

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
20 JANUARY 2015**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

13

**TITLE OF REPORT: COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) HALF YEAR
UPDATE – 01 APRIL 2014 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2014**

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER – COUNCILLOR LYNDA NEEDHAM

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 April 2014 to 30 September 2014.
- 1.2. The report shows that a total of 1013 3Cs were received by the Council and its contractors during the six month period, this is a significant decrease when compared to the same period of the previous year which saw an increase in 3Cs relating to the waste service changes. The decrease is largely as a result of the changes to the waste and recycling service now being fully embedded and a reduction in 3Cs for this area.
- 1.3. The report shows that the number of complaints (588) have decreased when compared to the same period of the previous two years; 1561 in 2013 and 1722 in 2012.
- 1.4. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) received eight separate complaints, two are currently still being considered by the LGO, the remaining six have been considered and / or investigated, and the outcome for those six was either no evidence of fault found, insignificant injustice or outside of jurisdiction. A brief summary of each can be found in section 8.25.
- 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 1013 3Cs 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 – 132
 - Compliments - 293
 - Complaints – 588 of which 12 escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process
- 1.6. Of the 1013 3Cs received, 418 were received directly by the Council and 595 were received by the contractors providing services on our behalf.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the continued good performance in managing 3Cs between 01 April 2014 and 30 September 2014.
- 2.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the number of 3Cs received has decreased when compared to the same period of the previous two years.
- 2.3 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) received eight complaints about NHDC. Two complaints are still being considered, the LGO decisions for the remaining six were no fault found, no evidence of significant injustice or outside of jurisdiction.

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 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 customer 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.
- Keep up to date with LGO guidance and training and case study material
- 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 Issues Received and Summary of Performance

During the six month period 01 April to 30 September 2014, the Council received approximately 459,000 contacts; this figure does not include emails received directly by officers and service areas, web and social media traffic or contact made directly with our contractors, it 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

8.2. A total of 1013 3Cs 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:

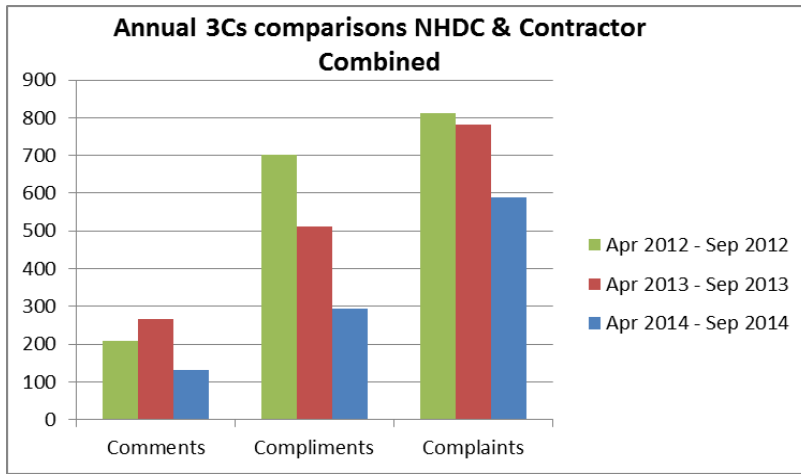
- Comments – 132
- Compliments - 293
- Complaints – 588

8.3. Of the 1013 3Cs received, 418 were received directly by the Council and 595 were received by the contractors providing services on our behalf, this is shown by 3C type in the table below. When considered against the high number of contacts received, the percentage of contacts resulting in a formal complaint directly to the Council is very low at 0.05%

April – September 14	NHDC	Contractors	Combined
Comments	72	60	132
Compliments	138	155	293
Complaints	208	380	588

8.4. 3Cs are received and recorded in a number of ways, those received directly by the Council and are recorded on the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) enabling effective tracking and reporting. Contractors record and manage their own 3Cs and report this information regularly back to the Council as part of the on going contract management process.

8.5. The total number of 3Cs received has decreased in comparison to the same periods of the previous two years, as shown in the chart below.

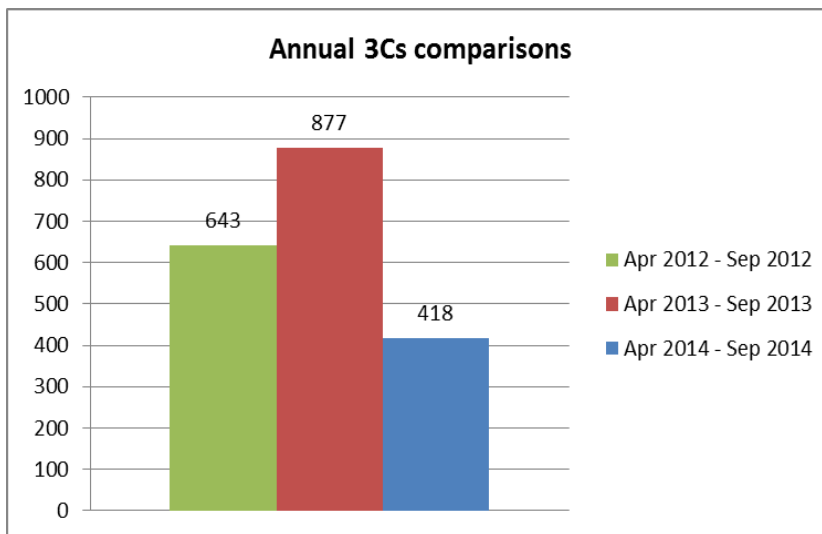


8.6. 3Cs received directly by the Council (excluding Contractors)

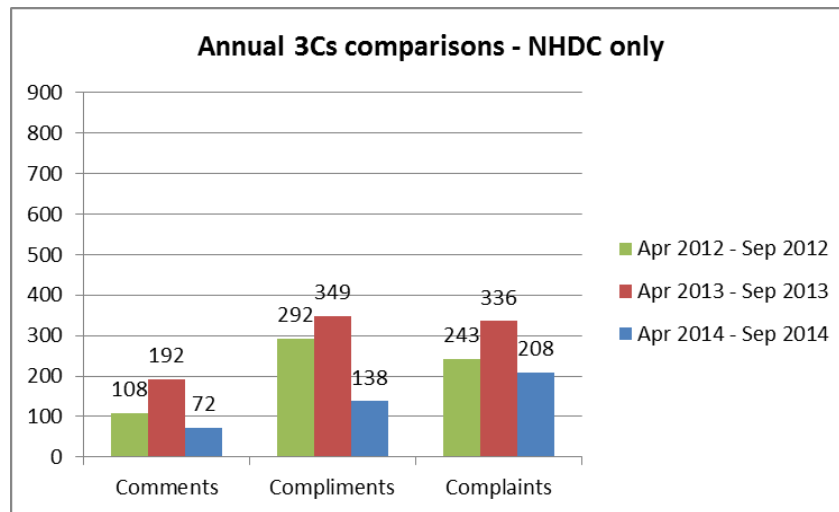
418 3Cs were received directly by the Council, the breakdown of this is as follows:

- Comments – 72
- Compliments – 138
- Complaints – 208

As shown in the chart below, 3Cs reported directly to the Council is at its lowest for three years.



8.7. The chart below shows that complaints are now at a lower level than before the waste service changes, introduced in 2013, which generated an increase in complaints and comments. The volume of compliments has also decreased significantly, mainly as a result of the closure of the Museums which have historically received high numbers of compliments.



8.8. What customers were unhappy about

The table below shows the breakdown of 3Cs by Directorate and Service Area and includes contractors where denoted by an asterix.

**includes contractor data*

Chief Executive Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Land Charges	0	2	0
Democratic Services	1	0	2
Customer Services Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Customer Service Centre	5	3	3
Grounds Maintenance *	0	13	51
Human Resources	0	0	1
Leisure *	67	88	90
Parking Services	6	2	19
Parks and Open Spaces	0	2	1
Waste Management *	30	88	363
Finance, Policy & Governance	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Benefits	0	2	6
Active Communities	0	32	0
Information Unit	1	1	0
Post & Admin	0	2	0
Property Services	4	1	1
Revenue Technical	3	0	3
Revenues Billing & Recovery	5	3	11
Planning, Housing and Enterprise	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Building Control	0	4	3
Careline	0	27	0
Community Safety	0	0	1
Enforcement	0	7	3
Environmental Health	0	8	3
Environmental Protection	0	1	4
Food Health & Safety	0	1	3
Housing Needs	0	0	8
Licensing & Enviro-Crime	1	0	2

Planning Control & Conservation	5	4	7
Planning Policy	4	0	3
Private Sector Housing	0	2	0
Grand Totals	132	293	588

- 8.9. The majority (89.7%) of complaints received by both NHDC and our contractors relate to services provided by the Customer Services Directorate, this is consistent with previous years and not surprising given the high levels of customer interactions and service provision from the Directorate. 62% of complaints were in relation to the waste and street cleaning service, 15% relate to leisure services with just under 9% for grounds maintenance and 3% relating to parking services.
- 8.10. The complaints received regarding the waste service are generally operational, mostly regarding missed collections, spillages and crew actions. The Waste Services Manager is working closely with Veolia to identify how complaints can be reduced in areas where opportunities for improvement have been identified. A customer service improvement plan has been produced by Veolia as well as one for NHDC which identified some training needs and a need for improved monitoring of data. Complaints about operational service delivery are collated by Veolia in the main. An integrated waste management IT system would be required to monitor trends in more detail.
- 8.11. Whilst the highest volume of complaints relate to the waste service, it is important to consider this data alongside the high number of collections that are carried out by Veolia. There are approximately 93,750 collections per week or 4,875,000 per year. As a percentage of collections the level of complaints is very low at 0.01% for this six month period. Other performance measures indicate that the service is well embedded with public satisfaction at a historically high level with a six percentage increase from 79% in 2011 to 85% in 2013, additionally 62% of waste collected is now being recycled or composted.
- 8.12. A text alert service was introduced in 2013 to enable us to quickly inform residents who have subscribed to the service of changes to schedules or services, we currently have over 600 subscribers, messages were sent to residents regarding the changes to collection schedules over the August Bank Holiday. Additionally Twitter is pro actively used to provide regular service updates to our 5000 Twitter followers.
- 8.13. **Complaint Response Performance**
- Of the 208 complaints received directly by NHDC the percentage of complaints responded to in full within the target response time of 10 working days was 73%. Regular reporting of outstanding 3Cs enables the CSC team to highlight to Managers complaints that are in breach of the Service Level.
- 8.14. 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, particularly Stage 2 complaints which generally take longer to resolve. It is important that a complainant is kept informed of the progress of their complaint and is made aware of when a resolution can be expected.

8.15 The new CRM system has inbuilt automatic workflow to send timed reminders when complaints are not resolved within the target response time, additionally escalations have been built to alert a Manager if a complaint continues to remain overdue despite reminders. The new CRM was implemented part way through this reporting period so it is anticipated that the percentage of complaints responded to within 10 days will increase in future.

8.16 NHDC continues to give a high profile to the 3Cs 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.

8.17 What customers were happy about

Of the 293 compliments received, 30% were for Waste management, 30% for Leisure, 9% for Active communities with 9% for Careline. 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.

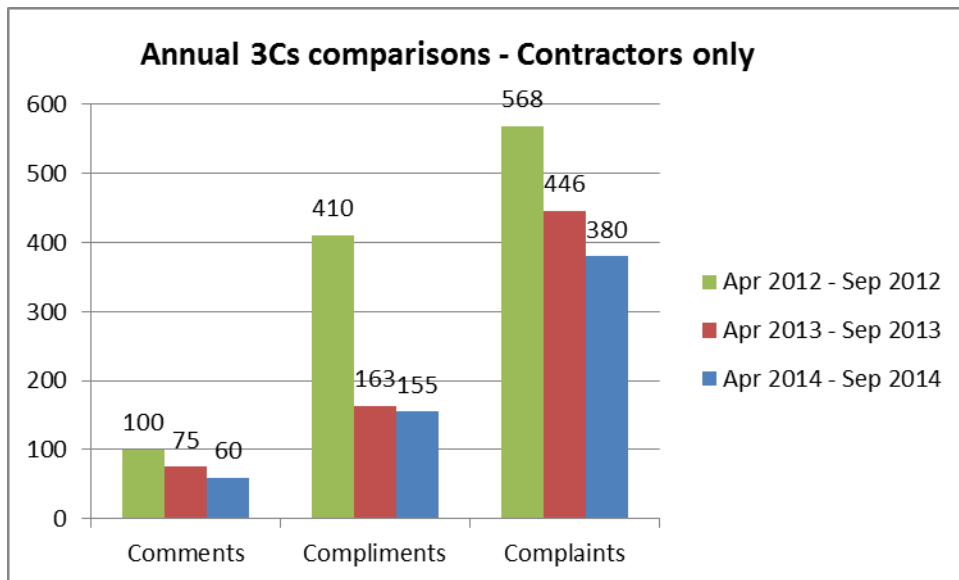
8.18 3Cs reported directly to the Contractors providing services on our behalf

During this six month period 595 3Cs were received by the contractors, this is a decrease from 684 for the same period of the previous year.

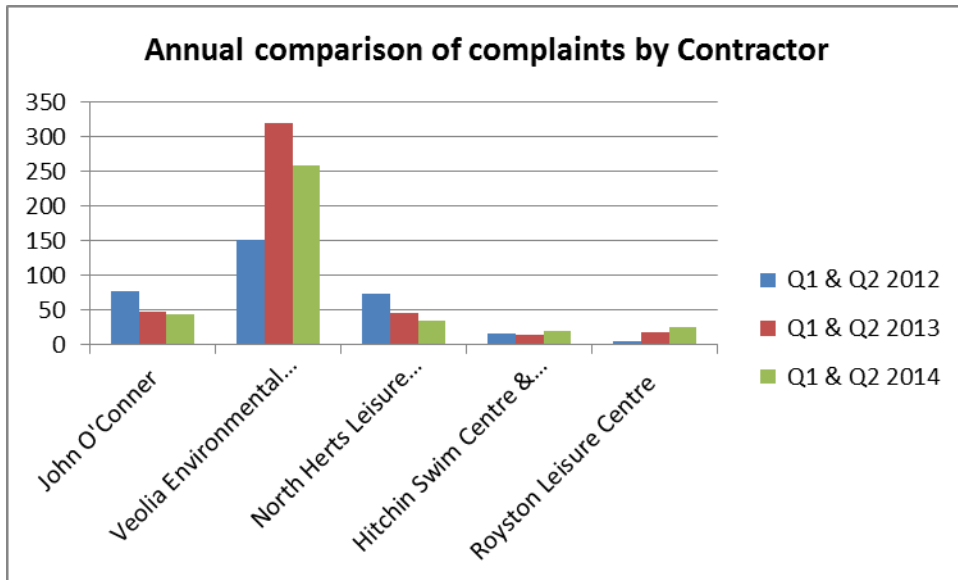
8.19 The breakdown of Contractor 3Cs is shown in the two charts below, however to summarise the 595 3Cs comprise of the following;

- Comments - 60
- Compliments - 155
- Complaints – 380

8.20 The chart below shows that as with 3Cs reported directly to NHDC the volumes of complaints reported to all contractors collectively is decreasing and is at the lowest level for three years.



8.20 When broken down by contractor, John O’Conner, Veolia and North Herts Leisure have all seen a reduction in the number of complaints. Complaints to John O’Conner have reduced considerably since 2012 which saw a spike in complaints as a result of the adverse weather impacting on service delivery. Additionally the current contract with John O’Conner commenced in 2012 which is more aligned with customers expectations and is a good example of continuing improvement in this service area. Whilst the complaints to Veolia have decreased when compared to the previous year they have not yet returned to the pre service change level of 2012 as shown in the chart below



8.21 Hitchin swim centre and Royston leisure centre have both had a slight increase in complaints received, Hitchin increased from 13 to 19 and Royston increased from 18 to 25. 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:

April – September 14	North Herts Leisure Centre	Hitchin Swim Centre & Archers	Royston Leisure Centre
Number of complaints	35	19	25
Number of Visitors	197,944	206,850	182,506
% of complaints per visitor	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%

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

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

Telephone and email continue to be channels that are highly used to register a 3C. 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.

8.25 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

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

Complaint description	LGO decision / outcome
Estates – re sale of land	Not investigated
Road Safety	No evidence of fault causing significant injustice
Parking – PCN	No jurisdiction to investigate
Payment of Grant	Fault by the Council did not cause significant injustice
Housing assessment of affordability	No fault found and investigation ended
Licensing re application for street trading licence	Awaiting outcome
Planning approval	No fault found
Planning approval and information given to planning committee	Awaiting outcome

8.26 NHDC coordinated and hosted a training event which was run by the LGOs office on effective complaint handling and carrying out investigations. The course was attended by 12 NHDC officers who have responsibility for complaint handling along with 11 colleagues from other Councils. The post training feedback gathered showed that participants all felt their complaint handling skills and knowledge increased after the training.

8.27 Corporate 3Cs work

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

8.28 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.

8.29 Complaint information is reported to managers on a regular basis. The Customer Service Manager also discusses complaints with service managers as part of an ongoing review process.

8.30 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.

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 October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5 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 has been provided to enable staff to handle 3Cs using the replacement CRM system.

15. APPENDICES

15.1 Appendix A – Summary of 3Cs information

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None