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**SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 8th SEPTEMBER 2025****MINUTE EXTRACT****Corporate Complaints and Compliments 2024/25**

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, the purpose of which was to present the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report, covering the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) Root cause analysis was undertaken in respect of all complaints received and to identify common themes which supported improvements being made to processes and practices both within departments and the Corporate Complaints Service.
- (ii) Whilst closely monitored, response times to complaints could vary considerably. It was noted that all complaints were investigated to identify if there was any fault on the part of the County Council. Depending on the complexity of the matter concerned impacted the speed with which those investigations could be carried out.
- (iii) Work was taking place to refine how complaints and general enquiries were managed to ensure that issues were routed correctly and handled promptly. In particular, to ensure enquires received, which were not necessarily complaints, were redirected quickly to departments for response.
- (iv) Efforts were underway to use artificial intelligence (AI) technology where possible to support in the drafting of responses to similar complainants. Although these would continue to be prepared on an individual, personalised basis, utilising AI did offer some efficiencies to speed up parts of the process.
- (v) Members raised concerns that sometimes departments added to delays by not responding to the Corporate Complaints Service regarding complaints received. It was emphasised that responsibility for complaints ultimately rested with departments and that its timely response was critical and should be escalated when this occurred.

- (vi) Members emphasised the importance of good communication with service users, which if done correctly helped to avoid complaints in the first instance. Communication during the complaints process also helped to ensure complaints did not escalate further. Members agreed that this should continue to be a key area of focus for improvement across all service areas.
- (vii) Members noted the challenges presented by delays in Special Educational Needs assessments and Education and Health Care Plan process wait times which affected the number of complaints received. Members noted work taking place to address these areas within the Children and Family Services Department through the TSIL Programme but expressed concern that this added to the increasing cost pressures faced by the County Council.
- (viii) A member suggested the use of a 'mystery shopper' approach which might be beneficial in identifying areas for improvement within departments where service users are experiencing frustration which can lead to complaints.
- (ix) It was recognised that capturing compliments was equally important to recognise the good work of officers. Whilst the Authority sought to capture these both formally and informally, it was suggested more could be done.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report, covering the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, be noted and the comments now made be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 12 September 2025 for consideration.