



Customer Relations



Corporate Complaints & Commendations Annual Report



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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report statistical information to Members and Officers detailing Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) corporate complaints and commendations activity from 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014.
- 1.2 To identify a number of key developments and planned improvements to the complaints processes operated by the Council.
- 1.3 To evidence the learning captured from complaints and commendations and how this can inform and improve the overall customer experience.

2. Complaints and Commendations Analysis 2013-14

2.1 The work of the Customer Relations Team

This report relates to the Council's Corporate Complaints and Commendations processes. However, to put the report within a wider context, it is worth referring to the broader work of the Customer Relations Team.

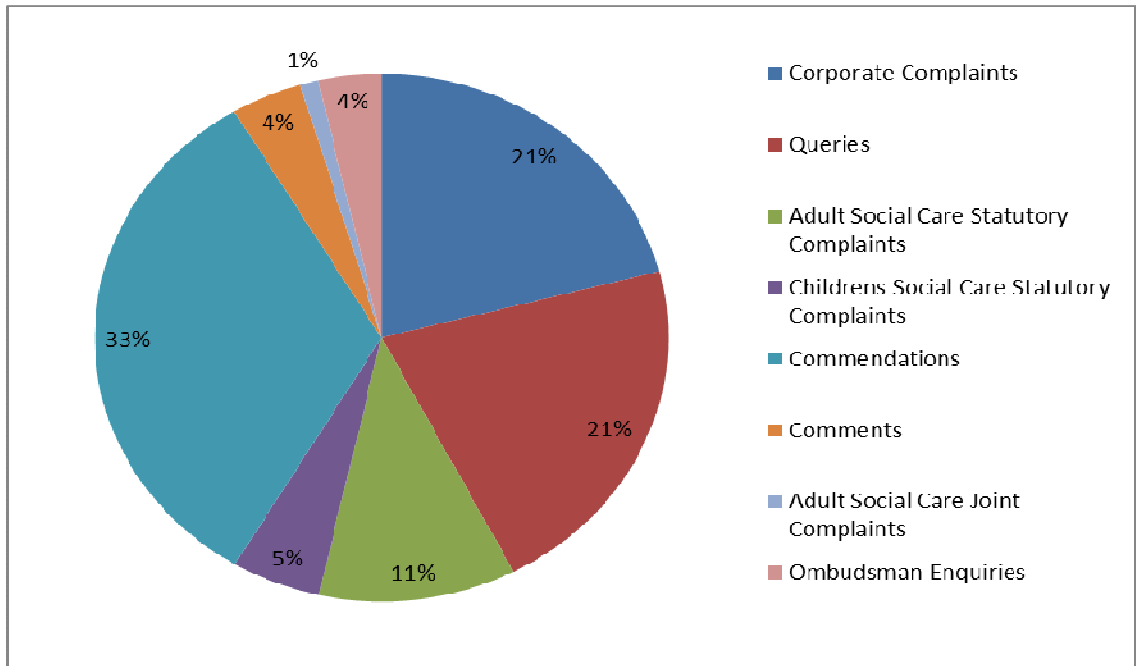
The Council has two other complaints processes – the statutory process for Adult Social Care and a similar statutory process for Children's Social Care. Both social care complaints processes are governed by statutory regulations and are not, therefore, considered within this report. These two processes are also managed by the Customer Relations Team and are subject to separate reports to the relevant directorates and scrutiny groups.

In addition, the team deals with a wide range of miscellaneous interactions with customers that do not go on to become formal complaints. These cases are managed as 'queries' but are often as complex and time-consuming as many formal complaints.

Finally, in liaison with the County Solicitor, the team also manages all complaints that are made to, or escalate to, the Local Government Ombudsman.

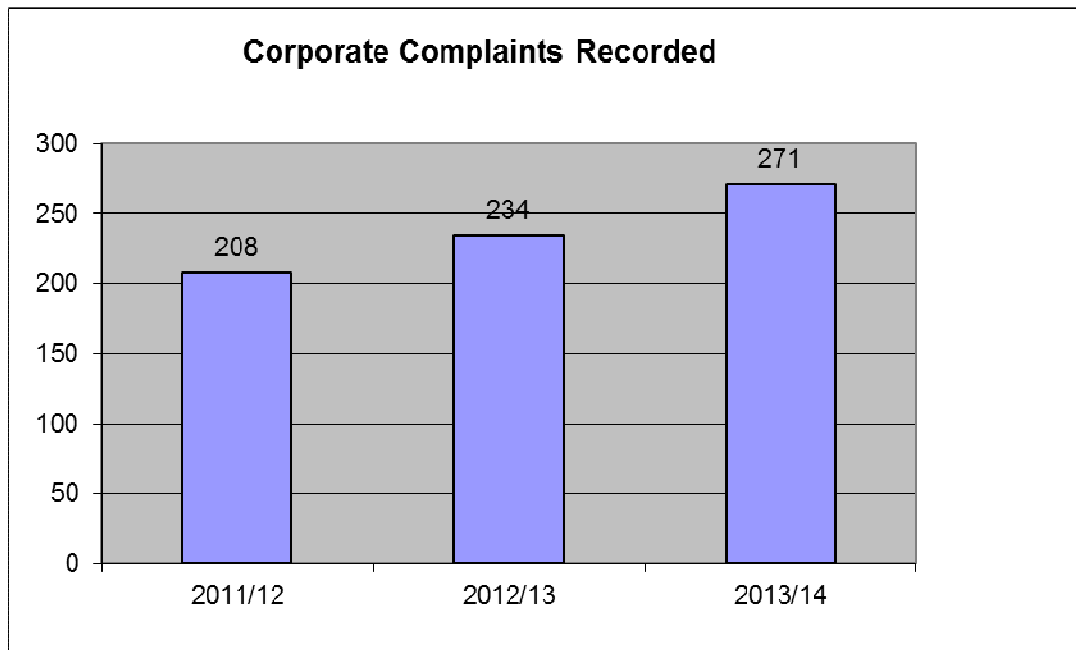
In total, therefore, the Customer Relations Team dealt with 1292 cases of various types during 2013/2014, as set out in the chart below.

The Customer Relations Team itself remains a small operation of 2 people – the Customer Relations Manager and a Complaints Officer.



2.2 Corporate Complaints summary

Table 1: Corporate Complaints recorded during 2013/2014



As illustrated above, the total number of corporate complaints received year-on-year has continued to grow. There has been a 30% increase since 2011/12. The possible reasons behind this increase are explored in more detail later in this report. It is clear, however, that there is a link between increasing complaints and a number of policy decisions that have been implemented across the Council during the year. With the increased

financial pressures being felt across departments it is, perhaps, inevitable that the number of complaints received will continue to increase.

Table 2a: Corporate Complaints by Department

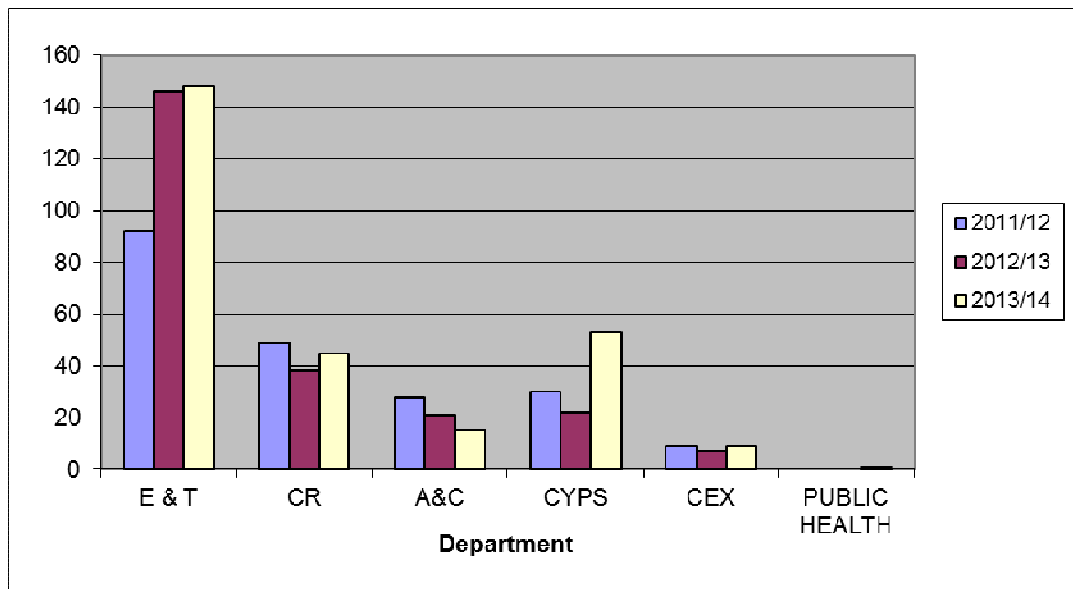
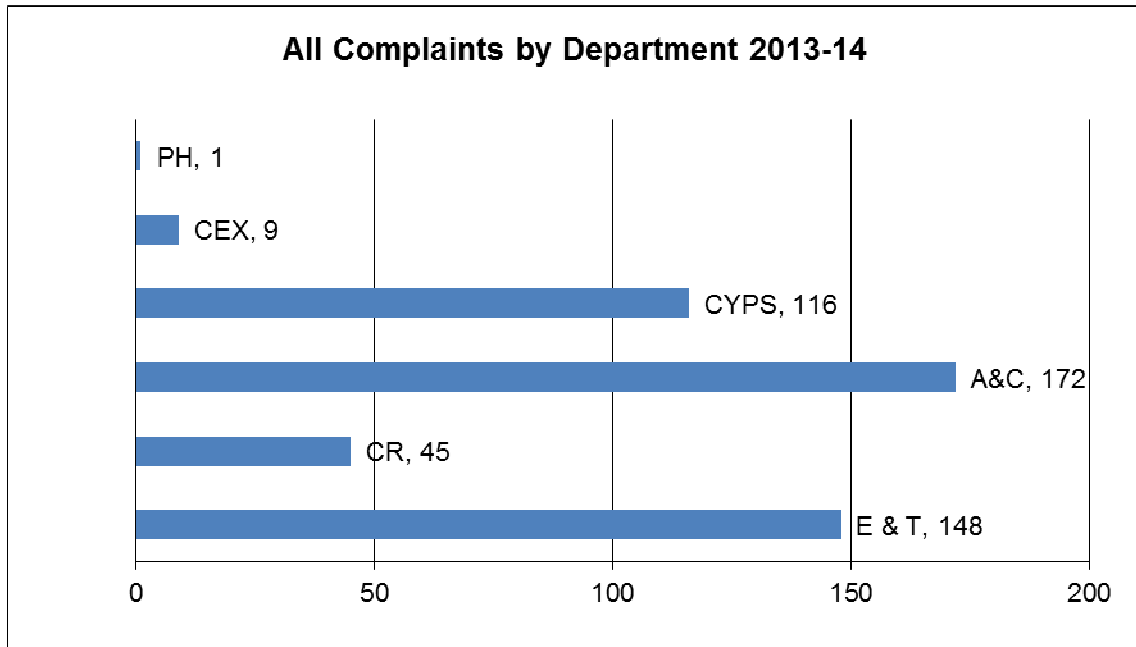


Table 2a shows the departmental breakdown of all corporate complaints received across the last 3 years.

As mentioned already, it is important to note that, for both Children and Young People (CYPS) and Adults and Communities (A & C), the bulk of their complaints relate to social care matters and, as such, are not presented here. With this in mind, it is unsurprising, therefore, that by far the largest number of corporate complaints relate to services delivered by the Environment & Transport Department, which has no separate statutory process.

To illustrate this better, Table 2b below shows the total volume of all complaints (both social care & corporate) by department and shows the big 3 customer facing departments to be quite closely aligned in terms of overall volume. Chief Execs, Public Health and to a lesser extent Corporate Resources do not have such significant external service provision and as such volumes are inevitably lower in these areas.

Table 2b – All complaints (statutory and non-statutory) by Department



For all departments except Adults and Communities there has been an increase in the number of corporate complaints recorded. The sharpest increase has been seen in the CYPS. However, this needs to be offset against greatly reduced numbers of social care complaints considered under the statutory framework¹. Some of the increase in CYPS volumes can, therefore, be attributed to an increased vigilance within the Customer Relations team around eligibility to the statutory complaints procedure (effectively, complaints that may previously have been received under the statutory social care complaints procedure are now being managed under the corporate – non statutory – procedure).

2.3 Queries

Increasingly the Customer Relations Team is positioning itself as a customer contact point for advice and help where things are going wrong. Often, some of these matters can be quickly and informally put right and, where this is the case, the intervention is not formally recorded as a complaint. However it is important that the nature of such interactions is still recorded.

During 2013-14, Customer Relations handled 278 such interactions which typically included -

¹ Statutory children's social care complaints reduced by 41% from 2012-13

- Advice and signposting to the correct body in jurisdiction
- Advice and referral to alternative procedures for redress, for example Appeals procedures
- Informal resolution by direct contact with departments
- On-going correspondence around complaints which have already been considered and responded to
- Responses to general queries on how to access services the Council provides
- Clarification of potential complaint matters including verification of eligibility to make a complaint.
- MP enquiries which fall outside of the scope of the complaints procedure

Sometimes, these queries are simple matters for the team to resolve. Others, however, can be extremely difficult cases; especially when managing expectations and where nothing more can be achieved through the complaints process.

Some key trends include -

- 76 cases (27% of the total volume) were referred to other organisations for consideration. The biggest segment here are District Councils accounting for 26 of the cases, Schools also feature prominently with 17 instances.
- 17 cases were re-directed to other internal procedures. The most common being Insurance claims against the Council (7) and Data Protection concerns (4).
- 13 complaints were re-opened by the Customer Relations Team as it was felt additional questions needed to be answered. Rather than new complaints these were handled as additional queries to existing complaints).

Wherever possible, the Customer Relations Team aims to resolve customer complaints and concerns without the need to escalate into the formal complaints process. This is good complaints handling practice with complaints being resolved as close to the point of origin as possible.

2.3 Corporate Complaints - Causes

Significant effort has been made this year to review every corporate complaint to understand the principal issue that led to it being made.

During 2013-14, a decision was taken to map complaints against the Council's Customer Service Standards (see Appendix B) which were launched in January 2014. As a key source of customer feedback, complaints often form an important part of evaluating how well the County Council is performing against these Standards. Table 3 below summarises these findings.

Table 3 – What were complaints about?



As can be seen from the table above, the issue most commonly raised is around the 'quality' of the Council's work. This is, however, a broad category ranging from not doing 'the basics' well enough (e.g. poor quality letters or not doing things we have promised), through to the thoroughness of a social care assessment or report. Examples under the heading "Quality" include -

- Taking more than one payment for a Blue Badge
- Perceived poor quality of tarmac used when carrying out highways works
- Failure to enclose a bus pass with a letter confirming successful application
- Driving standards of one of our contracted bus drivers

The next largest categories of complaint are 'Professional judgement/decision making and 'Keeping customers informed'.

Professional judgement relates directly to our promise within the Customer Service Standards to ensure our staff are appropriately trained. Essentially, complaints about decisions reached by county council officers are best illustrated by giving a few examples -

- Decision not to take any further action following a referral into the CYPS First Response team
- Decision that a highway defect did not meet the threshold for action

- Decision on type of transport provision for a child with special needs

It is re-assuring, however, to see that this category of complaint has the lowest level of complaints upheld - 15%. This suggests that, in the majority of cases, officers are making sound professional decisions.

Keeping customers informed and updated is a key principle of the new Customer Service Standards. It is clear, however, that this issue is a regular source of complaints. It is also worth noting that this category is the 2nd most likely to have complaints upheld - 77% - and, as such, remains an ongoing area for improvement for the Council.

The full breakdown of complaint causes and their respective outcome appears below.

Cause	Number	% Upheld (Partly or Fully)
Quality of our Work	61	59%
Professional Judgement / Decision making	26	15%
Keeping Informed / Updated	26	77%
Delays in providing services	25	68%
Our Policy	23	13%
Politeness, Openess and Honesty	23	52%
Accuracy / Clarity of Information	20	60%
Condition of our premises or infrastructure	16	62%
Accessibility of our services	10	50%
Our Fairness to you	10	40%
Sensitivity / Empathy of staff	10	50%
Multiple	9	78%
Collaborative Working	7	86%

2.4 Accessibility and equalities

64% of complainants did not declare any ethnicity data. Efforts are made to capture this information through the online complaint form and from departmental systems. It is recognised, however, that more can be done to capture this key data in future and this will be reviewed during the forthcoming year in conjunction with equalities colleagues in the Chief Executives Department.

From the data that has been collected, the vast majority of complainants describe themselves as White British - 87%. However, when set against the population of Leicestershire (i.e. 89% White British) this appears to be in line with local demography. The remaining 13 complainants are recorded as follows

- White Other / Irish 5
- Asian / Indian / Pakistani 6
- Mixed White / Asian 2

48% of complaints were raised by males and 52% by females, again in line with local demographics.

Just 7 complainants described themselves as Disabled.

Whilst caution needs to be taken, given the relatively low numbers completing equalities information, there are no apparent trends or evidence of any barriers to accessing the complaints service. However, this is an area that needs more robust recording and further, more detailed analysis during 2014-2015.

2.5 Commendations

128 commendations were recorded across all services (excluding social care) during 2013/14. This marks a further 25% increase on last year (101).

In particular, the Customer Service & Operations Branch within Corporate Resources has seen a large rise with 62 commendations coming for this area alone.

It is encouraging to again see greater visibility of the good work that is being delivered by the Council and an increasing number of managers passing compliments to the Customer Relations Team for formal recording. Increasing the number of commendations reported in this report has been an objective of the Customer Relations Team this year. It is, however, accepted that there is still much more that can be done and this will remain a key priority for the year ahead. Anecdotally, it seems there are many more commendations being made by the public, but not being reported formally.

A small selection of the commendations received can be found in Appendix A of this document.

The Customer Relations Team will continue to work closely with departments to try to reflect all the positive feedback received across the teams. Recently a new customer insight and customer satisfaction survey tool has been procured and efforts will be made to use this tool as a more efficient and more encompassing means of capturing the positive work being delivered.

2.6 Performance against timescales: How responsive have we been?

Table 4: Corporate Complaints Performance against timescales

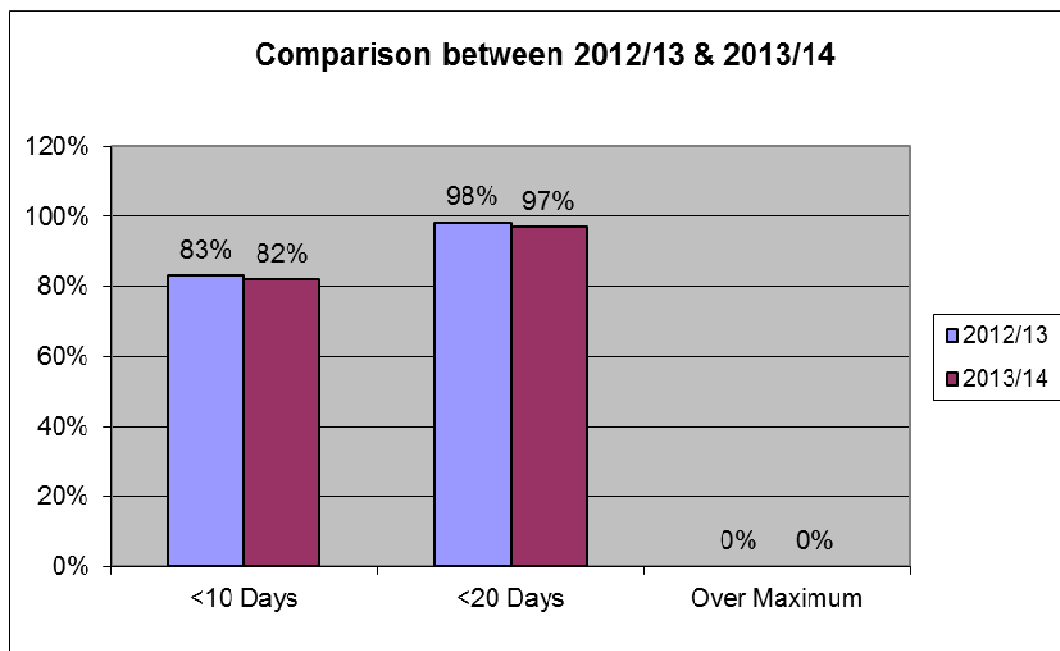


Table 4 above shows a summary of time taken to respond to complaints, providing a comparison between the current reporting year and the previous one.

The table shows almost identical performance against both a 20 working day timescale and our internal 'best practice' target of 10 working days.

For the second successive year, no complaints were recorded as being resolved outside of the maximum 60 working days. This continues the strong progress made since 2010-11 when an unacceptable 14 complaints exceeded this mark.

After sustained improvement across recent years it appears that the council may have plateaued and reached a position where performance is unlikely to be improved further.

Overall, performance continues to be pleasing and reflects the strong collaborative working between the Customer Relations Team and service managers and an on-going focus on the customer.

2.7 Complaints Outcomes & Resolutions

Table 5: Corporate complaints recorded by outcome.

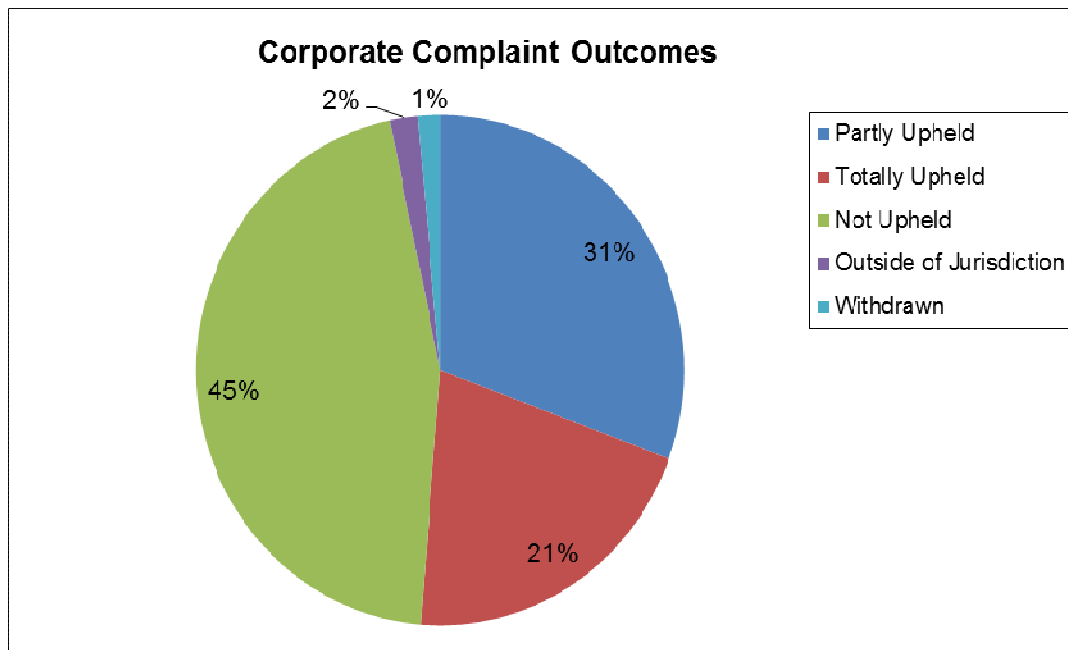


Table 5 above shows that 45% of complaints were not upheld following investigation. 21% were fully upheld, with a further 31% had some element of the complaint upheld (i.e. partially upheld).

The percentage of complaints upheld in some way has increased from the previous year. By contrast, the number being fully upheld is lower. This suggests an increased willingness by managers to accept and cede certain elements of fault. This is a positive cultural change with the emphasis being “what can we learn from the experience?” rather than “can we defend our position?”

An extra category has been added this year marked “Outside of Jurisdiction”. This reflects a small number of cases where, upon investigation, the responsibility for the complaint was found to lie with another organisation

2.8 Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

During the year 2013-14 the Local Government Ombudsman made 46 enquiries of the County Council with the following departmental breakdown

- Adults and Communities (includes social care) 18
- Children’s and Young Peoples (includes social care) 14
- Environment & Transport 7
- Corporate Resources 4
- Chief Executives 3

Of the 46 enquiries, 37 have been fully determined, with a further 9 still awaiting the Final Decision of the Ombudsman.

Of the 37, 5 were rejected by the Ombudsman as 'premature' complaints and referred back to the County Council to address. 1 complaint was withdrawn during the process.

For the remaining 31, the Ombudsman ruled as follows -

- 14 Investigation Completed and satisfied with proposed actions of the Council
- 8 Closed after initial enquires - no further action
- 6 Not in Jurisdiction and discretion not exercised
- 1 Not upheld – No maladministration
- 2 Upheld – Maladministration with injustice

Details of the 2 cases determined as "Maladministration with injustice" both relate to statutory social care cases. However, for completeness, the details are as follows -

1. Ms A was a foster carer. The Council had a number of concerns with her performance and these were reported to the fostering agency she worked for. She subsequently de-registered but cited the Council's reports as inaccurate and that we had not responded to her version of events. The Ombudsman found administrative fault that the Council had not forwarded her version of events to the fostering agency. The Council agreed to send her comments on and the complaint was settled on this basis.
2. Mrs B complained to the Ombudsman that the Council had not provided adequate notification that charges would be applied for care provided to her daughter. The Ombudsman took the view that, whilst there was evidence of verbal discussions, this was not sufficient and this should have been done formally in writing. The Council agreed to waive 3 months of charges which represented the period before adequate notification was provided.

In addition to the above, 10 Ombudsman complaints which were received before the period of this report (i.e. before April 1st 2013) were determined within the last 12 months. In 3 cases, maladministration was found as follows

3. 2 separate residents complained about the failure of the Council to take action against a Waste operator to control noise and dust. The Ombudsman found fault in delay (before the Council issued an enforcement notice) and asked the Council to pay £500 to each of the complainants.
4. The Council decided to remove funding for a 2nd support worker providing community care services. The Ombudsman found some fault in how the Council made this decision and asked the

Council to undertake a fresh assessment which the Council agreed to.

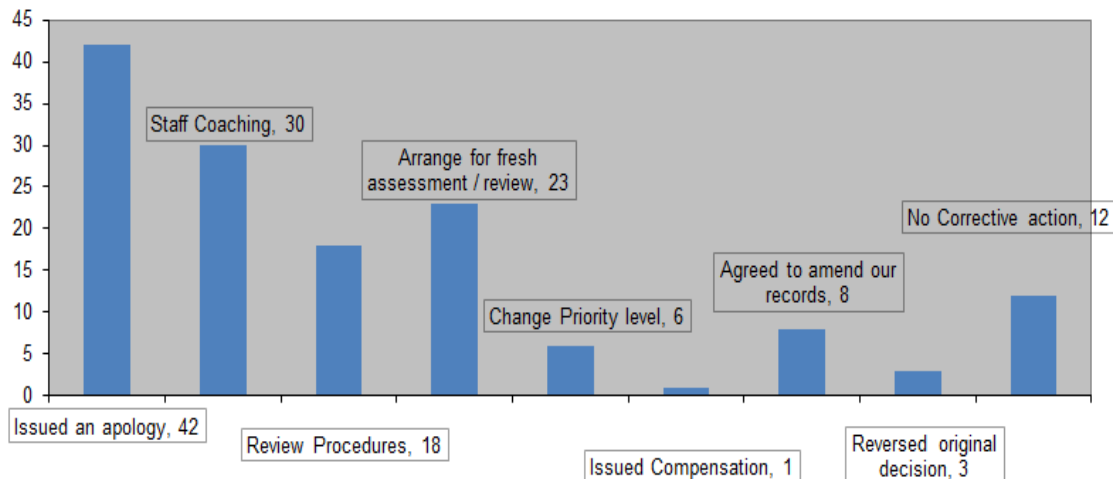
2.9 Learning from Complaints

All of the 143 complaints that were either partly or fully upheld have been reviewed by the Customer Relations Team to ascertain what action the relevant department has taken to learn from the complaints and avoid such issues occurring in the future.

Table 6 below provides a breakdown of the action taken.

In all cases an apology was issued. In 42 instances, this was seen as sufficient with no further action required.

Action Taken in response to upheld complaints



The most common additional action undertaken was staff re-training or coaching (30). Often this was done through direct supervision with the staff member concerned.

In 23 cases, a fresh review of the case was carried out by a different worker. In some instances, this led to different action being taken.

In 18 cases the Council agreed to review procedures to examine ways things could be done differently. Examples of this include -

- Agreement to review the Council's campaigns strategy in response to concerns about too many flyers being produced
- A full review of how the Fostering Team manage incoming enquiries
- A review as to how management of the Registrars car-park is undertaken

On 6 occasions a decision was made to change the priority level of a response – typically within Highways – in order to expedite more urgent remedial work.

Finally, on 3 occasions the investigating manager immediately reversed the original decision, finding fault with how the initial officer had considered the original enquiry.

Whilst it is encouraging to see that actions are being put in place following complaints, there is still a gap in the Customer Relations Team's visibility of the outcome of follow-up actions. This issue has been discussed with departmental representatives and it has been agreed to introduce a more robust mechanism for reporting follow-up actions. The new process will also require departments to maintain an 'actions log' with outcomes being fed back into the Customer Relations Team who will take on a compliance monitoring role.

3. Department by department commentary

3.1 Environment and Transport

The table below shows a monthly breakdown of complaints received within the Environment & Transport Department.

Apr-13	May-13	Jun-13	Jul-13	Aug-13	Sep-13	Oct-13	Nov-13	Dec-13	Jan-14	Feb-14	Mar-14
13	6	8	10	9	18	13	13	16	18	10	14

No major seasonal variances are apparent. However there was some increase though the autumn / winter period.

In addition to formal complaints, 87 informal queries were handled by the Customer Relations Team.

The bulk of the complaints were recorded against the department's Highways branch, with 90 corporate complaints for this area (61%)

44 Complaints were about Transport matters with a further 14 relating to Environment services.

On highways-related complaints, flooding and drainage featured prominently during 2012-13 (29) but, after a number of improvements were made during the 2013/14 year, the volume of these complaints dropped to just 7. It is encouraging to also note that 3 commendations were received about this service, testament to the range of improvements that have been made, including -

- Development of an Operational Control Room to oversee activities and prioritise where resources are deployed
- Giving the Customer Service Centre access to gulley clearance schedules

- Significant improvement to the efficiency of jetting vehicles.
- A drainage investigation vehicle was established, holding equipment such as gully diggers, drainage rods, CCTV camera system, low pressure jetting facility etc. This now enables a proactive approach to drainage issues, allowing inspection of drainage runs prior to any collapse
- LHO drainage works co-ordinator debriefing the CSC agents, clarifying the type of information required in order to ensure the best possible response to a flooding problem

All the above helped see large reductions in average response times for gully cleansing with a resultant reduction in complaints.

Grass cutting complaints remained the same as last year (5), whilst the mild winter led to an absence of any formal complaints about winter highways maintenance. Although the weather was undoubtedly a big factor, it is also pleasing to note the absence of any formal complaints regarding grit-bins – a significant issue in the 2 previous years.

Of the 90 highways complaints, roadwork co-ordination (10) and street lighting (11) again featured prominently as the 2 largest categories. Provision of timely information was a common theme sitting behind the roadwork complaints. However, it is recognised that utility companies often have a role to play, too.

Complaints which were fundamentally around policy matters have been included this year. The bulk of these were around the following topics -

1. Part-lighting programme (7)
2. Reduction in Waste Site opening hours (6)
3. Removal of discretionary elements of concessionary travel scheme (5)

The Environment and Transport department has performed strongly in terms of response timescales, with an average response time of just 6.86 working days, well below best practice target of 10 days.

Whilst there has been a number of much improved areas (as outlined above), it should be noted that only limited progress has been made around the key theme of 'Keeping customers updated' – another important commitment within the Council's Customer Service Standards. Whilst this is an area for improvement across the whole council, it is particularly relevant to the Highways area - 14 of the council's 26 complaints recorded against this theme arising from Highways. This was an issue identified last year and it, again, features prominently suggesting insufficient progress has been made. The Director of Environment and Transport has acknowledged this as a key issue for his department and has already begun a significant piece of work within the department to make the necessary sustainable improvements.

3.2 Children's and Young Peoples

As mentioned earlier, an increasing number of social care complaints are now being deemed out of scope for the statutory process and are now being handled under the corporate complaints procedure. This has inevitably increased the number of corporate complaints from last year.

33 of the department's 53 corporate complaints related to social care – an increase of 11 from the prior year. This distinction is important as the statutory children's complaints procedure grants additional stages to the complaints process and, potentially, increases costs to the department. An eligibility test is provided through DfE guidance and is used by the Customer Relations Team when making the assessment about which complaints process is most appropriate.

Typical reasons for social care complaints being handled under the corporate procedure are (i) complaints made by family members lacking parental responsibility or (ii) where the alleged impact is not on the child or young person. Complaints also revert back to the corporate process where no informed consent can be verified from a young person who has reached an age where they should rightly have a voice.

All of the above reflect 'tests' that the Ombudsman would use and have been introduced following attendance at an Ombudsman-led training event in March 2013.

Examples include -

- A complaint from a neighbour that the First Response team did not handle a safeguarding referral (made by her) sensitively.
- Complaint made by neighbours of one of the Council's children's residential homes regarding the behaviour of residents.
- Several complaints from prospective foster carers regarding their experience of the foster carer assessment process

Whilst these are all reasonable complaints requiring investigation, and even though they relate to social care services, they are most appropriately handled under the corporate complaints procedure.

2 CYPS complaints escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman during the year, with no suggestion from the Ombudsman that either should have been given access to the statutory complaints procedure. The Customer Relations Manager routinely works with departmental managers to advise on which procedure should be followed.

Aside from the social care area, complaints received have remained unchanged with no particular service area featuring disproportionately – the largest number related to the SEN (4) and Admissions (4). These are low

numbers considering the volume of work passing through these services and this should be regarded as positive.

The one area which has seen a rise in complaints is the Fostering and Adoption Service (7). There is no single theme behind this though keeping people updated and the sensitivity of staff appear as themes. A new Service Manager has been introduced to this area and a number of improvement plans are in place which should bring benefits during 2014-15.

3.3 Corporate Resources

Last year (2012-13) a significant number of complaints were made about car-parking facilities for visitors to County Hall.

Since the issue was reported in this report last year, there have been a number of improvements made with a huge (85%) reduction in complaints received. This is a good example of managers pro-actively using complaints data to target improvements. It also acts as a good 'case study' of how a positive attitude to complaints, and listening to customers, can be hugely beneficial. Actions taken included design changes to the car-park, a review of the security team and improved co-ordination of visitor activities

Following the improvements outlined above, the main source of complaints for Corporate Resources now comes from the Customer Service Centre with 32 complaints for this area. Given the tens of thousands of transactions that pass through the Centre each year, this is perhaps unsurprising. No clear themes are evident across the 32 complaints although 'getting the basics right' could be used to describe some customer concerns (e.g. accuracy and relevance of information being provided).

3.4 Adults and Communities

Again the majority of social care complaints have been considered under statutory regulations.

With just 15 complaints received within the Communities and Wellbeing section, this is one area that has bucked the trend with reducing, rather than increasing, numbers of complaints. Libraries have received 10 complaints during the year – however this is a reduction from 16 last year – so is not a major issue. Issues of customer concern ranged from a policy change on charging to the 'look and feel' of the premises following a refurbishment. There was no dominant theme, though politeness and helpfulness of staff was the topic most cited.

3 complaints were received for the Adult Learning Service. A meeting has been held to ensure the Customer Relations team has visibility of formal complaints which may see these numbers rise during the 2014-15 year.

3.5 Chief Executive's & Public Health

Both departments saw very low numbers of complaints from the public and do not warrant any additional analysis.

4. **Monitoring the Complaints and Commendations Processes**

The Customer Relations Team continues to support departments to both manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered by the team are:

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Production of Performance Reports
3. Liaison with Local Government Ombudsman
4. Quality Assurance of complaint responses
5. Complaint handling training for managers
6. Scrutiny and challenge to complaint responses
7. Support with persistent and unreasonable complainants

During this reporting period, a number of complaints handling workshops have been run for social care managers but none for other groups of managers. The Customer Relations Team is keen to promote this service over the next 12 months.

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to managers in drafting comprehensive responses to complaint investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response and that due process is followed.

Quarterly complaints reports are produced and presented to Departmental Management Teams (DMT) as appropriate. The Customer Relations Manager also regularly meets quarterly with each department's Intelligent Client to talk through complaints matters.

During the year of this report, the Customer Relations Manager used the Council's Vexatious Complainant Policy on 2 occasions, implementing restricted communications protocols. This has proved an effective way of managing difficult and complex complaints.

One important development this year has been the establishment of departmental monitoring of upheld complaints. This adds an extra layer of monitoring and places ownership on departments to ensure that, where complaints are upheld, actions agreed have been fully carried out and also that learning is channelled back into departmental plans.

4.1 How do customers feel about the complaints process?

Following an internal review, a new feedback process was introduced to establish, after a complaint has been finalised, how the complainant felt about the Council's handling of their issues. This is now routinely sent each month

to complainants who have had their issue resolved during the previous 4/5 weeks.

In common with other local authorities, the County Council historically struggles to generate constructive feedback from complainants about the Council's complaints handling processes. As such, questions were re-formatted recently to try to help the complainant separate in their mind the overall outcome of their complaint (which may not have been favourable) from the way in which the council handled their complaint. This has generated mixed results so far and work continues to try to increase the uptake.



Between November 2013 and March 2014, 21 surveys were completed by complainants². The key results appear below along with some of the feedback given.

Inevitably, it is not always possible to deliver the desired outcomes of all complaints, however if we are not able to, it should be very clearly explained to you the reasons why. With this in mind, please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the response we sent to you after investigating your complaint?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very satisfied		23.81%	5
2	Fairly satisfied		14.29%	3
3	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied		14.29%	3
4	Fairly dissatisfied		28.57%	6
5	Very dissatisfied		19.05%	4
			Answered	21
			Skipped	






Informed you in a helpful way of how your complaint was going to be looked in to and who would be investigating it			Percent	Total
1	Strongly agree		28.57%	6
2	Tend to agree		33.33%	7
3	Neither agree or disagree		14.29%	3
4	Tend to disagree		9.52%	2
5	Strongly disagree		14.29%	3
			Answered	21






Gave you clear timescales for when you should expect a response			Percent	Total
1	Strongly agree		14.29%	3
2	Tend to agree		33.33%	7
3	Neither agree or disagree		23.81%	5



² Circa 10% of overall complainants




Gave you clear timescales for when you should expect a response			Percent	Total
4	Tend to disagree		14.29%	3
5	Strongly disagree		14.29%	3
			Answered	21





Used clear, easy to understand language when writing to you.			Percent	Total
1	Strongly agree		28.57%	6
2	Tend to agree		42.86%	9
3	Neither agree or disagree		23.81%	5
4	Tend to disagree		4.76%	1
5	Strongly disagree		0.00%	0
			Answered	21

Kept you informed about the progress of your complaint			Percent	Total
1	Strongly agree		23.81%	5
2	Tend to agree		14.29%	3
3	Neither agree or disagree		38.10%	8
4	Tend to disagree		14.29%	3
5	Strongly disagree		9.52%	2
			answered	21

Explained clearly the appropriate route to follow if your complaint could either not be considered or you wished to escalate the matter further			Percent	Total
1	Strongly agree		14.29%	3
2	Tend to agree		9.52%	2
3	Neither agree or disagree		47.62%	10
4	Tend to disagree		14.29%	3
5	Strongly disagree		14.29%	3
			answered	21

Responded promptly and appropriately to your concerns			Percent	Total
1	Strongly agree		28.57%	6
2	Tend to agree		23.81%	5

Responded promptly and appropriately to your concerns			Percent	Total
3	Neither agree or disagree		28.57%	6
4	Tend to disagree		4.76%	1
5	Strongly disagree		14.29%	3
			answered	21

Would you agree that your complaint was taken seriously and was handled in a personal manner?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly agree		28.57%	6
2	Tend to Agree		28.57%	6
3	Neither Agree nor disagree		9.52%	2
4	Tend to disagree		14.29%	3
5	Strongly disagree		19.05%	4
			answered	21
			skipped	0

What can be learnt from what complainants have told us? Whilst some caution needs to be exercised, given the relatively low volume of respondents, it is encouraging to note that 57% believe that their complaint was handled in a personal manner – traditionally a much criticised aspect of complaints handling.

Equally pleasing is that 71% of respondents felt that our response was easy to understand and that plain language was used.

Disappointingly only 23% felt that a clear escalation route was given. This will be picked up with departments in order to ensure improvements are made. The 'model approach' is to signpost back to the Customer Relations Team who can then look at the most appropriate route to progress the matter.

Below are samples of the comments left by survey respondents, both positive and negative -

"No complaint about how Customer Relations dealt with the matter. My beef is that Highways has made a meal of a simple job so much so as to create the sense of contempt"

"I did not feel the apology was sincere as it came from the investigating officer. I will only appreciate any potential improvements when i experience them."

“Generally think the complaints system is working better than most things at the LA and have recommended it to others who are struggling to get reasonable service from the LA.”

“Complaint handling was very good. The actual complaint still stands.”

“Responded in a reasonable time and answered on the specific situation”

“No outcome to the complaint. Appeared as if there was a lack of empowerment with people concerned”

5. Customer Relations Team - Work Priorities for 2014-15

During 2014/15, the Customer Relations team will focus on a number of key priorities, as follows:

- Production of a Customer Feedback Framework which sets out principles for departments to adopt and ensure we commit to the feedback promises set out in the Council’s new Customer Service Standards.
- Introduction of a mechanism to monitor and evidentially audit that actions agreed, as part of a complaint response, have been carried out.
- Continuing to promote complaints training and explore opportunities to position this within the wider corporate learning and development agenda.
- Ensuring more equalities data is collected and that more robust analysis of this data takes place. The Customer Relations Manager will undertake a full Equalities and Human Rights Assessment of the Complaints process to ensure all key equalities angles are covered.
- Maintaining the Council’s strong track record of timely complaint responses.

6. Key Learning Points

The Customer Relations Team would specifically highlight 3 key themes which have emerged from this year's annual report process -

- Using complaints as an opportunity to improve

There have been good examples this year where departments have grasped the nettle and taken direct action in response to recurring complaints from the previous year. The actions taken to bring about improvements to gulley cleansing and parking at County Hall act as good case studies of responding positively to customer feedback. Departmental Managers are asked to continue to focus on emerging themes from this year's report and work on improving in these areas.

Culturally, complaints must be viewed as positive feedback, upon which continuous improvement can be built.

- Keeping customers informed

This remains a key theme where improvement can be made. Often, complaints can be avoided by simply informing customers as to the likely timescales a service can take. A Feedback Framework (see 5 above) will help assist with leveraging improvements in this vital area.

- Being open and honest around the rationale behind decisions made

There are several examples whereby perfectly reasonable decisions have been made by Council Officers, but the reasoning behind this has not been explained to the customer. This can then breed resentment and mistrust. Departments are asked to ensure that a culture of openness is actively promoted in their areas.

The Customer Relations Team believes that improvements in these 3 areas alone would substantially reduce the number of complaints received as well as fulfilling some of the key promises to customers within the Council's Customer Service Standards. In essence, this is all about a renewed focus on getting the basics right and this will be the focus during 2014/2015.

7. Concluding Comments

It is clear that the on-going fiscal climate, demanding financial constraints and necessary policy changes are starting to impact on the numbers of complaints being received. This is clearly evidenced, for example, by the number of complaints attributed to policy matters such as part street-lighting and the reduced opening hours of waste sites.

On the positive side, it is noteworthy that there is also clear evidence that, where complaint themes have emerged, action has been taken by some

departments to address these. This is directly evidenced by the improvements made to last year's highly featured topics such as flooding/drainage and car-parking facilities at County Hall.

The Customer Relations Team continues to receive strong support and commitment from Service Managers and Heads of Service, evidenced, once again, by the excellent response timescales achieved across all services.

APPENDIX A – Sample of commendations received

- Thanks for the assistance in arranging our conference at Beaumanor Hall...we'll definitely be back
- Mrs A phoned to thank R for his excellent service in relation to her road leak. She said STW came out a day after the issue was reported to STW. She was very pleased with you indeed
- A compliment for S and Ds for the excellent service we gave him when he had problems with his Blue Badge application. He was particularly impressed with our kindness and helpfulness, but also with the speed and efficiency with which D arranged for the badge to be issued
- My sincerest and complete thanks for the hard work carried out to remove the travellers from Radmoor Road...impressed by the sheer speed all the agencies responded to the challenge and the sense of calm exerted over the situation
- Mrs Smith rang in to say a big thank you to Customer Relations team for so promptly resolving her issues. It helps so much when you feel that somebody, "out there" is bothered about our plight.
- Dealing with your man whose name I think was A, I was surprised and delighted to get such an affable, polite and extremely helpful response
- I do wish to record my gratitude to library staff; the librarian was cheerful and unfailingly helpful and the facility itself is one where local people are not only able to browse, but socialise in an atmosphere which is both friendly and focused on an interest in reading...With so much current debate on "cost-cutting" and accountability, my experience was a reminder of the true value of such services
- I would like to take this opportunity to thank C for the recent advice, time and information which Chris provided (SEN)...the advice, guidance and information he provided was first class...I was heartened to meet someone with such an extensive overview of the reforms
- I have utter admiration for A and Sure Start services. A really changed my view of the social care sector. Every concern I raised she looked at strategies and ways to help me...she really is an amazing person. She's restored my confidence as a mother and person.
- I would just like to highlight to you how impressed I am with the service I have received from M, your School Admissions Team Leader. Over the last month my opinion of the service has changed dramatically, for the better....I feel M has gone above and beyond the call of his duties and has, often on a daily basis, relieved my anxieties and provided a knowledgeable and kind approach to our situation

- Just moved from North Warwickshire where recycle centres have limited opening hours, difficult recycling systems and difficult to find information. Recent visit to Barwell recycling: very helpful staff, great opening hours for working people....better here!"
- Thank you to the team for the recent resurfacing work (Old Dalby). So many residents of the village have also asked me to pass on their 'Thank you' to the team for keeping the locals informed of the work & for the team being so patient with them and in general for being so helpful...All in all the work wonderfully received by the residents with satisfaction at a high, plus a great relation built between LCC Highways and Old Dalby
- The new paving and build out in Lutterworth is fantastic and we have received very positive reports. I would like to pass on the Town Council's sincere thanks for the works undertaken and the professionalism of the workmen
- I used to live in Leicestershire but a couple of years ago moved over the border into Northants! Oh, the roads here are dire!!!!!! It's a pity that they don't look to you to improve their roads. It's a pity the government don't have a 'Road Maintenance Award'. I would vote for you and your team every time. Well done
- We would like to thank J for all his advice and support in making our school a safe and place to travel to. He has at all times been professional, courteous and enthusiastic. Our school would not be as safe as it is without his help in developing and implementing our Travel plan. Many thanks

APPENDIX B – Customer Service Standards (April 2014)

Our new customer service standards are available below



LCC-CustomerServiceStandards2.pdf