

2015/16

Quarter 1 Customer Feedback



For further information about
Customer Feedback at
Maidstone Borough Council,
please contact Sam Bailey,
Research and Information
Officer

OUR VISION

That our residents live in decent homes, enjoy good health and a pleasant environment, with a successful economy that is supported by reliable transport networks.

OUR MISSION

Putting People First.

PRIORITY 1

Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all

PRIORITY 2

Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Providing a clean and safe environment

Encouraging good health and wellbeing.

Respecting the character of our Borough

Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions

Enhancing the appeal of the town centre for everyone

Securing improvements to the transport infrastructure of our Borough

Promoting a range of employment opportunities and skills required across our Borough

Planning for sufficient homes to meet our Borough's needs

OUR VALUES

Service

Everything we do impacts on our customers, both internal and external. We will listen to and understand their needs, then take action to provide the right service in a positive and professional manner.

Teamwork

Working together to achieve our objectives and goals in a way that utilises the talents and creativity of everyone in our organisation.

Responsibility

We work in an environment that encourages us to take ownership for our actions. Making the right choices and decisions that lead to a satisfactory outcome for all.

Integrity

We have the courage to act on our convictions to build trust and honesty. We work with our partners and customers to create a feeling of openness and transparency in everything we do.

Value

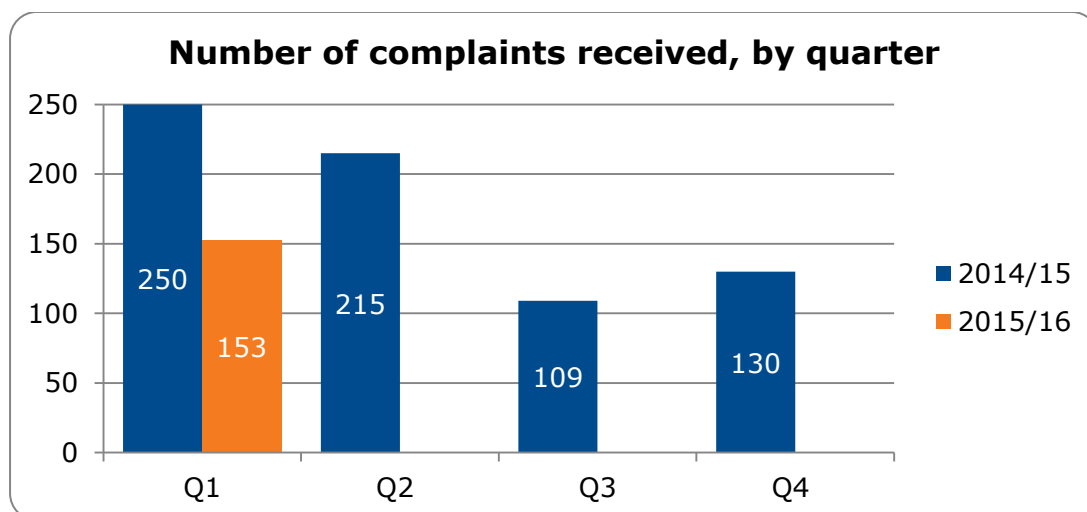
Taking care and weighing up our options, aiming to get the maximum effect for every penny of public money we spend.

Equality

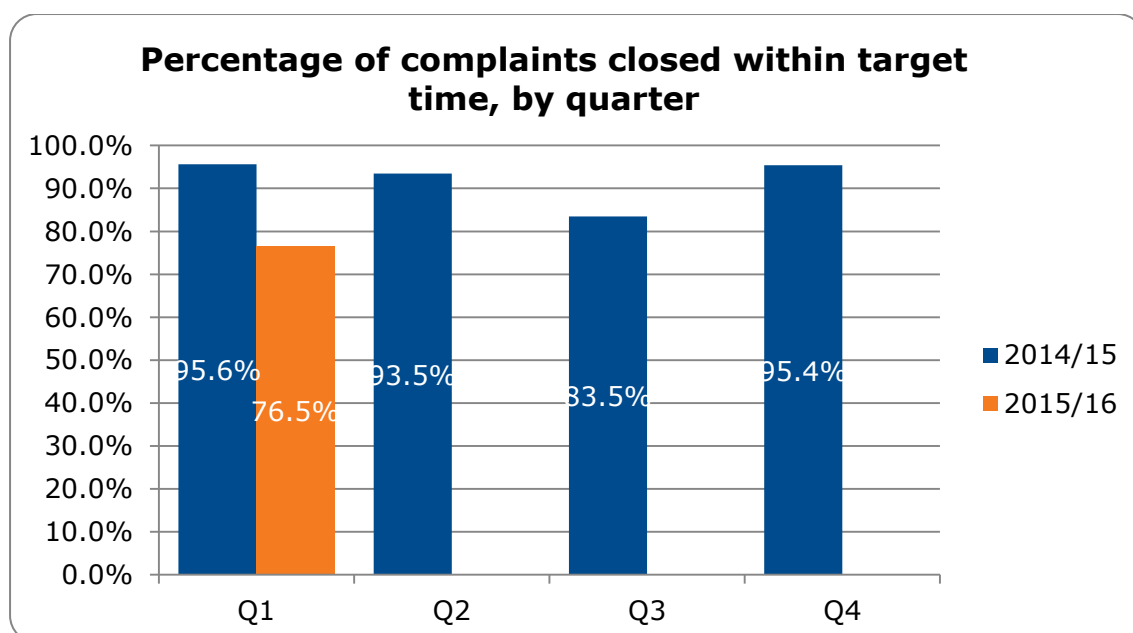
Valuing our differences and understanding how they can contribute to a better working environment and services that are fair and easy to access.

Overall Figures

In quarter 1 of 2015/16 the council received 153 complaints. This is an increase of 18% compared to quarter 4 of 2014/15, but a significant decrease of 63% compared to the same quarter of 2014/15. The graph below shows the volume of complaints received, by quarter, since quarter 1 of 2014/15.



76.5% of complaints were closed in time this quarter. This is the lowest result since we started reporting this data in 2009/10. The graph below shows the proportion of complaints closed within target time, by quarter, since quarter 1 of 2014/15. It should be noted that for a number of these complaints, complainants were contacted with expected dates for resolution.



The table below shows a full breakdown of complaints received, by service, whether they were late and what type of complaint they were. Complaints by service are discussed in detail later in the report.

Service	Number	On Time	Late	% on Time	Service	Policy	Staff	Time Taken	Lack of Contact	Discrimination
Benefits	5	5	0	100.0%	3	1	1	0	0	0
Bereavement Services	1	1	0	100.0%	0	0	1	0	0	0
Building Control	3	2	1	66.7%	1	1	1	0	0	0
Community Safety	2	1	1	50.0%	1	0	1	0	0	0
Corporate Property	1	1	0	100.0%	0	0	0	0	0	1
Customer Services	8	8	0	100.0%	7	0	1	0	0	0
Development Management	42	36	6	85.7%	7	31	3	1	0	0
Electoral Registration	25	4	21	16.0%	21	2	1	0	0	1
Environmental Enforcement	6	5	1	83.3%	3	0	3	0	0	0
Environmental Services	21	20	1	95.2%	13	0	8	0	0	0
Housing (Homelessness)	3	2	1	66.7%	0	2	1	0	0	0
Housing Register	7	6	1	85.7%	4	1	0	2	0	0
Legal Services	1	0	1	0.0%	0	1	0	0	0	0
Parking Services	9	9	0	100.0%	5	1	2	0	0	1
Parks and Leisure	4	4	0	100.0%	4	0	0	0	0	0
Planning Enforcement	2	1	1	50.0%	0	1	0	0	1	0
Planning Support	3	3	0	100.0%	0	2	1	0	0	0
Policy and Communications	1	1	0	100.0%	0	0	1	0	0	0
Private Sector Housing	3	2	1	66.7%	1	0	2	0	0	0
Revenues	5	5	0	100.0%	1	3	1	0	0	0
Spatial Planning	1	1	0	100.0%	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	153	117	36	76.5%	71	47	28	3	1	3

Stage 2 Complaints

A table detailing the overall number of stage 2 complaints can be found below. The number of stage 2 complaints received for particular services is discussed later in the report.

Service	Stage 2 Complaints	Number Upheld	Number answered out of time
Benefits	1	0	0
Building Control	1	0	0
Development Management	13	0	0
Electoral Registration	6	2	1
Environmental Enforcement	1	0	0
Environmental Services	1	1	0
Parking Services	3	0	0
Parks and Leisure	1	0	0
Planning Support	3	1	0
Private Sector Housing	1	0	0
Revenues	1	0	0
Total	32	4	1

The table below shows the number of stage 2s received, the escalation rate and percentage of upheld complaints by quarter since quarter 1 of 2014/15.

	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of stage 2 complaints received	14/15	32	24	34	25
	15/16	32	-	-	-
% of complaints escalated to stage 2	14/15	12.8	11.1	31.1	19.2
	15/16	20.9	-	-	-
% upheld stage 2 complaints	14/15	31.3	33.3	35.3	16
	15/16	12.5	-	-	-

The table above shows that the escalation rate has increased slightly since the previous quarter. However the percentage of stage 2 complaints that are upheld has decreased again, and seem to be continuing on a downward trajectory.

This suggests that the conclusions of the complaint investigation at stage 1 are generally accurate. However there may be other reasons the complaints are being escalated, for example the tone of the letter or not addressing all issues

raised. These issues are being addressed by the complaints review that the Policy and Information Team are currently undertaking.

Compliments

Several teams across the council received compliments in quarter 1. Compliments for each team are also mentioned in their relevant section of the report later on. The number of compliments received by the council, sorted by team, can be found in the table below.

Team	Number of compliments
Street Cleansing	6
Inclusion	3
Waste Collection	3
Electoral Registration	1
Customer Services	1
Development Management	1
Communications	1
Parks and Leisure	1
Grounds Maintenance	1

Some of these compliments were showing appreciation for the work our teams carry out – e.g. litter picks and street cleansing. Others were regarding the swiftness of carrying out a service request – for example thanking us for how quickly we cleared some tree branches. There were other compliments about officers going ‘the extra mile’ for customers. The inclusion team received compliments about support offered to residents regarding flood grants.

Complaints by Directorate

The services that received complaints this quarter have been grouped together by director. Those services mentioned below are those that are of interest this quarter, rather than an exhaustive list. A table showing a full breakdown of complaint figures by service can be found at the end of this section.

Mid Kent Services

Other than the Revenues and Benefits service, none of the Mid Kent Services received complaints. This is mainly because these services tend to be back office services and not customer facing.

Revenues & Benefits

Revenues and Benefits received five complaints each this quarter.

One complaint to Benefits was about mistakes made when a customer made an enquiry about their benefits. The complainant was one of our first Universal Credit claimants and this highlighted an issue with staff training that has since been addressed. The fact that there was only 1 complaint now that Universal Credit has been launched locally is positive. Other than this complaint, there were no real complaints of note or trends in the complaints received by Benefits.

There were no trends or complaints of note that were received by Revenues.

Neither service closed any of their complaints late this quarter. The overall number received is low in relation to the number of residents claiming benefits and the number of residents and businesses that come into contact with the Revenues service across the borough.

Both of these services received one stage 2 complaint, and neither of these complaints were upheld at stage 2.

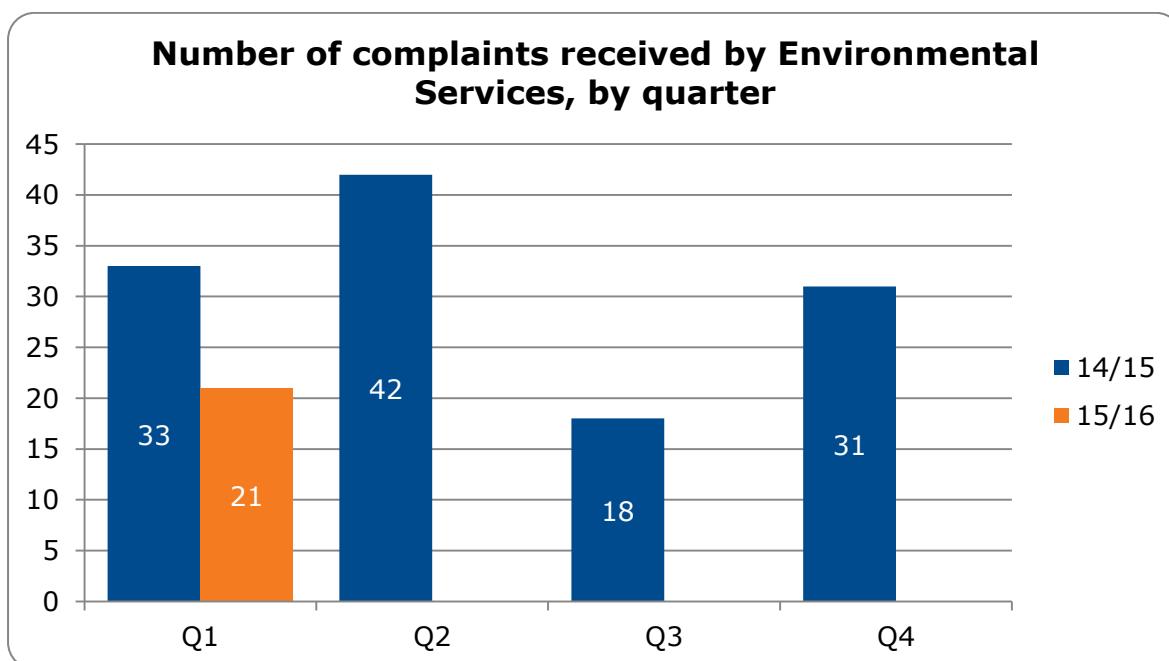
Environment and Shared Services

Environmental services consistently receive a number of complaints. This is to be expected as this service includes Waste Collection, a service delivered to every household and a number of businesses in the borough.

Parking Services and Environmental Enforcement also regularly receive a number of complaints, due to the nature of their work and both services issue fines which can leave customers feeling aggrieved.

Environmental Services

Environmental Services received 21 complaints this quarter. Of these, 18 were about Waste Collection. The graph below shows the number of complaints received by Environmental Services since quarter 1 of 2014/15.



The number of complaints received by Environmental Services in quarter 1 is lower than the previous quarter's results, as well as the corresponding quarter in 2014/15.

There were 2 common themes in the complaints received for this service.

The first was complaints about repeated missed collections. There were 5 complaints about this, this quarter, compared to six last quarter. In all of these cases the complainants' addresses were put on a 'hot spot' list and advised to log missed collections with us if they occur again.

The second was complaints about the way in which our officers were driving, or parking their vehicles. There were 4 complaints about this subject this quarter. This is an increase compared to the previous quarter when 2 complaints were received about this subject. To provide context it should be noted that we have a

fleet of 40 vehicles, as well as 15 MBC branded Biffa vehicles. The details of these complaints and action taken are outlined below:

- A resident had seen an MBC van mounting the pavement. The driver was identified and the issue was referred to their manager.
- A resident had seen a van being parked on double yellow lines. We were unable to identify who was driving the vehicle, but the problem was noted.
- A waste collection truck was driving too fast over speed bumps, making a mobile home shake and waking up the residents. As a result of this we asked the driver on this route to drive much slower on this road.
- A resident had noticed a truck was driving with an unsecured load. As a result of this complaint all our trucks were reviewed to make sure we had appropriate netting on the top to prevent debris falling onto the road in transit.

Other than this there were no other common themes or areas of concern within the complaints received for this service.

Environmental Services received one stage 2 complaint this quarter, which was upheld. This complaint was about repeated missed collections, but also questioned why the complainant couldn't raise missed bin reports on behalf of her neighbour. The stage 2 complaint response apologised and suggested ways in which the complainant could raise these missed bin reports on their neighbour's behalf.

Some compliments received for this team can be found below.

Would like to thank the refuse collection team for going the extra bit, we are expecting our first child and had a lot of cardboard boxes to dispose of, we left them outside the house before deciding best means to get rid of them and one of the men knocked on our front door and asked if we wanted them disposed of. It really helped not having to do lots of trip to the recycling centre so thank you very much.

I just wanted to record my thanks to the bin collection team on Friday 8th May. I was involved in election duties and failed to put my bins out in the right place that morning. Instead of just leaving them, your team very kindly found the right bins at the top of my drive and ensured they were all emptied. Much appreciated so please pass these thanks on to the team involved.

I just reported several broken tree branches and it was dealt with in a few hours.

Thank you for your prompt service!

I just reported several broken tree branches and it was dealt with in a few hours.

Thank you for your prompt service!

Environmental Enforcement

Environmental Enforcement received 6 complaints in total this quarter. Whilst this is not a particularly high number for this service there were 2 complaints about customers having problems making payment. One customer ended up making a payment twice as it was not clear whether a payment had already been made for the litter fine. As a result of the complaint the team will be exploring more bespoke solutions to paying litter fines so that customers can see whether the fine has been paid or not in real time. This should prevent double payments and make it easier for customers to pay online in the future.

This service received one stage 2 complaint this quarter which was not upheld and was responded to on time.

Parking Services

Parking Services received 9 complaints in total this quarter. This is not a particularly high number for this service. These complaints had the following themes:

- Complainants who had been issued Penalty Charge Notices (PCN), and were making a complaint as well as an appeal (2 regarding staff behaviour and one regarding the regulations at a particular location). None of these were upheld.
- Two complaints were requesting parking enforcement in their street. It was not possible for one of the complainants, as there was no Traffic Regulation Order in place and for the other complainant we assured them our Civil Enforcement Officers would continue to patrol their street.

In addition there was one complaint received about an ongoing issue with the timing of parking permit renewals. A resident had paid £25 for a parking permit for the year but it ran out in two months. As a result the customer had to buy a new one for the full £25. In this case the customer was initially not advised of the renewal date by Customer Services and a £20 goodwill payment was offered. However the problem of permits expiring after a few months, meaning customers have to then apply for a new one again at full price is a common complaint. Parking Services have committed to explore the possibility of introducing a virtual permit scheme that would eliminate this problem. As part of this visits have been made to Canterbury City Council, who are in the process of introducing virtual permits (although the system is not live yet), and there will be a further visit to Southwark to see a live virtual permit system in use.

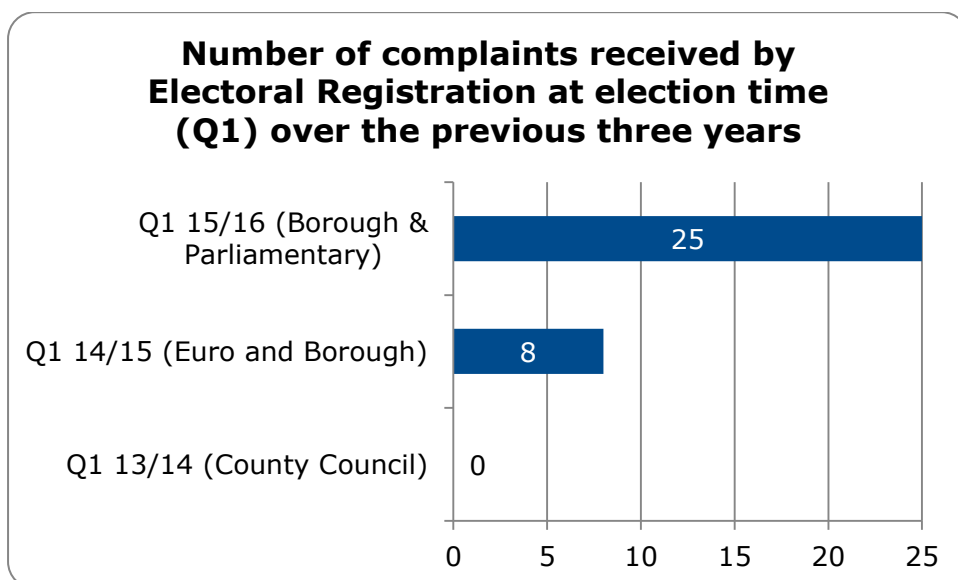
This service received 3 Stage 2 complaints this quarter, none of which were upheld.

Regeneration and Communities

The most common area of complaint for this directorate is usually the Housing Register and Homelessness services. However this quarter Electoral Registration received a higher than usual number of complaints. More detail on both of these services is provided below.

Electoral Registration

Electoral Registration received 25 complaints this quarter. This is a high number of complaints received for this service even during an election period. The graph below shows the number of complaints received about this service during quarter 1 for the last three years. There is a trend of an increasing number of complaints received for this service over the previous three years. It is important to bear in mind, however, that each year's election was more complicated than the last. Turnout was also higher in 2014/15 than 2013/14 and higher in 2015/16 than 2014/15 as it was an parliamentary election.



It was additionally complicated by the issue of postal votes for some wards in the Tunbridge Wells and Swale Borough Council areas, where Parliamentary constituencies crossed boundaries.

Due to the complexity of the election this year there were some problems that resulted in customers receiving postal votes late or not at all. This generated a large amount of contact around the time of the election, as people were asked to come to Maidstone House for a reissue.

The complaints received were a result of these problems faced, and the common themes of the complaints were:

- Postal votes not received;
- Postal votes received late (particularly from overseas voters); and
- Voters having to call up to ensure they got their postal votes.

To address some of the issues a review of elections is currently taking place and the results and recommendations of this review are expected to be ready by the end of September.

Five complaints received for this service were from complainants who were unhappy they were not on the electoral register at the time of the election. In each of these cases this was because of the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration. This was introduced in 2014, and has changed the way to register to vote so that it is the responsibility of the individual to register themselves, rather than one member of the household registering everyone. Inevitably there were some problems, with some customers being unaware of, or not understanding, the change that had happened or not filling out forms correctly. This resulted in these complainants being removed from the register and generated these complaints.

Out of the 25 complaints received, only 4 were responded to on time. This was partly because of the time the complaints were received. As many of the complaints were received at or immediately after the election the team were not able to spend the time investigating and responding to the complaints as they were carrying out post election duties which are time bound. Eight of the complainants who complained at this time were sent a letter explaining this and given a revised date for when to expect a response. Despite this, 6 of the complainants who were sent this letter had their complaint closed well past the extended deadline with no update letter. The complaints that were received just after the election were not sent update letters and the majority of these were closed late.

Electoral Registration received 6 stage 2 complaints this quarter, which is the second highest number after Development Management. Two of the stage 2 complaints for electoral registration were upheld- these were both about the way in which we had handled postal votes during the election.

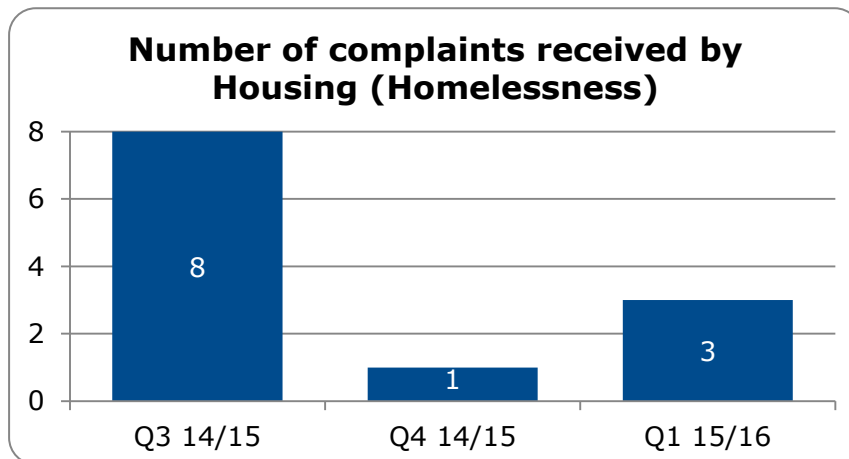
The one stage 2 complaint that was answered out of time was also an electoral registration complaint. The reason it was answered out of time was because the electoral registration team were still busy with post election paperwork. The complainant was kept up to date with the progress of their complaint by email.

This service received one compliment this quarter, which praised a member of staff in the team for their helpful attitude.

Housing (Homelessness) & Housing Register

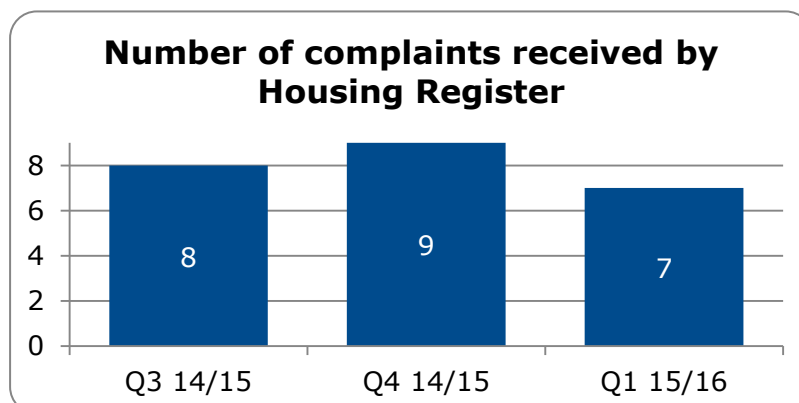
Historic data for these services is only available back to Q3 of 14/15 as before this time the 2 services were combined in the complaints report.

The number for Housing (Homelessness) has dropped dramatically since this time. This may be a seasonal pattern or something that is consistent across the year. None of the complaints made against this service were justified this quarter. The graph below shows the number of complaints received for this service since Q3 of 14/15.



The one complaint closed late for this service was a very complicated matter that had run of for several years and took longer to investigate than usual. The complainant was kept up to date with the progress of this complaint.

The number of complaints received for the Housing Register has remained stable over the previous 3 quarters. A graph showing the number of complaints received about the Housing Register can be found below.

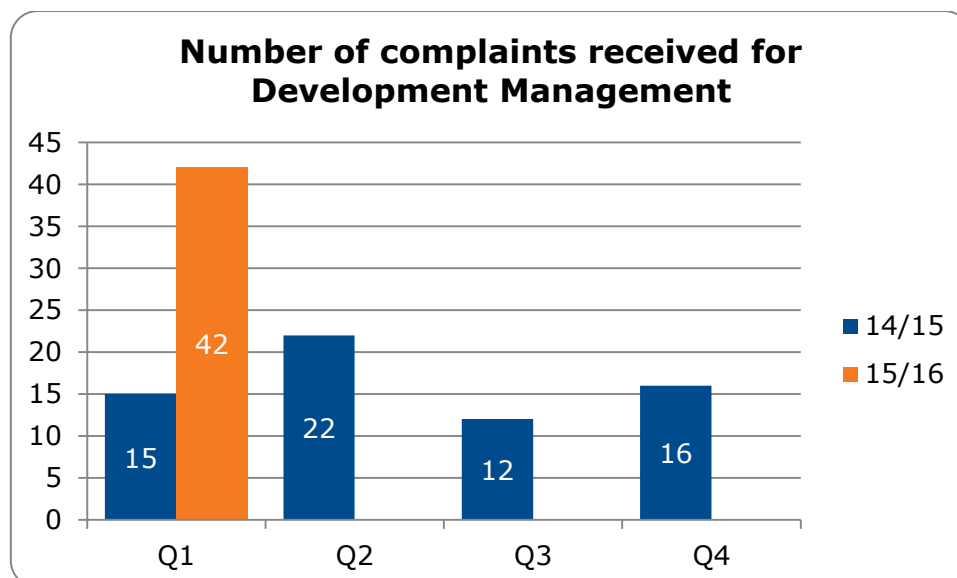


Of the 7 complaints received about the Housing Register only 2 were justified. Both of these were about time taken to process applications- 1 of which was due to a backlog of applicants who required medical assessments.

Chief Executive

Development Management

Development Management received an unusually high number of complaints this quarter. The graph below shows the number of complaints received for development management since quarter 1 of 2014/15.



As can be seen on the graph, the number of complaints received for Development Management has increased dramatically compared to the number of complaints received last year.

This was mainly due to 3 particularly contentious planning applications that generated large numbers of complaints:

1. An application for a gypsy and traveller site on Clapper Lane, Staplehurst (13/1453), which generated 8 complaints.
2. An application for 50 homes on land south of Cross Keys, Bearsted (14/504795), which generated 9 complaints. This site is known locally as 'the Lilk Meadow'.
3. Two slightly different applications for 220 homes in Headcorn, at land between Mill Bank, Ulcombe Road and Kings Road (14/505284) which generated 5 complaints. This site is also known as Hazelpits.

Nearly all of these complaints were received following the committee meeting in which the decision was made, and were requesting us to either revoke the planning application or for the committee to consider it again. This is not possible, as once a decision has been made by the committee it cannot be considered again unless a third party is able to successfully judicially review our decision. Revocation of planning permission is also not an option as it is reserved for extreme circumstances and is hugely costly.

These complaints frequently outline a range of concerns, which included:

- Residents not consulted properly;
- The views of the local community not taken into account;
- Objections on flooding and drainage terms;
- Local infrastructure (schools, roads, hospitals etc) could not cope with these developments;
- The developments would destroy existing settlements;
- Opposition to development on greenfield sites; and
- Opposition to any development in their local area.

The Headcorn application generated unfounded allegations against planning officers involved in the case. None of these were found to have any basis and the complainant did not provide any evidence to support their claims.

Most of the complaints about these applications were a result of dissatisfaction with the issues that planning committee can take into consideration as part of the process, the impact of proposed mitigation measures for additional infrastructure and with finality of planning decisions (i.e. once a decision is made committee cannot review the decision).

These type of complaints are becoming a problem for the Development Management department, as responding to these complaints (and in detail, addressing all of the complainants' issues) can be a drain on resources.

Development Management received 13 stage 2 complaints this quarter- the highest for any service. Seven of the stage 2 complaints received were regarding planning applications that had already been approved by committee (Cross Keys, Hazelpits and Clapper Lane). Most of the remaining stage 2 complaints were from people who had objected to a neighbour's planning application which we had approved. None of the stage 2 complaints for Development Management were upheld.

Development Management received one compliment this quarter. This compliment was from an objector to an application who wanted to thank the case officer for taking their time to help them understand the application.

Social Media

The two main issues raised on social media this quarter were Operation Stack and congestion caused by the combination of Operation Stack and the closure of Wellington Street. Both of these are issues that we have little control over, however we posted regular updates from the lead agencies for Operation Stack to ensure our residents and social media followers were kept up to date.

Payments, Refunds and Compensation

This quarter there were three complaints that resulted in remedies that had a financial implication, all of which at stage 1 of the process. They are detailed in the table below.

Service	Description	Cost
Parks and Leisure	We agreed to replant an area we had cut back in error	The cost of this will be added to the report before going to Committee
Parking Services	Goodwill payment to recognize that we did not inform a customer the charge for a parking permit was a £25 administration fee not an annual fee and not informing the customer the permit would expire in 3 months meaning he would have to pay another £25 for the year	£20
Electoral Registration	An offer of payment to cover the cost of a phone call from Spain to the council to arrange for a proxy vote	The cost of this will be added to the report before going to Committee

Methods of Contact

Methods of contact for complaints received this quarter can be found below:

	Email	Post	Telephone	Face to Face	Social Media
Number	76	32	39	6	0
%	49.7	20.9	25.5	3.9	0

Nearly half of complaints were made by email this quarter. The percentage of complaints made by email has increased steadily over the last year, from 35.2% in quarter 1 of 2014/15 up to just under 50% this quarter. There has also been an increase in complaints received by post, up from 6.4% of complaints made in quarter 1 of 2014/15 to 20.9% in 2015/16. The area that has seen a corresponding decrease has been complaints made by telephone, which has decreased from over half of complaints made in 2014/15 down to 25.5% of complaints made in this quarter.

	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Email	14/15	35.2%	44.7%	44.9%	46.2%
	15/16	49.7%	-	-	-
Post	14/15	6.4%	12.6%	14.7%	13.1%
	15/16	20.9%	-	-	-
Telephone	14/15	52.4%	34.9%	32.1%	36.9%
	15/16	25.5%	-	-	-
Face to Face	14/15	6.0%	7.9%	8.3%	3.8%
	15/16	3.9%	-	-	-
Social Media	14/15	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	15/16	0%	-	-	-