
COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS
ANNUAL REPORTS 2012/13

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Stephen Harker
Efficiency and Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith, Director of Resources

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2012/13 (**Appendix 1**).
2. To provide Members with the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2012/13 (**Appendix 2**).
3. To provide Members with the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2012/13 (**Appendix 3**).

Summary

4. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.
5. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
6. The Council saw a slight decrease in the overall number of representations made under its complaints procedures during 2012/13 compared to 2011/12.
7. The Council received a total of 466 complaints during 2012/13 compared to 517 in 2011/12. The Council also saw a decrease in the overall number of compliments it received, 254 compared to 320 in 2011/12. The Council saw an increase in the number of comments it received, 255 comments compared to 205 in 2011/12. The increase in comments received is as a result of people's dissatisfaction with

changes to Council policy in light of the current financial challenges faced by the Council.

8. There is no separate report to Cabinet this year following receipt of the Annual Letter of the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

Recommendation

9. It is recommended that:-
 - (a) Cabinet notes the content of the attached reports.
 - (b) Cabinet notes the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team in ensuring the Council handle complaints in an effective and efficient manner.

**Paul Wildsmith
Director of Resources**

Reasons

10. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) To make Cabinet aware of the number and nature of the complaints received by the Council and the organisational learning that has taken place as a result.
 - (b) To ensure Cabinet is aware of the progress made in respect of how the Council handles complaints since the introduction of the CIG Team.

Background Papers

Note: No background papers were used in the production of this report.

Lee Downey Extension 2401

S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no specific impact on Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	The purpose of the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report is to improve the service we provide to service users and their carers.
Carbon Impact	There are no specific recommendations contained within the attached reports concerning Carbon Reduction.
Diversity	Complaint investigations have led to service improvements for people with protected characteristics.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not have a direct impact on the Budget and Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This report does not constitute a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This report does not require an Urgent Decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Learning as a result of complaints contributes towards achieving across all of the delivery themes.
Efficiency	The revised procedures, organisational learning and improved training/support for officers has reduced the amount of time and the cost associated with handling complaints. The recommendations contained within the appended reports aim to reduce risk and improving efficiency in the way we interact with our customers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

11. In relation to representations made under the Council's Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure the Council saw a decrease in complaints, from 429 complaints in 2011/12 to 383 complaints in 2012/13. 58 complaints were investigated at Stage 2 of the procedure, a decrease from 60 in 2011/12. The Council also received 199 compliments a reduction from 267 compliments in 2011/12 and 306 in 2010/11. The Council saw an increase in the number of comments received 254 in 2012/13 compared to 199 in 2011/12; as noted in paragraph seven this increase can be attributed directly to an increase in people's dissatisfaction with changes to Council policy in light of the current financial challenges faced by the Council.
12. For the second consecutive year there was a decrease in the number of representations made under the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure, 62 compared to 81 in 2011/12 and 87 in 2010/11. The Council saw a decrease in the number of complaints received under the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure, 20 compared to 39 in 2011/12 and 29 in 2010/11. The Council received 42 compliments, compared to 39 in 2011/12 and 56 in 2010/11. The Council did not receive any comments compared to 6 in 2011/12 and 2 in 2010/11.
13. For the second consecutive year there was an increase in the number of representations made under the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure, 77 compared to 63 in 2011/12 and 52 in 2010/11. The Council received 63 complaints compared to 49 in 2011/12 and 44 in 2010/11. The Council also received 13 compliments compared to 14 in 2011/12 and six in 2010/11. The Council received one comment compared to zero in 2011/12 and 2 in 2010/11.
14. The Local Government Ombudsman determined 20 complaints previously considered under the Council's complaints procedures during 2012/13. The Council did not receive any maladministration decisions.
15. Some examples of organisational learning resulting from complaints have been extracted from the appended reports and are provided below.
16. *Corporate Complaints:*
 - (a) In order to improve the service we provide as a result of a complaint for Admissions and Transport we amended our Common Application Form (CAF), our Application to Transfer a Pupil Between Two Darlington Schools form and our School Admissions Appeal Application form to ensure the person completing the form is asked to provide details of any other person(s) with parental responsibility.
 - (b) Following a complaint for Development Control about information sent via email being stopped by our spam filter as a result of the content, despite it

being legitimate, the Council rolled out eSafe Web Quarantine software for all Council officers. This software allows officers to see a list of those emails stopped by the spam filter as a result of their content and release any legitimate emails inadvertently quarantined.

- (c) Following a complaint for Council Tax the Council agreed to amend our reminders and final notices and to avoid any confusion include the date by which payment should be made in the notice.
- (d) Following a number of complaints for Parking it was agreed that we would tailor our response letters to individual parking appeals, rather than use a standard letter, as this had caused further dissatisfaction particularly on those occasions where the Penalty Charge Notice was issued in error.

17. *Adult Social Care Complaints:*

- (a) Following one complaint about a care home it was agreed that the care home would up-date their Statement of Purpose in terms of the types of needs they can meet and whether or not they are equipped to take emergency admissions.
- (b) Following another complaint about a care home senior staff were made aware of the "Transfer to Hospital Procedure" and how this is implemented.

18. *Children's Social Care Complaints:*

- (a) Following a number of complaints the issue of communication was addressed.
- (b) Following a complaint for the Family Placement Service the issue of poor communication was addressed and a full review of Post Adoption Service provision was undertaken by senior children's social care managers and children's commissioning managers.

19. The further recommendations set out in the Corporate and Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2012/13 are:

- (a) Building Services are to take action to improve the response time, co-ordination and quality of Responsive Repairs particularly in relation to boilers.
- (b) Children's Social Care Services should properly address the issue of poor communication as it is a contributory factor in over a third of all the complaints received.

20. All of the Council's complaints procedures currently require the responding or investigating officer to contact the complainant within 5 working days. The procedures do not take into account the nature of the complaint and feedback from officers is that this is not always necessary; particularly in relation to some of the straight forward corporate complaints. As a result, whilst it is important to recognise the value of having such a dialogue with complainants, the Complaints and Information Governance Manager intends to amend the Council's complaints procedures to allow officers some discretion in this matter.

21. There is no separate report to Cabinet following receipt of the Annual Letter of the LGO 2012/13, as due to a change in their recording/reporting arrangements they have simply provided the number of complaints they received about the Council with no further analysis. While the LGO did not provide any information regarding those complaints they determined during 2012/13 in their annual letter details were reported to Cabinet on 4 December 2012 and 4 June 2013.
22. In terms of developments the LGO are currently running a consultation on the future content of annual letters. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager has responded on behalf of the Council.
23. The LGO is now publishing the final decision on all complaints received after 1 April 2013 on their website.

Outcome of Consultation

24. No consultation was required in repairing this report.