

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
18 JUNE 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

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

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR VAL BRYANT

PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the full 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 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.
- 2.4 The Council implemented a new customer relationship management (CRM) system in February 2024 moving from Achieve to Connect_CRM. This report covers all 3C's from the previous system in addition to those logged on the new CRM.

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

- 3.1 During 23/24 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 rose slightly.

- 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 417 in 22/23 to 384 in 23/24 (an 8% decrease). Of the total 384 complaints, 205 (53.4%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including our waste and recycling contractors (77) and the leisure centres (128).
- 3.4 The percentage of stage 1 complaints resolved within the SLA of 10 days has risen from 77% in 22/23 to 86% in 23/24, which is 6% above the target of 80%. April saw the lowest number of complaints logged with (8), with June coming in second lowest with only (9) logged.
- 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 (x10 – down from 21 in 22/23); however, this is 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 has dropped even further, to below 0.5%.
- 3.8 Appendix B provides a breakdown of all 3C's received by service and type. The areas of highest complaints reported directly were Housing Needs (34) and Revenues Billing and Recovery (30).

Specific areas of Housing Needs complaints were regarding:

- NHC not having a duty to house
- Incorrect procedure being followed
- Unsuitable housing

Some specific areas of Revenues Billing and Recovery complaints were regarding:

- Summons being issued
- Customers being ineligible for Discounts/Reductions
- Customer not in receipt of bills

- 3.9 It is worth noting that although Housing Needs received the highest number of complaints (34 in 23/24), the total amount of complaints has decreased from 185 in 22/23, to 179 in 23/24.
- 3.10 The volume of 3C's received by the leisure centres has increased very slightly from 124 in 22/23 to 128 in 23/24.
- 3.11 Some specific complaints in respect of the leisure centres included:
 - "Members male changing rooms litter on floor drains & floors dirty" - NHLC

- “Car park too full/busy” - NHLC
- “Flooring in the gym changing rooms need replacing” - Hitchin

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

- “Team member gone over and above helping my daughter who is hard of hearing, with her swimming lessons” - NHLC
- “Your soft play is definitely the best for value around here, my daughter loves it.” – NHLC
- “Excellent combat class + balance with ‘instructor’, her classes are fabulous” - Hitchin

3.13 Urbaser have seen a 27% decrease in complaints logged; with 105 in 22/23 compared to 77 in 23/24.

3.14 Urbaser also received a large number of compliments (74). Some specific compliments included:

- Extreme efficiency of delivery of food caddy ordered end of December
- Resident has complimented litter picking worker who has worked extremely hard and did an excellent job. “He worked on Saturday morning in the area of West View in Letchworth near the water fountain. He cleared the leaves, shrubs and all sorts of rubbish and showed great pride in his job. Well done!”

3.15 There were 142 compliments received directly to the Council. The Careline service received the highest number, with 48. These are generally submitted by a client’s family following an incident where the Careline staff had provided an emergency response service, these included:

- Customer reported that Careline Engineer was very helpful, explained the alarm in great detail and provided an efficient service.
- Customer reports that the Careline Engineer was highly professional and very helpful. She said he was an excellent asset to the Careline Team.
- Customer had problems with her alarm this week. She would like to pass her thanks to the Engineer, who attended and sorted her problem. She stated he was knowledgeable, and kind and she thought he did a wonderful job.

3.16 There were 29 stage 2 complaints over the course of the year; 8 of which were for Planning Control (however 7 of these complaints were not justified). Of the 29 stage 2 complaints only 4 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 6 complaints during this period which is a 54% decrease from 22/23 (where there were 13 LGO complaints). 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 3 of the 6 received in 23/34 met this criteria as detailed below). 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 6 complaints:

Service (as classified by the LGO)	LGO Decision	Further information
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction	<u>22 016 648 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman</u>
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries - complaint is premature	
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries - complaint is premature	
Corporate & Other Services	Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction	<u>23 013 725 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman</u>
Environmental Health	<i>Status – still open</i>	
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries - complaint is premature	

3.19 0 complaints were upheld by the LGO, however 1 of the 6 is currently still open with LGO for investigation.

3.20 Following an audit conducted by the Shared Internal Audit Service earlier this year, we received a reasonable overall assurance that there are effective controls in operation for the LGO processes. One of the low priority recommendations was to highlight details of the above complaints to the Overview and Scrutiny committee, including what the remedy was and what service improvements have been made. As none of the above complaints were upheld, this detail will be provided within future reports if and when complaints are upheld.

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 on a quarterly basis.

5. APPENDICES

5.1 Appendix A – Dashboard

5.2 Appendix B - Breakdown by service area

6. CONTACT OFFICERS

6.1 Chris Jeffery
Customer Services Manager
Chris.Jeffery@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474505

6.2 Jo Dufficy

Service Director - Customers
Johanne.Dufficy@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474555

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.