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COMPLAINTS SERVICE REPORT

2013/14 & 2014/15



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COMPLAINTS SERVICE REPORT

APRIL 2013– MARCH 2015

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Authority's complaints services for the last 2 years between April 2013 and March 2015. It covers complaints under the Children Act 1989 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, which are often referred to together as the 'social services' procedures. It also includes other 'corporate complaints' about other services provided by the Authority, and Complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and Housing Ombudsman (HO).

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

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

Executive Summary

The number of complaints continues to be very low compared to the millions of transactions the Authority has with its 202,200 residents and a substantial number of visitors every year. The overall number of formal complaints to the Authority increased by 23% from 602 in 2012-13 to 740 in 2013-14 and a further increase by 17% in 2014-15 with a total number of complaints of 864. This is a significant increase, however this was due to greater numbers of complaints in several service areas between 2012-13 and 2014-15, such as Benefits, Council Tax and Customer Services from 30 to 127 complaints; Housing increase from 112 to 173 complaints; Kier NT saw an increase from 209 to 244 in 2013-14, but complaints went down to 210 in 2014-15.

Complaint leaflets are widely available in the Authority's buildings and to download from the Authority's website. It is also now very easy for our customers to contact us online. Satisfaction surveys are now issued to all complainants following the closure of their complaint, regardless of the complaint outcome. During 2013-15 a survey of complainants showed 71% of complainants overall were happy with the complaints process. Appendix 3 provides a full breakdown of the survey results.

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

In keeping with the principle of resolving problems as quickly as possible, the proportion of Corporate complaints resolved at Stage 1 remains high at 84% (2013-14) and 83% (2014-15) and 97% for children Social care complaints in 2013-14. Adult Social Care complaints have a one stage process and if the complainant remains dissatisfied they may complain to the LGO, resulting in all such complaints being resolved at Stage 1 of the Statutory complaints procedure.

The Local Government Ombudsman found one case of maladministration with injustice against the Council. However the fault found had already been identified through the corporate complaints procedure and a suitable remedy identified and offered to the complainant. The LGO have changed the way such complaints are recorded and historically this would have been classified as a Local Settlement.

Procedures

Overview

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

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

Corporate Complaints (see Appendix 1)

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

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

Children Social Care Complaints (see Appendix 2)

In Children Social Care cases, the statutory complaints process is governed by the Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006. Stage 1 should be

responded to within 10 working days and can be extended to 20 working days; at Stage 2 the response is due within 25 working days and may be extended to 65 working days for complex complaints with the complainant's approval; and Stage 3 the complaint is referred to an Independent Review Panel.

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

Children Social Care staff ensure that all children, of an understanding age, who are new to the care system are in receipt of a complaints leaflet which is specific to young people.

Adult Social Care Complaints

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

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

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

How to make a complaint

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

- By talking to the staff involved, to let them try to sort the problem out;
- by writing to or telephoning the relevant service department, or the Customer & Member Liaison Office in Quadrant either in writing or by email.

Write to: Customer & Member Liaison Office

Quadrant

The Silverlink North

Cobalt Business Park

North Tyneside

NE27 0BY

tel. 0191 643 2280

Email: customerliaisonoffice@northtyneside.gov.uk

- A complaint form is available on line at:

- be www.northtyneside.gov.uk/complaints
- by personal visit to any of the Council's Customer First Centres,
- by telephoning the Council's Contact Centre on 0345 2000 101.

Help and support

The Customer & Member Liaison Office (CMLO) is independent of service departments and offers information, advice and help to complainants and staff responding to complaints. Its primary role is to ensure all complaints are looked into properly and any lessons learnt are adopted. The team also provides a comprehensive support service to the Authority's Councillors and this includes processing in the region of 8,000 enquiries per annum on behalf of the Members and residents.

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

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

Who can make a complaint?

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

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

Limited exclusions do apply:-

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

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

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

External review

Local Government & Housing Ombudsman (LGO & HO)

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

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

The LGO Advice Team can be contacted on:

Tel: 0300 061 0614 Fax: 024 7682 0001 Text ‘call back’ to **0762 481 1595**

at: www.lgo.org.uk

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

The HO Advice Team can be contacted on:

Tel : 0300 111 3000 Fax : 020 7831 1942 Email : info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman Service, 81 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4HN

Leaflets and information about the LGO are available at all main offices of the Authority and in a variety of formats. Operational liaison with the LGO & HO is provided by the Customer & Member Liaison Office.

In their Annual Letter for 2013-14 the LGO indicated that in total 56 complaints about North Tyneside Council had been received during the year. The HO do not provide an annual report currently, although regionally Complaints Managers have advised the HO that they would find this useful. The Authority has recorded that 42 complaints were received from the LGO & HO combined during the period, 10 of which were classified as premature and dealt with through the appropriate complaints procedure by the Authority. The information for 2014-15 is not available at the time of writing this report.

Between 2013-14 and 2014-15, of the 77 complaints received from the LGO & HO 18 were outside of their jurisdiction, on 20 occasions they exercised their general discretion not to pursue, 13 were classified as premature and referred to the Authority to investigate. Of the remaining 26 they found evidence of maladministration in relation to one complaint.

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

Complaints referred to the LGO in Tyne and Wear		
	2012/13	2013/14
Gateshead	38	64
Newcastle upon Tyne	36	58
North Tyneside	31	56
South Tyneside	34	49
Sunderland	39	59
Total	178	286

Care Quality Commission

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

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

OFSTED

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

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

Management and Operation

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

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

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

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

Performance Indicators

A report on the overall performance of the complaints service is submitted to the Authority's Senior Leadership Team on a monthly basis and to the Authority's Appeals and Complaints Committee on an annual basis.

There are currently no national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for complaints against Local Authorities.

The Complaints Service carry out an in-house survey of people who have used the complaints process. Returns are summarised in Appendix 3. These show that 56% of respondents said they found it easy to find information about the complaints process; 64% were happy with the time taken to respond to complaints; 71% thought the process was good and 52% were satisfied with the outcome.

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

%	O.N.S.	NTC	%	O.N.S.	NTC
Gender			Ethnic Origin		
Female	51.7	55	Asian	1.9	1
Male	48.3	43	Black	0.5	1
Declined		2	Other Ethnic	0.5	-
Age			Mixed	0.8	2
Under 18	22.31	1	White British	94.4	92
18-25	5.89	4	Other White	1.9	3
26-35	12.89	12	Declined	-	1
36-45	14.00	14	Religion		
46-55	14.55	20	Christian	63.8	55
56-65	12.84	21	Hindu	0.3	0.5
66-75	8.81	19	Buddhist	0.2	-
Over 75	8.71	6	Muslim	0.7	0.5
Declined	-	3	Sikh	0.2	-
With a disability			Other	0.3	5
Yes	-	34	None	28.1	26
No	-	58	Declined	6.4	13
Not given	-	8			

Numbers and analysis of complaints

The number of complaints for 2013-15, together with previous years for comparison, is shown in the Tables at the end of this report.

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

The total complaints related activity is set out in Table 1. Low level complaints have decreased year on year since 2012-13. However formal Corporate complaints have increased by 44% from 535 to 772, Social Care complaints increased by 37% during the 2 year period.

Corporate complaints resolved at Stage 1 remained high at between 83% and 84% and 100% of Children Social Care complaints were resolved at Stage 1 during 2013-14. This reflects the value of the training provided over the last few years by Customer & Member Liaison Staff and the LGO in Effective Complaint Handling and the commitment of Managers and Supervisors to resolve complaints at an early stage.

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

Brief Summary	Lessons Learned
Strap failed on child safety seat in Leisure Centre	All seats are now physically checked on a regular basis. Seat concerned was immediately removed and returned to the manufacturer for checking.
Length of time taken to complete a repair	A process change has been introduced to track stock requests from order and to chase up in a timely way.
Delay in roof repairs.	Kier NT have acquired a mobile elevated working platform to address backlog in roof repairs, this equipment can be used in some circumstances without the need for the installation of scaffolding.
Charge for missed class at leisure centre due to bus not turning up.	Cancellation policy changed from 48 hours to 1 hour.
Complaint from private landlord regarding processing of benefits payments to tenants.	Identified a need to review the results of the benefit pilot at regular intervals which involves analysis of the data.
School dinner payments.	Council launched an on-line system for school meals parents and guardian can check meals taken and the current balance on the account they can also pay on-line. The system is called Joinos and it

	can be accessed by going to the website www.joinos.com .
Delay in issue of replacement Blue Badge for disabled driver.	All applicants issued with a reminder letter to allow time to process the application for a new badge.

Future Developments

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Background

Statistics

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

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

1. Overall number of complaints across the Authority

The volume of formal complaint related activity for the period April 2011 to March 2015 is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Social Services Complaints	64	67	81	92
Corporate Complaints	590	535	659	772
Total	654	602	740	864
Local Government & Housing Ombudsman complaints received by NTC	30	39	42	35
Formal total	684	641	782	899
Pre-Complaint and general enquiries dealt with by the Customer Liaison Office.	1,165	944	889	814
Total complaint related activity	1,849	1,585	1,671	1,713

Table 1a

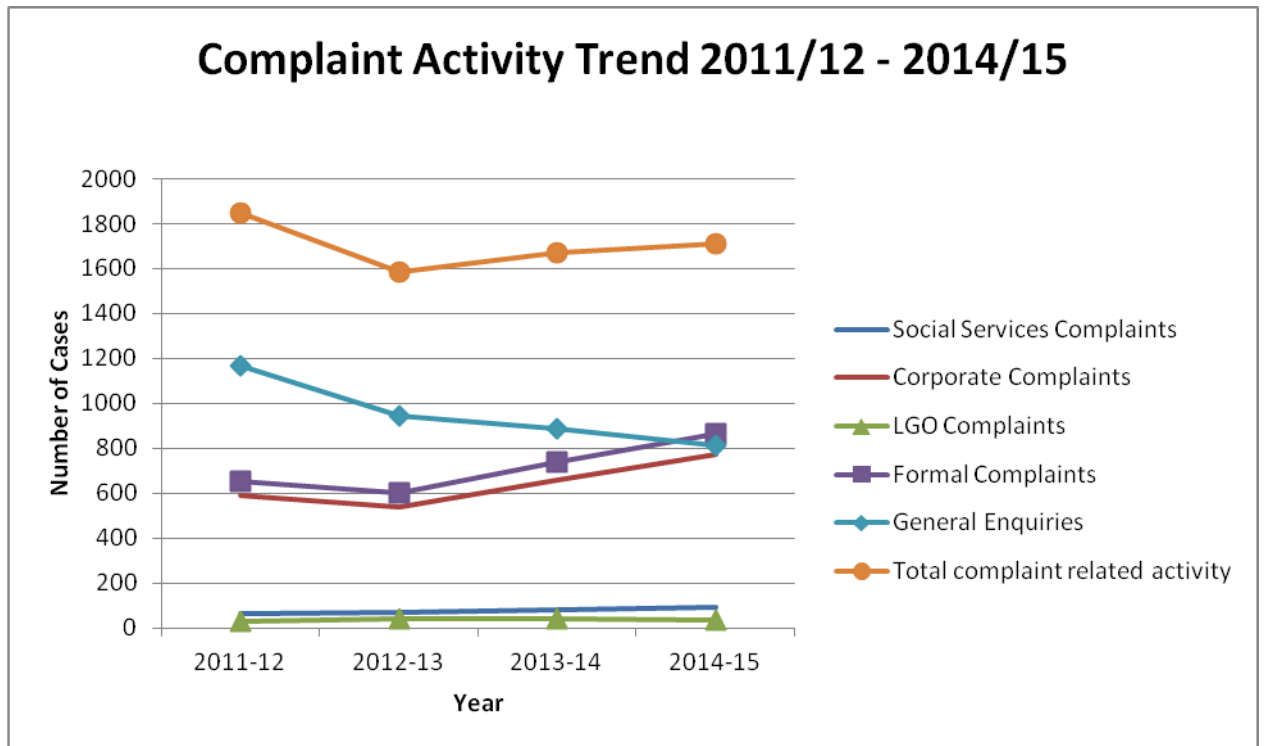


Table 1b – Percentage split by category of all formal complaints to the Council both Corporate and Social Care for 2013-14

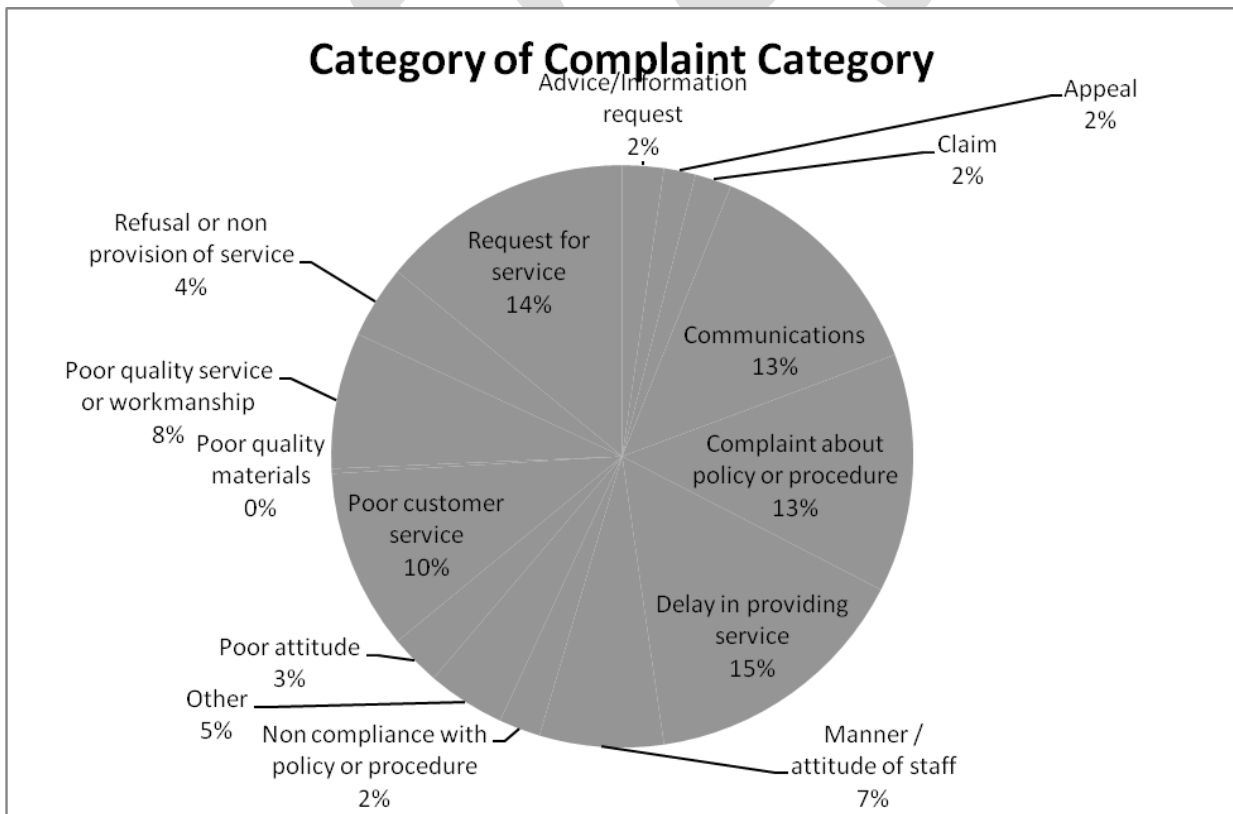
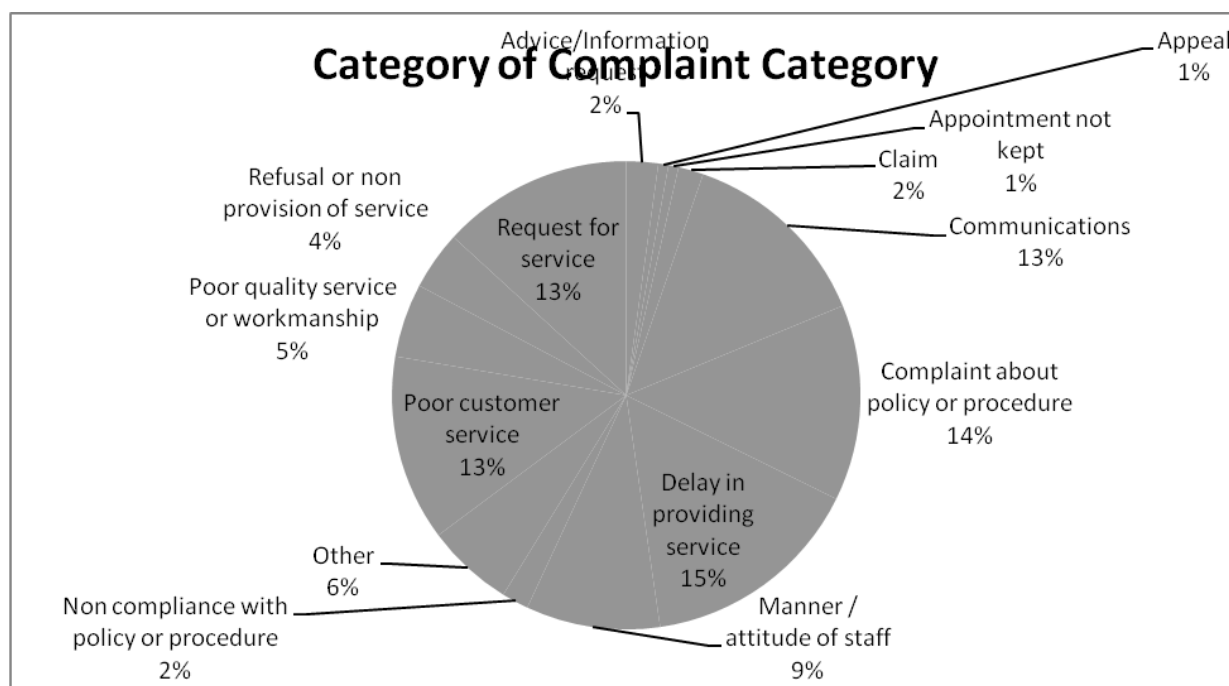


Table 1c – Percentage split by category of all formal complaints to the Council both Corporate and Social Care for 2014-15



There has been a 14% decrease between 2012/13 and 2014/15 in the number of pre-complaint and general enquiries dealt with by the Customer & Member Liaison Office (CMLO). The CMLO continue to make sure that as many enquiries as possible are directed to the most appropriate service at the first point of contact. This will ensure customers are given more responsive replies and reduce the inefficiencies inherent in redirection of enquiries within the Authority. All enquiries received by email into the CMLO are acknowledged by email, the majority on the same working day. The customer is also notified of who their enquiry has been sent to and that they should expect a response direct. Enquirers by telephone or letter are posted a receipt setting out the same information.

2. Social Services Complaints

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

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Children & Families Services	32	37	38	46
Adult Services	32	30	43	46
TOTAL	64	67	81	92

There has been an increase of complaints about Social Care Services overall by 37% during the last 2 years, however numbers remain very low.

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

Table 3 Children & Families Services Categories	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Adoption / Fostering / LAC	8	13	8	20
Safeguarding	11	9	12	11
Child Protection	2	5	2	0
Front Door	9	10	14	9
Commissioning & Investment	0	0	2	4
Other	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	32	37	39	46

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

In the child protection system users may feel they have little power to make a complaint and this is acknowledged. To capture issues of user concern the review process and other meetings are forums in which matters which are of worry to the user can be tackled. In this way the user's view can be heard and services influenced. In addition to the numbers reported above there were 27 complaints about CYPL dealt with under the Corporate Complaints procedure.

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

Table 4 Adult Services Categories	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Finance and Administration	2	1	6	3
Service Provision	4	0	0	0
Home Care / Residential	0	5	11	8
Community Assessment & Support	12	7	0	0
Social Work	14	10	23	24
Learning Disability & Mental Health	0	5	3	8
Other	0	2	0	3
TOTAL	32	30	43	46

In addition to the numbers reported above there were 27 complaints about Adult Services dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Procedure during 2013-14 and 2014-15.

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

Table 5 - Children Social Care complaint outcomes	2011-12 %	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %
Not Upheld	69	57	55	50
Upheld in Full	6	0	3	7
Upheld in Part	25	38	39	24
Ongoing	0	5	3	19

Table 6 - Adult Social Care complaint outcomes	2011-12 %	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %
Not Upheld	53	53	30	39
Upheld in Full	10	17	7	2
Upheld in Part	34	30	60	41
Ongoing	3	0	3	8

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

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

Table 7 – Children’s Social Services complaints resolved at stage:	2011-12 %	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %
One	94	92	97	76
Two	0	3	0	4
Three	0	0	0	0
Ongoing	6	5	3	20

3. Corporate Complaints

Table 8, below, shows a breakdown of corporate complaints received from 2011-12 for comparison purposes.

Table 8 – Corporate Complaints					
Department	Service Area	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Chief Exec & Financial Services	Claims & Insurance	1	-	2	1
	Law & Governance	2	5	6	15
	Other (inc Street Lighting)	5	4	1	9
	Total	8	9	9	25
Revs, Bens & Customer Services	Benefits	31	13	32	55
	Council Tax	8	7	20	41
	Customer Services	18	10	19	31
	Total	57	30	71	127
Adult Social Care	Transport/Other	2	6	7	13
	Financial Services	5	3	5	2
	Total	7	9	12	15
Children, Young People & Learning	Children Services	5	13	4	7
	Education	5	7	6	10
	Total	10	20	10	17

ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE AND HOUSING:					
Department	Service Area	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Leisure	Indoor Sports & Leisure	9	3	16	13
	Cultural Services Other	3	8	2	8
	Other	1	3	-	-
	Total	13	14	18	21
Environment	Parking	15	17	19	20
	Planning	6	12	19	19
	Highways	13	15	28	41
	Environmental Health	5	6	7	5
	Other	7	20	4	2
	Taxi Licensing	0	2	-	-
	Property	1	3	7	4
	Cleansing Management	37	3	-	8
	Biodiversity	3	-	-	-
	Vermin/Pest Control	1	3	5	5
	Litter/Enforcement/Fly-tipping	1	3	9	9
	Waste Management	15	15	11	20
	Grounds Maintenance	6	1	4	19
	Sea Front Management		-	-	-
	Recycling/Wheeled Bins/Special Collections	12	20	21	20
	Trees/Shrubs	3	6	7	8
	Winter Maintenance	1	2	-	-
	Cemeteries	0	3	1	2
	Total	127	131	142	182
	Housing	Debt Recovery	11	7	17
Day-to-day Repairs		27	20	18	13
Allocations/Letting		19	13	20	27
Housing Estates		26	45	60	73
Empty Homes /Voids		8	8	9	7
Gas Services		5	1	1	-
Homelessness / Advice		6	4	9	15
Housing Investment		9	6	4	8
Safer Estates		4	4	6	3
Leasehold		-	-	2	2
Other		6	4	6	10
Total	121	112	152	173	
Kier North Tyneside	Aids & Adaptations	2	-	-	-
	Day-to-day Repairs	188	159	162	156
	Gas Services	46	26	38	24
	Housing Investment	8	17	21	16
	Empty Homes / Voids	1	7	23	14
	Total	245	209	244	210

Business & Economic Development	Business & Economic Development	2	1	1	2
	Grand Total	590	535	659	772

The number of Corporate Complaints increased by 23% from 535 in 2012-13 to 659 in 2013-14 and increased by a further 17% from 659 to 772 in 2014-15.

Revenue, Benefits and Customer Services Complaints:

The Revenue and Benefit Service has seen an increase in complaints from 2012-13 to 2013-14 and a further increase in 2014-15. In 2014-15 complaints regarding Council Tax rose to 41. To put this in perspective there are 95,000 Council Tax payers in North Tyneside. The increase in complaints were particularly in relation to having a Council Tax liability for the first time due to changes brought about by the Welfare Reform Act.

In the Benefits area complaints rose to 55 in 2014-15. Analysis shows that 30 of these complaints were due to a delay in new benefit applications being processed. This has now been addressed and all new applications for benefit are dealt with promptly.

Customer Services complaints rose to 31 in 2014-15. This equates to 1 complaint for every 13,500 contacts handled by the Customer Service Team. However it was concerning to note that the majority of these complaints was down to poor customer service and/or manner or attitude of staff. This has resulted in the implementation of a new quality monitoring framework. Training issues and delivery sessions including guidance notes have been rolled out across Customer Services.

Housing Complaints:

North Tyneside Homes have seen an increase of 13.8% compared to 2013-14 and an overall increase of 43% since 2011-12. Housing Estates Teams continue to receive the highest level of complaints across the service (42%) which can be expected as they hold the main customer facing role throughout the Housing service with the exception of the repairs service who are delivered in partnership by Kier North Tyneside. Additional pressure has been placed on the Authority's housing stock since the introduction of welfare reform and this is evident in the complaints figures relating to allocations/lettings rising by 54% in 2013-14 and 35% in 2014-15. The repairs service provided by Kier North Tyneside (KNT) have seen a reduction in all areas of complaint with an overall reduction of 14%. KNT Empty homes/voids service have seen the biggest reduction in complaints (39%). KNT day to day repairs service has seen a slight reduction compared to 2013-14 (4%) but continues to be the main reason for complaints across KNT (74%).

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

Table 9: Corporate complaints outcomes	2011-12 %	2012-13 %	2013-14 %	2014-15 %
Not Upheld	23	34	34	37
Upheld in Full	38	33	40	31
Upheld in Part	39	33	26	26
Ongoing	-	-	-	6

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

Table 10: Corporate complaints resolved at Stage:	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
	%	%	%	%
One	87	87	84	83
Two	13	13	15	11
Three	0	0	1	-
Ongoing	-	-	-	6

Policy complaints

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

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

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

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

Table 11: Complaints to the LGO	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Environmental & Cultural Services	4	0	1	4
Highways, Transport & Planning	9	11	14	6
Revenues & Benefits	2	3	8	4
Housing	4	11	12	11
Education & Children Social Care	3	11	3	3
Adult Social Care	5	3	2	3
Other	3	0	2	4
Total	30	39	42	35

Table 12 gives the decisions made by the LGO & HO in the given years as recorded by the Authority.

Table 12 - LGO Decisions		2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Total	Complaints Received	66	39	42	35
	Outside Jurisdiction	1	6	9	9
	Discretion not to investigate	10	23	11	9
	Premature referrals	27	4	10	3
	Advice Given	9	0	0	0
Investigated		30	33	12	14
Outcome	Findings of no maladministration	14	5	5	3
	Satisfied with LA's actions	2	0	7	2
	Findings of maladministration & injustice	0	0	0	1

	Ongoing	0	1	0	8
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5. Informal complaints and enquiries

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

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

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

Table 13 - Pre complaint & general enquiries processed by CMLO	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Mayor's Office	0	0	4	0
Children, Young People & Learning	19	23	21	29
Business & Economic Development	202	171	195	189
Adult Social Care	16	9	31	25
Cultural Services	59	75	55	39
North Tyneside Homes	127	103	132	114
Kier North Tyneside	133	115	90	46
Environmental Services	517*	307	215	228
Customer Services (Revs & Bens)	30	42	52	58
Law & Governance	37	25	51	43
Finance & Resources	19	46	43	39
Other	6	28	0	4
TOTAL	1,165	944	889	814

*A high number of contacts were received from residents during April and May 2011 following a change in refuse collection rounds from a 5 day to 4 day service, this dropped to normal levels once initial issues were resolved.

NORTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

(Amended 1 September 2006)

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

NORTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL

CHILDREN ACT 1989 (*Amended 1 September 2006)

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

Summary of Customer Liaison Complaints Survey (1 April 2013 – 31 March 2015)

17% of survey forms issued were returned

How easy was it to find information about the complaints service?	Easy	Neither	Difficult
	56 %	29 %	15 %

If help was sought from staff, how helpful was it?	Helpful	Neither	Unhelpful
	73 %	11 %	16 %

If a leaflet was received, how helpful was the information?	Helpful	Neither	Unhelpful
	67 %	26 %	7 %

How satisfied were you with the response time?	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied
	64 %	14 %	22 %

Was response easy to understand?	Easy	Neither	Difficult
	82 %	12 %	6 %

Did response letter tell you what to do if unhappy?	Yes	No
	85 %	15 %

How good was the process?	Very good	Fairly good	Neither	Fairly poor	Very poor
	36 %	35 %	6 %	7 %	16 %

Were you satisfied with the outcome?	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
	26 %	26 %	9 %	8 %	31 %