



## Policy and Resources Committee – 16 February 2015

### Revisions to Council Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy

#### Purpose of report

To present to councillors a draft Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy which formalises and simplifies current practices in relation to the handling of complaints.

#### Attachment(s)

Appendix A – Current customer feedback leaflet

Appendix B - Draft Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy

#### 1.0 Background

1.1 We aim to provide high quality services that meet our customer's needs. Listening to customer feedback is an important part of the process to maintain quality and improve service delivery. The council's current approach is not captured in a policy but is outlined in a public leaflet (Appendix A). This includes a three stage complaints policy where complaints are first considered by the service area concerned and then if the customer is unhappy with the response the council's position is considered by the appropriate Head of Service and then, if necessary, by the Executive Director or the Chief Executive.

#### 2.0 Reasons for changes in proposed policy

2.1 Officers have carried out a review of the current complaints process for the following reasons:

a) it was felt important that middle managers, who have day-to-day operational responsibility for service delivery, were included in the process in order to monitor service delivery and quality. At present, the process often by-passes middle managers by going to heads of services, Executive Director or the Chief Executive.

b) an increasing number of customers are choosing to exercise the right to go through all three stages of the process. In the vast majority of complaints, our position is clear from an early stage and does not change as a result of the two further levels of review. However, carrying out such reviews takes managerial resources at a time when overall resources are reducing. A reduction in the number of reviews was therefore considered desirable and would be consistent with the approach taken at other councils and the recommendations of the Local Government Ombudsman.

2.2 As part of the review of the policy, consideration has also been given to the good practice guidance produced by the Local Government Ombudsman in relation to unreasonable complainants, remedies for complaints where council fault is found, and the timescale for responses. The requirements of the 2013 Regulators Compliance Code have also been taken into account.

2.3 All complaints will be recorded and monitored as part of the council's complaints recording system. This data will be included in performance clinics.

2.4 If the new policy is adopted, the leaflet for the public and information on our website will be updated. There will also be staff training on the new process.

### **3.0 Key changes**

3.1 As noted above, the key change from the previous approach has been to reduce the number of internal stages from 3 to 2, and the involvement of middle managers in the first stage. If the customer remains dissatisfied with the council's response after the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage review the complainant can refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman. A report is taken annually to the Governance and Audit Committee on the number and outcome of referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman.

3.2 The opportunity has also been taken to clarify the council's policy in relation to the following areas, again following best practice:

- information on apologies and remedies should the council be at fault (4.5)
- inclusion of an overall time frame for resolving the complaint (4.6)
- actions that will be taken in the case of unreasonable complainants (5.0)

### **4.0 Equality and diversity implications**

4.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from the proposals.

### **5.0 Legal implications**

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposals. The two stage complaints process allows a right of appeal to customers on the initial response by the council as recommended in the Ombudsman's best practice guidance.

### **6.0 Risk management**

6.1 It is considered that these changes may marginally increase the risk of referral to the Local Government Ombudsman, although any effect may be difficult to identify given the general rise in referrals reported by the Ombudsman. However this risk will be mitigated by the positive opportunities for improving service delivery provided by the facility for increased monitoring of complaints at a service and corporate level as a result of the new recording arrangements.

### **7.0 Financial implications**

7.1 There are no new financial implications arising from the proposals in this paper

### **8.0 Constitutional implications**

8.1 There are no constitutional implications arising from the proposals in this paper


### **9.0 Corporate outcomes**

9.1 The proposals in this paper would contribute to the corporate outcome of "High Quality Service Delivery" by providing feedback on current service delivery and how it could be improved.

## 10.0 Recommendation

- 10.1 The committee is recommended to adopt the draft Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy with immediate effect.

*[Reason: To enable the council to improve services by better use of feedback and complaints]*

<b>Legal</b>	Power: Local Government Act 1972				
	Other considerations: Regulators Code 2013				
<b>Background Papers:</b> Local Government Ombudsman Guidance on management of unreasonable complainant behaviour and running a complaints system					
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<b>CFO</b> 05.02.2015			<b>MO</b>		<b>CX</b>