

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
6 DECEMBER 2022**

**\*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: PEOPLE FIRST

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the first six months performance of 22/23 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 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.
- 2.3 In early 2022, the 3C's policy was updated and refreshed and was adopted by Cabinet in September. The updated policy ensures the Council and communities we serve know how to access help, and that a safe and compassionate system to deal with complaints is in place.

**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 2022, the number of 3C's received by the Council and contractors, specifically compliments, increased compared to the same period in the previous year, whilst comments and complaints decreased.

- 3.3 The number of complaints received decreased by 15% from 240 in 2021, to 203 in 2022. This includes complaints received directly at North Herts Council and by our contractors. Of the total 203 complaints, 98 (48%) relate to services delivered by our contractors, including Urbaser (37) and the leisure centres (58). It is also worth noting that out of the 229 compliments received, 162 (71%) relate to those same contractors, including Urbaser (31) and the leisure centres (131).
- 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 37 logged this year between April and September compared to 45 in 2021 and 103 in 2020.
- 3.5 The number of compliments and complaints received by our contractors has increased by 108% & 38%, respectively. Whereas comments have decreased by 75%.
- 3.6 The decrease in comments received by Urbaser has been noted in the last two information notes and is a result of Urbaser now only logging genuine comments as opposed to logging service requests as comments, thus providing an accurate reflection.
- 3.7 The number of complaints received directly to the Council has decreased by 38%. Appendix B provides a breakdown of all 3C's received by service and type, which shows the highest number of complaints reported directly were Planning Control & Conservation (22), and Environmental Health (Protection) (17).

Some specific areas of Planning complaints were regarding:

- S73 application – 22/00518 (3)
- The Templars, Baldock (2)
- The Cabinet, High Street, Reed (1)

Some specific areas of Environmental Health complaints were regarding:

- On-going noise complaints (3)
- Neighbour issues (2)

- 3.8 There were 67 compliments received directly to the Council. The Careline service received the highest number, with 38. 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 7; a few of these excellent compliments are shown below:

- "My thanks and appreciation of the work John O'Conner completed in Great Ashby, play area, beech hedging and roadside shrub growth. It looks nicely tidied up and carefully completed."
- (RE Letchworth roundabout) "If you can I would be grateful if your team would register my appreciation as a compliment to NHC greenspaces/contractors. Personally, I think it is extremely well planted, and with a location close to the public swimming pool/business area, I would think it must be appreciated by many people, being very uplifting! As roundabout planting goes, it is one of the best I have seen on my travels."

- 3.9 The number of 3C's received by the leisure centres has increased this year, as all sites are now fully open post-Covid. Visitor numbers across all three sites has risen from 373,683 (Apr-Sept 21) to 671,016 (Apr-Sept 22). North Herts Leisure Centre saw a large increase of compliments from 12 logged in 2021 to 56 in 2022, with some fantastic feedback provided regarding the pool, the staff, and the facilities.

- 3.10 The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days has decreased by 3% compared to the same period last year, to 74%.
- 3.11 June (53%) and September (50%) were the months where the least number of complaints were resolved within 10 days. These can be attributed to Environmental Health, which is explained below at 3.12.
- 3.12 Environmental Health (Protection) had the highest number not resolved within 10 days (12). One of the main reasons for this has been due to staff absences, added to the regular need to advertise and seek to employ new staff. This is followed by the subsequent need to train new staff, combined with high workloads. There is also the general complexity of Environmental Health complaints, and in some cases, the actions or otherwise of other services or outside agencies which have significantly contributed to the complaints being made.
- 3.13 There were 18 stage 2 complaints, 7 of which were for Planning Control and the rest for various service areas. Of the 18 stage 2 complaints, only 4 were deemed to be justified.
- 3.14 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.
- 3.15 The LGO received 8 complaints during this period. 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.

<b>Service (as classified by the LGO)</b>	<b>LGO Decision</b>
Corporate and Other Services	Closed after initial enquiries – No further action
Corporate and Other Services	Closed after initial enquiries – No further action
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries – Out of jurisdiction
Planning and Development	Upheld – No further action, organisation already remedied
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	LGO proposing to investigate
Planning and Development	LGO has passed this complaint to the investigation team for further consideration
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Closed after initial enquiries – No further action
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	LGO has passed this complaint to the investigation team for further consideration

- 3.16 The LGO upheld the Planning and Development complaint regarding the Council accepting comments on planning applications without an address being provided to verify the submissions. The Council accepted the policy was not followed in relation to the planning applications the complainant referred to. The Council apologised for the error and said it will ensure that names and addresses are provided in the future. The LGO advised that they would not investigate the complaint because it was unlikely they could add anything to the Council's response. The LGO also advised that they could not say the complainant had been caused any significant personal injustice by the matter.

- 3.17 Although not within the half year reporting period, it's useful to note that on 02 November, an article was published in The Comet and the Royston Crow online newspapers showing that North Herts Council is the least complained about Council – on district and borough level – in Hertfordshire. The data was provided by the LGO and analysed by claims.co.uk. The article can be found here: [North Herts and Stevenage among councils with fewest complaints | The Comet](#)

#### **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.