

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: Half Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3C's) 24/25

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER & DIGITAL SERVICES MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR VAL BRYANT

PRIORITY: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the half year (24/25) 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 2024, the number of complaints and comments received directly by North Herts Council has increased in volume compared to the same period in the previous year. The number of compliments has decreased. The increase of complaints is largely due to the change of the Leisure contract as explained at 3.10
- 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 increased from 209 in April – September 2023, to 358 in the same period in 2024. Of the

total 358 complaints, 236 (66%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including waste and recycling (10) and the leisure centres (226).

- 3.4 The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days between April and September is 90%, 10% above the target of 80%. April saw the highest number of complaints logged (38) with 95% 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 Leisure & Active Communities had the highest number of complaints not resolved within 10/20 days (4); however, two of the cases were not resolved on time due to waiting for a response from Everyone Active. 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 Leisure (30) & Green Space (15).

Some specific areas of the Leisure complaints were regarding:

- Everyone Active (various)
- Price increases
- Poor website
- Cleanliness

Some specific areas of the Green Space complaints were regarding:

- Grass cutting
- Overgrown vegetation
- Poor litter picking

- 3.9 As seen on the 3C's dashboard at Appendix A, the volume of 3C's received by all Contractors has increased, with the total 3C's being 307 between Apr-Sept 2023 and 442 between Apr-Sept 2024.
- 3.10 The volume of 3C's received by the leisure centres marks the largest increase, with the total 3C's being 190 between Apr-Sept 2023 and 418 between Apr-Sept 2024. This increase relates to the start of a new contract with Everyone Active, which commenced on the 1 April 2024, and new processes and systems implemented as a result, for example the new booking system and spilt sessions at the lidos. From 1 April 2024 KPI data will be collected by the Leisure and Active Communities team and used as baseline data to be able to monitor trends moving forward.
- 3.11 Urbaser have seen an 81% decrease in complaints logged; with 53 in April – September 2023 to only 10 complaints logged in the same period in 2024.
- 3.12 Urbaser also received several compliments (10). Some specific compliments included:

- “Thank you for such a prompt clearance of the two Diamond End fly tips – fantastic job!”
 - Resident called to say how lovely and honest the crew were for finding her phone and knocking on the door to give it to her.
- 3.13 There were 57 compliments received directly to the Council between April & September. The Careline service received the highest number, with 23. These are generally submitted by a client’s family following an incident where the Careline staff had provided an emergency response service.
- Resident said she would like to pass on her thanks to the operators. She said it was his lifeline in the end and whenever he pressed the alarm everyone was so nice and accommodating and gave him the help that he required. She said she would recommend the service to anyone.
 - Resident called to say that in today's world, our Careline service was outstanding and particularly Shane Hinds, Careline Technician as he was so kind and caring, and she felt completely at ease with him. She wants to pass her sincere thanks on to him.
- 3.14 There were 16 stage 2 complaints between April and September across a range of service areas; 8 of which were not justified.
- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 The LGO received 3 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 will then be shown in the Annual Review Letter received from the LGO in July 2025.
- 3.17 One complaint received was not upheld nor investigated by the LGO as it did not meet their criteria, and one complaint has recently been passed to the LGO investigation team for further consideration.
- 3.18 The third complaint regarding Planning Enforcement was upheld with fault and injustice caused by the Council. In summary, the resident complained the Council failed to follow its planning enforcement policy when investigating her reports of planning breaches. The Council agreed to the LGO’s recommendations of:
- Apologising to the customer for the frustration caused
 - Issuing a written reminder to enforcement staff about the need for clear and accurate communication with residents on enforcement cases. The aim behind this being to ensure officers do not inappropriately raise residents’ expectations about what action it would take and when by

The LGO have now recorded a compliance outcome of ‘remedy complete and satisfied’.

- 3.19 One LGO complaint was received in March 2024, and has been investigated throughout the course of the year. The final report was received on 19 September.

‘Miss F complained the Council wrongly delayed serving an abatement notice on a neighbouring business after it had identified a statutory noise nuisance. Although the Council has accepted it was at fault for this, Miss F complained it has not offered a

financial remedy to reflect her loss of amenity and distress arising from the delay. Miss F also says the business is yet to comply with the requirements of the abatement notice, but the Council has not taken action to enforce it.'

The LGO has found fault, causing injustice, and has made recommendations:

'The Council must consider the report and confirm within three months the action it has taken or proposes to take. The Council should consider the report at its full Council, Cabinet, or other appropriately delegated committee of elected members and we will require evidence of this.'

To remedy the injustice identified in this report, the LGO recommend to:

- Offer to pay Miss F £3,000, to recognise her loss of residential amenity because of its failure to serve an abatement notice sooner; and
- Circulate guidance to relevant staff to ensure they are aware of the law requiring them to make a timely, formal decision about whether a reported nuisance amounts to a statutory nuisance

3.20 The report was published on the [LGO's website](#) on 25 October 2024, then our Communications team subsequently published two public notices in the local newspapers as requested. Paper copies of the report have also been made available at the District Council Offices.

3.21 The Environmental Health management team have decided to accept the recommendations, and the report will be discussed at the Cabinet committee on 19 November 2024.

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.