

**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 2020/2021.

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

**Financial Implications:** None

**Budget and Policy Framework:**  
*Approved by Finance:* No

**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 12 months covering September 2020 until August 2021

Contact Method	01 September 2019 – 31 August 2020	01 September 2020- 31 August 2021
Number of visitors to the office for enquiries	8645	1259
Telephone Payments (including automated)	63072	73388
Calls to call centre	103578	104470
Calls to direct lines (not including calls to mobiles)	312414	280063
Emails Received	In excess of 1.4 Million	1556889
Digital Payments	30857	32522
Kiosk Payments	9755	972
Online- forms submitted	44591	52597
Planning Applications	1064	2464

1.2 Traditionally this has been an annual retrospective. A report came to Scrutiny January 2021 as part of a series of delayed activities due to the pandemic. This report is to re-establish the former annual review on a new schedule.

1.3 This report provides a summary of the number of complaints, compliments and comments received for each service from 1 Sept 2020 to 31 Aug 2021 (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 by the Service Manager and Level 2 Complaints are investigated by Operational/Corporate Managers or 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 are able to make 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 What are the numbers telling us? We are actively encouraging feedback from customers and as expected, despite being under national restrictions we have seen an increase in customer activity and transactions after the first twelve months of the pandemic. This was to be expected as our customers realised that broadly speaking we were continuing to provide most services, if a little differently.

3.4 The analysis - It is important to understand the current context or climate in which the council is working. 2021 continues to be a challenging year. Locally we have seen a high vaccination rate, but with the removal of all legal restrictions in the early summer the south west region continues to see increasing infection/hospitalisation rates. This impacts on our ability to provide normal cover for services. Over time this means that we may have seen a gap between customer expectation and our ability to deliver.

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 has become 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 for the future as we review our customer based policies and consider the case for a new Customer Service system.

3.6 We have seen a 41% increase in Complaints, comparatively to the year before. We have also seen increases in Compliments (32%) and Comments (33%), indicating that our customer behaviours are returning to a 'near normal' and that their expectations and experience of services is returning to pre-Covid levels. Samples of compliments received can be found at **Appendix 5**.

3.7 The Complaints Policy and Customer Care Policy are due for review this Autumn, currently scheduled for the relevant Committees in November. Additional guidance in the management of Housing complaints was received and this will be factored into the review.

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 seen and approved [yes/no – name of Cabinet Member], Leadership Team seen and approved [yes/no]

## Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Fig. 1

Feedback Received	01 September 2019 To 31 August 2020	01 September 2020 To 31 August 2021
Complaints received	252	354
Invalid or withdrawn complaints	0	0
Comments received	101	134
Compliments received	100	132
Number of complaints at level 2	30	40
Number of complaints at level 2 upheld	7	15
Number of complaints at level 1 upheld	60	83
Number where a change was made to the service procedures as a result of the complaint	4	6
Open at start of date range	147	170
Open at end of date range	238	238

### Percentage change - Processed and/or Completed

	2018/19-2019/20	2019/20 -2020/21
Complaints	34% DECREASE	41% INCREASE
Compliments*	32% DECREASE	32% INCREASE
Comments	7% INCREASE	33% INCREASE

% change included for 01/08/2019-31/08/2019 as a comparison

Fig.2

### Feedback by service – Processed and/or Completed

Feedback Processed Service	01 Sept 2019 to 31 Aug 2020			01 Sept 2020 to 31 Aug 2021		
	Complaints	Compliments	Comments	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
Abandoned Vehicles				1		
Bulky Waste		1		3		1
Business Rates	1			1		
Car Parks	5		2	3		
Community Alarms	3	1		2		
Community Safety				1	1	
Council Tax Billing	2		3	6		3
Council Tax Recovery	3		1	8		1
Council Tax Reduction						1
Customer Services	10	9	3	18	7	10
Dog Strays or Fouling	1		2	3		

Economic Development	1					
Electoral Register					1	
Environmental Issues						1
Environmental Services	1	1			6	2
Finance	1				1	1
Fly Tipping					2	2
Garden Waste	5	1	11		7	1
Grants and Funding					1	
Grass Cutting	6	3	3		5	2
Health & Safety	3				5	
High Hedges					2	
Homelessness	5	8	2		6	6
Housing Benefits	1	2	1		2	2
Housing Repairs	71	28	20		74	51
Housing Tenancy	44	16	2		70	18
Human Resources	1				2	1
Legal Services			1			
Leisure	8	1	5		4	
Licensing					1	
Parks and Flower Beds	2		1			
Planning					2	
Planning - Development Control	23		2		37	6
Planning - Forward Planning	1				2	
Play Areas						1
Pollution Inc. Noise	2				2	
Private Sector Housing	3				4	
Property Services	11		4		4	1
Recycling	18	6	15		26	13
Refuse Collection	20	17	18		36	14
Street Cleansing		5	5		3	6
Waste Transfer Station		1				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>354</b>	<b>132</b>
						<b>134</b>

**Fig.3**

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

Fig.1 relates to items received.

Fig.2 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 referrals 2020-2021

Reference	Authority	Category	Received
20014475	Mid Devon District Council	Planning & Development	30 Mar 2021
20006206	Mid Devon District Council	Housing	27 Oct 2020
20009575	Mid Devon District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	17 Dec 2020
20010392	Mid Devon District Council	Housing	11 Jan 2021
20007583	Mid Devon District Council	Planning & Development	11 Nov 2020
20012503	Mid Devon District Council	Corporate & Other Services	19 Feb 2021

Local Government &  
Social Care  
**OMBUDSMAN**

21 July 2021

By email

Mr Walford  
Chief Executive  
Mid Devon District Council

Dear Mr Walford

Annual Review letter 2021

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 2021. At the end of a challenging year, we maintain that good public administration is more important than ever and I hope this feedback provides you with both the opportunity to reflect on your Council's performance and plan for the future.

You will be aware that, at the end of March 2020 we took the unprecedented step of temporarily stopping our casework, in the wider public interest, to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services during the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak. We restarted casework in late June 2020, after a three month pause.

We listened to your feedback and decided it was unnecessary to pause our casework again during further waves of the pandemic. Instead, we have encouraged authorities to talk to us on an individual basis about difficulties responding to any stage of an investigation, including implementing our recommendations. We continue this approach and urge you to maintain clear communication with us.

### **Complaint statistics**

This year, we continue to 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 focused statistics on 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.

**Compliance with recommendations** - We recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the authority upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit authorities that accept fault and find appropriate ways 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.

Your annual data will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), along with a copy of this letter on 28 July 2021. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the decisions we have made about your Council, 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 resource 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.

As you would expect, data has been impacted by the pause to casework in the first quarter of the year. This should be considered when making comparisons with previous year's data.

#### Supporting complaint and service improvement

I am increasingly concerned about the evidence I see of the erosion of effective complaint functions in local authorities. While no doubt the result of considerable and prolonged budget and demand pressures, the Covid-19 pandemic appears to have amplified the problems and my concerns. With much greater frequency, we find poor local complaint handling practices when investigating substantive service issues and see evidence of reductions in the overall capacity, status and visibility of local redress systems.

With this context in mind, we are developing a new programme of work that will utilise complaints to drive improvements in both local complaint systems and services. We want to use the rich evidence of our casework to better identify authorities that need support to improve their complaint handling and target specific support to them. We are at the start of this ambitious work and there will be opportunities for local authorities to shape it over the coming months and years.

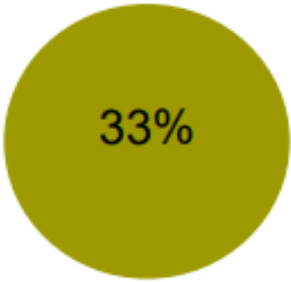
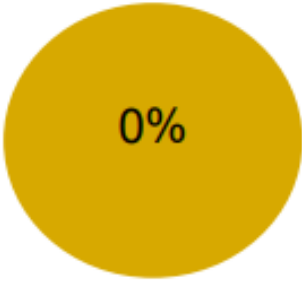
An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. During the year, we successfully adapted our face-to-face courses for online delivery. We provided 79 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,100 people. To 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		
	<p><b>33%</b> of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>53%</b> in similar authorities.</p>	<p><b>1</b> upheld decision</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 3 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
<p>No recommendations were due for compliance in this period</p>		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority		
	<p>In <b>0%</b> of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>16%</b> in similar authorities.</p>	<p><b>0</b> satisfactory remedy decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 3 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>

**NOTE:** To allow authorities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, we did not accept new complaints and stopped investigating existing cases between March and June 2020. This reduced the number of complaints we received and decided in the 20-21 year. Please consider this when comparing data from previous years.

## Appendix 4

### Local Authority Benchmarking

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Number of Complaints Investigated</b>	<b>Complaints Upheld</b>
East Devon	2	1
Mid Devon	3	1
North Devon	5	3
South Hams	5	2
Teignbridge	3	0
Torridge	3	2
West Devon	2	1

## Appendix 5

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

### Customer Services

#### November 2020

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 June 2021

Just a few lines to say thank you v. much for your prompt return of my documents re my cont claim for rent p-tax discount.

I am most gratefull and I must say very impressed with your offices speed and efficiency.

#### July 2021

Thank you for my above permit, which I received today. However, it would have been too late for my bin collection which was yesterday 1 07 21 had it not been for the fact that Emily ( I dont know her surname) went out of her way to make sure my bin was emptied even though my previous permit expired on June 30th 2021.

I had renewed my subscription in good time 15 06 21 but had not received my permit when I phoned your office on 29 06 21. I was told that due to a clerical error my payment hadn't been recognised and therefore no permit issued.

Had it not been for Emily I would have lodged a complaint as to why this error occurred.

You are very fortunate to have such a conscientious, understanding and pleasant person working in your department.

I would again like to thank Emily for everything she did.

### Housing Benefits

#### April 2021

Miss XXXXX has called in to pay a compliment to Mrs Pedrick from the Benefits Team. Miss XXXXX suffers from anxiety and worried about the Benefit decision notice, She has called in several times and spoken to Mrs Pedrick who has helped her each time and been amazing. She has taken time to explain things and made Miss XXXXX feel at ease, so is no longer

anxious when making future telephone calls. Miss XXXXX would like to thank Mrs Pedrick sincerely for all of her help and advice. She has been amazing.

### **August 2021**

This is a message of thanks to any and all people who work in the Benefits section of MDDC, regardless of whether or not I've had direct contact with you, and to MDDC staff in general.

My name is XXXXX and would like to thank you all. You have, collectively, been helpful, efficient, kind, polite and speedy in all my dealings with you, from "front of house" reception, through to telephone Enquiries, and all office staff, whether working from home or the Offices.

Since moving to Tiverton some five years ago I can find no fault with any member of staff, but the service offered throughout the pandemic has been exceptional, and I would like you all to know how much that has been appreciated. Last Friday I put a form, plus two bank statements, in the post box at 12.30pm. At 8.30am the next morning the bank statements were posted back to my house. How could I fail to be impressed?!

So sincere thanks to all at MDDC. I hope this message is circulated to everyone.

Stay safe.

## **Homelessness**

### **May 2021**

Thank you so much for everything you have done. You may see it as only doing your job, but me and my family see you as a saviour. Everything is looking so much brighter now and we have you to thank for it, I really can't thank you enough.

## **Waste & Recycling**

### **August 2021**

We would like to thank the refuse crews who collect our rubbish, they do a wonderful job! Each time they completely empty our bins and leave the correct ones very neatly stacked. This is in total contrast to the neighbouring authority from which we have recently moved. This great service is much appreciated, thank you all!

### **July 2021**

Just wanted to say a really big thank you to all your teams collecting our rubbish. Must have been a nightmare in this heat today and they never cease to amaze me how polite and friendly they all are at all times. Please pass on that they really are appreciated and theirs is a really hard physical job and thank them all for me. Thank you

### **August 2021**

Just a Thank You to your team collecting garden food waste on Monday 9 August. Cheerful, charming, helpful and efficient.

I know from experience that people tend to write if they want to complain - so I just wanted to add thanks and praise for a first class service.

<b>Housing Tenancy</b>
<p><b>April 2021</b></p> <p>Morning Sharon hope you and your family are well i just want to say thank you for helping with mr XXX if you had not contacted me he would have had a proper funeral it gives me a peace of mind to now he is buried in a beautiful place, please thank the other two ladies I spoke to</p> <p><b>August 2021</b></p> <p>Thank you for such fast service with the garage. I couldnt believe that the keys turned up on Saturday. Again would like to say thank you.</p>
<b>Building Services</b>
<p><b>May 2021</b></p> <p>Mrs xxxxxx of xxxxxxxxxx Cullompton called to pass on her thanks and appreciation to Jason for his professional manner and abiding by all the COVID regulations rules whilst carrying out a repair at her property today (10 05 21)</p> <p><b>August 2021</b></p> <p>Just wanted to say could you pass on to your department how pleased my husband and I were with all the work they have done this week putting in our new heating. Although I was a work for most of the week my husband couldn't praise them enough on their efficiency and tidiness all week.</p> <p>There helpfulness in all aspects of the work done was fantastic and we couldn't be happier.</p> <p>Thank you again for all your help also</p>
<b>Grounds Maintenance</b>
<p><b>April 2021</b></p> <p>could you please pass this onto the relevant people</p> <p>My son is buried in Crediton Cemetery and my wife and I have planted snowdrops and primroses on his grave, ie in the grass not in pots, so I am always a bit concerned when the grass is cut. However i am glad to say that the grass cutters always seem to be very careful not to cut any flowers even when they have finished flowering and this seems to be the case for the other primroses and other flowers which I see flowering in other parts of the Cemetery . Please pass on my thanks to all those involved in this work for their sensitive approach to this work</p>
<b>Environmental Services</b>
<p><b>July 2021</b></p> <p>Can I firstly thank you for letting the staff member know of my circumstances ahead of her</p>

visit.

Secondly, I know that the council are normally only on the receiving end of criticism and so I would like to give some positive feedback and compliment the lady that came to my house today to collect the water sample. She not only gave me time to answer the door, but removed her footwear to come in, which I thought very polite of her. She was very chatty and it was lovely and refreshing to have somebody who obviously is very proud of the work she does. I didnt get her name, but Im sure you know who it is, and I would like very much for her to know that her chat with me today was very much appreciated, along with her professionalism. Could you please pass on the compliment to her.

## **Planning – Development Control**

### **March 2021**

I also wanted to say that I had a very positive experience with your registration team. I had a query regarding payment details and Nicki was really helpful and prompt in her responses.

### **July 2021**

Also, just to say, you are probably the most helpful council I have come across for ages! Thanks for your swift responses it really is appreciated