
FUTURE OF COMPLAINTS HANDLING

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Jenny Chapman,
Communities and Engagement Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Lorraine O'Donnell – Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Cabinet of the decision of the Resources Scrutiny Committee following its 'call-in' of the future of complaints handling within the Authority.

Information and Analysis

2. Following the receipt of a 'call-in' request, signed by three Members of the Resources Scrutiny Committee in relation to Cabinet's decision (Minute C130(5)/Dec/07), in respect of the future of complaints handling within the Authority, a special meeting of the Committee to consider this issue was held on the 7th January, 2008.
3. The reason given for the 'call-in' was to receive further information from the Officers in relation to the actual number of complaints received within the Authority and the savings that would be achieved in other areas of the Council if proposals were approved and a centralised complaints unit was established and the Minute from this meeting is attached as **Appendix 1**.
4. Members will see from this Minute that the Scrutiny Committee agreed to forward the following views to Cabinet :-

that Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee supports, in principle, the implementation of a streamlined 2 stage complaints process that is managed centrally but has some concerns about the funding of any Centralised Complaints Unit in view of the current budgetary considerations and that it be requested to ask the Officers to look further into alternative options of how any Centralised Complaints Unit could be funded.

Comments of Assistant Chief Executive

5. It is pleasing that the committee support the proposed improvements to our complaints process.
6. The Cabinet report was based on a review of our existing complaints procedure and included investigation of how to fund the improvements proposed. No alternative sources of funding were identified.

Outcome of Consultation

7. Informal consultation with staff currently handling complaints monitoring was undertaken as part of the review.

Legal Implications

8. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

9. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

10. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

Decision Deadline

11. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

Key Decisions

12. The contents of this report represents a key decision as funding for this proposal will affect the way in which residents of all wards within the Borough will access Darlington's corporate complaints process.

Recommendation

13. It is recommended that the original proposals are agreed.

Reasons

14. The recommendations are supported to improve services for local people.

Lorraine O'Donnell
Assistant Chief Executive

Background Papers

There were no background papers used in the preparation of this report other than those referred to.

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