

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 DECEMBER 2021

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: Half 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 first six months performance of 2021/2022 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 and the breakdown of 3C's 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 (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.
- 3.2 Between April and September 2021, the number of 3C's received by the Council and contractors, specifically comments & complaints increased compared to the same period in the previous year, whilst compliments decreased.
- 3.3 The number of complaints received increased by 3% from 233 in 2020 to 240 in 2021. This includes complaints received directly at NHDC and by our contractors. Of the total 240 complaints, 71 (30%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including waste and recycling (45) and the leisure centres (24). It is also worth noting that out of

the 165 compliments received, 78 (47%) relate to the same contractors – waste and recycling (50) and the leisure centres (28).

- 3.4 The garden waste sign-up period falls within this reporting period each year. Since 2018, Urbaser have seen a steady decline of complaints logged within this period; with 45 logged this year between April and September compared to 103 in 2020 and 124 in 2019.
- 3.5 The number of compliments and complaints received by our contractors have decreased by 39% & 47%, respectively. Whereas comments have increased by 44%.
- 3.6 It is worth noting at this stage that the large number of comments received by Urbaser (346) is not a true figure. As noted in the full year update for 20/21, service requests have been logged as comments by Urbaser. This has been re-raised with Waste Management/Urbaser to encourage only genuine comments to be logged. These comments have been analysed individually and when the service requests are taken out of the total, the number of genuine comments drops to 18. This reduces the overall combined total of comments received to 58.
- 3.7 The number of complaints received directly to the Council has increased by 71%. Appendix B provides a breakdown of all 3C's received by service and type, which shows the highest number of complaints reported directly were Waste Management (68) and Planning Control & Conservation (38).

Some specific areas of waste complaints were regarding:

- On-going missed brown bin (11)
- Crew behaviour (7)

Some specific areas of Planning Control complaints were regarding:

- The Letchworth homeless shelter planning application (9)
- Delay of planning application due to Covid19 (2)

- 3.8 There were 87 compliments received directly to the Council. The Careline service received the highest number, with 32. These are generally submitted by a client's family following an incident where the Careline staff had provided an emergency response service. The Green Space team received the second highest with 17; a few of these excellent compliments are shown below:
 - "Went to Letchworth today and was very impressed with all the flowers/planters around the town. It was a joy to see".
 - RE: St Johns Cemetery, Hitchin – "Thank you for returning the donated watering cans after lockdown and for the way they keep the cemetery absolutely pristine and the 'wild garden' in the centre is always a delight".
- 3.9 The number of 3C's received by the leisure centres was lower than usual as they were all closed until 12th April when they re-opened under restricted measures. The touch screen feedback machines were switched off between April and June, in line with covid safety precautions. All sites confirmed no feedback was received in paper form during this period either.
- 3.10 The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days has decreased by 2% compared to the same period last year, to 77%, however 3 out of 6 months were above the 80% target. April saw the highest number of complaints logged (41), and the lowest percentage resolved within 10 days (61%). This month alone was enough to lower the overall average. Planning Control and Conservation had the highest number not resolved within 10 days (18); however, this was due to staff absences at the time, combined with high workloads and the general complexity of planning issues.

3.11 There were 20 stage 2 complaints, 11 of which were for Planning Control and the rest for various service areas. Of the 20 stage 2 complaints, only 5 were deemed to be justified. A couple of examples of stage 2 complaints that were not justified are shown below:

- Planning Control & Conservation – no fault found in processing of application
- Waste Management – not enough time given for stage 1 actions to be implemented

3.12 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.

3.13 The LGO resolved 1 complaint during this period, which was closed after initial enquires. There are 3 other cases open, as shown below. It's prudent to note there may be some cases that do not reach the Council, as they are premature and will be referred to go through the 3C's procedure (for example). These cases are then shown in the Annual Review Letter received from the LGO in July.

Service (as classified by the LGO)	LGO Decision
Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Planning Control & Conservation	LGO investigating and have invited comments & supporting information from NHC
Planning Control & Conservation	LGO have passed this complaint to the investigation team for further consideration
Planning Enforcement	LGO have passed this complaint to the investigation team for further consideration

3.14 The LGO advised they would not investigate the Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation case. It was regarding the Council collecting garden waste from some residents who have not paid the required fee. This was because the complaint did not meet the tests in their Assessment Code on how they decide which complaints to investigate. There was no evidence the complainant has been caused injustice that warranted their involvement.

3.15 In October, an LGO newsletter was shared with colleagues in Parking Services. It contained useful information relating to what the LGO would want to see when the Council has rejected a formal representation. It also referred to ensuring the Council considers formal representations within 28 days where payment has also been received.

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

6. CONTACT OFFICERS

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7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.