

Annual Customer Feedback Report 2014/15

Blackpool Council



Annual Customer Feedback Report 2014/15

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1. OVERVIEW

This report provides an overview of customer feedback received during the period 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015.

There are three main types of customer feedback – comments, compliments and complaints. The table below shows a breakdown of the feedback received during the year.

Department	Comments	Compliments	Complaints	Total
Adult Services	24	367	93	484
Chief Executive's Office	0	0	2	2
Children's Services	13	39	125	177
Community & Environmental Services	100	63	261	424
Deputy Chief Executive's	4	24	8	36
Governance & Regulatory Services	3	1	9	13
Places	36	7	97	140
Public Health	0	0	1	1
Resources	23	38	220	281
	203	539	816	1,558

The following sections of this report will analyse the data for comments, compliments and complaints in more detail. An overview of complaints received by the Local Government Ombudsman is included in section 5.

2. COMMENTS

Comments are equally important as complaints as they can help to shape and improve the quality of the services we provide. The following table shows the number of comments received for each department:

Department	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Adult Services	12	6	4	2	24
Chief Executive's Office	0	0	0	0	0
Children's Services	5	5	0	3	13
Community & Environmental Services	15	39	24	22	100
Deputy Chief Executive's	1	2	0	1	4
Governance & Regulatory Services	0	1	1	1	3
Places	4	7	15	10	36
Public Health	0	0	0	0	0
Resources	5	7	5	6	23
Total	42	67	49	45	203
<i>Total 2013/14</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>159</i>

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The department that received the most comments during the period was Community & Environmental Services, the majority of which (54%) were requests for service. The four main comment themes were Request for Service, Request for Information, General Comments and Suggestions for Improvement. Below are some examples of comments received during the year:

*Why are the pitch fees for static caravans so expensive in Blackpool? I would like to retire here but cannot afford to (**Public Protection**)*

*I was woken up at 6.38am by a large grass cutter in Moorpark Field. It sounded like the grass cutter was not working properly or the attachment on the back was not fixed on properly (**Parks & Open Spaces**)*

*I visited Blackpool promenade during the weekend to view the Illuminations. We had a great time, yet I was disappointed that the memorial plaque which is erected in Gynn Square for the 3 deceased Police Officers was not illuminated at night. Can we try and get it lit again? The memorial sculpture was lit up beautifully, yet not the plaque in the garden behind it (**Tourism**)*

3. COMPLIMENTS

Compliments are extremely important and help to highlight the areas we are improving in or maintaining levels of high quality service. Therefore, all compliments are passed on to the relevant staff member(s) and service manager to ensure that good practice is commended and to help boost staff morale.

The table below shows a breakdown of the compliments received during 2014/15:

Department	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Adult Services	107	90	81	89	367
Chief Executive's Office	0	0	0	0	0
Children's Services	9	15	6	9	39
Community & Environmental Services	13	22	15	13	63
Deputy Chief Executive's	4	11	7	2	24
Governance & Regulatory Services	0	1	0	0	1
Places	4	3	0	0	7
Public Health	0	0	0	0	0
Resources	7	12	8	11	38
Total	144	154	123	124	539
<i>Total 2013/14</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>475</i>

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Nearly three quarters of the compliments received during the year were for Adult Services (367). Across the rest of the Council, Community & Environmental Services 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 doesn't require the same level of involvement as complaints do. Feedback for Adult 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. Combine this with the nature of the services provided and this leads to a much higher number of compliments than for other departments.

The two most common compliment themes are the Quality of Service and Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer. Below are some examples of compliments received during this period:

*I am very grateful for all my services. I cannot manage without them. I really appreciate having regular carers so we can build a working partnership. All the visits are welcome. Thank you (**Adult Social Care**)*

*I'd like to pass on my thanks as the dog fouling I reported has been cleared now and the area has been left immaculate. I'm very pleased with the quick response and good work (**Street Cleansing**)*

*Can you pass this onto your supervisor, as I'd like them to know what a brilliant service I've had from you? My emails were answered very quickly and explained things perfectly (**Customer First**)*

*From day 1 you have stuck by me and believed in me. Words cannot express how much I appreciate the work you and everyone at the hub has put into helping me turn my life around. THANK YOU. The service I received was fantastic and I want to thank all of the staff involved (**Early Help for Children & Families**)*

4. COMPLAINTS

4.1 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

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

Stage	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	
Stage 1	178	207	200	195	780	95.6%
Stage 2	6	6	4	8	24	2.9%
Stage 3	7	0	3	2	12	1.5%
	191	213	207	205	816	

The number of Stage 1 complaints received is relatively consistent across the year. 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.

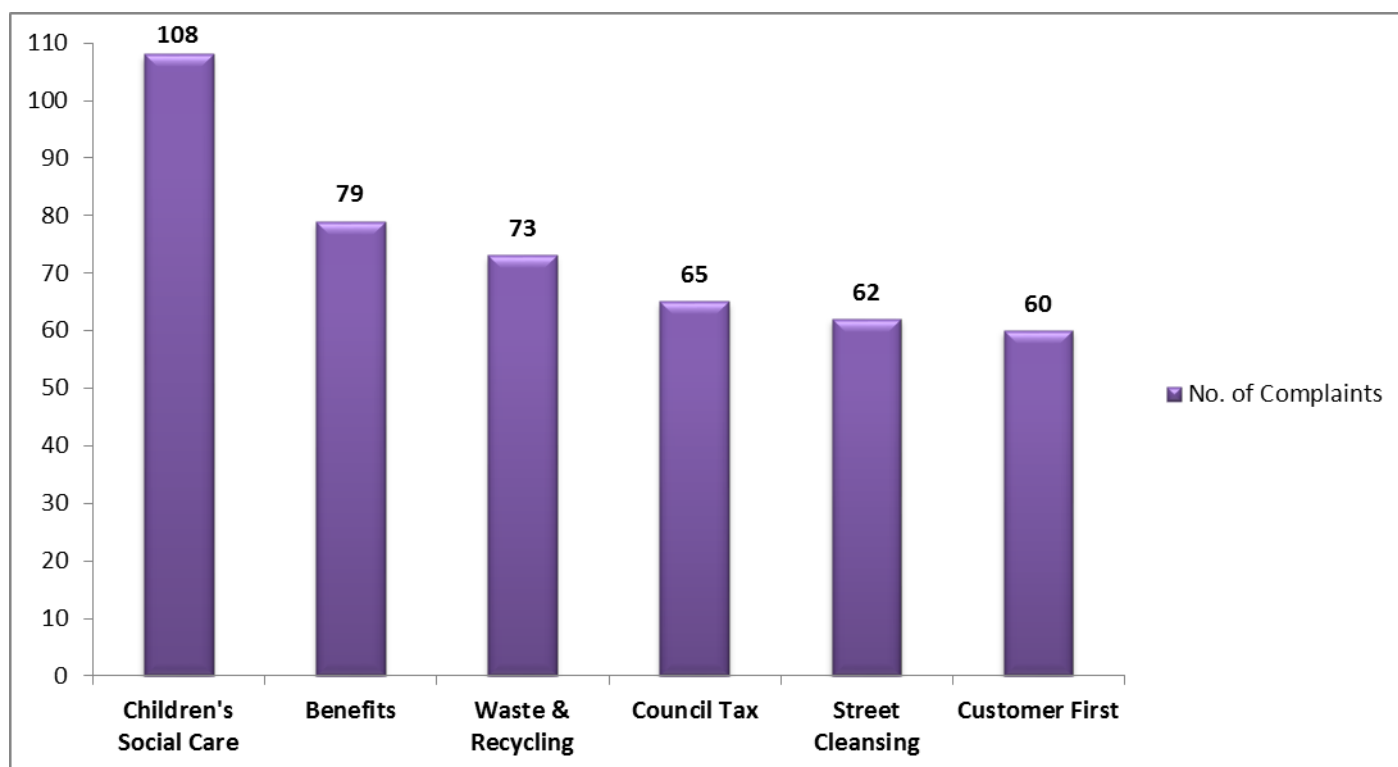
Although the number of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints has remained fairly stable when compared with the same period in 2013/14, the number of Stage 1 complaints has increased. Between the 1st July 2013 and the 31st March 2014 the Council received 452 Stage 1 complaints. During the same period in 2014/15, the number of Stage 1 complaints increased to 602. This increase could be attributed to further changes in services and reductions in staff as well as a more consistent approach to capturing complaints across the authority.

4.2 Departments & Service Areas

Department	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	
Adult Services	19	18	28	28	93	
Chief Executive's Office	0	0	2	0	2	
Children's Services	31	36	32	26	125	
Community & Environmental Services	70	68	60	63	261	
Deputy Chief Executive's	0	2	3	3	8	
Governance & Regulatory Services	2	3	2	2	9	
Places	21	27	23	26	97	
Public Health	0	0	0	1	1	
Resources	48	59	57	56	220	
	Total	191	213	207	205	816
	<i>Total 2013/14</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>127</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>469</i>

Almost half of all complaints received by the Council during this period relate to six service areas. These are Children's Social Care, Benefits, Waste & Recycling, Council Tax, Street Cleansing and Customer First.

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A breakdown of the number of complaints received by service area can be found in [Appendix A](#). Ongoing work throughout 2014/15 to further embed the customer feedback process has contributed to an increase in complaints for a number of public facing services. For example, Highways & Transport (delivery), Public Protection, Libraries, Parking etc.

4.3 Complaint Themes

The table below highlights the main complaint themes. As in 2013/14, the majority of all complaints received (86%) relate to the following four themes:

Theme	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Quality of Service	37	77	75	64	253
Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer	34	36	41	50	161
Lack of Action	36	42	36	35	149
Council Action	50	35	23	31	139
					702

By far, the most common complaint theme was Quality of Service. Over 60% of complaints within this theme relate to the following areas - Benefits (20.2%), Customer First (17.4%), Children's Services (12.6%) and Adult Services (12.3%). We can assume that the increase in the number of complaints about the quality of services are a result of changes to services and reduced staffing levels across departments, however further investigation into the complaints received would need to be undertaken to confirm this.

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The impact of large budget reductions means that the Council can no longer provide the same level of service to residents. As our emphasis shifts to building more resilient communities that can help themselves, it is anticipated that the number of complaints about the quality of services, lack of action and the treatment of customers will increase in the short term. The Strategic Customer Services Group (SCSG) has recently been established to ensure that the Council has a coherent and focused approach to how it supports its customers and service users so that the best possible outcomes are delivered given the resources available. Part of the SCSG's remit will be to ensure that residents are aware of the services the Council can and cannot provide as well as the standard of service they can expect to receive.

4.4 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 372 complaints.

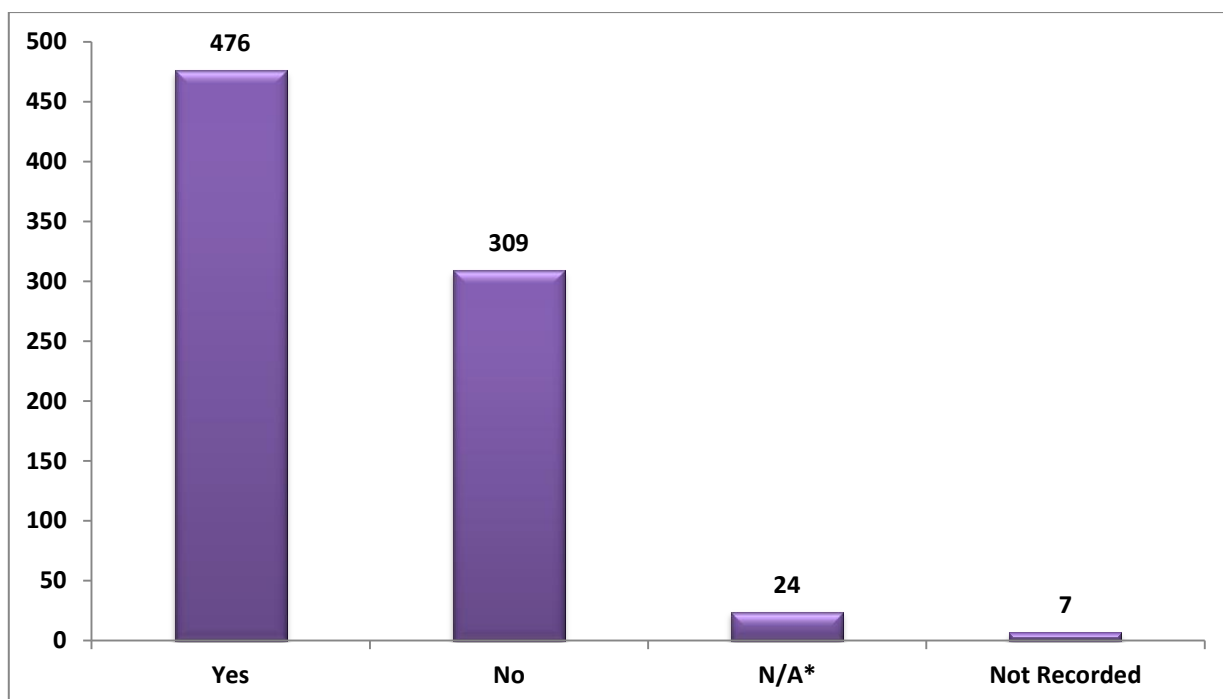
Ward	No.	%	Ward	No.	%
Outside Blackpool	50	6.1%	Waterloo	18	2.2%
Talbot	37	4.5%	Squires Gate	16	2%
Victoria	30	3.7%	Hawes Side	15	1.8%
Claremont	29	3.6%	Marton	14	1.7%
Bloomfield	28	3.4%	Norbreck	14	1.7%
Bispham	25	3.1%	Ingthorpe	13	1.6%
Warbreck	25	3.1%	Layton	12	1.5%
Stanley	20	2.5%	Park	12	1.5%
Clifton	19	2.3%	Tyldesley	11	1.3%
Brunswick	18	2.2%	Anchorsholme	10	1.2%
Greenlands	18	2.2%	Highfield	10	1.2%
			Total	444	

The wards generating the most complaints were Talbot, Victoria, Claremont and Bloomfield. This is a change from 2013/14 where the wards generating the most complaints were Claremont, Layton and Talbot. Although the majority of complaints are made by Blackpool residents, a large proportion were received from people residing outside of Blackpool (a mixture of Fylde Coast residents and visitors to Blackpool).

4.5 Response Timescales

We aim to respond to the majority of complaints within 5 working days. Where complaints are relatively easy to resolve this would mean that a full response is issued to the complainant within 5 working days. For more complex complaints which take longer to investigate it is more appropriate to allocate a longer response timescale. Therefore in these instances we aim to contact the complainant within 5 working days to acknowledge their complaint and explain when they can expect a full response. Complaints relating to Adult Services and Children's Services are covered by separate statutory legislation and therefore the timescale for responding to these complaints is extended to 15 working days.

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The chart above shows that in 60.1% of cases a response was sent to the complainant within timescale which is an improvement on 2013/14 where 53.7% of complaints were responded to within timescale. In a small number of cases the date a response was provided to the complainant has not been recorded. As a result, changes have been made to the Customer Feedback System to ensure the mandatory recording of this information before a complaint can be closed down. 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.

General reasons for timescales not being met include:

- Key members of staff being unavailable to respond to complaints due to sickness or annual leave;
- Senior officers being unavailable to sign off responses;
- Increasing workloads on restricted resources means that it is not always possible to prioritise complaint responding / investigation within some service areas;
- Complex investigation work required, which may include multi-agency communication, can prolong the time it takes to respond to complaints;
- Multiple complaints from the complainant regarding the same or different matters can lead to delays in the investigation process; and
- Difficulties in being able to contact complainants using the contact details they have provided can sometimes mean that we are unable to inform them of the outcome of their complaint.

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4.6 Outcomes

The table below details the outcomes of the complaints received during this period. It should be noted that the figures in the table do not include complaints which are on hold or in progress.

Outcome	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	%
Upheld	48	58	49	50	205	25.2%
Partially Upheld	12	18	21	20	71	8.7%
Not Upheld	61	72	72	64	269	33%
Explanation Provided	36	49	63	51	199	24.4%
Complaint Withdrawn	7	1	2	7	17	2.1%
Not Recorded	27	15	0	12	54	6.6%
					815	

In the majority of cases (33%), complaints were not upheld. This means the Council was not at fault. In 24.4% 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 25.2% 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.

A few of the general reasons for complaints being upheld over the year are shown below:

- A lack of action and / or long delays in delivering a service following a request from a customer;
- Errors in service delivery, such as failing to follow correct policies and procedures;
- Staff attitude / behaviour towards customers, ranging from poor customer service to the use of rude or abusive language;
- Failure to communicate with customers, for example, not informing them of a change of policy or action that has been taken in response to a previous request; and
- A combination of minor issues, which have overall resulted in a poor experience for the customer.

Outcomes were not recorded for 54 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. Changes have now been made to the Customer Feedback System to ensure the mandatory recording of this information before a complaint can be closed down.

4.7 Lessons Learned

Officers are encouraged to identify lessons learned from complaints in order to improve the services we deliver as well as share best practice. It should be noted that not all complaints produce lessons learned, however each case should be reviewed to ensure that any learning points are recorded and actioned where applicable.

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Of the complaints received during 2014/15, lessons learned have been logged for 224 complaints (28.1%). Although this is a low percentage, the number of lessons learned that have been captured has increased compared to 2013/14. Examples of learning obtained from complaints during this period include:

- New telephony queuing system introduced in Customer First to reduce delays for customers when contacting the Council by telephone. A number of channel shift projects are also underway to reduce the demand pressure on Customer First.
- It will now be the requirement for all Social Workers to provide an assessment following a visit regardless of whether or not the needs of the resident can be met by Adult Social Care.
- Responsibility for online payment forms on the Council website transferred to Transactional Services to avoid unnecessary delays in dealing with future complaints regarding payment form errors.
- Duration and volume level changed on musical elements of the Illuminations to prevent noise nuisance for local residents.
- The rules prohibiting the use of mobile phones within libraries has been withdrawn to enable customers to gain access to Wi-Fi using mobile devices.
- Continued work required on the transition policy which is to be rolled out to all staff across Adult and Childcare Services. Staff within Adult Social Care and in particular the Community Learning Disability Service need to work actively with Childcare Services to ensure gaps in support do not occur.
- Team talks / training conducted following complaints about poor customer service at the Household Waste & Recycling Centre.

We will continue to encourage the review of complaints to ensure that we learn from the feedback provided by our customers. However, the ability of services to take the time to review complaints and implement changes to improve services will be continually inhibited by the increasing demand on services and the pressure on existing resources.

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5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)

5.1 Complaints Received by the LGO

Complaints & Enquiries Received	2011/12	2013/14	2014/15	Trend*
Adult Care Services	6	10	17	↑
Benefits & Tax	5	8	6	↓
Corporate & Other Services	6	3	2	↓
Education & Children's Services	3	8	10	↑
Environmental Services & Public Protection	13	9	3	↓
Highways & Transport	12	4	2	↓
Housing	12	11	5	↓
Planning & Development	5	3	6	↑
	62	56	51	

* Direction of travel compared to 2013/14.

The table above shows the number of complaints received by the LGO in 2014/15 broken down by service area. There has been an increase in the numbers of complaints received for Adult Care Services and a slight increase in complaints relating to Education & Children's Services and Planning & Development during the year. However, the overall number of complaints received by the LGO has continued to decrease.

When compared to other unitary authorities in England, the Council received a below average number of LGO complaints in 2014/15 (the average number of complaints was 69).

5.2 Decisions Made by the LGO

The table below shows a breakdown of the decisions made by the LGO during 2014/15. **Appendix B** contains a definition of the types of decision made.

Decision Type		No. of Complaints	
		2013/14	2014/15
Complaints investigated by LGO	Complaint upheld	11	9
	Complaint not upheld	5	7
Complaints not investigated by LGO	Advice given	4	2
	Closed after initial enquiries	11	12
	Incomplete / invalid	2	1
	Referred back for local resolution	23	20
		56	51

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

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- 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 try and address these points. Ideally we would look at the premature complaints received by the LGO and review them on a case by case basis to establish why the complainant chose to circumvent the Council's complaints procedure. Unfortunately, the LGO does not provide detailed information about the premature complaints they receive so we are unable to track whether these complaints are referred back to the Council at a later date.

Of the 50 complaints received by the LGO, only 16 progressed on to the formal investigation stage. However, when we compare the percentage of complaints upheld following a formal investigation with that of other unitary authorities in England, the Council has one of the highest rates at 56.3%. Analysis is currently being undertaken to explore the reasons why these complaints have been upheld and to identify any actions that can be taken to reduce the number of upheld complaints going forward.

5.3 Lessons Learned from LGO Complaints

Examples of lessons learned from LGO complaints include:

- When informing service users of changes to the amount of care support they receive, the Council should ensure that an adequate explanation is given as to why the amount of care support is being changed and how the new provision will continue to meet the needs of the service user.
 - 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 a resident makes multiple requests for a service, where possible the officers dealing with those requests should ensure that the resident is kept informed of what action will be taken and when, as well as the outcome of any investigative work undertaken.
 - The appeals procedure for home to school transport should be reviewed in line with guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that appeals are considered appropriately and that the reasons for refusing an appeal are fully explained in decision letters.
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6. NEXT STEPS

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

- Review mandatory fields on the customer feedback system to encourage the completion of data required for reporting purposes.
- Further work should be undertaken with departments to encourage all services to follow the Council's complaints procedure and improve their complaint handling, particularly across those services which have changed due to restructures or where officers designated to deal with customer feedback have left the authority.
- The causes of complaints within the Quality of Service and Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer themes should be explored.
- Further work needs to be done to encourage services to capture and act upon learning from complaints 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 and the number of upheld complaints should be investigated.

There is limited capacity within the Corporate Development team and the Customer Relations team to undertake these actions. Therefore, consideration should be given as to which actions should be prioritised over the coming year.

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APPENDIX A – BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SERVICE AREA

Department	Service	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Adult Services	Adult Social Care	9	9	12	14	44
	Business Support & Resources	0	0	1	1	2
	Care & Support	1	0	1	2	4
	Commissioning	9	9	14	11	43
Chief Executive's	Exec Support	0	0	2	0	2
Children's Services	Children's Social Care	27	31	27	23	108
	Early Help for Children & Families	3	2	1	1	7
	Education	1	3	4	2	10
Community & Environmental Services	Animal Wardens & Pest Control	0	0	0	1	1
	Capital Projects	2	4	2	1	9
	Facilities Management	0	0	0	1	1
	Highways & Transport (delivery)	10	9	9	15	43
	Integrated Transport	1	0	3	1	5
	Leisure Centres	1	1	6	2	10
	Parks & Open Spaces	6	3	4	2	15
	Public Protection	13	13	7	7	40
	Stanley Park & Nature Resources	1	0	0	0	1
	Street Cleansing	19	20	14	9	62
	Waste & Recycling	17	18	15	23	73
	Unknown*	0	0	0	1	1
Deputy Chief Executive's	HR, Communications, Engagement & ICT	0	2	3	3	8
Governance & Regulatory Services	Cemeteries & Crematorium	2	0	0	0	2
	Democratic Services	0	1	1	0	2
	Licensing	0	1	0	2	3
	Registrars	0	1	1	0	2
Places	Community Safety	1	3	0	1	5
	Culture	0	0	1	0	1
	Economic Development	1	0	0	0	1
	Highways & Transport (policy)	3	1	1	0	5
	Housing Options	1	1	0	2	4
	Libraries	3	1	2	7	13
	Parking	8	9	13	11	41
	Planning	4	3	4	5	16
	Tourism	0	9	2	0	11
Public Health	Public Health	0	0	0	1	1
Resources	Benefit Fraud	1	1	2	0	4
	Benefits	13	13	23	30	79
	Business Rates	0	0	0	1	1
	Council Tax	18	23	12	12	65
	Customer First	14	18	17	11	60
	Debtors & Creditors	2	2	1	0	5
	Property & Asset Management	0	2	2	2	6
		191	213	207	205	816

* Complaint about a Council employee at Layton Depot but complainant was unable to provide enough information to establish which service the employee works in.

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APPENDIX B – DEFINITION OF DECISIONS MADE BY THE LGO

Decision Made	Explanation
Upheld	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.
Not upheld	Where the LGO has investigated a complaint and decided that the council was not at fault.
Advice given	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.
Closed after initial enquiries	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.
Incomplete / invalid	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.
Referred back for local resolution	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.
