

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 MAY 2015

REPORT BY HEAD OF INFORMATION, PARKING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

REVIEW OF COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS 1 APRIL 2014 TO 31 MARCH 2015

WARD(S) AFFECTED: None.

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To provide a summary of comments, compliments and complaints (3Cs) received between April 2014 and March 2015.
- To highlight the key issues, remedial action and learning arising from these 3Cs.
- To present actions in respect of 3Cs for 2015/16.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE That:

(A)	The report and actions in respect of ‘Comments, Compliments and Complaints’ be scrutinised; and
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(B)	The Executive be advised of any recommendations.
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1.0 Background

1.1 The Council implemented the current corporate comments, compliments and complaints system (3Cs) in January 2009.

1.2 On 14 July 2009, Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee resolved to receive an annual analysis of the 3Cs managed by the Council.

1.3 The 3Cs Procedure was reviewed to ensure compliance with the Regulator’s Code in April 2014. This places a statutory requirement on the Council’s regulatory services in respect of complaints:

- ‘2.3 *Regulators should provide an impartial and clearly explained route to appeal against a regulatory decision or a failure to act in accordance with this Code. Individual officers of the regulator who took the decision or action against which the appeal is being made should not be involved in considering the appeal. This route to appeal should be publicised to those who are regulated.*
- 2.4 *Regulators should provide a timely explanation in writing of any right to representation or right to appeal. This explanation should be in plain language and include practical information on the process involved.*
- 2.5 *Regulators should make available to those they regulate, clearly explained complaints procedures, allowing them to easily make a complaint about the conduct of the regulator.’*

SOURCE: Regulators’ Code 2014

- 1.4 The Council’s Freedom of Information IT system has been used to record 3Cs since April 2014.
- 1.5 The Council receives a very low level of formal complaints, 95 recorded in 2014/15. This should be compared to the high volume of enquiries and services that the Council delivers. There are in excess of 250,000 telephone calls to Customer Services alone during this period.
- 1.6 All stage 2 complaints (appeal of original decision) are managed through stage 1 of the 3Cs procedure.

2.0 Report

2.1 In order to enable the use of the Freedom of Information system to record 3Cs and given the low use of printed complaints forms to register 3Cs; forms sent online are now recorded as received from the website and those sent via post are recorded as a letter. This has had a minor impact on the comparative analysis presented.

2.2 Performance

2.2.1 The Council’s performance 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 is summarised below:

Performance Indicator	Performance 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 <i>(2013/14 figures in brackets)</i>
Total complaints recorded (Stage 1 plus Stage 2)	95(120)* <i>* All stage 2 complaints have passed through stage 1 of the 3Cs procedure.</i>
EHPI 5.1, % of complaints resolved in 14 days or less 2014/15 Target = 70%	77.9% (79.2%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer and Community Services – 93.3% (85.3%) • Internal Services/Financial and support services – 83.3% (93.5%) • Neighbourhood Services – 64.3%* (73.3%) <i>*The lower resolution rate in Neighbourhood Services reflects the additional time involved when handling planning complaints. All cases received acknowledgements and updates within the Council's Customer Service Standards.</i>
EHPI 5.2a, % of complaints about the Council and its services that are upheld: 1st Stage 2013/14 Target = 30%	35.3% (32.3%) – 28/79 (33/102) upheld at Stage 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer and Community Services – 34.6% (42.8%) • Internal Services/Financial Services – 68.2% (64.5%) • Neighbourhood Services – 12.9% (17.3%)
EHPI 5.2b, % of complaints about the Council and its services that are upheld: 2nd Stage – appeal 2013/14 Target = 25%	31.25% (11.1%) – 5/16 (2/18) upheld at stage 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer and Community Services – 33.3% (18.1%) • Financial and Support Services 50% (0%) • Neighbourhood Services – 27.3% (0%)

<p>EHPI 5.4, % of complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman that are upheld 2013/14</p> <p>Target = 0%</p>	<p>0%</p> <p>6 (6) Complaints received by the Local Government Ombudsman. 5 cases were not investigated, in the other case the Council was determined not at fault.</p>
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- 2.2.2 Neighbourhood Services did not meet the target of 70% of complaints resolved within 14 days. However their performance improved on last year and the main reason is the length of time that it can take to investigate contested planning decisions.
- 2.2.3 The Council just missed its target of only 30% of formal complaints upheld. Neighbourhood Services exceeded the target. Revenues and Benefits in Financial and Support Services had 12 complaints upheld impacting the performance indicator. However, this compares very favourably to their customer volume of almost 60,096 households, 4,269 businesses and 12,796 Council Tax and Benefit support customers. The service has also been re-sized to support the increased volume of work in the last year with an additional 26 staff engaged across the workload of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service with Stevenage Borough Council.
- 2.2.4 Cases upheld cover a variety of services, most are raised within the areas of most customer contact, Environmental Services and Revenue and Benefits (**Essential Reference Paper 'D'**).
- 2.2.5 The Council received 16 escalated complaints, where the customer remained dissatisfied after their initial complaint, 2 less than last year. Whilst the target of 25% of stage 2 complaints upheld was not met, only 5 complaints were upheld at this appeal stage. The low level of complaints at stage 2 means that a small change in the numbers has a significant impact on the performance indicator. The main source of stage 2 complaints was complex planning cases, where decisions were contested.

2.3 Volumes

2.3.1 The number of 3Cs recorded are shown below with 2013/14 figures in brackets:

	April – June (Q1)	July – Sept. (Q2)	Oct – Dec (Q3)	Jan – March (Q4)	Total
Comments	0 (1)	0 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	1 (3)
Compliments	0 (28)	6 (39)	0 (21)	1 (28)	7(116)
Complaints Stage 1	15 (12)	34 (29)	20 (24)	11 (19)	79 (84)
Complaints Stage 2	2 (4)	7 (7)	4(4)	2(4)	16 (18)
Total 3Cs logged	17	47	24	14	103 (221)

2.3.2 Due to the change in IT system 3Cs comments were not logged as in previous years. Steps to address this are detailed within the 3Cs action plan.

2.3.3 The number of stage one complaints the Council received fell by 6% compared to last year. Stage two complaints also fell, by 11%.

2.4 Source of Complaints

2.4.1 Customers have a clear preference for raising complaints by e-mail (64%) and letter (22%), see **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**. Email use continues to increase as the main source of complaints, with the number raised by letter falling. The number of complaints logged via telephone has also increased on the previous year.

2.5 Corrective Action Taken following 3Cs

2.5.1 58% of complaints investigated were found to be unjustified following investigation as it was found that the customer did not have grounds for complaint or that the Council had followed its procedures and policies correctly.

2.5.2 Improvement actions in response to complaints in 2013/14 are shown in **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**. The key reasons for upheld complaints were service delivery and change of details. Most of these complaints arose from high workloads increasing processing times or where customer details have been incorrect.

2.6 Local Government Ombudsman

2.6.1 From April 2013 The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) has published all decisions on its website to increase transparency and accountability.

2.6.2 6 complaints were raised with the LGO regarding East Herts Council, the same number as 2013/14. Only one Planning complaint was investigated and the Council was found not to be at fault.

Year	Decision	No of Cases	Service
2014/2015	Not investigated	2 1 1 1	Council Tax Building control Environmental Services Development Management
	Council not at fault	1	Development Management
2013/2014	Not investigated	1 1	Housing Options Development Management
	Premature complaint	1	Housing Benefits
	Not in jurisdiction and discretion not exercised	2	Development Management
	No maladministration	1	Development Management

2.7 Actions Completed 2014/2015:

Action	Outcome
Migration to new IT System	Freedom of Information system used as interim system.
3Cs Procedure reviewed to ensure compliance with the Regulator's Code 2014	New procedure in place
Audit completed by Shared Internal Audit Service to review use of 3Cs system in services.	Full assurance given with no recommended actions. See Essential Reference Paper 'E' .

2.8 Actions Planned in 2015/2016:

Action	Outcome
Optimisation of new IT system	Review ease of use and set up to identify changes to enhance use. Revised procedures for compliments and comments to encourage logging.
Evaluate interim 3Cs system with 3Cs champions and managers	Evaluate interim IT system and determine if a permanent replacement is a priority.
Review website complaint logging form and enquiry form	Effective and efficient process to promote ease of use on-line, with automated logging and distribution to further speed up responsiveness.
Refresh 3Cs champions	Support session to identify any concerns/issues and to assist in promoting use of 3Cs.
Streamline 3Cs information leaflet	Redesign the printed form to be suited to electronic presentation and use, remove pre-paid postage card as no-longer used by customers.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers:

Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee – 8 July 2014.

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