

Complaints Policy Review

Cabinet Member **Cllr Margaret Squires**
Responsible Officer **Head of Customer Services**

Reason for Report: Review of the complaints policy

RECOMMENDATION(S): to approve the updated corporate complaints policy for a further three years.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: To ensure that people have access to the services they need, particularly those on low incomes and those who are sick or disabled. People also need easy access to information about services at the right time and in the right place whether that is by telephone, website or face-to-face.

Financial Implications: None

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: Accurate recording and monitoring of complaints is good practice and ensures that we are open and accountable to all of our customers. Service improvement as a result of complaint investigation reduces the chance of penalties from the Ombudsman for mal administration.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The complaints policy was last reviewed in 2012 when additional procedures were added to the policy for dealing with “unreasonable, unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints”.

1.2 During 2014-15 a review of the complaints recording and monitoring system has taken place, resulting in improvements to internal working practices and customer service. The review took into account the guidance issued by the Local Government Ombudsman called “My expectations for raising concerns and complaints”.

1.3 The policy has been updated to include these new working practices.

2.0 Complaints monitoring system review

2.1 A team of staff worked with the Head of Customer Services to agree a specification for improvements to the complaints monitoring system. This included staff from Housing to ensure the additional benchmarking and good practice carried out in Housing was built into the new corporate complaints monitoring system.

2.2 Good practice advice from the Ombudsman states that:

- Customers should be aware that they have the right to make a complaint and feel confident to do so.
- All staff should be able to help a customer raise a complaint and that the process of making a complaint is simple.
- Customers should be kept updated of what is happening with their complaint throughout the process.
- Customers should always be informed of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint, including details of any actions to be taken as a result of their complaint.
- Customers should be aware of the right to ask for a second review of their complaint and feel confident to use the system again if needed.

2.3 Our complaints policy follows all the guidance as set out in paragraph 2.2. Our complaints leaflet explains how to make a complaint; this is also available on line and all staff are provided with details about our complaints policy at induction. Complaints can be made in writing (paper and email), over the phone, on-line or in person. They are recorded and monitored to ensure a response is made within the agreed timescale. When the complaint has been investigated and resolved, the customer is informed of the outcome and provided with information on what they can do next if they are still dissatisfied.

2.4 The review identified some improvements that could be made to the monitoring system:

- Additional letter templates to ensure customers all receive standardised text with the correct information, including how to appeal against the decision.
- Additional reminders and prompts for staff to ensure the complaint is resolved within target times, and the customer is kept informed.
- A “lessons learnt” log to ensure services are improved as a result of investigating the complaint.
- The ability to link documents to the complaint.
- A means to record complaints referred to the Ombudsman

2.5 The policy has been revised to reflect these changes. The complaint form has not needed to be updated.

3.0 **Ombudsman**

3.1 When someone is unhappy with the investigation carried out by the local authority, they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) who will carry out an independent review of our actions. There is currently also a Housing Ombudsman for complaints from Local Authority Tenants.

3.2 The government published a review of public sector ombudsmen in March of this year and has proposed that a single ombudsman scheme should be created for all public services in England mirroring the position in the other nations of the United Kingdom, the aim is to provide a simpler process in an increasingly complex public service landscape. The Government has also

recently consulted on a proposal to extend the jurisdiction of the LGO to some town and parish councils. Further details will be provided.

4.0 **Looking forward**

- 4.1 Our complaints policy will be reviewed again in 3 years unless any changes are needed before then. The review has ensured that the policy is still following the ombudsman's good practice guide. This ensures that it is easy to make a complaint using the access channel that suit each person best, that the process is clear, relevant, unbiased and the outcome of each complaint is notified to the complainant.
- 4.2 The annual report to Members ensures that monitoring and the outcome of complaints remain high profile. Complaints, comments and compliments form part of our continued improvement and inform how we design and change service delivery.

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Circulation of the Report: Cllr Margaret Squires, Management Team

List of Background Papers: Complaints policy, Annual Complaints Report to Members, Customer Care Policy.