

Bi-Annual Complaints Report April 2022- September 2022

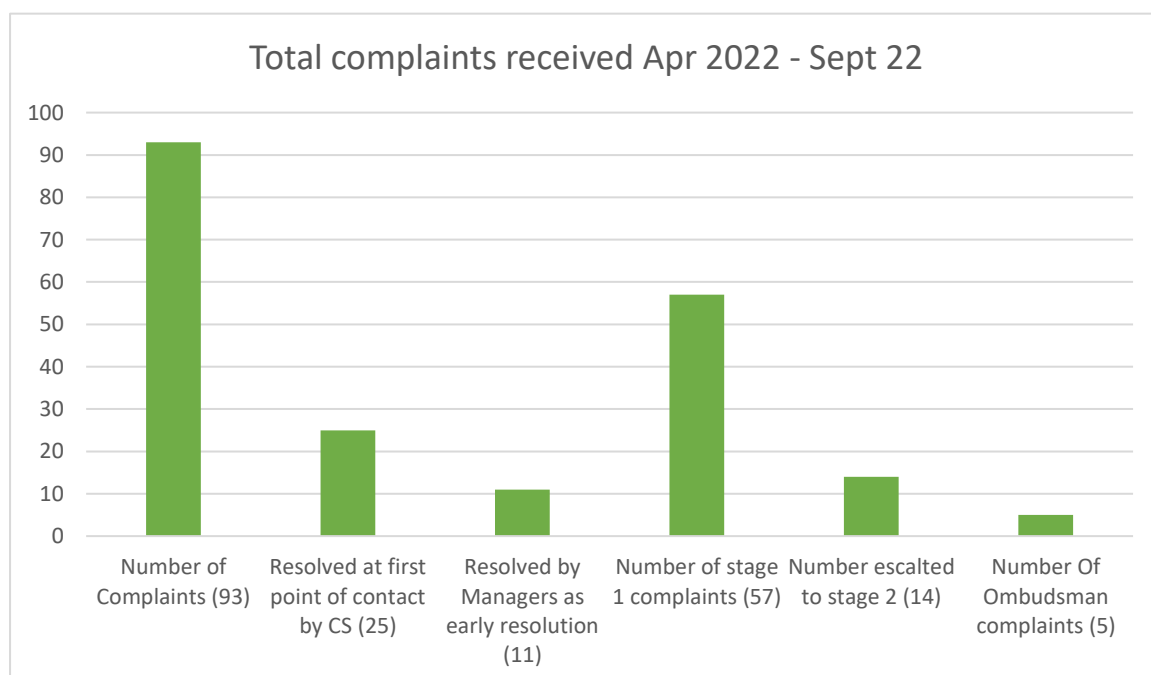


Introduction

The report summarises our complaints performance during the first and second quarter of 2022 covering the period from 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022.

The purpose of this report is to review the operation of the complaints processes over a six-month period, including statistical data, and to provide the local authority with the means by which it keeps itself informed about complaint themes and how effective its current arrangements are for handling customer complaints.

The Overall Picture



- The number of complaints received between 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022 was 93
- 25 complaints were resolved at first point of contact by the Customer Service team
- 11 complaints were resolved by managers as Early Resolution
- 57 complaints went through the formal complaints process and were investigated as Stage 1 complaints
- 14 complaints were escalated to Stage 2
- 5 complaints were received by the Ombudsman

Monthly Breakdown

The chart below shows the Stage 1 complaint comparison from the last reporting period Q3 & Q4 (Oct 21 – Mar 22) and the current reporting period Q1 & Q2 (Apr 22 – Sept 22)

Previous 6 months		Current 6 months	
Month	Stage 1 complaints received	Month	Stage 1 complaints received
Oct 21	3	Apr 22	14
Nov 21	4	May 22	12
Dec 21	7	Jun 22	8
Jan 22	11	July 22	5
Feb 22	12	Aug 22	9
Mar 22	9	Sept 22	9
Total	46	Total	57

Although Stage 1 complaints are higher in the current reporting period, we do see a big reduction in the overall number of complaints. In Q3 and Q4 (Oct 21 to Mar 22) the overall number of complaints was 136, in this current reporting period overall complaints were 93.

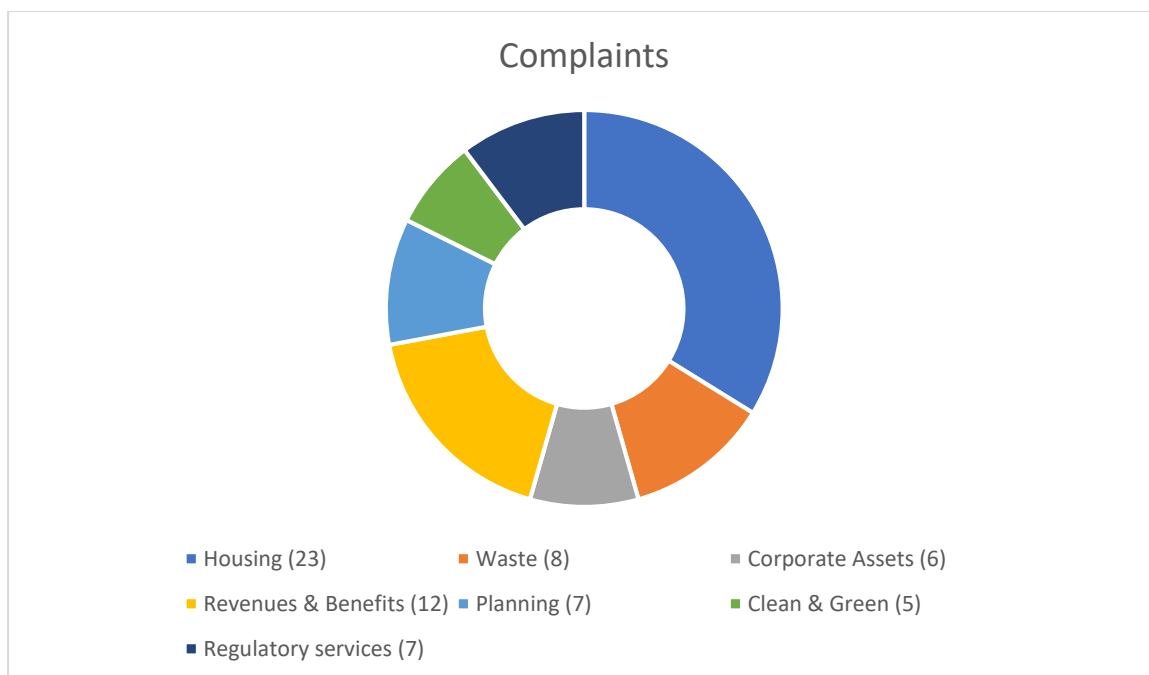
The chart below shows the Stage 2 complaint comparison from the last reporting period Q3 & Q4 (Oct 21 – Mar 22) and the current reporting period Q1 & Q2 (April 22 – Sept 22)

Previous 6 months		Current 6 months	
Stage 2 Complaints		Stage 2 Complaints	
Month	Number	Month	Number
Oct 21	1	Apr 22	4
Nov 21	1	May 22	2
Dec 21	3	Jun 22	3
Jan 22	4	Jul 22	0
Feb 22	3	Aug 22	3
Mar 22	5	Sept 22	2
Total	17	Total	14

Stage 2 complaints have been reduced in this current reporting period. Complaints Handing and Investigation training has been carried out with all managers in an effort to reduce unnecessary Stage 2 complaints.

Departmental Breakdown

The chart below shows all the complaints received by departments. This includes both Stage 1 and Early Resolution complaints. Lessons can still be learned from complaints that are resolved quickly by managers, so we are reporting on all of these.



Housing

Housing had a total of 23 Stage 1 and Early Resolution complaints – see breakdown below

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
1	Housing Allocations	Lack of communication from housing options officer	Better communication could have occurred	Partially upheld
10	Repairs	Delay in getting works completed (3)	Housing repairs not taking action Customer mis-understood - advice given correct	1 Partially upheld 1 Upheld 1 Not upheld
		Communal areas in a bad state	Lack of communication - called several times	1 upheld
		Poor quality of works from M&T	Quality of work	1 upheld
		Liberty Gas delays (4)	Customer mis-understood - advice given Compensation given for delays	3 Not upheld 1 Upheld
		Possible Data breach	Explanation given	1 upheld
12	Housing Tenancy	Lack of communication (3)	Housing Officer not taking requested action	2 upheld 1 Partially upheld
		Tenancy parking issue (2)	Unable to park	1 Not upheld 1 upheld
		ASB / Lack of action (5)	Housing officer not taking action against	4 upheld 1 Not upheld

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
			neighbours for ASB	
		Tenancy mobility scooter issue (2)	Help given to try and resolve	1 Partially upheld 1 not upheld

Two complaints escalated to Stage 2:

Stage 2		
Housing	Not happy with Stage 1 response	2 Not upheld

Two complaints were taken to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

Overview	Outcome
<p>Customer complaint about the landlord's response to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His reports of a leak in his property • His reports of problems with parking on his estate • His reports that he has been unable to use his garage due to parking issues on his estate. 	Compensation Given
<p>Customer complained about the service charges over the period 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021 for cleaning not carried out.</p>	Response not yet received at time of report publication

Housing Manager - Commentary

Complaints (10) made against the Repairs team, are largely justified. The primary reason for a complaint is because of contractors not attending in the time that they have stipulated. The team have now informed contractors that failure to attend an appointment without notifying the tenant of the non-attendance will result in a service failure and it will be expected that the contractor will award the tenant appropriate compensation.

The number of complaints (12) against the Tenancy team is disappointingly high. Many complaints are repeat requests for updates or incomplete actions which the team had previously said that they would deliver. The team is currently being restructured and processes and procedures are being implemented to improve service delivery.

The team have currently responded to two ombudsman enquiries. The Ombudsman's determination and compensation award has been accepted without challenge. In terms of the investigation outstanding the team were made aware of certain information which materially altered the Council's original view and complaint decision, We have advised that we would like to reconsider our position and response to the tenant, and we are awaiting their determination on this matter.

Waste

Waste had a total of eight Stage 1 and Early Resolution complaints – see breakdown below

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
3	Garden Waste	Reduction of winter month collections and increase in additional bin charges	Unhappy with price of service with reduced collections - pay in installments	2 Not upheld

		Issue with online renewal, had no bin	Customer error – wanted refund	1 not upheld
3	Bin Issues	Variety of issues with bins	Bins not being returned correct location Coming before 7am Bin not delivered in Timely manner	1 Upheld 1 Upheld 1 Partially upheld
2	Collections	Missed bin collection Staff attitude	Contamination Customer not happy with how binman Spoke to them	1 Not Upheld 1 Upheld

3 complaints escalated to Stage 2

Stage 2		
Garden waste issue (2)	Not happy with Stage 1 response	1 Not upheld 1 Not upheld (refund given as good will gesture)
Bin delivery issue	Not happy with Stage 1 response	1 Upheld

Waste Manager – Commentary

The Waste team carry out weekly collections for household and recycling waste for just over 24,000 domestic properties in the borough. They also collect garden waste and carry out bulky item collections as a chargeable service. Due to the wide-ranging nature of this service, complaints are inevitable.

Out of the eight Stage 1 complaints received only three were upheld and one was partially upheld. These complaints related to one bin not being returned to the correct location, a crew member coming just before 7am, an issue with a bin not being delivered as quickly as usual and one isolated staff attitude issue. Relevant Collection staff have received feedback and issues have been addressed.

Two of the Garden Waste complaints related to the policy decision to reduce winter collections from 12 months to 9 months, both complainants escalated their complaints relating to this to Stage 2 as they would not accept the Council's policy position on this. The other Garden Waste complaint related to a customer's own error when making their renewal online.

Corporate Assets

Corporate Assets had a total of six Stage 1 and Early Resolution complaints – see breakdown below

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
3	Cemeteries	Cemetery issue (3)	Lack of mowing being carried out Grave not dug	1 upheld 1 Upheld

			Rubble on grave/broken ornament	1 not upheld
2	Allotment (3)	Allotment issue (2)	Lack of maintenance	2 upheld
1	Play equipment	Poor maintenance	Improvements pending	1 upheld

Two complaints escalated to Stage 2:

Stage 2		
Cemeteries	Not happy with Stage 1 response	1 not upheld
Allotments	Not happy with Stage 1 response	1 not upheld

Corporate Assets Manager- Commentary

A number of issues within the cemeteries service were identified as communication errors in the processes involved. These were addressed at the time to ensure they wouldn't happen again, but the systems and processes are to be further reviewed in the coming months to put further procedures into place.

We are challenged in terms of budgets for maintenance of the allotments as an overall service. As a result of the complaints/enquiries received over the period we were able to provide a redressing of the internal 'cart track' road surfaces to improve access in all areas. Further, we reviewed some external boundary lines following enquiries and were able to reduce some vegetation – which further revealed some possible encroachment of property boundaries adjoining the allotments sites.

Maintenance has been improved at play areas via a more robust approach to the system for inspection and subsequent reactive maintenance.

Clean & Green

Clean & Green had a total of five Stage 1 and Early Resolution complaints – see breakdown below

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
5	Hedge maintenance (1)	Lack of communication	Lack of updates and communication	1 upheld
	Grounds maintenance (4)	Lack of work being carried out	Work to be completed soon	2 upheld 1 not upheld
		Lack of communication	Lack of updates and communication	1 upheld

Stage 2		
Grounds maintenance	Not happy with Stage 1 response	1 not upheld

Corporate Assets Manager – Commentary

The Clean and Green Service (comprising public cleansing and grounds maintenance operatives and the Brocks Hill Ranger) transferred to the Corporate Assets section in February/March, just ahead of the period in question. Staff were briefed prior to the start of this six-month period on the expectations to both the cleansing and grounds works and we approached much of these operational works from a different perspective to other years/seasons.

Green operations have been impacted due to staff being moved to cover sickness and absence on the cleansing team. A number of long-term absences have been covered within the whole of the Clean and Green team over the six months.

The complaints were dealt with as part of the normal maintenance schedules. It was anticipated that the first stage response which led to the second stage complaint would be rejected due to perceptions of how we should carry out the work. As a matter of practice, we do not strim or manually weed areas but spray them with weedkiller, which in order to be effective requires us to allow some growth of the weeds in order to spray them.

Lessons have been learnt by the whole team this season with a view to further improved processes for next year.

Revenues & Benefits

The Revenues & Benefits team received 12 Stage 1 and Early Resolution complaints – see breakdown below

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
6	Billing	Billing issue	Billing errors	4 not upheld 2 upheld
1	Lack of response	No reply to emails Lack of calling customer back	Lack of communication	1 Partially upheld
3	Recovery	Court Summons (1)	Outstanding amount to be paid	Not upheld
		Bailiffs (2)	Unhappy at bailiff's actions	2 not upheld
1	£150 rebate	Delays	Took too long to process	1 upheld
1	Business rates	Lack of response	Letters had been sent	1 Not upheld

One complaint escalated to stage two:

Stage 2			
1	Billing	Not happy with Stage 1 response	1 not upheld

Two complaints were taken to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

Overview	Outcome
Customer complaining that the Council did not set up a council tax direct debit which led to him receiving a reminder. He also says the complaint responses were late.	Complaint not being investigated by Ombudsman. Council has provided a fair and proportionate response
Customer requested a face to face to discuss the accounts in question and amounts paid, customer believes arrears are lower than stated.	Complaint not being investigated by Ombudsman, as it is still on-going within the Council's internal complaint process.

Revenues and Benefits Manager - Commentary

With around 24,000 Council Tax bills sent out in the six months leading up to April 2022 the time around annual billing is the busiest period in Revenues and Benefits, which sees an increase in calls and written/electronic correspondence. On top of this in 2022 we have administered the Council Tax rebate scheme which has seen close to 20,000 payments made. Whilst the majority of these were made without issue the scale of the task and short timescales involved have led to a number of cases where payment was not made as quickly as planned. A full debrief exercise will be carried out once the discretionary scheme has concluded, allowing us to learn from any mistakes ahead of future projects.

The majority of complaints were not upheld, but that does not mean there isn't learning to take from them. The process for accounts following a death has been updated to ensure a condolence letter is sent either with or before any other correspondence. Further information will be added to the website to provide clarity around empty properties and liability issues around the end of tenancies. Additional information around the split of Council Tax to be published at year end to explain where the payments go and what they are for.

All team leaders have revisited the complaints handling training and reduced the number of complaints that are escalated to Stage 2. I review each escalated complaint with the officer that completed the initial response to look for things that could be addressed differently to avoid that escalation.

Planning

Planning had a total of seven Stage 1 and Early Resolution complaints – see breakdown below

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
7	Planning Applications	Delays (5)	Unhappy at length of time to receive a planning application decision	4 Upheld 1 Partially upheld
		Lack Of communication (1)	Alleged rudeness of staff member	1 Not upheld

		Not providing requested documentation (1)	Unhappy with no provision of officers report	1 Not upheld
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4 complaints escalated to stage two:

Stage 2		
Planning Applications	Not happy with Stage 1 response	3 not upheld
Unhappy with staff advice	Not happy with Stage 1 response	1 not upheld

Planning Policy and Development Manager – Commentary

Given the nature of the Planning profession, complaints may well be received when applicants are aggrieved with the decisions that are being made, however, in the main, complaints are limited to the Development Control side of the Planning department at the Council. Since April 2022 a total of seven complaints have been received. In the main, the complaints related to historical planning applications that hadn't been decided within the statutory timescales. Such delays were due to a high turnover of agency staff during the earlier parts of the year, and an historical backlog of planning applications.

However, since the planning service restructure, more resource and time has been able to be focused where it is needed most, for example in the validating of planning applications and the assessing and deciding of planning applications. Consequently, the planning application backlog has decreased significantly and therefore complaints relating to the time taken to determine planning applications has reduced also.

Regulatory services

Regulatory services had a total of Seven Stage 1 and early resolution complaints – see breakdown below

Number	Area	Category	Overview	Upheld Y/N
4	EH	Lack of communication	Diary sheets to be returned and noise	1 upheld
		ASB at public house	Investigation carried out/lack of action taken	1 upheld
		Cats in garden	Cannot be enforced as cats are nomadic	1 not upheld
		Rats in neighboring property lack of action	Sewers baited / pest control in attendance	1 not upheld
1	Joint Grant/Licensing	No processing of grant	Possible investigation	1 not upheld
1	Selective Licensing	Complaints of lack of license being issued	Licenses already issued	1 not upheld
1	Licensing	Loss of documents	Wanting compensation	1 upheld

No complaints escalated to Stage 2

Regulatory Services Manager- Commentary

We have had three complaints upheld in six months from over 350 Environmental Health service requests received, over 500 private sector housing activities and 250 licensing and registration applications processed.

Two of those upheld were due to a delay in responding when set against our ambitious and challenging measure of responding within one working day. Staff continually work hard to ensure all our customers receive the best service they can despite continual staff shortages.

The loss of documents is something that we have pursued with Royal Mail and a new system to return documents has been introduced to prevent this from happening again.

Reporting, monitoring and driving service improvement

The Customer Service Improvement team together with the Compliance and Policy Officer reviews data on a monthly and quarterly basis to establish themes and trends.

Monthly Complaints Review meetings are held and Service Area Managers attend to discuss and review the complaints for their service area. Where a consistent theme or issue has been established, managers are instructed to take action to prevent the poor service that triggered those complaints from being repeated.

Lessons learned are recorded and best practice is shared to improve customer experience.

The Customer Service Improvement Manager feeds back to the Senior Leadership Team on a monthly basis.

Response Times

Response times for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints are monitored:

Month	Stage 1 (Target 10 days)	Stage 2 (Target 20 days)
Apr	6 days	15 days
May	7 days	12.5 days
June	7 days	10 days
July	10 days	N/A no stage 2 complaints
Aug	8 days	13 days
Sept	8 days	4.5 days

The Customer Service Improvement Manager and the Compliance and Policy Officer led training sessions on Complaints Handling and Investigations at the start of November. All managers and heads of service attended. This training was run in addition to the current e-learning training course to help support managers further and help them to provide a higher quality of response letters and avoid complaints escalating to stage two of the process.

The training re-iterates the importance of providing responses to complaints in a timely fashion. This will help to further improve response times. It also covered topics such as improving communication as lack of it is the number one reason for complaints escalating to Stage 2.

Complaints Benchmarking

We have carried out a benchmarking exercise against other local councils, and our performance compares well with our neighbouring local authorities. We have the lowest amount of complaints for both 2021 and 2022. The benchmarking also showed us that other councils are seeing a much higher increase in the number of complaints received in 2022 compared with the previous years. Work will begin to explore the reasons for this further.

Complaints Surveys

In 2021 we made the decision to survey complainants. The survey is conducted once their complaint has reached its conclusion.

The Customer Service Improvement Officer calls customers that have indicated they wish to be surveyed. The complainants are asked a range of questions about their experience of the complaints handling process.

A question is also asked to see if they are happy with the outcome of their complaint. We recognise that not all customers will be happy with the outcome, but by measuring their satisfaction on our other questions we can ensure we are providing a good service and managing complaints effectively.

Between April 2022 and September 2022, a total of 23 customers were surveyed, see the survey results below:

Handling of their complaint



96% of customers surveyed felt satisfied with the handling of their complaint (22/23)

Treated Fairly



91% of customers surveyed said they were treated fairly during their complaint (21/23)

Complaint Outcome



74% customers surveyed were satisfied with the outcome to their complaint (17/23)

Helpful & Polite



96% customers surveyed felt that staff were helpful and polite during their complaint (22/23)

Positive Comments

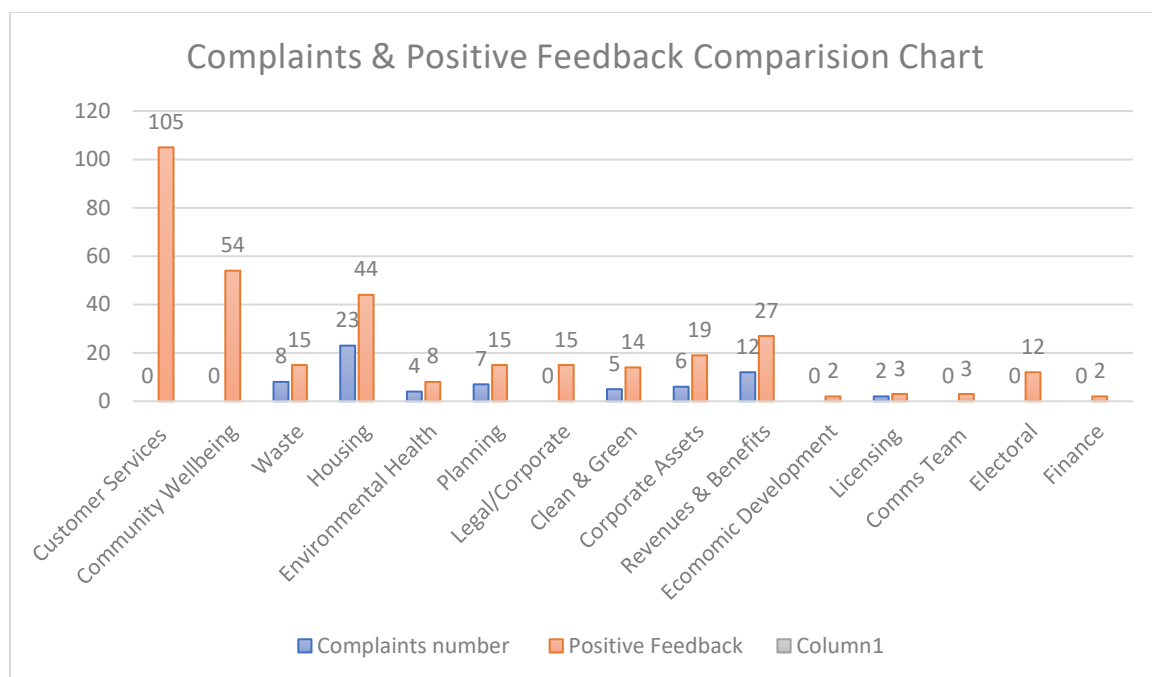
Between April 2022 and September 22 there was 338 positive feedbacks, compliments and comments received.

The Customer Services (105) and Community & Wellbeing teams (54) received the highest amount of positive feedback due to the frontline nature of their services and their proactive participation in surveying customers.

We have recently reviewed the definitions of compliments and positive feedback and the decision was made to combine all positive feedback to recognise that it should be celebrated.

Positive customer feedback is recorded and shared with line managers and staff involved. This is recognised at service level through team briefings/meetings and individual 'one-to-ones'. The Customer Service Improvement team also award 'Thanks' badges to officers/teams that have received positive feedback or have gone above and beyond.

The chart below highlights the positive feedback against the number of complaints received for each directorate.



In addition, the following teams received positive feedback and no complaints:

Customer Services	105 positive feedback comments
Community and Wellbeing	54 positive feedback comments
Legal/Corporate	15 positive feedback comments
Democratic/Electoral	12 positive feedback comments
Comms	3 positive feedback comments
Finance	2 positive feedback comments
Economic Development	2 Positive feedback comments

Here are some examples of positive feedback received:

Customer Services

█████ was extremely helpful and helped me organise pick up of old furniture very efficiently. █████ had all the additional useful information very effectively. Many Thanks.

Electoral Services

Excellent service from the Electoral services department. My email was answered immediately with an informative and friendly response

Housing

█████ was very helpful this morning, also made me feel comfy enough to talk about rent arrears situation!



Corporate Assets

Customer has phoned to thank █████ at Wigston Cemetery. He says that since █████ has been taken on the cemetery has never looked so good. Please pass on his thanks.

Clean & Green

You do a brilliant job up there, it's beautiful (Responding to a post about Brocks Hill)

Waste

A massive thank you to your crews. There aren't the words to say how much they are appreciated.