



Northumberland

County Council

CORPORATE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 SEPTEMBER 2018

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Report of: Mary Readman, Head of Customer Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Nick Oliver, Corporate Services and Cabinet Secretary

1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Council's Corporate Feedback system and present information on customer feedback from informal resolutions, complaints, suggestions and comments and compliments received into the Council for the period 01.04.2017 to 31.03.2018.

2. Recommendations

That the Committee fully consider the information contained within this report and agree to a full review of the way in which customer feedback is handled and used by the council to inform learning and continuous improvement.

3. Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the "we want to make a difference" priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021

4. Background

4.1 Customer feedback is a key tool for understanding what our residents, businesses and visitors think about the services they have received from the Council and the interactions that have taken place to progress the Council's work. It is important that we use that feedback to understand where we have failed to meet customer expectations and to comply with our agreed policies and processes so that we can do things differently to improve the Customer experience. It is also important that we use positive feedback to recognise and celebrate success.

4.2 In terms of complaints, there are 2 main mechanisms for progressing a formal complaint included in this report. The first relates to “statutory” complaints in relation to the Council’s social care processes for Childrens and Adults services. The second type relates to “corporate” complaints progressed in accordance with the Council’s corporate complaints process.

4.3 The current process for corporate complaints involves customers submitting their complaint which is then sent to the appropriate service area. If the service can fully resolve it for the customer, within 24 hours of receipt, it can be closed as an informal resolution.

If not closed through informal resolution, it will be treated as a stage 1 complaint and the service has up to 15 working days to investigate and respond.

If the customer remains dissatisfied, they can request for an escalation to a stage 2 complaint. This involves the review of the stage 1 response by a more senior member of staff and the outcome of that investigation relayed to the Customer within 20 working days.

If the Customer remains unhappy at that stage, they are informed to seek advice from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

5. Corporate Complaints

5.1 During 2017-2018, the Council received 824 corporate complaints. Of these, 50 (6%) were escalated to stage 2. Of the 824 Stage 1 cases received in total across all Directorates, 509 (62%) were closed in timescale, whilst 27 (54%) of the 50 Stage 2 cases were closed in timescale.

The overall breakdown showing resolution rate for each quarter is shown below:

Quarter 1 67.9%

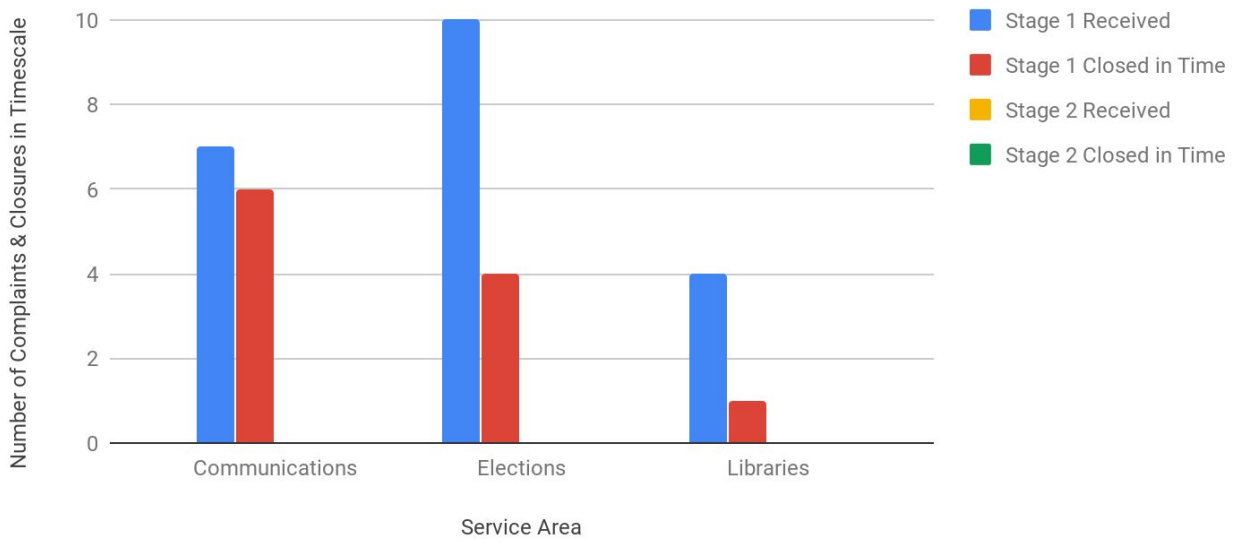
Quarter 2 56.3%

Quarter 3 51.0%

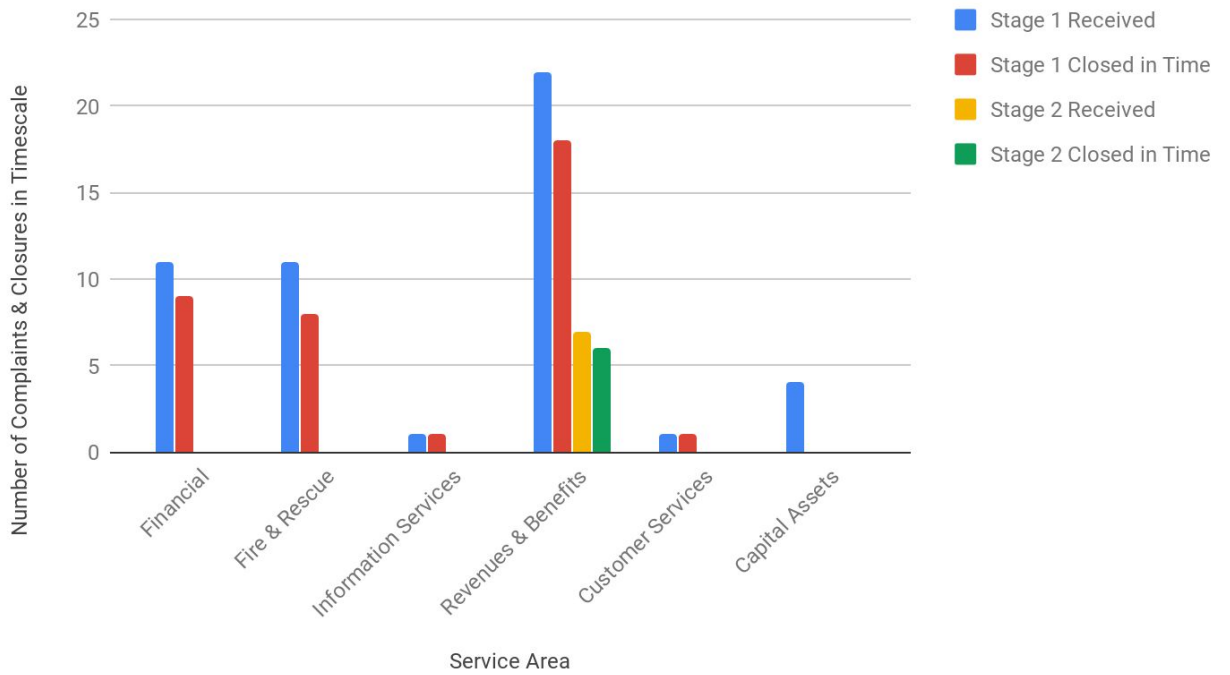
Quarter 4 68.8%

5.2 The following data for the 2017-18 financial year shows how each Directorate performed in relation to corporate complaints received for their services.

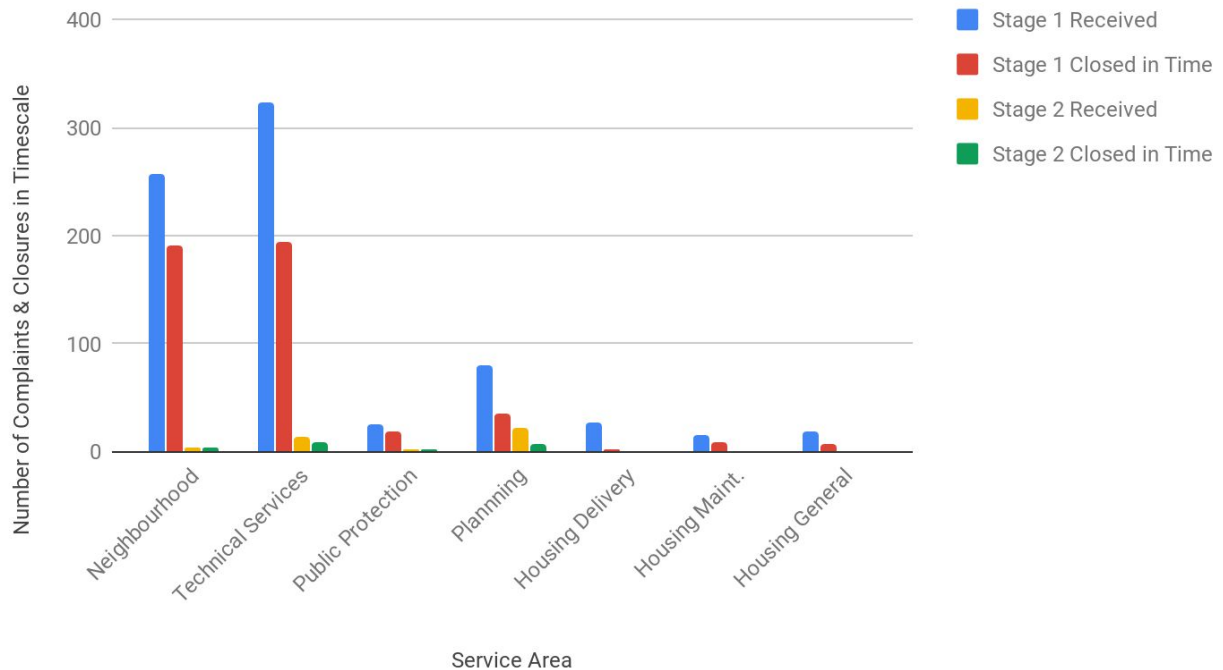
HR & OD Directorate Stage 1 & 2 Complaints 2017-18



Finance Directorate Stage 1 & 2 Complaints 2017-18



Place Directorate Stage 1 & 2 Complaints 2017-18



6. Main reasons for corporate complaints

- 6.1. Analysis of the data received around complaints gives us some insight into the main reasons for customers complaining to the council. 734 of the 824 stage 1 complaints received have been allocated a category.
- 6.2. From this analysis we can determine that 41% of all categorised complaints relates to 3 key service areas. The highest - 161 (22%) were complaints in relation to refuse and recycling, 73 (10%) for street lighting and 66 (9%) were categorised as 'other' within Neighbourhood and Technical Services.

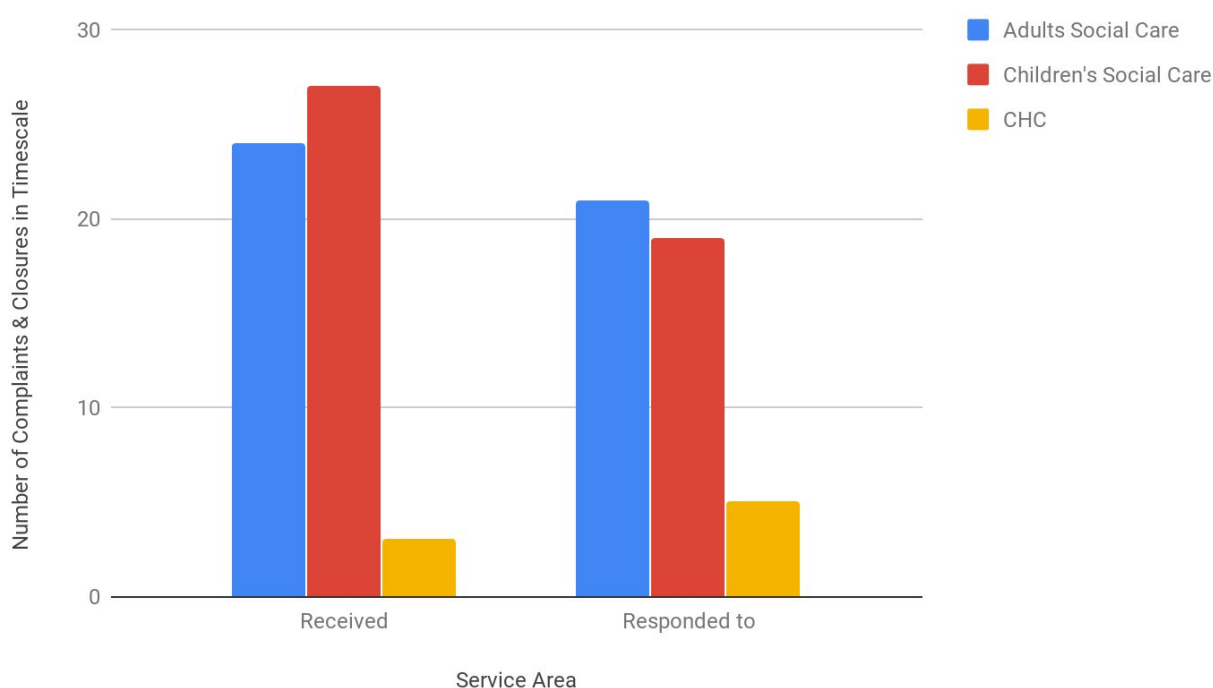
7. Adults and Children's Social Care

- 7.1. Statutory complaints regarding Adults and Children's social care are handled by the Client Relations Team. In Adults Social Care, when a complaint is received it is to be acknowledged within 3 working days. A resolution plan is agreed along with a timetable. Straightforward complaints are expected to be dealt with in 10 working days, with more complex ones, within 20. This can be extended with the agreement of the complainant if required. Whilst there are not multiple stages involved, if the complaint is particularly complex or serious, an independent investigator may become involved.
- 7.2. In Children's Social Care, there is a potential four stage process. When the complaints is received, if no immediate resolution can be found, the complaint will

be acknowledged in two working days and answered within 10 to 20 (with the complainants agreement) working days. At stage 2 a report is produced, which is signed of by the Director of Children’s Services, taking up to 25 working days, which can be extended to 65 working days with the agreement of the complainant. The complainant can request a stage 3 review within 20 working days of the stage 2 outcome. A panel is convened, including Legal Services within 30 working days of that request. The outcome of the panel is communicated to the complainant formally within 15 working days. Finally, the complainant is able to take their complaint to the LGSCO.

- 7.3. There is an annual report which sets out the information in relation to this area. The Customer Experience : Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2017-18 provides the following information on feedback regarding Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

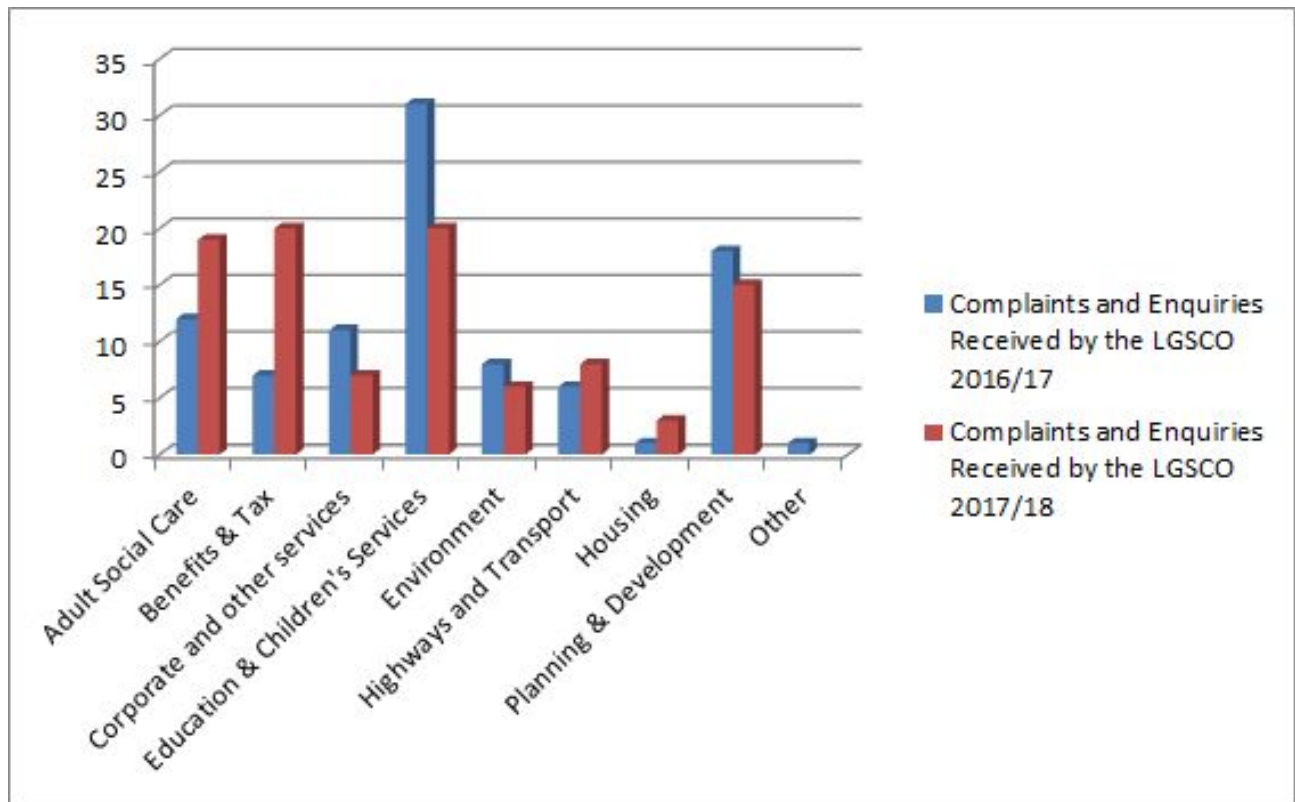
Adult & Children's Social Care Directorates Complaints Received / Responded to 2017-18



8. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

- 8.1. Each year, the LGSCO publishes its Annual Report and every Council receives a letter detailing complaints received by them and the outcomes. In 2017/18, the LGO received 98 complaints and enquiries regarding Northumberland County Council, 3 more than 2016/17.
- 8.2. The following graph show the number of complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO as published in the 2016-17 and 2017-18 Annual Reports

9. LGSCO complaints and enquiries received over the last 2 years



9.1. The graph shows that there are 3 areas in which we have seen an increase in customers escalating their complaint to the LGSCO from 16/17 to 17/18: Adult Social Care; Benefits and Council Tax and Highways and Transport.

9.2. In terms of decisions, of the 98 cases received by the LGSCO in 2017/18, **21** were referred for detailed investigations. The other cases were:

- ❖ Considered incomplete/invalid (10)
- ❖ Referred back for local resolution (54)
- ❖ Closed after initial enquiries (13)

Of the 21 subject to detailed investigations, 9 (43%) of these were upheld, with 6 considered to warrant a formal remedy.

This compares favourably to 2016/17 when of the 95 cases received, 25 were referred for detailed investigations. Of these, 13 (52%) were upheld with 9 warranting a remedy.

9.3. In September 2017, the LGSCO issued a public report against the Council in relation to delays that a family had encountered when they had made a complaint. The council has subsequently implemented the actions agreed as a result of the detailed investigation and key outcomes.

10. Compliments

10.1. There have been 1401 recorded compliments during 2017-18. Outside those recorded in Adult and Children's Social Care, of the remaining, 35% were received by Neighbourhood Services, these included compliments on the speed of work carried out and the kindness of staff. 20% were received by Customer Services. Compliments for this area were mainly for staff who Customers felt had gone above and beyond to assist with enquiries.

10.2. The table below shows the number of compliments received during 2017-18 by Directorate:

Directorate/Service Area	Compliments Received 2017-18
HR & OD	
Communications	2
Elections	1
Libraries	2
Leisure	4
Registrars	2
Total	11
Finance	
Fire & Rescue	53
Information Services	1
Revenues & Benefits	17
Customer Services	101
Capital Assets	2
Total	174
Place	
Neighbourhood Services	204
Technical Services	107
Public Protection	35

Planning	28
Housing Delivery	6
Housing Maintenance	21
Housing General	1
Total	402
Adults and Children's Social Care	
Social Care	608
CHC	206
Total	814

11. Comments and Suggestions

11.1. Of 195 comments and suggestions received, 120 were in relation to Neighbourhood Services, 35 for Technical Services and 26 for Customer Services.

Examples of the comments and suggestions received include asking for further consultations when roads are to close, and comments that works taking place outside housing areas start later in the day, rather than too early in the morning.

11.2. We have received a number of comments in relation to recycling including asking for glass collections at the kerbside. The council took the decision to not collect glass for a number of reasons. These are clearly explained on the website. We have also been asked about wider plastic recycling to include items such as yoghurt pots. Customers are informed that items collected are only those that there is an outlet for in terms of recycling. Although this is reviewed regularly, there is not currently an outlet for all types of plastic in Northumberland.

12. Key issues and recommendations

12.1. As part of the work being undertaken to update and refresh the council's approach to access to services, there is an opportunity to review the way in which the council responds to and learns from, customer feedback. This review would encompass the existing policy, processes and supporting information systems.

12.2. It is important that we respond to feedback in a timely way and use it to support service improvements. It is also important that we deal with customers in a consistent way and data is captured effectively so we can obtain intelligence and insight which gives staff, Members and partners an accurate picture of how our

customers are perceiving service provision and how effective we are as a learning organisation.

12.3. There are a number of considerations for the future collection and analysis of feedback across the Council. It is therefore proposed that the following is undertaken:

- A full review of the policy, including whether there is a requirement for an informal resolution stage and a clear definition of what constitutes a complaint.
- A review of the process and how we communicate on progress to customers.
- Updated communications plan and training of staff across the Council with regard to the process and the use of the corporate feedback system
- A review of the system to ensure collection of data enables full analysis and reporting
- Review how the Council uses feedback to improve services to Customers

13. Implications

Policy	By collecting and analysing corporate feedback, services can use results to determine, shape and influence future policies
Finance and value for money	Ensuring the Council listen to the concerns of Customers, reacting to trends and issues and shaping policies as a result can assist with value for, and saving money
Legal	No immediate implications
Procurement	In the event of a change of CRM (the corporate feedback system is an extension of the current CRM), or if development of the current system is not possible there could be a requirement for purchase of feedback specific software
Human Resources	The review of the way in which Corporate Feedback is handled will include ensuring responsible Officers maintain and update the system, including fully responding to customers in a timely way. It is also important that Management Teams are using the intelligence from feedback to inform service improvement.
Property	Not applicable
Equalities	As part of the review of corporate feedback importance will be placed on ensuring the Council can be contacted by all Customers.

(Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Risk Assessment	Not applicable
Crime & Disorder	Not applicable
Customer Consideration	As a Council it is important that Customers are able to contact us and feel that views and opinions are considered and genuine complaints are dealt with in an appropriate manner.
Carbon reduction	Not applicable
Wards	All

Background papers:

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2017/18

Report sign off:

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Initials
Monitoring Officer/Legal	NM
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	BS
Relevant Executive Director	BS
Chief Executive	DL
Portfolio Holder(s)	NO

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