

DECISION-MAKER:	GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE		
SUBJECT:	UPDATE TO COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY		
DATE OF DECISION:	30 APRIL 2013		
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF COMMUNITIES, CHANGE AND PARTNERSHIPS		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY
NOT APPLICABLE

BRIEF SUMMARY

This report sets out proposals to revise the corporate complaints policy to improve related services to customers whilst making best use of officer capacity. The report also describes the proposal to establish a single complaints unit for the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) To agree the proposed amendment to the Council's complaints procedure, comprising the removal of the current Stage 2 of the corporate procedure and amendments to the remaining two stages.
- (ii) To agree the draft Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy (attached at Appendix 1). This updates the current complaints policy to reflect recommended industry practice and proposed process changes.
- (iii) To note the proposals to establish a single complaints unit for the Council.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A review of the Council's handling of complaints was commissioned by Management Board of Directors (MBOD) in August 2012. Recommendations were considered and approved by Council Management Team (CMT) in March 2013.
2. A number of drivers resulted in the review of the complaints function, including the process, structure and current responsibility for the management of the complaints procedures. These include:
 - Organisational changes
 - The importance of customer focus, and of customer feedback contributing to service improvement

- Lean service improvement and reducing duplication in current process
- Changes to Housing complaints process introduced as part of Localism Act, and the transfer of Public Health to the Council.
- Proposals to join together the two separate complaints teams.

CREATION OF A CENTRAL COMPLAINTS TEAM

3. Currently the Corporate Complaints procedure is overseen by the Communities, Change and Partnerships Division. Children's Services and Adult Social Care complaints, whose responsibilities are set by statute, are overseen within the CYP Strategic Commissioning, Education and Inclusion Division.
4. On the 12th March 2013, CMT agreed the establishment of a central complaints team which will deal with all complaints procedures. This will:
 - Resolve inconsistencies in the culture and practice associated with the current provision
 - Provide a focal point for comments, complaints and compliments
 - Enable the organisation and services to make better use of the associated data and learning
 - Enable better use of available skills, resource and capacity
 - Secure functional resilience at a time when we are experiencing increase in complaints activity and shrinking organisational capacity
 - Create potential solutions for succession planning and introduce opportunities for skills development.
5. Final proposals will be agreed by CMT prior to staff consultation in line with agreed procedures.
6. Formal consultation with staff on the proposals will be undertaken during May with a view to the new Team being established on the 1st July 2013.

PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

7. The Council currently operates a three part corporate complaints system:
 - Stage 1 complaints are responded to by the relevant service manager
 - Stage 2 complaints are responded to by the appropriate Head of Service
 - Stage 3 complaints are responded to by the Corporate Complaints Officer or by a Senior Officer independent from the service which is the subject of the complaint.
8. The review concluded that Stage 2 of the Corporate Complaints policy and procedure is not adding significant value to resolving complaints. In 2011/12, 800 Stage 1 corporate complaints were received by the Council. Approximately 100 escalated to Stage 2 of the procedure. Half of these were not successfully resolved at Stage 2, and proceeded to the final Stage 3.
9. In addition to the very high rate of implied customer dissatisfaction, Stage 2 consumed around 700 hours of management time, along with further time associated with complaints co-ordinators and other staff members who were asked to contribute towards the reply.

10. The proposed change to the corporate complaints policy and procedure will remove the middle stage (2) and implement a new triage arrangement to help services identify higher-risk complaints when they are initially received; these higher-risk complaints will be routed to Heads of Service, who will decide on their handling and sign off the reply letters.
11. If complainants are not satisfied with the response at the new Stage1, they will be able to request an independent review and investigation by the Complaints Team.
12. There will be a slight variation to the policy and procedures in relation to complaints received from housing tenants, to accommodate the optional involvement of the Tenants Panel. At the request of a tenant, a Panel of three trained volunteers will review the Housing service's reply to their complaint at Stage 1 and provide feedback to the Service, which may then choose to revisit the reply in the light of the comments from the Panel. This Panel will not have the authority to refer complaints to the Housing Ombudsman. However, the new Localism Act does include provision for suitably nominated Panels to undertake that role, along with Councillors and MPs.
13. The proposed changes to the corporate complaints procedure will
 - Make the scheme easier for customers to understand and use
 - Use less resource
 - Be more risk-aware

Provide officers with more time to investigate and resolve a complaint at the new Stage 1.
14. This should improve customer satisfaction and reduce the number of complaints which escalate through the process.
15. The current arrangements for submitting comments and compliments are not affected by this policy and procedure change.
16. A copy of the revised Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure is attached to this report.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

17. Not applicable

DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

18. Please see Appendix 2. The proposals have been seen by Cllr Asa Thorpe.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

19. The cost of communicating the change in policy and procedure will mainly entail officer time, which has been agreed between the relevant Heads of Service. There will be a training cost of approx £4k - places will be paid for from service budgets.

Property/Other

20. The restructure proposals will not result in any reduction in headcount.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

21. Staffing issues will be addressed under Delegated Powers.

Other Legal Implications:

22. None

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

23. None

KEY DECISION? No

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	Not Applicable
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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1.	Draft new complaints policy – final version
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Documents In Members’ Rooms

1.	Draft new complaints policy – final version
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.	No
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Other Background Documents

Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
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1.	None	
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Report Tracking

VERSION NUMBER:	6
DATE LAST AMENDED:	15 April 2013
AMENDED BY:	C Taylor