



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21

**CUSTOMER FEEDBACK SCHEME – COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND
COMPLAINTS
ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18th January 2021

**JOINT REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES
AND THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATIONS.**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- (i) Provide the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with the inaugural Annual Report relating to the operation and effectiveness of the Council's corporate Customer Feedback Scheme ('CFS') between April 1st 2019 and March 31st 2020 prior to consideration by Cabinet; and
- (ii) Seek the Committee's recommendations and any suggested areas for improvement in respect of the contents and publication of future CFS Annual Reports, together with CFS reporting mechanisms more generally, for Cabinet's future consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:-

- 2.1 Consider and scrutinise the inaugural Annual Report relating to the operation and effectiveness of the Council's Customer Feedback Scheme (Comments, Compliments and Complaints) ('CFS') between April 1st 2019 and March 31st 2020, annexed at Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2.2 Provide recommendations and any suggested areas for improvement in respect of the contents and publication of future CFS Annual Reports, together with CFS reporting mechanisms more generally; and
- 2.3 Agree that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives a follow up report on the reporting mechanisms subsequently agreed by Cabinet in relation to the operation of the CFS scheme, including an update on any suggested changes

taken forward, in addition to receiving the CFS Annual Report as part of its work programme.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Whilst currently there is no statutory requirement for the Local Authority to produce an annual report it is important that Members are properly apprised of the nature of feedback received by the Council's customers, how that feedback has been used and, where appropriate, utilised to ensure service improvement across the Council.
- 3.2 Officers consider there needs to be a more consistent and programmed method of reporting customer feedback which can lead to informed recommendations for improvement and from which evidence of good practice/customer service can be shared more widely across service areas.
- 3.3 Legislative changes to the powers of the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) came into force on the 1st May 2019 (Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019) giving that office greater investigative powers and through the development of the 'Complaints Standards Authority' a role in monitoring standards, trends and patterns across public service delivery in Wales.
- 3.4 As part of this legislation the Council is now required to report quarterly on complaints activity to the PSOW.
- 3.5 The CFS records all Comments, Compliments and Complaints received by both residents of RCT and those people visiting RCT who access Council facilities. The scheme does not cover complaints where there are other statutory arrangements in place such as complaints about Social care or School complaints.
- 3.6 The complaints process is a two stage process and is in line with the Public Services Ombudsman's Model Complaints Policy that was adopted by all Local Authorities in 2011.

Stage One: Local Resolution – The emphasis at this stage of the process is early resolution of the complaint either by providing an explanation, putting things right or agreeing a way forward which may include identifying where improvements to services are necessary. The timescale for local resolution is 10 working days.

Stage Two: Formal Consideration – If the complainant remains dissatisfied after completion of stage one, they may request that the complaint proceeds to stage two of the process. This involves a formal investigation of the complaint with a report being produced by a Senior Council Officer. The timescale for dealing with this stage is 20 working days.

- 3.7 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage two investigation, they may progress their complaint to the PSOW.
- 3.8 On 1st January 2019 operational responsibility for managing and co-ordinating the CFS transferred to the Customer Feedback and Engagement Team, who already had responsibility for the existing management arrangements in respect

of the Social Services statutory complaints process. This team is led by the Service Improvement, Customer Feedback and Engagement Manager. This now means that the CFS and statutory Social Services complaints processes for the Council are now managed centrally by one team leading to better use of available expertise and experience as well as ensuring greater resilience in the operation of the CFS itself. Further it will:

- Enable more timely use of information captured via the operation of the CFS through improved reporting mechanisms which will support performance management arrangements and improvement within services;
- Introduce training, support and challenge across all services; and
- Strengthen complaint gatekeeping arrangements to improve the allocation and management of complaints (i.e. the early identification of only those that require action), the introduction of reporting management information to all Services and where agreed, to Members.

4. CFS IMPROVEMENTS

- 4.1 A number of improvements have been made to the CFS since January 2019 which has meant more accurate recording of customer feedback, the ability to produce better qualitative data, the introduction of quarterly CFS coordinators meetings and the introduction of a benchmarking exercise which rates RCT services against standards set by the PSOW.
- 4.2 Improvements have also been made to the customer facing web and social media information about the CFS to allow customers to better engage with the Council and for customer feedback to be better captured.
- 4.3 Ultimately, improvements to the CFS will enable the Council to improve engagement, understand where services need to be developed and improved and to better understand the needs of its residents and those who live and work in the County Borough.

5. SCRUTINY INVOLVEMENT

- 5.1 This report highlights the importance of consistent reporting and recommends that an annual report is continued to be produced providing a summary of all activity for the year.
- 5.2 Members are now asked to consider and scrutinise the inaugural Annual Report relating to the operation and effectiveness of the CFS between April 1st 2019 and March 31st 2020, annexed at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 5.3 Members are also asked to consider the appropriate level of reporting and make recommendations to Cabinet, prior to its consideration of the inaugural Annual Report, on how complaints activity is monitored in the future and whether any

further improvements could be made to the process, noting the recent improvements made to date.

- 5.4 It is proposed that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee receive future reports in respect of the CFS in order that feedback can be provided to the Cabinet thus ensuring that the proposals for improvement are being promoted by Scrutiny. It is recommended that the work programme reflect this additional item going forward.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Equality and diversity implications will be considered as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's feedback and comments and any subsequent implementation arrangements.

7. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Financial and resource implications will be considered as part of any feedback and subsequent implementation arrangements.

8. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 8.1 The function of the Customer Feedback and Engagement Team and the collation of service user feedback through both complaints and compliments provides a quality assurance mechanism by which the Council can measure its performance against the corporate priorities to:

- Deliver essential services well;
- Engage with customers and use feedback to redesign and/or improve our services.
- Ensure local people get good outcomes from their services

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

as amended by

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS:

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 18th JANUARY 2021

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & INTERIM HEAD OF
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**CUSTOMER FEEDBACK SCHEME – COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND
COMPLAINTS
ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**

RHONDDA CYNON TAF CUSTOMER FEEDBACK ANNUAL REPORT

1ST APRIL 2019 – 31ST MARCH 2020



FOREWORD

This report provides an overview of the operation of the Customer Feedback Scheme (CFS) including details of the level of feedback received as well as developments and improvements to the scheme for the year 2019/20. During this period the Customer Feedback and Engagement Team have prioritised the development of the CRM system to improve the quality of the information available both for reporting and enabling individual service areas to monitor the effectiveness of their service delivery. A designated post was created within the team to monitor the CFS and to undertake reporting tasks as required by the Complaint's Standards Authority. This has led to changes having to be made to the way in which complaints are categorised in line with PSOW expectations and to enable comparison data to be collected across all 22 Local Authorities in Wales. Whilst this has impacted on the consistency of reporting the message to service areas remains consistent going forward with emphasis on ensuring feedback is logged, responded to effectively and the information is used to improve and plan services.

Training for all CRM system users with particular focus on appropriately closing and re-allocating customer feedback has been undertaken although there is still progress to be made particularly in logging and detailing compliments. There has been a slight increase in the number of complaints being received and this should be viewed as a positive indication that complaint feedback is being more consistently recorded. Improvements have also been noted in the recording or evidence of learning from complaints which was introduced midway through this reporting period with 10% of complaints highlighting service improvements. Whilst the percentage remains low and the quality of data is variable it is nevertheless a positive step forward with many service areas routinely reporting. This will be an area of focus for the CFS co-ordinators in 2020/21. Training that was to be facilitated by the CSA for staff across all service areas was unfortunately postponed due to Covid-19 however this will be provided virtually in 2020/21.

Throughout 2019/20 the Customer Feedback and Engagement Team has been proactively monitoring the number of complaints that are left open or unsolved on the CRM database and this has resulted in the number of complaints showing as outstanding at 6 months reducing from 6.6% in 2018/19 to 2.4% in 2019/20. This work will continue with the expectation that the timeliness of complaint handling will improve over the coming years. To assist this the Customer Feedback and Engagement team will be liaising with customer care in relation to the development of a new customer feedback system which can be tailored to meet the requirements of the Council and improve the flexibility of the system particularly for frontline services.

Moving forward the Customer Feedback and Engagement Team will continue to support service areas with their management of Customer Feedback with more focus on using available data to improve performance. Whilst improvements in some areas have been slow I hope this report will evidence the journey that has been made in 2019/20 by the Customer Feedback Team engaging successfully with service areas and improving the quality of data that is available on feedback received from our customers.

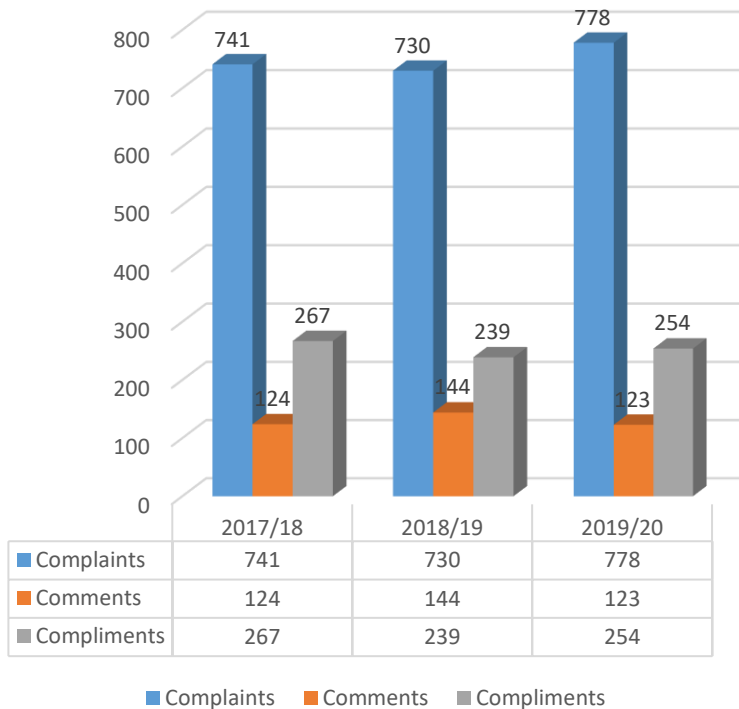
Jayne Thomas
Service Improvement, Customer Feedback and Engagement Manager

SUMMARY OF CUSTOMER FEEDBACK FOR 2019/20

Service Area	Complaints by Stage		Total complaints	Comments	Compliments	Total
	1	2				
Arts and Theatres	2	2	4	0	3	7
Benefits	13	1	14	0	0	14
Council Tax	44	4	48	0	0	48
Customer Care	35	0	35	4	28	67
Corporate Estates	6	1	7	0	4	11
Cross Service Cases (Multiple services)	44	6	50	6	20	76
Education	19	0	19	2	5	26
E-Access	2	0	2	1	0	3
ESG, Highways and Street care	215	4	219	34	126	379
Legal (including elections and insurance)	5	0	5	0	0	5
Leisure	36	1	37	8	5	50
Libraries	1	0	1	0	6	7
Parks and Countrysides'	22	0	22	10	7	39
Prosperity and Development /Housing	31	4	35	6	29	70
Public Health and Protection	38	6	44	3	9	56
Strategy/Events	5	0	5	5	5	15
Unspecified	206	6	212	39	2	253
Cases falling outside of CFS	19	0	19	5	5	29
Totals	743	35	778	123	254	1155

KEY THEMES FOR CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Customer Feedback Annual Comparison

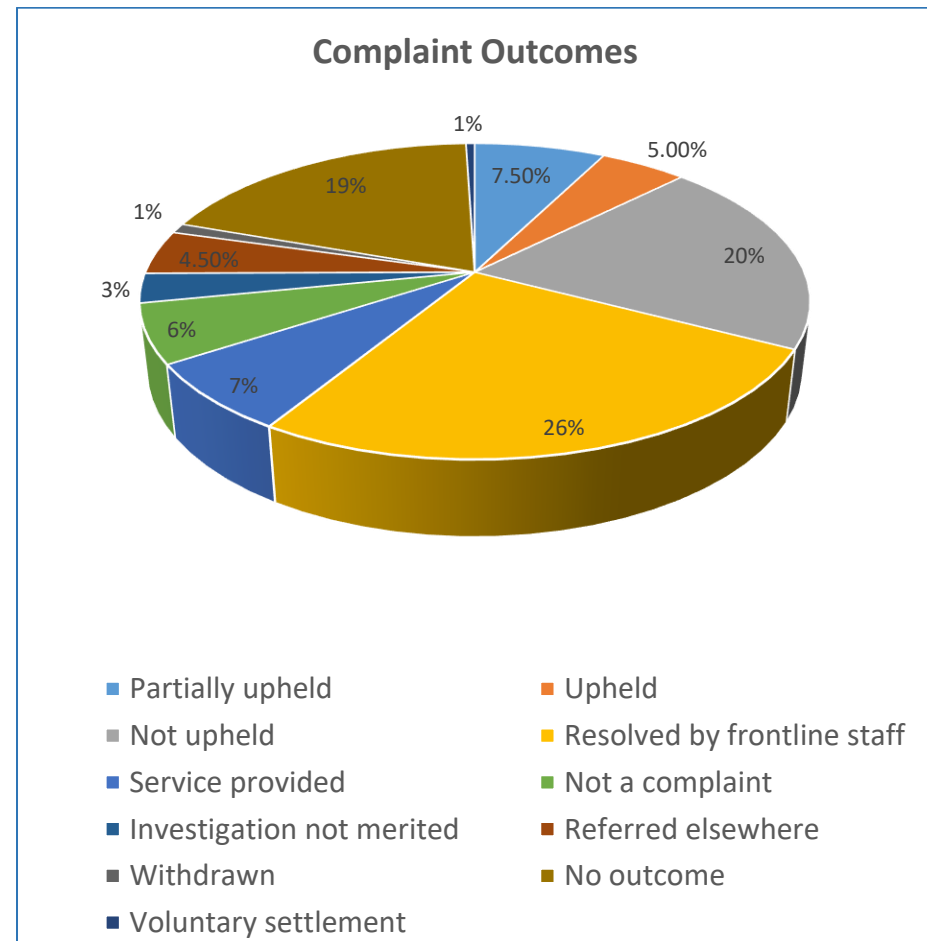
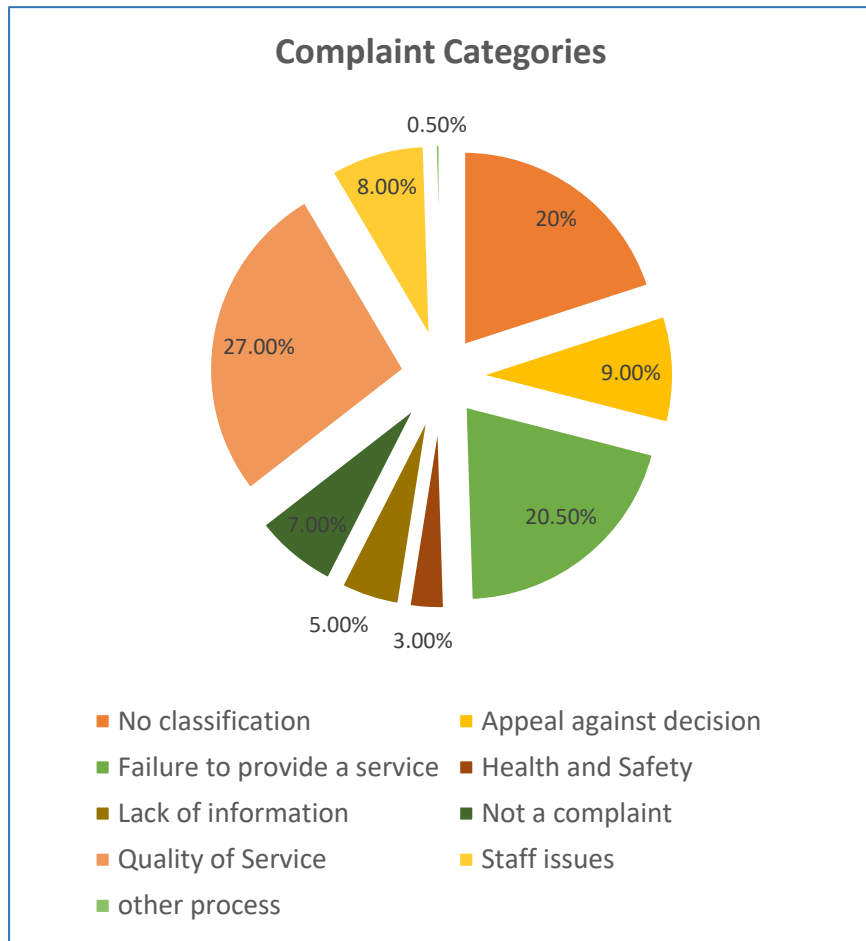


Key Themes

- A total of 1155 feedback items were logged for 2019/20. This number is slightly higher but consistent with the previous two years and is likely to be an underestimate of the actual amount of feedback received with compliments in particular being under reported.
- There has been small increase on the number of complaints received in comparison to previous years and this was anticipated with the training for staff on accurate identification and recording of complaint issues.
- 65% of feedback was received via the Councils website with only 0.7% of customers choosing to provide feedback face to face. 18.5% of customers provided feedback by telephone and 9.5% by letter. E-Mail correspondence accounted for 8.5% of the feedback received.
- 22.5% of feedback items on the CRM are not allocated to a service area and this indicates that they have not been allocated or closed properly. Further work is required on developing a more flexible system particularly for frontline services.

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS.

In 2019/20 the Council received 778 complaints through the Customer Feedback Scheme 35 (4.4%) of which were dealt with at Stage 2. This number remains consistent with the previous 2 years. The following charts detail the category of complaint where these were recorded on the CRM system and the complaint outcome.

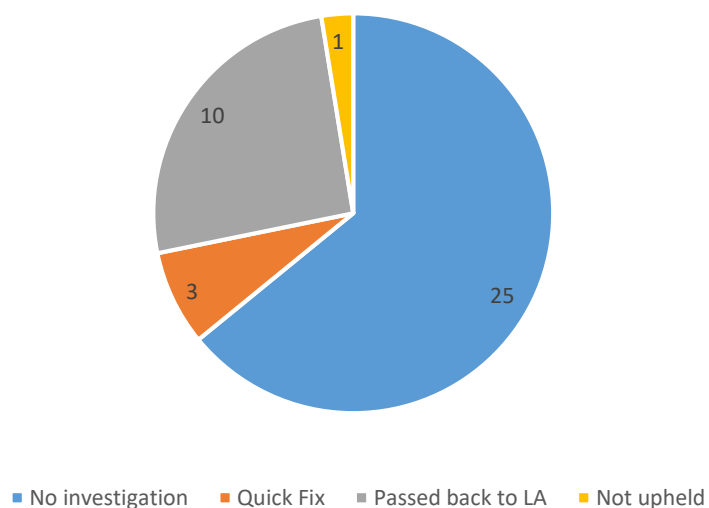


KEY THEMES

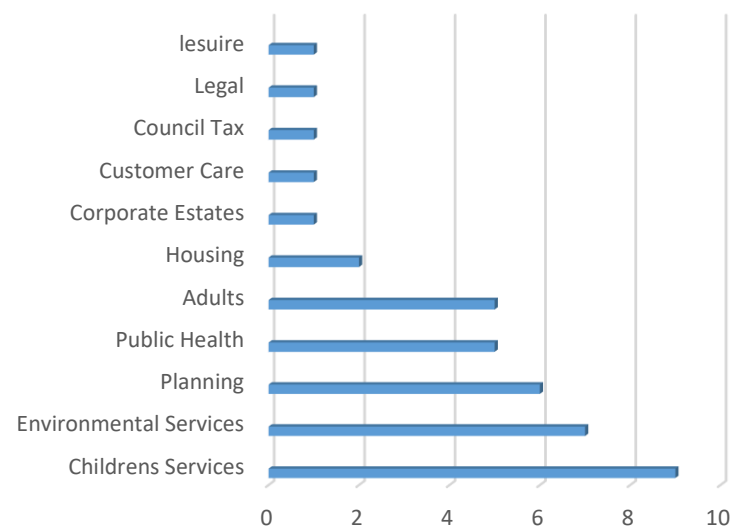
- 70% of Stage 1 complaints were dealt with within 10 working days with 59% of Stage 2 complaints dealt with within the designated 20 working days.
- As anticipated and consistent with previous years the Environmental Services Group (ESG) received the most number of complaints making up 28% of the total recorded on the CFS. This however does not include complaints counted in the overall total that have been reallocated and dropped out of the ESG service queue. This represents 27% of the total number and so it is estimated that the true number of complaints for ESG is in excess of 50%.
- The highest number of complaints were categorised as quality of service or failure to provide a service and related to frontline services such as refuse, recycling and street care.
- 26% of complaints were resolved by frontline services. Again the total is likely to be higher and reflects the commitment of frontline staff to deal with customer dissatisfaction as quickly and efficiently as possible. Only 4.5% of complaints progressed to Stage 2 of the complaints process.
- In this reporting period and in line with Ombudsman reporting not all complaints have been categorised as Upheld or Not Upheld. Reporting for future years will be amended to enable service areas to log upheld/not upheld as well as categorising the nature of the complaint and outcome.
- In 2019/20 to ensure compliance with both legislation and internal policies all recorded complaints must identify if any issues raised relates to Welsh language, Equality or Data Protection. In 2019/20 26 complaints in total were recorded, 10 relating to data protection concerns, 6 for Welsh Language and 10 relating to equality issues. 1 equality complaint resulted in staff training regarding working with the gypsy and traveling community.
- Due to changes in policy by the Public Services Ombudsman no benchmarking exercises have been possible in the second half of this reporting year. Following discussions with the PSOW this has now been resolved and it is hoped we can continue to access complaint's information from which we can identify and share learning with other Council's.
- 39 complaints were referred to the Public Services Ombudsman, details of outcomes for these complaints are detailed in the next graph.

OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

Complaints referred to Public Service Ombudsman



Ombudsman Complaints by Service Area



KEY THEMES

- The number of Ombudsman complaints received in 2019/2020 is consistent with the number received in 2018/19.
- There are no identified themes or concerns as to a particular service area or service provision with 25 of the 39 complaints not requiring any further action.
- 14 complaints referred to the PSOW related to Social Care.
- The Ombudsman letter to the Council for 2019/20 recommends training from the Complaint's Standards Authority and arrangements are currently being made for this to take place for staff across all service areas.

EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Complaint area	Complaint detail	Service Improvement
Housing Advice	Complaint about delays in customers being dealt with at walk in Housing Advice centre.	Internal review of the service to be undertaken to include the views and suggestions of customers on how the service can be improved and in particular waiting times reduced.
Council Tax	Complaint regarding length of time waiting for a refund, leaving customer short of money.	The frequency of payments increased to ensure refunds provided as quickly as possible.
Heritage Services	Customer with Autistic Child complaining of poor experience of visit to Santa's Toy Mine in the Heritage Park.	Relevant training on autism to be provide to all relevant staff including seasonal employees irrespective of length of employment contract. Parent to be involved directly in sharing her view on how attraction can be improved for users with autism.
Crosscutting	Complaint regarding lack of knowledge of customer advisor on the purchasing/general advice relating to residential parking permits.	All advisors advised that any for any future queries customers should be directed to the policy available on the website thus ensuring correct and consistent information is provided.
Leisure	Complaint from parent re. Incident where daughter refused access to pool inflatable despite her being a competent swimmer. Refusal was based on existing policy and child's age.	Policy to be reviewed to take account of child's ability and not just age when considering use of pool inflatables.
ESG rubbish/litter	Complaint regarding amount of litter in area (Maerdy) and need for more bins	More litter bins provided in area.
Crosscutting	Complaint regarding misinformation given by customer advisor regarding Discretionary Housing Payments	Customer Advisors to receive training on the DHP policy to ensure accurate advice and information is provided in the future.
Education	Complaint regarding delay in responding to a query re. college funding	Improvements made to CRM in ensuring information is allocated correctly. Feedback team updated, college funding arrangements fall within the remit of career Wales and not the Council.
Regeneration and Planning	Complaint regarding involvement of surveyor in Housing Grant application.	All staff reminded of correct process in offering another surveyor where urgent planning request received and allocated surveyor unavailable.

EXAMPLES OF COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS

Service Area	Detail of Compliments (Total received 254) Comments (Total received 123)
Education	<i>Thank you very much indeed. I very much appreciate your help and it is a breath of fresh air to deal with someone so helpful. Hopefully this will assist xxxx with her statement process in Powys.</i>
Customer Care and ESG	<i>Mrs xxxx would like to thank the Contact Centre Advisor who arranged for her large bin to be swapped to a small bin along with the crew members who carried out the exchange. She contacted us earlier today & said that the exchange has already taken place</i>
Recycling and Waste Services	<i>I visited the Bryn Pica (Llwydcoed) community recycling centre at the weekend and I was very grateful to receive help unloading my car from one of the site operatives. He was extremely pleasant and went out of his way to help me on 2 separate occasions on Saturday and this was very much appreciated - this young man is a credit to your team. Please pass on my thanks to him via his line manager.</i>
Corporate Estates	<i>I, and my classmates, were very impressed by the modern facilities and equipment, it was the original school building, where we spent our own school days that made the greatest impression. The sensitive and extensive restoration work has produced a wonderful reminder of times past and an important memorial to the academic heritage of the area. (Tonyrefail Community School)</i>
Crosscutting	<i>Hi I wish to complement your Customer Service, Licencing and Street Works team for helping me complete an application for a container to be located in the Maerdy Area. We at TCMS are working with Trivallis on Maerdy Road. All the staff were helpful, informative and called back when they said they would. Thanks for your help and assistance.</i>
Arts and Theatres	<i>We attended the pantomime today. Can you please pass on our thanks for an excellent performance and arrangements (inside and outside the venue). We used to visit the Grand annually until last year when we moved to visiting the Coliseum (regret not moving much sooner). The quality of your performances and arrangements makes the visit much more enjoyable for all involved.</i>
Housing Advice	<i>I would just like to thank xxxx from housing for all the help he has given me recently during a very stressful and difficult time. He has gone above and beyond to help me and find a solution for me. xxxx thank you so much from the bottom of my heart</i>

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND PRIORITIES

The Customer Feedback and Engagement Team will continue to review the effectiveness of the Customer Feedback Scheme ensuring that the Council not only provide customer focused services but also use feedback received to both understand our customers' needs and to develop and improve services across RCT. Below are some of the priorities for 2020/21:

Improved complaints training.

Virtual training for 40 key staff across all service areas will be held in the coming months and will be facilitated at no cost to the Council by the newly established Complaint's Standards Authority. The training will cover core modules including complaint handling, investigation, communication and a number of soft skills modules such as effective time management and managing difficult behaviours. It is hoped that this will improve the management of complaints by key staff, raising both the profile of complaints and an improved understanding of effective complaints resolution.

Improved reporting.

The last 12 months has seen all co-ordinators and key staff trained in effectively using the existing CRM system ensuring that all feedback items are properly re-allocated or closed. There is still work to be done to improve the existing CRM system to ensure that accurate information is transferred to any new commissioned system and that any new system has the flexibility to meet the needs of frontline services. New reports will be developed to monitor set performance measures around timescales and it is hoped that improved performance data can be made available to individual service areas by 2021/22.

Public facing information.

The highest percentage of feedback items are received through the Council's website and whilst this is positive not all residents of RCT will have internet access. The Digital RCT plan* identifies that in RCT '*41,500 (22.5%) adults do not use the internet regularly and are considered digitally excluded*'. Age UK highlight that older people are more likely to not have internet access and are potentially more isolated and vulnerable than some other groups within the community. It is therefore important that the Council offer a range of mechanisms to enable **all** customers to use the Customer Feedback Scheme. In light of this as well as improved web information, public information will be provided in key sites across RCT over the coming year.

Improved customer feedback.

As the Customer Feedback Scheme develops and we promote the Council as a 'learning organisation' it is important that we consider how we effectively communicate to customers through the 'You said We did' platform. Further discussions will take place with relevant officers in relation to improving in this area in 2020/21.