



**Challenge and
Improvement Committee**

Tuesday 6th November 2018

Customer Complaints Handling Update Report

Report by:	Mark Sturgess, Executive Director of Operations and Head of Paid Service
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Purpose / Summary:	To update Members on the current status of customer complaints. Member request for Challenge and Improvement Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **That Members note the content of this Customer Complaints Handling Update Report.**
- **That Members endorse this report and receive future updates via the Quarterly Voice of the Customer Report which will be published as part of the Members Newsletter.**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:
None arising directly from this report.

Financial: FIN/130/19
None arising directly from this report.

Staffing:
None arising directly from this report.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:
N/A

Risk Assessment:
N/A

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:
N/A

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of 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

Executive Summary

Following the previous report to Challenge and Improvement Committee in May 2018 outlining the new Customer Experience Policy 2018/19 complaints process the purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the current state of customer complaints and feedback overall.

This report includes figures that show the amount of feedback (Compliments, Comments and Complaints) received in the first six months of the 2018/19 period from 1st April 2018 to 30th September 2018 compared to previous years. Feedback received is then broken down by service and category.

The report goes on to look at upheld complaints, learning from complaints and complaints that have been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman in the six month period from April to September 2018.

1 Feedback received since April 2018 (April to September 2018) 6 months - Compliments, Comments and Complaints

The table below includes figures for April 2018 to September 2018:

Overall Figures 2018 - 2019	April- 2018	May- 2018	June- 2018	July- 2018	Aug- 2018	Sept- 2018	Totals/Average
COMPLAINTS	19	13	10	10	8	6	66
COMPLIMENTS	55	33	60	60	39	31	278
COMMENTS	17	22	21	11	21	6	98
AVG DAYS TO RESPOND	7.7	10.6	6.3	4.6	9.25	6.5	7.49
WLDC at Fault	10	4	3	6	1	3	27
% WLDC at Fault	52%	31%	30%	60%	12.5%	50%	39%

The table below includes figures for April 2017 to September 2017:

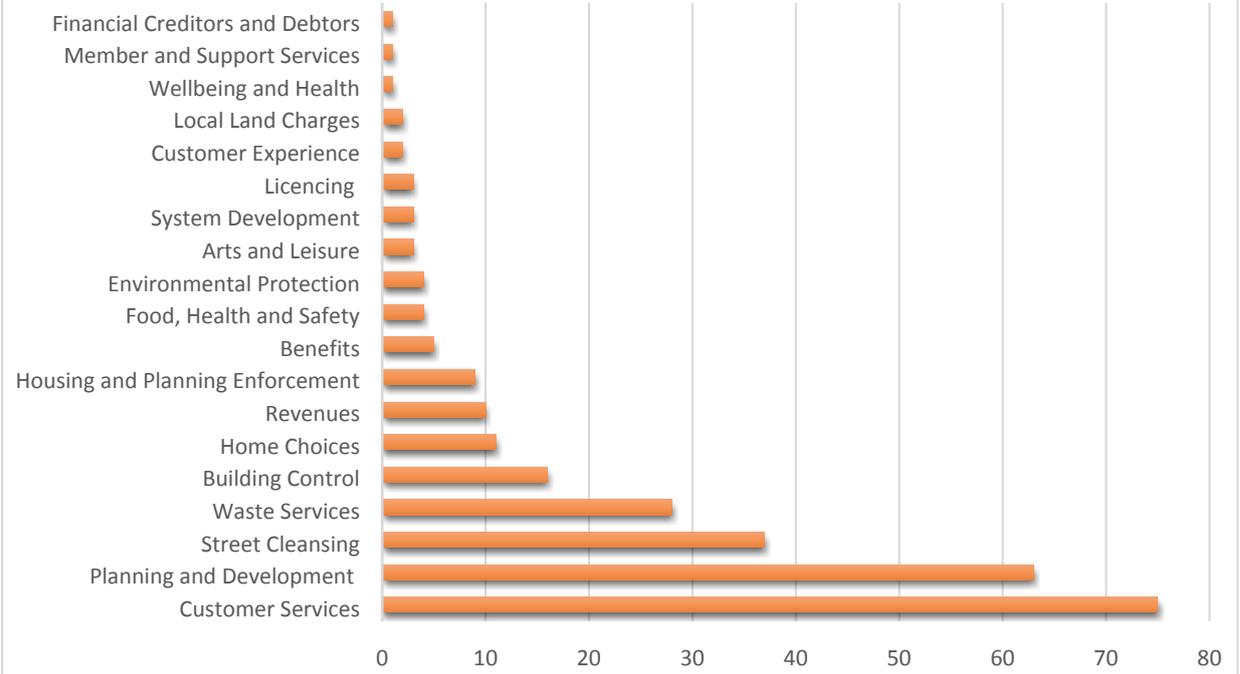
Overall Figures 2017 - 2018	April- 2017	May- 2017	June- 2017	July- 2017	Aug- 2017	Sept- 2017	Totals/Average
COMPLAINTS	11	13	19	10	14	10	77
COMPLIMENTS	21	29	29	22	15	19	135
COMMENTS	3	3	9	1	8	5	29
AVG DAYS TO RESPOND	9.4	8.6	6.9	12.2	12.4	11.5	10.17
WLDC at Fault	7	9	11	3	9	5	44
% WLDC at Fault	63%	69%	58%	30%	64%	50%	56%

- 1.1 Compared to the same period last year the number of complaints received has reduced from 77 to 66. During August and September 2018 there has been a notable decrease in the amount of complaints received compared to previous years.
- 1.2 It is encouraging to see that the amount of compliments received has more than doubled since the same period last year. Since the new Customer Experience Policy 2018/19 was implemented officers are more aware of how important feedback is and are proactively seeking and recording the compliments they receive.
- 1.3 The amount of comments received has significantly increased since the same period last year, with 29 being received previously and 98 being recorded in the current year. This is due to the implementation of customer satisfaction surveys. Since the beginning of 2018 we have been able to collect and record a wider variety of customer feedback including comments where previously the main focus was around complaints and compliments.
- 1.4 Although the timeframe for complaint responses has increased to 21 days under the new policy it is positive to see that the average days to respond to complaints has actually decreased and each month response times are shorter than the previous period.
- 1.5 As well as examining the amount of complaints received another important indicator of performance is the amount of complaints that are upheld because the council is at fault. The percentage of upheld complaints has reduced since the same period last year from 56% to 39%. Upheld complaints are examined in more detail later on in this report.

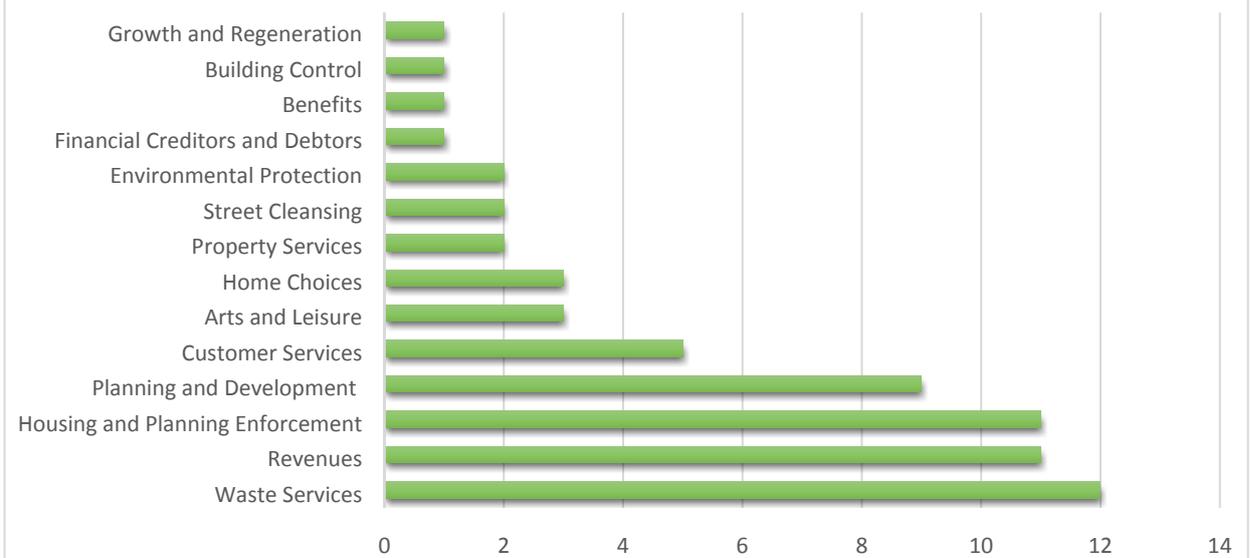
2 Feedback received since April 2018 (April to September 2018) Broken down by Service

- 2.1 The graphs below illustrate the number of compliments, complaints and comments received by each individual service during the six month period from April to September 2018.
- 2.2 Services that do not appear on the graphs received no compliments, complaints or comments.
- 2.3 It should be noted that the services that receive the most complaints also receive the highest amount of compliments.
- 2.4 These are the main customer facing services and have contact with our customers on a daily basis.
- 2.5 The number of complaints received should be considered in proportion to the number of customers that have contact with and use the service concerned. For example waste services visit a total of around 40,000 properties weekly so a higher number of complaints is to be expected.

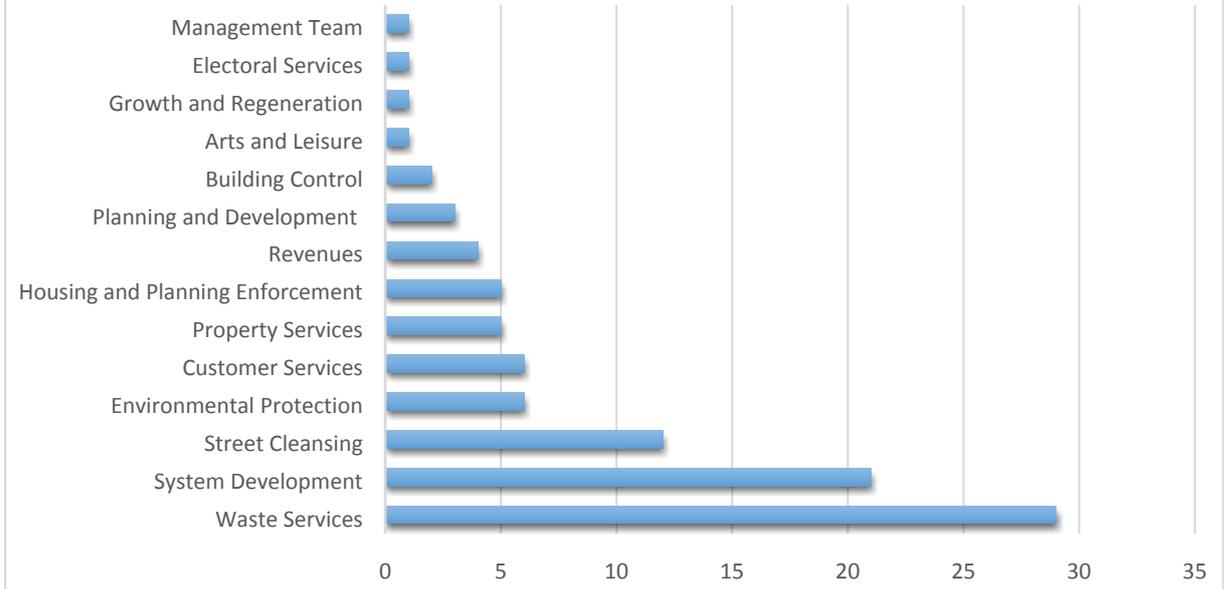
Number of Compliments received per Service April 2018 to September 2018



Number of Complaints received per Service April 2018 to September 2018



Number of Comments received per Service April 2018 to September 2018

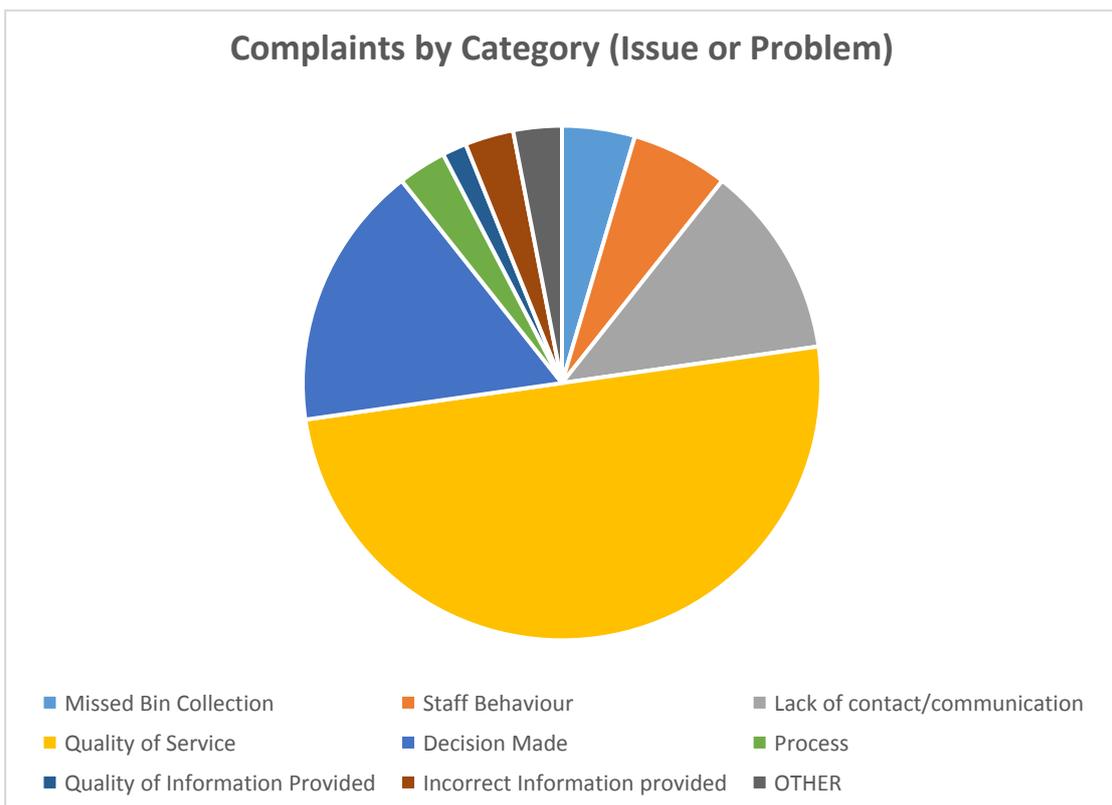


3 Complaints received broken down by Category

3.1 Complaints received refer to many different issues or problems. Each complaint received is categorised depending on what the main point of the complaint is.

3.2 The chart below shows how many complaints have been received per category.

Complaints by Category (Issue or Problem)



4 Upheld Complaints

4.1 In the six month period from April to September 2018 a total of 27 complaints have been upheld because the council has been either partially or fully at fault.

4.2 The table below shows how many complaints were partially and fully upheld per service.

Service	Partially Upheld	Fully Upheld	Total
Waste Services		8	8
Revenues (Council Tax)	4		4
Customer Services	1	2	3
Development management	1	2	3
Planning Enforcement	2	1	3
Home Choices	2		2
Environmental Protection	1		1
Financial Creditors and Debtors		1	1
Housing Enforcement	1		1
Benefits		1	1

4.3 Complaints can be partially upheld. This occurs when partial fault has been found following a complaint investigation.

4.4 For example – a letter is sent directly to a service making accusations of fault in the way a decision has been made or claim has been processed. The customer received no acknowledgment or response.

4.5 Upon investigation it is found that the process followed in making the decision was correct but the council are at fault for not responding to the customer with an acknowledgement or explanation of what the outcome of their enquiry was.

4.6 So there is fault on the council's part regarding the lack of contact as the customer never received an acknowledgement or response.

4.7 When a complaint is upheld and fault is identified the findings are analysed to identify learning opportunities and implement changes to ensure the same problems do not occur again in the future.

4.8 The next section of this report summarises some of the learning and improvements that have taken place during the last six months.

5 Learning from Complaints

- 5.1 **Recording of Telephone Calls** - Complaints regarding what has been said/advised on the phone between an officer and a customer cannot ever be fully resolved as calls are not recorded so it is one word against another. If all telephone calls were recorded then it would make it easier to investigate complaints fully when a customer advises that they have been given incorrect information by one of our officers. This is being implemented as part of the new telephony project/implementation and will be in place before the end of the financial year.
- 5.2 **Change in Procedure** – A customer was located in our area and complained about a noise that was coming from an establishment located within another council area. We referred the complaint to other authority when we should have also monitored noise and investigated ourselves. Delay in investigation caused the customer injustice and anxiety. As a result we will be reviewing our procedures in light of this to ensure that this does not occur again.
- 5.3 **Receipt Book Implemented**- Customers previously handed paperwork in at reception and were not given a receipt. Some customers have claimed that their paperwork has been lost by officers. There was no way of proving that they even handed it into us. A receipt book has now been implemented for when customers hand documents in to us, this is a duplicate book so they have a copy that matches our copy.
- 5.4 **New Post Process** – A complaint was received regarding missing letters sent to planning department. They had been sent by recorded delivery and there was proof that they were delivered to us but they were never received by planning department. This resulted in letters going missing and unanswered. A new process has now been put in place for scanning post to ensure nothing goes missing or unanswered in the future.
- 5.5 **New Code of Conduct Implemented** – The LGO identified that planning committee site visits were not recorded as they should be. A site visit that was part of a complaint investigation was looked into and we had no record or list of attendees. The recommended action was to ensure a committee clerk attends every site visit to record list of attendees, address, date, time, duration and planning app reference number. The new Code of conduct for committee site visits was agreed and implemented September 2018.
- 5.6 **Briefing Note Circulated** – The LGO identified fault in the way in which a historical planning application was decided. The outcome would not have changed however extra consideration was required regarding the height of a new proposed building and the drawings submitted. LGO identified fault in the way in which a historical planning application was decided. The recommended action was to issue a briefing note for planning officers explaining what went wrong and how to avoid the same issues in the future. The briefing note for planning officers agreed and circulated September 2018.
- 5.7 **New Procedure and Staff Training** - Incorrect advice was given to a customer regarding benefit entitlement which meant that customer was

delayed in making a claim and missed out on an amount of money because of us and our advice. In terms of ensuring that these mistakes are not repeated in the future more staff training is being given to all officers that deal with benefit claims and a new procedure has been issued to the team to stop this happening again.

- 5.8 **Policy and Customer Charter Update** – It has been identified that the planning enforcement customer charter 2013 published on our website needs updating to be more specific. It states ' In all cases when a report of a possible planning breach is made to the enforcement officers it will be acknowledged within 2 working days.' this needs to make clear that this refers to emails directly to the enforcement email address or reports made online, not necessarily emails sent directly to an enforcement officer in order to manage customers' expectations. The other document published 'the policy' states that the council will respond to the issue in 20 days - Confusing for customers - expectations not managed. These documents need to be updated so that the charter aligns with the policy.
- 5.9 **Customer Standards being Implemented** – Several upheld complaints regarding lack of contact or updates when promised to customers. Work is underway on designing and implementing customer service standards that will be embedded into the appraisal process next year.

6 Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

- 6.1 Since April 2018 six new complaints have been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 6.2 The table below shows which services these complaints relate to and what the current status of them are.

Subject of complaint to LGO	Outcome/Current Stage
Planning and Enforcement	LGO decided not to investigate
S106 Agreement	LGO final decision now received
Planning Application	LGO decided not to investigate
Noise Complaint	LGO final decision now received
Planning and Development	LGO currently investigating
Council Tax	LGO decided not to investigate

- 6.3 Since April 2018 six complaint decisions have been received from the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 6.4 The table below shows the subject of the complaints decided, the outcome and what the LGO recommended actions were.

Subject of Complaint	Outcome	LGO Recommended Actions
Historical Planning Application	Fault found	Letter of apology, 2 x £100 compensation payments, change in process and briefing note required.
Council Tax Payments	Partial fault found	Deduction of court charges from council tax amount outstanding
Sale of Land	No fault found	No action required
Planning Application	Partial fault found	Letter of apology
S106 Agreement	No injustice caused	No action required
Noise complaint	Fault found	Letter of apology and £150 compensation payment. Change in process required.

6.5 Further information regarding complaints referred to the LGO during the 2017/18 period can be found via the report 'LGO Annual Review Letter' being presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on 6th November 2018.

7 Quarterly Voice of the Customer Report

- 7.1 The information included in this report forms part of the Quarterly Voice of the Customer Report with more detail and analysis also included.
- 7.2 The Voice of the Customer Report includes customer feedback data and comparison as well as other information regarding the way we interact with and serve our customers.
- 7.3 Information on methods of contact, volumes of footfall and the methods customers use to make payments and access our services is included in the Voice of the Customer Report.
- 7.4 Future updates on complaints handling will be reported via the Quarterly Voice of the Customer Report which will be published as part of the Members Newsletter.

