

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 JUNE 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: Full Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's) 22/23

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH DENNIS

PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the full year (22/23) 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 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 The 3C's policy was updated and refreshed and was adopted by Cabinet in September 2022. 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 During 22/23 the number of compliments and complaints received directly by North Herts Council both decreased in volume compared to the previous year, whilst the number of comments received remained the same.
- 3.2 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.

- 3.3 The number of complaints received by both the Council and our contractors decreased from 423 in 21/22 to 417 in 22/23. Of the total 417 complaints, 232 (56%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including waste and recycling (105) and the leisure centres (124). It is also worth noting that out of the 477 compliments received, 305 (64%) relate to the same contractors – waste and recycling (63) and the leisure centres (242).
- 3.4 The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days has remained at 77%, 3% below the target of 80%. 6 out of 12 months were, however, above the 80% target. October saw the second lowest number of complaints logged (10), but only 40% resolved within 10/20 days.
- 3.5 As part of the 3C's policy refresh at the end of 2022, the deadline for responding to stage 2 complaints was increased from 10 days to 20 days. This was to allow sufficient time for officers to investigate and consider complaints which are usually complex in nature.
- 3.6 Environmental Health had the highest number of complaints not resolved within 10/20 days (21); however, this was due to the general complexity of Environmental Health issues, combined with high workloads, staff absences and recruitment challenges. Complainants were kept updated regarding changing timeframes.
- 3.7 The summary dashboard at Appendix A shows annual comparisons of both 3C's received directly at North Herts Council 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%.
- 3.8 Appendix B provides a breakdown of all 3C's received by service and type. The areas of highest complaints reported directly were Planning Control & Conservation (34) and Waste Management (30).

Specific areas of planning complaints were regarding:

- General handling of planning applications
- The Templars, Baldock (2)
- The Cabinet, High Street, Reed (1)

Some specific areas of waste complaints were regarding:

- Crew behaviour
- Damage to property
- Collect and return issues

- 3.9 It is worth noting that although Planning Control & Conservation received the highest number of complaints, this has decreased by 48% compared to the previous year (65 in 21/22, compared to 34 in 22/23).
- 3.10 As seen on the 3C's dashboard at Appendix A, the volume of 3C's received by the leisure centres has naturally increased over the last two years following an increase of visitors since covid restrictions were eased.
- 3.11 Some specific complaints in respect of the leisure centres included:
- Cleanliness in changing rooms - NHLC
 - Car park too full/busy - Hitchin
 - Gym equipment needs updating - NHLC

3.12 Some specific compliments in respect of the leisure centres included:

- “Pool area was sparkling today” - NHLC
- “Swimming lessons always fantastic” – NHLC
- “The pool parties are amazing” - Hitchin

3.13 Urbaser have seen a 98% increase in complaints logged; with 52 logged in 21/22 compared to 105 in 22/23. This may be because per the 3C’s policy, our Customer Service Team have encouraged customers to log their complaint with the contractor in the first instance to allow them the chance to rectify the issue and avoid double counting.

3.14 Urbaser also received several compliments (63). Some specific compliments included:

- “I want to say a big thank you for ordering us bins. I am so grateful for your help. You made our day, helping us, and answering so quickly at our need”
- “Many thanks. I must say that I have always found customer service from Urbaser to be very quick and helpful – thank you”

3.15 There were 172 compliments received directly to the Council. The Careline service received the highest number, with 102. 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 15, including compliments such as:

- RE Letchworth roundabout – “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!”
- The main Ride and McFadyen look really so much better. A fine example of what the Friends of Norton Common, the Contractors and the owners of Norton Common can achieve by working together. Excellent stuff!”

3.16 The Customer Service Centre also received 10 compliments, which included:

- “I must say that you are one of the most helpful customer service people I have spoken to at any establishment”
- “Wow.. another superhuman being”
- Thank you for your patience and help when I phoned. You are definitely a ‘people’s person’, such a lovely quality”

3.17 There were 27 stage 2 complaints over the course of the year; 10 of which were for Planning Control (however 6 complaints were not justified, and 3 did not meet the criteria) and the rest for various service areas. Of the 27 stage 2 complaints, only 4 were deemed to be justified and 4 did not meet the criteria to be escalated.

3.18 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.

3.19 The LGO received 13 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.

The table below summarises the LGO decisions on those 13 complaints:

Service (as classified by the LGO)	LGO Decision
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
Planning and Development	Upheld – Fault, no injustice
Planning and Development	Not upheld – no fault
Planning and Development	Status – still open
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Environmental Services and Public Protection	Upheld – fault and injustice. No further action, organisation already remedied
Environmental Services and Public Protection	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action
Environmental Services and Public Protection	Upheld – fault and injustice (remedy complete and satisfied)
Environmental Services and Public Protection	Upheld – fault and injustice
Environmental Services and Public Protection	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action

- 3.20 5 complaints were upheld by the LGO, however 2 of the 5 had already been remedied by the Council.
- 3.21 One of the Environmental Health cases was a complaint that the Council failed to properly investigate reports of a statutory noise nuisance caused by a neighbour. The LGO found evidence of fault by the Council and upheld the complaint. The Council agreed to the recommended actions, including looking to resolve the noise issue and payment of £300 for time and trouble, and £900 for distress.
- 3.22 In November 2022, the service manager for Waste was forwarded an LGO report relating to Waste, specifically collect and returns.
- 3.23 In January 2023, the Monitoring Officer was forwarded an LGO report outlining the need for Council's to ensure standards investigations into the actions of councillors are conducted fairly and properly.

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.

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.