

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**  
**17 June 2014**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**14**

**TITLE OF REPORT: COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) FULL YEAR UPDATE – 1 APRIL 2013 TO 31 March 2014**

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 (3Cs) received by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and its contractors for the period 01<sup>st</sup> April 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.
- 1.2 The report shows that the number of 3Cs received has increased overall when compared to the previous year, when broken down the number of complaints has increased and compliments have decreased following the temporary closure of the museum service.
- 1.3 The increase in complaints relate to the Customer Services Directorate and can mainly be attributed to I changes to the waste and recycling service that was successfully implemented during 2013. Further information relating to this is provided in section 8.
- 1.4 The Ombudsman received 11 separate complaints, details are included in section 8.29. One investigation found the Council to be at fault and resulted in a payment awarded to the complainant. All other cases had no fault found or were outside of jurisdiction.
- 1.5 Further detailed information is provided in Section 8 of this report and a summary of the key aspects of the Council's 3Cs procedure is shown in Appendix A, however to summarise the key headline information is as follows:
  - A total of 1413 3Cs were received directly by NHDC this total comprises of the following:
    - 315 Comments
    - 469 Compliments
    - 593 Complaints Stage 1
    - 36 Complaints Stage 2
  - Additionally a further 1229 3Cs were received primarily by Veolia in respect of waste and recycling and by the other contractors that provide services on behalf of the Council, this total comprises of the following:
    - 157 Comments
    - 272 Compliments
    - 800 Complaints

- An annual comparison is included in section 8 of this report, however to summarise the number of complaints has increased for this reporting year
- 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.
- The Customer Services Directorate accounts for the vast majority of complaints (79%) with the highest volume (64%) of complaints within the directorate relating to the waste service followed by parking services (6%). This reflects that the waste and recycling service is provided on a weekly basis to 55,000 homes and that significant changes were made to the service during the course of the year.
- The Council received approximately 772,000 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.
- Although complaints have increased during this reporting year the percentage resulting in a complaint remains the same as last year at 0.08%, because the number of contacts has also increased.
- 71% of complaints received at NHDC were responded to within the target response time of ten days.
- 30% of complaints received at NHDC were considered justified complaints.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the continued good performance in managing 3Cs between 01<sup>st</sup> April 2013 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.
- 2.2 That Overview and Scrutiny note the reasons for the increase in complaints and note that these have now decreased in number since the new waste service has become embedded and that the most recent measure of public satisfaction with the service shows a net satisfaction level of 85% compared to 79% in 2012, a net increase of 6%.
- 2.3 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the Local Government Ombudsman found fault with the handling of one complaint which resulted in remedial action taken and appropriate measures put in place to avoid a similar situation arising again.

## **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 This report allows corporate consideration of the 3Cs 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 3Cs Received, Summary and Performance**

For the period period 01<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, the Council received approximately 772,000 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)

- 8.2 During this period a grand total of 2642 3Cs were received, this figure includes the 1413 3Cs made directly to the Council and 1229 made via the Contractors that provide services on our behalf.
- 8.3 The table below shows a breakdown of 3Cs by Directorate and by service area. The following sections provide a breakdown of 3Cs received directly by NHDC and our Contractors.

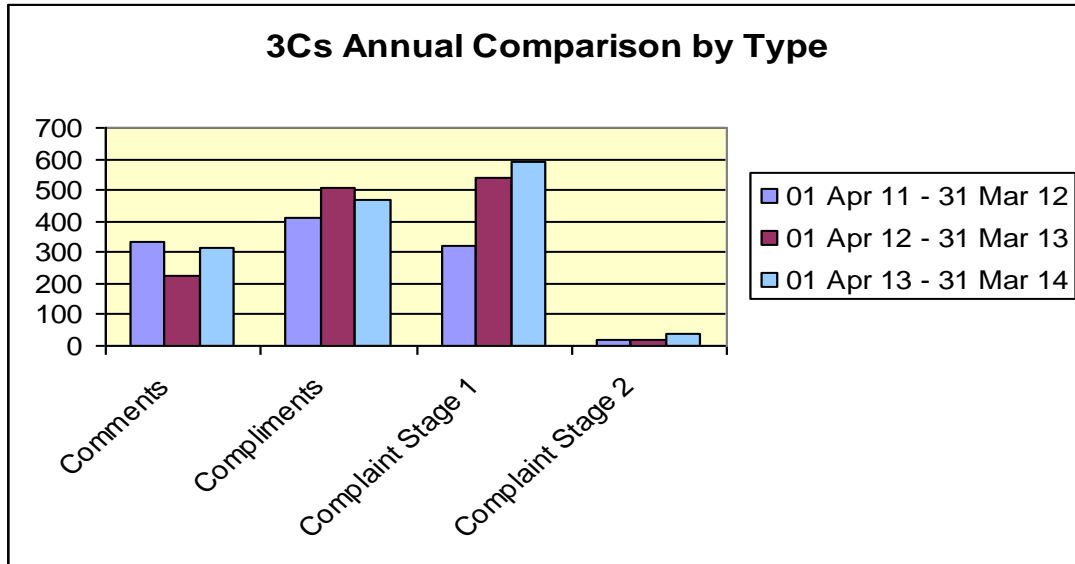
Chief Executive Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Democratic Services	3	0	4
Customer Services Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Communications Team	2	0	4
Customer Service Centre	5	20	10
Grounds Maintenance * <i>includes contractor data</i>	7	27	20
Leisure * <i>includes contractor data</i>	11	15	24
Markets	1	0	1
Museums	0	0	0
Parking Services	9	3	41
Waste Management * <i>includes contractor data</i>	213	64	390
Finance, Policy & Governance	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Benefits	2	9	15
Community Development	17	149	2
Community Services	2	0	4
Information Unit	2	0	0
Legal Services	0	0	0
Post & Admin	0	1	1
Performance, Policy & partnership	1	2	1
Property Services	5	0	7
Revenue Technical	9	0	6
Revenues Billing & Recovery	9	7	32
Planning, Housing and Enterprise	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Building Control	0	3	5
Careline	0	138	3
Enforcement	0	6	1
Environmental Health	3	4	1
Food Health & Safety	0	0	4
Halls	2	1	3
Housing Needs	2	1	13
Licensing & Enviro-Crime	1	1	6
Planning Control & Conservation	4	12	19
Planning Policy	5	0	11
Private Sector Housing	0	6	0
Third Party			
North Herts Homes	0	0	1
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>629</b>

#### 8.4 3Cs received directly by the Council

1413 3Cs were received directly by the Council, the breakdown of this is as follows:

- Comments – 315
- Compliments – 469
- Complaints - 629

8.5 The chart below shows an annual comparison of the breakdown of 3C by type. The increase in stage 1 complaints in 12/13 were specifically relating to weather related matters which impacted on the waste and recycling and grounds maintenance operations, including the suspension of brown bin collections during a period of adverse weather. This can be seen in more detail in the chart at 8.8.

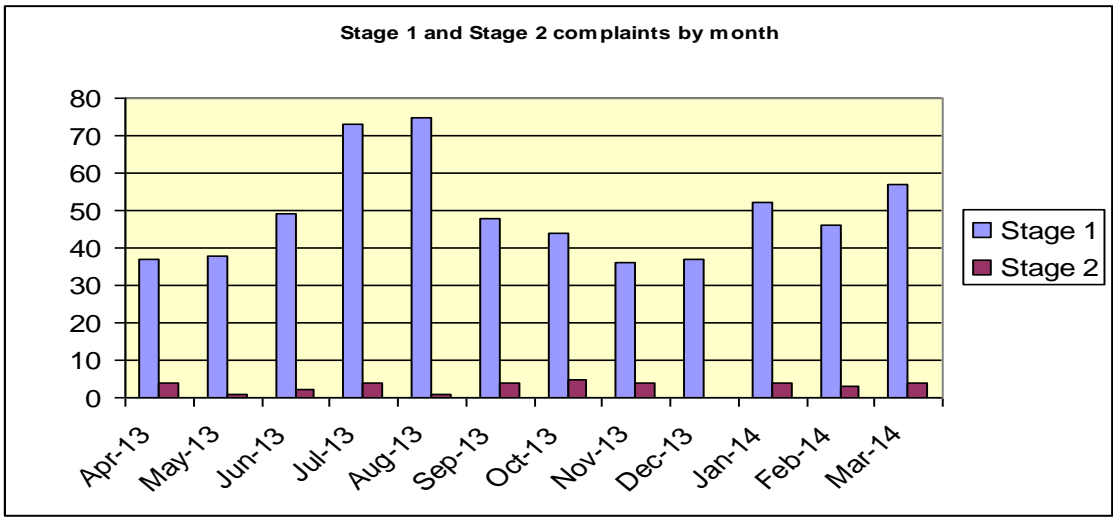


8.6 3Cs are received and recorded in a number of ways, the majority are received directly by the Council and are recorded on the CRM system enabling effective tracking and reporting. Museums and The Resource Centre record 3Cs locally in visitor books at each location.

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

### 8.8 Complaints received directly by the Council

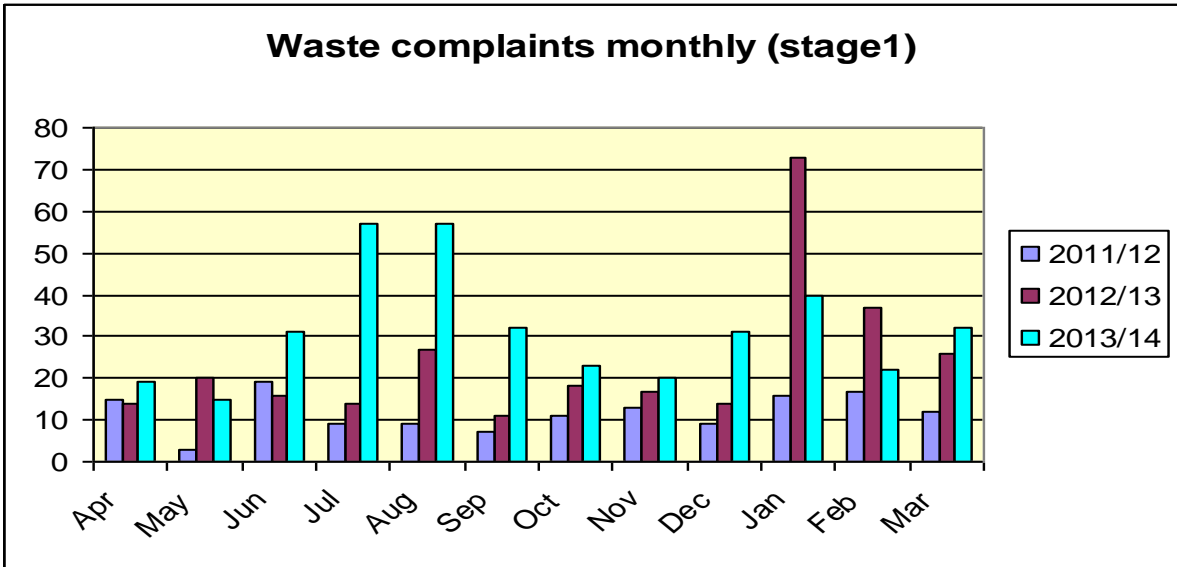
The chart below shows a monthly breakdown of complaints received directly and shows that the level of complaints increased during the summer, declined through the Autumn and then increased slightly again between January and March.



8.9 The majority (79%) of complaints received relate to services provided by the Customer Services directorate. 64% of complaints were in relation to the Waste service with just under 6% relating to Parking services.

8.10 The chart below shows three years of comparative volumes of complaints received about the waste service broken down by month. This chart illustrates that the number of complaints tend to increase at times of service disruption such as around a Bank Holiday. Additionally the significant spikes can be seen in January 2013, following the suspension of services due to inclement weather, and more recently during the new service roll out in the summer of 2013.

8.11 In response to the service disruptions mentioned above we have introduced a text alert service to enable us to quickly inform subscribers of any future service messages and pro actively use Twitter to post regular updates.



8.12 It is worth noting that throughout the new service roll out, 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. As the chart shows complaint levels started to decrease once the new service became embedded with a seasonal spike following the Christmas period.

8.13 As a result of the changes to the waste and recycling service, we have seen an increase in performance in two key areas, Customer satisfaction levels with the service measured in the District Wide Survey have increased by 6% from 79% in 2012 to 85% in 2014 and Recycling performance has increased from 47% to 57% with a reduction in waste sent to landfill of around 27%

**8.14 What customers were unhappy about**

For all 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	51 %
Failure to deliver a service	33 %
Disagreement with policy or decision	15 %
Staff Conduct	10 %

**8.15 Complaint Response Performance**

The percentage of complaints responded to in full within 10 working days was 71%. Regular reporting of outstanding 3Cs enables the CSC team to highlight to Managers complaints that are in breach of the Service Level.

8.16 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.

**8.17 Justified Complaints**

For this reporting period 30% were recorded as justified complaints following investigation. As a reminder we consider a complaint to be justified if we find that one of the following has occurred:

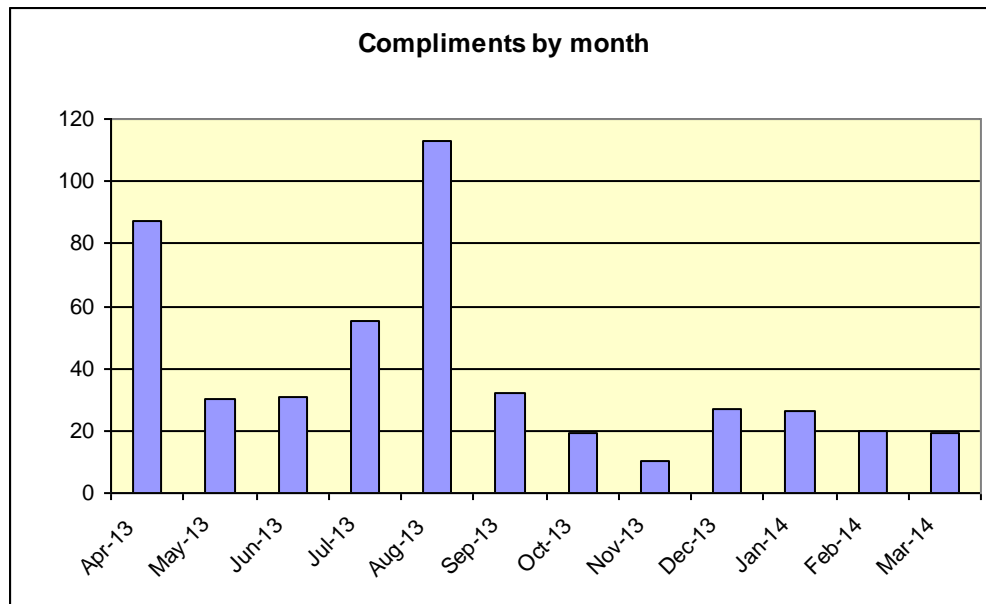
- We have failed to do something we should have
- We have done something badly or in the wrong way
- We have treated a customer unfairly or discourteously

The number of justified complaints has increased, however this increase is most likely to be because they are being categorised more accurately now than has been the case in the past.

8.18 NHDC continues to give a high profile to the 3C's process via our website 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 so that we can continuously seek to improve, therefore we should not be concerned that we continue to receive complaints despite taking appropriate corrective action.

### 8.19 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.



### 8.20 What customers were happy about

Of the 469 compliments received directly, 32% were for Community Development, 29% for Careline, 14% for Waste Management with 6% for Grounds Maintenance and 3% for Leisure Services. We know from experience and industry data that customers are less likely to pay a compliment about good service than complain about an unsatisfactory experience.

### 8.21 3C's reported directly to our 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 1229 3C's were received by the contractors, this is a slight increase from 1219 for the same period of the previous year.

8.22 The breakdown of Contractor 3C's is shown in the charts A and B below, however to summarise the 1229 3Cs comprise of the following;

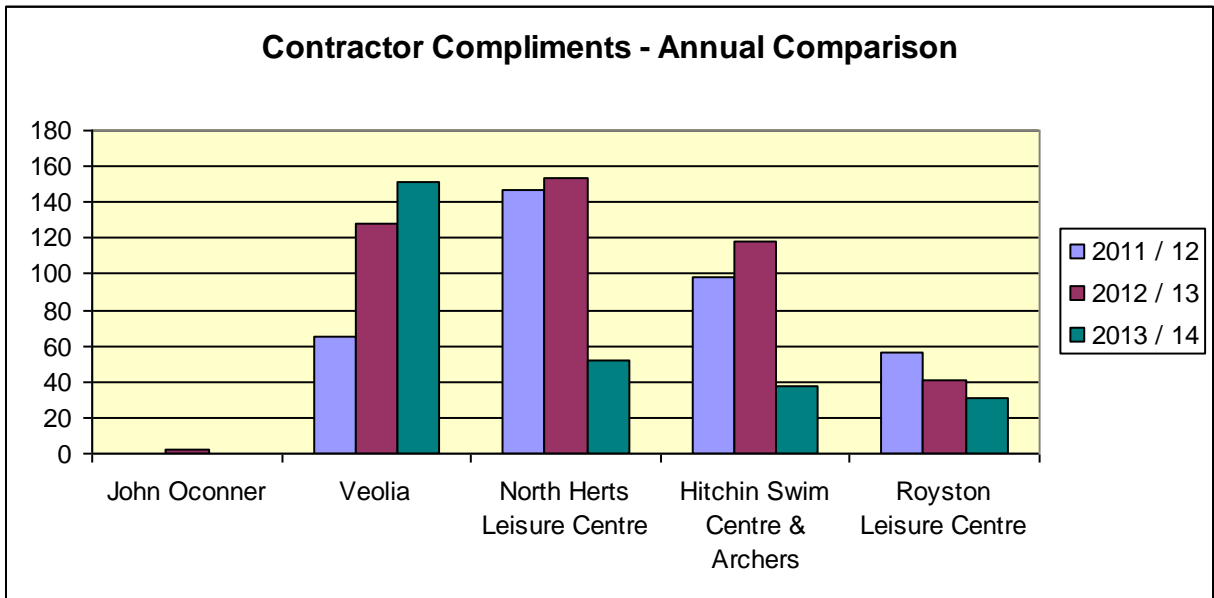
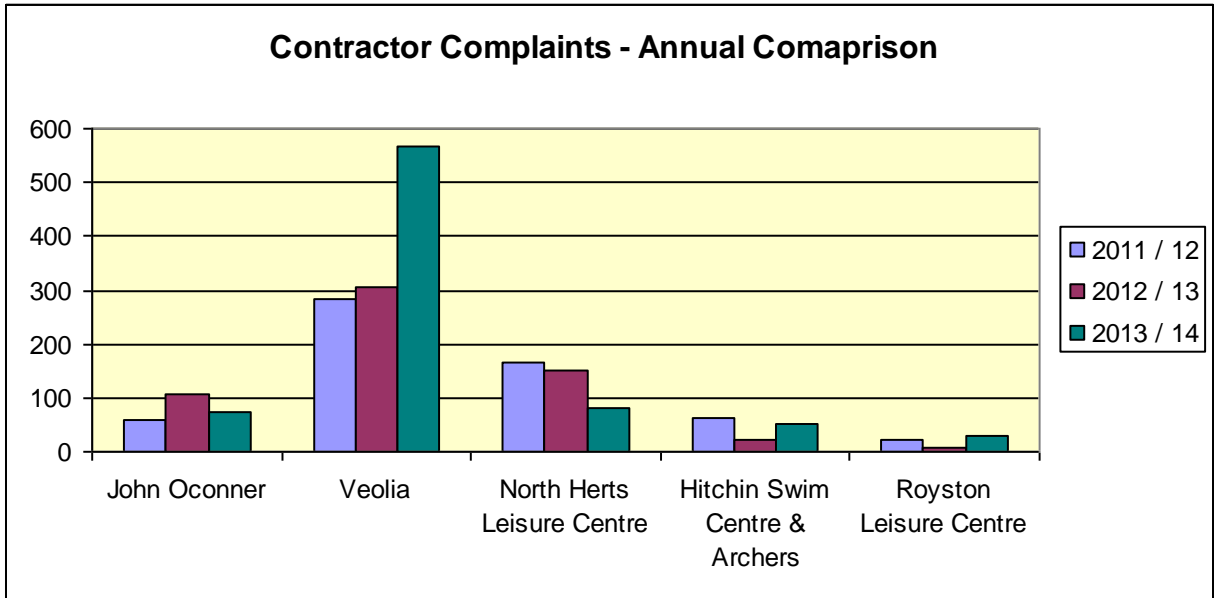
- Comments - 157
- Compliments - 272
- Complaints - 800

8.23 The Leisure Centres have seen a large decrease in compliments; however North Herts Leisure Centre has also seen a 53% reduction in complaints. When considered alongside the number of visits each centre received during the year the percentage of visits that resulted in a complaint is very low as shown in the table below.



8.24 The chart below shows that complaints to John O’Conner Grounds Maintenance Ltd have reduced and complaints to Veolia Environmental Services have increased when compared to the previous two years; however we have already seen a similar pattern for waste complaints received directly at NHDC during the changes to the service in 2013.

8.25 All contract complaints are reviewed and monitored through contract management meetings with appropriate action plans put in place where required.



The table below shows the volume of Leisure Centre complaints in relation to visitor numbers.

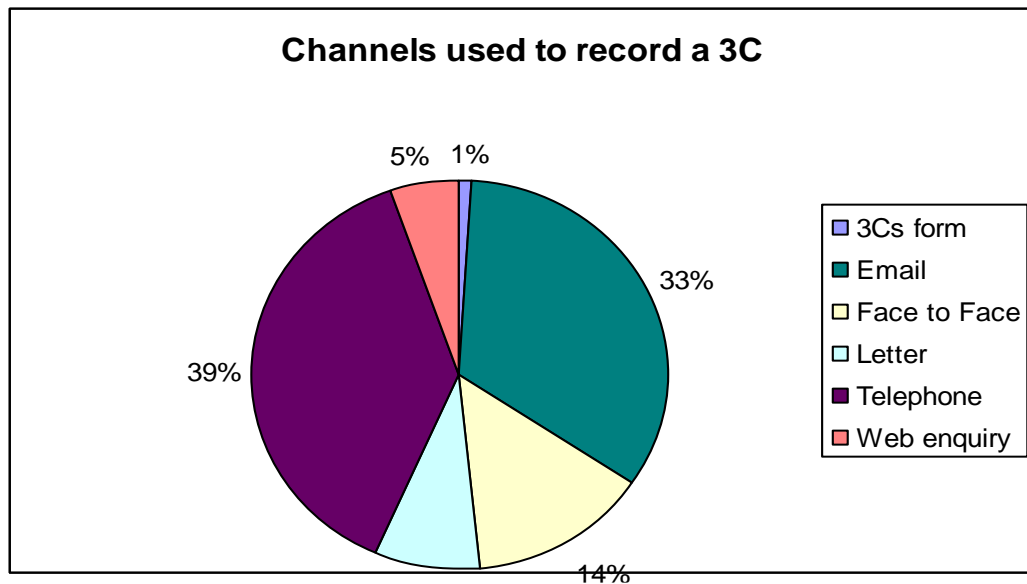
	North Herts Leisure Centre	Hitchin Swim Centre & Archers	Royston Leisure Centre
Number of complaints	81	51	28
Number of Visitors	460,567	230,869	367,282
% of complaints per visitor	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%

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

Of the 3Cs received directly by NHDC the majority were received by telephone (39%) followed by email (33%) as shown in the chart below, Although this does vary depending on the type of 3C and service, overall the telephone and email are the most popular channels.

8.27 Letter as a channel accounts for 9% of 3Cs, 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.

8.28 Additionally Social Media such as Twitter and more recently Facebook are growing channels for customers to contact us; we monitor these channels also for signs of dissatisfaction so that we can pro actively deal with and resolve matters promptly.



## 8.29 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

Eleven complaints were taken to the LGO, a description and outcome of each is detailed in the table below.

Complaint description	LGO decision / outcome
Council Tax billing & recovery	Not investigated
Parking penalty notice	Not in jurisdiction & discretion not exercised
Missed bin collections	Issue resolved locally, investigation stopped
Business rate debt recovery actions	Not investigated as no evidence of fault
Homelessness issue	Fault found and injustice – payment awarded to remedy injustice
Planning application	Not investigated as no evidence of fault
Tennis club lease	Investigated no fault found
Demolition of community hall	Investigated outside of jurisdiction & discretion not exercised
Building Control	In progress
Planning decision	Investigated, no evidence of fault or injustice
Community grant funding	Not investigated as no significant injustice caused

8.30 In response to the case where the LGO found fault an action review plan was formulated to avoid a similar situation occurring again, the LGO found during the investigation that we had failed to follow up appropriately on information provided by not advising the customer of his right to make a homelessness application. This case was rather complex and the LGO acknowledged this in the findings. However in the interest of maintaining confidentiality only high level detail has been included in this report. The LGO's findings were that the Council was at fault and that the fault caused injustice to the complainant. A remedy was agreed with the LGO in recognition of the injustice caused and a payment of £1650 was awarded.

The Housing service has subsequently put measures in place to avoid a similar situation arising in the future, as summarised below:

8.31 *In order to ensure this situation does not arise again, there has been discussion with relevant departments to ensure that any contact from a member of the public, that mentions homelessness, is flagged up to the Housing Options Team at the earliest possible stage. Members of the Housing Options Team have all been re-trained on the homelessness legislation, ensuring that all advice given concerning homelessness approaches are followed up in writing.*

## 8.32 Corporate 3Cs work

8.33 NHDC has been accredited in previous years to ISO 10002/2004, the internationally recognised quality standard for complaints management systems.

- 8.34 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.
- 8.35 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.
- 8.36 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
- 8.37 The recent introduction of a corporate performance dashboard enables high level reporting of complaint handling performance to the senior management team on a quarterly basis.

**8.38 Learning from our 3Cs process**

One of the benefits of having a robust feedback system is to help us identify where we can improve or change services or processes as well as understanding what we do well. Below are recent examples of how this has been used:

- Following feedback from a customer regarding Hitchin toilet doors being too heavy and closing too quickly, the door closer was replaced and the settings adjusted to delay the closing action of the door allowing disabled users more time to get into the toilet without needing the door to be held open.
- John O’Conner’s are surveying customers who have received the Pest Control Service to pro actively identify improvements and initiatives that can be implemented.

**8.39 Replacement CRM Project**

A project is underway to replace the existing CRM system, the replacement solution will go live during June and one of the significant improvements that it will bring is an improved 3Cs handling process. The specific changes that have been incorporated and will be beneficial include:

- Automatic timed reminders and escalations, reminders will be sent automatically to officers one day before the target completion date of a complaint and again if a complaint becomes overdue. If appropriate action has not been taken despite reminders then an automatic escalation email will be triggered advising that a complaint has become overdue.
- Capturing learning from the investigating officer in the system at the time of complaint handling will help us to ensure that learning is extracted from customer feedback and followed up on and reported.

- 8.40 Additionally as part of this project the e-form on the website is being refreshed to ensure that we are able to capture the relevant information we require to handle the 3C most effectively.

#### 8.41 **Policy Review**

A review and refresh of the Complaints Policy and internal management procedures has been taking place, a copy of the updated documents is available in draft.

The aim of the refreshed policy is to provide a clear and transparent document that the public can refer to and easily follow that is in line with updated LGO guidance and our corporate 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 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 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.

### 11. **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 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.

11.2 A project risk log has supported the implementation of the new CRM system.

### 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. 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. In that respect the council can review its procedures to provide a better service with the resources it has available. This has been demonstrated by the action taken at Sections 8.30-8.31.

### **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.
- 14.2 Training is being provided to enable staff to handle 3Cs using the replacement CRM system.

### **15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1 Appendix A – Summary of 3C's information
- 15.2 Appendix B – Local Government Ombudsman Fact Sheet

### **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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Martin Lawrence, Strategic Housing Manager

### **17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 17.1 None