

**ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr N Woollatt  
**Responsible Officer:** Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement

**Reason for Report:** Annual report on compliments, comments and complaints received as part of our 2 million plus contacts with customers in 2019/2020.

**RECOMMENDATION:** to note the record of compliments, comments and complaints

**Financial Implications:** None

**Legal Implications:** None

**Risk Assessment:** Accurate recording and monitoring of complaints is good practice and ensures openness and accountability to all customers.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** Compliments, comments and complaints are received by a variety of means which ensures that there is equality of opportunity for all customers. In addition, where there is a need Customer Services staff will always assist in the recording of these communications and complaints. There is also an interpretation service available.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** To ensure that the Council provides access to services for customers in whatever way they choose to transact with us. Ensuring extended access via digital means and improving the way that we hold information and deliver our services to customers, placing them at the centre of what we do.

**Impact on Climate Change:** None

**1.0 Introduction/Background**

1.1 The Council receives contact from customers in a variety of ways for all services. The table below shows the overall number of contacts for each method for the last two years covering 2019 and 2020 to date.

Contact Method	01 December 2018 – 30 November 2019	01 December 2019 – 30 November 2020
Number of visitors to the office for enquiries	14789	5333
Telephone Payments (including automated)	60784	47698
Calls to call centre	106662	96381
Calls to direct lines (not including calls to mobiles)	340888	300345
Emails Received	Over 1 million	Over 1.4 Million
Digital Payments	89477	98063
Kiosk Payments	15857	6352

Online- forms submitted	41413	44101
Planning Applications	1001	1081

- 1.2 Traditionally this has been an annual retrospective. However, due to the pandemic and busy cabinet agendas this report has been postponed a number of times. The figures therefore also include Apr20 - Nov20; a period which covers the recent months of the pandemic and can be used as a measure of how we have been providing services over this period.
- 1.3 This report provides a summary of the number of complaints, compliments and comments received for each service from 1 April 2019 to 30 November 2020 (see **Appendix 1**). An official complaint is recorded when a customer has been unable to resolve their issues with the service concerned or where the issue is more serious than a normal service request that can be resolved by officers as part of their day to day activities.
- 1.4 Compliments, comments and complaints are recorded on the CRM in accordance with our corporate complaints policy. The name, address and contact details of the complainant, the nature of the complaint and the outcome of the complaint investigation are all recorded.
- 1.5 Feedback recorded is not the totality of the expression of dissatisfaction with service delivery. For example, Customer Services record many service requests and services also record contacts/service requests in their own ICT systems. These include routine enquiries, requests for service and logging service failures which can be resolved quickly to the customers' satisfaction.
- 1.6 Members are provided with performance statistics for complaints via the six weekly PDG Performance Management reports and as part of the Audit cycle.

## 2.0 Performance Statistics

- 2.1 Feedback is recorded on the CRM, based on the information recorded we are able to extract the number of complaints raised at each level. Level 1 complaints are investigated the Service Manager and Level 2 Complaints are investigated by Group Managers/member of Leadership Team.
- 2.2 Numbers of complaints upheld is recorded within the CRM.
- 2.3 As a measure of performance with complaint handling, the number acknowledged within 3 working days and resolved within timescales is recorded and reported on monthly as mentioned at 1.5.

## 3.0 What does feedback tell us?

- 3.1 As a result of complaints made, service managers have made changes to the working practices within service areas. These are also recorded in the CRM. Feedback where a change can be identified is an excellent way to improve services and respond to the needs of our customers.
- 3.2 Compliments received are often for members of staff who customers feel have done a good job. These are fed back to staff by line managers and in where appropriate in staff communications.

- 3.3 2020 has been a difficult and an unusual year for everyone due to Covid. We witnessed a decrease in customer contacts across most channels during the 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown in March. Surprisingly, even online transactions and phone calls went down as we reduced our hours for Face-to-Face contact and our customers adjusted to a very different way of life. There inevitably followed a decrease in the number and complexity of complaints that were reported.
- 3.4 The analysis of why customer transactions and complaints initially decreased has yet to be assessed in detail. But it does indicate customer behavioural change due to shifting priorities within the pandemic.
- 3.5 Additionally, as the customer transactions increased as we came out of the first lockdown we can see our customers moving away from the traditional telephony method of communication. Email became an important tool, but this can be a time consuming and inefficient way for customers to transact with us. This will be something that we need to consider as we review our customer based policies and consider the case for a new Customer Service system.
- 3.6 Overall feedback numbers are down by 16%. Despite the decrease in overall comments, the public have increased the number of compliments they have reported to us. That is testament to the hard work of staff over the last few months in continuing to provide a high level of service, even as it has been delivered slightly differently. It also indicates the value that our customers have placed on that. Samples of compliments received can be found at **Appendix 5**.
- 3.7 The Complaints Policy and Customer Care Policy are due for review in 2021 and this opportunity will be used to examine how we are managing complaints and the performance measures we have in place. Additional guidance in the management of Housing complaints has also been received, so the policy review will be brought forward to ensure that the guidance is appropriately reflected and communicated to staff.
- 3.8 In light of the above policy review, and as part of the Customer Service training requested following Scrutiny and Cabinet recommendations, the authority will be reviewing complaints training for managers as a substantive part of that work.

#### **4.0 Referrals to the Ombudsman complaints service**

- 4.1 11 complaints were made to the ombudsman by residents. Only one of these was upheld by the ombudsman. A summary of complaints to the Ombudsman 2019-20 (the latest available) is provided at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.2 The Local Government Ombudsman Annual review letter is provided at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.3 For comparison, a table of neighbouring authorities and their ombudsman cases has been provided at **Appendix 4**.

**Contact for more Information:** Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement

**Circulation of the Report: Cabinet Member**

## Feedback recorded on CRM

Feedback Received	01 December 2018 to 30 November 2019	01 December 2019 to 30 November 2020
Complaints received	556	247
Invalid or withdrawn complaints	0	0
Comments received	114	106
Compliments received	90	113
Number of complaints at level 2	45	25
Number of complaints at level 2 upheld	10	10
Number of complaints at level 1 upheld	67	68
Number where a change was made to the service procedures as a result of the complaint	14	6
Open at start of date range	123	152
Open at end of date range	205	205

Fig. 1

## Percentage change 2018/19 – 2019-20 – Processed and/or Completed

Complaints	30%	DECREASE
Compliments	25%	INCREASE
Comments	9%	DECREASE

Fig.2

## Feedback by service – Processed and/or Completed

Feedback Processed Service	01 December 2018 to 30 November 2019			01 December 2019 to 30 November 2020		
	Complaints	Compliments	Comments	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
Bulky Waste		2		1	1	
Business Rates			1	1		
Car Parks	3		2	5		2
Community Alarms	2	1		3		
Community Safety	1					
Council Tax Billing	12		5	2		1
Council Tax Recovery	7	1		2		1
Customer Services	9	8	8	13	8	7
Democracy and Members			11	1		
Dog Strays or Fouling			2	1		2
Economic Development				1		
Electoral Register	1		1			

Environmental Services	2	1		3		1
Finance				1		
Garden Waste	7		10	5	1	10
Grass Cutting	5	5		6	2	3
Health & Safety				3		
High Hedges				1		
Homelessness	6	6	3	4	8	1
Housing Benefits	7			1	2	1
Housing Repairs	85	29	26	59	35	28
Housing Tenancy	37	10	2	50	23	1
Human Resources				1		
Legal Services	1					1
Leisure	14		6	3	1	
Monitoring Officer	1					
Parks and Flower Beds	1	1	1	1		1
Payments	2		2			
Planning - Development Control	28	2	1	23	*	2
Planning - Forward Planning				1		
Pollution Inc. Noise				2		
Private Sector Housing	4			3		
Property Services	10	1	2	9		3
Recycling	38	8	12	19	8	15
Refuse Collection	64	10	17	21	18	21
Street Cleansing	4	4	2	1	6	5
Trade Waste	1					
Waste Transfer Station		1				
Uncategorized			2			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>352**</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>245**</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>106</b>

**Fig.3**

\*Compliments not recorded in CRM – recording process to be amended going forward.

\*\*Fig.1 relates to items received.

Fig.3 relates to comments processed through to completion. The totals will differ based on a number of cases (particularly complaints) remaining 'active' on the dates selected for reporting. Complaints can take a number of days to complete.

## Ombudsman Decisions 2019-20

Category	Decided	Decision	Decision Reason
Planning & Development	22/08/2019	Closed after initial enquiries	Not warranted by alleged injustice
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	07/05/2019	Not Upheld	no mal
Planning & Development	15/08/2019	Upheld	mal & inj - no further action, BinJ already remedied
Planning & Development	01/04/2019	Closed after initial enquiries	S27 not by member of the public
Housing	09/10/2019	Not Upheld	Other reason not to continue with investigation
Highways & Transport	01/07/2019	Referred back for local resolution	Premature Decision - advice given
Planning & Development	05/11/2019	Closed after initial enquiries	Not warranted by alleged mal/service failure
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	17/10/2019	Referred back for local resolution	Premature Decision - advice given
Planning & Development	11/12/2019	Referred back for local resolution	Premature Decision - referred to BinJ
Housing	18/11/2019	Referred back for local resolution	Premature Decision - advice given
Planning & Development	28/02/2020	Closed after initial enquiries	Not warranted by alleged mal/service failure

Local Government &  
Social Care  
**OMBUDSMAN**

22 July 2020

*By email*

Mr Walford  
Chief Executive  
Mid Devon District Council

Dear Mr Walford

### **Annual Review letter 2020**

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the decisions made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2020. Given the exceptional pressures under which local authorities have been working over recent months, I thought carefully about whether it was still appropriate to send you this annual update. However, now, more than ever, I believe that it is essential that the public experience of local services is at the heart of our thinking. So, I hope that this feedback, which provides unique insight into the lived experience of your Council's services, will be useful as you continue to deal with the current situation and plan for the future.

### **Complaint statistics**

This year, we continue to place our focus on the outcomes of complaints and what can be learned from them. We want to provide you with the most insightful information we can and have made several changes over recent years to improve the data we capture and report.

We focus our statistics on these three key areas:

**Complaints upheld** - We uphold complaints when we find some form of fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before we investigated. A focus on how often things go wrong, rather than simple volumes of complaints provides a clearer indicator of performance.

**Compliance with recommendations** - We recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice. Our recommendations try to put people back in the position they were before the fault and we monitor authorities to ensure they comply with our recommendations. Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An authority with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

**Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority** - We want to encourage the early resolution of complaints and to credit authorities that have a positive and open approach to resolving complaints. We recognise cases where an authority has taken steps to put things right before the complaint came to us. The authority upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your authority with similar types of authorities to work out an average level of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

This data will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), along with a copy of this letter on 29 July 2020, and our Review of Local Government Complaints. For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our [website](#).

### Resources to help you get it right

There are a range of resources available that can support you to place the learning from complaints, about your authority and others, at the heart of your system of corporate governance. Your council's performance launched last year and puts our data and information about councils in one place. Again, the emphasis is on learning, not numbers.

You can find the decisions we have made, public reports we have issued, and the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

I would encourage you to share the tool with colleagues and elected members; the information can provide valuable insights into service areas, early warning signs of problems and is a key source of information for governance, audit, risk and scrutiny functions.

Earlier this year, we held our link officer seminars in London, Bristol, Leeds and Birmingham. Attended by 178 delegates from 143 local authorities, we focused on maximising the impact of complaints, making sure the right person is involved with complaints at the right time, and how to overcome common challenges.

We have a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. During the year, we delivered 118 courses, training more than 1,400 people. This is 47 more courses than we delivered last year and included more training to adult social care providers than ever before.

To find out more visit [www.lgo.org.uk/training](http://www.lgo.org.uk/training).

Yours sincerely,



Michael King  
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

### Complaints upheld



33% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of 45% in similar authorities.

**1**  
Upheld decision

Statistics are based on a total of 3 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

### Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

### Satisfactory remedies provided by the



In 100% of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of 20% in similar

**1**  
Satisfactory remedy decision

Statistics are based on a total of 3 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

## Appendix 4

### Local Authority Benchmarking

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Number of Complaints Referred</b>	<b>Complaints Upheld</b>
East Devon	7	2
Mid Devon	11	1
North Devon	5	3
South Hams	3	2
Teignbridge	5	0
Torridge	18	2
West Devon	4	1

## Appendix 5

Sample Compliments received – names and addresses have been removed but all other content as received.

### Customer Services

#### October 2020

I just wanted to pass on my thanks to XXXXX, who works in your customer service department and answered the 'phone to me on two separate occasions last week,

My query was regarding Council Tax and was a bit convoluted, but both times Emma was so helpful and friendly, taking the time to really look into the issue and ensure that i had the right advice. Due to her help, the issue is now being resolved and I'd like to thank her and also say that as far as customer service goes, Emma is a complete star! In these days when unfortunately excellent customer service isn't always given the recognition it deserves, the Council should be very proud of the level of service provided by Emma. It makes a real difference. Thanks again.  
XXXXXX

#### October 2020

Mrs XXXXXX has called in to thank us for helping sort out her communal aerial problem. The engineer has called and she can now watch TV. She says she could hug us all

#### November 2020

Good morning My name is XXXXXXXXXXXX my account number is XXXXXXXXXXX

Ive just got off the phone with one of your staff members named Andrea who advised me her role was customer service, pressing number 4 to speak to some one regarding me bill and payments

I would like to send back some feedback about this human being... This lady has gone above and beyond to comfort me and respect me, she has made me feel relaxed and showed alot of compassion and empathy she respected me with integrity and dignity,... She has explained in great detail how she was able to help me today with my bill... Has provided me with reassurance that I will be okay and restored my faith in businesses and more importantly people today... I cannot speak highly enough of this wonderful women and would like to thank her ever so much for respectfully leaving me with dignity reassuring me there is support available and comforting me when I showed concern

Many Thanks

MDDC for such fantastic customer Service and once again... A VERY passionate and caring member of your company :)

### Waste & Recycling

#### August 2020

Would like to pass on thanks for their superb conduct during these unprecedented times. The refuse and recycling teams have all been marvellous.

#### November 2020

A big thankyou to all refuse and recycling collectors. Unsung heroes in our opinion. My husband is

81 and finds difficulty in walking but carefully sorts our recycling and puts out the boxes each fortnight. The collectors carefully stack the emptied boxes making it easier for him to take in. Please pass on a BIG THANKYOU from us. Stay safe!

## Street Cleaning

### September 2020

We have just had the road sweeper (XXXXXX) in our close (XXXXXXXX) and I just wanted to say how brilliant the operator was. All the areas that the vehicle could not reach - he got out of his cab and swept manually (and there was a lot of sweeping). I was really impressed with how the driver went above and beyond what they normally do and it has been noted and appreciated. Please pass the message onto the driver.

### July 2020

I wish to send my compliments to the MDDC street cleaner in Cullompton. This morning a huge amount of refuse was on the streets when I passed at 6.00am. When I returned at 8.00 the refuse had been collected and the town centre was immaculate no litter or windblown refuse could be seen. Also thanked him for keeping the Mill stream both clean and tidy. He deserves to receive good feedback for his efforts

## Housing Tenancy

### June 2020

Can you pass on to the CEO and your line manager that I am really pleased with the action you have taken and the way you have had open communication with me. This is a completely different way of dealing with MDDC and has exceeded my expectations.

### October 2020

Thank you so much for all your help today. You've gone above and beyond and I really appreciate it. I'm such a worrier and I'm sorry I've been a pest and asked lots of questions!

### November 2020

No Many Thanks to you XXXXX! I think today from yourself has been the best experience of communication I've had at all from MDDC in all! And I'm very glad we have been able to get to the bottom of the rent situation!

Many thanks again

## Building Services

### September 2020

I would like to thank you and your team  
On the efficient way my request for repair was dealt with.  
James and his apprentice solved the Ongoing 'hot water' problem efficiently and with courtesy.  
Very grateful for a wonderful service!

### June 2020

I would just like to thank you for getting this job done today. (XXXXXXXXXXXX) was initially booked in for the 4th July 2020 so was surprised when he rang the buzzer this afternoon!

The workman arrived at 1pm and completed the job within 10minutes tops. Very happy with the outcome, he was very considerate and social distanced perfectly!

Thank you again, it is very much appreciated!

## **Grounds Maintenance**

### **January 2020**

The customer wishes to thank the people that came and cleared her garden and cut the hedges and bushes as they have done a great job and left it lovely,. This is the customers allocated garden withtin the communal area

### **May 2020**

Mrs Cxxxxxx rang to thank you for doing a very job cutting the hedge at the front of the house. She said that you did a wonderful job and brushed and tidied up after themselves. She just wanted to pass her compliments to you

## **Garden Waste**

### **March 2020**

Mr Bxxxxx would like to thank the operatives who went out on Friday and collected his bin and put the permit on.

They also wheeled the bin back inside his garden boundary which he is thankful for as he has some back problems at present.

### **May 2020**

I just wanted to thank the refuse collectors for their really helpful and intelligent approach to collecting our garden waste today 15 04 20.

Because we were unable to access the Punchbowl Recycling centre and missed collections due to Covid 19, we had a couple of bins with garden waste along with our brown bin. Everything was collected.

This makes life a little easier for us. Once again thank you.