



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

6 May 2015

Title: Complaints and Compliments Performance Update 2014/15

Report of: Involvement and Diversity Manager

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the committee with complaints & compliments performance for the year ending 31 March 2015.

Background

2. A review of the complaints policy was identified as a corporate objective for the organisation.
3. Following the adoption of the new complaints policy in July 2014, the Committee agreed to receive a year-end report as well as 6 monthly updates on complaints and compliments performance, the activity of the Complaints Scrutiny Panel, and the ongoing work associated with the review.
4. The company has a three stage process for dealing with complaints:
 - Step 1: Problem solving* – where we are able to resolve the complaint at the point that it is brought to our attention
 - Step 2: Investigation* – a complaint that cannot be immediately resolved and an investigation is required. The timescale for resolution is 10 days (which can include a holding letter).
 - Step 3: Review* – where a complainant is unhappy with the response following an investigation they can request a review of their complaint by the Managing Director. This will be completed within 20 days.

Complaints and Compliments Performance

Number of complaints recorded

5. The number of complaints recorded in 2014/15 has reduced overall compared with the same period in 2013/14. The number of Problem-solving complaints has seen a reduction of 18%, and Investigations have seen a reduction of 36%.

6. Moving the recording of complaints into Northgate by Q2 of 2015/16 will contribute to the introduction of contact logging to the Company. In the interim we will continue to monitor the complaints being logged to ensure that we are capturing all feedback and to make sure that all existing 2015/16 complaints can be migrated into Northgate when the time comes.
7. A breakdown of the number of Step 2 – investigation complaints by service area and category is provided in [Appendix 1](#) and [Appendix 2](#) shows them by geographical area.
8. In the same time period, the number of complaints escalated to Review has increased slightly compared with last year with three additional reviews being requested.

	2013/14	2014/15
Step 1 – Problem-solving	1068	880
Step 2 – Investigation	492	315
Step 3 – Review	11 (2.2%)	14 (4.4%)
Compliments	331	253

9. Of the 14 Reviews undertaken in 2014/15, 9 (64.2%) upheld the original decision of the Investigation, 1 (7.1%) partly upheld the original decision, 3 (21.4%) overturned the original decision and 1 Review was ongoing at year-end.
10. Compared with the previous year out of 11 Reviews, 5 (45.5%) upheld the original decision of the investigation, 2 (18.2%) partly upheld the original decision and 4 (36.4%) overturned the original decision.
11. Although the number of Reviews has increased slightly this year, the proportion of original decisions being upheld has also increased, suggesting that the quality of investigations has improved. The increase in Reviews could suggest that customers are better informed and have a greater understanding how to progress their complaint.

Responding within target

12. The company-wide target for 2014/15 was to respond to 76% of Investigations within 10 days, and by year-end, overall 81.3% of complaints have been responded to within 10 working days.
13. By the end of 2014/15, 61.9% of complaints were resolved within target and without the use of a holding letter. On average, these took 6.29 days to resolve. 61 holding letters were issued (19.4%) and for these complaints the average time to resolve was 23.7 days, with an average of 15.4 days from the holding letter being issued to the complaint being resolved. 14.6% of complaints were resolved out of target and 4.1% were closed. Taking into account the total number of complaints received the average response time was 11.6 days. [Appendix 1](#) provides information on the proportion of complaints responded to within target by service area.
14. Mears and Repairs represent the highest number of complaints recorded, due to the volume of contact with our tenants and leaseholders. 183 of the total 312 (58.7%) complaints related to this service area, however, they continue to

achieve a high degree of compliance (88% resolved in target) reflecting the approach within the service of dedicated customer care officers responsible for coordinating and resolving complaints and close working between the company and Mears.

15. Performance against the 20 day target for step 3 Reviews shows that there has been a reduction in the number completed in target compared to 2013/14. This can be partly attributed to the reviews relating to more complex complaints and investigations which can take longer to consider and respond to.

Step 3 Review status	2013/14	2014/15
In target	9 (75.0%)	9 (64.3%)
Outside target	2 (16.7%)	4 (28.6%)
Open	1 (8.3%)	1 (7.1%)

Customer Satisfaction

16. Currently, satisfaction information is collected via a short survey which is completed by the customer once the Step 2 investigation has been responded to.
17. Satisfaction has fallen in 2014/15. 62.1% of people surveyed were satisfied with how we handled their complaint compared with 73.4% in 2013/14, a drop of 11.2%. Satisfaction with how we communicated throughout a customer's complaint is down by 5.3% from 70.2% in 2013/14 to 64.9% and satisfaction with the outcome of complaints is down by 7.4% from 65.1% in 2013/14 to 57.7%. (See Appendix 3)

Survey Responses		Y	N
Did we communicate well throughout your complaint	2014/15	109 (64.9%)	59 (35.1%)
	2013/14	120 (70.2%)	51 (29.8%)
Are you satisfied with the outcome of your complaint	2014/15	97 (57.7%)	71 (42.3%)
	2013/14	110 (65.1%)	59 (34.9%)
Satisfied how we handled your complaint overall	2014/15	105 (62.1%)	64 (37.9%)
	2013/14	124 (73.4%)	45 (26.6%)

18. Following review of the dissatisfied respondents, it appears that there is not a particular trend in terms of a specific service or officer where satisfaction has dropped. We will continue to increase the number of surveys we collect to improve the sample for us to review and identify any learning.
19. After consultation with the Complaints Scrutiny Panel it has been decided to adopt the "Very satisfied" to "Very dissatisfied" format for the Customer Satisfaction Survey from 2015/16 onwards. This will make it consistent with the Company's standard format for surveys and the results from the 2015/16 surveys will establish a new baseline for customer satisfaction.

Compliments

20. There have been 253 compliments recorded this year, including 70 received for services provided by Mears. Other services recording a high level of compliments are Caretakers (50) and Estate Management (50) Compliments recorded by service area and geographical area are provided in [Appendix 4](#).

21. A selection of compliments are reported weekly in the employee e-newsletter 'HomeWork' so that all employees can see where customers have taken the time to report the positive service they have received.
22. A sample of compliments received has been included in [Appendix 5](#).

Service Improvements

23. Officers are asked to log any potential learning or service improvement at the end of each investigation.
24. In total, 16 complaints resulted in additional or refresher training for employees, and 1 resulted in a change to procedure. A further 31 suggestions have been passed to service managers for consideration. These included:
 - Taking before and after photographs on site to provide evidence where customers are claiming that damage has been caused by contractors, or that the site has not been properly cleared afterwards.
 - Using photographs to support the void checklist, providing evidence of property and fixture condition at handover.
 - Reducing the response time for damp works from 40 days to 20 days for vulnerable tenants.
25. Further examples of service improvements can be seen in [Appendix 6](#).

Complaints Scrutiny Panel

26. The Complaints Scrutiny Panel have continued to meet on a monthly basis since May 2014 and during this time have been actively involved in challenging complaints performance and identifying opportunities and tools for improvement.
27. The Panel undertook a shadowing exercise with Advice Assistants in HomeRepairs in November 2014 and then repeated the exercise at Mears Head Office in March 2015 in order to better understand the journey a Repair follows from being reported by the customer to being carried out by the operative. Following the Repairs journey has allowed the panel to see the challenges from both the customer side and contractor side and better understand the reasons that customers feel the need to complain. The information they gained from this exercise will help them to scrutinise Repairs related complaints in the future and make more informed suggestions. Information that was gathered which falls outside the remit of complaints has been fed into the relevant Service Improvement Groups.
28. The Panel would like to identify and carry out further projects over the coming year and develop a more structured approach which will involve producing a report which can be presented at subsequent meetings following an exercise.
29. The Panel are keen to clarify their identity and role within the company. They recently scrutinised two examples of Step 3 Reviews and made comments and suggestions from a customer perspective; whether they agreed with the outcomes and why, whether or not the complaint should have proceeded to Review stage, what could have been done in the investigation to prevent the complaint proceeding to Review and identifying examples of best practice. In

both instances the Panel agreed with the outcome of the Review. The comments and suggestions they made have been fed back to the Investigating Officers.

30. Most recently the group completed the Company's Data Protection Training. This will allow them to begin to carry out Customer Satisfaction Surveys as planned, with a view to increasing the number of surveys returned. Completing the surveys will also give the group further insight into what we are doing right and where we can improve.

Progress against Complaints Review recommendations

31. The main priority now for Complaints and Compliments management in 2015/16 is to develop Northgate. Process mapping the procedure is ongoing and ICT development time will be allocated in the early part of 2015/16 to build the system.
32. This was recommended at the review and should help improve case handling as well as significantly improve the reporting capability so that we can drive forward improvements.
33. It has been identified that this exercise is closely linked to the development of a wider contact logging system within the company.

The Housing Ombudsman

34. From 1 April 2013 the Localism Act 2011 extended the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman to cover all social landlords, including Councils. The Housing Ombudsman is able to consider complaints in so far as they relate to the provision or management of housing. The Local Government Ombudsman continues to investigate complaints about allocations and the lettings policy.
35. During 2014/15 the Council was contacted by the Housing Ombudsman in respect of 7 cases. Of these two are ongoing, four have been resolved without the need for a full investigation by the Housing Ombudsman and the only one investigated concluded that there was no evidence of service failure within the landlord's response and no grounds for any further intervention.

Vexatious Contacts

36. The vexatious contacts guide is currently waiting to be tested against an existing case however a suitable example has not yet been identified.
37. Further to the work that has already been completed on the guide there will also be the opportunity to utilise Northgate's referrals module to administer the Vexatious Procedure meaning there will be no need for a paper referral form, all stages of the process will be recorded and managed centrally and therefore easy to report on and standard letters will be Northgate generated.

Link to values

38. This report is aligned to the following company values: -
 - Fair
 - Customer Focused
 - Open and Honest

- Accountable
- Inclusive, valuing diversity
- Innovative
- Passionate about what we do

Impact on tenants

39. Using learning from customer complaints will allow us to improve services for our tenants and leaseholders.

Risk Management Implications

40. Failure to record and monitor customer feedback may result in missed opportunities to improve services for customers, resulting in decreased customer satisfaction.
41. Inappropriate responses to the Council leading to negative findings against the company from Local Government Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman has been highlighted as an operational risk for the company. Through having clear and comprehensive records of our complaints handling process we are able to minimise this risk.

Financial Implications

42. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

43. We aim to improve customer service and ensure extended, inclusive access to services, advice and information for all customers.

Value for Money Implications

44. Improvements identified and implemented as a result of complaints will have a positive value for money implication by providing a more effective service to our customers.

Health Implications

45. There are no direct health implications arising from this report.

Environmental Implications

46. There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Consultation carried out

47. The Complaint Scrutiny Panel met on the 17 April 2015 to discuss the company's year-end performance and to plan future activity.

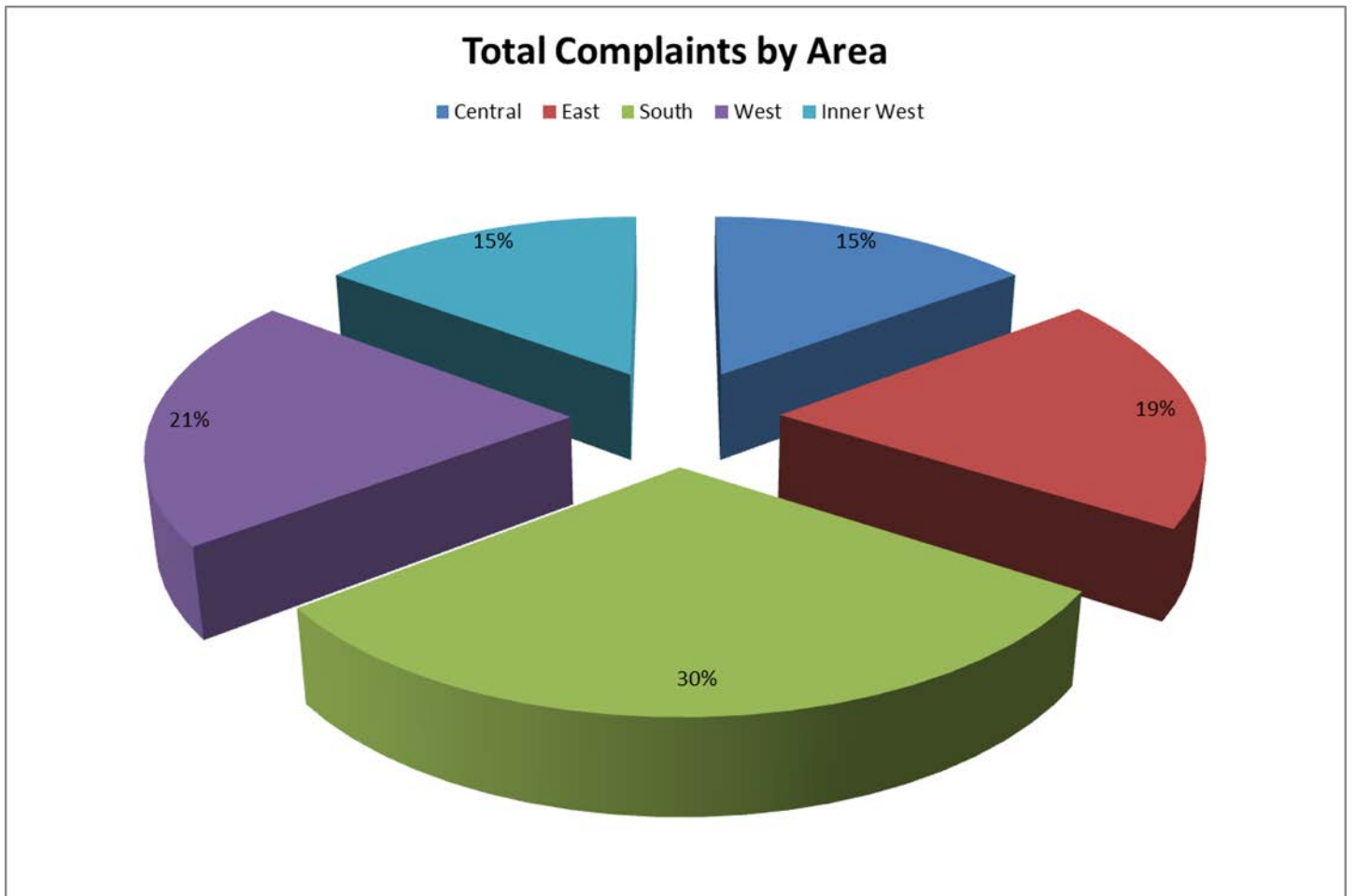
Recommendation

48. The views of the committee are sought on whether it is satisfied with performance for complaints and compliments for 2014/15.

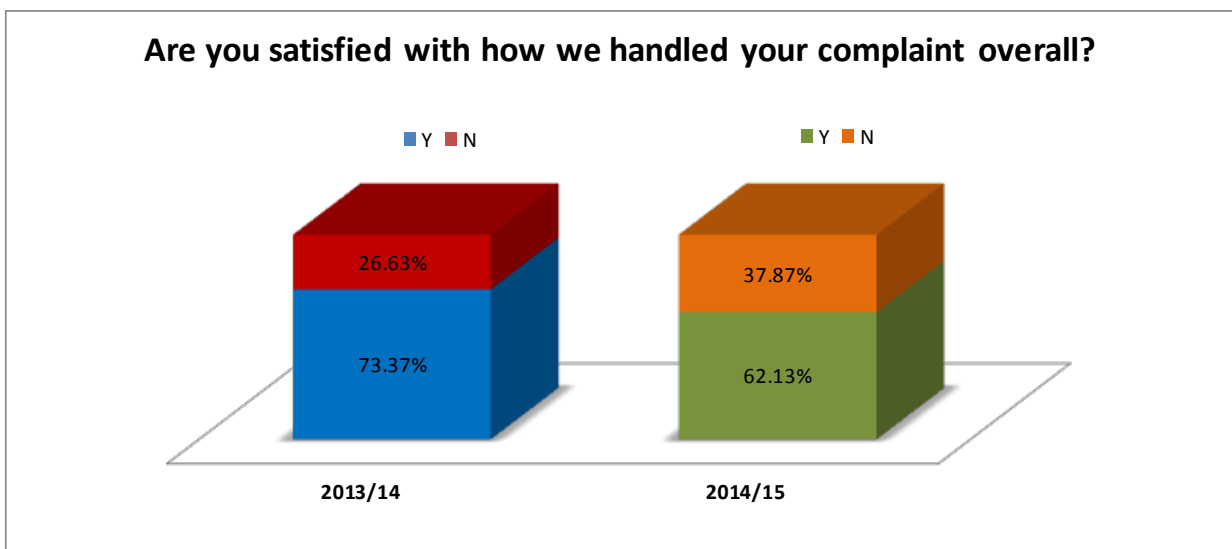
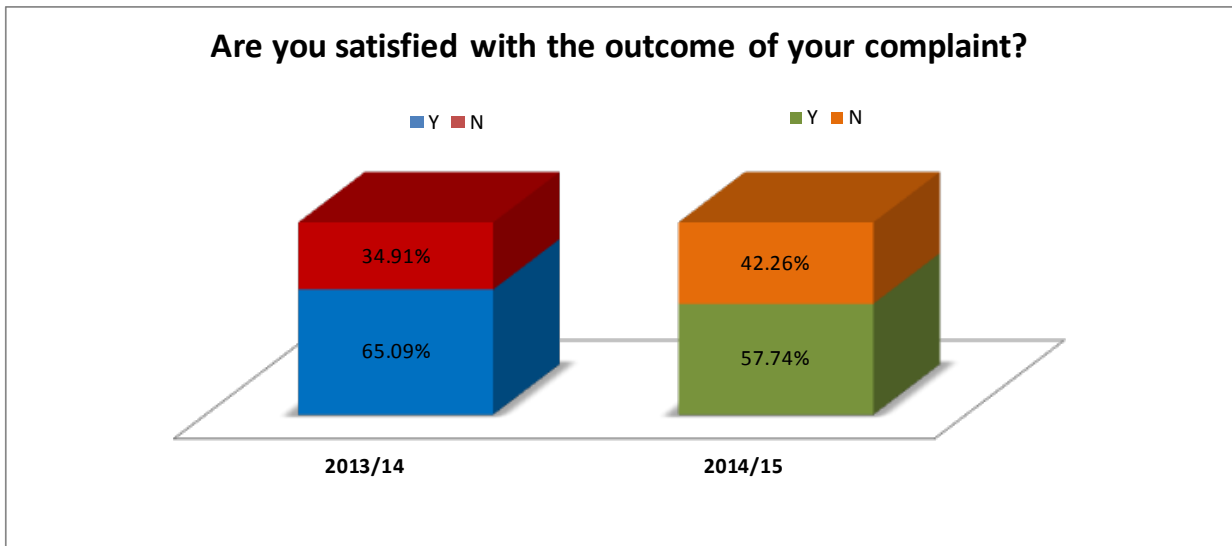
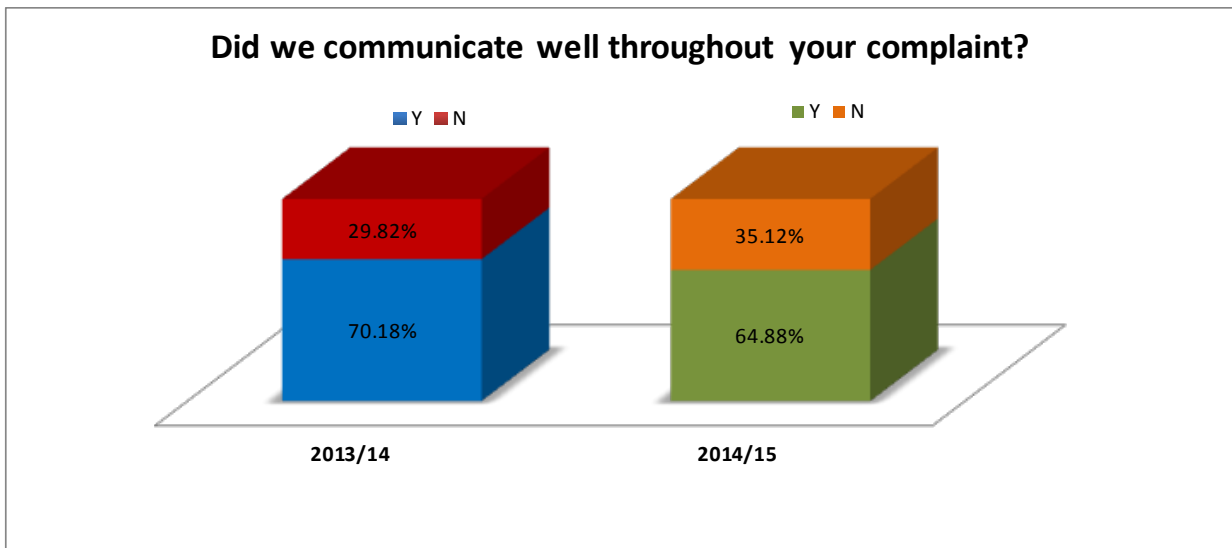
Summary of complaints end of year 2014/15

Service Area	Total Complaints (not including closed)			Category					
	Recorded	Resolved	% in Target	Quality of service	Access to service	Employee	Injury/Damage	Policy	Other
Capital Works	5	5	80.00%	3	0	0	1	0	2
Caretakers	11	11	100.00%	6	1	7	1	1	0
Concierge	1	1	100.00%	1	0	1	0	0	0
Cyclical Maintenance	1	1	100.00%	1	0	0	0	0	0
Empty Homes Initiative	1	1	100.00%	1	0	0	0	0	0
Estate Management	38	38	76.32%	25	2	10	0	6	4
Gas servicing	18	16	61.11%	17	1	3	0	0	0
Investment	7	7	100.00%	4	0	2	0	0	1
Lettings	17	17	94.12%	11	1	0	0	7	1
Mears	87	82	88.10%	69	5	27	16	1	0
New Build	4	3	75.00%	4	1	0	2	1	0
NRT	12	12	75.00%	9	0	2	0	2	1
Older Persons	2	2	100.00%	1	2	0	0	0	1
RAIT	4	4	75.00%	2	1	2	0	0	1
Repairs	88	81	76.14%	76	7	13	16	6	2
Scaffolding/Mears	11	11	90.91%	7	0	3	7	0	1
Surveyors	6	6	83.33%	6	0	0	1	0	0
Voids	2	1	0.00%	2	1	0	1	0	0
	315	299		245	22	70	45	24	14

Step 2 – Investigation complaints by geographical area

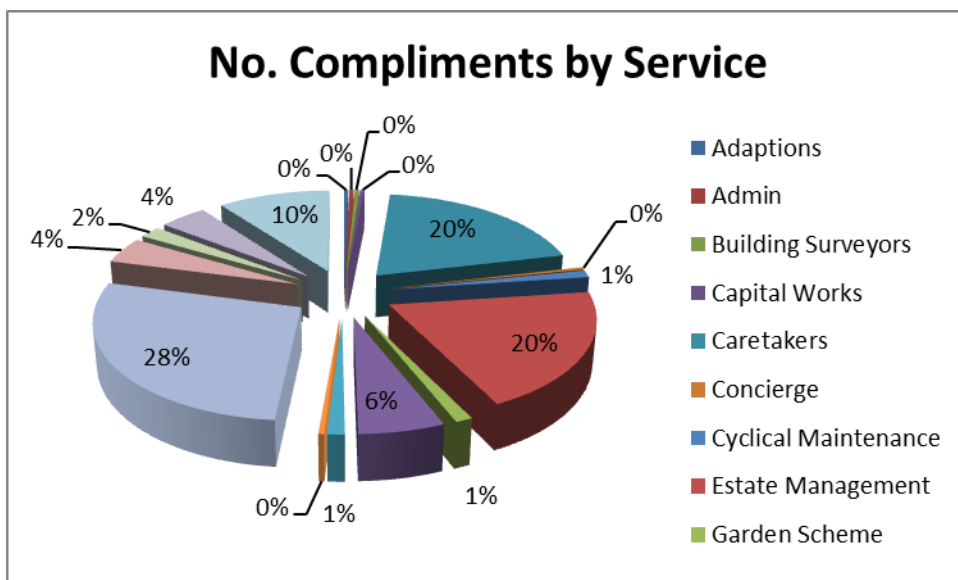


Satisfaction Survey Results

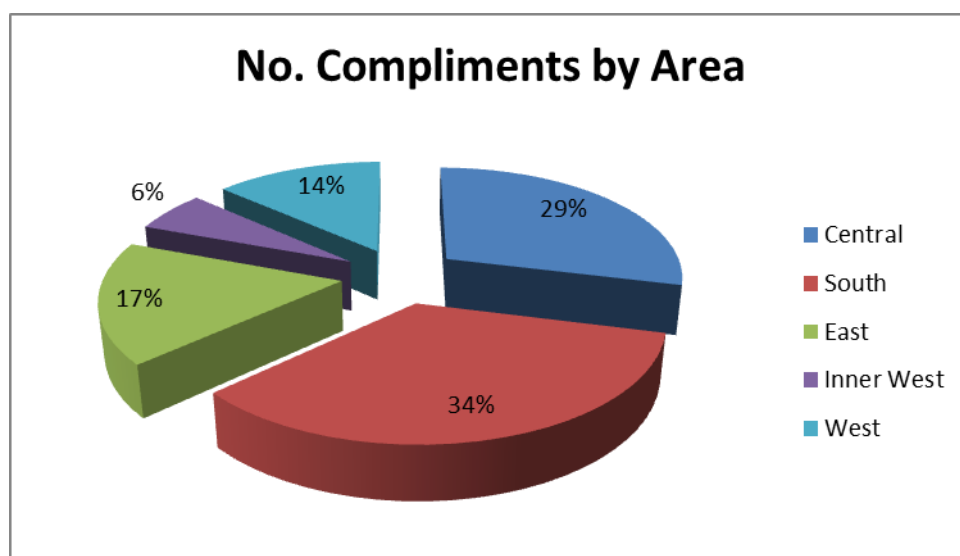


Compliments by service and geographical area

Service	No.	Compliments
Adaptions	1	0.40%
Admin	1	0.40%
Building Surveyors	1	0.40%
Capital Works	1	0.40%
Caretakers	50	19.76%
Concierge	1	0.40%
Cyclical Maintenance	3	1.19%
Estate Management	50	19.76%
Garden Scheme	3	1.19%
Lettings	15	5.93%
Leasehold	3	1.19%
Involvement	1	0.40%
Mears	70	27.67%
Older Persons	11	4.35%
NRT	5	1.98%
RAIT	11	4.35%
Repairs	26	10.28%
Total	253	100.00%



Area	No.	Compliments
Central	73	28.85%
South	87	34.39%
East	44	17.39%
Inner West	15	5.93%
West	34	13.44%
Total	253	100.00%



A selection of Compliments received in 2014/15

Tenant, Central - Customer wanted to thank all the HMAs at Central for treating him with courtesy and helping him with the bidding process which has led to him finding a new home.

Tenant, Central - Customer said today that Wendy Phin is 'the best caretaker' she keeps the block very clean and tidy.

Tenant, East - Customer would like to thank Stephen Richardson, a plumber from Mears. She called repairs on Sunday 6th April at 3pm as she had no water coming from any of her three hot taps and being elderly was very concerned re the heating. She received a phone call at 4:10pm to say the plumber would be with me in 15 minutes and he arrived very promptly to fix a sticky valve on the water tank in the loft. I can't thank him enough for this excellent service especially on a Sunday.

Tenant, East – Customer emailed, "Hope you're feeling okay. Thank you very much for getting pigeon dirt removed. We are very grateful. You're doing a great job. We will miss you when you go on maternity leave".

Tenant, Inner West – ASB satisfaction survey carried out. Customer complimented Alex Hunter and Laura Bell who have both been officers on this case. Both are very approachable and easy to talk to, always able to contact and contact customer when they say they will. Both were keen to take action against perpetrator and get something done and are excellent at their jobs, they did a good job resolving it and were sympathetic to customers.

Tenant, Inner West – Customer called into office with a Thank You card for Lisa Arnott, to thank her for all her efforts with helping her through her current difficult circumstances.

Tenant, South – Customer telephoned the office to pass on her thanks to Mark Ralph at Birtley Office. Customer said Mark has signed her up onto the garden scheme and he has been brilliant with her, she said he spent lots of time with her and he really felt that he cared. Customer said when Mark leaves this role it will be such a shame as he is brilliant and she was really impressed with the service he provided.

Leaseholder, South - Customer E-Mailed to say: I spoke to a member of your staff, namely Stephen Wilson and feel I must write to let you know what an asset he is to your team, as he immediately made me feel at ease and explained what had taken place and advised he would email me all the correspondence I had not received, plus photos and a breakdown of the work that had taken place. True to his word and within hours (which was very impressive and appreciated) Stephen sent me a fully comprehensive email with attachments as promised. With the upmost respect to Stephen he put my mind at rest and I felt at ease upon reading his email.

With no disrespect to Stephen, I was surprised to receive such a high level of customer care. Regrettably, I pigeon holed Stephen due to a low level of customer service I had received in the past from "Customer Service Advisors" from various other companies both in the UK and abroad.

I would like to think Stephen would receive some recognition for his courtesy,

professionalism and the help he has given me in dealing with my query.

Unfortunately people are too quick to complain but never feel the need to show gratitude upon receiving a good service. I hope the above expresses how grateful I am to Stephen.

Tenant, West – Customer emailed, “Hi there just to thank John very much for fixing the fan! He was great!! Very respectful and tidying up etc etc please pass this message on as I think he deserves a BIG thanks”.

Tenant, West – Customer would like to thank the Lettings Team very much for all the help, advice and assistance given in getting them re-housed.

Examples of Service Improvements

Procedural Change

- October 2014: Following a complaint about miscommunication during the decant process it was decided that in future all temporary accommodation viewings will be conducted jointly by Estate Officers and Senior Customer Care Officers in order that all questions are answered accurately in one visit.

Additional or Refresher Training

- May 2014: The Repairs monthly customer service training centred around customer care and telephone manner following the outcome of a complaint.
- July 2014: Reminder from Tyne and Wear Homes to Housing offices to scan supporting documents for applications through to Lettings in a timely fashion to avoid any delays.
- August 2014: Lettings Staff reminded to be clear when speaking to customers at the pre-offer stage and ensure only relevant and accurate information is provided.
- November 2014: Mears carried out additional training with all operatives regarding the importance of communication and keeping the customer informed.
- November 2014: Staff in Lettings were asked to inform their customers that if they are already on offer for a property they will not be considered for any other bids placed prior to receiving the offer.
- December 2014: Staff at Blaydon Office were reminded of the importance of offering private interviews for complex or sensitive issues.
- February 2015: Following a complaint regarding a new surveyor being unknowledgeable about historical issues experienced by particular property types, further training was carried out to ensure all surveyors were up to date with their knowledge.

Suggestions

- Improve leak diagnosis and ensure all appointments are met or discussed with customer.
- Check on Scaffolders more often and make them aware they need to be more careful.
- Keep tenants updated inbetween sending letters with a phone call to keep them updated. The Gateshead Housing Company needs to improve on communication when dealing with complaints.
- Improve communication between departments to ensure errors are not made.
- Voids - think about the person who is moving into the property before making available to let, what repairs are outstanding? Some people are vulnerable and may not be able to cope with the amount of work to be done.

- Explain clearly the current situation with garage repairs to avoid future complaints.
- Confirm responsibilities for rental payments / housing benefit entitlement in writing when customers placed in temporary accommodation.
- Ensure customers receive written notification of change of investigating officer.