
**COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS
ANNUAL REPORTS 2015/16**

Responsible Cabinet Members

**Councillor Stephen Harker - Efficiency and Resources Portfolio
Councillor Veronica Copeland - Adults and Housing Portfolio
Councillor Cyndi Hughes - Children and Young People Portfolio**

Responsible Directors

**Paul Wildsmith, Neighbourhood Services and Resources
Suzanne Joyner Director of Children and Adults Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide COB with the 2015/16 Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports for:
 - (a) Adult Social Care (**Appendix 2**);
 - (b) Children's Social Care (**Appendix 3**);
 - (c) Corporate (**Appendix 4**);
 - (d) Housing (**Appendix 5**); and
 - (e) Public Health.

Summary

2. For the first time since 2012/13 the Council saw a decrease in the overall number of representations made under its complaints, compliments and comments procedures. This decrease can be attributed primarily to the reduction in comments and complaints about problems people initially experienced with their refuse and recycling collections following the introduction of wheeled bins and alternate weekly collections.
3. The Council received a total of 611 complaints during 2015/16 (*N.B. 11 complaints were received directly at Stage 2*), a decrease from 947 complaints during 2014/15.
4. The Council received a total of 243 compliments, a decrease from 284 in 2014/15.

5. The Council received a total of 149 comments, a decrease from 273 in 2014/15.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012.

Recommendation

9. That Cabinet notes the content of the attached reports.
10. That Cabinet notes the overall improvement in performance against the extended timescales in the Council's complaints procedures.
11. That Cabinet endorses the further recommendations made in the Adult Social Care and Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports.

Reasons

12. 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.
13. To enable the Council to further improve its services as a result of the complaints received and continue to improve satisfaction with complaints handling.

Background Papers

14. No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Lee Downey,
Complaints and Information Governance Manager
Extension 5451

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 aim to improve the efficiency with which complaints are handled. The recommendations contained within the appended reports aim to reduce risk and improve efficiency in the way we interact with our customers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

15. Contrary to the overall trend there was a significant increase in the number of representations made under the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2015/16. There was a significant increase in the number of complaints received, a decrease in the number of compliments received, while the number of comments received remained the same as in 2014/15. Full details and comparisons with previous years are attached at **Appendix 1**.

16. There was a decrease in the number of representations made under the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2015/16. There was a decrease in the number of complaints received at Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure, although there was an increase in the number of complaints received at Stage 3. There was a decrease in the number of compliments received, while the number of comments received remained the same as in 2014/15. Full details and comparisons with previous years are attached at Appendix 1.

17. There was a significant decrease in the number of representations made under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2015/16. There was a significant decrease in the number of complaints received at Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure. There was a decrease in the number of compliments received and a significant decrease in the number of comments received. Full details and comparisons with previous years are attached at Appendix 1.
18. There was a decrease in the number of representations made under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2015/16. There was a decrease in the number of complaints received at Stage 1 of the procedure, an increase in the number received at Stage 2 and a decrease in the number received at Stage 3. There was a decrease in the number of compliments received and a decrease in the number of comments received. Full details and comparisons with previous years are attached at Appendix 1.
19. As in 2014/15 the Council did not receive any complaints, compliments or comments under the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure introduced in April 2013. Complaints Managers attending the Northern Regional Complaints Managers Group reported a similar picture across the region.
20. Some examples of organisational learning resulting from complaints have been extracted from the appended reports and are provided below.
21. *Adult Social Care Complaints:*
 - (a) Adult Safeguarding - It was agreed that practice guidance would be developed around involving people alleged to have caused harm in the process and ensuring their views are taken into account as part of the decision making process.
 - (b) Affective Disorder Team - It was agreed that we would provide training for officers on the Government guidance for assessing individuals with Autism issued in March 2015.
 - (c) Financial Assessments - We agreed to undertake a full review of our systems to ensure we do not send demands for payment and notification of court action after we have been advised payment cannot be made until probate is completed and the property sold.
 - (d) Life Stages 0 – 25 Team - It was agreed that Mental Health Team and the Life Stages Team would agree a transfer protocol and communicate this to our health colleagues in Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.
 - (e) Occupational Therapy - We agreed to review our procedures for assessing service users with degenerative illnesses to ensure we comply with Government guidance and plan sensitively for the progression of their illness. We also agreed to ensure proper records are kept of officers and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Panel's consideration of DFG applications to ensure our decision making is transparent.

22. *Children's Social Care Complaints:*

- (a) MASH - It was agreed that we would review the circumstances in which written agreements are used, their format and content. We also agreed to reinforce with managers and staff the need to ensure families are kept informed throughout our involvement and that safeguarding measures are implemented without delay.
- (b) MASH - It was agreed that the Council would carry out further staff training and a review of safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure information received by way of referrals is appropriately verified and that policies and procedures are sufficiently embedded amongst staff.
- (c) Looked After Through Care Team - Social workers were reminded to use their email out of office function when out of the office for extended periods of time.
- (d) Area 1 Social Work Team - We agreed to review the current policy and guidance regarding taking messages when social workers are out of the office to ensure it is fit for purpose. We also agreed to ensure staff update details of service users on the electronic system so that up to date essential details are always available to all staff.
- (e) Life Stages Services 0 – 25 - It was agreed that to avoid inconsistency and to provide a base from which Early Support Team practitioners can scrutinise and evaluate their practice, good practice guidelines would be produced regarding home visits to families. Written information for parents with children under three years of age was also developed, clarifying the assistance available from the Life Stages Team, the Inclusion Team and the Special Educational Needs Team and informing parents of their rights, and the processes involved.

23. *Corporate Complaints:*

- (a) Development Control – planning officers were reminded of the need to adhere to the provisions of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) when consulting individuals who may be affected by planning applications and that they should interpret SCI in the broadest possible sense.
- (b) Economy – it was recommended that in future the Tees Valley Nature Partnership adhere to the DEFRA guidance and consider developing a written process to follow for selecting Local Wildlife Sites.
- (c) Private Sector Housing - both the Private Sector Housing Operational Plan and the Working Procedure "Improving Housing Conditions - Inspection and Regulation" were updated to reflect current working practices.
- (d) Council Tax - developed a report and process to ensure customers paying their Council Tax by direct debit are not falling into arrears.

- (e) Area 2 Social Work Team - staff attended training in relation to private law proceedings (section 7 reports) and data protection training. Staff were also reminded of the importance of dealing with complaints in accordance with the Council's complaints procedures.

24. Housing Complaints:

- (a) A section was added to the Council's Furnished Tenancies Procedure 2015 regarding ability to pay and what happens if tenants arrears are not managed.
- (b) The Council agreed to clarifying what is meant by 'a reasonable offer of accommodation' to applicants who bid on major voids.
- (c) The Council agreed to ensure the issue of disability is properly considered when making decisions to grant/refuse permission for drive crossings due to the proximity of a tree.

25. The further recommendations set out in the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2015/16 are:

- (a) The Council should take action to address the significant increase in complaints relating to delays in undertaking financial assessments.
- (b) The Council should take steps to ensure, where it is identified that an individual has an informal carer, that a Carer's Assessment is always offered.

26. 20. The further recommendation set out in the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2015/16 is as recommended in 2014/15, the timeliness of responding to complaints or agreeing an extension when it is not going to be possible to respond within timescale should be addressed with Housing and Building Services staff.

Outcome of Consultation

27. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager attended the Housing Tenants' Board who were in agreement with the proposal to extend the timescales for the reasons stated in this report.

Total Representations by Year

Type of representation	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Complaints				
Corporate				
<i>Stage 1</i>	403	744	672	383
<i>Stage 2</i>	58	99	72	58
Adult Social Care	49	24	26	20
Children's Social Care				
<i>Stage 1</i>	54	60	46	63
<i>Stage 2</i>	14	15	9	5
<i>Stage 3</i>	3	1	0	0
Housing				
<i>Stage 1</i>	94	106	101	N/A
<i>Stage 2</i>	15	13	12	N/A
<i>Stage 3</i>	0	2	1	N/A
Public Health	0	0	0	N/A
Compliments				
Corporate	173	185	233	199
Adult Social Care	33	40	39	42
Children's Social Care	6	12	6	13
Housing	31	47	0	N/A
Public Health	0	0	0	N/A
Comments				
Corporate	143	263	209	254
Adult Social Care	0	0	0	0
Children's Social Care	1	1	0	1
Housing	5	9	0	N/A
Public Health	0	0	0	N/A

N.B. Housing Compliments and Comments were recorded under the Corporate Procedure in 2013/14 – (49 Compliments and 8 Comments).