



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2024/25

Contents

Introduction	3
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	4
Information and Accessibility	4
Summary	5
Review of the Year	6
Organisational Learning	7
Further Recommendations	7
Performance against the Procedure	7
Performance Indicator	7

Introduction

1. The purpose of this annual report is to inform service users, carers, the public, Council Members and staff of the effectiveness of the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the Procedure).
2. On the 1 April 2013 the NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012 (the Regulations) came into force. Part five of the Regulations deals with Complaints about Public Health Functions of Local Authorities.
3. The Council implemented a new procedure providing a local framework to ensure complaints are handled effectively and in line with the regulations.
4. The procedure aims to:
 - (a) Make it as easy and accessible as possible for service users and their carers to raise complaints;
 - (b) Foster an organisational culture in which complaints are accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently as possible;
 - (c) Ensure high levels of customer satisfaction with complaints handling;
 - (d) Resolve individual issues when they arise and reduce the number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman; and
 - (e) Enable the Council to identify topics and trends in relation to Public Health complaints and improve services as a result.
5. The Chief Executive is designated as the 'Responsible Person' for ensuring compliance with the arrangements made under the Regulations, and in particular ensuring that action is taken if necessary in the light of the outcome of a complaint. The functions of the responsible person will usually be performed by the Director of Public Health.
6. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager is designated the 'Complaints Manager' in accordance with the regulations and is responsible for managing the procedures for handling and considering complaints in accordance with the arrangements made under the Regulations.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

7. Although complainants can refer their complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) from the outset, the LGSCO will not normally investigate until the Council or service provider has conducted its own investigation and provided a response. Where it has not been possible for the complaint to be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant they may refer the matter to the LGSCO.

Information and Accessibility

8. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services, including the complaints procedure. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
9. Information is available on the Council's website. There is also an electronic form which people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, by email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
10. The Complaints Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Summary

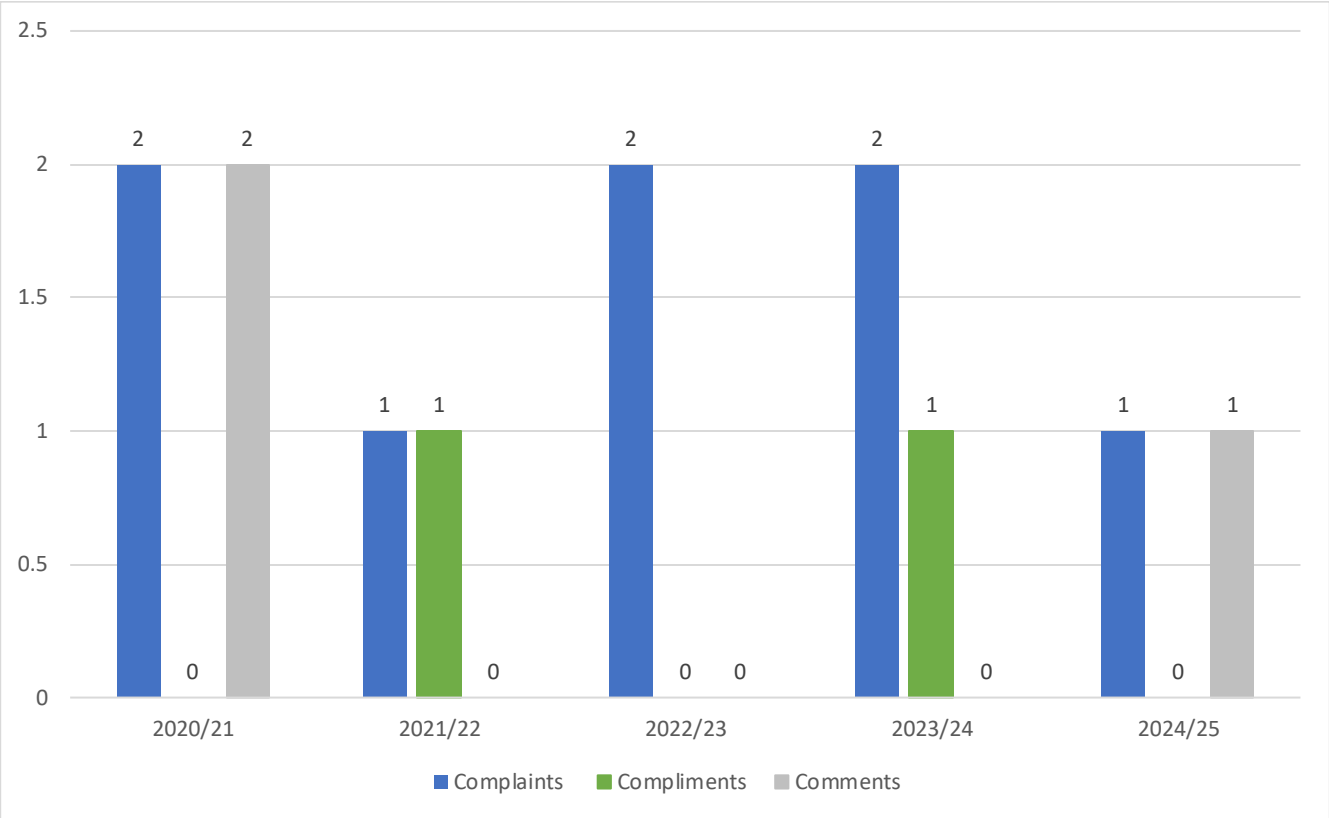
11. The Council received one complaint about Public Health services in 2024/25, a decrease from two in 2023/24.
12. Zero compliments were received about Public Health services in 2024/25, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
13. The Council received one comment about Public Health services during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Review of the Year

Breakdown of all Representations

14. A total of two representations were handled under the procedure during 2024/25.

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments Received



15. The complaint related to a delay in responding to a referral to the smoking cessation service.

16. The comment suggested that in addition to services aimed at prevention of child sexual abuse there should be a greater focus on intervention with those at risk of going on to commit offences.

Complaint Outcomes

17. Two complaints were determined during 2024/25. One was not upheld and the other was partially upheld.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints (LGSCO) Received 2024/25

18. No Public Health complaints were progressed to the LGSCO during 2024/25, as was the case in 2023/24.

Local Government Ombudsman Complaint Outcomes (LGSCO) 2024/25

19. No Public Health complaints were determined by the LGSCO during 2024/25, as was the case in 2023/24.

Organisational Learning

20. As a result of the complaint regarding the smoking cessation service it was agreed going forward that Public Health would contact the GP Practice to remind staff of the information required as part of a referral and also the availability of the option for self-referral. Public Health also attended the GP Practice Managers' meeting to ensure every GP Practice in the borough understands how to refer into the Stop Smoking Service, in an effort to ensure there are no further issues in the future.

Further recommendations

21. There are no further recommendations.

Performance against the Procedure

22. While the Regulations allow a maximum of six months to respond to a complaint, we aim to respond to complaints within 30 working days.
23. While the complaint determined during 2024/25 was not responded to within 30 working days, it was responded to within the time permitted in the Regulations.

Performance Indicator for 2024/25

24. In relation to Public Health complaints the Council's key performance indicator is the number of maladministration decisions received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council received zero maladministration decisions during 2024/25.
25. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).