

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	15 July 2013
TITLE:	Corporate Complaints Policy & Procedure
WARD:	ALL
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Annual Complaints Report 2012/13 Appendix 2 – Draft new Customer Feedback Policy Appendix 3 - Local Government Ombudsman guidance on running a complaints system	

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 This paper updates the Panel on the latest annual complaints report 2012/13 and future plans for implementing a revised Customer Feedback policy and procedures, due to be launched later this year.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is recommended to:

- 2.1 Review and discuss the 2012/13 Annual Complaints report (appendix 1)
- 2.2 Receive an update on progress with implementing a revised Corporate Feedback Policy and Procedures (appendix 2)
- 2.3 With reference to Local Government Ombudsman guidance (appendix 3), consider they are satisfied with the approach the Council is taking.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this update report.
- 3.2 Costs associated with the introduction of new Customer Feedback Policy and systems are funded within the agreed annual Service & Resources Plan for the Customer Services division, which is leading the Corporate Customer Service Excellence programme.

4 THE REPORT

Annual Report for the analysis of close complaints

- 4.1 Bath & North East Somerset Council closely monitors the compliments, comments and complaints that we receive from our customers, so we can use the information to improve the services that we provide. This process is managed through the Council's Complaints Procedure (available on the Council's website at www.bathnes.gov.uk in the 'Your Council & Democracy' section and from any Council office).
- 4.2 Customer Services is responsible for managing the corporate complaints process and compiles an annual report to highlight the Council's performance in handling corporate complaints and the key actions or service improvements that have resulted from reviewing them
- 4.3 The latest report for the 2012/13 is provided at appendix 1.

New Customer Feedback Policy & Procedures

- 4.4 Customer Services are running a project as part of the corporate customer service redesign workstream, to implement a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system called Northgate Front Office Enterprise.
- 4.5 A revised Customer Feedback (and Complaints) process will be one of the first business processes to go live on the CRM system, launching autumn 2013. A new Customer Feedback Policy has been written in consultation with existing Complaints officers and agreed by Divisional Directors. The policy is now called a Customer Feedback Policy, to encompass all aspects of feedback including compliments and comments as well as complaints.
- 4.6 A draft Corporate Customer Feedback Policy document (appendix 2) describes how the Council expects to manage and respond to customer feedback, whether suggestions, compliments, or complaints. It is designed to reflect best practice both for the customer and the Council.
- 4.7 The new policy is designed to adhere to the Customer Services target operating model to deliver 6x core corporate processes to manage customer contacts (of which 'Feedback' is one).
- 4.8 The Service Redesign Programme, supported by the new CRM system, other technology and associated procedures, will embed 4x Customer Services Design Principles across the organisation:
 - Put the Customer First
 - Easy Access to Services – Right Time, Right Place
 - Do it Once, Do it Right
 - Ensure Efficiency and Effectiveness

4.9 The project supports:

- a) the emerging Corporate aim to become an excellent Council, to refresh and reframe around the 'One Council' approach, and to treat all Customer comments as a valuable contribution towards service delivery improvements – to put the customer at the heart of what we do.
- b) our Corporate Vision which describes the kind of organisation we want to be, including that we will be 'a listening Council' and 'put people and communities at the heart of everything we do'. The Vision is underpinned by our Values that say we are 'an open and engaging council' and 'an organisation that encourages continuous learning and improvement'.

4.10 The significant change to the new Policy is a more distinct two stage approach with a third level of escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) that incorporates and reflects best local government practice:

- Stage One review and response to the complaint by the relevant council service team. Stage One involves the service themselves investigating the complaint, whether informally or more formally through an investigation. Our policy is to have our Services always respond to customer complaints directly and have the opportunity to explain or put things right if there has been a mistake. We aim to resolve matters with a single and accurate response but, if this is not possible or if there is dissatisfaction, we encourage continued dialogue and feedback between customer and Service until the issue is satisfactorily closed.
- Stage Two investigation by the Council. This stage provides the opportunity of another Service investigating the complaint by undertaking an independent review. However, before a Stage Two review is agreed, a Corporate Customer Services Review Officer will review the Stage One investigation to consider whether all matters raised in the original complaint have been comprehensively and accurately addressed, and if not, may refer it back to the Service to ensure this now happens.
- Customer referral for a Local Government Ombudsman independent review

4.11 Customer Services is engaging with designated Customer Feedback Officers in all Service areas to develop understanding and awareness of the change in Policy and the revised operating procedures of the CRM system. Information and briefing sessions with appropriate Service Officers are planned for September, in readiness for the system going live during the Autumn. The aim is to ensure that each Service area has a primary point of contact who will:

- understand the new Policy and Procedures and be able to apply them to the types of customer feedback received by their Service area
- be responsible for championing the new approach and channelling customer feedback to appropriate service colleagues who can deal with the subject matter
- ensure that appropriate and agreed responses are drafted and issued to customers, including sign-off by appropriate managers as necessary

- Undertake stage 1 reviews when required

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

6 EQUALITIES

6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were found.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 *Cabinet Member; Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Service Users; Local Residents;*

7.2 It is stated in our existing Complaints policy that the Council welcomes any feedback on the use of the policy. Customer Services team knowledge and experience of dealing with complaints led to a consultation on improvements with complaints officers. Improvements were ratified with Divisional Directors.

8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

8.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Human Rights; Corporate; Other Legal Considerations*

9 ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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Background papers	None
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