



Cambridge City Council

Annual Complaints Report 2013 - 2014

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CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL'S ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

Every year we publish our Annual Complaints Report, which gives an overview of the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them, though we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained.

Why we produce this report

- To learn from our mistakes so that we can improve our services
- To encourage people who have cause to complain to make comments and suggestions to help us make these improvements.
- To show how we've responded to complaints and what we've done to try and put things right.
- To publicise and explain our complaints process.

Our Complaints Procedure

What is a complaint?

A complaint is defined as: ***'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Council, or its staff, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.'***

To set these complaints in context, it should be explained that where an issue is brought to the Council's attention for the first time (for example, a missed bin) that is dealt with as a request for action, and is not processed as a formal complaint. However, the Council's response, or lack of response, to that first time notification might lead to a complaint if the customer were still dissatisfied.

Customers complain to the Council if they:

- Are unhappy about something we have or haven't done.
- Are not satisfied with the way a member of staff has treated them.
- Are not happy with the way a councillor has treated them.
- Want to complain for any other reason.

How do customers make a complaint?

We publish a 'How to Complain Leaflet' which is available on our website at <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/complaints> or customers can ask for a paper copy from our reception points. Customers can make a complaint by letter, email, telephone, face-to-face or they can use our online complaints form.

We aim to deal with complaints quickly and efficiently. Our target response time is seven working days, but if we need longer we will tell the customer why and keep them informed of progress during our investigation. We will also tell them who is dealing with their complaint.

We will apologise when we have made mistakes, try and put things right as soon as possible and make sure we do better next time. If customers are unhappy with the response to their complaint they can ask for their complaint to be passed to a service manager.

There are some things we can't change because we are legally required to do them or because they concern services provided by other organisations. In these cases we will always explain why we can't change things and tell customers who else they can contact if they are still unhappy.

Each of the Council's departments has a complaints co-ordinator who keeps details of all complaints for their service areas. Managers review the complaints regularly and decide whether they need to change things to prevent problems from happening again.

The Independent Complaints Investigator

If customers have not received a reply to a complaint within seven days or they are not satisfied with the way the council has dealt with their complaint, customers can ask for it to be referred to a Head of Service. If customers are still dissatisfied with the reply they can refer the complaint to the Independent Complaints Investigator who will investigate their complaint for them.

The Independent Complaints Investigator, (ICI), is not an employee of the Council but is paid by the Council on a contract basis to investigate complaints. This ensures that the role can be independent of the Council's departments.

The Independent Complaints Investigator investigates complaints to see if they are justified and acts on the complainant's behalf to try and find a way of resolving the issues raised. They aim to acknowledge each complaint within seven days and let the complainant know a date by which they can expect a full response. They will also arrange a confidential interview at a convenient time and place if it is required.

The Independent Complaints Investigator's role is not intended to be a substitute for handling complaints effectively within departments. It is intended to complement our complaints procedures and ensure consistency throughout the Council. Cambridge City Council is one of the few Councils to operate this service.

The Local Government Ombudsman

If customers are still not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman's office. The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and other bodies.

Executive Summary

General Summary

In 2013/14 Cambridge City Council received 429 complaints, 14% fewer than in the previous year. The Council also received 182 compliments, 3322 positive comments through GovMetric and 1589 negative (Including the website). 1 out of 485 contacts with the council results in a complaint, this is almost a 1 in 500 chance, and therefore very low. We continue to value and monitor feedback, and address all issues and concerns.

Independent Complaints Investigator

28 complaints were made to the Independent Complaints Investigator, of which 20 were investigated, 18 of which have been completed. 7 cases were not upheld, 4 were not upheld but with recommendations, 5 cases were partially upheld, and 2 cases were fully upheld.

Local Government Ombudsman

Two upheld complaints uncovered some common failures in the Housing Advice Service. Firstly, that there were delays in the homeless decision making process and that households were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than permitted. In a third case, referred in 2013-14 but not upheld until July 2014, the Council was criticised by the Ombudsman for ending a temporary accommodation stay prematurely and delaying an adverse homelessness decision in order to assist a family into housing in the private rented sector.

New Style Report

The City Council has worked hard to understand the reasons for the complaints, and has taken action to prevent the poor service that triggered those complaints from being repeated. We continue to work hard to deliver high quality services to all residents and customers, and welcome all feedback on our services and suggestions for improvement. This report allows us to reflect on our successes and areas of development. Following feedback and a review of our complaints process we have changed the way we record and monitor complaints, compliments and comments.

The Lead complaints Officer will review all data and feedback on a quarterly basis to establish themes and trends within services. This will then be discussed with Directors and Heads of service to gain an understanding of what the service is doing to improve, change or prevent. This will help to create a rolling yearly report, ensuring accuracy and that changes and improvements made are captured and reviewed on a regular basis. Particular attention will be focused on reducing complaints being escalated to the independent complaints investigator by making sure that complaints that involve more than one service at stage one are dealt with more efficiently.

We will continue to address complaints within the Environment directorate to improve service levels and reduce complaints.

Complaints to the City Council in 2013/14

We received 429 complaints in 2013-14. This was a 14% decrease on those received in the previous year as can be seen in the **Figure & Table 1** below.

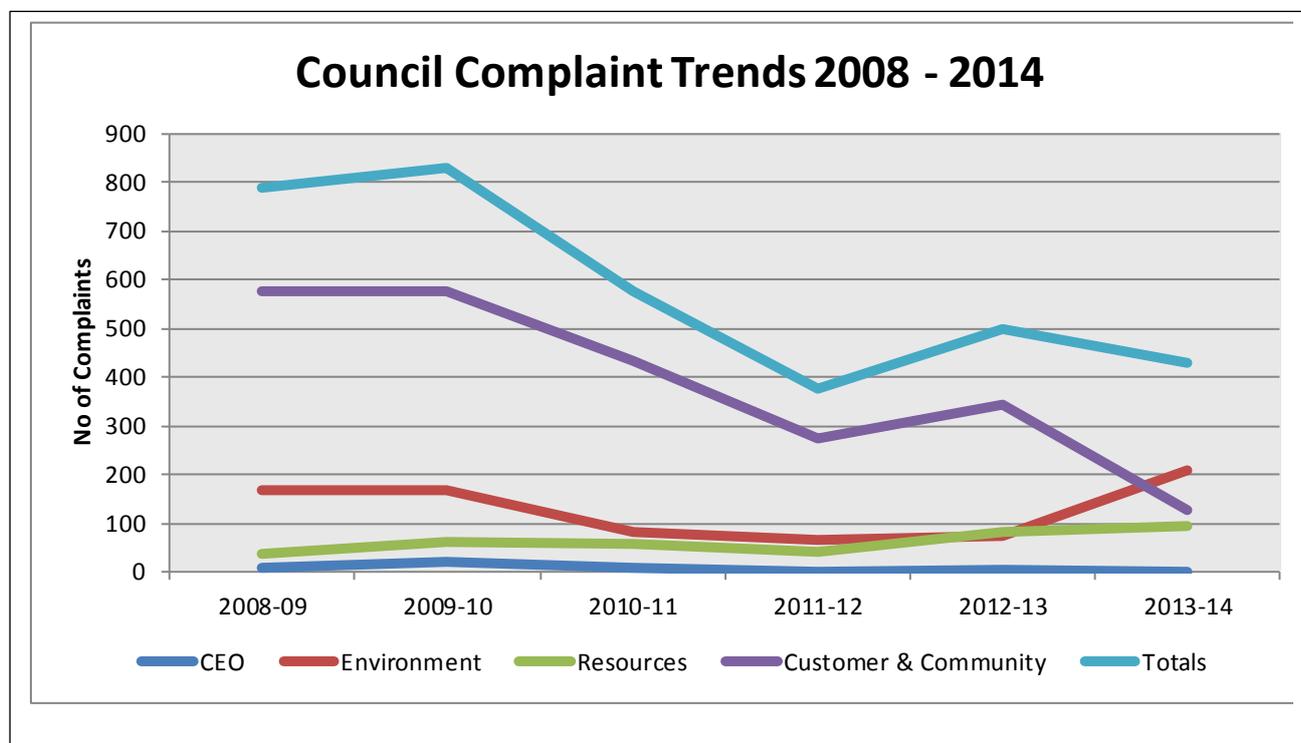


Table 1. Cambridge City Council complaint totals 2008 - 2014

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals	% Change
2013-14	0	210	93	125	428	-14
2012-13	2	72	83	341	498	+32
2011-12	0	65	40	272	377	-34.5
2010-11	8	81	56	431	576	-30
2009-10	21	168	61	577	827	+5
2008-09	8	169	36	576	789	

Since 2008 complaints have generally been falling with a reduction of 45% since 2008-09 which is a considerable reduction. We are very proud of this and hope to build on this success in the coming year. In this report you will see the number of complaints overall, broken down by service and also what the services are doing to improve, prevent and change as a result of the feedback received¹. Within the report, services have explained what the trends are and what actions are being taken.

¹ **Appendix 1** details the services within the directorates.

Number of complaints in context

To put the number of complaints in broader context, last year over 175,000 telephone contacts and 33,000 face to face visits were recorded at the customer service centre. This is at a time where the complexity of queries and therefore the duration of customer contacts are increasing. The Customer Service Centre began a review of how it handles customer enquiries. The result of these reviews has been an increase in end to end service provision given for customers given at the first point of contact.

The largest number of complaints was received by our biggest directorate Environment.

- Out of the 210 complaints received, 49 were waste related waste collections. There are approximately 49,000 households visited each week, this number of complaints is therefore a very small percentage. However every time a complaint is made about a missed collection or bins have not been put back, the enquiry is investigated and crews are reminded of their duties.
- The second largest source of complaints related to Open Spaces (missed litter bin collections) and the service is currently carrying out a complete review of this function with the goal of improving collection efficiency.
- Parking services updated the pay station kiosks in September 2013. Due to an error with the contractor there was a period of time where the option to prepay for parking was unavailable. This resulted in a large numbers of complaints, the service has made changes and normal service has now resumed.
- Planning services saw an increase in workload on local developments, this contributed to the delays in response times. The team continue to review caseloads, deadlines and ensure they are communicating with their customers.

Revenues and Benefits has seen an increase in workload due to the Government's ongoing welfare reform programme, and in particular the benefits caseload is now more complex to administer for claimants who are in work and in receipt of housing benefit. There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of changes in circumstances dealt with. It is important to set complaint analysis in context of the number of documents sent to residents.

- Each year Revenues and Benefits send approximately 150,000 documents in relation to Council Tax administration, which includes council tax bills, reminders, final notices and summonses for Court action (approximately £60m of council tax to be collected from 51,725 council tax properties).
- For Benefits' administration we send approximately 60,000 letters per annum and we paid more than £44m during 2013/14 in housing benefit and council tax support to over 8,500 households.

Complaints are generally filtered for the Council via the customer service centre. The increased use of email and online forms has allowed a greater distinction between requests for service and genuine complaints over the years, and this has been reflected in the final totals.

Between 2012-13 and 2013-14 telephone contacts to the customer service centre decreased, primarily as a result of the box office general enquiries calls being outsourced to a third party.

Figure 2. Contact and complaint volumes 2010-2014.

Year	Total Contacts	Complaint Totals	% of complaints to contacts
2013-14	256,068	429	0.16
2012-13	277,500	498	0.18
2011-12	245,874	377	0.15
2010-11	235,124	576	0.24
2009-10	208,624	827	0.39

Changes to the method for recording complaints

In previous years complaints were recorded by various means including the use of paper, spreadsheets, access databases and the Service Mail System. Last year all complaints and compliments that required a reply were recorded and administered through the corporate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Full training was arranged for all complaints officers in all departments. The use of CRM has streamlined the process for both the logging and the reporting of complaints and compliments, giving a more effective, responsive and flexible system.

How many complaints did we respond to on time?

The figures for 2013-14 show an increase in performance from last year with the number of complaints responded to on time increasing from 85% to 88% see table 3

Table 3. Complaint response times

(% responded to within seven days, by Department)

Year	Chief Exec's %	Environment %	Resources %	Customer & Community %	Totals %	% Change
2013-14	100	81	74	97	88	+3
2012-13	100	72	78	89	85	+2
2011-12	NA	80	73	97	83	+26

How were complaints received across the Council?

E-mail continues to be the favoured method of contact for customers making a complaint (78%) see table below.

Table 4. How complaints were received

Year	Face to Face %	Letter %	Email %	Telephone %	Other (Comment Cards) %	Total %
2013-14	2	13	78	7	2	100
2012-13	1	19	70	8	2	100
2011-12	2	26	48	6	18	100
2010-11	1	24	56	4	15	100
2009-10	4	34	47	11	4	100

GovMetric customer feedback system

GovMetric was introduced by customer services to monitor feedback and measure improvement. The tool allows us to record how the feedback was received, ratings of good, average or poor can be selected by customers. They are also able to select service areas/departments and give more specific detail about their experiences.

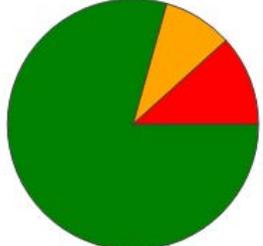
GovMetric has had a marked impact, both in the amount and the details received. This year we have also seen a 43% increase in face to face feedback. We expect phone and e-mail feedback to increase over the next financial year with the roll-out of GovMetric across the remaining contact streams.

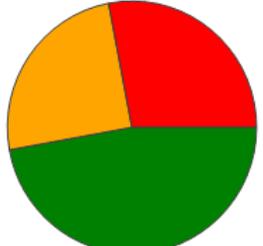
We currently use GovMetric to monitor feedback from face to face visits at Mandela House (table 5) and the Website (table 6).

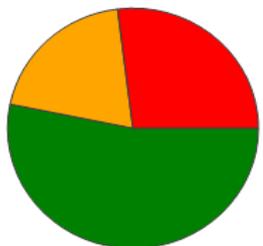
Table 5. Face to Face GovMetric feedback

01/04/2013 – 31/03/2014

F2F - Time Taken				Overall Rating Good	
Number of respondents	617	71	148		
Percentage of respondents	74%	8%	18%		

F2F - Advisor/Information				Overall Rating Good	
Number of respondents	476	54	70		
Percentage of respondents	79%	9%	12%		

F2F - Decision				Overall Rating Average	
Number of respondents	165	87	98		
Percentage of respondents	47%	25%	28%		

F2F - Query Resolution				Overall Rating Average	
Number of respondents	306	114	155		
Percentage of respondents	53%	20%	27%		

Action taken in response to feedback

In 2014 the Customer Service Centre assisted an average of 700 customers per week via personal interviews. In 2013 the Service Centre was operating a drop-in, first come first serve service for customers who visited personally to have their queries resolved. This method of prioritising customers routinely lead to bottle necks of demand and resulted in significant waiting times for customers and caused pressure for the staff serving them.

In March 2014 the Centre introduced an appointment only service in the afternoons for customers with non-emergency Housing Benefit and Council Tax enquiries. This initiative has enabled the centre to deliver a more consistent service to customers. Waiting times have reduced significantly and are now routinely under their 10 minute target.

With the introduction of a payment kiosk in the reception the opportunity was taken to move resource from the payments office to the reception services aspect of the front of house area. A sustained plan of cross training was completed over the 2013-14 financial year to enable more resources to be located in line with demand.

New services were offered to customers visiting the centre in 2013-14. Cambridge community navigators, who assist older, isolated and vulnerable people living in Cambridgeshire to stay independent and maintain social contacts, were invited to use office space within the centre so they could help customers who may be having difficulty.

Financial capability reviews and appeals assistance were also offered via the Cambridge Citizens' Advice Bureau (CCAB) within the service centre, allowing customers to receive a more holistic solution to the problems they contact the council about.

In order to increase opportunities for customers at Mandela House to self-serve, two computers were opened up to allow internet access for customers and free Wi-Fi has been enabled.

Customer Services has also worked with Revenues & Benefits to introduce e-benefits and e-services. These systems allow customers to make applications for benefits and update their details via an online system directly through our website.

Customer service advisors are on hand to give assistance to customers using the applications, guide them through the systems so they can make subsequent changes or applications on their own.

Table 6. Website GovMetric feedback

01/04/2013 – 31/03/2014

Rating	Total number	Common theme identified
Good	1758	Time taken and Information offered
Poor	1118	Query resolution
Average	201	Query resolution

Action taken in response to feedback

We launched our new-look website in early February 2013, when we implemented a more task-based navigation and structure. The **good** rating and **time taken/information offered** means customers are finding our content easily and quickly.

We know that less than 20% of visits to our site within this period were to our home page, and 70% of all visits came directly from Google. This means people are searching with keywords in Google and hitting our site directly within content pages. Our well-structured site ranks highly in Google's results.

Many of the **poor** ratings for **query resolution** came about because customers viewed out of date content, found broken links or because their query was not answered as they would have expected.

We forward on these individual reports to service teams so they can update the website. We also have a regular maintenance schedule where we check the site for broken links, spelling errors etc.

Further Actions

We will be customer testing the website at the end of July 2014 and will create an action plan to address any issues raised, which we expect to include a review of our content, to ensure it is written specifically to achieve the customer task, quickly and efficiently. We also expect to slim-down the size of the site removing content that isn't often viewed.

We will also be making improvements to our publishing system with the aim of helping web editors to keep their content up to date.

Complaint Trends and Service Feedback

Each council department reviews the complaints and compliments it receives on a quarterly basis. This enables services to identify if there are any trends in the types of complaint being made or the services that complaints are being made about. As a result, changes are made to services and how they are provided.

Examples of how service provision has changed arising from complaints made over the past year are shown in table 7:

Table 7. Service Complaint Trends 2013-14

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Refuse & Environment	49	Missed bin collections Crew Bins not returned	10
<p>Changes and improvements made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new joined up procedure has been put in place between City Centre Management, Environmental health, the city Rangers and the Customer service centre. • The performance indicator is included as an agenda item with the Team leaders and Leadings Hands team meetings to ensure that staff are made aware of how the service is performing. Meetings are carried out where crew behaviour or performance is found not to be at the level required. Missed bin statistics are now shown on the staff notice board to help raise awareness of how each waste stream is performing. Regular meetings are held and staff training provided where necessary. The issue has also been raised with all crews and the leading hands now carry out regular crew visits in the city. 				

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Planning	32	Delayed or no response	2
<p>Changes and improvements made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service has introduced more regular one to one sessions between Principal Planning Officers and case officers. Discussions at team meetings and continuous emphasis on the need to communicate well with applicants and in particular to give realistic timescales for responses. Officers are advised to seek early support on workload management issues. • Increasing use of management information has allowed a re-allocation of application caseload to ensure that deadlines are achieved. 				

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Tourism/CCM	5	No theme identified	
<p>Changes and improvements made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints dealt with on an individual basis 				

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Streets and open spaces	48	Street cleaning Trees No or delayed response	1

Changes and improvements made:

- Trees and hedges are maintained on a cyclical programme to meet budget demands. Depending on growth variation sometimes work is required when it is not scheduled. The tree team are installing voicemail on their office phones and having their calls transferred to their mobiles to improve availability and customer service.
- To reduce missed litter bin collections there is a review taking place to re-route collection rounds to make them more efficient and the most appropriate frequency.
- Locate and identify all litter/recycling and dog bins within Cambridge. Once completed this will be mapped and new routes identified. Optimisation of rounds will also occur along with changes to frequency to meet the needs of the areas concerned.
- Parks and children's play areas are inspected on a regular basis to ensure sites are safe for play and activities.
- Staff have been advised to be vigilant in terms of damage to play equipment through criminal damage.
- Staff are currently reminded of their responsibilities and the importance of not missing the emptying of bins through their line managers.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Environmental Health	22	Noise/buskers	

Changes and improvements made:

- The service has been working very closely with the Customer Service Centre and Environmental Health team to improve the way in which departments across the council work together to respond to these complaints.
- A comprehensive procedure has been put in place between City Centre Management, Environmental health, the city Rangers and the Customer service centre.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Specialist Services*	10	No theme identified	2

Changes and improvements made:

- Complaints dealt with on an individual basis

*Specialist services includes Parking, Bereavement Services, CCTV and Out of Hours call handling. The report separates out Parking, as a discrete category.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Parking Services	36	Car Park costs Ease of payment	2

Changes and improvements made:

- Parking services updated the pay station kiosks in September 2013. Due to an error with the contractor there was a period of time where the option to prepay for parking was unavailable. This resulted in a large numbers of complaints, the service has made changes and normal service has now resumed.
- We review our car parking charges regularly and take specialist advice about the effects of previous changes on the use of our car parks, and in order to forecast how future changes will affect demand.
- We have thoroughly reviewed our parking services web pages to improve the quality of information for the public, and continue to improve our physical signs and review our general communications on a regular basis.
- Many of the 'complaints' we receive from customers refer to the council's pricing policy rather than to operational issues. With limited capacity and high demand for spaces, our car park prices are set so as to make the city as accessible as possible at the busiest times. Cheaper rates apply outside of peak times, for example in the evenings, and concessions are offered to people such as blue badge holders who need to access the city by car. Our prices are set to discourage long-stay parking, for whom park and ride can offer a cheaper alternative. There are five Park and Ride sites located around the City. These are well signed from the M11 and approach roads.
- Signs displaying our tariffs are displayed prominently at every pay machine, as well as the entrances to all our car parks. If a customer decides not to park but has already entered the car park our barrier system allows an immediate exit without charge. Complaints about the location of payment machines, particularly the new arrangements for Blue Badge holders at the Grand Arcade car park have been addressed.
- All parent and child parking and Blue Badge parking has been re-located to level two which is the first level of the upper part of Grand Arcade car park. The number of parent and child bays has actually increased and they are all situated at the North end of the car park adjacent to the lifts into the centre.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Environment	Garage	8	Staff/service	2

Changes and improvements made:

The service has introduced a new management system, including a data entry programme to capture information for both internal and external customers, this has improved the level of service offered. This tool also helps the management team to identify staff training needs, workload and manage performance.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Resources	Estates and Facilities	92	No or delayed response Staff Damp External contractors Fencing	15

Changes and improvements made:

- We have looked into the trend of damp and fencing complaints which identified that many of these are a result of poor communication and confusion about what the tenants or council are responsible for maintaining. To support our tenants in avoiding damp we have created a leaflet giving advice on good ventilation in the home. The Customer Service Centre staff have also attended training to improve understanding, enabling these cases to be handled more effectively at the first point of contact.
- With regard to fencing we are aiming to reduce these complaints by ensuring clearer information is available to the tenants explaining what work we will/will not carry out.
- Complaints regarding staff and contractors are assessed on a case by case basis and are addressed with extra training, or through the Council's capability/disciplinary proceedings. Contractors attend meetings to discuss complaints made against them and are given the opportunity to respond/explain. Poor performance results in formal warnings and in some cases a contract may be re-assigned.
- Additionally all staff received "Respect at Work" training in May 2013 focusing on improving communications and behaviours.
- We have also allocated a dedicated officer to take ownership of complaints to improve response times.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Resources	Accounting	1	No theme identified	

Changes and improvements made:

- Complaint dealt with on an individual basis.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Customer & Community	Arts & Recs	28	Costs Standard/cleanliness Play equipment	9

Changes and improvements made:

- The health suite closed and although this was an unpopular decision for existing members that used it, we have not had any further correspondence about it since the closure and reopening of the new gym.
- Membership fees became a topic due to the new contractor taking over the facilities. Not everyone was happy with their pricing structure, as a result of this (Greenwich leisure limited) GLL created new price bands for members so that they were not disadvantaged.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Customer & Community	Customer Services	8	Poor customer service	75

Changes and improvements made:

- The Centre has introduced a face to face appointments system in the afternoon to improve waiting times for customers and help set expectations.
- The centre has improved the self-serve facilities to increase convenience for customers. The payment kiosk, installed early 2013 has been very well used.
- Staff receive targeted coaching or training where complaints are upheld.
- Our records show that, increasingly, customers are unhappy at the decision made or the lack of options we are able to give them. The service will continue to focus its efforts on training staff to be as positive as possible. The opportunity to solve customers' problems, by recommending they apply for a discount or a benefit, have greatly reduced over the last year as welfare benefit changes have been implemented and the changes to Council Tax charging have come into effect.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Customer & Community	City Homes	34	No or delayed response Poor customer service Garages	3

Changes and improvements made:

- No or delayed response - staff have been reminded of the targets for replying to customer enquiries.
- Poor customer service - City Homes staff recently participated in a customer awareness training session to improve both internal and external customer service. The resident involvement team regularly assesses feedback and are now in the process introducing a survey to gather feedback from tenants and leaseholders.
- Garages - The web page has been updated to include an interactive map so customers are able to locate garages in advance of application. We are in the early stages of reviewing the sign up process and now have online applications to reduce waiting times. The garages are currently going through a refurbishment to improve standards.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Customer & Community	Strategic Housing	26	No or delayed response Homelink	4

Changes and improvements made:

- This year the service has completed a Home-Link procedural review to improve procedures and customer service. Alongside this correspondence has been improved by using assessment and support officers to request the submission of proofs and review homeless case assignments and cover arrangements.
- Working with Shelter (National Housing Charity) we reviewed and improved our quality standards framework.
- Communications improved due to improvements in procedure and guidance for advisors. Accessibility improved for customers by removing appointment restrictions, so we are now able to offer advice at the first point of contact.
- Changes in the record keeping of B&B placements have ensured that deadlines are managed effectively to prevent delays.
- With a new complaints recording spreadsheet and improved procedure the service is now able to capture feedback and action changes in a timely manner.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Customer & Community	Community & Development	5	Noise	51

Changes and improvements made:

- The procedure has been updated to reflect guidance on where complaints should be directed in the first instance taking into account the nature of the complaint (e.g. noise nuisance). The new procedure also reflects much closer joined up working across all departments of the Council
- Noise complaints regarding buses parked outside resident's home were responded to. As a result of the complaint, the activity programme was adapted to provide the bus at a different location, on a rotational basis.

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Customer & Community	Box Office	1	No theme identified	

Changes and improvements made:

- Complaint dealt with on an individual basis

Directorate	Service	No. of complaints	Theme identified	No. of Compliments Recorded on CRM
Customer & Community	Revenues and benefits	23	Reminder letters incorrect No or delayed response Direct debit cancelled in error	6

Changes and improvements made:

- Reminder letters incorrect – The lack of integration between IDOX (document management system) and the Northgate Revenues and Benefits system has caused inaccurate reminder letters to be issued to customers. To counter this we undertook a manual matching exercise and affected accounts are put on hold. Overall we have noticed a significant reduction in these contacts and complaints, due to this exercise.
- No or delayed response – Careful monitoring of the workload has meant that any build-up of work is quickly identified and processes put in place to ensure that resources are deployed quickly and effectively to minimise the delay in responding to correspondence. Regular audit checks are carried out on cases to ensure calculations and documents produce are correct and appropriate. Some responses take longer than others and in these cases officers are aware of the need to keep customers informed. We aim to respond to all work items promptly however delays can occur at peak periods during the year.
- Direct debit cancelled in error - Direct Debits are only cancelled when we receive a cancellation from a customer's bank. We have evidence where we were asked to make the cancellation, but it is particularly difficult for a customer to get their bank to admit they were at fault.

Compliments to the City Council in 2013-14

The way in which we receive feedback changed last year with the introduction of GovMetric. We have seen a significance decrease in compliments received via e-mail and letter to the customer service center as customers are choosing to use the GovMetric feedback kiosk, see table 5. In 2014/15 we will show customer services feedback separately to give an overview of all channels of feedback.

Table 8. Cambridge City Council Compliment totals 2013-14.

Year	Chief Exec's	Environment	Resources	Customer & Community	Totals	% Change
2013-14	0	19	15	148	182	*
2012-13	0	8	23	571	602	+10
2011-12	0	7	3	531	541	+15
2010-11	6	35	12	408	461	+7
2009-10	2	121	Not recorded	308	431	+6
2008-09	0	86	Not recorded	321	407	+19

* Due to different recording mechanisms being used in 2013-2014 the % change value is not representative

Table 9. Compliments via GovMetric totals 2013-14

Compliments Channel	Total number	Common theme identified
Face to Face	1564	Time taken Advisor /information
Website	1758	Time taken Information

Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

The Independent Complaints Investigator, is not an employee of the Council but is paid by the Council on a contract basis to investigate complaints. This ensures that the role can be independent of the Council’s departments.

The ICI investigates complaints to see if they are justified and acts on the complainant’s behalf to try and find a way of resolving the issues raised. It is intended to complement our complaints procedures and ensure consistency throughout the Council.

Cambridge City Council is one of the few councils which employ an Independent Investigation Service and is an example of good practice in terms of transparency and public accountability. It is also a highly effective method of resolution for serious complaints.

How many complaints did the Independent Complaints Investigator deal with in 2013-14?

A total of 28 complaints were received by the ICI in 2013-14, with 20 cases being investigated and 8 cases not being investigated. Of the 20 complaints investigated 18 have been reported and concluded and two are on-going, and were carried forward to 2014-15

Of the 18 completed investigations, 7 cases were not upheld, 4 were not upheld but with recommendations for the services concerned, 5 cases were partially upheld, and 2 cases were fully upheld.

Further details on the complaints to the ICI that were upheld can be found in table 9 and are summarised on Figure 3.

Table 9. Upheld and partially upheld complaints to the ICI 2013-14

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment and Customer and Community	Planning, Housing Advice, Anti-Social Behaviour, and Environment	Upheld
<p>Complaint:</p> <p>Complainant reported poor communication between services. Planning applications to extend a bed and breakfast establishment were refused. Cambridge City Council entered into an agreement with the owner to use the Guest House as temporary accommodation solely for (primarily) vulnerable homeless people. After an inspection, Environmental Services considered the property to be an unregistered House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO), and advised Housing Advice not to place any further tenants in the property. Consequently, Housing Advice suggested to the owners that the guest house be used as an HMO with no more than nine people. This breached the planning restriction. The owner was reminded of the restriction to four rooms.</p>		

Changes and improvements made:

- A review has taken place as to how the City Council deal with noise complaints. Work has taken place between various services such as Environmental Health, City Homes, Community Safety, Planning and the Customer Service Centre to devise a more streamlined approach to dealing with such complaints. A corporate noise procedure for residential premises has been developed, and a new mediation service will feed into the process.
- As part of the new HMO licensing procedure, all HMO Licensing applications that Environmental Health receives are now copied to planning and building control for their information. They can then act upon any which may require planning permission. When licenses are reissued copies are now sent to planning and building control
- The Council paid compensation to neighbours affected by anti-social behaviour at the property.

Directorate	Service	Decision
Business Transformation	Accountancy and Support Services, and Estates and Facilities	Upheld

Complaint:

- Complaint received with regard to a property which is a former local authority flat. It had been purchased under the Right to Buy scheme by a previous owner, and the customer purchased it on the open market.

The customer submitted an insurance claim for damage to a window frame, and felt that they did not receive a satisfactory response. An additional telephone conversation failed to improve matters. Failure to repair a leaking gutter caused damage to a window frame, and caused a second insurance claim.

The customer also complained that they did not receive a response to their complaint regarding leaseholder services.

Changes and improvements made:

- Following this case we appointed a dedicated officer to deal with each complaint received. This ensures that the same officer handles the complaint from receipt through to conclusion. This has been a very positive development resulting in better working relationships with other departments involved in the complaint. A more 'joined-up' approach to resolving complaints between departments has reduced the risk of missed communication.

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment	Planning	Partially upheld
Complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaint received regarding the proportionate allocation of parking facilities within a development. The complainant considered that the response from service was unacceptable and that the delay in responding to the complaint by the planning department was unacceptable. 		
Changes and improvements made: <p>The ICI found the specifics of the complaint to be unfounded. The complainant had a tenancy agreement that specified that there was no car parking provision with the unit she was living in. The unit was in a development in a central location where parking provision had been specifically reduced at the planning stage. The complainant had been made fully aware of the restrictions when she took the tenancy so her complaint against the planning service was found to be unjustified. There were some delays in responding to her complaints which were submitted over an extended period before being investigated by the ICI. The service has improved complaint recording and monitoring to address this.</p>		

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment	Planning	Partially upheld
Complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaint received that the Planning Department's treatment of customer's objection to a planning application was flawed. 		
Changes and improvements made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a management level discussion with the officer concerned with the complaint to emphasise the importance of communication and workload management. 		

Directorate	Service	Decision
Environment and Customer and Community	City Homes, and Environmental Services	Partially upheld
Complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaint received regarding night-time noise disturbance from a neighbour. Inadequate action taken by the Council to rectify plumbing which was causing noise disturbance. The Council took insufficient action over a period of four years in response to complaints regarding noise nuisance, and anti-social behaviour, including racial harassment 		
Changes and improvements made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a result of this complaint a new joined up approach has been put in place which alerts all the departments concerned so complaints can be addressed more holistically. There is now one single point of contact and this officer takes ownership of the complaint until it is resolved. 		

Directorate	Service	Decision
Customer and Community	Revenues and Benefits	Partially upheld
Complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer complained of maladministration in responding to questions made on behalf of his father and his uncle regarding Housing and Council Tax Benefit, resulting in distress, debt, and a court order for arrears. 		
Changes and improvements made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have an ongoing project to review the content and layout of letters so that they are easy to understand but still retain the legal references as appropriate. As part of this project, we will reference the date letters are sent on where that is available. We will continue to refer to the date correspondence is received as there can be significant gaps between letter's date and date of receipt. We have also made the telephone as the preferred method of communication. Diary dates create work items within the back office system and outstanding work is monitored to ensure these are actioned. Improved training across services allows officers to understand differing roles and to use these to assist customers in a One Council Approach. We actively encourage and expect officers to bring cases to the attention of the Recovery Team where recovery action has commenced and also where it is known that the case had been passed to the bailiff. Council Tax bills created as a result of benefit changes are produced on a separate extract and an integrity check is carried out by the business team (primarily looking for unusually large or small instalments). 		

Directorate	Service	Decision
Business Transformation	Estates and facilities	Partially upheld
Complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaint submitted regarding the treatment a customer received during maintenance work to their home. The Independent Complaints Investigator reported that the service had failed to respond both to the written complaint, and to reminder emails. The Independent Complaints Investigator did not up-hold the part of the complaint regarding an alleged unsatisfactory response to the complaint, including rudeness and discourtesy from CCC officer, and from an external contractor employee. 		
Changes and improvements made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The complaints officer investigated why the complaint was not forwarded for action. Temporary staff were made aware of good customer service, particularly respect and courtesy. The partnership organisation was reminded of the values which are expected of it under the Corporate Code of Governance. 		

The Local Government Ombudsman, (LGO).

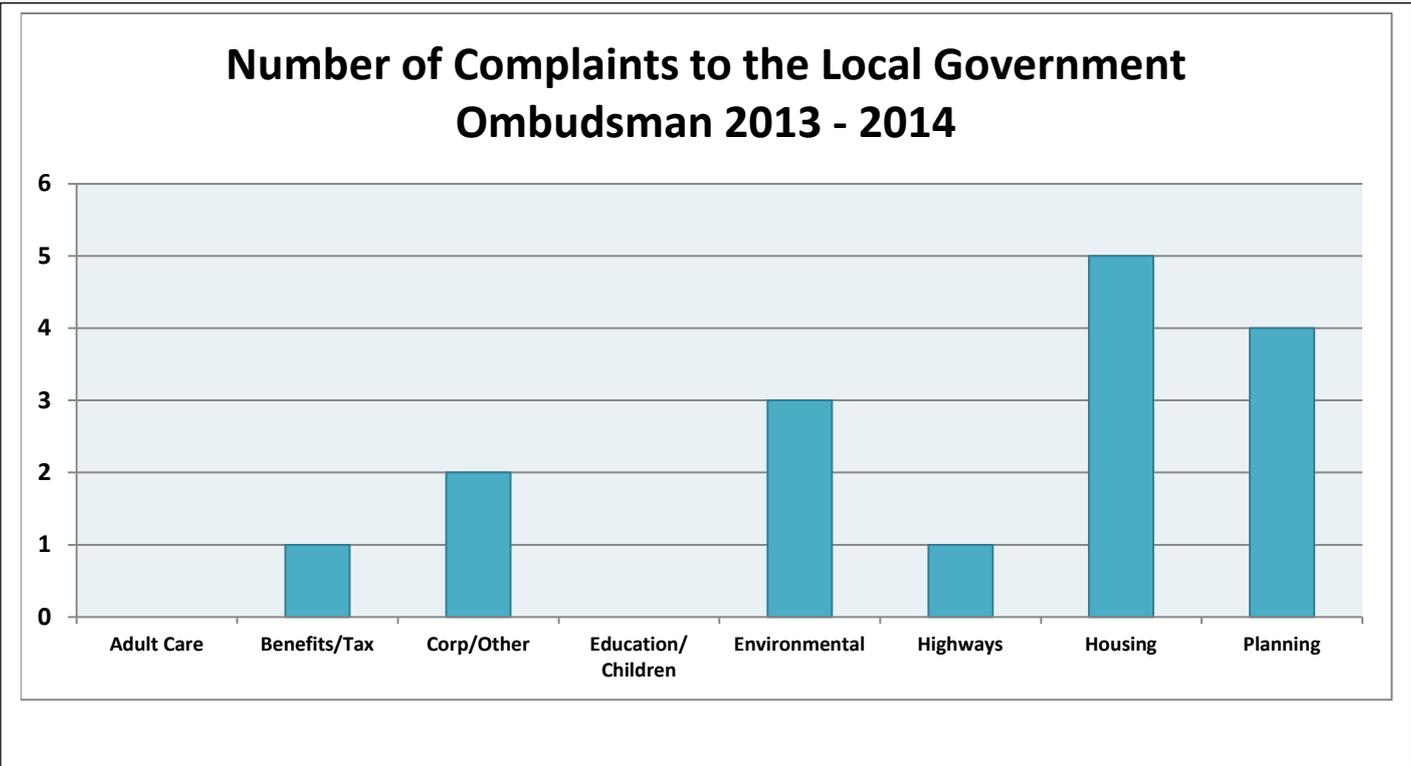
The Local Government Ombudsman

If customers are not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman’s office. The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and other bodies.

Since April 2008 the LGO Advice Team has been the single point of contact for all enquiries and new complaints. The advisors provide comprehensive information and advice to callers at the first point of contact with a full explanation of the process and possible outcomes. This enables callers to make a more informed decision about whether putting their complaint to the LGO Investigative Team is the right course of action.

In 2013/14 The Local Government Ombudsman received 16 complaints about Cambridge City Council. These are summarised in Figure 3 and in the table which follows.

Figure 3



The complaints and LGO actions are summarised below:

In 2013-14 the Local Government Ombudsman received 16 enquiries and complaints, of those 15 decisions were made. 2 were given advice, 3 closed after initial enquiries, 1 was invalid, 5 referred back for local resolution, 2 not upheld and 2 were upheld. 1 complaint made in March 2014 was still outstanding at the time LGO published their report.

Department	No of Complaints	Complaint Upheld	Complaint Not Upheld or other
Adult Care	0		
Benefits & Tax	1		1
Corporate & Other Services	2		2
Education/Children	0		
Environmental Services	3		3
Highways & Transport	1		1
Housing	5	2	3
Planning	4		4
Total	16	2	14

Summary of concerns raised:

The two upheld complaints uncovered some failures in the Housing Advice Service. Firstly, that there were delays in the homeless decision making process and that both households were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than the permitted maximum of 6 weeks as detailed in the Homelessness Code of Guidance.

In a third case, referred in 2013-14 but not upheld until July 2014, the Council was criticised by the Ombudsman for ending a temporary accommodation stay prematurely and delaying an adverse homelessness decisions.

Background:

Both the cases where a decision of maladministration was upheld during 2013-14 related to the housing advice service. Following a change in reporting by LGO, our systems failed to recognise these as maladministration cases. This resulted in a delay in reporting this to Committee. A full report will be provided to Housing Committee on 30th September 2014, this will include details of the complaints and decisions made in 2014/15.

In relation to the two cases there were delays in the homeless decision making process for both households and a lack of suitable temporary accommodation made available. Both households were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than the permitted maximum 6 weeks as detailed in the *Homelessness Code of Guidance*.

The Council wishes to acknowledge that there were shortcomings in relation to working practice, whilst also highlighting that there were other factors, particularly housing pressures at the time not within the Council's control that contributed to these circumstances.

The Council's Housing Advice Service has since introduced improved performance monitoring systems, has increased temporary accommodation units from 70 to 86, has introduced a stronger focus on using temporary accommodation and monitoring bed and breakfast usage. From a high of 30 households in Bed and Breakfast in August 2013 this has been reduced to less than 3 at any one time, since October 2013, and none for longer than 3 weeks.

A report on Discharge of Homelessness Duties to Community Services Scrutiny Committee in June 2013 provided a summary of pressures in the service at the time and policy solutions.

There are a number of factors that influence housing pressure in relation to length of stays in bed and breakfast accommodation but one of the most influential is the numbers of properties available to let through the Council's choice based lettings (CBL) system. Year on year lettings figures below demonstrate that there was a significant decline in available lettings from April 2011 to March 2013:

2009-10	890
2010-11	798
2011-12	558
2012-13	595
2013-14	704

In relation to the third finding of maladministration the Council is reviewing procedures for ending its temporary housing duties and staff will be trained on the need to investigate incidents more thoroughly, issue warnings and determine whether the behaviour is persistent before ending temporary accommodation duties.

Further detail on actions taken by the Housing Department to address concerns raised and charge of maladministration in the two Ombudsman cases determined in 2013-14.

- 1. Better performance monitoring systems** for homelessness and housing advice cases – housing advisers are now closely monitored in the following areas:
 - Average homelessness decision times – taken over a quarterly period
 - Case file reviews – one per month per full time housing adviser – analysis of the quality and timeliness of record keeping
 - Analysis of cases with no casework activity for 6 weeks or more
 - Analysis of those customers in temporary accommodation for more than 5 months

The Housing Advice Service also has a weekly report on numbers in bed and breakfast accommodation and flags the numbers of households who have been placed there for 3, 4 and 5 weeks. A statistics report will be reviewed by Head of Service and reported to the director on a monthly basis to maintain service level agreements.

- 2. More temporary accommodation** – the government set local authorities a target to halve the number of temporary accommodation units by 2010 from an initial baseline. The target was set as a blanket target for all local authorities in England and Wales regardless of local conditions. Cambridge City's baseline figure of 140 was set in 2005. By 2010 the Council had met the government target by reducing the figure to 70. However, over the last 5 years, the Council has consistently had an average of around 85 households in temporary accommodation. This has meant that meeting the target had led to a shortfall of around 15 temporary accommodation units. Spend on bed and breakfast peaked in 2013 where the Council had up to 30 households in bed and breakfast by August of that year. We make every effort to ensure that temporary housing is offered close to Cambridge, taking into consideration the Customers personal circumstances, e.g. work, school and vulnerability.

The Housing Advice Service has a target to increase temporary accommodation provision to 90 by the end of this financial year. As at 24th July 2014 the Council has 86 units, including a 10 bedroom hostel acquired through a lease from a registered provider in October 2013. The Council has not had more than 3 households in bed and breakfast since November 2013 and has had no households showing as resident for more than 3 weeks in the weekly snapshot report since 25th October 2013.

- 3. Reorganisation of resources** – the Housing Advice Service has trialled the use of a dedicated officer to coordinate temporary accommodation placements and this has led to the move to create a dedicated role which appears in a restructure proposal currently out to consultation. The restructure proposal also includes the addition of another full time equivalent housing adviser, which should help to further reduce casework decision times.

4. **Partnerships with other local authorities in the sub-region** – The council has reciprocal arrangements for provision of temporary accommodation with both East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire district councils.
5. **Review of processes** – We have reviewed the Council processes to ensure LGO reports are monitored, reviewed and actioned in a timely manner.

Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct

Councillors must adhere to the Council's Code of Conduct whenever they are conducting Council business, representing the Council or conducting the business of the office to which they were elected. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure high standards of ethics and conduct are maintained and that Councillors treat everybody in an equal capacity and with respect, ensuring at all times that the integrity of the Council is not compromised in any way.

Complaints about councillors are considered initially by the Council's Monitoring Officer (who is also the Head of Legal Services). When he receives a complaint about breach of the Code of Conduct, he consults one of two "Independent Persons" appointed by the Council. The role of the "Independent Persons" is to introduce external scrutiny of the complaints process. The Monitoring Officer can respond to a complaint, can commission a formal investigation or can refer it for consideration by the Council's Standards Sub-Committee. The Council's Standards Sub-Committee is made up of three councillors.

During 2013-14, the Council received three complaints about the conduct of councillors. None of the complaints were upheld.

The three complaints arose through the Council's consideration of planning applications relating to Wilton Terrace. Two complainants claimed that a councillor should not take part in later decisions affecting Wilton Terrace as they said that the way the councillor had voted previously on similar applications amounted to predetermination. They claimed that the councillor would not be approaching the later applications with an open mind. This is not a complaint that relates to the Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer wrote to the complainants explaining why he disagreed with their view of predetermination and why it was legitimate for the councillor to take part in the decisions.

The third complaint related more generally to members of the Planning Committee, alleging "erratic & inconsistent behaviour on behalf of the Councillor & their committee members". The Monitoring Officer clarified that no allegation was being made of breach of the Code of Conduct and concluded that the complaint was not one that should be investigated under the complaints procedure.

There were three complaints in 2011/12 and two complaints in 2012/13.

To find out more about the Council's Code of Conduct and how to make a complaint about a councillor go to <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions> or contact the Council's Monitoring Officer, Simon Pugh (simon.pugh@cambridge.gov.uk).

Appendix 1 Departments 2013-14

Chief Executive's Department

CEX Office

Corporate Strategy

Business Transformation Department

Accounting Services

Human Resources

Internal Audit

Customer Service

ICT Client

Property Services

Legal Services

Environment Department

Planning

Refuse and Environment

Specialist Services

Tourism and City Centre Management

Streets and Open Spaces

Customer and Community Services Department

Arts and Recreation

City Homes

Community Development

Strategic Housing

Revenue and Benefits

Estates and Facilities

Please note that that there has been a change in services and directorates in 2014.

- Estates and facilities moved from Business Transformation to Customer and Community Services.
- The Customer Services has moved from Customer and Community Services to Business Transformation.
- Community Development and Arts and Receptions will merge in Autumn 2014

The 2014/15 complaints report will reflect these changes.