

## Minutes

### Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy

### Overview Committee

Wednesday 29 October 2014

Meeting held at Committee Room 4 - Civic Centre,  
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



HILLINGDON  
LONDON

	<p><b>Members Present:</b> Councillors Richard Lewis (Chairman), Richard Mills (Vice-Chairman), Lynne Allen, Wayne Bridges, Tony Burles, Nick Denys, Carol Melvin, Jane Palmer and Robin Sansarpuri.</p> <p><b>Apologies:</b> Councillors Narinder Garg (Councillor Lynne Allen substituting) and Ray Graham (Councillor Jane Palmer substituting).</p> <p><b>Officers:</b> Ian Anderson (Complaints and Service Improvement Manager - Administration), Michelle Gleeson (Customer Liaison Manager - Residents Services), Dan Kennedy (Head of Performance and Improvement) and Khalid Ahmed (Democratic Services Manager).</p> <p><b>Witness:</b> Richard Shaw (Investigator from Local Government Ombudsman Office).</p>
20.	<p><b>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2014</b></p> <p>Agreed as an accurate record.</p>
21.	<p><b>EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC</b></p> <p>It was agreed that all items of business would be considered in public.</p>
22.	<p><b>MAJOR REVIEW - THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE</b></p> <p>For this meeting, the Committee was provided with evidence from Richard Shaw, an Investigator for the Local Government Ombudsman Office.</p> <p>The Committee was provided with a summary of the key components of a good complaints procedure:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To enable residents to make officers and the Council accountable</li><li>• Where complaints have been justified, to enable Councils to address poor working practice and to improve services</li><li>• To have a clear and transparent process which enables</li></ul> <p><b>Action By:</b></p>

	<p>a quick resolution to residents' complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing quickly with a complaint for the benefit of a complainant</li> <li>• The less stages of a complaints process would eliminate repetitiveness and bring about a quicker resolution</li> <li>• Service requests and appeals should be dealt with separately and outside the complaints process</li> <li>• The focus should be on resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity</li> <li>• There should be consideration given to the costs of dealing with complaints</li> <li>• The key focus should be on customer care and customer satisfaction for residents</li> <li>• A complaints process needs to be understood and publicised and accessible for residents</li> <li>• There should be a common procedure to cover contractors</li> <li>• Managers should be made responsible for dealing with complaints and should be empowered to proactively resolve complaints</li> <li>• Managers should be given discretionary powers to remedy failures and to make apologies to complainants where necessary</li> <li>• Officers should be given discretionary powers to offer compensation to remedy a failure</li> <li>• Failures which have been highlighted by a complaint provided an opportunity to make improvements to services</li> <li>• Regarding Council policy - caveats should be contained in complaints procedures which clearly stated that a complaint about Council policy which had been correctly applied should not be taken through the complaints procedure. Complaints could be advised to submit their complaint direct to the Local Government Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action By:</b></p>
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- Directors should have sight and knowledge of complaints

**Action By:**

Discussion took place on aspects of the evidence provided and reference was made to the various complaints which the Council received in relation to the Housing Allocation Policy and Housing Benefit and Council Tax decisions. Members were informed that complaints should still be considered regarding the application of policies, but not the actual policy itself. The importance was stressed of officers ensuring they correctly applied policies.

Members were informed that these complaints did escalate through the present complaints procedure, but if changes were made to the complaints procedure, these types of complaints could be resolved at Stage 1 or be referred direct to the Ombudsman.

The LGO Investigator confirmed that complaints had to have gone through at least one stage of a local authority complaints procedure before being considered by the LGO.

The communication of Council policies was important and these should be clearly pointed out to residents. Relevant policies and the rules relating to Housing Benefit and Council Tax should be explained to complainants to ensure they understand the reasoning behind the decisions taken which have resulted in the complaint.

As previously mentioned at an earlier witness session, the Committee was informed that extra training would be provided for officers to enable a greater focus on resolution of complaints. A move to a two stage complaints procedure, with a longer timeline for Stage 1, would enable intervention work to take place and give officers an opportunity to try to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of the resident.

Members were informed that there were cost implications for dealing with complaints in terms of officer time in dealing with complaints through the 3 stage process. An early intervention and attempts to resolve complaints would be beneficial for the Council and for the complainant.

Reference was made to a number of local authorities which had moved to two stage complaint procedure which consisted of flexible first stages whereby contact was made with the complainant with the focus on resolving the issue which had been raised.

The Committee asked that officers provide a paper at the next meeting setting out all the evidence presented during the review thus far, together with details of the potential implications of moving to a two stage complaints procedure.

**RESOLVED –**

- 1. That the presentations and the information provided be noted and officers be asked to report back to the next meeting of the Committee providing details as outlined above.**

**Action By:**  
**Dan Kennedy**  
**/ Ian**  
**Anderson /**  
**Khalid**  
**Ahmed**

**23.**

**MEMBERS ENQUIRIES**

The Committee was provided with a report which provided details on the Members Enquiries process, together with statistics of Members Enquiries received across the Council's service areas for 2012/2013 and 2013/2014.

The Customer Liaison Manager for Residents Services attended the meeting and gave an overview of the process. A Member Enquiry (ME) was a question which a Councillor wanted answered on behalf of residents or other local organisations.

The Members Liaison Officers within both Residents Services and Administration and Finance, dealt with such queries and provided an efficient link for this, ensuring all Members' Enquiries were logged, processed and progressed with Lead Officers to guarantee a response within a dedicated timescale of 10 working days.

Members agreed that the service provided was a very useful resource and enabled Members to provide guidance and advice to their constituents.

The success of the service was highlighted by the increased usage over the last two years:-

<b>Service Areas</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
Housing Service	862	1,134
Housing Benefit	79	105
Council Tax	55	88
Education Services	44	39
Residents Services	4,591	5,444
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,631</b>	<b>6,810</b>

Discussion took place on the process and Members expressed

	<p>their appreciation at the efforts of the Member Liaison Officers. Officers were asked that, where possible, Members Enquiries responses sent to Members, be also copied to the resident concerned.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED –</b></p> <p><b>1. That the report and the presentation given be noted and officers be thanked for the excellent service given to Members on behalf of residents.</b></p>	
<b>24.</b>	<p><b>WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15</b></p> <p>Noted. Members asked that the scheduled next meeting of the Committee be re-arranged.</p>	
<b>25.</b>	<p><b>CABINET FORWARD PLAN</b></p> <p>Noted.</p>	
	<p><b>Meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.30pm</b>  <b>Next meeting: 11 December 2014 at 7.30pm</b></p>	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Khalid Ahmed on 01895 250833. These minutes are circulated to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.