

15 December 2015

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee

Draft Complaints Policy

Report of: *Steve Summers, Head of Customer Services*

Wards Affected: *None*

This report is *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Customer Access Strategy provides the overarching framework for the channels (or methods) the Council will use to interact with customers to ensure the successful delivery of our services with the resources available.
- 1.2 Key to the delivery of the Customer Access Strategy is the Implementation Plan which contains a number of actions. One of the actions contained within the Implementation Plan was the review of the Council's complaints procedure and development of a new Complaints Policy.
- 1.3 This report is for Members to consider and approve the draft Complaints Policy as attached at Appendix A.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee approves the draft Complaints Policy.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 One of the actions contained within the Council's Customer Access Strategy Implementation Plan was the review and of its complaints procedure and the development of a new complaints policy.
- 3.2 The purpose of a complaints system is to put right what has gone wrong and to learn from it. The key principles for effective complaint handling are:

- Accessibility – It is well publicised
- Communication – Includes early direct contact with the person making the complaint and continued contact through the process
- Timeliness – It takes no longer than 12 weeks from receipt to resolution
- Fairness – Staff are clear about roles and responsibilities
- Credibility – It is managed by someone who can take an overview and implement changes in the complaints system
- Accountability – Information is provided in a clear and open way and is properly managed

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Following a review of its complaints procedure the Council has introduced a three stage complaints process which is intended to improve on the previous procedure for customers to take issue with any perceived failure to provide a service, failure to respond to requests or failure to adhere to standards on the part of the Council and its officers. The process has been trialled for a period of time to enable feedback to its effectiveness.
- 4.2 The new process itself has three stages. In the first instance, the complaint is forwarded to the service Investigator for a meaningful and informed review. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response then it will be forwarded to the Head of Service for the department concerned or an appointed Senior Officer to conduct a second stage investigation into the matter. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response from the Head of Services they can request a third stage investigation into the matter by the Head of Paid Services. At all stages, the Council aims to respond fully following the investigation within 20 working days.
- 4.3 Once the complaint has been through our complaints process they will be informed of their rights to refer the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.4 Monitoring of the complaints and outcomes is undertaken by the Council's Corporate Leadership Board and the Audit, Scrutiny and Transformation Committee on a half yearly basis.

5. Implications

Financial Implications

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6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

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6.2 None - although a robust complaints mechanism contributes towards good governance.

6. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

6.1 None.

7. Appendices to this report

Appendix A - Draft Complaints Policy.

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