

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN FOCUS REPORT :
LEARNING LESSONS FROM COMPLAINTS**

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE SERVICES

1 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To inform Members of the national debate around pressure on the statutory complaints process and how this impacts on the Councils' ability to meet their statutory requirements.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Children Act 1989 requires Local Councils which provide Children's Services to set up a three stage complaints process. Sunderland established its three stage procedure many years ago. The process requires fixed timescales and an element of independence at stages two and three – the investigation and review panel. Whilst this independence adds integrity and robustness to the process, it also adds considerable cost and delay. Investigators, independent people to oversee the investigation and panel members charge an hourly rate and the supply of them is limited.
- 2.2 When the Adult Services statutory complaints process was subject to a similar debate several years ago, the outcome was simplification to a single resolution stage. Thus paving the way for a swifter, easier process for service users and councils alike.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Ombudsman's good practice recommendations are reinforced. That Members continue to ask questions of how the complaint function is carried out. Additionally any changes to the statutory process resulting from the debate be reported back to Members.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 It is clear the process is due for review to ensure it is fit for purpose, relevant and continues to have the interests of children, young people and their families at its heart. Their voices need to be heard and the issues they raise need to be resolved quickly and fairly. A debate on the current process is welcomed.