recognise the need to give high profile to effectively communicating any service changes to our residents We are continuing to develop communication methods to include the proactive use of Twitter and potentially text messaging in the future.
- 8.33 It is worth noting that an average of 385,400 collections are undertaken each month by Veolia resulting in an average of 25 complaints per month which is a very low error rate.

8.34 **Leisure Centres**

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

- 8.35 Across all three leisure centres there has been a reduction in complaints and an increase in compliments, complaints have decreased to 183 for the year compared to 230 in the previous year and compliments have increased to 313 compared to 301 in the previous year.
- 8.36 Areas of dissatisfaction vary although they mainly relate to programming, maintenance, cleanliness and staff conduct. Across all centres unannounced site inspections take place as part of the contract monitoring process.
- 8.37 The table below shows the breakdown of 3C's for each Leisure Centre along with visitor numbers and the percentage of visits resulting in a complaint.
- 8.38 All three Centres have seen an increase in visitor numbers when compared to the previous year (as shown in table in 8.39) North Herts Leisure Centre has seen a slight increase in both complaints and compliments which with an increase in visits to the centre maintains a figure of just 0.03% of visits resulting in a complaint.

8.39

	North Herts Leisure Centre		Hitchin Swim Centre & Archers		Royston Leisure Centre	
	11/12	12/13	11/12	12/13	11/12	12/13
Comments	124	86	61	61	48	35
Compliments	147	154	98	118	56	41
Complaints	146	152	61	22	23	9
Number of visitors received	465,808	474,447	342,949	347,573	365,658	367,012
% of visits resulting in complaint	0.03%	0.03%	0.01%	0.006%	0.006%	0.002%

#### 8.40 Details of 3Cs received by NHDC and Contractors

The table below shows a breakdown of 3Cs received by NHDC and our contractors as well as those received at the Museums.

	<b>NHDC (including third party)</b>	<b>Museums</b>	<b>Contractors</b>	<b>Total</b>
Comments	226	38	184	448
Compliments	507	393	445	1345
Complaints	559	0	594	1153

#### 8.41 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

Fourteen complaints were escalated to the LGO, one of which was taken twice so there were thirteen separate complainants. The LGO chose not to investigate six of those complaints because they had not gone through the NHDC complaints process or were outside of the LGO's jurisdiction. The remaining seven that were investigated resulted in no fault found or evidence of mal administration by NHDC.

#### 8.42 Changes to the LGO service

The LGO has recently undergone a restructure which has resulted in changes being made to the way complaints are handled. The changes aim to deliver a service that deals with complaints swiftly and proportionately.

8.43 Straightforward cases are handled at the earliest opportunity with only cases that require more detailed work being referred for investigation.

8.44 Premature complaints are no longer referred by the LGO to local authorities, it will be up to the complainant to follow the local authorities process should they wish – the exception to this will be where the complainant is vulnerable or cannot be reasonably expected to pursue on their own.

8.45 A new assessment phase has been introduced which is designed to enable sound and justified decision making at the earliest opportunity and at the lowest cost. This new phase seeks to screen out complaints that are out of the LGOs jurisdiction, premature or do not merit formal investigation, enabling more serious complaints to be investigated with decisions made within 20 days

#### 8.46 Corporate 3Cs work

NHDC has been accredited in previous years to ISO 10002/2004, the internationally recognised quality standard for complaints management systems. Although the Accreditation is no longer carried out following an annual efficiency saving of £2,500 the complaints management system is embedded with robust management and reporting processes.

8.47 Staff have access via the Learning Management System to bespoke training relating to 3Cs covering behavioural training and also system training, this is complimented by practical support from the Customer Services Manager and Team Leaders.

8.48 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.

8.49 In depth analysis of the number of justified complaints will be conducted and the findings will be included in the half yearly report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee later in the year.

## 9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 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 avoiding a legal claim.

9.2 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference state that it is entitled to review the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance and targets.

## 10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no specific financial implications relating to the 3Cs process, however claims for damages and compensation could be significant should the 3Cs procedure not be followed. No specific Corporate risk allowance is made for compensation/costs, outside of insurable claims, instead any costs have to be met from within existing budgets.

## 11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no specific risks relating to the 3Cs process on the risk register, however, 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.

## 12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.

12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.3 The authority actively promotes the opportunities available to the public to report issues of concern, to comment on services or to complain and whilst that can increase the number of 3Cs we ultimately receive, it is important that this access and 'voice' remains available to all parties and all sections of the community.

## 13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12.

**14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 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.

**15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1 Appendix A – Summary of the 3Cs procedure

**16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

**16.1 Report Author**

Jo Dufficy, Customer Service Manager  
Email: johanne.dufficy@north-herts.gov.uk  
Telephone: 01462 474555

**16.2 Contributors**

John Robinson, Strategic Director Customer Services

Liz Green, Head of Policy and Community Services

Anthony Roche, Acting Corporate Legal Manager and Monitoring Officer

Kerry Shorrocks, Corporate Human Resources Manager

**17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 17.1 None