



**Committee: Governance and Audit**

**Date 25 July 17**

**Subject: Annual Customer Feedback report**

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To review the number, type and results of Compliments, comments and complaints made to the Council during 2016/17, advise on any trends, areas for learning and future management of feedback

**RECOMMENDATION(S): That Members note the 2016/17 results and where appropriate suggest corrective action**

## **IMPLICATIONS**

**Legal: None arising from this report**

**Financial FIN/TJB/35/18:** A position of a Customer Complaint Advocate has been created and is to be funded from in-year vacancy savings. The post has been evaluated as Band 8, annual salary £25,951 rising to £29,323. The work of this position is explained within this report at item 7.

**Staffing : HR033-7-17:** See above. If it is felt that this position is required on a permanent basis then a recommendation will be made within the Annual Feedback report for 2017/18.

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :** Customers have the ability to make a compliment, comment or complaint in a variety of ways such as face to face, letter, telephone, email or the website. When requested our procedure will be provided in alternative formats such as another language or in braille

**Risk Assessment : None arising from this report**

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : None arising from this report**

**Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:** The Local Government Ombudsman prepare an annual letter which provides details of LGO complaints received and dealt with.

\*Institute of Customer Services “Cost of handling complaints in the public sector 2014”

Details of all compliments, comments and complaints are held on internal software and reports from that system are used to create this report

**Call in and Urgency:**

**Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?**

*i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)*

**Yes**

**No**

**Key Decision:**

*A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications*

**Yes**

**No**

**1. Looking Backwards**

1.1 In March 2008 the Corporate Governance Group agreed to submit an annual report to this Committee on customer complaints, referred to internally as feedback. Customers are at the heart of what we do and we need to ensure that our services meet the needs of the customer.

1.2 This report looks at 3 main areas within feedback. These are compliments, comments and complaints. All 3 are of equal importance in understanding what

customers think of the services we provide and give us the chance to seize learning opportunities.

1.3 Customers can also ask that their complaint is ultimately reviewed by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The remit of the LGO is to investigate complaints about 'maladministration' and 'service failure'. If there has been fault she considers whether it has caused an injustice and if it has, she may suggest a remedy. (Local Government Act 1974 Sections 26 (1) & 26A (1))

1.4 Historical feedback, details and statically data is held in sections 3 to 6

## **2. Looking Forwards**

2.1 Compliments, Comments and Complaints are all recorded by the Customer Services Team and are dealt with in accordance with Council procedures. Customers also have the option to log a compliment, comment or complaint via the West Lindsey Website.

2.2 Refer to section 7

## **3. Compliments**

3.1 The Council received a total of 186 compliments from April 2016 to March 2017 and this is an increase of 15% from the previous year, which is to be welcomed.

3.2 Compliments were received for the following teams:

Development Management (Planning)	59
Operations Services (Waste)	33
Customer Services	27
Public Protection	15
Building Control	15
Housing/Home Choices	12
Revenues	6
Trinity Arts Centre	5
Planning Enforcement	4
Anti-Social Behaviour	2
Local Land Charges	2
Organisation Development	2
Property and Assets	2
Electoral Registration	1
Licensing	1

3.3 As shown above, Development Management (planning) received the highest number of compliments of any service, with 59 during 2016/17, followed by Operations Services (waste) at 33. A fact that should be celebrate and demonstrates that services that our customers are passionate about will receive both good and bad reactions during delivery.

3.4 The Council encourages all staff to record any compliments that are received each year so the public perception on the services we deliver can be understood. Although the number of compliments increased the number of teams receiving compliments decreased, suggesting some teams are more proactive with the recording of compliments.

3.5 With the implementation of the Customer Complaints Advocate position it is envisaged that this role will also promote the proactive capture and logging of compliments across the Council.

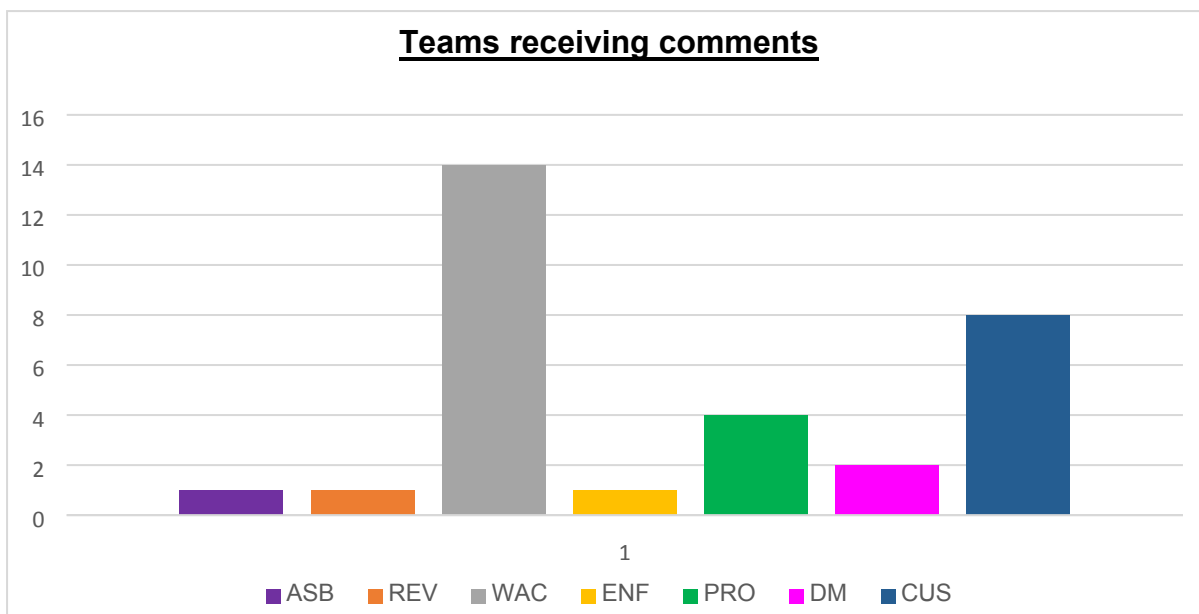
3.6 Appendix A shows what customers complimented us for.

#### **4. Comments**

4.1 Every year the number of comments received are captured from our customers. These comments give us essential information to look at ways to improve services for the benefit of residents.

4.2 For the year 2016/2017 we received a total of 31 comments which is disappointing. In the previous year 142 comments were received.

The comments were across seven teams and covered a range of issues. Comments were received for the following teams.



ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
Rev	Revenues(Council Tax)
WAC	Operational Services (Waste)
ENF	Planning Enforcement
PRO	Property and Assets
DM	Development Management(planning)
CUS	Customer Services

4.3 The introduction of car parking charges in Market Rasen, being a local contentious issue and the loss of the multi storey car park in Gainsborough have brought challenges over the last year. Our customers clearly made this known to us and this is demonstrated in Appendix B. The comments showed the passion our residents have for the area in which they live, which is to be welcomed.

4.4 The second highest comments received were with regards to missed bins, in total over the year 1430 bins were reported to us as missed this decreased from the previous year's total of 1661 so would be consistent that comments were also higher then.

4.5 Using the Customer Complaint Advocate proactive work will be undertaken to promote the capture and logging of comments during 2017/18 and onwards.

## **5. Complaints**

5.1 A total of 180 complaints have been received during 2016/17, this is a 32% increase on the previous year. The total figure includes both stage 2 and stage 3 complaints.

5.2 Whilst this is an increase we need to understand that 180 complaints represents 0.05% of customer contact with the Council resulted in a complaint in 2016/17.

5.3 March 2017 saw the biggest increase in complaints being received, with Development Management (Planning) receiving the highest amount, 7 in total.

5.3.1 However this also aligns with changes to the way member comments and MP letters were being recorded, with some of these being logged as complaints for the first time, although this method of recording is to be reviewed and is referred to in section 7 of this report.

5.3.2 Given the many thousands of people that interact with the planning service during the year, this represents an extremely low percentage of customers and well under 1%.

5.3.3 Over the course of the last year just 30 complaints were received, a reduction of 11 on previous years, whilst the team handled over 1,400 different planning applications and pre-application requests, but actual customer contact is higher as this does not take into account the number of telephone calls and email received by the Development Management team.

5.4 Waste services followed closely behind with 5 complaints during March. Proportionally waste services also receive an extremely small amount of complaints if we take into account the 41910 households that have their bins emptied each month, typically less than 1%.

5.5 The number of contacts the Council receives from customers, whether this be via phone, face to face or email has decreased from the previous year, from over half a million to approximately 400,000. However this in part could be attributed to the extensive work IT have done to prevent spam emails being received by officers.

5.6 The number of complaints received equates to less than 0.05% of all customer contact.

5.7 Appendix E shows the number of informal complaints received. Waste services receive the majority of informal complaints, however the majority only equates to three. Customers tend to be satisfied with an informal response or apology, complaints for this department seem best resolved on an informal basis and a service improvement is quick to identify.

5.8 In 2014/15 members requested an understanding of how much it costs the Council to deal with complaints. Using the same figures as 2014/15, with each complaint costing a minimum of £314.54 to deal with. Therefore the total minimum figure for investigating and resolving the whole year's complaints is £56,617.20. As complaints have increased then these costs have also increased by a minimum of £13,000 from the last financial year. \*(see background papers comment)

5.9 Of the 180 complaints 103 were upheld in the customers favour. On one occasion we issued Trinity Arts tickets as their original visit had been disrupted, by way of an apology. In the majority of cases customer are happy with an apology and a commitment from the Council not to allow the situation to be repeated.

5.10 Appendices D to I provided at the end of this report show volumes of complaints, types and the response rates.

## **6. Local Government Ombudsman**

6.1 There has been a total of eight enquiries to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) which is over double the amount of referred complaints from 2015/16.

6.2 Seven of the cases have been investigated and closed with one currently still under investigation.

6.3 Below shows the outcome of the seven referred complaints. At no point did the LGO find any evidence of the Council being at fault. Therefore there has been no financial compensation made.

Closed after initial contact	4
Out of jurisdiction	1
Not upheld	2

6.4 The complaints referred to the LGO were originally against the following departments:

Development Management	3
Planning Enforcement	1
Housing Enforcement	1
Housing Benefit	1
Environmental Protection	1

6.5 The final outstanding investigation outstanding with the LGO is in relation to Development Management.

## **7. Next Steps**

7.1 Following the increase of complaints over the year and the reduction in comments received from customers the Council is taking action to address the situation for the coming year, in terms of being more proactive in capturing comments and using complaints as a learning tool.

7.2 Work continues in refining our processes, with the implementation of the Customer Complaints Advocate, our work with the Institute of customer services and a number of changes will take place to our 3c's system. (Compliments, comments and complaints) which may include enhancing the current 3cs system.

7.3 Work is also underway to review the complaint process itself in order to make it simpler and easier for customers, improve communication with the customer during

the complaint process and easier for officers to analysis and understand complaints, how they occur, identification of learning from our complaints and monitoring to ensure learning is implemented

7.4 West Lindsey has recently appointed a Customer Complaints Advocate. The role will allow for complaints to be handled in a more focussed and customer centric way. It is anticipated that the officer in post will provide feedback to panel of Senior Officers and where relevant a learning outcome will be identified and updates on progress will be requested. I

7.4.1 It is envisaged that this post will ultimately focus on all aspects of Customer feedback not just complaints, in order to improve the Customer Experience by undertaking regular satisfaction surveys and acting on those results, putting mistakes right quickly when they go wrong, promoting our complaint learning outcomes, using the website in a proactive way demonstrating the number of 3cs received during the year and for those updates to happen in real time during the rest of 2017/18 and going forward and working to enhance the current complaints system

7.5 All of the above work will be carried out in accordance with our Customer First Programme as part of the Council Corporate Priorities one of which is of "Putting People First"

## **8. Conclusion**

8.1 The content of this report details comprehensive information on customer comments, compliments and complaints and clearly provides us with the feedback needed to implement a customer focused system for the coming year.

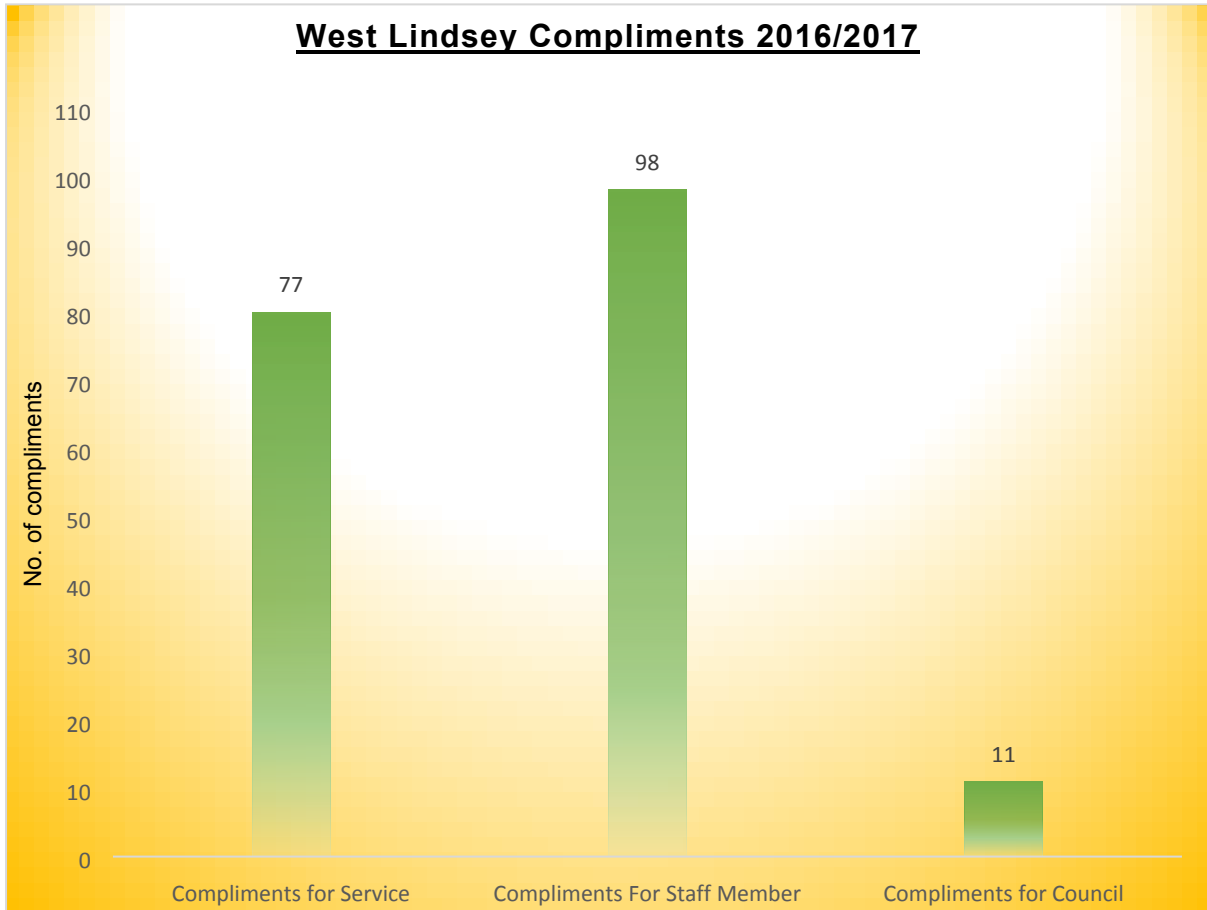
8.2 The journey we are embarking on with the Institute of Customer Services will ensure we embed our new Customer First strategy with all staff and over the coming years, endeavour to see more comments and compliments logged, more learning from complaints and a proactive culture towards receiving and reacting to the complaints we receive.



## Appendix A

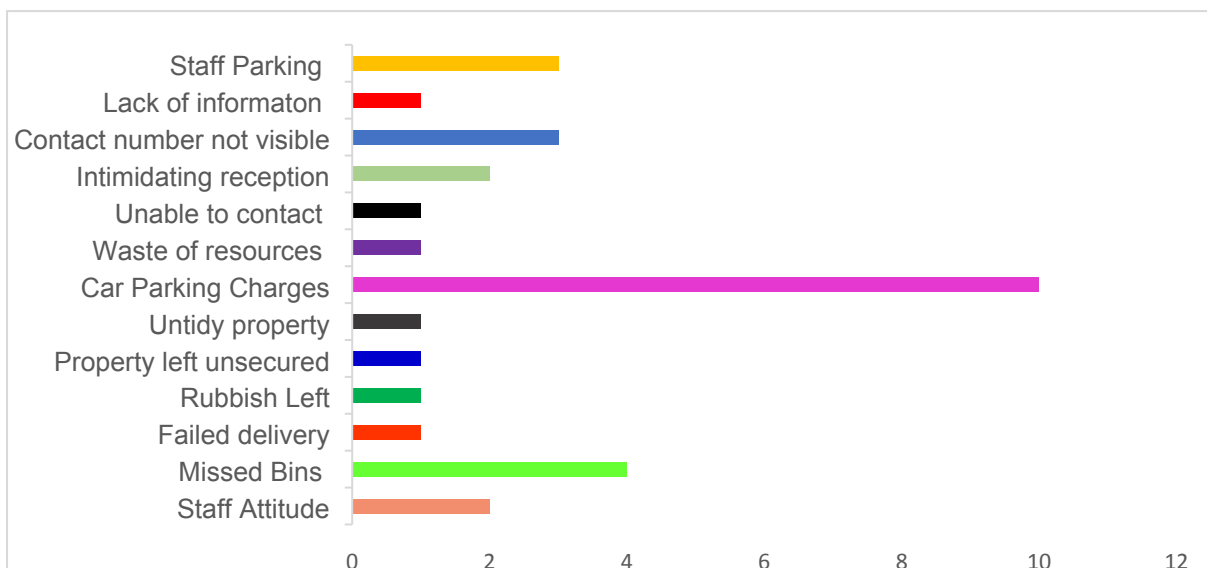
### What customers complimented us on

The results shown below are consistent with the previous year, customer's complimenting staff over service which needs to be recognised for and staff rewarded for this.



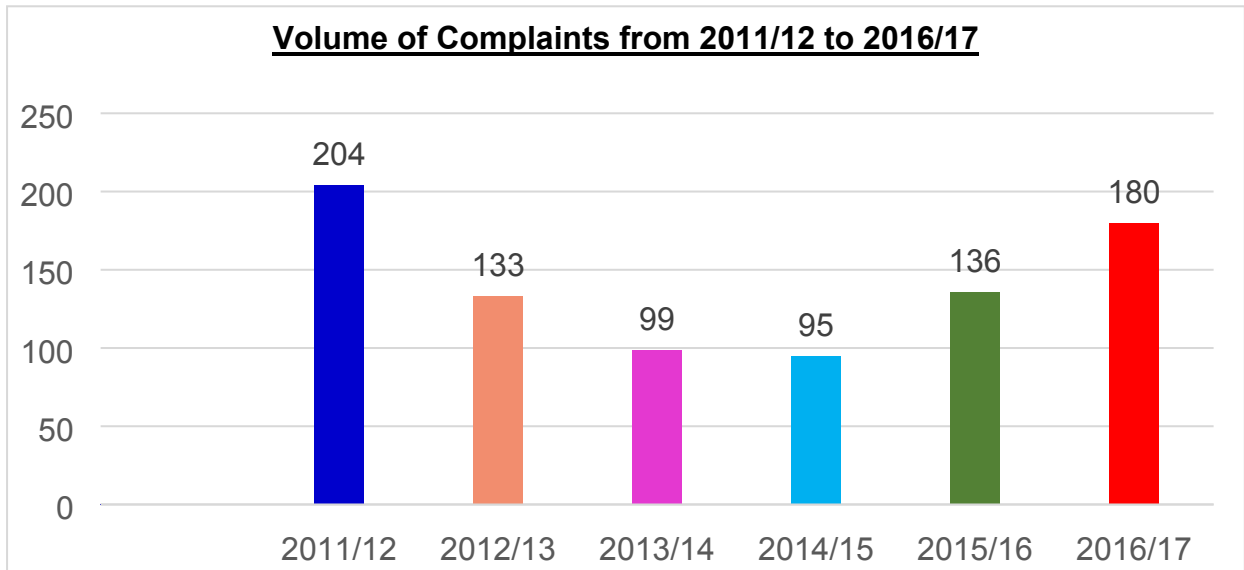
## Appendix B

### Subject of Comment made

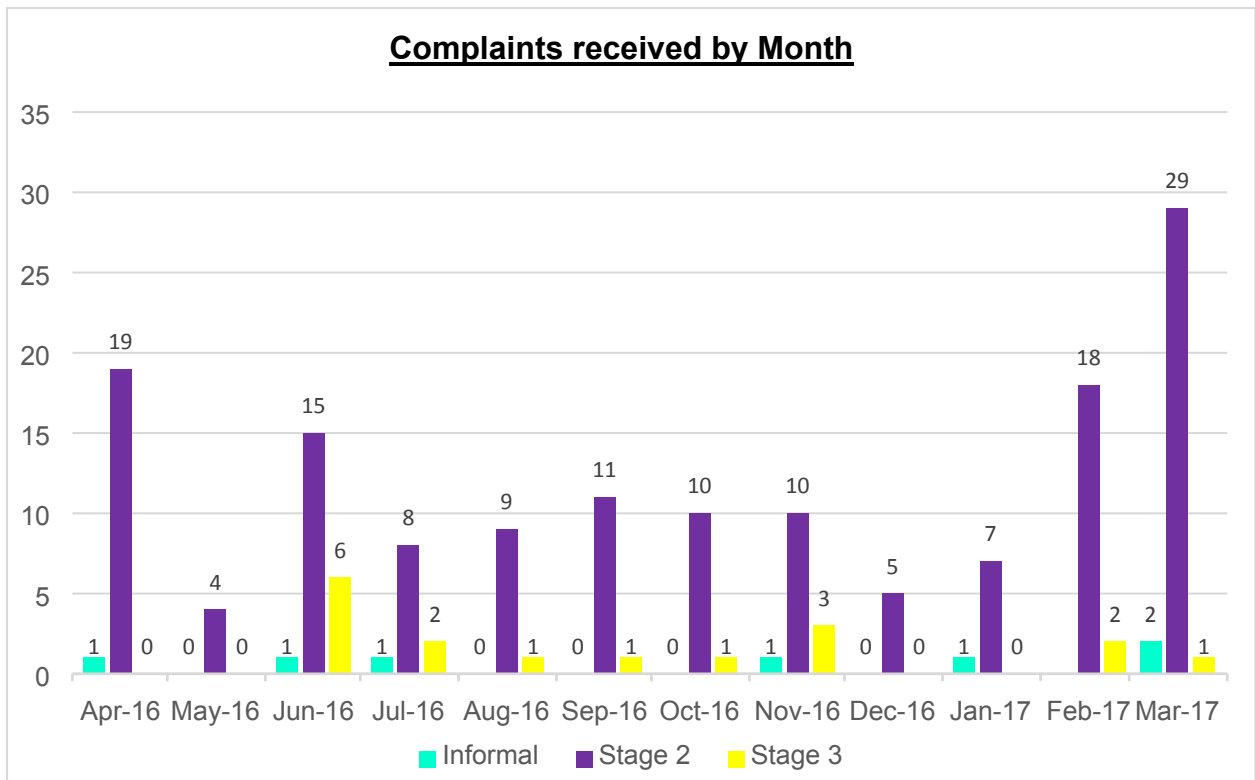


**Appendix C**

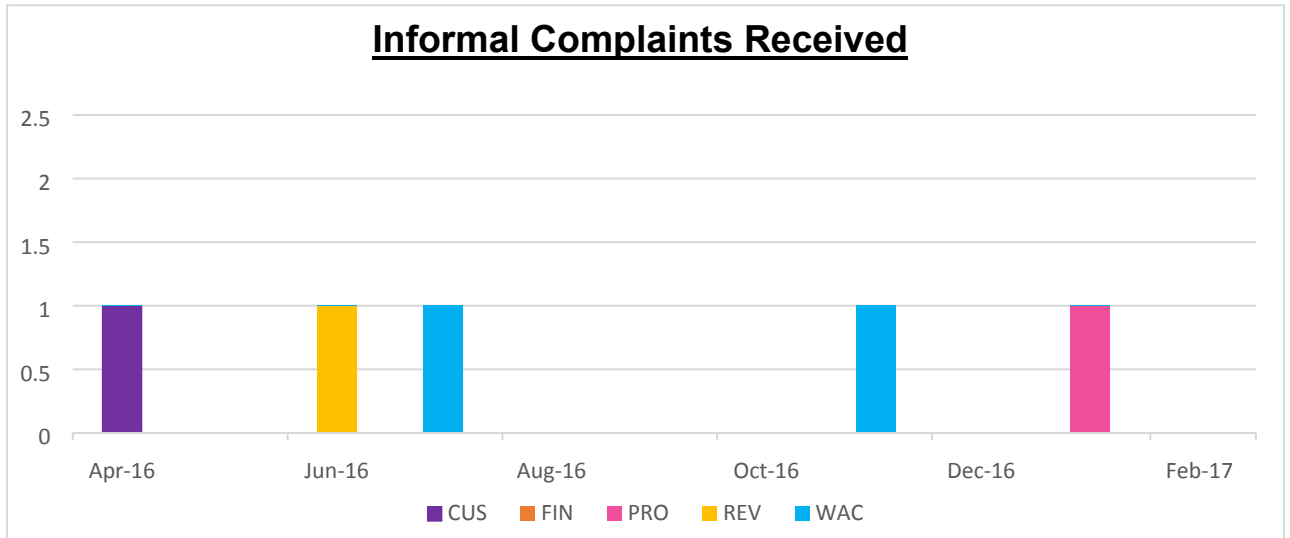
**Complaints volume year on year and monthly for 2016/17**



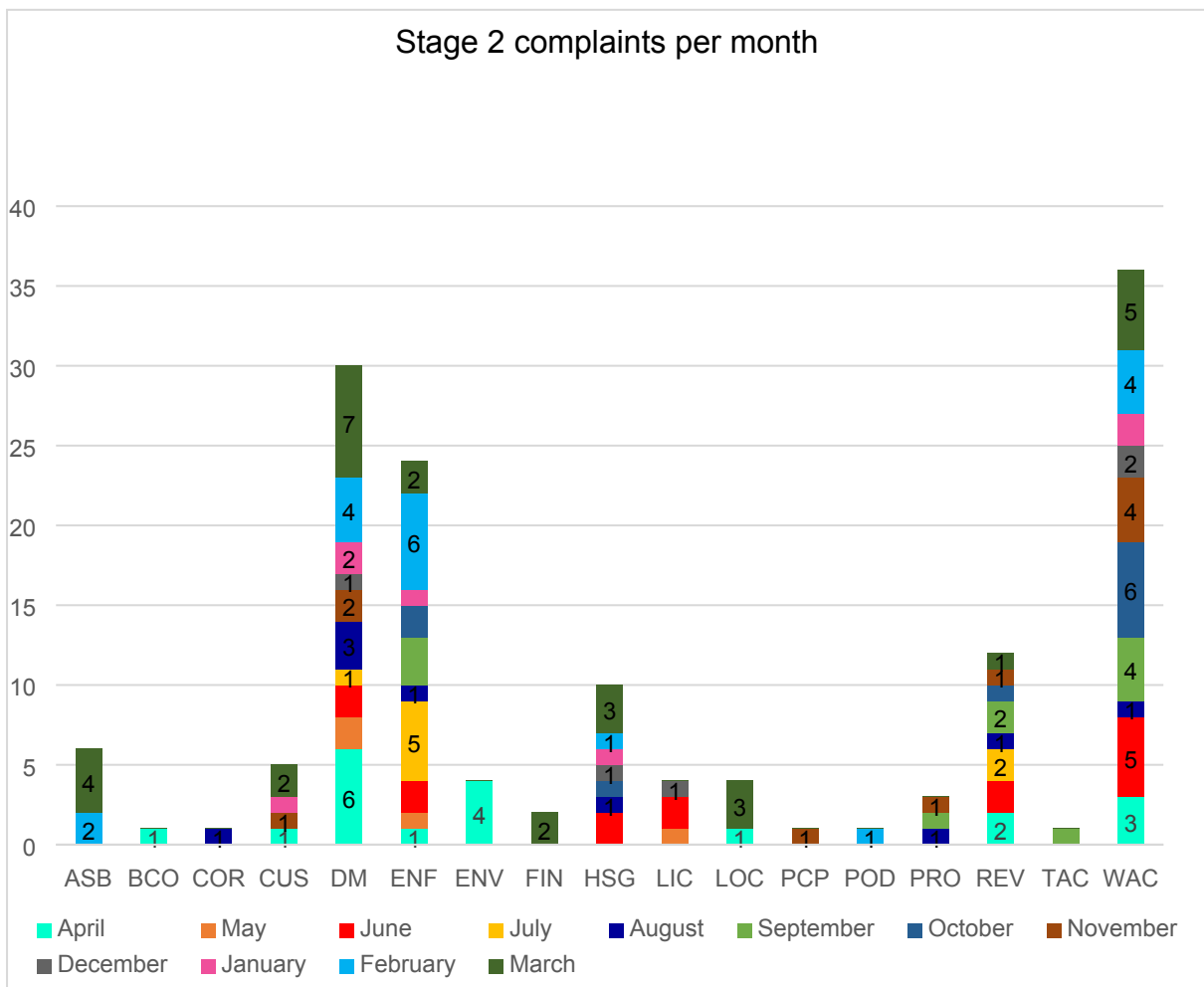
**Appendix D Continued**



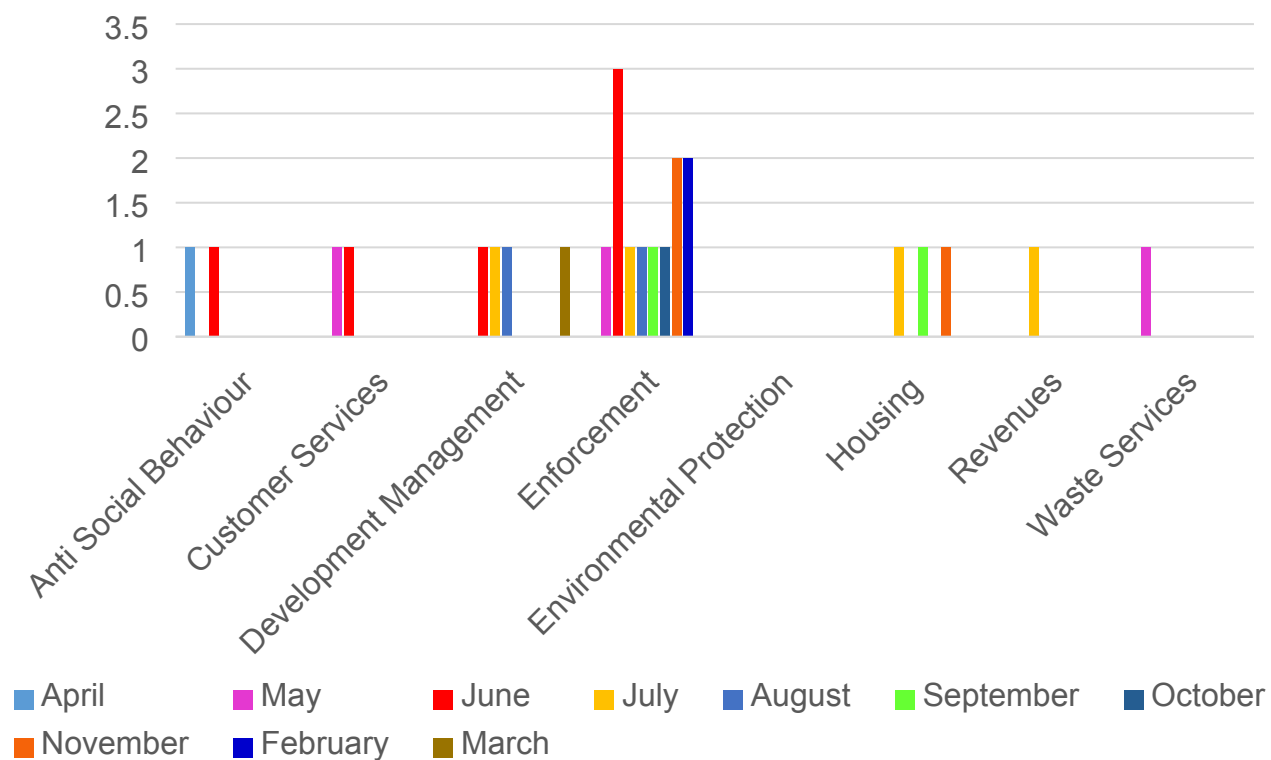
**Appendix E**



**Appendix F**



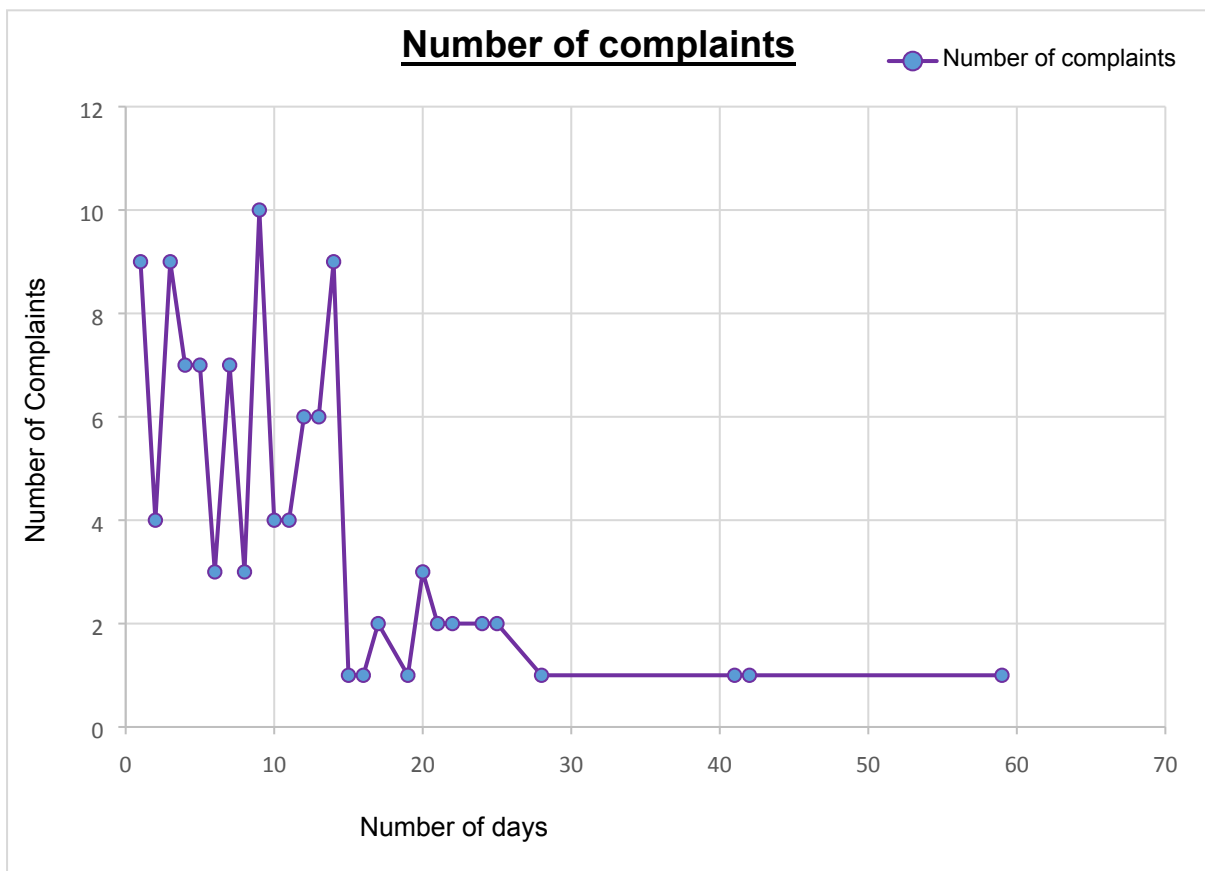
### Stage 3 Complaints per month



## Appendix G

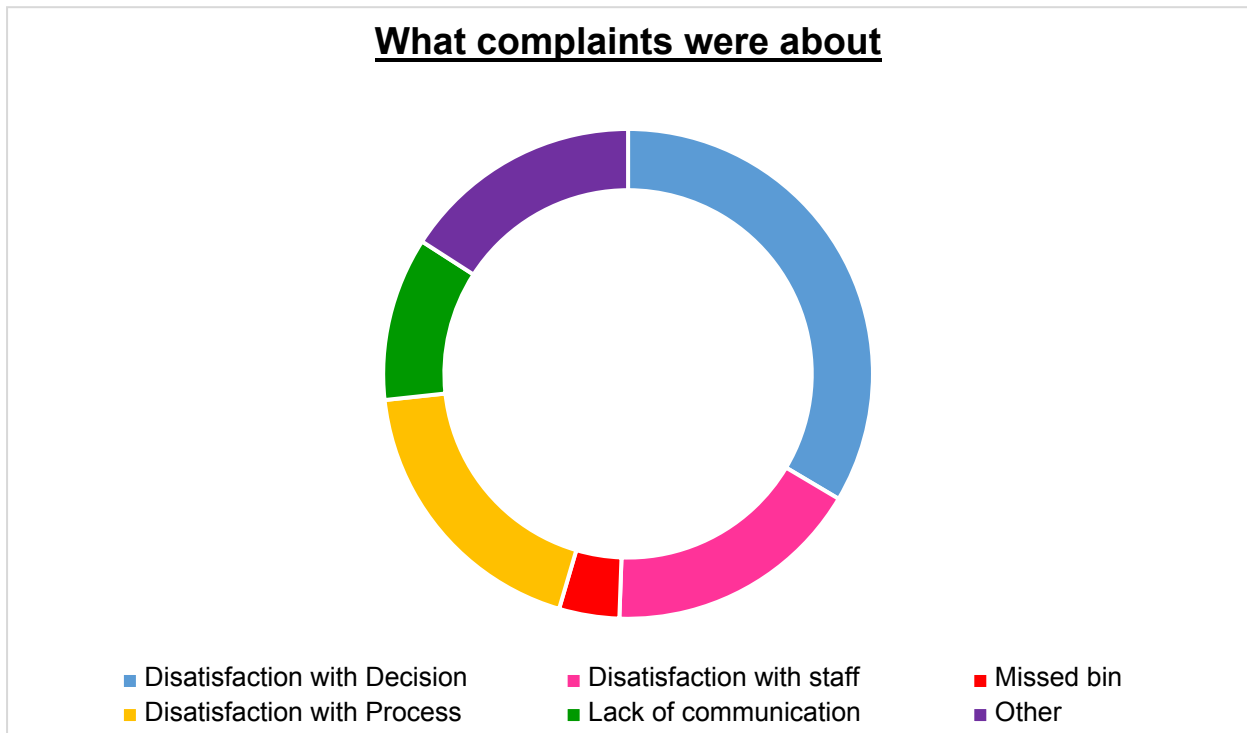
### Time taken to resolve stage 2 and stage 3 complaints

Where complaints are complex and require extensive investigation customers receive 'keeping in touch' letters or phone calls from officers keeping them updated on progress. The number of complaints detailed in the below graph is less than the total number of complaints received. This is because some complaints are categorised as requiring 'no written response'.



## Appendix H

This shows what customers complained to us about, other complaints were generally a collection of waste issues, such as bins left in the middle of pavements, bags verses bins and bin lorries blocking roads. The largest majority of decision dissatisfaction came from planning enforcement complaints, this is usually where we have concluded no action needs to be taken but the issue still remains.



## Appendix I

Below details who are complaints over the year came from

