

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****CUSTOMER COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND  
COMPLAINTS POLICY AND GUIDANCE  
10 OCTOBER 2012****Report of Head of Environmental Services****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To request that Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the revised Customer Comments, Compliments and Complaints policy.

**This report is public**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the updated 'Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy' and related 'Guidance on Handling Complaints'.
- (2) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider to what extent Elected Members should be involved in the corporate complaints process. Should Members consider that direct involvement in dealing with complaints at Stage 2 is required then this would need the resource requirements detailed and reported to Cabinet for consideration along with other budgetary proposals.

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Following an Internal Audit review of the council's management of corporate a number of questions have been asked by Elected Members on how they could be best involved in order to ensure a corporate approach to complaints.

**2.0 Details**

- 2.1 The revised policy is broadly similar to the previous policy in that the council's definition of 'complaint' remains relatively unchanged and the recommendation is to continue with a two stage process in line with guidance from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The Guidance, along with proposals for training when the revised Policy is rolled out, will ensure the policy is consistently and appropriately applied.
- 2.2 It is recognised that Elected Members have a role to play in acting as advocates and this is reflected in the Policy and Guidance. Officer have also considered more direct Elected Member involvement in the complaints process. As a result two options have been identified.
- 2.3 OPTION 1- The first of these is direct involvement in the investigation/review process via a member panel at Stage 2. Should members wish to pursue this option considerable staff resource will be required to service the panel.

This includes advice from the Service Head concerned to advise the panel, the Stage 1 investigating officer to answer any technical issues and Democratic Services to arrange meetings, call any witnesses and advise the complainant on the process and their rights to attend. If such a panel were to be set up a Constitutional update may be required and the approval of Full Council needed. Clearly this option complicates the process and would likely add to the time spent handling complaints. This in turn increases the risk of failing to meet the LGO's expectation that the complaints process (all stages) will be completed within 12 weeks. As outlined it would also require considerable additional resource. At this stage no indication of additional cost is available.

- 2.4 OPTION 2- is for Elected Members to review complaints data on a regular basis, (eg through Performance Review Team meetings) which could give an indication of overall performance – i.e. complaints trends could indicate service areas in need of improvement. Reports could be provided to the relevant committee at agreed intervals. This would provide an overview of the types of issues that were being complained about and then allow for Elected Members the opportunity to explore these areas further if required.

**3.0 Conclusion**

- 3.1 The new Customer Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and Guidance have been developed based on best practice as defined by the LGO and as such will ensure that the policy operates effectively.
- 3.2 Regular reporting of complaints would enable efficient and effective member involvement in the process.

**CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

There are no direct implications as a result of this report.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no implications as a result of this report.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no immediate financial implications however there are likely to be costs involved if Members favour Option 1 above. The need for additional funding will therefore be considered if required.

**OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

**Human Resources:**

There are no implications as a result of this report.

**Information Services:**

There are no implications as a result of this report.

**Property:**

There are no implications as a result of this report.

**Open Spaces:**

There are no implications as a result of this report.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Appendix A : Customer Comments,  
Compliments and Complaints Policy**  
**Appendix B : Customer Comments,  
Compliments and Complaints Guidance**

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