

<b>OVERVIEW &amp; SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b> <b>14 JULY 2020</b>
---

<b>*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b>
----------------------------------

**TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: FULL YEAR UPDATE ON COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3CS)**

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR MARTIN STEARS-HANDSCOMB

PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the full year (2019/20) performance regarding the Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) for the Council and the Contractors that provide services on the Council's behalf. This briefing note accompanies the 3Cs dashboard at Appendix A and the breakdown of 3Cs by service and type at Appendix B.

**2. STEPS TO DATE**

- 2.1 The Council has a well embedded policy and procedures for handling customer feedback; the Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) Policy. We welcome feedback from our customers about our services so that we can continue to learn about how we can make improvements and what we do well.
- 2.2 The 3Cs policy, which was reviewed and updated in September 2019, sets out clearly the definition of a comment, compliment and complaint as well as how to escalate a complaint further either to stage 2 of the process or the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Customers are able to give feedback in a number of ways and can do this to us directly or to the contractors who provide key services on our behalf.
- 2.3 Whilst the role of the LGO is to consider complaints about Councils, they are also a useful source of information and guidance around best practice. If the LGO upholds a customer's complaint it will seek to put the complainant back in the position they would have been in had the fault not occurred and will suggest a remedy and make recommendations to avoid a similar situation, if appropriate. The Assistant Ombudsman had been due to provide a briefing session to the Senior Management Group (SMG) in March; however, this was postponed due to Covid-19.

**3. INFORMATION TO NOTE**

- 3.1 The areas that generally receive the highest amount of feedback are, not surprisingly those where there is the highest level of contact or interactions such as the waste and recycling service and the leisure facilities.

- 3.2 During 2019/20 the number of 3Cs received, specifically comments and complaints, decreased compared to the previous year, whilst compliments have remained at the same level as the previous year. 2018/19 saw an unusually high number of 3Cs following a major service change with the waste service. We know from previous changes of this scale that it takes time for customer feedback to return to a level consistent with before the change.
- 3.3 The number of complaints received decreased from 1,947 in 2018/19 to 764 in 2019/20. This includes complaints received directly at NHDC and by our contractors. Of the 764 complaints, 613 (80%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, waste and recycling (340) and the leisure centres (273) It is also worth noting that of the 543 compliments received, 402 (74%) relate to the same services, waste and recycling and the leisure centres.
- 3.4 Comments and complaints regarding the waste and recycling service were mostly regarding missed collections, crew behaviour and difficulties with the telephone lines into the Urbaser call centre. The complaints started to increase during the garden waste subscription period from May and peaking in July and August. This follows a similar pattern to the year before. This year garden waste subscriptions are being managed differently to spread the communications over a longer period and to allow customers to set up direct debit payments to make the process easier.
- 3.5 Compliments regarding the waste and recycling service related to the crew, complimenting them for working well and efficiently and for specific acts such as offering to change a flat tyre on a lady's car and explaining to an interested child how the road sweeper works. There were also compliments regarding leaf clearance works and keeping the streets and roads clean and tidy.
- 3.6 Comments and complaints regarding the leisure centres were mostly concerning; maintenance items, other customers not wearing blue overshoes and the temperature of the pool, showers and changing areas. Compliments were regarding the classes and instructors, the cleanliness and temperature of the pools and complimenting the facilities in general.
- 3.7 Following the installation of feedback machines in all leisure centres, there has been an increase in feedback. The machines are entirely self-service which means that the customer decides whether their feedback is a comment, compliment or complaint. Analysis of the feedback shows that different customers may record the same issue differently depending on their own interpretation. This change in how feedback is captured makes it essential that the feedback is reviewed in detail. An example of this is that North Herts Leisure received numerous complaints regarding the squash court lights over a period. The fluorescent tubes were replaced but some of the fittings were also faulty, so a replacement project took place. Once this has been completed the centre then received several compliments about the new lighting. Listening to the customer feedback in this situation led to longer term improvement and satisfaction.
- 3.8 The summary dashboard at appendix A shows the key 3Cs data for the contractors alongside the numbers of annual bin collections and the number of visitors the leisure facilities received in this reporting period.

- 3.9 Appendix B provides a breakdown of all 3Cs received by service and by type. The areas of highest complaints reported directly were Planning Control & Conservation (33) Revenues and Billing (25) and Housing (20). The specific areas of complaints were relating to the planning application process, the issuing of reminders and summonses and the housing application process. This is not surprising as these are services that are highly regulated, and the outcomes will not always be those desired or expected by customers.
- 3.10 The Careline service received a high number of compliments; these are generally submitted by a client's family following an incident where the Careline staff had provided an emergency response service.
- 3.11 There were 16 stage 2 complaints received, across a range of services, of which 7 were considered justified or upheld. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the complaint outcome after completing our process, they may escalate their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. The LGO received ten complaints during this period across a range of service areas. The table below summarises the LGO decisions on those complaints:

<b>Service (as classified by the LGO)</b>	<b>LGO Decision</b>
Private Sector Housing	Upheld: maladministration and injustice £200 financial payment awarded
Planning Control and Conservation	On hold due to Covid19
Environmental Services & Public Protection	Not upheld: no maladministration
Planning & Development	Premature complaint – no further action
Planning & Development	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Housing	On hold, awaiting further information from complainant
Environmental Services & Public Protection	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Planning & Development	Not investigating; the injustice claimed is not the result of fault by the Council
Environmental Services & Public Protection	Premature complaint – no further action
Benefits & Tax	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action

- 3.12 Complaints that are escalated to the LGO are usually complex and will usually have exhausted our own complaints procedure. In March, the LGO paused their investigations of existing complaints and the receiving of new ones, recognising that Councils were diverting resources in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 3.13 The LGO upheld one of the ten complaints. The complaint was in relation to poor living conditions in privately rented accommodation. Through our complaints process we had identified a fault and upheld the complaint. The LGO investigated and found the Council was at fault because of a delay in responding to the complainant's concerns which led to an increased risk of harm. The LGO's remedy included a payment of £200 to the customer for the distress and inconvenience caused.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 3Cs performance will continue to be monitored and reported to SMT and this Committee on a six monthly basis.
- 4.2 The Customer Service Manager will continue to keep up-to-date with guidance and case studies from the LGO, sharing any key learning.

#### **5. APPENDICES**

- 5.1 Appendix A – Dashboard
- 5.2 Appendix B - Breakdown by service area
- 5.3 Appendix C – Social media report

#### **6. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 6.1 Jo Dufficy  
Customer Service Manager  
[Johanne.dufficy@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Johanne.dufficy@north-herts.gov.uk)  
01462 474555
- 6.2 Howard Crompton  
Service Director - Customers  
[Howard.crompton@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Howard.crompton@north-herts.gov.uk)  
01462 474247
- 6.3 Sarah Kingsley  
Communications Manager  
[Sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk)  
01462 474552

#### **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.