

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 JULY 2021

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: Full Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's)

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH DENNIS-HARBURG

PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the full year (2020/21) performance regarding the Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's) for the Council and the Contractors that provide services on the Council's behalf. This briefing note accompanies the 3C's dashboard at Appendix A, the breakdown of 3C's by service and type at Appendix B, and the Social Media report at Appendix C.

2. STEPS TO DATE

2.1 The Council has a well embedded policy and procedures for handling customer feedback; the Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's) 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 3C's policy sets out clearly the definition of a comment, compliment and complaint as well as how to escalate a complaint either to stage 2 of the process or the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Customers can give feedback in a number of ways and can do this directly to the Council or to the contractors who provide key services on our behalf.

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

3.1 The areas that generally receive the highest amount of feedback are, those where there is the highest level of contact or interactions from residents such as the waste and recycling service and the leisure facilities.

3.2 During 2020/21 the number of 3C's received, specifically comments and complaints, decreased compared to the previous year, whilst compliments increased.

3.3 The number of complaints received decreased from 764 in 2019/20 to 527 in 2020/21. This includes complaints received directly at NHDC and by our contractors. Of the total 527 complaints, 302 (57%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including waste and recycling (266) and the leisure centres (33). It is also worth noting that out of the 452 compliments received, 216 (48%) relate to the same contractors – waste and recycling (143) and the leisure centres (73).

- 3.4 During the pandemic, the Council has been able to run services as normal with minimal disruption. The Customer Service Centre (CSC) has been closed, but all staff were set up to work from home in March 20. An intercom was implemented at the front door of the DCO. The intercom has a sim card which routes through to the CSC so officers could continue to speak to customers who arrived at the DCO. As a result, there have been no complaints about being closed, as customers have found alternative ways to access the services they require.
- 3.5 The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days has improved again and hit the target of 80%, compared to the same period last year.
- 3.6 The summary dashboard at Appendix A shows annual comparisons of both 3C's received directly at NHDC and 3C's received by our contractors. The dashboard also details the percentage of interactions resulting in a formal complaint.
- 3.7 Appendix B provides a breakdown of all 3C's received by service and type. The areas of highest complaints reported directly were Waste Management (105) and Planning Control & Conservation (48).

Specific areas of waste complaints were:

- customers who had paid for the garden waste service but the crew had conflicting information and therefore bins not emptied (9)
- bins not being returned to their collection point (9)
- customers saying they had not been advised of the garden waste renewal date (8).

Some specific areas of Planning Control complaints were:

- customers who were unhappy with a planning decision (18)
- customers who were dissatisfied with the handling of their application (10)

- 3.8 It is worth noting that although Waste Management received the highest number of complaints, this has decreased by 36% compared to the previous year. (163 in 19/20, compared to 105 in 20/21).
- 3.9 Whilst Waste Management did receive the highest amount of complaints, they also received the second highest number of compliments (35). Some specific compliments were thanking crew for their service throughout the pandemic and for their efficient service.
- 3.10 Urbaser recorded a high number of comments (410). A number of these comments – defined as feedback or a suggestion which is general in nature - could be defined as 'service requests'. Discussions will be held with Waste Management to explore whether these comments should be recorded in this way.
- 3.11 There was a large reduction of 3C's received by the leisure centres, because of their closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They were closed between April-June 2020 and January-March 2021. The touch screen feedback machines were also turned off due to the restrictions.
- 3.12 Some specific complaints in respect of the leisure centres were:
- regarding a combat class being interrupted by a badminton player complaining the class was too loud; the combat class users then complained about this and that the person was not socially distancing (6)
 - customers unable to use the app to book swim sessions (3)

- too many people in the female changing rooms (2)

Some comments were regarding customers asking for more evening yoga classes, more fitness classes, and advising the spin bikes may need a service.

- 3.13 The Careline service received an increase of compliments (97) compared to the previous period (72); these are generally submitted by a client's family following an incident where the Careline staff had provided an emergency response service.
- 3.14 There were 26 stage 2 complaints during 2020/21.
- 3.15 If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the complaint outcome after completing our process, they may escalate their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Complaints escalated to the LGO will usually have exhausted our internal complaints process.
- 3.16 The LGO resolved eight complaints during this period across a range of service areas.

In March 2020, 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. The LGO began to receive new complaints again from the 29th June.

The table below summarises the LGO decisions on those eight complaints:

Service (as classified by the LGO)	LGO Decision
Planning & Development	Upheld: Maladministration and injustice – no further action
Corporate & Other Services	Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction
Planning & Development	Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction
Planning & Development	Not investigating – recommended to be put to Stage 2 complaint
Planning & Development	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Housing	Not upheld – no maladministration
Environmental Services & Public Protection Regulation	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Planning & Development	Not upheld – no maladministration

- 3.17 The Planning & Development complaint which was upheld was in relation to a delay in issuing notification letters, which meant that residents only had four days to comment on the application. The Council accepted this error as this was four days after the 56-day statutory determination period was due to expire. The LGO said the Council had already accepted there was fault in the way the application was considered. It set a deadline for representations that was beyond the statutory deadline for determination. This meant the Council was not able to fully consult the local highway authority on the proposals. It also meant that whilst the Council received the objections from the resident, it was unable to use them to consider whether the application should be refused or whether any conditions should be set, as the development had to be allowed without conditions. The council said it would have nonetheless approved the application with conditions. The Council apologised and the LGO was satisfied this was a sufficient and proportionate remedy.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 3C's performance will continue to be monitored and reported to 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

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7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.