



## Report to Customers and Communities Committee

5 November 2015

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**Title:** Complaints and Compliments Performance Update – First Six Months 2015/16

**Report of:** Managing Director

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### Purpose of Report

1. To provide the committee with an update on complaints and compliments performance over the first six months of 2015/16.

### Background

2. Following the adoption of the new complaints policy in July 2014, the Committee agreed to receive a six monthly update on complaints and compliments performance, the activity of the Complaints Scrutiny Panel, and the ongoing work associated with the review.
3. 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

4. The number of complaints recorded for the first six months of 2015/16 has increased overall compared with the same period in 2014/15. The number of Problem-solving complaints has increased by 31%, while Investigations have decreased by 20%. Officers have therefore become more effective at resolving complaints quickly and informally without the need for investigation.
5. 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.

6. In the same time period, the number of complaints escalated to Review has remained the same compared with the first six months of last year.

	Apr-Sept 2014/15	Apr-Sept 2015/16
<b>Step 1 – Problem-solving</b>	320	463
<b>Step 2 – Investigation</b>	151	121
<b>Step 3 – Review</b>	7 (4.6%)	7 (5.8%)
<b>Compliments</b>	136	99

7. Of the seven Reviews undertaken in the first six months of 2015/16, two (28.6%) upheld the original decision of the Investigation, two (28.6%) partly upheld the original decision, two (28.6%) overturned the original decision and one Review was still ongoing.
8. Compared with the first six months of 2014/15, out of seven Reviews, six (85.7%) upheld the original decision of the investigation and one (14.3%) overturned the original decision.

### **Responding within target**

9. The company-wide target for 2015/16 is to respond to 87% of Investigations within 10 working days, and for the first six months, 84.3% of complaints met this target. This is a reduction on the first six months of the previous year when 89.89% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days.
10. By the end of the first six months, 61.2% of complaints were resolved within target and without the use of a holding letter. On average, these took 5.04 days to resolve. 29 holding letters were issued (24%) and for these complaints the average time to resolve was 19.6 days, with an average of 13.2 days from the holding letter being issued to the complaint being resolved. 14% of complaints were resolved out of target and 1% was closed.
11. Taking into account the total number of complaints received, the average response time is 10.3 days. [Appendix 1](#) provides information on the proportion of complaints responded to within target by service area.
12. Repairs (including Mears and Gateshead Council Construction Services) represent the highest number of complaints recorded, due to the volume of contact with our tenants and leaseholders. 67 of the total 121 (55.4%) complaints related to this service area, however, these complaints continue to achieve a high degree of compliance (85% 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 their Repairs Partners.
13. Performance against the 20 day target for step 3 Reviews shows that there has been a reduction in the number completed in target in the first six months of 2015/16 compared to 2014/15, however the Review which was completed outside of target was one which required a period of monitoring which was longer than 20 days.

Step 3 Review status	Apr-Sept 2014/15	Apr-Sept 2015/16
In target	6 (85.8%)	5 (71.4%)
Outside target	-	1 (14.3%)
Open	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)

### Customer Satisfaction

14. Satisfaction information is collected via a short survey which is completed by the customer once the Step 2 investigation has been responded to.
15. After consultation with the Complaints Scrutiny Panel it was 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.
16. Survey results for the first six months of 2015/16 show a high level of satisfaction with regards to complaint investigation (73.7%) and communication (79%) whereas satisfaction with the outcome of a complaint is quite low (57.9%), although satisfaction will often dip in this category when the customer has not achieved the outcome they desired from their complaint. [Appendix 3](#).

Survey Responses	Apr-Sept 2015/16
% of those making a complaint satisfied with the investigation of their complaint	73.68%
% of customers Satisfied with the outcome of their complaint	57.89%
% of customers satisfied with communication throughout the investigation of their complaint	78.95%

17. 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.

### Compliments

18. There have been 99 compliments recorded this year, including 39 received for services provided by Mears. Other services recording a high level of compliments are Repairs Reporting (23) and Estate Management (13). Compliments recorded by service area and geographical area are provided in [Appendix 4](#).
19. 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.
20. There are 80 employees who have been individually recognised by customers. Four of these have received three compliments each during the first half of the year, three from TGHC Repairs and one from Tenancy and Estate Management.

21. A sample of compliments received has been included in [Appendix 5](#).

### **Service Improvements**

22. Officers are asked to log any potential learning or service improvement at the end of each investigation.
23. In total, 27 suggestions for service improvements have been recorded on the complaints system across 6 services and 18 (66.7%) of those have been evidenced as having been implemented. Examples of these can be seen in [Appendix 6](#).
24. In addition, the Home Repairs Service have introduced a weekly meeting with Repairs Partners where they analyse data provided from Problem Solving (Step 1) complaints and use it to identify areas for improvement. As a result of this the following improvements have been introduced:
- A new works order priority of MAJOR works. Within this there is greater customer care involvement preventing complaints occurring as we are fully aware of the works required.
  - A new interface will be implemented in Quarter 3, which allows for greater level of data to be passed to the contractor.
  - TGHC now have a platform to add agenda items to “tool box talks” where operatives are briefed on reoccurring complaint trends.
  - A new process has been developed to mitigate “rubbish removal” from complaints.
  - A new appointment system has been introduced whereby customers now get two hour appointment slots with Property Inspectors. To be developed over Q3 and Q4 to extend out to Building Surveyors.
25. This clearly shows the benefit of recognising and recording Step 1 complaints. Repairs related Step 1s are recorded within Northgate which then generates the report allowing data to be analysed, demonstrating the effectiveness of using Northgate for managing complaints.

### **Complaints Scrutiny Panel**

26. The Complaints Scrutiny Panel have continued to meet on a monthly basis throughout the year and during this time have been actively involved in challenging complaints performance and identifying opportunities and tools for improvement.
27. Detailed scrutiny of resolved complaints now forms a significant part of the meetings and their comments are recorded in the monthly complaints report which goes to Service Managers.
28. To build on this work the Panel spent the second quarter of 2015/16 developing a Scrutiny Framework which is a standard set of questions to be applied to a complaint and looks at complaint reporting, complaint investigation, quality of letters, compensation, service improvements and justification. Taking all of these elements into account they then make recommendations for improvements and highlight any examples of good practice.

29. The full report is sent to the reporting officer, investigating officer and their line managers and the summary and recommendations are included in the monthly complaints report.
30. To date, the framework has been applied to one complaint and feedback from officers has been positive including a suggestion that a section be added for officers to be able to feed back and a suggestion that the framework can be used by managers as a training tool for their teams. The panel is now considering if there is a way of introducing a scoring element to the framework so that standards can be measured.

### **Progress against Complaints Review recommendations**

31. The main priority for Complaints and Compliments management in 2015/16 remains the need to develop Northgate.
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.
34. Also recommended by the review was the introduction of a regular complaints report for service managers and this has now been introduced. This report will be used as a template for reports to be generated by Northgate once the system has been built.

### **Vexatious Contacts**

35. The vexatious contacts procedure has been tested against one customer who has been identified as possibly being vexatious.
36. The procedure has not been exhausted for this customer who so far has received initial correspondence to inform them that they are displaying behaviour that we may consider as vexatious.
37. Since it was sent, there have been no further examples of vexatious behaviour so no further action has been taken.

### **Link to values**

38. This report is aligned to the company values of being: -
  - Fair
  - Customer Focused
  - Open and Honest
  - Accountable
  - 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. Ongoing consultation with the Complaint Scrutiny Panel takes place monthly.

## **Recommendation**

48. The views of the committee are sought on whether it is satisfied with performance for complaints and compliments for quarters one and two of 2015/16.

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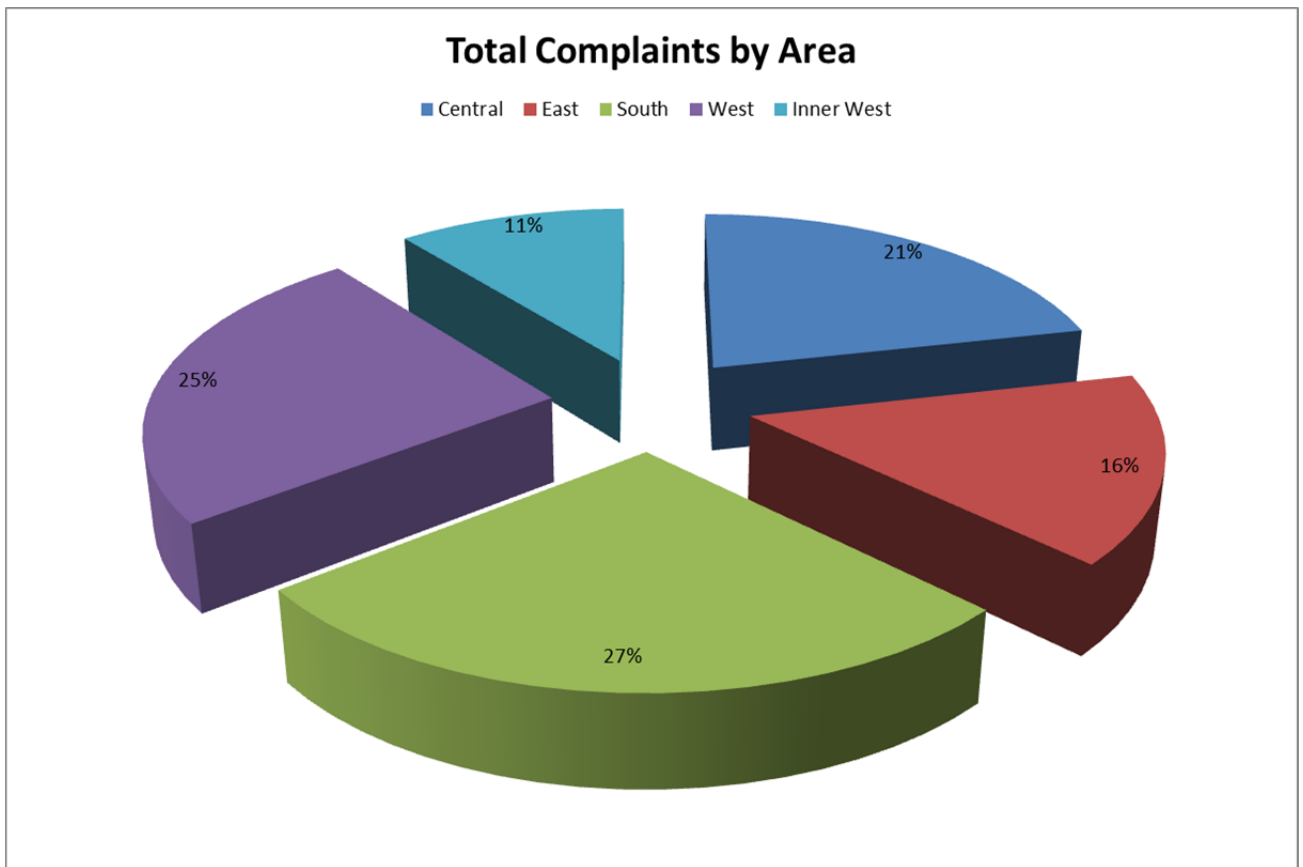
Contact: Mark Pollard, Customer Services Policy Officer Tel No: 0191 433 5375

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Summary of complaints Q1 and Q2 2015/15

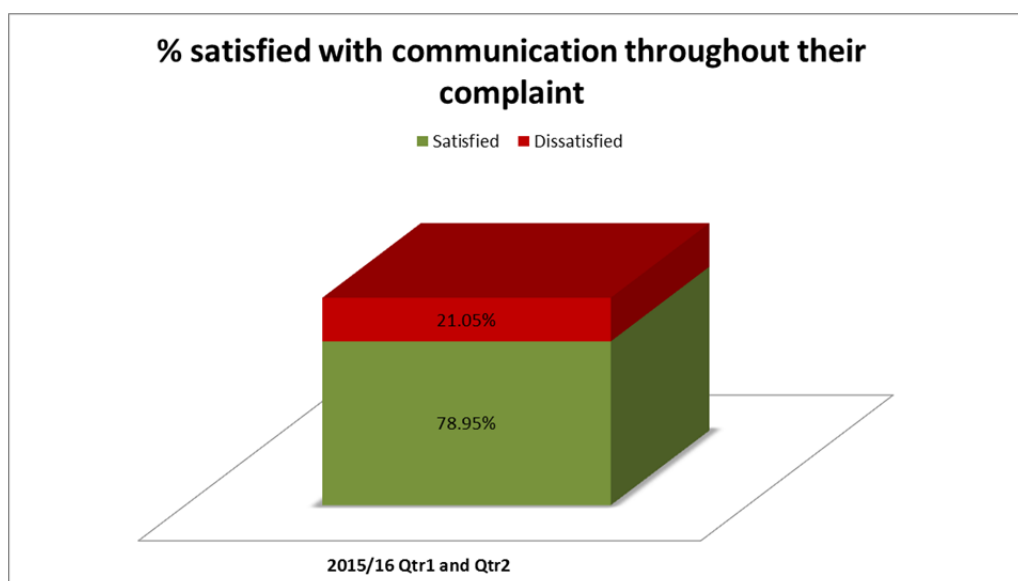
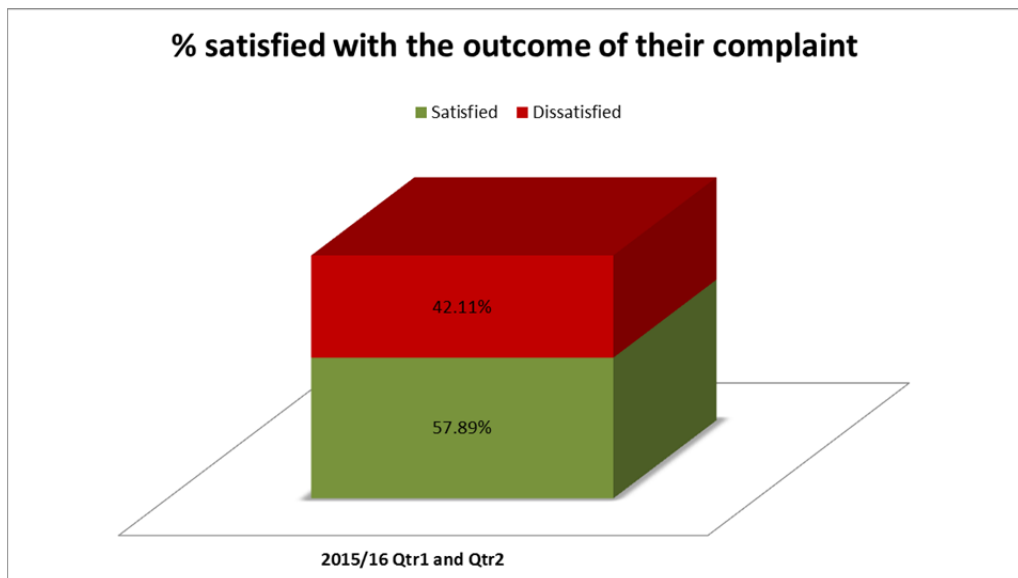
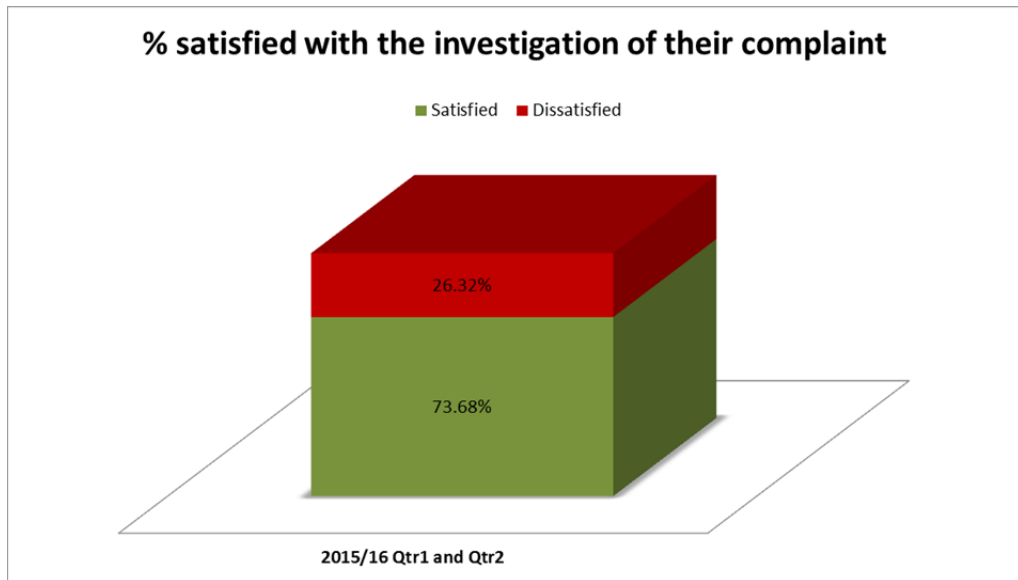
Service	Total Received	Resolved				Category						Average Days to Resolve
		In Target	Holding Letter	% In Target	Out of Target	Quality of service	Access to service	Employee	Injury/Damage	Policy	Other	
Caretakers	1	1	0	100.0%	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	8
Concierge	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Empty Homes Initiative	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Estate Management	8	5	1	75.0%	2	4	0	3	1	1	1	11
Investment	1	0	0	0.0%	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	
Leasehold	4	4	0	100.0%	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	8
Lettings	8	8	0	100.0%	0	6	1	3	0	1	0	5
Low Rise Cleaning	5	3	1	80.0%	1	4	0	2	0	0	0	17
New Build	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
NRT	7	4	2	85.7%	1	7	1	0	0	0	1	8
Older Persons	2	2	0	100.0%	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	9
RAIT	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
HomeRepairs	18	12	2	77.8%	2	17	0	1	0	1	1	8
Capital Works	5	2	2	80.0%	1	3	0	0	2	0	1	10
Construction Services	5	2	2	80.0%	0	5	0	0	1	0	0	14
Cyclical Maintenance	1	0	0	0.0%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	14
Gas servicing	11	7	3	90.9%	1	11	1	0	1	0	0	9
Mears	40	21	14	87.5%	5	37	1	7	8	0	1	12
Scaffolding	4	2	0	50.0%	2	4	0	1	1	0	0	9
Surveyors	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Voids	1	1	0	100.0%	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	6
	<b>121</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>27</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>

Step 2 – Investigation complaints by geographical area



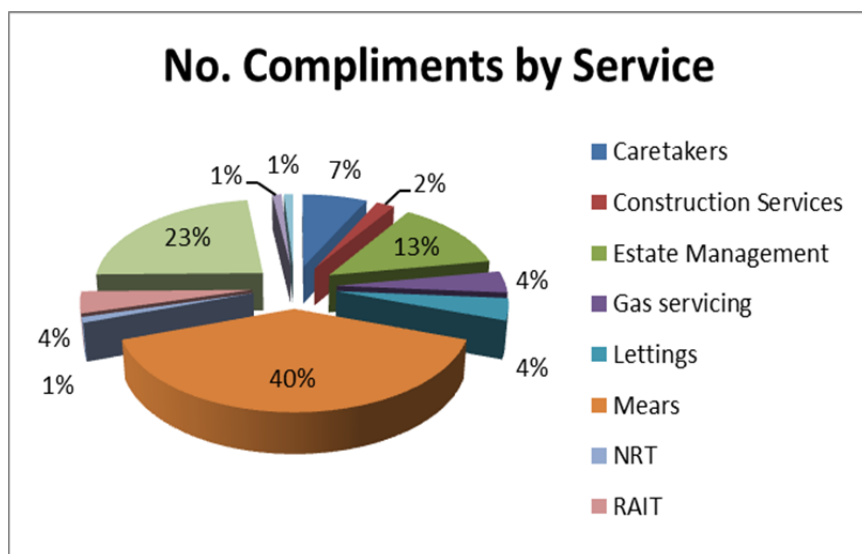


Satisfaction Survey Results

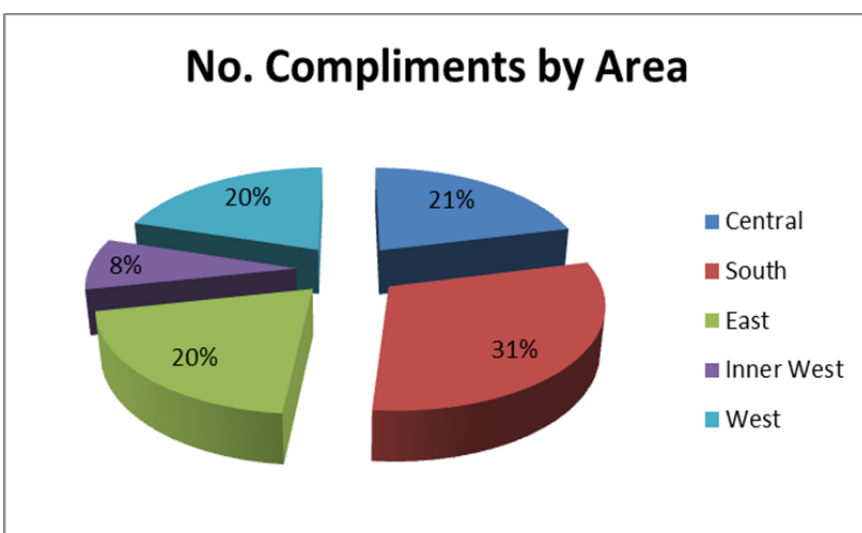


Compliments by service and geographical area

Service	No. Compliments	
Caretakers	7	7.07%
Construction Services	2	2.02%
Estate Management	13	13.13%
Gas servicing	4	4.04%
Lettings	4	4.04%
Mears	39	39.39%
NRT	1	1.01%
RAIT	4	4.04%
Repairs	23	23.23%
Voids	1	1.01%
Handyperson	1	1.01%
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



Area	No. Compliments	
Central	21	21.21%
South	30	30.30%
East	20	20.20%
Inner West	8	8.08%
West	20	20.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



**A selection of Compliments received in 2015/16 Quarters 1 and 2**

- **East** - Customer wanted to thank all involved with her repair after her kitchen was flooded. She is very grateful with how quickly and well it was resolved.
- **Central** - Customer complimented the caretakers of Tennyson and Newbolt courts on the cleanliness and tidiness of the blocks.
- **West** - Wanted to thank Officer for all her help explaining her housing application. She said she was really nice and she knows exactly what to do as she took her time to show her and explained as she went.
- **East** – Customer called to thank an Officer in the Lettings Team for her patience and assistance in rehousing them.
- **East** – Customer wished to compliment a Handyman who has recently cut back her overgrown garden. She said, "he's done a good job out of a bad situation".
- **West** – Customer rang Blaydon Office to thank Officer for getting him sorted out on garden scheme. He also wanted to thank repairs for putting his house back in order after doing his repairs.
- **West** – Thank you card received to thank team for all the support and help they gave the customer arranging support through Adult Social Care/DWP etc.
- **Central** - Customer said that she was very thankful for all of the help Estate Officer provided on the viewing and before she signed for her new flat.

## Examples of Service Improvements

- **Leasehold** – Investment services ensure that contractors provide leaseholders with full design information at survey stage. Leasehold services ensure copy information is provided to customers, with a quote, and contact is made with leaseholders prior to acceptance of a deposit to ensure leaseholders are fully aware of the product to be purchased, timescales for installation and repayment arrangements.
- **Lettings** - Procedure has now been agreed to check notifications of 'non council tenant' deaths. Previously lettings did not have access to this information but have now been given access to the 'tell us once' system.
- **Repairs** – Home Repairs Team have call monitoring and errors (for raising repairs) fed back to them weekly instead of monthly. It also allows the Supervisors to give a more hands on approach to coaching, mentoring and monitoring.
- **Gas Servicing** – Gas Servicing have increased the frequency of meetings with the installation teams in order to improve the quality of installations and are carrying out more site visits to work closer with customers and reduce complaints.
- **Gas Servicing** – More detailed reports in place highlighting common used boiler parts and stocks adjusted accordingly following a complaint about the length of time it took to get parts for a boiler.
- **Low Rise Cleaning** – LES cleaner has been provided with a lockable cupboard within the block to store cleaning materials and ensuring that everything needed is always to hand.
- **Low Rise Cleaning** – Weekly inspections of blocks have been introduced to ensure that the Service Level Agreement is being met.
- **Lettings** – The message on the advice line has been updated so that it is clear to customers that waiting times are long and that it is possible to access the information they require via the website.