

Review – Formal Complaints Policy 2015

Consideration	Proposal
<p>Three stage process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The full 3 stages total 80 working days if exhausted, which Officers generally do. Stage 2 is often not used effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce number of stages to 2 (recommended by the LGO) – reduced Officer hours and expedited process for complainant Reduce response time – for example, 10 working days. Max time from report to resolution should be 12 weeks (as stated in LGO guidance).
<p>Untimely responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For 2017/18 – 10 requests for extensions, 23 sent on the 20th working day = 45% of complaints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce response time –10 working days? Officers are encouraged to investigate the complaint more urgently. <i>RISK</i> – potential lack of thorough investigation, however, extensions could be requested. Extensions of time must be requested within 3 working days of receiving the complaint so that the complainant can be informed. This would also ensure that Officer’s review the complaint at the earliest opportunity.
<p>Urgent responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some complaints need to be prioritised and may require a quicker response where there is a serious risk or effect on the complainant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This should be identified by the complaints administrators and investigating Officer and a response issued quickly and accordingly.
<p>Use of templates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Templates are sometimes not used which results in loss of clarity, particularly of the outcome, for the complainant and complaints administrators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All responses are sent to complaints administrators to review before sending to ensure compliance with the policy. This would also be an opportunity to proof read for errors etc.
<p>Complaints Co-ordinators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of complaints co-ordinators within each service has proved ineffective. They often have little vested interest in the complaint and add a ‘middle man’ to the process. The complaints administrators are finding themselves chasing both co-ordinators and investigating Officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints administrators takes responsibility for sending acknowledgements and updating the complaints system. Create single point of contact for complaints for all services.
<p>Vexatious/unreasonable complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council have had difficulty dealing with vexatious complainants as the policy does not refer to how we define or handle these complaints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An additional policy to address unreasonable complainants is required. Definition on how we ascertain if a complaint is unreasonable/vexatious, and how we manage this needs to be included. Guidance on this can be found https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/advice-and-guidance/guidance-notes/guidance-on-managing-unreasonable-complainant-behaviour.

<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New staff, with a responsibility for investigating complaints, have not been receiving training on the complaints policy or process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a new member of staff is required to respond to complaints, the complaints administrators must be informed, and adequate training arranged. • Regular (annual) refresher training should be conducted with all responsible Officers and front-line staff.
<p>Informal complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGO guidance does not differentiate between formal and informal complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider Stage 0 complaints, rather than 'informal'. This may be effective when things can quickly be put right or if written correspondence isn't required. • Complaints administrators should register Stage 0 complaints (if aware).
<p>Complaints about policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add a point to the 'What complaints aren't covered by this policy?'. There is little scope to investigate a complaint regarding how a person has been affected by Council policy. • Complaints will be investigated if there is a believed breach of a policy, or where it is believed actions have been taken in the absence of a policy.