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Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee Review Scoping Report 2014/15

The Effectiveness of the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure

1. REVIEW OBJECTIVES

Aim and background to review

To examine the effectiveness of the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure and to propose improvements and enhancements which could be made to the procedure to improve this important aspect of customer service to the Borough's residents.

Terms of Reference

1. To review the current definition of what constitutes a complaint?
2. To consider what makes an effective complaints system.
3. To review the effectiveness of the current three stage complaints structure.

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4. To assess the Council's current performance in dealing with complaints.
5. To examine the handling of complaints across the Council to ensure that there is a consistent and standard approach.
6. To review the current timelines and service standards for responses to complaints within each stage of the complaints process.
7. To identify what staff do to try and resolve complaints and consider whether this is effective in stopping complaints from escalating.
8. To review and update the existing compensation policy.
9. How has the organisation learnt from complaints received and what evidence is there of service improvement.
10. To report to Cabinet on any recommendations which arise out of the review.

2. INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

Key Information

Dealing with complaints is a key part of effective customer service delivery. A good complaints system is an opportunity for a Council to show that it wants to open and honest, that it cares about providing a good service to residents and that it genuinely values feedback on whether there are any problems which need attention. Therefore, improving the way the Council deals with complaints should improve service delivery.

There are four complaint procedures that operate within this Council.

- Complaints made by children or on their behalf are governed by the Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 (Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1738).
- Adults' services complaints are managed in line with the 'The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009'.
- All other complaints are dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- All complaints received by the Council regarding its public health functions are handled in accordance with The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership

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Arrangement Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012.

The first three complaint procedures are set by statute and the Council is required to follow legislation with little scope for doing otherwise. However, the Corporate Complaints procedure is different because it is agreed locally and it is this procedure which Members will be considering as part of their review. The Corporate Complaints Procedure currently operates as follows;

- Informal Complaints (Service requests)

Officers try and resolve enquiries and concerns as quickly as possible by discussing the problem with the complainant.

- Stage 1 – Response from the Head of Service or Deputy Director

Officers acknowledge Stage 1 complaints within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint and the deadline is for complainants to receive a full response within 10 working days.

- Stage 2 – Response from the relevant Director

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response, he/she can ask for their complaint to be reviewed at Stage 2 stating the reason for their dissatisfaction with the response.

Officers acknowledge Stage 2 complaints within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint and the deadline is for complainants to receive a full response within 10 working days.

- Stage 3 – response from the Chief Executive of the Council

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response, he/she can ask for their complaint to be reviewed at Stage 3 by the Chief Executive. The complainant has to state the reason why they are dissatisfied with the response given at Stage 2.

The Chief Executive acknowledges Stage 3 complaints within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint and the deadline is for complainants to receive a full response within 15 working days.

- Stage 4 - Designated Person for the Council (**for housing complaints only**)

If the complaint is about a tenancy, leasehold or other housing management issue, this can be referred to a 'Designated Person'. If complaint is still not resolved, the

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complainant is advised to take their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman for Housing complaints with all other complaints being directed to the Local Government Ombudsman.

If after the Stage 3 response, the complainant remains dissatisfied, he/she is advised to take the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Responsibilities

Service areas covered by the Corporate Complaints Procedure:

- Housing
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax
- Education Services
- Resident Services (Planning, Environment, Anti social behaviour, etc)
- Administration and Finance
- Legal

Connected activity

Members Enquiries.

Current intelligence, best practice and research

Information from feedback from complainants will be reported to the Committee, together with details on statistics on the number of complaints each Council service received at the three stages of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Details of the Annual Complaints Reports which are submitted to relevant Policy Overview Committee's in September will be supplied for the review.

Consideration could also be given to best practice used in other organisation's complaints procedure and systems which could be introduced at Hillingdon to improve the process for residents

Further information

Corporate Complaints Procedure

Local Government Ombudsman <http://www.lgo.org.uk/>

Annual Complaints Reports to relevant Policy Overview Committees

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3. WITNESS EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY

Witness testimony

Officer from Local Government Ombudsman Office
Dan Kennedy - LBH Performance & Intelligence Team Manager - Administration and Finance
Ian Anderson - Complaints and Service Improvement Manager - Administration and Finance
Heads of service / Managers from service departments
Customer Liaison Officers from Complaints Teams
Lloyd White - Head of Democratic Services

Key information required

Statistics and data on complaints at all three stages
Annual Complaints Reports
Comparisons with other local authorities
Feedback from complainants

Potential Consultation & Communications

N/A

Emerging conclusions or themes for development

4. REVIEW PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

Proposed timeframe & milestones for the review up to Cabinet and beyond in terms of monitoring:

Meeting Date	Action	Purpose / Outcome
16 July 2014	Agree Scoping Report and presentation from Performance and Intelligence Team Manager	Information and analysis
16 September	Witness Session 1 - Good	Evidence & enquiry

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2014	practice and service standards	Complaints and Service Improvement Manager Head of Service Council's Customer Liaison Officers
29 October 2014	Witness Session 2 - Stage 3 Complaints and Suggested Recommendations	Evidence & enquiry Guidelines on good practice in dealing with complaints - Officer from LGO
11 November 2014	Suggested Recommendations	Proposals – agree recommendations and final draft report

** Specific meetings can be shortened or extended to suit the review topic and needs of the Committee*

Resource requirements

Normal officer support.

Equalities impact

None.