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**COMPLAINTS UNIT PROGRESS AND ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORTS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Efficiency and Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith, Director of Corporate Services**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Cabinet with an update on the work of the Corporate Complaints Unit (CCU).
2. To provide Cabinet with the first Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report (**Appendix 1**) following the introduction of the new corporate complaints procedure in April 2009, along with both the Adult and Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports (**Appendices 2 and 3**).

**Summary**

3. The CCU has now assumed responsibility for the handling of all complaints received by the Council including Adult and Children's Social Care Services.
4. Over the past year the CCU has worked to embed the new corporate complaints procedure within the organisation and foster an organisational culture in which complaints are welcomed as a positive means of engagement and resolved as close to the point of service delivery as possible.
5. The CCU has successfully introduced a new Adult Social Care Complaints Procedure in line with the requirements of the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and has rolled out a training program to accompany it.
6. The new procedures ensure that complaint resolutions do not simply focus on resolving individual issues but take into account the wider implications of complaints for the service concerned. This approach enables the Council to improve policies and working practices as a result of the complaints it receives reducing the likelihood of the Council having to deal with the same complaint again in the future. This has obvious benefits in terms of the cost associated with complaint handling, reducing both officer time spent handling complaints and money paid to complainants following investigation under the Council's procedures or following an investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman.
7. The Council's complaints management system has now been configured to ensure that all complaints received can be recorded and monitored enabling the production of accurate

complaints information. This has enabled the Council to demonstrate how learns from complaints as an organisation (details of which are included in the attached reports), something it was previously unable to do and for which it was criticised by The Audit Commission (2008 Corporate Assessment).

8. In addition to enabling the Council to demonstrate organisational learning that has taken place the complaints management system provides the Complaints Manager with the opportunity to undertake further detailed analysis of complaints in order to identify areas of underperformance and make further recommendations to improve services. This approach further contributes to the reduction in cost associated with the handling and resolution of complaints.

### **Recommendation**

9. It is recommended that Cabinet note the content of the attached report(s), the improvements made to date in relation to the Council's complaints handling arrangements and the impact this new approach in driving down the cost associated with complaints handling and resolution.

### **Reasons**

10. The recommendation is supported to enable Cabinet to understand the improvements made to complaints handling and reporting arrangements following the introduction of the CCU.

**Paul Wildsmith**  
**Director of Corporate Services**

### **Background Papers**

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no specific impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	The Adult Social Care Complaints procedure aims to ensure complaints about Adult Social Care Services are handled effectively and service improvements are implemented as a result of learning from complaints.
Sustainability	There is no specific impact on sustainability.
Diversity	The procedures make specific provisions to ensure the diverse needs of the people of Darlington are addressed. An EIA and DEIA's have been carried out.
Wards Affected	All wards will be affected equally.
Groups Affected	All residents and visitors to Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not classed as a key decision and has not been included in the forward plan.
Urgent Decision	This does not represent an urgent matter.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Learning as a result of complaints will contribute towards achieving the goals of the Healthy Darlington Priority.
Efficiency	As a result of the revised Corporate and Adult Social Care complaints procedures there will be a reduction in officer time spent investigating complaints. Future efficiencies as a result of learning from complaints.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

11. Examples of organisational learning resulting from complaints are provided below.

12. *Corporate Complaints:*

- (a) Following a complaint about the dropped kerbs outside a supermarket in Cockerton being incorrectly positioned, a Disability Equality Impact Assessment was carried out and the dropped kerbs were relocated.
- (b) Following another complaint about the manner in which a planning application was publicised, planning officers were asked to ensure planning applications for major developments are publicised in line with not only the regulations but the requirements set out in Darlington Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement.
- (c) In response to a complaint regarding having to attend the Town Hall to complete a concessionary fares application form, application forms and supporting documents can now be obtained from Customer Services or on-line and returned by post.
- (d) Following a stage two complaint, the procedure for allocating allotments was reviewed and it was decided that due to the huge increase in the numbers of people on the waiting list variations in the way allotments were allocated according to locally specific circumstances was no longer tenable.

13. *Adult Social Care Complaints:*

- (a) In response to a complaint about the way contributions to Direct Payments were calculated, the Fairer Charging Policy is currently being reviewed. This review will aim to make the assessment of 'disability disregards' more personalised to each person's circumstances.

14. *Children's Social Care Complaints:*

- (a) Following a complaint a review was undertaken in relation to the process of audit and review of case files.
- (b) Following another complaint a review of the process for sending out copies of assessments to service users was undertaken.
- (c) In response to another complaint a parents' support group has been developed.

15. Following an in-depth analysis of the information collated in relation to complaints, further recommendations made in the attached corporate report are that Street Scene implement effective solutions for those individuals who have to contact the Council regarding their rubbish and recycling being missed on a consistent basis including those people with assisted collections, and that parking bays are reviewed as proposed in the Council's new parking strategy and that any new parking spaces meet the required specifications as quoted

in the adopted Borough of Darlington Local Plan

### **Outcome of Consultation**

16. No consultation was undertaken in relation to the production of this report.