

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
9 JUNE 2015**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**13**

**TITLE OF REPORT: COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) FULL YEAR  
UPDATE – 1 APRIL 2014 TO 31 MARCH 2015**

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER – MRS L.A. 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<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.
- 1.2 The report shows that the number of 3Cs received has decreased when compared to the previous year, the decrease is across comments, compliments and complaints..
- 1.3 The Ombudsman received nine separate complaints; details are included in section 8.21. Two complaints were upheld by the Ombudsman, one resulted in a payment awarded to the complainant, all other cases had no fault found or were outside of jurisdiction.
- 1.4 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 677 3Cs were received directly by NHDC, this total comprises of the following:
    - 116 Comments
    - 228 Compliments
    - 309 Complaints Stage 1
    - 24 Complaints Stage 2
  - Additionally a further 1018 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:
    - 135 Comments
    - 267 Compliments
    - 616 Complaints
  - An annual comparison is included in section 8 of this report, however to summarise the number of complaints received directly at NHDC and by the contractors have decreased for this reporting year as follows:
    - 333 complaints received directly at NHDC in 14/15 compared to 629 in 13/14
    - 616 complaints received by the contractors in 14/15 compared to 800 in 13/14

- There has also been a decrease in the number of comments and compliments received.
- The Customer Services Directorate accounts for the vast majority of complaints received directly at NHDC (69.5%) with the highest volume (51%) of complaints relating to the waste service reflecting that the Customer Services Directorate has the highest level of contact with residents through the front line services delivered.
- The Council received approximately 795,000 contacts by telephone, email or in person, of which 0.03% have resulted in a formal complaint. This contact figure does not include emails directly into service areas, web traffic or contacts made directly with contractors.
- 73% of complaints received at NHDC were responded to within the target response time of ten days.
- 51% 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 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.
- 2.2 That Overview and Scrutiny note that the volumes of 3Cs have reduced when compared to the previous two years.
- 2.3 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the Local Government Ombudsman upheld two complaints, both of which the Council had already recognised and acknowledged come fault through its own complaints process.

## **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 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 even though the Council no longer continues to apply for accreditation, 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

For the period 01<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, the Council received approximately 795,000 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 1695 3Cs were received, this figure includes the 677 3Cs made directly to the Council and 1018 made via the Contractors that provide services on our behalf .as shown in the table below:

April 14 – Mar 15	NHDC	Contractors	Combined
Comments	116	135	251
Compliments	228	267	495
Complaints (Stg 1 & 2)	333	616	949

8.3 The table below shows a breakdown of 3Cs by directorate and by service area with the following sections providing a breakdown of 3Cs received directly by NHDC and our contractors

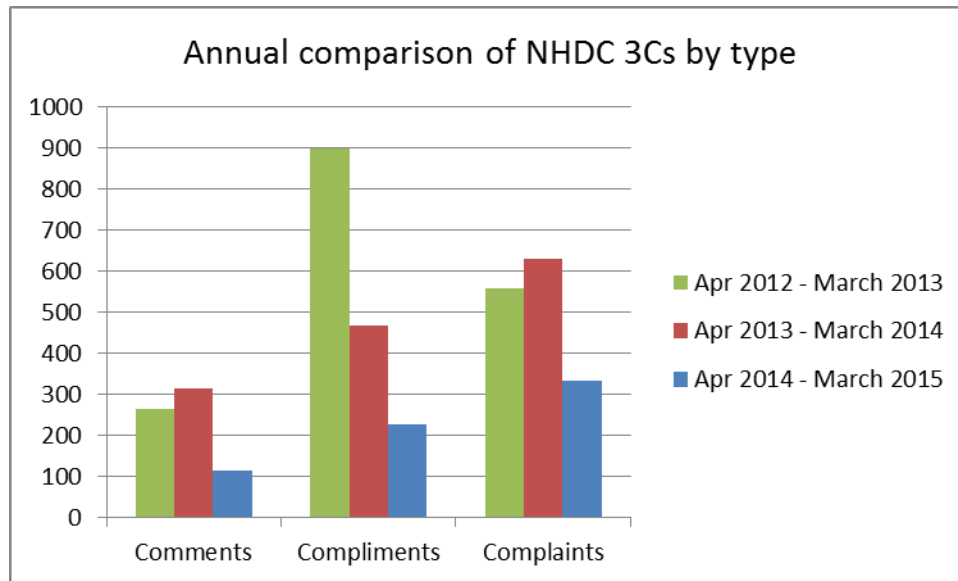
Chief Executive Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Stage 1 Complaints
Democratic Services	1	0	3
Customer Services Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Communications Team	0	2	0
Customer Service Centre	6	11	5
Grounds Maintenance	3	21	9
Human Resources	0	0	1
Leisure	10	2	13
Markets	0	0	0
Museums	0	0	0
Parking Services	8	2	26
Parks and Open Spaces	3	6	2
Waste Management	46	30	159
Finance, Policy & Governance	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Benefits	1	4	12
Community Development	0	1	0
Active Communities	0	32	0
Information Unit	1	1	1
Land Charges	0	2	0
Legal Services	0	0	0
Post & Admin	0	5	0
Property Services	6	2	1
Revenue Technical	5	0	3
Revenues Billing & Recovery	7	6	20
Planning, Housing and Enterprise	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Building Control	0	5	4
Careline	0	58	0
Community Safety	0	0	1
Enforcement	0	7	3
Environmental Health	0	9	12
Environmental Protection	0	1	5
Halls	0	3	0
Housing Needs	0	6	9
Licensing & Enviro-Crime	2	0	3
Planning Control & Conservation	8	10	12
Planning Policy	9	0	5
Private Sector Housing	0	2	0
<b>NHDC Totals</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>309</b>
Contractor Data	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Grounds (John O'Connor)	0	0	63
Waste (Veolia)	0	113	407
Leisure (North Herts Leisure, Hitchin Swim Centre & Royston Leisure Centre)	135	154	146
<b>Contractor Totals</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>616</b>
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>925</b>

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

677 3Cs were received directly by the Council, the breakdown of this is as follows:

- Comments – 116
- Compliments – 228
- Complaints (Stage 1 & 2) - 333

8.5 The chart below shows an annual comparison of the breakdown of 3Cs received by NHDC by type. There has been a decrease in all types of 3C over the past year, and an overall decrease over the past two years. Adverse weather impacting on services and changes to the waste and recycling services in 2013 resulted in increased levels of complaints which have now reduced considerably.



8.6 3Cs are received and recorded in a number of ways, those received directly by NHDC are recorded on the CRM system enabling effective tracking and reporting. Play services record their feedback locally and pass it to the Customer Service Manager for reporting purposes.

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 Customer Services Directorate accounts for the vast majority of complaints received directly at NHDC (69.5%) with the highest volume (51%) of complaints relating to the waste service followed by parking services (8%) The Revenues Billing & Technical service received 6% of the Council's complaints. This reflects the fact that the Customer Services Directorate has the highest level of contact with residents through the front line services delivered.

### 8.9 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 the most selected reasons is shown in the table below.

Reason for complaint	% of complaints with this reason
Quality of Service	42 %
Disagreement with council policy or decision	21 %
Failure to deliver a service	17 %
Delay in dealing	5 %
Disagreement with decision of officer	4 %
Staff Conduct (NHDC)	4 %

### 8.10 Complaint Response Performance

The percentage of complaints responded to in full within 10 working days was 73%, this is a 2% increase on the previous year. A feature of the new CRM system enables automatic reminders to be sent to managers who are dealing with a complaint to encourage completion within the target timescale. Additionally complaints that go over the target completion date are escalated to the head of service if action is not taken promptly. The table below shows that performance in this area has improved year on year.

Year	% of complaints resolved within 10 days
2014 /15	73 %
2013 /14	71 %
2012 /13	70 %
2011 /12	62

8.11 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, the automatic reminders assist with ensuring this practice occurs

### 8.12 Justified Complaints

For this reporting period 51% of complaints received at NHDC were recorded as justified complaints following investigation. Of the justified complaints 62% were in relation to the waste service, this high percentage is also reflected in the complaints received directly by Veolia. The percentage of justified complaints has increased, this increase is most likely to be because they are being categorised more accurately now than has been the case in the past.

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

8.13 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.

**8.14 What customers were happy about**

The table at 8.5 shows the breakdown of compliments received by service area. Of the 228 compliments received directly, 25% were for Careline, 14% for active communities, 13% for waste management, 9% for grounds maintenance and 5% for the customer service centre. We know from experience and industry data that customers are less likely to pay a compliment about good service and more likely to complain about an unsatisfactory experience. Compliments overall have decreased following the closure of the museums.

**8.15 3Cs reported directly to our Contractors providing services on our behalf**

Additionally some customers report 3Cs directly with the contractors that provide services on our behalf, 1018 3Cs were received by the contractors; this is a decrease from 1229 for the same period of the previous year.

8.16 The breakdown of Contractor 3C's is shown in the charts below, however to summarise the 1018 3Cs comprise of the following;

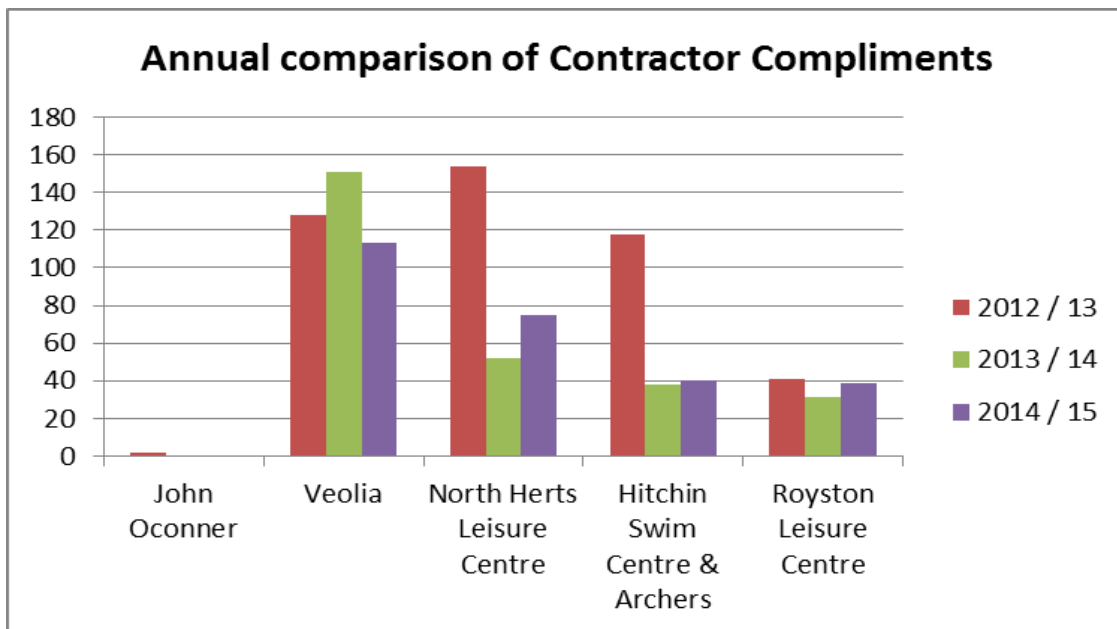
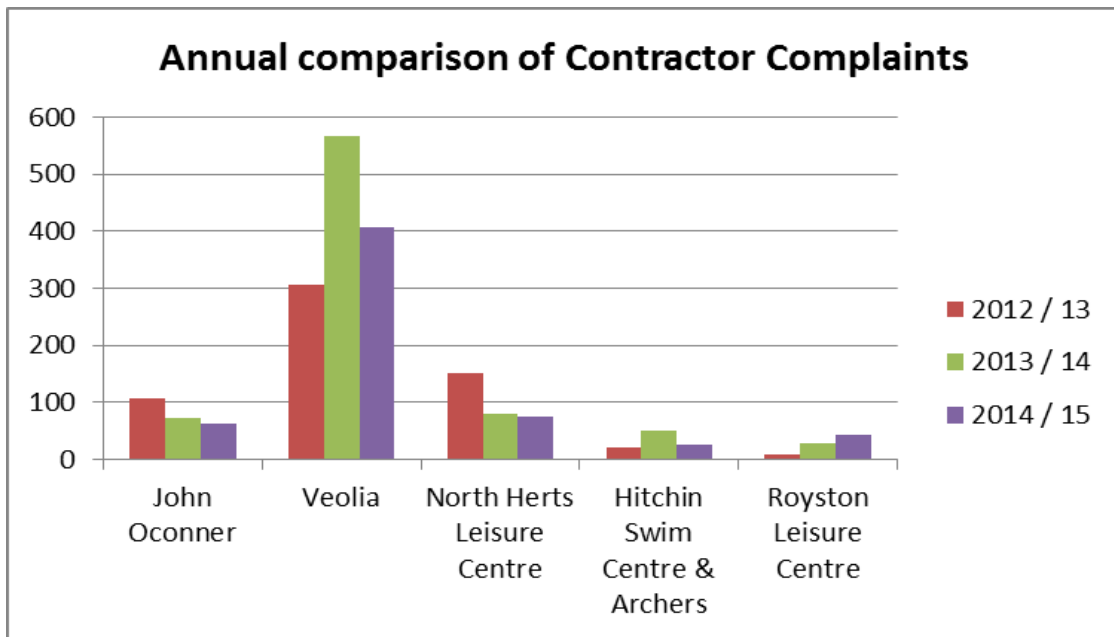
- Comments - 135
- Compliments - 267
- Complaints – 616

8.17 All contractors have received fewer complaints when compared to the previous year with the exception of Royston Leisure Centre which has had an increase from 28 complaints in 2013/14 to 44 complaints in 2014/15. 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.

	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%

8.18 The chart below shows that complaints to John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance Ltd, Veolia Environmental Services, North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin swim centre have decreased when compared to the previous year. We are aware that changes to waste and recycling service and the impact of adverse weather resulted in an increase in complaints during 2013.

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



**8.20 Channels used to report 3Cs**

Of the complaints received directly at NHDC there has been a shift in the channels used for reporting, with email as a channel accounting for 43% followed by 28% by telephone and 13% by letter. 12% were reported via an online form on our website.

8.21 Social Media such as Twitter and 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.



## 8.22 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

Nine complaints were taken to the LGO, a description and outcome of each is detailed in the table below. Of the nine complaints taken to the LGO, four were not investigated and closed after initial enquiries, either because the complainant could have exercised an alternative appeals process or because the LGO found no evidence of fault causing significant injustice. Three complaints were investigated and these complaints were not upheld with no maladministration found.

Complaint description	LGO decision / outcome
Sale of land	Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction
Pedestrian crossing on A507	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Issuing of a PCN	Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction
Payment of a grant to a community group	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Homelessness issue	Not upheld: no maladministration
Application of street trade licence	Not upheld: no maladministration
Planning control	Not upheld: no maladministration
Planning control	Upheld: maladministration, no injustice
Housing / Council Tax Benefit	Upheld: maladministration and injustice

8.23 Two further complaints were investigated and upheld. It is worth noting that in both cases the Council had already identified through the complaints process that a fault had occurred. The fault in relation to the planning case did not cause injustice and therefore no further action was required. The fault in relation to the benefit case did cause injustice to the complainant and although the service had already offered a remedy the LGO recommended a further remedy by way of payment of £100 to the complainant.

All LGO decisions are published on their website [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

## 8.24 Corporate 3Cs work

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.

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

- 8.26 Complaint information is reported to managers on a regular basis and 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.
- 8.27 The 3Cs policy has been updated along with accompanying manager guides following Cabinet and SMT approval, the updated policy is available on our website for customers and the intranet for all staff to access. The updated policy provides 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 or referral to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 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.
- 10.2 The use of a CRM system, and monitoring of electronic media, also assists in managing the overall 3Cs process. This contributes to timely resolutions, so reducing the potential for further costs in officer time, financial claims and legal expenses.

## **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.

## **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 8.26-8.27

### **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 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 and the updated policy changes have been cascaded via Managers and Heads of Service.

### **15. APPENDICES**

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

### **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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**17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

17.1 None