

COMPLAINTS SERVICE REPORT 2015 -16

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North Tyneside Council

COMPLAINTS SERVICE REPORT

APRIL 2015– MARCH 2016

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Authority's complaints services for the last year between April 2015 and March 2016. It covers complaints under the Children Act 1989 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, which are often referred to together as the 'social services' procedures. It also includes other 'corporate complaints' about other services provided by the Authority, and Complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and Housing Ombudsman (HO).

The Authority aims to provide high quality services and customer care at all times. However, it recognises there are occasions when people may wish to register dissatisfaction with those services. When this happens, the Authority wants to hear about people's experiences and, where something has gone wrong, to put it right, so far as is possible and this process in turn drives improvements generated from complaints. Therefore we have a comprehensive complaints service that covers not only the statutory Social Services arena, but also all other services of the Authority under a Corporate Complaints Procedure. The procedures for dealing with Corporate and Children Services complaints are attached to this report as Appendix 1 and 2.

We also welcome comments, compliments and suggestions to provide a broad, balanced and reflective picture of people's experiences of our services.

Executive Summary

The number of complaints continues to be very low compared to the millions of transactions the Authority has with its 202,200 residents and substantial number of visitors every year, but the overall number of formal complaints to the Authority increased by 8% from 864 in 2014-15 to 933 in 2015-16. This increase was due to greater numbers in some areas, such as Benefits, Council Tax & Customer Services and Environment.

Complaint leaflets are widely available in the Authority's buildings and to download from the Authority's website. It is also now very easy for our customers to contact us online. Satisfaction surveys are now issued to all complainants following the closure of their complaint, regardless of the complaint outcome. During 2015-16 a survey of complainants showed 62% of complainants overall were happy with the complaints process. Appendix 3 provides a full breakdown of the survey results.

As a result of complaints received during the year a number of changes to practice and procedure were introduced; examples are summarised under 'Number and Analysis of Complaints' below.

In keeping with the principle of resolving problems as quickly as possible, the proportion of Corporate complaints resolved at Stage 1 remains high at 87% in 2015-16 and 88% for Children Social care complaints, the remainder being ongoing at the time of writing this report. Adult Social Care complaints have a one stage process and if the complainant remains dissatisfied they may complain to the LGO, resulting in all such complaints being resolved at Stage 1 of the Statutory complaints procedure.

The LGO found two cases of maladministration with injustice against the Council. The complaints related to the way the Authority communicated a move for a service user who resides in a Local Authority community dwelling and the way a rent account was dealt with following the death of a resident. The recommendations of the LGO in relation to these two complaints have been fully implemented.

Procedures

Overview

The Council aims to respond positively to all complaints and other representations so that it can help resolve individual issues and learn from experience how to improve services. We aim to provide comprehensive complaint services, which are widely understood and easily accessible to all. The whole Authority, staff and Members, are committed to effective complaint handling and problem solving as an integral part of customer focussed services and responsive performance management.

There are four separate procedures for Corporate, Children and Adult Social Care and Public Health complaints. Wherever possible, before the 'formal' complaint procedures are used, efforts are made at an operational level to resolve any difficulties.

Corporate Complaints (see Appendix 1)

Once the formal procedures are entered into for Corporate Complaints, there are, in essence, three stages:

1. Complaint referred to team leader or operational manager to try to resolve within 10 working days;
2. If not resolved to the customer's satisfaction, they can ask for it to be reviewed by a more senior manager within 10 working days; and
3. Ultimately, the Regulation and Review Committee, consisting of up to 5 Ward Councillors, makes the final decision.

Children Social Care Complaints (see Appendix 2)

In Children Social Care cases, the statutory complaints process is governed by the Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006. Stage 1 should be responded to within 10 working days and can be extended to 20 working days; at Stage 2 the response is due within 25 working days and may be extended to 65 working days for complex complaints with the complainant's approval; and Stage 3 the complaint is referred to an Independent Review Panel.

The Authority engage Independent Investigators and Independent Persons for Children Act Complaints at Stage 2 as set out in the Regulations. Other independent roles, e.g. members of Independent Complaint Review Panels, are also engaged by the Authority's Complaints Service as and when required.

Children social care staff ensure that all children, of an understanding age, who are new to the care system are in receipt of a complaints leaflet.

Adult Social Care Complaints

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 were introduced in April 2009. Under these provisions, the characteristics of individual complaints are assessed and specific plans of how to address the complaint are agreed with the complainant. The approach focuses on the complainant and enables organisations to tailor a flexible response that seeks to resolve the complainant's specific concerns. It is based on the principles of good complaints handling:

1. Getting it right
2. Being customer focussed
3. Being open and accountable
4. Acting fairly and proportionately
5. Putting things right
6. Seeking continuous improvement.

This statutory procedure has no fixed timescales, other than a maximum period of 6 months for handling the complaint and is a one stage process. Complaints about the Public Health Service are dealt with under a similar procedure as Adult Social Care complaints; however the Local Authority has only received one complaint about the service to date.

How to make a complaint

Complaints can be made in a number of ways, e.g.

- By talking to the staff involved, to let them try to sort the problem out;
- By writing to or telephoning the relevant service department or the Customer & Member Liaison Office in Quadrant.
Write to: Customer & Member Liaison Office
Quadrant
The Silverlink North
Cobalt Business Park
North Tyneside
NE27 0BY
tel. 0191 643 2280
Email: customerliaisonoffice@northtyneside.gov.uk
- A complaint form is available on line at:
- <https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/478/complain-about-council-services>
- By personal visit to any of the Council's Customer First Centres,
- By telephoning the Council's Contact Centre on 0345 2000 101.

Help and support

The Customer & Member Liaison Office (CMLO) is independent of service departments and offers information, advice and help to complainants and staff responding to complaints. The CMLO primary role is to ensure all complaints are looked into properly and any lessons learnt are adopted. The team also provides a comprehensive support service to the Authority's Councillors and this includes processing in the region of 7,000 enquiries per annum on behalf of the Members and residents.

Independent advocacy is available for people wishing to make Social Services complaints, especially children and vulnerable adults. Other assistance can be arranged to suit individual requirements.

Copies of this report and other material can be made available in other formats or languages on request to the Customer & Member Liaison Office.

Who can make a complaint?

Under the Corporate Complaints Procedures, any user of the Authority's Services can complain. This includes residents and visitors. It also includes relatives and carers acting on someone's behalf, e.g. a person living outside the area representing a relative living in North Tyneside.

In the Social Services arena, people can make a complaint if they are someone for whom the Authority has a power or duty to provide, directly or indirectly, a social service and his/her needs for that service have come to the attention of the Authority. This is extended to cover someone acting on his or her behalf, e.g. a relative or carer.

Limited exclusions do apply:-

- when other more appropriate processes already exist, e.g. formal appeal procedures, legal proceedings;
- when the matter occurred more than 12 months before the complaint was made (unless there is good reason for the delay in bringing the matter to the Authority's attention); and
- when the matter has already been properly examined.

It should be noted that where a complaint is made on someone else's behalf, reasonable checks will be made with that person to ensure they are aware of and are happy for the complaint to be considered.

Outlines of the processes are shown in Appendices 1 and 2 and further information is available from the Customer & Member Liaison Office.

External review

Local Government & Housing Ombudsman (LGO & HO)

The LGO & HO look at complaints about local authorities in a fair and independent way and their service is provided free of charge. They are independent of all Government departments and have the same powers as the High Court to obtain information and documents. If they find the Authority has done something wrong they will make recommendations to put things right.

The LGO & HO play a vital role for people wishing to make a complaint. It is usual for them to refer a matter to the Authority to look into, if it has not done so previously; they class this type of complaint as “premature”.

The LGO Advice Team can be contacted on:

Tel: **0300 061 0614** Text ‘call back’ to **0762 481 1595**

at: www.lgo.org.uk

or write to: **The Local Government Ombudsman**, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH

The HO Advice Team can be contacted on:

Tel: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

or write to: **Housing Ombudsman Service**, Exchange Tower, Harbour Exchange Square, London, E14 9GE

Operational liaison with the LGO & HO is provided by the Customer & Member Liaison Office.

In their Annual Letter for 2015-16 the LGO indicated that in total 56 complaints about North Tyneside Council had been received during the year. The HO do not provide an annual report for each Authority.

The Authority has recorded that 43 complaints were received from the LGO & HO combined during the period. Of the 43 complaints received 10 were outside of their jurisdiction, on 4 occasions they exercised their general discretion not to investigate, 4 were classified as premature and referred to the Authority to investigate, in 14 cases they found no maladministration and they found maladministration and injustice in relation to two complaints.

The LGO’s Annual Letter is available on their website or via the Council’s Customer & Member Liaison Office.

Complaints referred to the LGO in Tyne & Wear	2015-16
Gateshead	58
Newcastle upon Tyne	68
North Tyneside	56
South Tyneside	51
Sunderland	56
Total	289

Care Quality Commission

In the Adult Social Care arena, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) also plays a similar role within its wider remit of regulation of social care. The Commission can be contacted at:

CQC National Customer Service Centre
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4PA
Telephone: 03000 616161
Fax: 03000 616171
On line form on website www.cqc.org.uk

OFSTED

For Children Social Care, and across Children Young People and Learning, OFSTED plays a similar role to CQC. They can be contacted at:

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 1231
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Management and Operation

Management and operation of both the corporate and social services processes are provided by the Customer & Member Liaison Office (CMLLO), which is based in Law and Governance in the Chief Executive's Office. The Customer & Member Liaison Office is also the main point of contact for the LGO & HO.

The Office not only manages many individual complaints but also oversees the correct use of the procedures in the various service departments. It does not investigate complaints as service areas are responsible for examining complaints about their own services.

Individual complaints are referred to relevant service managers to examine and respond to the complainant.

The Complaint service is supported by a bespoke Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

Performance Indicators

A report on the overall performance of the complaints service is submitted to the Authority's Senior Leadership Team on a monthly basis and to the Authority's Member Support Group every 6 months.

The Complaints Service carry out an in-house survey of people who have used the complaints process. Returns are summarised in Appendix 3. These show that 57% of respondents said they found it easy to find information about the complaints process; 61% were happy with the time taken to respond to complaints; 62% thought the process was good and 47% were satisfied with the outcome.

There are currently 202,200 residents in North Tyneside. Voluntary diversity monitoring of complainants was introduced several years ago. The following table compares the results of the survey against the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Mid Year Population Census estimate for 2012. There is no up to date information relating to disability.

%	O.N.S.	NTC	%	O.N.S.	NTC
Gender			Ethnic Origin		
Female	52	55	Asian	2	1
Male	48	44	Black	0.5	1
Declined		1	Other Ethnic	0.5	-
Age			Mixed	1	1
16-24	28	4	White British	94	94
25-34	13	9	Other White	2	1
35-44	14	11	Declined	-	2
45-54	14	22	Religion		
55-64	13	23	Christian	64	53
65-74	9	21	Hindu	0.3	1
Over 75	9	7	Buddhist	0.2	1
Declined	-	3	Muslim	1	1
With a disability			Sikh	0.2	-
Yes	-	33	Other	0.3	1
No	-	61	None	28	34
Not given	-	6	Declined	6	9

Numbers and analysis of complaints

The number of complaints for 2015-16, together with previous years for comparison, is shown in the Tables at the end of this report.

This information is made available for consideration by individual service areas, as part of performance management throughout the year. This helps identify any themes or trends and so informs service improvement initiatives. The Customer & Member Liaison Manager meets with various service management teams to discuss any implications arising from themes or trends in complaints.

The total complaints related activity is set out in Table 1. Low level complaints have decreased year on year since 2012-13, however formal Corporate complaints have increased.

Corporate complaints resolved at Stage 1 remained high at 87% and all Children Social Care complaints closed during the period were resolved at Stage 1. This reflects the value of the training provided over the last few years by Customer & Member Liaison staff and the LGO in Effective Complaint Handling and the commitment of Managers and Supervisors to resolve complaints at an early stage.

All complaints concluded and closed off on the Complaints Database create a prompt to enter any lessons learnt as a result of the complaint. A number of improvements generated by complaints were made to procedures and services during the year. A number of examples of such improvements are set out below:-

Brief Summary	Lessons Learned
The notice given for a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard Assessment for a service user with Autism.	Developments being progressed with Stirling University to introduce communication tools for assessment of persons with communication difficulties.
Following a report about concerns for a child to NSPCC, complainant concerned that his/her identity was made known to the parent.	More scrutiny regarding anonymous concerns required, so that any information which may lead the person to assume who the referrer is not shared. Session undertaken with team members.
Customer paid for parking at the ticket machines however the board did not state what the hourly rate was for parking as board had been covered over.	Ensure that stickers for the information boards are available at the time that the tariff's are changed. On occasion customers do not read the information that is provided on the machines themselves.
Customer was refused planning permission as the property had 'No building rights' the search the Council had previously carried out was incorrect.	Officers to review historic planning permissions to establish validity of any conditions which remove permitted development rights. Revision to documentation being developed.
On-line school application fault.	Procedure developed between the Access Team and the Systems Team for managing technical issues, user errors and communication with the customer.
Staff working on private property.	Procedures changed to ensure owners are clearly highlighted on scaffolding plan to ensure notification in the case of repair works on adjoining property.

Future Developments

North Tyneside Council is a rapidly changing organisation. This process will continue and remain a challenge for effective complaints handling as service users experience changes and the organisation evolves internally as a result of changing priorities from central Government and more limited resources being available to the Authority.

There are significant examples of change within the Authority. The Authority has partnership arrangements with Kier North Tyneside, Engie and Capita to provide a range of services. The Authority's Customer & Member Liaison Office will continue to manage complaints for all of the Authority's partners on behalf of its customers.

The overall focus of attention is now very much on 'learning' from complaints and this will be a core driver in all future developments by the Authority.

Conclusions

The Authority has made a commitment to deliver a successful future for its residents and the borough in the Our North Tyneside plan, but to achieve the outcomes we need to deliver within the resources available and must therefore do things differently. There is not only significantly less money available, but also increasing pressures and challenges from a growing and ageing population and changing needs and expectations.

The 'Creating a Brighter Future' programme is not just a new plan for delivery but it will deliver a major culture change and new way of working that will:

- Encourage our customers to be more independent
- Better manage demand for services so people access the right services at the right time
- Focus everything it does to delivering its priorities.

The extent of the changes required will inevitably generate concerns from customers as the changes to service delivery and charging arrangements are implemented.

The rapidly changing culture and demands of increased customer satisfaction coupled with organisational changes across public and partner sectors means that complaints services must be continually kept up to date. The Authority's successful history and current good practice in effective complaint handling cannot be taken for granted.

By the very nature of this area of work, the complaints services will never satisfy all of the people all of the time. However, the survey of complainants indicates a high level of satisfaction with the service overall.

The Authority is committed to providing effective complaints services for the benefits of individual customers, the Authority and the community alike. Complaints are now widely recognised as integral to the provision of quality services at both individual and strategic levels.

Background

Statistics

This part of the report is broken down into the following sections:-

- 1) Overall number of complaints across the Authority
- 2) Social Services Complaints
- 3) Corporate Complaints
- 4) Local Government Ombudsman
- 5) Informal Complaints and Enquiries.

1. Overall number of complaints across the Authority

The volume of formal complaint related activity for the period April 2012 to March 2016 is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Social Service Complaints	67	81	92	97
Corporate Complaints	535	659	772	836
Total	602	740	864	933
Local Government & Housing Ombudsman complaints received by NTC	39	42	35	43
Formal total	641	782	899	976
Pre-Complaint and general enquiries dealt with by the Customer & Member Liaison Office	944	889	814	550
Total complaint related activity	1,585	1,671	1,713	1,526

Table 1a

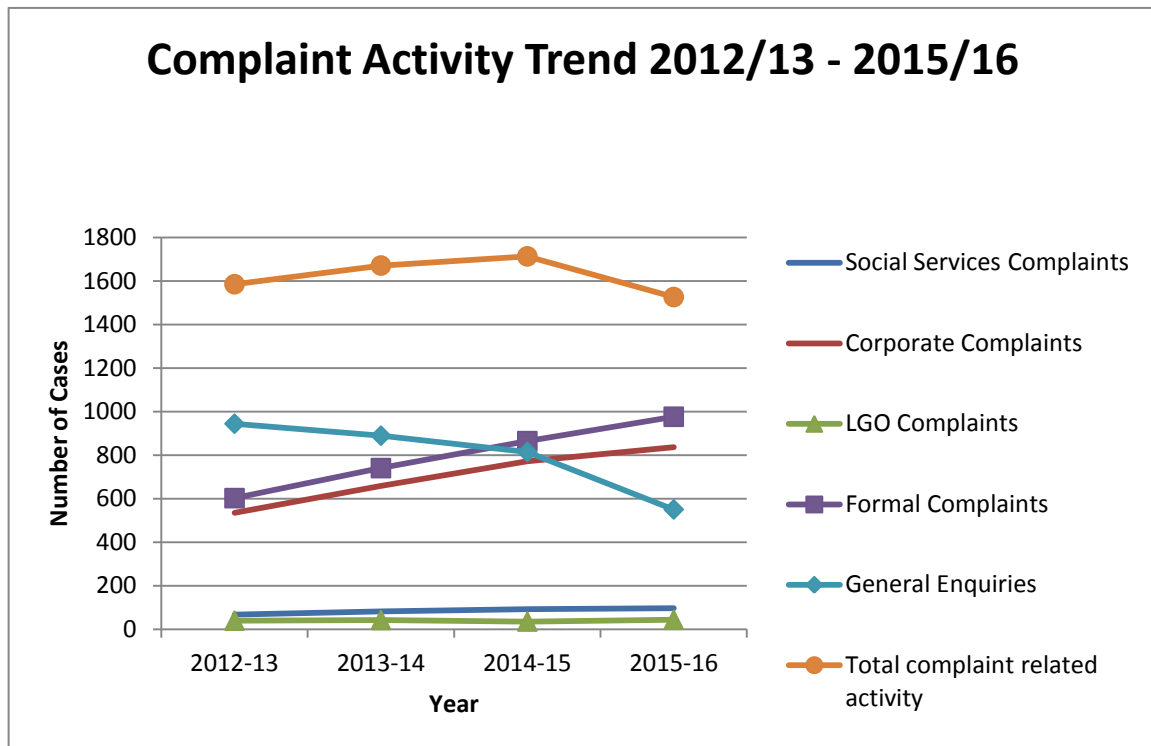
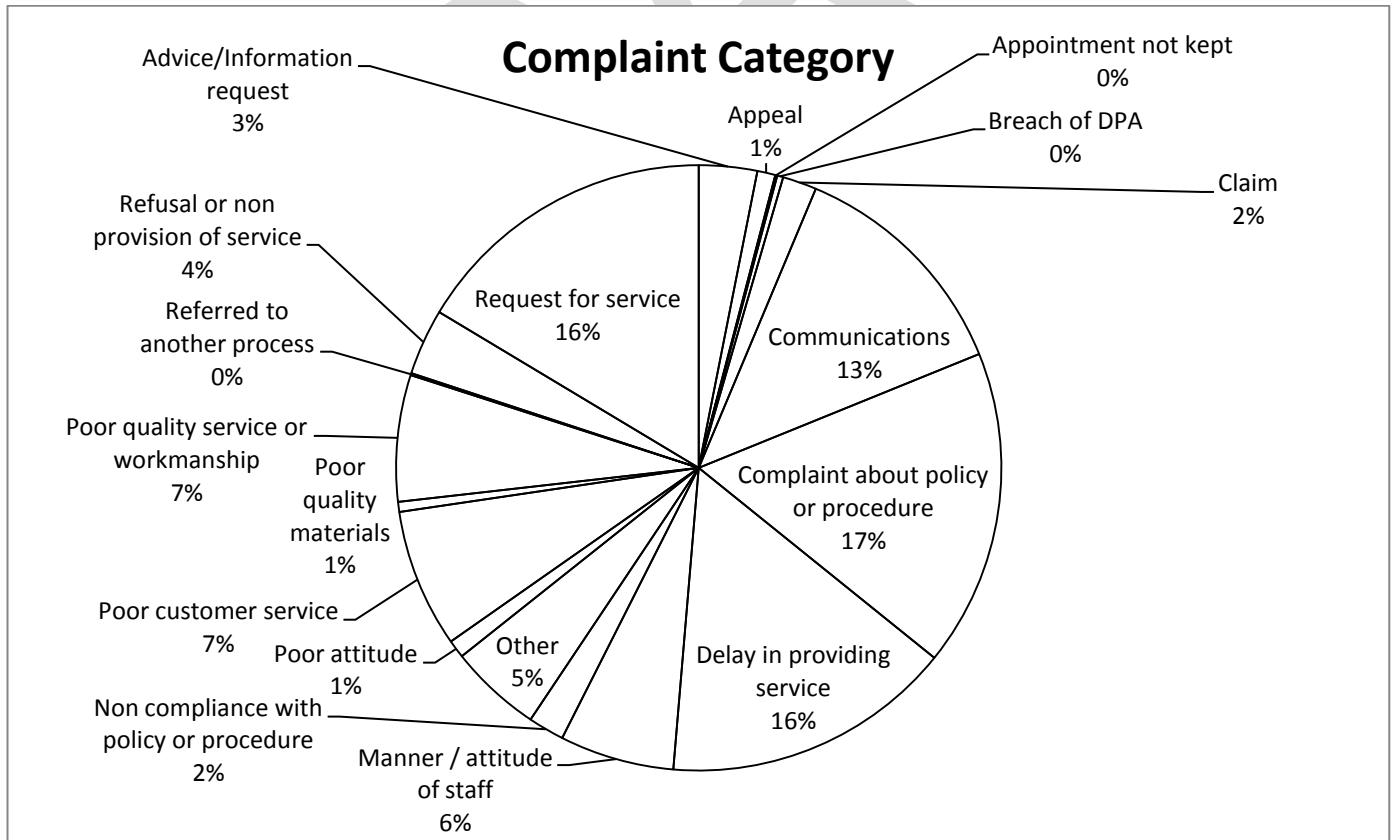


Table 1b – Percentage split by category of all formal complaints to the Council both Corporate and Social Care for 2015-16



Due to improvements in the Authority's website resulting in more enquiries directed to the correct department at the initial contact there has been a decrease in the number of pre-complaint and general enquiries dealt with by the Customer & Member Liaison Office (CMLO). The CMLO continue to make sure that as many enquiries as possible are directed to the most appropriate service at the first point of contact. This will ensure customers are given more responsive replies and reduce the inefficiencies inherent in redirection of enquiries within the Authority. All enquiries received by email into the CMLO are acknowledged by email, the majority on the same working day. The customer is also notified of who their enquiry has been sent to and that they should expect a response direct. Enquirers by telephone or letter are posted a receipt setting out the same information.

2. Social Services Complaints

Social Service complaints dealt with under the relevant statutory processes are split into Children's and Adult Services, as shown in Table 2. In addition there are complaints regarding Children's and Adult Services which were dealt with under the Corporate Procedure (see Table 8).

Table 2 Social Services by Division	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Children & Families Services	37	38	46	50
Adult Services	30	43	46	47
TOTAL	67	81	92	97

There has been a small increase of complaints about Social Care Services overall by 5% during the last year, however numbers remain very low.

Within Children Social Care, complaints have been categorised as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Children & Families Services Categories	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Adoption / Fostering / LAC	13	8	20	10
Safeguarding	9	12	11	20
Child Protection	5	2	0	0
Front Door	10	14	9	12
Commissioning & Investment	0	2	4	3
Other	0	0	2	5
TOTAL	37	39	46	50

Children who are looked after receive a 'complaints form' to use if they wish to raise any point about their care or circumstances generally. Acknowledging that making a complaint can be difficult, young people are encouraged to have the assistance of a mentor or advocate if they want to make a complaint. The units for children with a disability have specially trained advocates to help those who have communication difficulties.

In the child protection system users may feel they have little power to make a complaint and this is acknowledged. To capture issues of user concern the review process and other meetings are forums in which matters which are a worry to the user can be tackled. In this

way the user's view can be heard and services influenced. In addition to the numbers reported above there were 7 complaints about Children Services dealt with under the Corporate Complaints procedure.

Within Adult Social Care, categories are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Adult Services Categories	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Safeguarding	1	0	2	2
Commissioning	1	6	3	3
Personalisation / Social Work	9	24	32	36
Integrated Services	1	11	8	4
Other	18	2	1	2
TOTAL	30	43	46	47

In addition to the numbers reported above there were 11 complaints about Adult Services dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Procedure during 2015-16.

Tables 5 and 6 show the proportions of upheld complaints for Children's and Adults Services over the year.

Table 5 - Children Social Care complaint outcomes	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %	2015-16 %
Not Upheld	58	58	61	64
Upheld in Full	3	3	7	0
Upheld in Part	39	39	30	24
Ongoing	0	0	2	12

Table 6 - Adult Social Care complaint outcomes	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %	2015-16 %
Not Upheld	53	30	46	47
Upheld in Full	17	7	2	0
Upheld in Part	30	63	52	49
Ongoing	0	0	0	4

Problem solving at the earliest opportunity is a key aim of effective complaint handling. This is not only of value to the complainant but also to the Authority in optimising use of resources and enhancing customer care.

Table 7 shows early resolution at Stage 1 of children complaints only. From April 2009 a one stage process was introduced for Adult Social Care complaints.

Table 7 – Children's Social Services complaints resolved at stage:	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %	2015-16 %
One	100	100	96	88
Two	0	0	0	0
Three	0	0	0	0
Ongoing	0	0	4	12

3. Corporate Complaints

Table 8, below, shows a breakdown of corporate complaints received from 2012-13 for comparison purposes.

Table 8 – Corporate Complaints					
Department	Service Area	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Chief Exec & Financial Services	Finance & Resources	-	2	1	7
	Law & Governance	5	6	15	13
	Other (inc Street Lighting)	4	1	9	0
	Total	9	9	25	20
Revs, Bens & Customer Services	Benefits	13	32	55	80
	Council Tax	7	20	41	50
	Customer Services	10	19	31	34
	Total	30	71	127	164
Adult Social Care	Transport/Other	6	7	13	8
	Financial Services	3	5	2	3
	Total	9	12	15	11
Children, Young People & Learning	Children Services	13	4	7	7
	Education	7	6	10	6
	Total	20	10	17	13
ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE AND HOUSING:					
Department	Service Area	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Leisure	Indoor Sports & Leisure	3	16	13	14
	Cultural Services Other	11	2	8	12
	Total	14	18	21	26
Environment	Parking	17	19	20	20
	Planning	12	19	19	20
	Highways	15	28	41	52
	Environmental Health	6	7	5	12
	Other	20	4	2	2
	Street Environment	9	13	36	37
	Property	3	7	4	6
	Waste Management	15	11	20	16
	Vermin/Pest Control	3	5	5	2
	Recycling/Wheeled Bins/Special Collections	20	21	20	71
	Trees/Shrubs	6	7	8	15
	Winter Maintenance	2	-	-	2
	Bereavement Services	3	1	2	2
	Total	131	142	182	255

Housing	Debt Recovery/Income	7	17	15	12
	Day-to-day Repairs	20	18	13	12
	Allocations/Letting	13	20	27	19
	Housing Estates	45	60	73	45
	Empty Homes /Voids	8	9	7	12
	Quality Homes for Older People	-	-	2	10
	Homelessness / Advice	4	9	15	12
	Housing Investment	6	4	8	25
	Safer Estates	4	6	3	3
	Leasehold	-	2	2	2
	Other	5	7	8	3
	Total	112	152	173	155
Kier North Tyneside	Day-to-day Repairs	159	162	156	126
	Gas Services	26	38	24	23
	Housing Investment	17	21	16	27
	Empty Homes / Voids	7	23	14	14
	Total	209	244	210	190
Business & Economic Development	Business & Economic Development	1	1	2	2
	Grand Total	535	659	772	836

The number of Corporate Complaints increased by 8% from 772 in 2014-15 to 836 in 2015-16.

Revenue, Benefits and Customer Services Complaints:

The Benefit Service has seen an increase in complaints from 2014-15 to 2015-16 of 25, however in view of the number of active claims, which is around 20,000, this represents only 0.4% of the caseload. The majority are around delays in dealing with changes in circumstances. This is disappointing as the service saw significant improved service delivery in both new claims and changes in circumstances in 2015-16 in comparison to the previous year, with new claims being processed on average in 24.39 days and changes in circumstances in 7.69 days, both well within the Council's KPI requirements.

The service is working hard at embedding new technologies around on line claiming and Robotic Processing Automation (RPA) in support of the Target Operating Model and should see the days to process improve even further.

Both the Revenues Service and Customer Services have seen small increases from the previous year and whilst every effort is made to meet customer expectation this is not always possible, however both services continue to operate well within the Councils required KPI's. The number of Revenues complaints in relation to households is still very small at 1 per 1,900 households and Customer Service Complaints against the number of contacts is 1 in 11,900 contacts.

Environment Complaints:

Complaint numbers were 182 in 2014-15 and increased to 255 in 2015-16. This was largely due to complaints about recycling, wheeled bins and special collections from 20 last year to 71 in 2015-16. In the context of the 90,000 households in the borough and the total number of collections annually the increase was small. Every effort is made to ensure all complaints are kept to a minimum and that residents satisfaction is maintained.

Table 9 shows the proportion of corporate complaints upheld or not.

Table 9: Corporate complaints outcomes	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %	2015-16 %
Not Upheld	34	34	39	39
Upheld in Full	33	40	33	32
Upheld in Part	33	26	28	28
Ongoing	-	-	-	1

Table 10 shows the stage at which corporate complaints were resolved, again indicating a high level of early problem solving overall and again is consistent with previous years.

Table 10: Corporate complaints resolved at Stage:	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %	2015-16 %
One	87	84	86	87
Two	13	15	13	12
Three	0	1	1	0
Ongoing	0	0	0	1

Policy complaints

Complaints about the policies of the Authority are recorded and responded to at Stage 1 but not considered further within the complaints process.

4. Local Government and Housing Ombudsman (LGO & HO)

The next stage after the Authority's complaints procedures is the Local Government or Housing Ombudsman.

Table 11 groups the breakdown by the Authority's Service Areas as recorded by the Authority:

Table 11: Complaints to the LGO & HO	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Environmental & Cultural Services	0	1	4	5
Highways, Transport & Planning	11	14	6	9
Revenues & Benefits	3	8	4	5
Housing	11	12	11	7
Education & Children Social Care	11	3	3	8
Adult Social Care	3	2	3	7
Other	0	2	4	2

Total	39	42	35	43
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Table 12 gives the decisions made by the LGO & HO in the given years as recorded by the Authority.

Table 12: LGO & HO Decisions		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Total	Complaints Received	39	42	35	43
Not Investigated	Outside Jurisdiction	6	9	9	10
	Discretion not to investigate	23	8	5	4
	Premature referrals	4	9	4	4
	Discontinued Investigation	2	3	6	3
Total Not Investigated		35	29	24	21
Investigated	Findings of no maladministration	2	3	6	14
	Satisfied with LA's actions	2	8	3	0
	Findings of maladministration & injustice	0	2	2	2
	Ongoing	0	0	0	6
Total Investigated		4	13	11	22

5. Informal complaints and enquiries

As has been indicated previously, the 'headline' figure of the number of formal complaints does not reflect the number of concerns or problems reported to the Authority, and satisfactorily dealt with by staff and via the Members Enquiries System.

Consideration is currently being given in a number of service areas to better ways of 'capturing' the valuable information provided by 'informal' complaints as an aid to performance monitoring. This is being extended to include comments and compliments and provide a more comprehensive picture of feedback from our customers.

In the meantime, the Customer & Member Liaison Office has been monitoring the number of enquiries and informal complaints, or 'pre-complaint enquiries' dealt with by its staff, and these figures are shown in Table 14. This information has already proved valuable on a number of occasions as early indicators of developing issues in some service areas.

Table 13 - Pre complaint & general enquiries processed by CMLO	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Children, Young People & Learning	23	21	29	11
Adult Social Care	9	31	25	18
Cultural Services	75	55	39	19
North Tyneside Homes	103	132	114	79
Kier North Tyneside	115	90	46	30
Environmental Services	478	410	417	306
Customer Services, Revs & Bens	42	52	58	36
Law & Governance	25	51	43	23

Finance & Resources	46	43	39	25
Other	28	4	4	3
TOTAL	944	889	814	550

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NORTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

(Amended 1 September 2006)

<p>STAGE 1</p> <p>10 working days to respond in writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints can be received by any employee/office but usually in a Customer Services Centre, the Telephone Call Centre or Customer Liaison Office. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints are registered on computer and referred to Service Area <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Manager informed, makes enquiries and responds to the complainant in writing.
<p>STAGE 2</p> <p>10 working days to respond in writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If not satisfied with the Stage 1 reply, the complainant has 10 working days to ask, giving reasons, for a more senior manager to review matters. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case referred to Head of Service or other Senior Manager to review whole complaint and first response.
<p>STAGE 3 COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE</p> <p>Held within 28 calendar days of request.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If not satisfied with Stage 2 reply the complainant has 10 working days to ask, giving reasons, for the complaint to be considered by a Committee of up to 5 Councillors. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complainant and officers are invited to attend and present their cases, supported by all previous correspondence etc. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision of the Committee is the final stage of the Council's internal procedure, the decision is communicated to the complainant within 24 hours and confirmed in writing within 5 working days.
<p>FURTHER OPTIONS</p>	<p>Complainants advised to consider consulting Citizen's Advice, a solicitor or Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied. The Ombudsman will only look into a complaint if the Council has not first examined it in exceptional circumstances.</p>

NORTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL

CHILDREN ACT 1989

(*Amended 1 September 2006)

STAGE 1	<p>Sometimes known as the 'informal' stage.</p> <p>10 working days to respond, can extend to 20 if need be.</p>	<p>Receipt and referral of complaint to Complaints staff</p> <hr/> <p>Service Manager informed of the problem, makes enquiries and responds to the complainant.</p>
STAGE 2	<p>Sometimes known as the 'formal' stage.</p> <p>25 working days to respond can extend to maximum of 65.</p>	<p>Progress to this stage if:-</p> <p>Complainant feels problem not resolved at stage 1, it is a particularly serious complaint, the complainant requests to by-pass stage 1.</p> <hr/> <p>All stage 2 investigations are co-ordinated by Complaints Manager in Customer Liaison Office.</p> <hr/> <p>For Children Act complaints an 'Independent Investigator' and 'Independent Person' are appointed.</p> <hr/> <p>The Head of Service responds to the complainant after consideration of the investigator's report.</p>
STAGE 3 REVIEW PANEL	<p>Held within 28 days of request for Review Panel.</p>	<p>Progress to this stage if complainant is not satisfied at stage 2.</p> <p>A Review Panel considers the complaint, the investigator's report and the response of the Head of Service.</p> <p>*It comprises 3 independent people recruited from outside of the Council.</p> <p>Relevant Director communicates Review Panel outcome to complainant within 15 working days with any actions to be taken.</p>
FURTHER OPTIONS	<p>Complainants will be advised to consider consulting Citizen's Advice, a solicitor or Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied. The Ombudsman will not usually look into a complaint if it has not first been examined by the Council.</p>	

Summary of Customer Liaison Complaints Survey (1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016)

11% of survey forms issued were returned

How easy was it to find information about the complaints service?	Easy	Neither	Difficult
	57 %	36 %	7 %

If help was sought from staff, how helpful was it?	Helpful	Neither	Unhelpful
	70 %	10 %	20 %

If a leaflet was received, how helpful was the information?	Helpful	Neither	Unhelpful
	71 %	22 %	7 %

How satisfied were you with the response time?	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied
	61 %	11 %	28 %

Was response easy to understand?	Easy	Neither	Difficult
	77 %	17 %	6 %

Did response letter tell you what to do if unhappy?	Yes	No
	90 %	10 %

How good was the process?	Very good	Fairly good	Neither	Fairly poor	Very poor
	42 %	20 %	12 %	9 %	17 %

Were you satisfied with the outcome?	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
	28 %	19 %	8 %	9 %	36 %