

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
06 SEPTEMBER 2022**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: Full Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's) 21/22

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH DENNIS-HARBURG

PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the full year (21/22) 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, 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 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 policy has been updated and refreshed to reflect previous experiences, learning and discussions since the last review in 2019. The updated policy is being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny committee and Cabinet in September 2022.
- 2.3 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 21/22 the number of 3C's received directly at NHDC and by our contractors all decreased in volume compared to the previous year.
- 3.3 The number of complaints received decreased from 527 in 20/21 to 423 in 21/22. Of the total 423 complaints, 148 (35%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including waste and recycling (52) and the leisure centres (94). It is also worth noting

that out of the 338 compliments received, 153 (45%) relate to the same contractors – waste and recycling (66) and the leisure centres (87).

- 3.4 The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days has decreased by 3% below the target of 80% to 77%, however 5 out of 12 months were above the 80% target. April saw the highest number of complaints logged (41), and the second lowest percentage resolved within 10 days (61%). December saw the second lowest number of complaints logged (12), but only 58% resolved within 10 days. Combining April & December was enough to lower the overall average below 80%.
- 3.5 Planning Control and Conservation had the highest number not resolved within 10 days (28); however, this was due to staff absences, combined with high workloads and the general complexity of planning issues.
- 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. It is worth noting that the percentage of interactions/collections/visitors resulting in a complaint remains at less than 1%.
- 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 (95) and Planning Control & Conservation (65).

Specific areas of waste complaints were regarding:

- On-going missed bins
- Crew behaviour / throwing caddies

Some specific areas of Planning Control complaints were regarding:

- Proposed 40 bed homeless shelter on Pixmore Avenue, Letchworth (17)
- Various applications & decisions

- 3.8 It is worth noting that although Waste Management received the highest number of complaints, this has decreased by 10% compared to the previous year (105 in 20/21, compared to 95 in 21/22).
- 3.9 In the half year update in December 2021, it was noted that it was re-raised with Urbaser to encourage that only genuine comments be logged, rather than service requests. This has been taken on board by Urbaser, as comments have decreased from 410 in 20/21, to 18 in 21/22, providing an accurate reflection.
- 3.10 Urbaser have also seen a decline in complaints logged; with only 52 logged in 21/22 compared to 266 in 20/21. As with 3.9, Urbaser have ensured they are now only logging genuine complaints instead of logging service requests as complaints.
- 3.11 Waste Management received 43 more complaints than Urbaser (95 vs 52). Per the 3C's policy, customers are encouraged to log their complaint with the contractor in the first instance to allow them the chance to rectify the issue. A large proportion of complaints logged to Waste Management were regarding Urbaser, for various reasons including on-going missed collections, supervisors not calling customers back, neighbours bins left on driveway but no action taken, street cleansing not done for four months.
- 3.12 In addition to the above, Waste Management did receive the third highest number of compliments (17). Some specific compliments included:

- "I would like to thank the refuse operator that emptied our bin today. We are away and our sons had forgotten to leave the bin out. The operator walked up our drive to collect our bin. A massive thank you to him. In a world we're so easy to complain, it deserves a compliment for such a kind thought."
- Customer called to say thank you to the team for being so prompt in clearing up the fly tipping which she reported. She said that she wanted to pass along her thanks as she is very grateful and said this is a big weight lifted off her mind.

3.13 The leisure centres were all closed until 12th April 2021 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. The volume of 3C's has increased following a natural increase of visitors as covid restrictions lessened over the year.

3.14 Some specific complaints in respect of the leisure centres were:

- Car park dangerous and not well lit enough (NHLC)
- Female showers cold (NHLC)
- Showers faulty in changing rooms upstairs and constantly cold (Royston)

Most comments at NHLC through January to March were regarding customers asking why the sauna & steam room were closed, owing to a refurbishment.

3.15 There were 185 compliments received directly to the Council. The Careline service received the highest number, with 87. 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 32; a couple of these great compliments are shown below:

- "A big thank you to Tom Ayres, Green Space Manager at North Herts Council. Friends of Great Ashby needed some sundries for Sunday's litter pick, and they arrived within the hour!".
- "We just wanted to say that we appreciate the clear up job done at the rear of Hilltop in Baldock during the week, a tidy job well done so thank you and please pass on our appreciation to the hard-working team".

3.16 There were 33 stage 2 complaints, 20 of which were for Planning Control and the rest for various service areas, including Waste Management (6). Of the 33 stage 2 complaints, only 8 were deemed to be justified.

3.17 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.

3.18 The LGO received 10 complaints during this period across a range of service areas.

The table below summarises the LGO decisions on those 10 complaints:

Service (as classified by the LGO)	LGO Decision
Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation	Upheld – maladministration and injustice
Planning Control and Development	(Decided May 22) Not upheld – no further action

Planning Control and Development	Closed after initial enquiries – premature decision
Planning Control and Development	LGO investigating
Planning Control and Development	LGO investigating
Planning Control and Development	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Planning Control and Development	(Decided June 22) Upheld – maladministration, no injustice
Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation	Referred back for local resolution
Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation	Referred back for local resolution

- 3.19 The Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation case that was upheld was regarding a complaint about noise and conditions from a takeaway in Hitchin. Fault was found with the Council as there was delay in taking action and in not keeping the complainant updated. The remedy suggested by the LGO was to apologise for the delay and a symbolic payment of £150 to acknowledge the time, trouble and frustration caused to the complainant for the delays.
- 3.20 The Planning Control and Development case was received in February 22 and upheld in June 22. It was regarding a complaint about the Council approving plans to increase the height of a neighbour's property without following the proper decision-making process. The Council was found to be at fault, but it was deemed that no injustice was caused as the complainant lives a significant distance from the property.

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 (CSM) will continue to keep up to date with guidance and case studies from the LGO, sharing any key learning. The CSM will also provide regular updates to the Leadership Team moving forward.

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.