

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: Half Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's) 23/24

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 half year (23/24) 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 has ensured 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 Between April and September 2023, the number of complaints received directly by North Herts Council has decreased in volume compared to the same period in the previous year. The number of compliments has increased, whilst the number of comments received increased by one.
- 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 has marginally increased from 203 in April – September 2022, to 209 in the same period in

2023. Of the total 209 complaints, 123 (59%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including waste and recycling (53) and the leisure centres (70). It is also worth noting that out of the 203 compliments received, 122 (60%) relate to the same contractors – waste and recycling (47) and the leisure centres (75).

- 3.4 The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days between April and September is 79%, 1% below the target of 80%. In summary, 4 out of the 6 months in this period were above the 80% target. May saw the highest number of complaints logged (20) with 85% resolved within the 10 & 20 day targets.
- 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 (6); however, this is generally due to the 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 Careline (16) & Planning Control & Conservation (15).

Some specific areas of the Careline complaints were regarding:

- Handling of calls from customers – A customer, following an FOI, complained that the call handler did not listen to his father's symptoms on the original call, and this could have had adverse consequences.
- Failure to maintain voicemail inbox – A customer complained that technical support was not available as their mother could not leave a voicemail due to the voicemail inbox being full.
- Failure to adhere to procedure – A customer complained that a Careline staff member arrived at her mother's property and did not have any identification to show when they were asked to provide it.

Some specific areas of the Planning complaints were regarding:

- General handling of planning applications – A customer was displeased that their application was refused and believed the reasons given were not substantive.
- Incorrect application fees – A customer was unhappy with the fact they had been charged an incorrect amount for their planning application.
- Inconsistent criteria for acceptance – A customer complained that the reasons given for his refusal were not applied to a number of properties in the same area, and if they were, these applications should have also failed.

- 3.9 It is worth noting that although Planning Control & Conservation received 15 complaints, this has decreased by 32% compared to the same period in the previous year (22 in Apr-Sept 2022)
- 3.10 As seen on the 3C's dashboard at Appendix A, the volume of 3C's received by all Contractors has decreased, with the total 3C's being 352 in Apr-Sept 2022 and 307 in Apr-Sept 2023.
- 3.11 The volume of 3C's received by the leisure centres has also decreased, with the total 3C's being 274 in Apr-Sept 2022 and 190 in Apr-Sept 2023.
- 3.12 Some specific complaints in respect of the leisure centres included:
- Opening times too restrictive - Hitchin
 - Car park too full/busy – NHLC
 - Cleanliness of Changing rooms - Royston
- 3.13 Some specific compliments in respect of the leisure centres included:
- "I just wanted to commend your lovely lady who was on reception" - Royston
 - "Swim teacher extremely helpful with my daughter who's petrified of water" - NHLC
 - "The outdoor pool looks beautiful." - Hitchin
- 3.14 Urbaser have seen a 36% increase in complaints logged; with 39 in April – September 2022 to 53 complaints logged in the same period in 2023. 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. Some of the most common complaints to Urbaser included:
- Bins not collected
 - Bin not returned to correct property / near enough to property
 - Standard of driving by driver of Refuse Vehicle
 - Spillage of refuse during collection
 - Noise created by bin collection
- 3.15 Urbaser also received several compliments (47). Some specific compliments included:
- "Resident phoning to report that the crew were very respectful and accommodating yesterday when a funeral car was passing down Millers Lane around 12:30 yesterday. Thanks"
 - "Called to say thank you and appreciates how quickly the paper box was delivered and how much sturdier it is than the last one."
- 3.16 There were 81 compliments received directly to the Council between April & September. The Careline service received the highest number, with 35. 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 14, including compliments such as:
- RE Overgrown Hedges – "I wanted to say how pleased I was with the quick service. People complain about the council but everything I have ever asked about has been addressed. Thank you very much."

- RE Cemeteries – “It can be difficult sometimes to get things done from such a great distance, but everyone has been so kind and helpful, and our family is extremely grateful. I can't thank you enough.”

3.17 There were 17 stage 2 complaints between April and September; 6 of which were for Planning Control (however 5 complaints were not justified) and the rest for various service areas. Of the 17 stage 2 complaints, only 2 were deemed to be justified and 1 did not meet the criteria to be accepted as a stage 2.

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 1 complaint 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 will then be shown in the Annual Review Letter received from the LGO in July 2024.

3.20 The 1 complaint received was not upheld nor investigated by the LGO as it did not meet their criteria.

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.