

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
19 July 2016

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

12

TITLE OF REPORT: COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) FULL YEAR UPDATE – 1 APRIL 2015 TO 31 March 2016

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER – 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 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.
- 1.2 The report shows that the number of 3Cs received has decreased when compared to the previous year, this is across all types of 3C; comments, compliments and complaints.
- 1.3 The Ombudsman received 12 separate complaints; details are included in section 8.23. Two complaints are still ongoing, of the ten that have been completed, no fault has been found.
- 1.4 Further detailed information is provided in Section 8 of this report, however to summarise the key headline information is as follows:
 - A total of 440 3Cs were received directly by NHDC, this total comprises of the following:
 - 79 Comments
 - 207 Compliments
 - 142 Complaints Stage 1
 - 12 Complaints Stage 2
 - Additionally a further 920 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:
 - 167 Comments
 - 263 Compliments
 - 490 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:
 - 154 complaints received directly at NHDC in 15/16 compared to 333 in 14/15 and 629 in 13/14
 - 490 complaints received by the contractors in 15/16 compared to 616 in 14/15 and 800 in 13/14
- The Customer Services Directorate accounts for the vast majority of complaints received directly at NHDC (48%) with the highest volume (27%) 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 receives approximately 795,000 contacts per year by telephone, email or in person, of which 0.01% resulted in a formal complaint to NHDC. This contact figure does not include emails directly into service areas, web traffic or contacts made directly with contractors.
- 67% of complaints received at NHDC were responded to within the target response time of ten days.
- 42% 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 01st April 2015 and 31st March 2016.
- 2.2 That Overview and Scrutiny note that the volumes of 3Cs have reduced when compared to the previous three years.
- 2.3 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the Local Government Ombudsman has not upheld any complaints of those that have been referred to her office and have been considered.

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

The Council receives approximately 795,000 contacts per year, this figure is made up of the following:

- Telephone calls into the Council via the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and direct lines to officers.
- 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 1360 3Cs were received, this figure includes the 440 3Cs made directly to the Council and 920 made via the Contractors that provide services on our behalf .as shown in the table below:

| April 15 – Mar 16 | NHDC | Contractors | Combined |
|------------------------|------|-------------|----------|
| Comments | 79 | 167 | 246 |
| Compliments | 207 | 263 | 470 |
| Complaints (Stg 1 & 2) | 154 | 490 | 644 |

- 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.

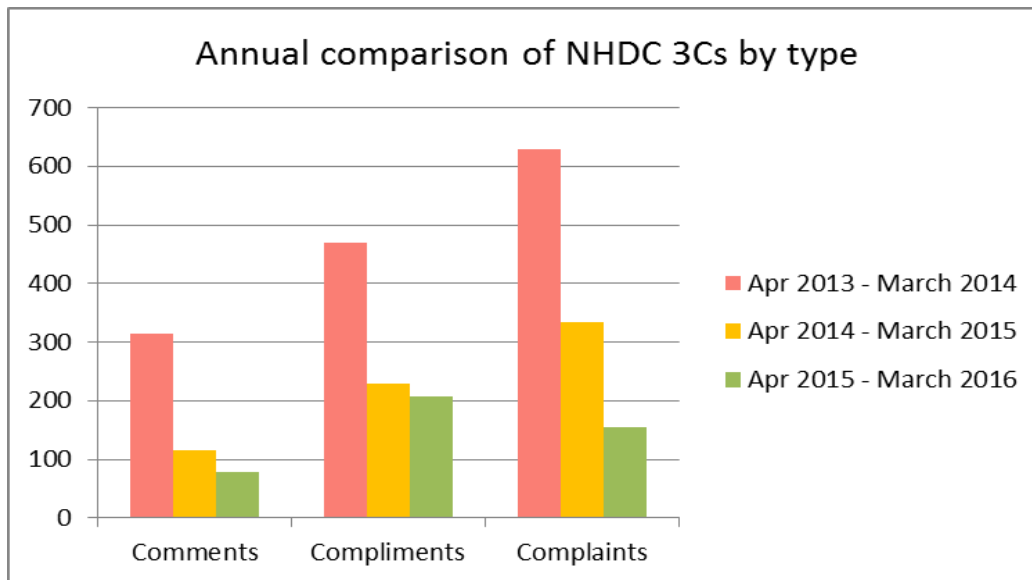
| Chief Executive Directorate | Comments | Compliments | Complaints |
|---|------------|-------------|------------|
| Committee and Member Services | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Electoral Services | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Customer Services Directorate | Comments | Compliments | Complaints |
| Communications Team | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Customer Service Centre | 2 | 9 | 3 |
| Grounds Maintenance | 4 | 24 | 4 |
| Leisure | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Parking Services | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| Parks and Open Spaces | 1 | 5 | 4 |
| Waste Management | 50 | 27 | 42 |
| Finance, Policy & Governance | Comments | Compliments | Complaints |
| Benefits | 0 | 4 | 8 |
| Active Communities | 1 | 33 | 0 |
| Information Unit | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Land Charges | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Legal Services | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Post & Admin | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Property Services | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Revenue Technical | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Revenues Billing & Recovery | 2 | 9 | 23 |
| Risk Management & Insurance | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Planning, Housing and Enterprise | Comments | Compliments | Complaints |
| Building Control | 0 | 6 | 2 |
| Careline | 1 | 49 | 0 |
| Enforcement | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Environmental Health Commercial | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Environmental Health Protection | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Housing Needs | 0 | 12 | 9 |
| Licensing & Enviro-Crime | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Planning Control & Conservation | 1 | 8 | 12 |
| Planning Policy | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| NHDC Totals | 79 | 207 | 154 |
| Contractor Data | Comments | Compliments | Complaints |
| Grounds (John O'Conner) | 0 | 0 | 46 |
| Waste (Veolia) | 0 | 88 | 332 |
| Leisure (North Herts Leisure, Hitchin Swim Centre & Royston Leisure Centre) | 167 | 175 | 112 |
| Contractor Totals | 167 | 263 | 490 |
| Grand Totals | 246 | 470 | 644 |

8.4 3Cs received directly by the Council

440 3Cs were received directly by the Council, the breakdown of this is as follows:

- Comments – 79
- Compliments – 207
- Complaints (Stage 1 & 2) - 154

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 two years. Adverse weather impacting on services and changes to the waste and recycling services in 2013 resulted in an increased level 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 % |
| Staff Conduct | 17.8% |
| Failure to deliver a service | 12.3% |
| Failure to carry out council policy | 12.3% |
| Disagreement with decision of officer | 8.2% |

8.10 Complaint Response Performance

The percentage of complaints responded to in full within 10 working days was 67%; this is a 6% drop from 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.

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 42% of complaints received at NHDC were recorded as justified complaints following investigation. Of the justified complaints 46% were in relation to the waste service, this high percentage is also reflected in the complaints received directly by Veolia which considered 78% of the 332 complaints to be justified.

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 8.3 shows the breakdown of compliments received by service area. Of the 207 compliments received directly, 24% were for Careline, 16% for active communities, 13% for waste management, 12% for grounds maintenance and 6% for the housing needs service. 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 which historically received high levels of compliments (393 in 12/13).

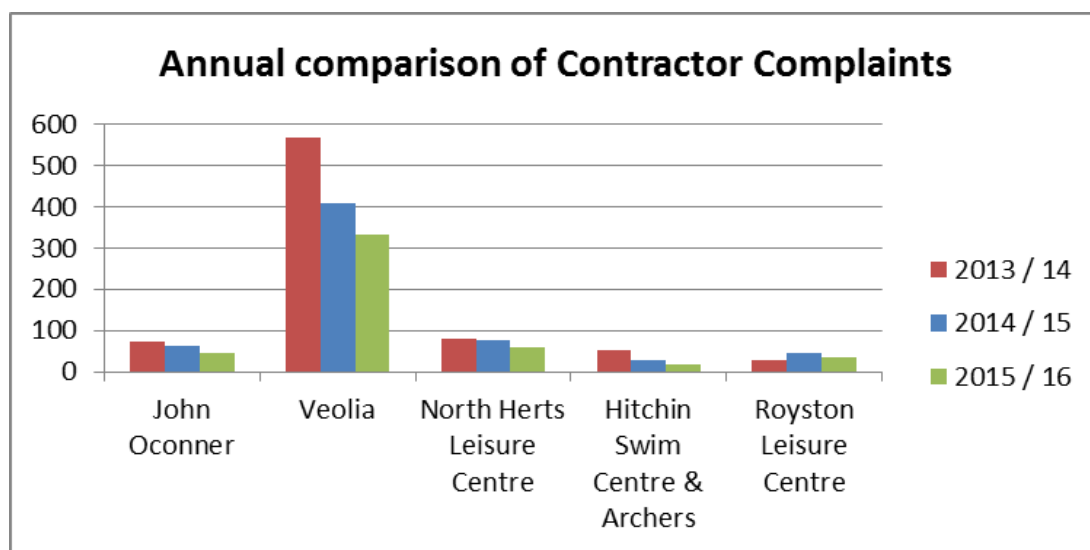
8.15 3Cs reported directly to our Contractors providing services on our behalf

Additionally some customers report 3Cs directly with the contractors that provide services on our behalf, 920 3Cs were received by the contractors; this is a decrease from 1018 for the same period of the previous year.

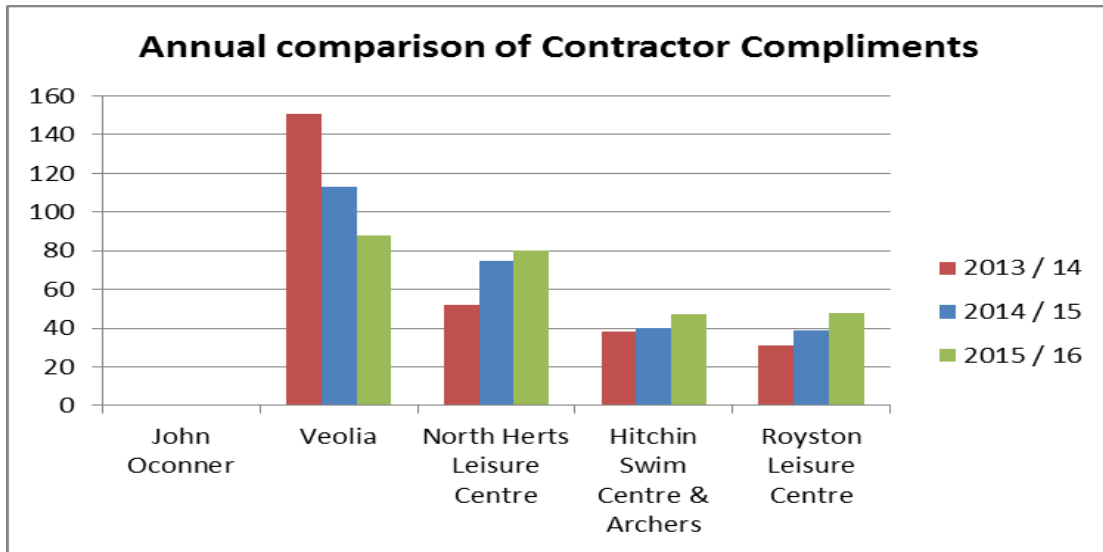
8.16 The breakdown of Contractor 3C's is shown in the charts below, however to summarise the 920 3Cs comprise of the following;

- Comments - 167
- Compliments - 263
- Complaints – 490

8.17 All contractors have received fewer complaints when compared to the previous year, and with the exception of Royston Leisure Centre, all contractors' complaint levels are lower than both of the previous two years.



8.18 The chart below shows that all three Leisure Centres have had an increase in compliments over the last two years.



8.19 Levels of 3Cs feedback through our contractors have exceeded the levels we received directly at NHDC. This is a reflection of the services that are provided by our contractors and the levels of customer interaction that takes place amongst those services. Some contextual information is included below to demonstrate that the levels of complaints is very low in relation to the level of interactions

8.20 The table below shows that 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. Customer feedback is discussed at monthly contract meetings with Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) ensuring that appropriate action is taken where required; this includes monitoring for trends in feedback and working with SLL to address any issues.

| | North Herts Leisure Centre | Hitchin Swim Centre & Archers | Royston Leisure Centre |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Number of complaints | 60 | 18 | 34 |
| Number of Visitors | 477,893 | 412,014 | 352,568 |
| % of complaints per visitor | 0.01% | 0.004% | 0.001% |

Additionally the waste collection management information shows that there are over 400,000 collections per month totalling just over 4.9 million collections per year. When considered in this context the number of waste related complaints (374) received about the service is very low at 0.007%

Alongside this data Veolia have received 925 justified missed bin reports for the year, of which 100% were reported as being put right within the agreed timescales. This information is summarised in the table below:

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Cumulative number of all collections in the year to date | 4,914,334 |
| Cumulative number of justified missed collections in the year to date | 925 |
| Percentage of justified missed collections put right in the agreed timescale in the year to date | 100% |
| Number of formal complaints received about the service | 374 |
| Percentage of collection interactions that have resulted in a formal complaint | 0.007% |

8.21 **Channels used to report 3Cs**

Of the complaints received directly at NHDC Email is the most popular channel used to make a complaint, with 46% of complaints received by email or an online form, 31% were reported by telephone and 22% by letter, less than 1% were reported in person.

8.22 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.

8.23 **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

Twelve complaints were taken to the LGO, a description and outcome of each is detailed in the table below. A summary of the complaint description and LGO outcome are listed below. Two complaints are currently still being investigated and we are awaiting the outcome of those.

| Complaint description | LGO decision / outcome |
|-----------------------|--|
| Parking enforcement | closed after initial enquiries - no further action |
| Planning | closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction |
| Enforcement | closed after initial enquiries - no further action |
| Housing | Undecided |
| Planning / Legal | Undecided |
| Property Services | closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction |
| Waste Management | closed after initial enquiries - no further action |
| Planning | Not upheld: no administration |
| Housing | Not upheld: no administration |
| Licensing | Not upheld: no administration |
| Property services | closed after initial enquiries - no further action |
| Housing | Not upheld: no administration |

All LGO decisions are published on their website 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 Constitution sets out at 6.2.7(s) that Overview and Scrutiny's terms of reference include "to review performance against the councils agreed objectives / priorities and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and / or service areas".

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 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th 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 1 - 3Cs Performance Summary 2015/16 - 01 April 2015 – 31 March 2016

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None