
TITLE: HANDLING OF CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

To: Regulatory & Support Services Committee

Date: 4th April 2016

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[Q236]

1.0 ISSUE

- 1.1 To consider the revised Customer Complaints Policy and handling process.
- 1.2 To consider the draft Policy for Handling Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION (S)

- 2.1 That the revised Customer Complaints Policy and handling process be approved.
- 2.2 That the draft Policy for Handling Unreasonable or Unreasonably Persistent Complainants be approved.

3.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS

- 3.1 The existing Customer Complaints Policy has not been reviewed since the introduction of a centralised Customer Services Team in 2007. It does not include the handling of comments, compliments and unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants, nor does it include a process to encourage learning from feedback to continually improve our services.

Complaints are recorded and monitored within each individual service area and lessons learnt are not shared nor publicised.

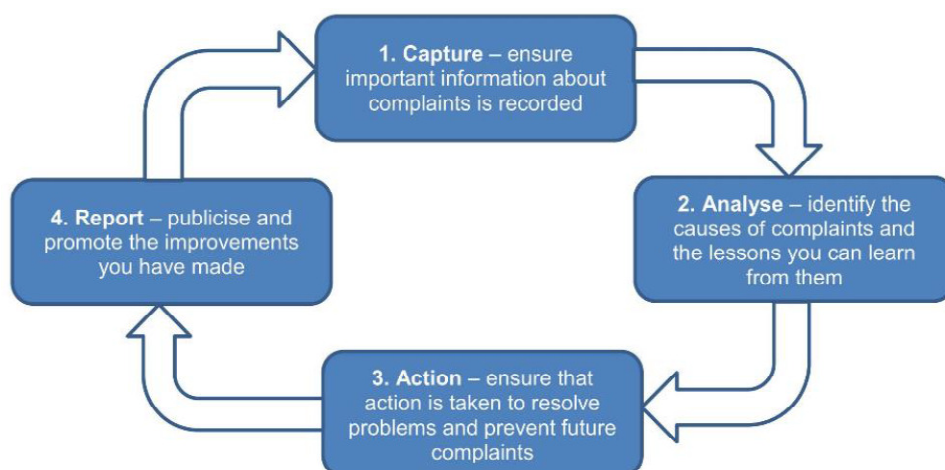
- 3.2 The draft Policy for Handling Unreasonable or Unreasonably Persistent Complainants is based on the Local Government Ombudsman guidance notes and the draft Vexatious Policy developed by the former Head of Legal Services.
- 3.3 Service Leads and Management Team have been consulted on the revised Customer Complaints Policy and the draft Policy for Handling Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants.

4.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Council believes that the needs of our customers are a priority and is committed to providing our customers with quality services in the most effective and efficient way possible.

To provide a consistent and equitable high level of service for all service users, staff need to be working to service standards, these should be publicised to clearly set out what customers can expect from us and include a formal complaints procedure through which dissatisfaction with services can be expressed.

- 4.2 The Council welcomes customer feedback, however collecting information is only valuable if it leads to actions being taken or informs service improvements. Compliments, comments and complaints are a valuable source of information about our services, which can help us identify, what is working well, recurring or underlying problems and potential service improvements. Learning from complaints is a continuous process made up of four key stages (see below) and coupled with other performance information will help build up an accurate picture of how each service is performing and whether it meets the need of its customers. Publicly celebrating improvements that have been made will prove to customers that complaints are taken seriously and are acted upon.



- 4.3 In the majority of cases investigating complaints is a straight forward process. The Council recognises that customers will exert pressure on the Council when making a complaint as they believe that the Council has failed in its service to them. Such pressure may be persistent, but in most cases this is reasonable and acceptable.

However, a small minority of complainants may pursue their complaints in ways that impede the investigation of the complaint, are abusive and aggressive or impose significant and disproportionate resource requirement on the authority. Although the Council does not seek to limit the contact complainants may make with officers or its Members the aim of the Policy for Handling Unreasonable or Unreasonably Persistent Complainants is to ensure such complainants are dealt with fairly, honestly and properly whilst protecting other service users, officers, Members and the Council against any detriment.

- 4.4 A centralised recording and monitoring system is key to ensuring consistency in the delivery and monitoring of complaints handling throughout the Council. As well as providing a holistic picture for Corporate Management Team and Council Members to focus their attention it will also provide a support framework for all services using the complaints process and generate efficiency savings as services will no longer be required to record, monitor and report on their own service's complaints.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no costs associated with this actual report; however there are efficiency savings to be gained by adhering to the processes e.g. streamlining/improving services to meet the needs of the customer or withdrawing the requirement for each service to record or monitor their own complaints.

6.0 APPENDICES

- 6.1 Revised Customer Complaints Policy
6.2 Draft Policy for Handling of Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

Background Documents

Location

Contact Officer

None

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Ely

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