

UPDATE ON THE MAJOR REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE - 2014/15

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REASON FOR ITEM

To provide the Committee with an update on the impact of the Major Review of the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure that was undertaken in 2014/15.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. During 2014/15, the Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee completed a major review of the three-stage corporate complaints procedure. The scope of the review did not include the statutory social care complaints procedures.
2. The aim of the review was to examine the effectiveness of the council-wide complaints procedure and to propose improvements and enhancements. The POC agreed that a priority for the review was to find ways to produce a faster resolution to complaints for residents.
3. The following is a summary of the main findings from the review:
 - The Committee found strong evidence that officers are resolving concerns at the earliest stage possible when a matter is raised by a resident, to avert the need to escalate issues to become a formal complaint.
 - Overall, there are relatively fewer complaints from Hillingdon escalating to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) compared to other London Boroughs. The evidence given by the LGO officer in the witness session found that they received 93 enquiries for Hillingdon in 2013/14, which is almost 40% less than average for London (at an average of 151 enquiries).
 - The Committee concluded that there is an opportunity to streamline the existing procedure to expedite those complaints where the resident has requested escalation of their complaint and where the outcome is likely to remain unchanged at stages 2 and / or 3. These tend to be policy related complaints.
4. Your recommendations were considered by Cabinet on 21 May and 22 October 2015. Cabinet agreed that the current three-stage Corporate Complaints Procedure should continue with two important changes, namely that:
 - Minor service requests should not be logged as complaints where the issue is simply corrected within 24 hours; and
 - Officers have discretion to escalate a complaint direct from Stages 1 and/or 2 to the Housing or Local Government Ombudsman where it is felt that the decision cannot be overturned through the complaint process, e.g. on policy matters.

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5. The recommendations were implemented in November 2015 when the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure was revised and published on the Council's website: www.hillingdon.gov.uk/complaints and all staff briefed on the changes.

IMPACT OF THE CHANGE

1. Minor service requests are being logged as informal complaints and as a result they have increased from 683 for 2014/15 to 986 for 2015/16. Officers will continue to focus on resolving concerns at the earliest stage possible when a matter is raised by a resident
2. The number of Stage 1 complaints has remained constant when comparing 2014/15 figure of 310 with 2015/16 figure of 328.
3. The number of Stage 2 complaints has risen from 46 for 2014/15 to 58 for 2015/16. However, this figure has already begun to reduce and for 1 April to 31 December 2016, a total of 36 Stage 2 complaints have been registered.
4. The number of Stage 3 complaints dropped from 35 for 2014/15 to 19 for 2015/16. For 1 April to 31 December 2016 a total of three Stage 3 complaints have been registered. No Stage 3 complaints have been registered since August 2016.
5. The number of investigations by the Housing and Local Government Ombudsman has remained constant when comparing 2014/15 of 14 with 2015/16 of 15. This is significant because by allowing an early escalation of complaints to the Ombudsman it has not resulted in significantly increasing the workload of the Ombudsman. If it did, we could be criticised for this.
6. With fewer Stage 2 and 3 complaints now being registered, it is saving officer and senior manager time in reviewing complaints. From a customer perspective, it also gives them an early opportunity to escalate their concerns to the Ombudsman rather than slavishly following a complaint process where the outcome is unlikely to change at Stages 2 and 3.