

# Annual Customer Feedback Report

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of customer feedback recorded by the Council. The report covers the period 1st July 2013 – 31st March 2014 as the refreshed complaints procedure and the customer feedback system were introduced in July 2013. The annual customer feedback report for 2014/15 will cover a full 12 month period.

There are three main types of customer feedback:

**Comments:** sometimes customers feel that there is something the Council could do differently. They don't want to complain, but would like to suggest a change or improvement that could be made.

**Compliments:** tell us not only that our customers are happy with the standard of service we provide but they also highlight areas of good practice which could be used in other parts of the Council.

**Complaints:** are an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action.

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## 2. OVERVIEW OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED

| Department                      | Comments   | Compliments | Complaints | Total        |
|---------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| Adult Services                  | 27         | 264         | 87         | <b>378</b>   |
| Built Environment               | 61         | 39          | 130        | <b>230</b>   |
| Children's Services             | 7          | 96          | 99         | <b>202</b>   |
| Democratic Services             | 0          | 0           | 1          | <b>1</b>     |
| Deputy Chief Executive's        | 4          | 17          | 3          | <b>24</b>    |
| Leisure & Operational Services  | 18         | 15          | 60         | <b>93</b>    |
| Public Health                   | 0          | 0           | 0          | <b>0</b>     |
| Regeneration, Tourism & Culture | 11         | 5           | 9          | <b>25</b>    |
| Treasurer Services              | 27         | 35          | 86         | <b>148</b>   |
|                                 | <b>155</b> | <b>471</b>  | <b>475</b> | <b>1,101</b> |

The following sections of this report will analyse the data for comments, compliments and complaints in more detail.

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## 3. COMMENTS

The departments receiving the most comments during the period were Built Environment (61), Treasurer Services (27) and Adult Services (27). This equates to 74.1% of all comments received.

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The three main comment themes are requests for service / information, suggestions about how to improve the quality of services and comments on action the Council has taken. Below are some examples of comments received during this period:

*Please could you tell me what the activity and developments on the old Devonshire Road hospital site are leading to? I would be interested to know what it's going to be used for (**Organisation& Property**)*

*I would just like to thank you for returning common sense to motoring by disposing of the ridiculous traffic lights, which do nothing other than cause congestion. Installing a simple give-way system has been a revelation. I wish you had done it sooner and on many more traffic light controlled roundabouts (**Highways**)*

*Why doesn't the Council have a facility to set up Direct Debits online? I don't like giving my details out over the phone or on the paper form. Can you put forward this suggestion to the Director of Finance? I think more people would opt to pay by direct debit if there was a facility to set this up online through a secure website (**Council Tax**)*

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## 4. COMPLIMENTS

Three quarters of the compliments received during the period were for Adult Services (264) and Children's Services (96). Across the rest of the Council, Neighbourhood Services (25) and Customer First (22) received the most compliments.

The lower level of compliments for other departments is not necessarily representative of poor quality service in these areas. Usually positive feedback is less likely to be recorded consistently as it does not require the same level of involvement as complaints do. Feedback for both Adult Services and Children's Services is dealt with by the Customer Relations Team which has ensured that positive feedback from service users is logged and reported on a regular basis, hence the much higher number of compliments for both departments. It is anticipated that the number of compliments recorded for other departments will increase as the use of the customer feedback system becomes more embedded across the Council.

The two most common compliment themes are the quality of service and staff conduct / treatment of a customer. Below are some examples of compliments received during this period:

*I just wanted to say what a fantastic job has been done re-surfacing the pavements and roads on Charnwood Avenue and the surrounding road (**Highways**)*

*I'm so grateful for the help I received from the bin crew today. I always receive a brilliant service from them and they are always very pleasant (**Waste**)*

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*I'm very happy with my mother's new social worker; she has been wonderful. We are so glad that things are now in place to help us (Adult Social Care)*

*The service I received was fantastic and I want to thank all of the staff involved (Customer First)*

## 5. COMPLAINTS

### 5.1 Types of Complaint

The Council has a three stage process for dealing with complaints:

- Stage 1** Investigation by the service
- Stage 2** Review by the relevant Director / Assistant Director
- Stage 3** Review by the Complaints Panel on behalf of the Chief Executive

The table below shows the number of complaints logged for each stage during the period.

| Stage   | Q1  | Q2  | Q3  | Total |       |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| Stage 1 | 167 | 123 | 165 | 455   | 95.8% |
| Stage 2 | 7   | 2   | 3   | 12    | 2.5%  |
| Stage 3 | 5   | 3   | 0   | 8     | 1.7%  |
|         | 179 | 128 | 168 | 475   |       |

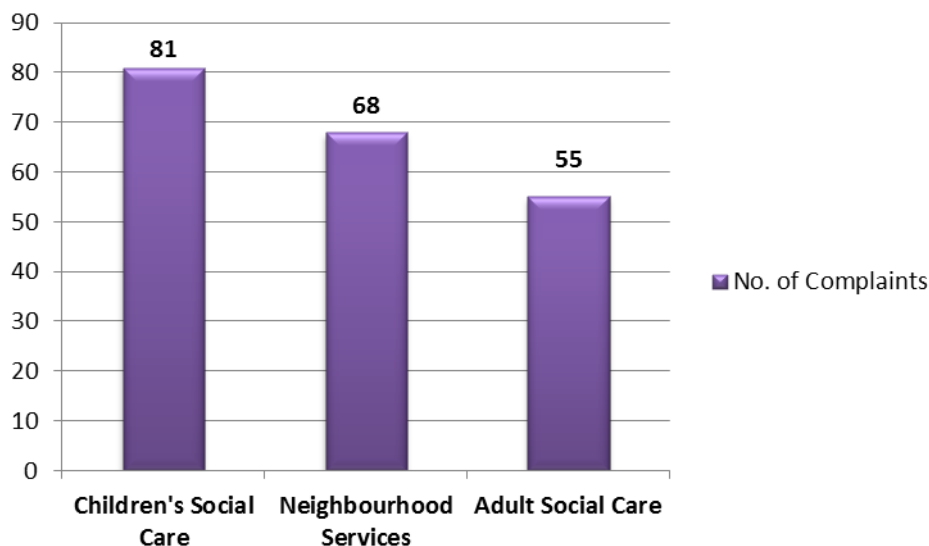
The number of Stage 1 complaints received is relatively consistent across the period with the exception of Quarter 2, where there is a reduction due to the Christmas break. The low numbers of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints received suggests that the majority of Stage 1 complaints are dealt with effectively, therefore preventing complaints from escalating.

### 5.2 Departments & Service Areas

| Department                      | Total | %     |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Adult Services                  | 87    | 18.3% |
| Built Environment               | 130   | 27.4% |
| Children's Services             | 99    | 20.8% |
| Democratic Services             | 1     | 0.2%  |
| Deputy Chief Executive's        | 3     | 0.6%  |
| Leisure & Operational Services  | 60    | 12.6% |
| Public Health                   | 0     | 0%    |
| Regeneration, Tourism & Culture | 9     | 1.9%  |
| Treasurer Services              | 86    | 18.1% |
|                                 | 475   |       |

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Almost half of all complaints received by the Council during this period relate to three service areas. These are Children’s Social Care, Neighbourhood Services (part of Built Environment) and Adult Social Care.



The full breakdown of service areas in Appendix A shows that some service areas have lower than expected levels of complaints, for example, for services which are more visible to the public. It is possible that these low levels of complaints are due to the fact that the customer feedback system is not embedded within these services. Work is ongoing to ensure that customer feedback for all Council services is recorded on the customer feedback system, particularly across services which have moved / changed due to the restructure of Built Environment.

## 5.3 Complaint Themes

The table below highlights the main complaint themes. 82.3% of all complaints received relate to the following four themes:

| Theme                                 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Total      |
|---------------------------------------|----|----|----|------------|
| Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer | 45 | 39 | 55 | <b>139</b> |
| Quality of Service                    | 57 | 33 | 33 | <b>123</b> |
| Lack of Action                        | 24 | 17 | 26 | <b>67</b>  |
| Council Action                        | 23 | 16 | 23 | <b>62</b>  |
|                                       |    |    |    | <b>391</b> |

It is concerning that the themes with the highest number of complaints are Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer and Quality of Service. It is possible that complaints relating to these themes are a result of reduced staffing levels across departments, however further investigation into complaints within these themes would need to be undertaken to confirm this.

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## 5.4 Ward Breakdown

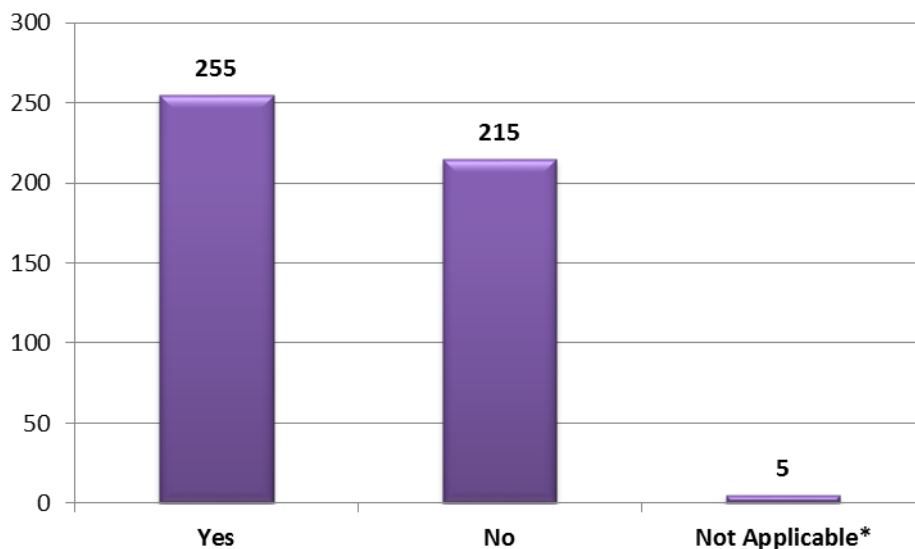
The table below provides a breakdown of complaints by ward based on the address of the complainant. It should be noted that not all complainants provide their postal address and therefore the ward cannot be determined for 264 complaints.

| Ward         | No. | %    | Ward              | No.        | %    |
|--------------|-----|------|-------------------|------------|------|
| Anchorsholme | 3   | 0.6% | Marton            | 6          | 1.3% |
| Bispham      | 8   | 1.7% | Norbreck          | 5          | 1.1% |
| Bloomfield   | 7   | 1.5% | Park              | 9          | 1.9% |
| Brunswick    | 13  | 2.7% | Squires Gate      | 10         | 2.1% |
| Claremont    | 19  | 4%   | Stanley           | 8          | 1.7% |
| Clifton      | 8   | 1.7% | Talbot            | 15         | 3.2% |
| Greenlands   | 7   | 1.5% | Tyldesley         | 7          | 1.5% |
| Hawes Side   | 6   | 1.3% | Victoria          | 12         | 2.5% |
| Highfield    | 6   | 1.3% | Warbreck          | 13         | 2.7% |
| Ingthorpe    | 10  | 2.1% | Waterloo          | 6          | 1.3% |
| Layton       | 16  | 3.4% | Outside Blackpool | 17         | 3.6% |
|              |     |      | <b>Total</b>      | <b>211</b> |      |

The wards generating the most complaints were: Claremont, Layton and Talbot. However, a high number of complaints were also received from people residing outside of Blackpool. This is a mixture of Fylde Coast residents (6) and visitors to Blackpool (11).

## 5.5 Response Timescales

We aim to respond to the majority of complaints within 5 working days; this timescale is extended to 15 working days for complaints in Adult Services and Children’s Services which are covered by statutory legislation. Sometimes it isn’t possible to respond to a complaint within this time, for example, for complex cases which may involve other agencies or legal issues and therefore take longer to investigate. In these instances, it is more appropriate to allocate a longer response timescale.



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The chart above shows that in 54.3% of cases a response was sent to the complainant within timescale. The number of complaints which were not responded to within timescale has remained steady over the period. Not Applicable refers to complaints which are in progress, have been withdrawn, are on hold or have been made anonymously and therefore a response cannot be sent to the complainant.

## 5.6 Outcomes

The table below details the outcomes of the complaints received during this period.

| Outcome              | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Total      |
|----------------------|----|----|----|------------|
| Upheld               | 33 | 30 | 25 | <b>88</b>  |
| Partially Upheld     | 19 | 11 | 12 | <b>42</b>  |
| Not Upheld           | 57 | 46 | 67 | <b>170</b> |
| Explanation Provided | 51 | 25 | 38 | <b>114</b> |
| Complaint Withdrawn  | 3  | 1  | 1  | <b>5</b>   |
|                      |    |    |    | <b>419</b> |

It should be noted that the figures in the above table do not include complaints which are on hold or in progress.

In the majority of cases (40.6%), complaints were not upheld. This means the Council was not at fault. In 27.2% of cases the outcome was to provide an explanation to the complainant of the reasons why the Council has done something. For example, changes to benefits due to government legislation. In 21% of cases, complaints are upheld. This means that the Council has failed to provide a service or has provided an inadequate service to a customer.

Outcomes were not recorded for 56 complaints during this period. This is a result of services failing to record this information when closing down complaints once they have been dealt with.

## 5.7 Lessons Learned

Of the 475 complaints received during the period, lessons learned have been logged for 142 complaints (29.8%). This low figure doesn't necessarily mean that learning hasn't been derived from complaints; it is more likely that learning is not being routinely logged once a complaint has been dealt with. Further work needs to be done to ensure services capture learning where appropriate so that services can be improved as a result.

Examples of learning obtained from complaints during this period include:

- Additional guidance about providing proof of identity included on blue badge application forms to ensure customers are aware of the risks of providing identification via post.
- Care homes to ensure that interventions are recorded in a single place to enable all parties involved in delivering care to a service user to be aware of each other's actions and concerns.
- Review of the telephony queuing system to ensure that customers are not cut off when the telephone lines are busy.
- Standard letters for families should be developed to explain expected levels of contribution to placements and clarify top up arrangements.

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- Customer First staff briefed on the rooms in Municipal Buildings which can be made available for customers to use as breast feeding facilities.
- Consideration given to consulting with local businesses as part of the organisation of Remembrance Day services to ensure that loud music isn't played during services in the future.
- Enhanced scrutiny by managers when approving care packages to ensure that the levels of assessed need are correct from the first instance.

## 6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)

### 6.1 Complaints Received by the LGO

| Service Area   | Enquiries & Complaints Received by LGO |           |       |
|--|--|-----------|-------|
|  | 2013/14                                | 2011/12   | Trend |
| Adult Care Services                                    | 10                                     | 6         | ↑     |
| Benefits & Tax   | 8                                      | 5         | ↑     |
| Corporate & Other Services                             | 3                                      | 6         | ↓     |
| Education & Children's Services                        | 8                                      | 3         | ↑     |
| Environmental Services, Public Protection & Regulation | 9                                      | 13        | ↓     |
| Highways & Transport                                   | 4                                      | 12        | ↓     |
| Housing  | 11                                     | 12        | ↓     |
| Planning & Development                                 | 3                                      | 5         | ↓     |
|  | <b>56</b>                              | <b>62</b> |       |

The table above shows the number of complaints received by the LGO broken down by service area. The data shows that there has been an increase in the numbers of complaints received for Adult Care Services, Benefits & Tax and Education & Children's Services. Please note that the data has been compared to 2011/12 as the LGO did not publish local authority statistics in 2012/13.

When compared to other unitary authorities in England, the Council received a slightly below average number of complaints from the LGO in 2013/14 (56 complaints compared with the average of 58).

### 6.2 Decisions Made by the LGO

| Decision Type                      |                                    | No.       | %     |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Complaints investigated by LGO     | Complaint upheld                   | 11        | 19.6% |
|                                    | Complaint not upheld               | 5         | 8.9%  |
| Complaints not investigated by LGO | Advice given                       | 4         | 7.1%  |
|                                    | Closed after initial enquiries     | 11        | 19.6% |
|                                    | Incomplete / invalid               | 2         | 3.6%  |
|                                    | Referred back for local resolution | 23        | 41%   |
|                                    |                                    | <b>56</b> |       |

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**Appendix B** contains a definition of the types of decision made by the LGO.

Of the 56 complaints received by the LGO, only 16 progressed on to the formal investigation stage. This is in line with the average for unitary authorities in England.

Almost half of complaints received by the Ombudsman were referred back to the Council for local resolution. There are a number of possible reasons why complainants opt to refer their complaint to the LGO prematurely:

- They are not aware of the Council's complaints procedure;
- They did not receive a response to their initial complaint;
- They are not happy with the response they have received at Stages 1 and 2;
- They are not confident that the Council will investigate their complaint impartially; or
- The Council failed to take their complaint seriously or deal with it under the complaints procedure.

In order to reduce the number of premature complaints being referred to the LGO, work should be undertaken to address these points. For example, ensuring that the customer feedback procedure is easily accessible to our customers so they are aware of how to make a complaint to the Council.

## 6.3 Lessons Learned from LGO Complaints

Examples of lessons learned from LGO complaints include:

- When consulting on changes to policies which relate to charges for social care provision, the Council will look to identify service users who will be significantly impacted by the changes to ensure that they are engaged in the consultation process. The Council will also ensure that service users are given a longer period between the time they are notified of an increase in charges and the date from which the new charges will be applied.
- Guidance issued to Housing staff to ensure that exceptional circumstances are considered when applicants are assessed against the Council's eligibility criteria for social housing. Applicants should also be made aware of how their circumstances have been considered when they are informed of the outcome of their application.
- When making changes to care packages, the Council will ensure that an explanation is provided to the service user of how their care package will change and how the new care package will meet their care needs more effectively.

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## 7. NEXT STEPS

There are a number of actions arising from the review of customer feedback:

- The data fields on the customer feedback system should be streamlined so that only essential data is requested to further simplify the system for users.
- More fields should be made mandatory on the customer feedback system to encourage the completion of data such as the date responses are sent, complaint outcome and lessons learned before a complaint is closed down.



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- Further work should be undertaken with departments to encourage all Council services to use the customer feedback system, particularly across those services which have moved / changed due to the restructure of Built Environment.
  - The reasons for late responses should be captured and reported on.
  - The causes of complaints within the Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer and Quality of Service themes should be explored.
  - Further work needs to be done to encourage services to capture learning where appropriate so that services can be improved as a result.
  - Ways in which we can reduce the number of premature complaints being referred to the LGO should be investigated.
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## APPENDIX A – FULL BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SERVICE AREA

| Department                                 | Service                         | Q1         | Q2         | Q3         | Total      |
|--|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Adult Services</b>                      | Adult Social Care               | 21         | 14         | 20         | <b>55</b>  |
|  | Care & Support                  | 2          | 3          | 1          | <b>6</b>   |
|  | Commissioning                   | 8          | 6          | 12         | <b>26</b>  |
| <b>Built Environment</b>                   | Highways                        | 16         | 6          | 8          | <b>30</b>  |
|  | Housing                         | 0          | 1          | 0          | <b>1</b>   |
|  | Housing Options                 | 2          | 2          | 2          | <b>6</b>   |
|  | Neighbourhood Services          | 27         | 13         | 28         | <b>68</b>  |
|  | Parking                         | 3          | 10         | 6          | <b>19</b>  |
|  | Planning                        | 1          | 0          | 1          | <b>2</b>   |
|  | Public Protection               | 0          | 1          | 2          | <b>3</b>   |
|  | Transportation                  | 1          | 0          | 0          | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>Children's Services</b>                 | Children's Social Care          | 27         | 26         | 28         | <b>81</b>  |
|  | Early Help for Children         | 3          | 1          | 2          | <b>6</b>   |
|  | Education                       | 5          | 2          | 5          | <b>12</b>  |
| <b>Deputy Chief Executive's</b>            | HR, Communications & Engagement | 1          | 0          | 1          | <b>2</b>   |
|  | ICT                             | 0          | 0          | 1          | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>Democratic Services</b>                 | Member Services                 | 1          | 0          | 0          | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>Leisure &amp; Operational Services</b>  | Capital Projects                | 1          | 0          | 2          | <b>3</b>   |
|  | Facilities Management           | 0          | 2          | 2          | <b>4</b>   |
|  | Integrated Transport            | 0          | 1          | 0          | <b>1</b>   |
|  | Leisure Services                | 5          | 1          | 0          | <b>6</b>   |
|  | Parks                           | 0          | 1          | 0          | <b>1</b>   |
|  | Waste                           | 15         | 12         | 18         | <b>45</b>  |
| <b>Regeneration, Tourism &amp; Culture</b> | Libraries                       | 1          | 0          | 1          | <b>2</b>   |
|  | Tourism                         | 2          | 4          | 1          | <b>7</b>   |
| <b>Treasurer Services</b>                  | Benefit Fraud                   | 1          | 2          | 2          | <b>5</b>   |
|  | Benefits                        | 3          | 2          | 8          | <b>13</b>  |
|  | Business Rates                  | 1          | 0          | 0          | <b>1</b>   |
|  | Council Tax                     | 15         | 12         | 13         | <b>40</b>  |
|  | Customer First                  | 13         | 5          | 3          | <b>21</b>  |
|  | Debtors & Creditors             | 3          | 0          | 1          | <b>4</b>   |
|  | Organisation & Property         | 1          | 1          | 0          | <b>0</b>   |
|  |                                 | <b>179</b> | <b>128</b> | <b>168</b> | <b>475</b> |

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## APPENDIX B – DEFINITION OF DECISIONS MADE BY THE LGO

| Decision Made                             | Explanation   |
|---|---|
| <b>Upheld</b>                             | Where the LGO has decided that the council is at fault in how it acted and that this fault may or may not have caused an injustice to the complainant, or where the council has accepted that it needs to remedy the complaint.   |
| <b>Not upheld</b>                         | Where the LGO has investigated a complaint and decided that the council was not at fault.   |
| <b>Advice given</b>                       | Where the LGO advises a complainant that their complaint does not fall within their jurisdiction or where the complaint has already been investigated by the LGO and therefore cannot be investigated again.  |
| <b>Closed after initial enquiries</b>     | Where the LGO has made an early decision that they could not or should not investigate a complaint, or where there is little or no injustice to a complainant that would necessitate an LGO investigation of the matter, or where an investigation could not achieve anything, either because the evidence shows at an early stage that the council was not at fault or the outcome a complainant wants is not one the LGO could achieve. |
| <b>Incomplete / invalid</b>               | These are complaints where the complainant has not provided the LGO with enough information to be able to decide what should happen with their complaint, or where the complainant no longer wishes to pursue their complaint.  |
| <b>Referred back for local resolution</b> | These are complaints which have been referred back to the council by the LGO because the council has not had an opportunity to resolve the issues through its own complaints procedure.   |

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