

REPORT TO: **MANAGEMENT BOARD**

TITLE: **Corporate Complaints Handling Review**

DATE OF MEETING: **Management Board 14th May 2007**
Resource & Performance Scrutiny
Commission 6th June 2007
The Executive 20th June 2007
Standards Committee (for information only)
31st May 2007

Lead Executive Member: **Deputy Leader of the Council**

Project Sponsor **Mike Kelly, Deputy Chief Executive**

Project Lead Officer: **Karen Brockway**
Customer Contact Co-ordinator

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The former Performance Management Scrutiny Panel established the Complaints Working Group in January 2005 to investigate the council's procedures for dealing with complaints and make recommendations for improvement.

The work of this group led to an action plan being developed to review how complaints are handled across the Council. The purpose of this report is to summarise the work that has already been carried out and make recommendations for the future.

2. KEY MILESTONES FOR THIS PERIOD

An action plan prioritising further improvement work in this area was endorsed by the Executive (21 February 2007 – Minute Ex 1029).

Update report to Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission (6 June 2007) together with a copy of the Annual Complaints Report

12 month review of the Complaints System – Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission – 6 March 2008

3. PROGRESS TO DATE

Complaints Officers across the Council have been brought together to form a working group to deliver on the approved action plan. This has produced a number of initiatives to address the findings of the Members' review:

a. A clear definition of what is a 'complaint':

Evidence from the review revealed no distinction being made between complaints and service requests. This presented a misleading picture as to the council's level of customer care. To clarify the position, a complaint is now being defined as dissatisfaction with the operation of a particular council service. It may be about the standard of service received, delay, lack of communication, discourtesy or failure to consult.

Future literature will ask the public to let us know if:

- They think we have done something wrong;
- We have not done something we said we would do; or
- They are not satisfied with a particular service or set of services that we provide.

An initial request for service will not be treated as a complaint. For example, when people first let us know about a street light not working or want to report a pothole in the road, etc.

b A more responsive, listening council

The Council will be shortly introducing a Citizen Panel. Feedback from the Panel will give us more information on how well residents feel complaints are being handled.

As part of the regular monitoring process, the Complaints Officers group will be looking at the number of complaints received, the time taken to resolve complaints and continually review the complaints process.

c Contacting the Right Person

We have tackled this in two ways. Firstly, additional guidance and training is being offered on telephone techniques – to ensure calls are answered, voicemail is used appropriately, etc. In addition, the continuing development of the Customer Relationship Management System is enabling more calls to be dealt with via the Corporate Contact Centre, Reception Points and Council Information Points. This means that the citizen has better access to services and more enquiries can be dealt with at the 'first point of contact' without having to be put through to another number.

d Accountability for the complaints system

The Customer Services Administrator (Finance & e-Government Department) has now taken on the responsibility of owning the Complaints System. They will also act as an advocate for people who wish to make a complaint but find it difficult to navigate around the system.

In addition, the role of Departmental Complaints Officers has been clarified and agreement reached as to who takes ownership of co-ordinating a response to a complaint that may cut across departments/services.

e Monitoring Complaints performance

- (i) The Customer Relationship Management System will ultimately form the basis of how complaints are logged but it will be sometime before the CRM System is fully operational across the Council. Accordingly development work needs to take place on a 'back office' system so that complaints can be monitored more affectively.

Six Town Housing have developed a very good access database and the group is currently looking at whether this can be adopted corporately. This system would also include complaints that have been received by the Ombudsman and to also keep a log of all petitions received by the Council.

- (ii) As part of ongoing monitoring of the process, a 'Complainant' Satisfaction Survey will be undertaken and feedback sought from the Citizen Panel. There will also be a feedback sheet to complete by complainants and complaints will be used as scenarios when undertaking the Corporate Mystery Shopping exercise.
- (iii) A yearly report will be submitted to the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission outlining the number of complaints and performance across Chief Executive's, Children's Services and Environmental and Development Services departments. (Social Care report separately as they are bound by different statutory legislation)

f Staff Training in Customer Care

The Customer Care Charter has been recently reviewed and will be re-launched in the summer in readiness for the next Corporate Mystery Shopping exercise to be undertaken in September. The Complaints procedure will form part of that launch.

As part of the Customer Relationship Management Programme 'front line' staff are involved in a continuous training programme to develop their Customer Care skills.

g No Evidence of Learning

A 'Lessons Learned' pro forma is being introduced for completion after the complaint has been closed. This information is then used to identify what went wrong, what has been the outcome (has anything changed) and lessons to be learned. Complaints will be an agenda item on Departmental Management Team meetings. Lessons Learned will be discussed and what action has been taken.

On a monthly basis the Customer Services Administrator will receive a report outlining Lessons Learned which will then be published on the shared learning website and to Complaints Officers highlighting good practice.

The monthly meeting of the Complaints Officer Group will also discuss complaints that have been handled cross departmentally, highlighting successes and monitoring performance.

In scoping and developing the Complaints monitoring system there will be an opportunity to track complaints, identify common themes and highlight good practice.

h Transparency in the Process

As part of the review process, performance standards have been written and agreed so that irrespective of the method of contact all complaints will be logged and investigated consistently. The Standards also conclude that equal weight will be given to complaints irrespective of who has made the complaint be it a member of the public, Area Co-ordinator, Councillor or Member of Parliament.

In scoping the Corporate Complaints System consultation will take place as to what information Councillors who like to receive with regards to complaints within their Ward Boundary.

Please see Appendix 1(Parts A & B) for further information on the Procedure/Standards

4. OTHER AREAS OF WORK

Process Standards

In setting the standards expected when handling complaints the quality of the response to the complainant will also be under scrutiny. A checklist and scoring mechanism has been developed with which the Customer Services Administrator will randomly check the responses that have been sent out by departments.

Self Service

The public already has access to the current Corporate Complaints System 'Your Voice Counts' via the website. The will still be available but further development of the Corporate Customer Relationship Management System will replace the current Report a Problem web service with Request a Service. This will also help alleviate the confusion currently experienced when the public wish to make a complaint to the Council.

Scoping the New Complaints System

The initial thoughts as to what monitoring information would be required from a new system would be as follows:

- Total number of complaints
- % acknowledged within 5 day target
- % completed within 20 day target
- % completed within policy, but needed more time
- % of complaints closed
- % of feedback received as to how complaint dealt with
- Breakdown of complaints by ethnicity
- Breakdown of complaints by type
- Breakdown of complaints by contact method
- Total number of Petitions received and acknowledged
- Total number of complaints received from Ombudsman
- % number actioned within timescale 28 days
- Number of complaints received from a particular Ward Area (subject to upgrade of Graphical Information System)

Gathering this information via the system would give a comprehensive view of the complaints received and how they had been dealt with. This would also give information for BVPI 4 (% of complainants happy in which their complaint has been handled). The 2006 Residents Survey showed satisfaction has remained at 33% - the same as in 2003.

5. ISSUES

Progress on gaining access to information with regards to how many complaints come into the Authority and by which route has been slow. Some service areas do not use the current Corporate Complaints System resulting in incomplete monitoring information.

In order that we can provide a full and fair reflection of our position, Departmental Complaints Officers must adhere to corporate standards and input details as they are received into the Complaints System.

This first report highlights the lack of information that is available with regards to complaints coming into the Authority and by what means. It also highlights that lack of monitoring that currently takes place. The

statistical information (Appendix 2) shows the number of complaints that have been received from April 2006 to March 2007. (The statistical information contained within this report has been submitted by the Complaints Officers across the Council -excluding Social Care).

6. RISKS

There are two main risks to the successful completion of this review. In terms of systems, development time is needed to build a 'back office' system. Delays in delivering the necessary functionality would hamper our efforts to gather the data needed to improve complaints handling.

Perhaps the greatest risk however is if services do not abide by corporate standards and continue to deal with complaints without entering details in to the Complaints system. It is imperative that we have a consistent approach to dealing with complaints.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY (SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EIA)

Not applicable at this time.

8. FUTURE ACTIONS

There is still an amount of work needed to bring all services together in order to monitor complaints across the Council. To take this review to the next stage:

- A scoping exercise is required to look at the development work needed to build a 'back office' system
- The Complaints Officer Group need to adopt the standards and report each month on complaints received in each service area.
- The Group will continue to be lead by the Customer Services Administrator and as such will continually look to how improvements can be made in the way which the Council handles complaints and learns from best practice.

9. DECISIONS REQUIRED

Management Board are requested to:

- Note the good progress made so far to improve complaints handling
- Approve the next steps as outlined in Section 8 above
- Reaffirms the commitment to customer care and the need for all services to log complaints in line with corporate standards

- Approve the working towards the amalgamation of the Corporate Complaints System and Social Care System taking into account appropriate procedures and standards.
- Agree that a presentation to be made to Senior Officers Team on the review of the Corporate Complaint Handling and to ask for nominations for Complaints Officers from within respective service areas.