

**Standards Committee**

28 May 2010


**Corporate Complaints, Compliments,  
Comments and Suggestions Performance  
Report - Quarter 4 (1 January to 31 March 2010)**


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**Report of Terry Collins,  
Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services**


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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To present members of Standards Committee with the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarterly report for 2009/10 on Complaints, Compliments, Comments and Suggestions.

**Background**

2. This report informs the Standards Committee of performance results for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2009/10, providing information from 1 January 2010 to 31 March 2010. These results may not be comparable with previous years due to changes to the new Council's structure and services delivered.
3. Corporate Complaints, Compliments, Comments and Suggestions are currently monitored by the Corporate Complaints Team within Customer Services in the Neighbourhood Services Service Grouping. They deal with Corporate Complaints across the Council, including non-statutory complaints for Adults, Wellbeing & Health and Children's & Young Peoples Services.

**Summary Analysis and Overview – Year End April 2009- March 2010**

4. The table below shows a summary of the complaints received and responded to across all Council services, from April 2009 to March 2010:

| Service Area                        | Q1 total | Q2 total | Q3 total | Q4 total | Year to date | % acknowledged within 2 working days |         | % response within 10/20 working days |         |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------|---------|
|                                     |          |          |          |          |              | Stage 1                              | Stage 2 | Stage 1                              | Stage 2 |
| Adults Wellbeing and Health         | 9        | 9        | 29       | 12       | 59           | 33                                   | 100     | 72                                   | 100     |
| Assistant Chief Executive's office  | 3        | 0        | 0        | 2        | 5            | 40                                   | -       | 40                                   | -       |
| Children and Young People's Service | 12       | 13       | 5        | 3        | 33           | 46                                   | 100     | 30                                   | 46      |
| Corporate Resources                 | 96       | 50       | 38       | 36       | 220          | 36                                   | 13      | 66                                   | 41      |
| Neighbourhood Services              | 222      | 121      | 103      | 180      | 626          | 43                                   | 37      | 75                                   | 44      |
| Regeneration &                      | 44       | 33       | 31       | 37       | 145          | 44                                   | 40      | 65                                   | 27      |

| Service Area         | Q1 total | Q2 total | Q3 total | Q4 total | Year to date | % acknowledged within 2 working days |         | % response within 10/20 working days |         |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------|---------|
|                      |          |          |          |          |              | Stage 1                              | Stage 2 | Stage 1                              | Stage 2 |
| Economic Development |          |          |          |          |              |                                      |         |                                      |         |
| <b>Total</b>         | 386      | 226      | 206      | 270      | 1088         | 39                                   | 58      | 58                                   | 52      |

5. The summary table above identifies that over half of all complaints (57.5%) received for the period 2009/10 relate to Neighbourhood Services. Data shows an increasing trend within this Service Grouping however, the data shows that this is attributable to the extremely poor winter weather causing an increase in complaints in relation to both service delivery (for example the disruption to the refuse collection service) and also to the condition of the footways and highways as a result of the damage caused by the prolonged winter weather. As mentioned previously no comparison can be made against previous year's data due to changes in the Councils Structure and the Services being delivered.

#### Performance Quarter 4

6. During 1 January – 31 March 2010, a total of 270 Corporate Complaints were handled by the Corporate Complaints Team; 12 for Adults Wellbeing and Health, 2 for Assistant Chief Executive's Office, 3 for Children's and Young Peoples Service, 36 for Corporate Resources, 180 for Neighbourhood Services, and 37 for Regeneration & Economic Development.
7. This report provides detailed analysis of the numbers and types of complaints received and how these have been translated into learning outcomes to inform service improvement. It should also be noted that greater detail has been made available for Adults Wellbeing and Health, and Children's and Young People's Services. Both of these service groupings are required to comply with statutory reporting requirements and benefit from dedicated service based support teams. These structures were not interrupted by the changes associated with creation of the new Council. Consequently, these service areas have been able to consistently collect data for a longer period of time, enabling comparability of performance between this and previous years. The other service groupings do not have dedicated complaints handling staff, indeed service managers and officers with additional complaints handling responsibilities were not in post until later in the financial year. As a consequence complaints have not been managed consistently throughout this period, with consequences to overall data quality.
8. The current reporting regime and complaints handling procedures were introduced in early 2009 through the adopted Complaints Policy, to ensure that procedures were in place for vesting day. Since implementation of the Complaints Policy, the adequacy of procedures has been subject to continuous appraisal and findings are soon to be reported in the Complaints Review. This has made numerous recommendations, and includes an appended Implementation Plan, addressing improvements to the handling and reporting of complaints, compliments, comments, suggestions. The findings of this review will be reported to a meeting of this Committee in due course.

9. The following sections provide more detail in relation to the types and numbers of corporate and statutory complaints received across the service groupings during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2009/10.


## **ADULTS, WELLBEING AND HEALTH**

### 10. **Introduction and Update**

This section of the report provides details of complaints and representations in Adult Social Care, Adults Well-Being and Health for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter ending 31 March 2010.

### 11. **Section A: Adult Social Care Complaints and Representations (January - March 2010)**

12. During the Quarter 19 complaints were received. Whilst this is a 90% increase on the complaints received in the last quarter the table overleaf demonstrates that it was the low receipt of complaints in the third quarter that was exceptional. There has been a noticeable trend in the last three years of the number of complaints received in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter dipping below the consistent norm and this is likely to be due to seasonal variation. This quarter's figures are, therefore consistent with previous years' performance and are not a cause for concern.

| <b>Summary of Complaints by Quarter/Year End</b> |                 |                 |                 |                 |                   |                                 |   |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Service Area</b>                              | <b>Q1 total</b> | <b>Q2 total</b> | <b>Q3 total</b> | <b>Q4 total</b> | <b>Year Total</b> | <b>Year End 2009 Comparison</b> | <b>Direction of Travel</b>  |
| Adult Social Care – AW&H                         | 17              | 18              | 10              | 19              | 64                | 66                              |  |

| <b>Summary of Complaints by Service Area</b> |                              |                     |                              |                           |                         |              |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Branch Name</b>                           | <b>Learning Disabilities</b> | <b>Older People</b> | <b>Physical Disabilities</b> | <b>Sensory Impairment</b> | <b>Substance Misuse</b> | <b>Total</b> |
| Adult Care - LD/MH/Carers                    | 2                            | 0                   | 0                            | 0                         | 1                       | 3            |
| Adult Care - OP/MHSOP /PDSI/SS               | 0                            | 11                  | 2                            | 0                         | 0                       | 13           |
| Finance                                      | 0                            | 0                   | 1                            | 0                         | 0                       | 1            |
| PP & P                                       | 0                            | 0                   | 0                            | 1                         | 0                       | 1            |
| Social Inclusion                             | 0                            | 0                   | 1                            | 0                         | 0                       | 1            |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>2</b>                     | <b>11</b>           | <b>4</b>                     | <b>1</b>                  | <b>1</b>                | <b>19</b>    |

### 13. **Responding within Timescales**

Of the 19 complaints all (100%) were acknowledged within 3 working days.

### 14. **Complaints Resolution Plans (CRP)**

Of the 19 complaints, CRPs were completed in 15 cases (79%). This compares to 90% in the third quarter and 72% in the second quarter. In the 4 cases where a CRP was not completed the reasons were as follows:-

- In one case, following preliminary communication with the complainants, a meeting was facilitated by a Social Worker after which the complaint was withdrawn.
- In three cases the complainants declined to participate in the CRP process. In these circumstances where negotiation with the complainant is not possible, timescales are imposed.

**15. Completion within CRP Timescales**

11 of the 15 cases with CRPs were concluded within the quarter and within the timescales agreed. Of the remaining 4 cases these are ongoing not yet having reached the agreed timescale.

**16. Ongoing Cases**

7 cases (the 4 with CRP's and 3 with timescales imposed) from Quarter 4 are ongoing and will be concluded in Quarter 1 of 2010/11. They are all within timescales. Three complaints from Quarter 3 remain ongoing. One is awaiting the outcome of a disciplinary investigation and one is being independently investigated and the report is awaited. In the third case an independent investigation had been commissioned but was suspended pending a safeguarding investigation following allegations made about family members, and their actions, who had brought the original complaint. The independent investigation will be reinstated as appropriate once the safeguarding investigation is concluded.

**17. Local Government Ombudsman**

The Local Government Ombudsman referred a complaint that had been made directly to them rather than through local procedures. This was resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.

**18. Complaints by Classification**

|    | Description  | No. of Classified Issues |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1  | Lack Of Service - Communications/Information             | 7                        |
| 2  | Quality Of Service - Personal Financial Issues           | 4                        |
| 3  | Conduct Or Attitude Of Staff                             | 3                        |
| 4  | Lack Of Service - Restricted Choices Of Current Services | 2                        |
| 5  | Provision Of Service – Placement Provision               | 2                        |
| 6  | Provision Of Service - Assessment                        | 2                        |
| 7  | Lack Of Service - Other                                  | 1                        |
| 8  | Quality Of Service - Work Of Other Agencies              | 1                        |
| 9  | Quality of Service – Personal Care                       | 1                        |
| 10 | Provision of Service – Handling of Complaint             | 1                        |
| 11 | Application Of Service Guidance/Procedures               | 1                        |

**NB A complaint may have more than one classification recorded against it**

*Poor Communication* constituted the highest category of complaint and in 4 of the 7 cases *Staff Conduct* was linked to failures in communication – either not providing information at all or providing inaccurate information, especially around the issue of charges for care services and the need for financial assessment.

**19. Learning Outcomes**

In this quarter learning outcomes have been identified for implementation by the relevant Operations Managers in Adult Care and Business Support. These include:

- Social work staff again are to be reminded that clients must be advised that home care services are subject to financial assessment and may be subject to charging and that such discussions are clearly recorded in the notes on case.
- Administrative and clerical staff dealing with mobility transport passes have been reminded that all letters to clients must include relevant staff contact details to ensure that clients can make contact with ease.

**20. Compliments**

122 compliments were received in adult social care in the quarter, compared to 84 in Quarter 3, 100 in Quarter 2 and 109 in Quarter 1. The ratio of compliments to complaints is 6.5:1.

| SERVICE AREA                    | COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| FINANCE                         | 1 (1%)               |
| CDCS                            | 71 (58%)             |
| ADULT CARE – OP/MHSOP/PDSI & SI | 37 (30%)             |
| ADULT CARE – LD/MH              | 11 (9%)              |
| SOCIAL INCLUSION                | 2 (2%)               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                    | <b>122 (100%)</b>    |

21 A number of the compliments received reflected the commitment of home care staff to continue to provide daily care visits to clients in the extreme adverse weather conditions experienced from December 2009 through to February 2010. Home Care services also stepped in when relatives were unable to travel to provide care for their elderly relatives and levels of appreciation were high.

22 The compliments recorded below give some indication of the appreciation expressed by clients, carers and families about the dedicated and professional staff.

*“We were very grateful that you stepped in and provided extra visits for our mother when due to the snow the family were unable to do their visits. It was a huge relief to us know that Mum was being well cared for. Thank you for your invaluable assistance when we were in a difficult position, and thank you for your excellent care of our Mum.”*

*"I thought that after the bad weather that has affected so many of the services that we all take for granted I would like to congratulate all of the County Durham Home Care Team that provide such a good service to not just me, but many vulnerable people. I was never let down not one day and all of my carers . . . have been very reliable and extremely helpful and always with a smile . . . and a caring attitude - it is a pleasure to see them each day. Not forgetting the people in the office doing the work behind the scenes to help all of the service function to such a high standard so well done to everyone."*

*"We would like to thank the 'Home Help Team' for the excellent service we received. Even during recent bad weather conditions, the Home Care Ladies never missed a call."*

23. **Section B: Service Representations Corporate (January - March 2010)**

24. **Libraries, Learning and Culture**

11 Complaints were reported as received in Libraries, Learning and Culture (LLC) in Quarter 4 compared to 25 in quarter 3. None of the complaints were upheld but full explanations were provided in all cases. For example two complaints were about the booking of computers in libraries and the procedure for booking was fully explained. Another person complained when they were not allowed to use the computer when they could not produce their library card. Two others complained about the lack of DVDs in libraries.

There were no clear learning outcomes and in all cases information and explanations were provided to complainants which resolved the enquiries.

LLC received 3 compliments this quarter, the same as last quarter. 1 was about the new lay-out at Bishop Auckland Town Hall (BATH) Library; 1 was about the excellent service at BATH Library; and 1 was highly complimentary about all of the staff at Seaham library and how helpful they were in searching for and ordering books.

25. **Policy, Planning and Performance**

No complaints were received in this Service Area.

26. **Finance**

No complaints were received in this Service Area.

27. **Adult Social Care**

No complaints were received in this Service Area.

28. **Social Inclusion**

1 Complaint was received in Social Inclusion compared to 2 in the previous quarter. No key trends were identified from the single complaint which related to a long standing neighbour dispute where independent mediation had been offered by Local Multi-agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) on the advice of the Local Government Ombudsman from a previous complaint, but which the complainants had declined. They alleged breach of confidentiality and took offence at the letter offering mediation. The complaint was not upheld. There

were no clear learning outcomes from the complaint and a full explanation was given to the complainant as well as reasons why the complaint was not upheld. Advice was given on how the matter could be progressed through the Local Government Ombudsman and Information Commissioner.

## 29. **Compliments**

Within Social Inclusion Welfare Rights received 53 compliments compared to 35 the previous quarter while Workable Solutions received 98 compliments compared to 21 the previous quarter. The volume of compliments demonstrates the importance and value of the services to those who need to use them. They are fed back to advisors and staff.

### **ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

## 30. **Introduction and Update**

This section of the report provides details on complaints and representations in Assistant Chief Executive for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter ending 31 March 2010.

Assistant Chief Executives received 2 complaints this quarter compared to none the previous quarter. One related to Planning Performance, Research and Information and data held by the Council. The complaint was not justified and has now been closed. The other complaint related to Policy Communications, Corporate Communications and Marketing regarding a failure to respond to a crowd management and bus services complaint at the Durham Lumiere festival. The complainant received a comprehensive reply and an apology for the delay.

Having completed the Local Government review recruitment into our management structures in January, the Assistant Chief Executives management team are in the process of designing a more robust process for handling complaints, comments and compliments in relation to the service. Initial performance information will be available for quarter 1 2010 based on our new arrangements. Furthermore a representative of the complaints team is to be invited to attend an Assistant Chief Executives Management Team to support improvements to our recording processes.

One comment was received by the service for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter and this related to a Durham County Council publication which had not been pushed through the letter box properly. The comment was acknowledged and noted.

### **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES SERVICES**

## 31. **Introduction and Update**

This section of the report provides details on complaints and representations in CYPS for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter ending 31 March 2010.

A total of **194 new representations** were received. This includes:

- 138 compliments (71 statutory, 67 corporate)
- 7 comments
- 40 new complaints resolved informally (30 statutory, 10 corporate); and
- 9 new formal complaints.

This compares with 241 compliments, 28 comments and 66 new complaints (15 formal, 51 informal) received and actioned in Q3 2009/10.



### 32. New formal complaints by service area and theme

A breakdown of new complaints by service area and theme is shown in the table below:

|                      | Poor Service | Staff Conduct | Poor Service & Staff Conduct | Decision re Service | Staff Conduct & Decision re Service | Other        | Totals        |
|----------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Statutory Complaints | 3 (5)        | 2 (1)         | 0(3)                         | 1 (1)               | 0 (2)                               | 0 (0)        | <b>6 (12)</b> |
| Corporate Complaints | 1 (2)        | 0 (0)         | 0 (0)                        | 0 (1)               | 0 (0)                               | 2 (0)        | <b>3 (3)</b>  |
| <b>Totals</b>        | <b>4 (7)</b> | <b>2 (1)</b>  | <b>0 (3)</b>                 | <b>1 (2)</b>        | <b>0 (2)</b>                        | <b>2 (0)</b> | <b>9 (15)</b> |

(numbers in brackets refer to Q3 2009/10)

6 statutory complaints were about SaSS, 1 related to Strategic Commissioning.

2 corporate complaints for Q4 fell within Access and Inclusion service, 1 was about SaSS.

### 33. Performance Indicators

100% of new statutory and 100% of new corporate formal complaints at Stage 1 was acknowledged within the target timescales (5 and 2 working days respectively). Q3 figures were 100% acknowledgement within the CYPS target of 2 working days.

50% of new statutory and 100% of new corporate formal complaints at Stage 1 were resolved within the target timescales (20 working days for statutory, 10 working days for corporate), as shown in the table below. Q3 figures were 66.7% and 100% respectively.

Formal complaints: resolution and outcome

|           | No. (new) resolved in timescale | % (of new) resolved in timescale | % (no.) still potentially in time (ongoing) | No. resolved in quarter | No. upheld | No. partially upheld | No. not upheld |
|-----------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Statutory | 3 (of 6)                        | 50%                              | 0   | 5 (9)                   | 2 (3)      | 1 (1)                | 2 (5)          |
| Corporate | 3 (of 3)                        | 100%                             | 0   | 3 (6)                   | 0 (1)      | 0 (3)                | 3 (2)          |

### 34. **Key messages**

Resolving complaints within timescale has remained at 100% for corporate complaints but has worsened for statutory complaints, despite the lower number of complaints received. The complex nature of complaints taken through the formal procedure has had an adverse effect on the resolution timescales; however managers working on complaints investigations have been keeping the Complaints Officer informed of progress and complainants have been kept informed.

As in previous quarters, poor service is a major theme of complaints.

50% of complaints resolved in the quarter were partially or not upheld. In previous quarters, this percentage was 81.3% (Q3) and 71.4% (Q2), indicating that more complaints received this quarter were justified.

The number of recorded compliments about statutory services has increased. Work is in progress to provide a breakdown of compliments by service area and team for 2010/11. The majority of compliments received were from service users, about Sure Start, the Community Support team and the new Family Pathfinder teams.

### **NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

#### 35. **Introduction and Update**

This section of the report provides details of complaints and representations in Neighbourhood Services for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter ending 31 March 2010.

#### 36. **Direct Services**

There was a rise in complaints received from 43 in the last quarter to 62 this quarter. **Refuse Services received** 52% of these complaints which related to missed refuse and recycling collections. The severe weather conditions we experienced in December through to January resulted in a prolonged heavy snowfall coupled with low temperatures made driving conditions very dangerous. This meant our refuse and recycling services were tested and there were occasions when services had to be suspended for a number of consecutive days. This resulted in a backlog of refuse and recycling and the public did not know whether it was a recycling or refuse collections week. **Footpath Clearance** 3 complaints were received about the condition of footpaths during this period. We have since taken delivery of snow clearing equipment.

A meeting to assess what went well and how we can improve our winter maintenance and refuse services took place in January 2010. A Refuse and Recycling Operational Plan during heavy snow fall and prolonged conditions has been established. The document includes two operations plans that detail actions that will be taken in the event of heavy snow fall or prolonged severe frosts.

In order to improve the refuse and recycling service, Streetscene will be working closely with Technical Services to explore different ways we can access estate roads and therefore minimise disruption to refuse and recycling collections.

Direct Services received 34 compliments this quarter compared with 26 the previous quarter. Furthermore 16 comments/suggestions were made compared with 13 the previous quarter. There were no discernable trends. Weather and waste collections do form the majority of comments. We have received a number of compliments in respect of our refuse and recycling collections. Our Catering and Cleaning staff received 5 compliments in respect of their efforts.

In order to learn from these comments/suggestions it is proposed that residents are consulted to seek their views of waste services as part of service improvements. With regards to compliments received systems are now in place to ensure front line staff receives this information personally, with thanks from the Head of Service. Furthermore in order to see first hand how residents valued employees' hard work, large posters were displayed around all the departments.

### 37. **Customer Services**

There were 12 complaints received this quarter compared with 11 the previous quarter. Of these 12 complaints 5 (42%) related to the inclement weather and services that were suspended i.e. refuse or closed recycling centres. This was mainly regarding information being handed out or when alternative collections would be carried out. Of the other 7 there were no real trends with 3 about quality of service, 2 about speed of delivery of service, 1 about technical problems with the phones that were swiftly corrected and 1 where callers were not told someone was being trained and a member of staff would be listening in. In order to learn from these complaints a meeting was held in January to look at the problems caused by the snow and a Refuse and Recycling Operational Plan during heavy snow fall and prolonged conditions has been established. It has been agreed that all phone systems, where possible, will have a message on the front stating calls maybe monitored for training purposes. Although there is no legal requirement to do this it was seen as good practice. Direct action was taken to address and respond to all complaints raised, however due to the fact that there were no real trends and no required changes were identified. Where individual staff were named the complaints were taken up directly with the staff.

Customer Services received 8 compliments this quarter compared to 5 the previous quarter. They were all concerning the service received or the attitude of the front line staff. The suggestion related to a technical issue with the telephones at County Hall which was quickly resolved. The comment was actually a compliment regarding the speed of service at the Chester le Street office. There were no trends from the compliments, suggestions/comments. Where compliments were received and staff could be identified these were passed to the line managers to ensure that the compliments were passed on to the officers concerned.

### 38. **Sport and Leisure Services**

This service area has seen complaints reduce by 50% during this quarter compared to the last quarter. Of the 11 complaints received, 3 related to procedures and policies within our leisure facilities and 3 related to poor response times to initial enquiries. 2 related to Health and safety issues which upon investigation were found to be unjustified. 1 was due to cleanliness issues in an externally managed facility 1 was due to the behaviour of other customers and finally the remaining 1 complaint was opposition to a decision made by the council and is being dealt with by local members and the community. All managers have been aware of the importance of dealing with complaints efficiently, the external contractor has been written to regarding performance and a number of meetings have taken place regarding the Derwent links complaint. No compliments, but 1 suggestion was received. The suggestion was to utilise the web site to advertise services; this issue has already been highlighted within the service area, resulting in additional resources being brought into the Policy, Performance and Communications team, in order to improve the content and functionality of the sport and leisure information on the website,

### 39. **Environmental Health and Consumer Protection**

There were 9 recorded complaints compared with 10 the previous quarter. Of these 9, 2 were actually service requests 1 referred to a Direct Services issue. Of the others there were no key trends however there is a need to maintain customer focus. It should be noted that a significant amount of Officer time has been spent in dealing with unreasonable and persistent complainants. All complaints have been investigated and actions to improve service delivery on identified failures have been undertaken.

### 40. **Technical Services**

There were 86 recorded complaints this quarter compared to 28 the previous quarter. 53 of the 86 complaints relate to service failure/quality of service in respect of winter maintenance function during Jan/Feb 2010. Next highest number of complaints relates to knock-on effects i.e. Potholes in roads and lack of servicing of refuse/re-cycling bins. The majority of complaints arose from route reductions caused by salt shortage. In order to prevent this in the future additional salt storage facilities are being provided.

Technical services received 27 compliments this quarter 19 of which were relating to prompt action following requests for winter maintenance salting/snow clearing, four of the remaining related to prompt repairs to potholes and two to prompt repairs to non-working street lights. These compliments prove that prompt attention satisfies the public. In order to maintain and improve the winter maintenance service, mechanical refilling of salt boxes is being considered.

Technical Services received 12 comments/suggestions this quarter, 9 were concerning highway maintenance, 1 street lighting, 1 public transport, with the remaining report relating to the A66 trunk road which is the responsibility of the Highways Agency and their Maintenance Contractor A-one. All comments/suggestions are acknowledged and forwarded to Service Managers for consideration.

## **REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **41. Introduction and Update**

This section of the report provides details of complaints and representations in RED for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter ending 31 March 2010.

### **42. Economic Development**

There were no complaints in quarter 4 compared to one complaint in quarter 3

### **43. Planning**

The number of complaints has reduced this quarter from 16 in quarter 3 compared to 11 in quarter 4. Majority of complaints relate to simple nature of work carried out by the service in particular decisions to grant planning permission in the face of objections received. This is an inherent part of the Service's core business and it would be impossible to seek to remove all such complaints. Notwithstanding this the Service continues to look at ways in which customers can be better engaged in planning decisions; the benefit of this should be fewer complaints received as people will hopefully feel they have been given the best possible opportunity to comment on planning proposals. Work to improve engagement in this area includes a focus on the hosting of more community consultation events; and the ongoing review of the Council's Planning Committee procedures to ensure they are customer focused and fit for purpose.

Some complaints relate to delay in responses. The CRM team are to be invited to a future management team to better explain their work and the processes involved in the CRM system. It is expected that this awareness raising amongst managers will lead to more focus on timely complaint management.

Planning received 12 compliments/suggestions for this quarter demonstrating the importance of timely helpful and cheery approach to service delivery. This information was cascaded to managers for passing onto relevant staff and demonstration of how awareness and acknowledgement of good service is reported to Members.

### **44. Transport**

Transport received 5 complaints for this quarter compared to 2 the previous quarter. There were a variety of complaints, some relating to bus service reliability. The Bus Service issues relate to Arriva and ongoing problems following depot rationalisation. In order to rectify this, the Managing Director has given reassurances and timescale for improvement. A follow up meeting has been planned. Transport received no compliments/suggestions for this quarter

#### 45. **Housing**

Complaints received this quarter have increased from 9 complaints to 20 complaints. The common strand that runs through these complaints concerns housing condition and the delivery of the Care Connect Service.

In order to resolve this efforts are being made by the Council's three housing management providers to improve stock condition through the Decent Homes programmes and ongoing improvements to responsive and planned maintenance works. A 'root and branch' review of the Council's Telerate service (Care Connect) is currently being undertaken. Progress to date in relation to customer outcomes has included a re-branding of the service to reflect the countywide approach, updated information on the Council's website and the development of on line referrals.

The procedure for acting upon and learning from complaints is being looked at across all Housing service area to ensure that information received in relation to complaints is used effectively to inform service improvements. Housing received no compliments comments/suggestions for the quarter.

### **RESOURCES**

#### 46. **Introduction and Update**

This section of the report provides details of complaints and representations in Resources for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter ending 31 March 2010.

#### 47. **Legal and Democratic Services**

2 complaints were submitted during quarter 4 of 2009/10 compared to 2 in quarter 3. 1 complaint was justified. This referred to inaccurate website content. As a result an improved process for updating the website has been implemented. There were 11 compliments received this quarter compared to 13 the previous quarter. The compliments were all regarding the Registrars service.

No complaints were received for the Corporate **Human Resources** function in quarter 4.

No complaints were received for **Information and Computer Technology** in quarter 4.

#### 48. **Finance**

32 complaints were received during quarter 4 compared to 30 in quarter 3 all referred to Revenues & Benefits/Council Tax. Of the 32 complaints received 4 are ongoing (with 3 at Stage 2 of the Complaints process) and the remainder are closed and allocated as follows:

8 Closed – part justified  
16 Closed – not justified  
4 Closed –justified.

The number of complaints has to be taken in context of over 50,000 contacts by the customers over the same period. The main area of customer

dissatisfaction was with the front of house service or delays in requested information being sent to the customer. The process of contact/communication between the customer and the Revenues and Benefit staff is to be mapped to identify where delays and issues are occurring and implement improvements where appropriate.. Once this has been concluded training will be provided where the process has changed. The identified learning outcomes should be incorporated into the action plan which is currently being developed by the revenues and Benefits service.

Finance received 1 suggestion and 1 compliment. The suggestion was not in line with Department of Works and Pensions guidance. The compliment referred to the Pensions service and this positive feedback was given to the relevant staff.

49. **Assets**

2 complaints were received this quarter compared to 6 the previous quarter. One complaint referred to the DLI museum car park being used as an overflow car park for Durham County Council staff. A corporate investigation is underway regarding the provision of car parking at County Hall. The other complaint is currently being investigated under Stage 2 of the complaints process and refers to the flooding of a property adjacent to Durham County Council land. Assets received 2 compliments both about a specific member of staff and how efficient they were. Positive feedback has been given to that particular member of staff.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - CURRENT ACTIVITY**

50. During the quarter the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) initiated investigations into 4 matters relating concerning:

- Environmental and planning dispute with the Council – outcome awaited.
- Failure to provide mobility provisions within Council property – the matter was concluded as a local settlement.
- School transport provision – the matter was concluded as a local settlement.
- School Admissions – ongoing.

During the quarter the Ombudsman also notified the Council of the outcome in relation to a range of matters which were not subject to full investigation. The Ombudsman's investigators reached their decisions on the basis of the details supplied by complainants supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers. These matters can be summarised as follows:

- Planning & Building Control – 3 findings of No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration.
- Housing - 1 outside Jurisdiction and 1 awaiting outcome.

- Children & Family Services - 1 outside Jurisdiction.
- Licensing – 1 finding of No Evidence of Maladministration.
- Environmental Health – 1 finding of No Evidence of Maladministration.
- Other – 3 outside Jurisdiction, 1 discontinued.

51. **Recommendations and Reasons**

Members of Standards Committee to note the report.

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