

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
21 JANUARY 2013**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**11**

**TITLE OF REPORT : COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) HALF YEAR UPDATE – 1 APRIL 2013 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 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 a summary of Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's) received by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and its contractors for the period 01<sup>st</sup> April 2013 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013.
- 1.2 The report shows that the number of 3C's received has decreased overall when compared to the previous year, however that is due to the closure of the museums which would typically receive high volumes of compliments on a monthly basis.
- 1.3 The report also shows that the number of complaints received by the council has increased when compared to the same period of the previous year. Further information regarding the reasons for the increase is provided in section 8, however to summarise, the increase can be mainly attributed to the changes to the waste and recycling service that were implemented during the Spring and Summer.
- 1.4 The Ombudsman received two separate complaints of which one was outside of jurisdiction and the other had no fault found.
- 1.5 Further detailed information is provided in Section 8 of this report and a summary of the key aspects of the Council's 3C's procedure is shown in Appendix A, however to summarise the key headline information is as follows:
  - A total of 1561 3C's were received either directly by NHDC or reported directly to the contractors that provide services on behalf of NHDC, this total comprises of the following:
    - Comments – 267
    - Compliments - 512
    - Complaints – 782
  - There has been a decrease in the number of compliments received following the closure of the museums where typically high volumes of compliments are received.

- 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 405,000 contacts by telephone, email or in person, of which 0.08% have resulted in a formal complaint. This figure does not include emails directly into service areas, web traffic or contacts made directly with contractors.
- 336 complaints were received at NHDC directly of which 320 were Stage 1 complaints. 16 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.
- Two separate complaints were taken directly to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) of which one was outside of jurisdiction and the other had no fault found.
- 86% of complaints received at NHDC were responded to within the target response time of ten days.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the continued good performance in managing 3C's between 01<sup>st</sup> April 2013 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013.
- 2.2 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 3C's received by the Organisation and our Contractors 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.

## **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 for information only, although the contents have been discussed with the relevant portfolio holder.

## **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 3C's 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 learn from what our customers tell us we do well.
- Clearly publicise our complaints procedure to all 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 3C's 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 3C's Received, Summary and Performance**

During the six month period 01<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013, the Council received approximately 405,000 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 (not service areas directly)
- Face to face customers seen at the CSC

(Not included in this figure are emails received directly by service areas and officers, web traffic or contact made directly with our contractors)

During this period a grand total of 1561 3C's were received, this figure includes all 3C's made directly to the Council and via the contractors that provide services on our behalf as well as a small number that relate to third parties.

The table below shows a breakdown of 3C's by Directorate and by service area. The following sections then provide further information about the 3C's received directly by NHDC and our contractors.

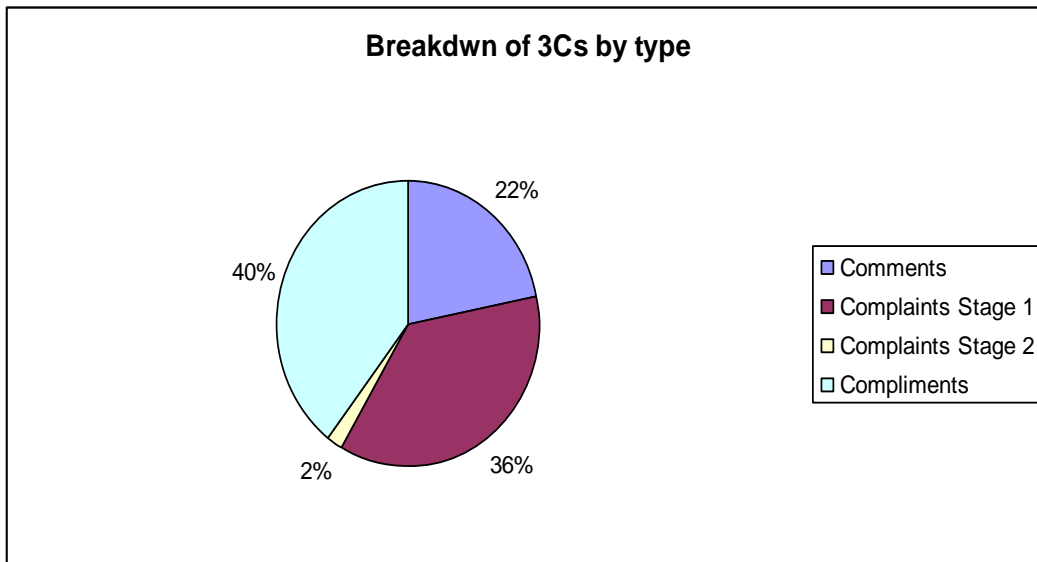
Chief Executive Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Democratic Services	2	2	4
Customer Services Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Communications Team	1	0	0
Customer Service Centre	2	12	5
Grounds Maintenance * <i>includes contractor data</i>	6	17	58
Leisure * <i>includes contractor data</i>	83	78	89
Markets	0	0	1
Museums	0	0	0
Parking Services	4	2	21
Waste Management * <i>includes contractor data</i>	134	150	538
Finance, Policy & Governance	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Benefits	1	7	8
Community Development	16	146	1
Community Services	0	0	4
Information Unit	2	0	0
Legal Services	0	0	0
Post & Admin	0	1	1
Property Services	1	0	6
Revenue Technical	1	0	3
Revenues Billing & Recovery	4	3	9
Planning, Housing and Enterprise	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Building Control	0	1	3
Careline	0	75	1
Enforcement	0	5	0
Environmental Health	2	1	1
Food Health & Safety	0	0	2
Halls	1	1	1
Housing Needs	0	0	7
Licensing & Enviro-Crime	1	1	4
Planning Control & Conservation	2	7	10
Planning Policy	4	0	5
Private Sector Housing	0	3	0
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>782</b>

## 8.2 3C's received directly by the Council

877 3C's were received directly by the Council, the breakdown of this is as follows:

- Comments – 192
- Compliments - 349
- Complaints – 336

The pie chart below shows the percentage breakdown of 3C by type.



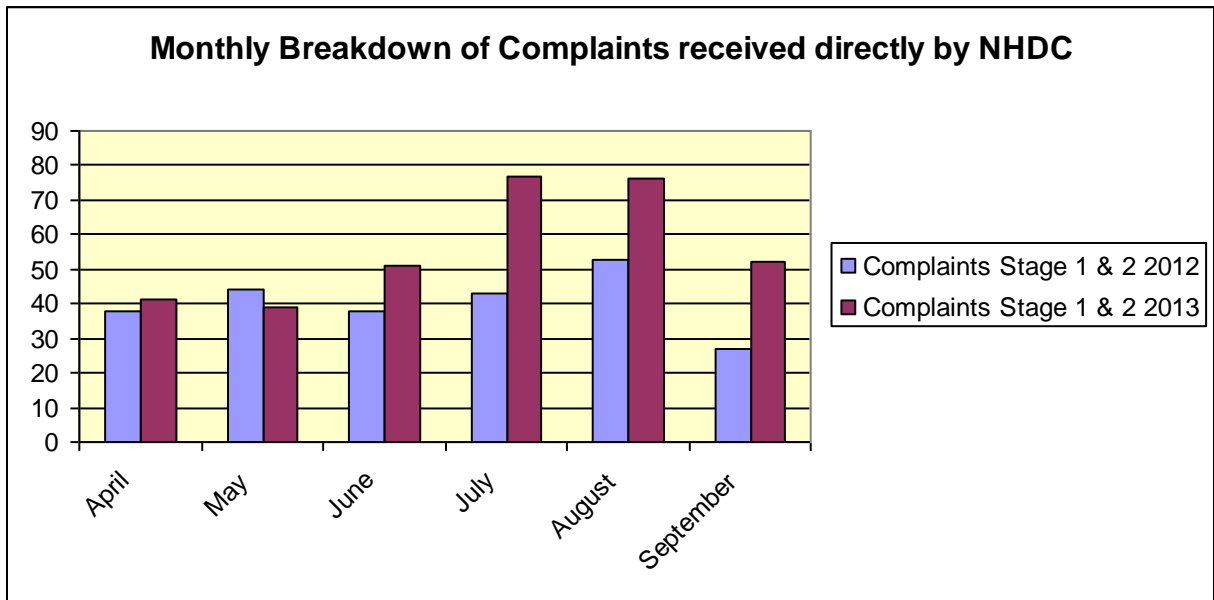
8.3 3C's are received and recorded in a number of ways, the majority are received directly by the Council and are recorded on the CRM system enabling effective tracking and reporting. Museums and Resource Centres record 3C's locally in visitor books at each location.

8.4 Contractors record and manage their own 3C's and report this information regularly back to the Council which forms part of the ongoing contract management process.

## 8.5 Complaints received directly by the Council

The chart below shows that the level of complaints started to increase in June and continue to increase during July and August with a decline in September.

- 8.6 The increase in complaints was in relation to the new waste and recycling service, the first increase in June was in response to the information that was communicated to residents regarding the changes, via Outlook and direct correspondence.



- 8.7 The subsequent increase during July and August was at the height of the new service roll out, during this time the smaller purple bins were being delivered with second brown bins removed from some properties that had historically had two brown bins. During this time the majority of the districts residents were starting to receive the new service .

- 8.8 It is worth noting that throughout this time, levels of complaints and operational performance levels were monitored very closely, with high levels of communication and information supplied to residents. A weekly MIS report dedicated to the new service was distributed to Councillors to provide up to date information and reports.

- 8.9 As the chart shows complaint levels started to decrease during September as the new system became embedded.

- 8.10 With the exception of Waste management, other services remained in line with previous year and have not seen a significant change in the level of complaints

**8.11 What customers were unhappy about**

For complaints reported directly to the Council we are able to categorise at a high level the reason for the complaint, a breakdown of these reasons is shown in the table below. More than one complaint reason can be selected by the customer therefore the percentages will total more than 100%.

Reason for complaint	% of complaints with this reason
Quality of Service	52 %
Failure to deliver a service	37 %
Disagreement with policy or decision	12 %
Staff Conduct	9 %

**8.12 Complaint Response Performance**

The percentage of complaints responded to in full within 10 working days was 86 % which is an improvement on the previous year. Regular reporting of outstanding 3C's enables the CSC team to highlight to Managers where complaints are in breach of the SLA.

8.13 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.

**8.14 Justified Complaints**

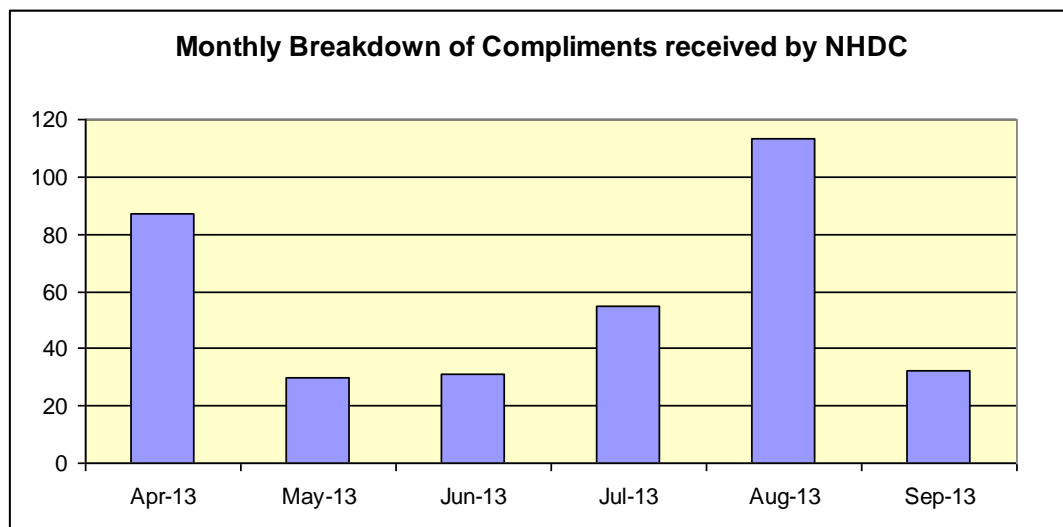
For this reporting period 23% were recorded as Justified complaints following investigation, as a reminder the following would be classed as a justified complaint:

- Where there is substance in the allegations made by the complainant, whether minor in significance or otherwise
- Where we have failed to do something we should have
- Where we have needed to take action to correct an error

8.15 NHDC continues to give a high profile to the 3C's 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.

**8.16 Compliments received directly by the Council**

The chart below shows the monthly breakdown of compliments received directly by NHDC. We know that compliments overall have decreased following the closure of the museums, however the chart below is useful to show the seasonal increase in compliments for services such as the Play Ranger Service.



8.17 **What customers were happy about**

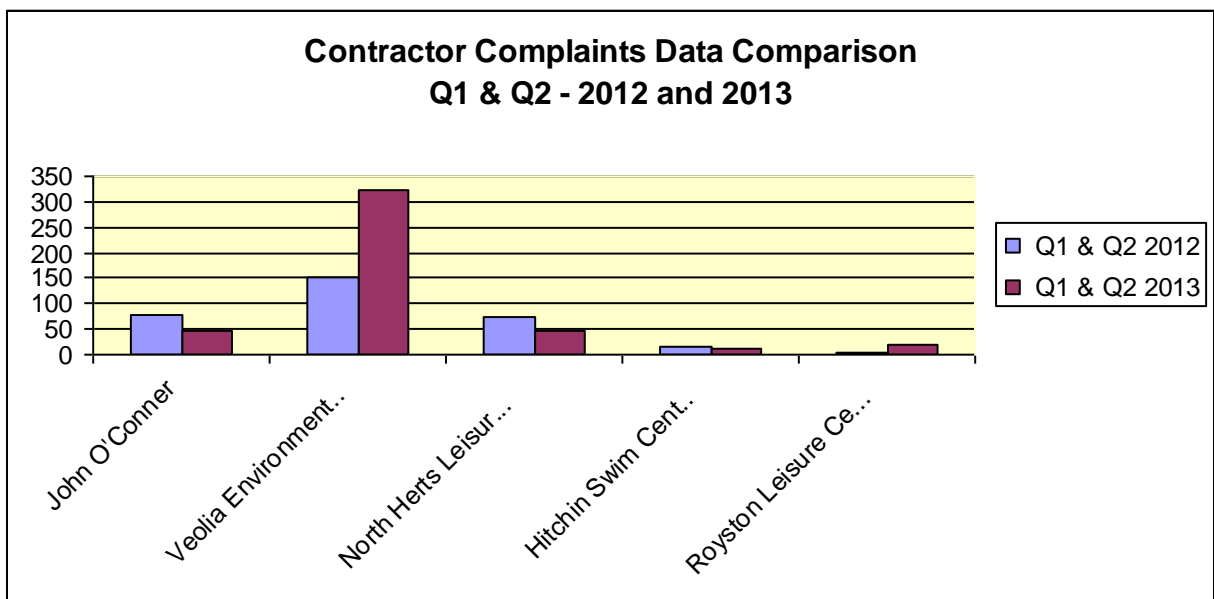
Of the 349 compliments received directly, 42% were for Community Development, 22% for Careline, 14% for Waste Management with 5% for Grounds Maintenance and similarly 5% for Leisure Services.

8.18 **3C's reported directly to Contractors providing services on our behalf**

Additionally some customers report 3C's directly with the contractors that provide services on our behalf, during this six month period 684 3C's were received by the contractors, this is an increase from 648 for the same period of the previous year.

8.19 The increase in complaints relating to the new waste and recycling service is also reflected in the information relating to the contractors Veolia Environmental Services who provide the service on our behalf. This is shown on the chart below.

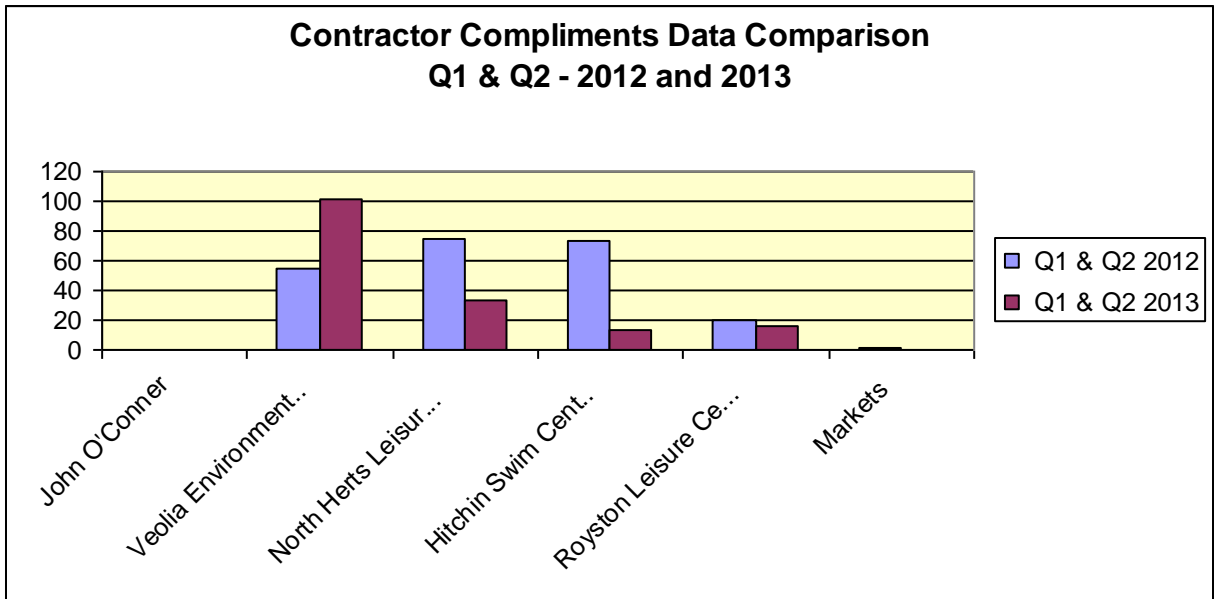
8.20 Complaints relating to our contractors are monitored through contract performance meetings and emphasis is placed on addressing complaints and ensuring appropriate corrective action is taken at management and staff meetings.



8.21 The chart also shows that complaints to our other contractors have decreased, with the exception of Royston Leisure centre who received 14 more complaints than the previous year.

8.22 The chart below shows the quarterly breakdown of compliments made directly to our contractors as well as a comparison to the same period of the previous year. Similarly to the complaints data, Veolia Environmental Services have received an increase in the number of compliments received.

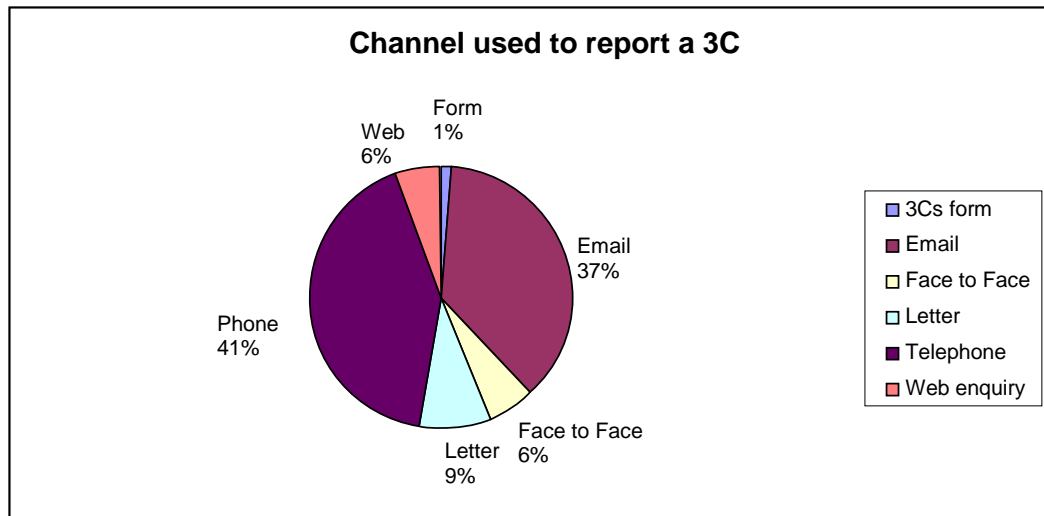




**8.23 Channels used to report a 3C**

Of the 3C's received directly by NHDC the majority were received by email (42%) followed by telephone (37%) as shown in the chart below.

Letter as a channel accounts for 9% of 3C's, which although is a low percentage, this has up until recently taken up a significant amount of time to process. Recently scanning of letters via the Multi Functional Devices has been enabled to allow us to scan letters and attach to the case within the CRM rather than manually typing the letter, making the process more efficient.



**8.24 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

Two complaints were escalated to the LGO, of which one was outside of the LGO's jurisdiction and the other had no fault found.

## 8.25 **Corporate 3C's work**

8.26 NHDC has been accredited in previous years to ISO 10002/2004, the internationally recognised quality standard for complaints management systems. As the complaints management system is embedded and working effectively with robust management and reporting processes in place, the formal accreditation process is no longer carried out resulting in an annual saving of £2,500.

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

8.28 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.

8.29 The 3C's policy and supporting processes are undergoing a review to ensure that the process continues to be aligned with our strategic priorities.

## 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 3C's procedure could be significant. Best practice illustrates that complaints dealt with at an early stage reduce escalation, potentially avoiding a legal claim.

9.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference include a function to scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or service areas. This report is intended to enable Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discharge this function with respect to performance of the 3C's procedure.

## 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.

10.2 As the complaints management system is embedded and working effectively, with robust management and reporting processes in place, the formal accreditation process is no longer carried out resulting in an annual saving of £2,500.

## 11. **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 If the Council fails to follow the 3C's 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 3C's we ultimately receive, it is important that this access and 'voice' remains available to all parties and all sections of the community. In instances where a complainant feels that their specific needs have not been met, and they indicate that this may have been due to their marital status, gender, race, age etc, complaints are reviewed both by the relevant service area and the corporate policy team, to ensure any decision making is compliant with equalities policies and legislation.

## **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 3C's procedure.

## **15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1 Appendix A – Summary of 3C's information

## **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

17.1 None