

North Tyneside Council Report to Cabinet 10th February 2014

ITEM 6(c)

Complaints Service
Annual Report 2012-13

Portfolio(s): Elected Mayor
Adult Social Care
Children, Young People and Learning

Cabinet Member(s): Mrs.Norma Redfearn
Councillor Lesley Spillard
Councillor Ian Grayson

Report from: Chief Executive's Office

Report Author: Vivienne Geary (Tel: 643 5339)
Head of Law and Governance

Wards affected: All

PART 1

1.1 Purpose:

To provide Cabinet with an Annual Report on complaint related activity during 2012-13 and to comply with the requirement to publish an Annual Report on Complaints under the relevant statutory complaint legislation.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. notes the complaint related activity during 2012-13 as set out in the Complaints Service Annual Report for 2012-13 (Appendix 1);
2. approves and authorises the above Report for publication by the Head of Law and Governance; and
3. receives the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review of complaints concerning North Tyneside Council for 2012-13 (Appendix 2).

1.3 Forward plan:

28 days notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 11 December 2013.

1.4 Council plan and policy framework

This report supports the Council Priorities for “Our People” and “Our Resources” in the Council Strategic Plan 2012-2015, as lessons learned from complaints are a key driver in service improvement and ensuring best value for money.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

The Authority undertakes millions of transactions with its 201,400 residents, and substantial numbers of visitors to the Borough, throughout the year. Against that background, the number of complaints received by the Authority remains consistently very low, reflecting the excellent services our customers receive and the Authority’s ability to resolve swiftly any issues that do arise at the first point of contact.

The number of formal complaints decreased during 2012-13 for the first year in many years. This is likely to be as staff have resolved issues at the first point of contact therefore negating the need to formalise the complaint. Complaints leaflets tailored to Corporate, Social Care Services and young people are widely available in the Authority’s buildings and to download from the Authority’s website. It is also now very easy for our customers to contact us on-line and Social Care Service users are provided with a complaints leaflet at the first point of contact.

Customer satisfaction with the complaints process remains relatively high and the Authority continues to resolve the vast majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure. The Authority welcomes complaints as valuable feedback from its customers, and complaint outcomes provide valuable lessons learned to further improve and enhance the Authority’s services and procedures.

The Authority operates statutory complaint procedures for Adult Social Care and Children and Young People’s Services and Public Health. It also provides a Corporate Complaints Procedure for all other services. The Customer & Member Liaison Office (CMLO) Manager is the main contact with the offices of Local Government Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman, (LGO & HO) responding to initial enquiries, gathering information and arranging access to files and interviews of staff under the instruction of the LGO and HO investigators and the CMLO providing advice and assistance to Council Officers who may be subject of a complaint.

All work in supporting the operation of these services is undertaken by the CMLO within Law and Governance.

1.5.2 Local Government and Housing Ombudsman

In 2012-13 the Authority responded to LGO enquiries in a timely fashion and is well within the required timescale for response of 28 days. The LGO's Annual review of complaints 2012-13 is at Appendix 2. The HO only came into being on 1st April 2013 and complaints referred to the HO will be referred to in the Annual Report for 2013/14 in due course.

1.5.3 Annual Complaints Report

The Authority's Complaints Service Annual Report for 2012-13 is attached at Appendix 1. Cabinet is invited to note that the overall number of formal complaints dropped by 9% from 654 in 2011-12, to 602 in 2012-13. The number of complaints received remains consistently very low given the huge volume of transactions the Authority undertakes every year with its customers.

1.5.4 Corporate Complaints

The number of Corporate Complaints received dropped by 10%, from 590 in 2011-12 to 535 in 2012-13. The decrease in complaints relates to several service areas, the main reduction being in areas concerning Kier North Tyneside, where complaints dropped from 245 to 209, and Environmental Services, where 80 complaints during 2011-12 decreased to 56 in 2012-13. In addition complaints about Revenues and Benefits dropped from 31 in 2011-12 to 13 in 2012-13. There was however an increase from 49 to 76 in Business and Economic Development.

The Authority recognises that it is important to deal with complaints well as this is central to providing a good customer service. Services try to put things right and learn from these complaints so that the Authority can continually improve its services.

The results are set out in detail in Section 3 and Table 8 of the Annual Report at Appendix 1.

1.5.5 Social Care Complaints

The number of Social Care complaints (relating to both Adult Social Care and Children and Young People's Services) increased from 64 in 2011-12 to 67 in 2012-13, a rise of 4%. This equates to an increase of 5 cases in Children Social Services and a reduction of 2 cases in Adult Social Care.

The results are set out in Section 2 and Tables 2 to 4 of the Annual Report at Appendix 1.

1.5.6 Customer Survey

A survey of complainants' experiences of, and satisfaction with the complaint services undertaken in respect of complaints handled during 2012-13 resulted in 17% of forms being returned. The majority of those responding found it easy to find information about the service and were happy with the length of time taken to respond to their complaint and the content of the response letter.

1.5.7 Future Developments

One key aim of the complaint process is 'learning' from complaints and this is a core driver in all future developments. A number of changes were made to procedures and practice in services as a result of complaints resolved during 2012-13. Examples have been listed on page 10 of the Annual Report.

A continuing area of development is partnership working, where services are provided on behalf of the Authority in conjunction with other public, voluntary and private sector organisations. Such change has potential for complaint processes to become complex, so arrangements are in place to ensure the customer's experience is as straightforward as possible. Securing the efficient handling of complaints is a vital component of ongoing arrangements with our current and any potential future partners.

From 1st April 2013 the Authority assumed responsibility for managing all complaints about the Public Health Service. This process is covered by regulations which came into being at the end of 2012. Issues arising from complaints relating to this area will be addressed in the next Annual Report.

From 1st April 2013 the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) is now fully utilized for managing low level complaints, Ombudsman cases and all formal complaints against the Authority, as well as comments and compliments received by the CMLO. This followed a successful trial in several departments the previous year. The system is highly automated and networked to all service departments of the Authority and our partner organizations. The system produces detailed automated monthly reports.

1.5.8 Conclusion

Complaints are now widely recognised as integral to the provision of quality services at both individual and strategic levels. The Authority's successful history and current good practice in effective complaint handling will be an integral service improvement driver in the current rapidly changing culture. The demands of maintaining, and increasing levels of customer satisfaction, coupled with organisational changes across public and partner sectors, will be well supported by the current robust complaint handling procedures and electronic system in place.

The Annual Report will be published on the Authority's website, and will be available in Libraries and on request from the Customer and Member Liaison Office.

1.6 Decision options:

Option 1

All local authorities providing 'social service functions' including North Tyneside Council are required by law to publish an annual report on complaints received. A report must be published to ensure this obligation is complied with.

Option 2

Cabinet may refer the report back to officers and request that further analysis and information is provided.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

The Authority is required to publish an Annual Report on Complaints. Publication of an Annual Report also supports community engagement, and promotes transparency and opportunities for organisational improvement.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix 1: North Tyneside Council Complaints Service Annual Report 2012-13

Appendix 2: The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review of complaints about North Tyneside Council 2012-13.

1.9 Contact officers:

Vivienne Geary, Head of Law and Governance, tel 643 5339

Yvette Monaghan, Customer & Member Liaison Manager, tel 643 5361

Alison Campbell, Finance Business Manager, tel. 643 7038

1.10 Background information:

The following background papers and research reports have been used in the compilation of this report and are available for inspection at the offices of the author.

- The Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and Guidance (Children)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2006/1738/contents/made>
- The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and Guidance (Adults)
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/DH_120361
- North Tyneside Council Corporate Complaints Procedure
http://www.northtyneside.gov.uk/browse-display.shtml?p_ID=28887&p_subjectCategory=629
- The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities Regulations 2012
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/3094/introduction/made>

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

There are no financial or other resource implications arising directly from this report. The delivery of the service is provided for from existing budget provision. Compensation payments are funded from existing budgets in the relevant Service areas.

2.2 Legal

Local Authorities with Social Service functions are required to publish Annual Reports on Complaints and Ombudsman investigations. Failure to produce a report will render the Authority in breach of the relevant statutory provisions set out in The Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

Internal Consultation

The Annual Report has been circulated to Heads of Service, Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care and Children, Young People and Learning. Comments received have been incorporated where relevant in the Annual Report.

2.4 Human rights

The service promotes equal access to complaint services and opportunities to contribute to service improvement.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

The service promotes equal access to complaint services and opportunities to contribute to service improvement. Material is available in different formats and the CMLO actively provides assistance for people with individual needs as required.

2.6 Risk management

A risk assessment has taken place. All risks identified can be managed through North Tyneside Risk Process and will be added to the Authority's Risk Register.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no implications directly arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no implications directly arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive X
- Deputy Chief Executive X
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s) X
- Chief Finance Officer X
- HR Implications X
- Monitoring Officer X
- Strategic Manager, Policy,
Partnership, Performance
and Communication X