

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 10 JUNE 2025

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

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

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER AND 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 full 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 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 24/25 the number of compliments received directly by North Herts Council decreased in volume compared to the previous year, whilst the number of comments and complaints 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 increased from 384 in 23/24 to 591 in 24/25 (a 54% increase). Of the total 591 complaints, 391 (66%) relate to services delivered by our key contractors, including our waste and recycling contractors (21) and the leisure centres (370).
- 3.4 The percentage of stage 1 complaints resolved within the SLA of 10 days has risen from 86% in 23/24 to 91% in 24/25, which is 11% above the target of 80%. March 25 saw the lowest number of complaints logged with (6), with May & December 24 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 Leisure had the highest number of complaints not resolved within 10/20 days (x8); however, this was mainly 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 is currently below 0.2%.
- 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 (40) and Green Space (24). Specific areas of repeat Leisure complaints were regarding poor hygiene, cancelled classes, price increases, and the booking system. Some specific areas of Green Space complaints were regarding overgrown vegetation, poor grass cutting, gate access at the cemeteries, and overhanging trees.
- 3.9 It is worth noting that although Leisure received the highest number of complaints (40), the total amount of complaints received directly by the Council has decreased slightly, from 179 in 23/24, to 176 in 24/25.
- 3.10 The volume of 3C's received by the leisure centres marks the largest increase, with the total 3C's being 334 in 23/24 and 823 in 24/25. This large increase relates to the start of the new contract with Everyone Active, which commenced on the 1 April 2024, and new processes and systems implemented as a result. From 1 April 2024, KPI data is being collected by the Leisure and Active Communities team and will be used as baseline data to be able to monitor trends moving forward.
- 3.11 Everyone Active are addressing these complaints according to their complaint's procedure. When the complaints are about new policy changes, they provide extra information to clarify. Complaints about cleanliness are investigated and responded to by Everyone Active, and the Leisure and Active Communities team. The top five complaints relate to policy changes.
- Advanced booking of sessions
 - Split sessions/lunch closure at lidos
 - Concession changes
 - Increase in swimming lesson capacity
 - No show/late cancel charges

- 3.12 Urbaser saw a 73% decrease in complaints logged; with 77 in 23/24 compared to 21 in 24/25.
- 3.13 Urbaser also received some great compliments (21). Some specific compliments included:
- “Very helpful and polite young man working on the bin emptying crew helped me with my grey recycling bin today - above and beyond”
 - “I have been over to Baldock, and the area has been left the cleanest I have seen for many years so please pass on my thanks to the team involved. Please pass on this message to the crew involved and thank them for me for doing such a great job. Really appreciated.”
- 3.14 There were 131 compliments received directly to the Council. The Careline service received the highest number, with 42. 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 said “that in today's world, our Careline service was outstanding and particularly Shane, Careline Technician, as he was so kind and caring and she felt completely at ease with him”
 - Customer called to say “that Lesley, Careline Operator, was brilliant for her help when her mother needed it and awarded her a gold star.
- 3.15 There were 24 stage 2 complaints over the course of the year; 5 of which were for Planning Control (however 4 of these complaints were not justified). Of the 29 stage 2 complaints, only 9 were deemed to be justified.
- 3.16 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.
- 3.17 The LGO received 5 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. These cases are then shown in the Annual Review Letter received from the LGO in July. Further information can be found on the LGO’s website, by searching for the reference numbers found in the table below. ([Decisions - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#))

The table below summarises the LGO decisions on those 5 complaints:

Service (as classified by the LGO)	LGO Decision	Further information
Planning & Development 23 012 307	Upheld: fault and injustice	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:

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>The LGO have now recorded a compliance outcome of 'remedy complete and satisfied'.</p> <p>Planning Enforcement Service improvements can be found at Appendix C.</p>
Benefits & Tax 24 004 775	Upheld: fault and injustice	<p>The resident complained the bailiffs acting on behalf of the Council made an unnecessary visit incurring extra fees and failed to properly respond during telephone conversations when he explained his vulnerabilities. The LGO recommended to refund the enforcement costs of £310.</p> <p>The LGO have now recorded a compliance outcome of 'remedy complete and satisfied'.</p> <p>Enforcement Agency Service improvements can be found at Appendix C.</p>
Benefits & Tax 24 006 736	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	<p>The resident complained that the Council failed to contact him about a Council Tax debt which led to a liability order and costs. The LGO decided not to investigate as the matter was out of time and there was no evidence of fault by the Council.</p>
Planning & Development 24 015 901	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	<p>The resident complained about the conduct of two Council planning officers during an application for a development near her property, and how the Council responded to her complaints. The LGO decided there was not enough evidence of fault by</p>

		the Council in the planning process to warrant investigation.
Housing 24 018 639	Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	The resident complained about the Council's handling of his homeless case, saying that the Council did not provide him with adequate support. The LGO decided not to investigate as there was insufficient evidence of fault.

- 3.18 Following an audit conducted by the Shared Internal Audit Service last 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. These can be found at Appendix C.

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
- 5.3 Appendix C – Service improvements

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7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.