

Audit Committee

Report Title:	Compliments, Comments and Complaints Annual Report 2015 - 2016
Meeting Date:	28 September 2016
Lead Councillor(s):	Councillor Michael Bond
Local Councillor(s):	All
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Brief summary of report

1. This report, prepared for the Audit Committee, provides an executive summary of compliments, comments and complaints received from 1 April 2015 until 31 March 2016.
2. It provides an overview analysis of the numbers of compliments, comments and complaints received and highlights trends and themes based on the information provided in reports from individual directorates.
3. It also incorporates a summary of the Annual Report from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Action recommended

The Committee is recommended to:

- a) agree the contents of the report; and
- b) decide whether further information or action is required.

Reason for recommendation

4. The Committee's terms of reference include responsibility for taking an overview of the compliments, comments, and complaints process.

Alternative options

5. The Committee may decide that further information and analysis is required.

Who will be affected by this decision?

6. Anyone in Suffolk who is providing feedback to the Council in the form of compliments, comments and complaints.

Main body of report

Introduction

7. All local authorities are required to have in place procedures for handling complaints made by or on behalf of people in receipt of, or affected by, a service they provide or commission. Two significant pieces of legislation; the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014 have impacted on the Council and the way it works with people; offering advocacy and or support as a requirement. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) reforms changed the way the Council plans for young people with special educational needs.
8. The Council operates three different procedures: one statutory for Adult and Community Services (ACS), one statutory for Children and Young People's Services (CYP) and a corporate complaints procedure for all other services.
9. Suffolk County Council (SCC) Complaints Team (Customer Rights) moved into Resource Management in January 2015; continuing to manage complaints across the Council promoting the rights of the customer and developing systems to work more closely with the digital and contact centre. Staff secondment opportunities are enabling an opportunity for staff who work in the Customer Service contact centre to learn the corporate complaints procedures.
10. In August 2015 the directorates were restructured. The development of 4 directorates from what was previously 6. Public Protection (PP) joined with Public Health (PH) making one directorate for Public Health and Protection (PHP) and Economy, Skills and Environment (ESE) joined with Resource Management (RM) to make one directorate under Resource Management. Adult and Community Services (ACS) and Children and Young People's (CYP) directorates remained the same.
11. The consequence of these mergers means that there are no direct comparisons between years. Statistics have been gathered by combining figures (for the part of the year before the merger) for PH and PP and ESE and RM.
12. Over the past two years the Council has divested or delegated a number of service areas. The providers of some of these services are fulfilling the Council's statutory duty in relation to these services.
13. The Council has successfully implemented the Care Act 2014 using the Supporting Lives Connecting Communities (SLCC) model of delivery. This legislation is considered to be the most significant reform for more than 60 years and embeds Carers Rights, encouraging Health and Social Care to work together.
14. The Council have made necessary adjustments and changes to embed the Children and Families Act 2014 giving greater protection to vulnerable children. The Council are committed to providing better support for children whose parents are separating and the SEN reforms ensure that teachers are accountable for every pupil's progress. Every eligible child will have an education, health and care plan which has replaced statements. These steps are designed to ensure that the child and the family will be at the centre of all support and planning.

15. The Council's Children's services were rated 'Good' by Ofsted during the last inspection in October 2015 which was a pleasing outcome which could be partly attributed to the adoption of 'Signs of Safety' as a working model.
16. This summary report provides an overview of compliments, comments and complaints received by the Council from 1 April 2015 until 31 March 2016.
17. It shows the numbers of compliments, comments and complaints received and highlights themes and trends of issues that are common across the Council.
18. Where possible, comparisons with previous years' data 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 are included.
19. The Council encourages members of the public to make their views known about the services provided by the Council. This information is used to put things right when they have gone wrong, to help improve services and to acknowledge when things have gone well.
20. A new online form for customer feedback was designed and implemented by the SCC Complaints Team (Customer Rights), offering people more flexibility in the way they can give feedback to the Council. The Council is a learning organisation and use customer feedback to change and/or improve services as a result.
21. The Council's definition of a complaint is "an expression of dissatisfaction with the standard of service, action, or lack of action, by the Council or others working on its behalf."

Customers can expect to know:

- a) Who will be dealing with their complaint
- b) When they will receive a response
- c) That their complaint will be looked into fairly and in detail
- d) That their privacy and confidentiality will be maintained
- e) That there will be an apology if Suffolk County Council has failed
- f) What Suffolk County Council has learned from the complaint and what they will be doing to put things right and ensure it will not happen again.

Complaints management

22. The SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) manages statutory and corporate complaints for the entire Council and has the lead role for policy development on complaints and customer care. They will also carry out investigations into complaints about councillor conduct on request from the Monitoring Officer.
23. Using a case management model to provide support to practitioners, officers, councillors and complainants, the SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) provides an interface between operational teams and customers.
24. Investigating Officers and the panel of Independent Persons are commissioned and managed by the SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) in order to fulfil the obligation of statutory complaint investigations.
25. Information on how to give feedback can be found on the Council's website via www.suffolk.gov.uk/feedback. There are options to print off a form, details of all the complaints procedures and an easy read version. All contact details are

available in order to give people the opportunity to speak to a complaints manager, email or write as well as the option to complete the online form.

Complaints procedures

Statutory complaints procedures - the Council has a duty to provide statutory complaints procedures for people wishing to complain about children's and adults' social care services.

26. There are different regulations governing the management of statutory complaints.
27. Complaints about ACS social care services and health services are governed by the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009. This allows a flexible approach to resolving complaints, with a focus on customer inclusion and a 6-month period for the Council to resolve the issues.
28. Complaints relating to CYP social services are governed by the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and follow a more traditional procedure, with 3 stages. CYP corporate complaints are dealt with in a 2 stage process. The new CYP integrated services are handled under the statutory Children's regulations but with an approach that mirrors the model of National Health Service complaints.

Corporate complaints procedures - used by all other areas of the Council.

The Corporate procedures follow a 2 Stage process:

- Stage 1: response by operational manager
- Stage 2: response by or on behalf of Director, following investigation.

Corporate investigations are carried out by experienced case workers within SCC Complaints Team (Customer Rights) or another experienced external investigator.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

29. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) are working more closely with a common aim to develop a single Public Service Ombudsman (PSO) by the end of 2017. 'Ultimately, we want all service users to be able to say: 'I felt confident to speak up and making my complaint was simple. I felt listened to and understood. I felt that my complaint made a difference' (My Expectations 2014)
30. Customers who remain dissatisfied with the Council's response can contact the LGO. The LGO reports annually to the County Council about complaints she has received.
31. SCC Complaints Team (Customer Rights) has a good working relationship with the LGO; they receive and respond to LGO enquiries, often discussing cases directly with the LGO and negotiating resolution and remedy.
32. The LGO writes to the Chief Executive Officer every year providing an annual summary of statistics. Since April 2013 the LGO has been publishing all decisions. These can be found on the LGO website.

33. The LGO shares trends and measures they have recommended to remedy injustice. Councils and care providers can draw on the LGO's experience and expertise to help raise the standards.
34. The LGO reported a 10% increase in complaints about Social Care a trend that is mirrored within Suffolk where there has been a 12% increase in complaints about adult social care. In Suffolk the largest increases in complaints were in the RM area which saw 120% increase from 254 in 2014/2015 to 559 in 2015/2016. Education transport and highways related complaints received over 75% of RM complaints.
35. The LGO received 92 complaints or enquiries for Suffolk County Council in this reporting period; an increase of 22% (from 75) on the previous year.
36. Suffolk remains comparable with neighbouring counties regarding the numbers of complaints and enquiries received in relation to population as shown in Table 1.
37. In common with previous years, Ombudsman complaints regarding education and children's services remain the largest category, representing 52% of the total of LGO complaints referred.
38. This area also saw the biggest increase in percentage terms (13%) for complaints and enquiries received by the Ombudsman. This trend is reflected across a number of neighbouring authorities with some experiencing increases of between 30% (Suffolk) and 156% (Essex).

Table 1 Comparison with neighbours

Authority	Complaints/ enquiries received 2015/16	Uphold rate	Population	Complaints/ enquiries per '000 head of pop.
Suffolk	92 (75)	38%	735,900	0.12 (0.10)
Cambridgeshire	57 (60)	57%	635,100	0.09 (0.10)
Essex	279 (151)	25%	1,729,200	0.16 (0.09)
Hertfordshire	135 (126)	41%	1,119,800	0.12 (0.11)
Norfolk	110 (53)	47%	859,400	0.12 (0.06)

[Last year's figures in brackets]

39. The table demonstrates that Suffolk is comparable with neighbouring authorities.

Complaint outcomes

40. Upheld complaints are those where the LGO has decided that an authority has been at fault in how it acted, and that this fault may or may not have caused an injustice to the complainant, or where an authority has accepted that it needs to remedy the complaint before the LGO makes a finding on fault. If the LGO has decided there was fault and it caused an injustice to the complainant, it will usually recommend the authority take some action to address this.
41. Complaints classified as Not Upheld are those which the LGO has investigated and decided that a council has not acted with fault.
42. During the reporting period of the Annual Letter the LGO made final decisions on 91 complaints about the County Council.

43. Of the 91 decisions in relation to the 92 enquiries the LGO received 21 (23%) were forwarded for investigation. Following investigation, 8 of the 21 complaints (38%) were upheld compared to 51% nationally. The remaining 13 complaints were not upheld.
44. Where the LGO finds an authority has been at fault, and the fault has caused injustice, it will make recommendations for the local authority to put things right to remedy the fault. The LGO's most common recommendations are an apology, financial payment or procedural change.
45. In the case of Suffolk financial payments were recommended in 4 of the 8 cases which were upheld.

Highlights from LGO's Review of LGO complaints 2015-16

46. The LGO has widened the scope of the bodies classed as local government to include school admission panels, fire authorities, police and crime commissioners, and some other government organisations. This is to reflect the changing definition of what constitutes local government services. The LGO accepts that this widening of the scope of bodies classed as local government has undoubtedly been a factor in the 6% rise in complaints and enquiries.
47. The LGO has seen a 13% increase in complaints and enquiries about education and children's services, with the highest number relating to child protection matters (68% of cases resulted in complaints being upheld).
48. The number of complaints and enquiries about the responsibilities of councils for adult social care rose by 4%.
49. The LGO's report stresses that higher numbers of complaints do not necessarily mean poor standards of service it may indicate a council's open approach to listening to feedback and using complaints as an early indicator of potential issues.
50. The report also recognises that its investigations can also provide local authorities with the reassurance that they have carried out a fair investigation of a complaint and satisfactorily offered to put things right, before the matter reaches the LGO. Suffolk have 100% compliance rating with the LGO.
51. The LGO notes that the role of the local authority as a commissioner of services has become increasingly prevalent and that service delivery typically involves a complex mix of public, private and charitable organisations working together. While local government has proven its abilities to adapt and innovate in the light of budgetary challenges, these systems have inevitably changed the relationship between the citizen and public service provider. The LGO acknowledges this has brought challenges for local authorities in retaining accountability structures and ensuring redress is accessible when things go wrong.
52. The LGO also recognises that the devolution agenda is perhaps the biggest change to local government in a generation, and will transform the way public services are held to account.
53. The LGO has suggested that complaints teams should be better aligned with commissioners to enable a more robust oversight especially regarding complaints and learning from customer feedback.
54. The report acknowledges that the complaint system in local government is under increasing pressure and most teams are having to do more with less.

55. People are waiting too long to have their complaints sorted. Some people have spent an average of nine months trying to get a complaint resolved before approaching the LGO.
56. While results do not account for the size and composition of the councils responding, data indicates many councils are handling increasing numbers of complaints. (The LGO notes that higher complaint volumes do not necessarily mean poorer standards of service, it may in fact indicate a council's open approach to listening to feedback and using complaints as early indicators of potential issues.)
57. The intelligence from complaints can be used to learn lessons, spot early warning signs and understand public sentiment. Particularly in this current financial climate, further investment in good local complaint handling, both in terms of resources and developing an open culture, could help councils to achieve better outcomes for people at a lower long term cost.
58. Staffing reductions across councils result in greater demand on teams that handle complaints.
59. 43% of complainants were not advised they could refer to the LGO if they remained dissatisfied with the Council.
60. Councils are taking more time to talk to complainants to discuss outcomes and come to satisfactory resolution at the earliest opportunity. The LGO supports a complaints system that enables people to feel confident in speaking up, listened to and assured that their complaint makes a difference.

Context

Children and Young People's Services

61. During the period 1 April 2015 - 31 March 2016 Suffolk County Council received **22,008 initial contacts through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This figure may include multiple contacts for some families and relates to 44,211 individual children. This represents a 39% decrease in contacts compared to the **36,142 recorded for 2014/2015. (**Source - Guardian).
62. *The numbers of children and young people receiving support from specialist services as at 31 March 2016 is as follows:
 - a) Child in Need - 2361
 - b) Child Protection Plan - 428
 - c) Looked after Children - 797
 (*Source Carefirst)

Adult and Community Services (ACS)

63. ACS supported 17,008 customers in the 2015/2016 period. 9,638 customers are currently in receipt of services open to ACS in the main service areas (Day service, Homecare, Care home, Direct Payment, and Specialist Housing.)
64. ACS received 11,842 requests for support from people aged 18-64 and 27,674 for people aged 65+. These figures are taken from the SALT (Short and Long Term care) statutory return, so can be benchmarked regionally and nationally (the national data is not published until October 2015.)
65. ACS have seen a 56% increase in requests for support for people over 65.

Public Health and Protection (PHP)

66. The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) has seen approximately a 52% reduction in the number of emergency calls it attends in the last 10 years with the number of incidents it attends plateauing in the last 4 years. Suffolk FRS receives approximately 6,000 999 calls each year and responds to just under 5,000 emergencies. Last year there were 887 primary fires (fires in property, such as buildings, vehicles, trailers etc.) of these 334 dwelling fires. From the 334 dwelling fires, 106 were fires in chimneys. There were approximately 850 'secondary fires' such as derelict buildings/vehicles, bins, grass and heath fires; about 310 road traffic collisions and 480 special services (body recovery, leak of hazardous materials, water rescues etc.). There were about 1,470 calls to automatic fire alarms that had activated in higher risk premises, such as sleeping risks and industrial premises with special risks like chemicals.
67. 2015/2016 saw the Fire Authority carry out a significant Integrated Risk Management Plan consultation that included a number of changes to the way the fire service is structured in Suffolk. The proposals were adjusted following the consultation and changes to the provision of fire engines and firefighters in Ipswich, Lowestoft, Wrentham, and Bury St Edmunds are now being implemented through 2016. These changes are being implemented alongside new approaches to improve the availability of on-call firefighters during the working week.
68. Trading Standards has powers to enforce over 80 Acts of Parliament covering a wide range of functional areas within a very broad and increasingly complex Consumer Protection framework.
69. This involves the department in a wide and varied range of activities including carrying out routine inspections of high risk premises, sampling consumer goods (including imports through the Port of Felixstowe), carrying out statutory duties as well as responding to requests for advice, guidance and information, receiving and analysing information and intelligence, and carrying out criminal investigations. Trading Standards staff come into contact with a wide range of consumers, traders and other stakeholders.
70. Public Health promotes and protects health and well-being encouraging healthy lifestyles. They commission a range of services including sexual health, drug and alcohol treatment, the integrated healthy lifestyle service, NHS health checks, health visitors and school nurses.

Resource Management (including Registrars and ESE directorate)

71. The Registrars Service registered 6,830 births, 6,753 deaths and 2,548 civil marriages/partnerships between April 2015 and March 2016.
72. The Customer Service area became part of the Communications team when the Customer Services Direct (CSD) contract ceased and the SCC Complaints Team (Customer Rights), joined Resource management at the beginning of the 2015.
73. IT, Corporate Property, Procurement, Scrutiny and Monitoring Finance and Human Resources are all part of the RM directorate.
74. From August 2015 the RM directorate took responsibility for maintaining highways, paths and footways as well as developing Suffolk's infrastructure for everyone who lives and visits Suffolk including planning and enabling economic growth. The directorate is also responsible for providing passenger transport

and transport for eligible children in education and managing commissioned services including highways and waste.

75. Suffolk Highways Area Management continued to see increases in complaints with a 51% rise from 134 in 2014/2015 to 207 in 2015/2016. This was largely down to the slow rate at which work on the highway network was being carried out by Kier and its subcontractors. There was an increasing number of complaints relating to attitude and conduct of staff, seemingly linked to a combination of frustration at the duration of works and often very lengthy diversion routes.
76. The Highways Transformation Programme is fundamentally changing the way that County Council staff and Kier representatives deliver highway services in the future - moving towards integrated teams which enables more effective and faster decision-making and shorter timeframes for work delivery on the ground. By making its work programmes, processes and policies more visible on the Suffolk Highways webpages, it is hoped that this increased transparency aids public understanding of the limitations reduced funding has on what can be done and by when. A new performance management framework came into effect at the beginning of April 2016 with a significant focus on customer opinion expressed through the annual National Highways and Transport (NHT) public survey.

**1 SCC's Business Intelligence system is O.R.B.I.T (Organisational Reporting & Business Intelligence System)*

Context

77. The latest census estimates the population of Suffolk as 735,900 out of which:
 - 180,100 (24.5%) are over 65
 - 130,689 (18%) are adults with a disability that limits their ability.
 - 77,745 (10.5%) are family carers
78. People need to be able to feedback on the services offered by the Council and be confident that the Council will listen to the views and opinions of people, respond appropriately and honestly, and improve where possible.
79. It is essential that appropriate monitoring of customer feedback from the newly divested service areas is carried out. This has been raised as an issue through the directors.
80. Work is being undertaken in contract management to ensure customers can complain or provide feedback in relation to the new service areas that the Council has responsibility for.
81. Persistent complainants are handled in a consistent manner via SCC Complaints (Customer Rights) and advised of their rights to challenge the Council's decisions through the Local Government Ombudsman which has seen a marked reduction in wasted staff time.
82. Vexatious complainants are channelled through the Customer Care Manager in line with the Council's policy and in agreement with the Monitoring Officer.

Response times

83. **Acknowledgement:** 96% of all complaints across the Council were acknowledged within 3 working days during the reporting period. This represents a slight decrease of 1% on the previous year and is largely due to the complexity of complaints and restructured teams.
84. **Response:** 66% of all complaints were resolved within 20 days, (1% decrease on last year and 3% over past 2 years).
85. **Resolution at Stage 1:** 99% of all statutory complaints are resolved at the first stage without the need for costly investigations. 96% of corporate complaints were resolved at Stage 1.
86. Occasionally complaints arrive at the Council via an MP or Councillor which often results in the required agreement and risk assessment not taking place within the required timescales.
87. Some complex complaints have been resolved by face to face meetings. This approach can often provide an opportunity to clarify the complaint and discuss outstanding issues including desired outcomes especially for those people with sensory or cognitive impairments.

Recording systems

88. All statutory complaints and the majority of corporate complaints are currently recorded in comprehensive excel databases that can be responsive to directorate demands for data and learning. All other corporate complaints are recorded on Gbiz, an online database which has limited functionality. The systems vary greatly in the amount and quality of data they are able to provide to inform reporting and aid organisational learning. The current Gbiz system is unable to provide the data required but a new Customer Service Platform (Dynamics) has been developed to capture complaints and customer feedback in a more holistic manner. It is expected that implementation will occur in early 2017.

Diversity information

89. Minimum data relating to statutory complaints is available for all compliments, comments and complaints. Complaints from black and ethnic groups are under-represented at 3.1%. According to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), 5.6% of the population of Suffolk are other than 'White British' or 'Irish'. Efforts are made to provide information in alternative formats and languages and to use interpreters and/or advocates when required. The Customer Care Manager has been focussing on making information about complaints and customer feedback accessible too hard to reach groups in conjunction with the Eastern Region Complaints Group.
90. Recording of diversity information for complaints outside ACS and CYP is undertaken, though is less comprehensive. The relationship between the complainant/customer and the Council is different for these services in comparison to those covered by statutory regulations.

Analysis

Complaints

91. In 2015-2016 the Council formally registered 1098 complaints compared to 741 in the previous period; this represents an overall increase of 48%. Contributory

factors were customer dissatisfaction about 3 key areas Support to Live at Home, Education Transport and Highways. These 3 areas showed a marked increase in formal complaints.

Table 2. Number of complaints by directorate

	Complaints 2013/2014	Complaints 2014/2015	Complaints 2015/2016
ACS	172	194	218
CYP	248	247	296
RM	303	254	559
PHP	9	5	25
Total	759	741	1098

Table 3. Method complaint received

Method Received Statutory Services	ACS	CYP
Phone Call	77	97
Email	69	104
Letter	36	59
Face to Face	2	0
Directors correspondence	4	14
Customer First	2	1
Complaint Form	25	16
Chief Executive correspondence	3	5
Total	218	296

92. The Council are working towards encouraging people to use digital channels to make contact - it is evident though that vulnerable customers value the opportunity to talk to people about their concerns and the Council provides alternative channels such as face-to-face or telephone so those customers / groups who are unable to engage with us digitally are not excluded.

Table 4. Breakdown to service areas ACS

Service Area	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Adult teams (all areas)	97	119	99
Customer First Service	12	7	4
Direct Payments/Finance	18	25	26
Domiciliary care (agency)	6	15	47
Domiciliary care (Home First)	5	4	9
Integrated Discharge Teams	3	0	1
Other - Occupational Therapy, Policy decisions, day service, transition	14	11	6
Residential care (agency)	12	7	13
Library (Corporate)	-	0	1
Other ACS Corporate	5	6	12
Total	172	194	218

93. Table 4 shows the relevant areas for all complaints that have been formally recorded and dealt with under the statutory or corporate procedures. An overall increase of 12% which is largely due to complaints about Domiciliary Care (Agency) 37 of the 47 were related to implementation of Support to Live at Home customers and a further 5 from commissioned services which were managed under the corporate complaints procedures.

Table 5. Breakdown to service areas CYP

Service Areas	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Statutory Specialist services	150	146	168
Statutory Early Help services	52(8)	45(14)	10(3)
Fostering (Statutory)	3	4	6
Adoption (Statutory)	3	3	5
Admissions/Appeals (Corporate)	5	6	20
Education (Corporate)	3	4	0
Commissioned services (Statutory)	-	-	0
Special Educational Needs (Corporate)	14	15	28
EOTAS	3	2	2
Other/ including policy etc.	15	22	2
Annual Total	248	247	296

94. The Early Help service figure includes all complaints received in 2015/2016 those relating specifically to health professionals are recorded in brackets. There has been a significant overall reduction in complaints to Early Help services of 77%.

Table 6 Breakdown of service areas RM

Service Area	Complaints	%
Education Transport	184	33%
Passenger Transport	31	5%
Registrars	8	1%
Environment	9	2%
Suffolk Highways (SH) Area Management	6	1%
Central	55	10%
East	59	10%
Ipswich	28	5%
West	59	10%
SH Network Management	34	6%
SH Operations (Kier)	33	6%
SH Street Lighting and Intelligent Transport Systems	10	2%
Road Safety	1	0.1%
Public Rights of Way	2	0.3%
Household Waste and Recycling	16	3%
Property and Planning	3	0.5%
Customer Services/ Digital	11	2%
Better Broadband	1	0.1%
Monitoring Officer	1	0.1%
HR/Schools	1	0.1%
Vertas	1	0.1%
Other	6	1%
TOTAL	559	100%

95. Suffolk Highways Area Management continue to see increases in complaints with a 54% rise from 134 in 2014/2015 to 207 in 2015/2016. This has been largely down to Kier and sub contracted services with an increasing number relating to attitude and conduct of staff.
96. There is a significant 120% increase in formally registered complaints in the RM directorate compared to the 2014/2015 period.

Table 7. RM (Including ESE) Complaints comparison

	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Stage 1	298	254 (-17%)	559 (+120%)
Stage 2	5	15 (+67%)	22 +32%)

97. There has been an increase in Stage 2 investigations with the majority being required in the RM area. All corporate investigations are carried out by the Complaints Team (Customer Rights) which represents a significant saving for the Council as each complaint investigation could potentially cost the Council between £1,000.00 and £3,000.00 if external investigators are used - a total saving of circa £44,000.00 using an average of £2,000.00.

Table 8. Breakdown of service areas PHP

Service Area	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Fire and Rescue	11	10	15
Trading Standards	4	8	4
Public Health	-	0	6
Total	15	18	25

98. PH had one complex complaint investigated at Stage 2 in the last reporting period which highlighted the need for all directorates to use the formal complaints procedure at an early stage. This ensures that agencies or individuals have their complaints managed in a formal framework that protects both the person and the Council.
99. ACS and CYP have seen increases in complaints 12% and 20% respectively.
100. RM have seen a significant increase of 120% in formally registered complaints which are largely due to Suffolk Highways and Education/passenger transport. The Registrar's service has seen a decrease from 14 to 8.
101. Complaints Case Managers are continuing to spend more time with complainants listening, involving and engaging in order that appropriate resolution can be facilitated. Support and advice is offered to managers in all directorates to draft responses.
102. Education Transport complaints have increased significantly from 28 in 2014/2015 to 184 in 2015/2016. The majority of the complaints related to the impact of the implementation of changes to the post 16 transport policy which had been approved by Cabinet in June 2014. Areas of complaint related to the tightening of the criteria, the use of discretion and requests for more clarity in the policy. There are early indications that the changes of policy regarding 16+ transport in 2015 are continuing to attract large numbers of complaints.

103. Key areas of the ACS service have been divested or delegated and there continues to be concern that commissioned services may not be complying with the Council's complaints policy.
104. A full rollout of Supporting Lives Connecting Communities (SLCC) and Support to Live at Home (STLH) has contributed to the increase in complaints in ACS. The Council has put a great deal of work into communications with customers, making sure people have full reviews of their needs and by undertaking quality checking of customer experience.
105. The number of complaints across all directorates that have progressed to Stage 2 or In-Depth investigation has increased again from 25 to 27 with the increase in corporate complaint areas. Statutory areas; CYP and ACS actually saw reductions at 5 and nil respectively. This is despite major structural changes and increased numbers of statutory complaints.
106. Suffolk Legal is accessed frequently by operational teams to provide support with complaints, which may be more appropriately handled by the SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights). This can result in responses being delayed and is an issue that is being addressed during quality assurance meetings with individual directorates.
107. Increased media exposure of historic abuse cases often results in approaches to the SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights). These cases relate to issues some years in the past, when the complainant was in the care of the Council. Rather than dismissing people as out of time, each case is considered on its merit and people are offered a variety of options including face to face meetings, counselling and in some cases financial remedy. Most importantly, people are offered realistic options to gain closure on what has usually been a very difficult period in their lives.

Financial Remedies

108. The Council will sometimes pay money to remedy an injustice caused to an individual as a result of its action or lack of action. It is of note that less than 1% complaints warranted a financial remedy with the majority of payments being made for time and trouble and/or delay. Occasionally payments or waivers are made by managers which are clearly an attempt to aid early resolution but they need to be reminded that payments made as a direct result of a complaint should follow guidelines for ex-gratia payments. This requires the Customer Care Manager, Director of service, Cabinet Member and Chief Executive to agree payments over £500. Payments under £500 are agreed by the Customer Care Manager and the relevant Director.

Table 9. Financial Remedies across directorates

Directorate	Total amount (£) 2014/2015	Total amount (£) 2015/2016	Number of cases 2014/2015	Number of cases 2015/2016
ACS	500	1320	2	1
CYP	2300	3250	2	2
Other Corporate	0	1085	0	4
Total	2,800	5655	4	7

Themes for complaints

109. Trading Standards have seen a decrease to 4 complaints in this reporting period. The service has been working hard to support recording of customer feedback which has also shown a significant increase in compliments too. The service received 21 compliments and 3 comments.
110. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service received an increased number of complaints this year. Ten of the complaints referred specifically to the conduct and attitude of the fire personnel. Five complainants stressed concerns about the quality and service that had been provided by SFRS. All complaints received were fully investigated with a satisfactory response delivered to all complainants within the timescales set out in the County Council's policy.
111. Service provision for adults continues to be a significant cause for complaint frequently linked with financial issues. 121 were received which remains the same as the previous year. Many of these are listed as area team complaints but often have elements of finance and direct payments included.
112. There was an overall increase of 12% in complaints relating to ACS which is largely due to complaints about Domiciliary Care (Agency). 37 of the 47 were related to implementation of Support to Live at Home customers and a further 5 from commissioned services which were managed under the corporate complaints procedures.
113. It is acknowledged that sometimes disaffected customers will lodge a complaint to intimidate a practitioner and indeed in over 35% of complaints made to CYP the customer had unrealistic expectations of the Council.

Learning from complaints

114. Following the resolution of some education transport complaints the Customer Care Manager and the Education Transport lead carried out some focussed interviews with dissatisfied customers in an effort to establish the root cause of these complaints.
115. Key findings:
 - a) The importance of good communication at an early stage in order to manage expectations
 - b) Mixed messages coming from various service areas
 - c) Lack of clarity about policy
 - d) No apparent account of individual needs.
 - e) Lack of key information about alternative options
116. The service area has made some changes to their information, policy and practice as a result of customer feedback.
117. Directorates are committed to ensuring that learning from complaints is both implemented and evidenced. The SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) are providing additional intelligence around geographical areas and teams to identify areas of dissatisfaction.
118. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) has asked that there are checks made with the SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) to avoid duplication in corresponding with customers. Improved mechanisms for providing co-ordinated

responses within the Council have been developed resulting in complaints being offered a consistent response and the Council saving valuable staff time.

119. Early resolution is one of the over-riding principles of statutory complaints but there is room for improvement in all service areas with 34% of all complaint responses not meeting deadlines.
120. CYP have a Quality Engagement and Intelligence Board that is working to quality assure and ensure concrete changes are made that have come to light as a result of a complaint. A group consisting of Professional Advisors, Customer Care Manager, and senior officers from both the specialist and integrated services meet regularly to consider themes and trends and take ownership for ensuring changes in practice are made where necessary.
121. ACS is committed to learning from customer feedback and has developed an Improvement and Intelligence Forum that will ensure they are implementing systems that show how services have improved or changed as a result of customer feedback.
122. The Customer Care Manager reports on a regular basis to the management team bringing key issues of pressure to the attention of the Directors and AD's in statutory areas in order to identify areas that could be improved and encourage learning from customer feedback. Action plans are formulated with teams to ensure changes and/or improvements take place if necessary.
123. The Customer Care Manager attends bi-monthly management meetings linking with quality improvement and contracts and safeguarding to ensure a joined up approach and report on trends and key features of complaints.
124. It is easy for large directorates to lose sight of things that need changing or improving. It's not the constant collation of data that will improve services; it's what the directorate pays attention to that makes the difference. The RM directorate has many areas of responsibility and it exists to deliver services for customers and support Council functions - if the primary focus is numbers then the focus is neither the service nor the customer and a solution will only last if work environments are adjusted to support change.
125. An example of this environment change is in the way the Assistant Director Operational Highways in RM has already implemented a number of integrated teams (both permanent and temporary) to deal with backlogs of work, simplified processes through the application of systems thinking, resolved contractual issues that adversely impacted on personnel behaviour and instilled across Suffolk Highways a greater focus on the importance of the customer, corporate priorities and joint strategic objectives.

Training

126. Corporately, e-learning on Customer Care is available on the learning pool and practical support with letter writing is provided through the "Getting it Write" course. This can be booked through the learning pool and HR self-service and bespoke courses that are contextualised to meet the demands of the service area are also available.
127. The SCC Complaints Team (Customer Rights) provides ongoing training sessions to newly qualified Social Workers as part of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) across the county.

128. 'Signs of Safety' training is being delivered across Children's services in Suffolk which aims to improve relationships and ways of working with families where children are in need of intervention.

129. The high demand cases continue to progress to Stage 2 and beyond.

Characteristics of these cases are:

- a. The disproportionate amount of staff time compared to issues complained about.
- b. The difficulty in handling challenging situations; often with no concerns regarding safeguarding or welling of children and young people.
- c. A further dimension being that there is no desire on behalf of the complainant to achieve resolution but the statutory process must be followed.
- d. Other routes through professional bodies frequently used to hold the Council or individuals to account.

Comments

Table 10. Analysis of comments

	Comments 2013/2014	Comments 2014/2015	Comments 2015/2016
ACS	105	78	97
CYP	-	135	226
PHP	2	2	1
RM	127	41	222
Total	234	257	546

Learning from comments

130. Services welcome comments to inform them about customers' opinions. Comments are a useful way for people to have their say without using formal procedures. The general feedback is that people do appreciate consultation, ongoing dialogue and discussion about key issues. The Council have seen a significant increase of 112% in customers making comments.

131. The following are frequent subjects of customer concern:

- a. At least half of comments received were about Quality of Service.
- b. Overgrown footpaths, verges etc. - review of maintenance regularity.
- c. Highways maintenance across the county - Potholes etc.
- d. Education Transport
- e. Planning
- f. Policy

Compliments

Analysis of compliments

132. Numbers vary from service to service, depending on the type of service and the relationship between the customer and the Council. For example, the majority of compliments are received by in-house domiciliary providers who are often stepping in at critical times of a person's life, whilst children's safeguarding services receive traditionally low numbers of compliments due to the requirement for statutory intervention. Staff continue to be encouraged to record compliments

and forward to the SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) where they are formally recorded. Compliments are also forwarded to senior managers for endorsement of good practice and provide valuable sources of learning for the Council.

Table 11. Breakdown of compliments across directorates

	Compliments 2013/2014	Compliments 2014/2015	Compliments 2015/16
ACS	71	73	81
CYP	40	25	56
PHP	44	26	21
RM	250	249	238
Total	405	373	396

RM Compliments

133. This reporting period sees a 6% increase in compliments overall. The Registrars Service received the majority of unsolicited compliments. Suffolk Highways received over 30% of registered compliments.

PHP Compliments

134. There has been an increase in the number of compliments within PHP. The fire service received 20 this year compared to 13 last year. Most of these compliments have referred to the diligent work carried out by the Prevention team within the community, but a good proportion of compliments have expressed appreciation to the crews for their professionalism on the operational ground.

ACS Compliments

135. It is recognised that some service areas attract more compliments than others by their very nature. In ACS this year Home First continue to receive the majority closely followed by Occupational Therapy (OT) interventions. There has been an 11% increase in unsolicited compliments (73 in 2014/2015).

CYP Compliments

136. 56 compliments were received in 2015/2016; they all reflected aspects of good work carried out by individual social work professionals, the Youth Offending Service, Early help and Foley House. In addition to these numbers CYP ask for questionnaires to be completed following assessment or intervention. Surveys carried out in this way provide valuable feedback that aids service improvement and change.

137. Compliments generally confirm how much the public value prompt, good quality front line services.

138. The SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) found that the primary identifiable theme from their compliments was with regard to individuals going the extra mile in providing service.

Overarching issues

Managing complaints consistently

139. It is essential that the SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) are used as a central point for coordinating complaints and customer feedback. Complaints made by advocates, MP's and Councillors on behalf of an individual may often be duplicated contacts and it is therefore important that the protocol for channelling communications are followed. Directors, Cabinet members and Assistant Director's should not respond to complaints at stage 1. The protocol for Personal Assistants' gives guidance on how to manage correspondence and the evidence is that the Council is better at managing complaints if this protocol is followed. Evidence suggests that failure to follow the protocol results in unnecessary staff time and a poor customer experience which often includes delays and referral to the LGO.
140. SCC Complaints (Customer Rights) are working closely with all directorates to raise awareness of the importance of effective complaint handling and supporting quality assurance in statutory service areas by meeting regularly with key management groups to join up all aspects of customer feedback.
141. As the LGO highlighted, complaints teams are under considerable pressure to effectively manage complaints. The SCC Complaints team (Customer Rights) are part of the Customer Service and Communications function and have been working to train staff from the customer services call centre by way of regular 3 monthly secondments. There is a plan for more joined up working with Customer First and Customer Services as the front line centres dealing with statutory and corporate services respectively.
142. Data regarding compliments, comments and complaints, from delegated, divested and commissioned services is not provided in the annual report but the commissioners are working to ensure all those services are aware of their responsibility to inform their customers regarding complaints procedures.

Conclusion

143. Formally registered complaints and comments for this period have increased significantly, which is indicative of the structural changes and financial pressures that all Councils are experiencing. These changes and improvements are frequently required to make the best use of public money but complaint activity is also affected by high customer expectations.

Sources of further information

- a) LGO report
- b) Online complaints form including policy information
- c) easy read version
- d) Complaints form