

Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet – 26 January 2021
Draft Updated Corporate Complaints and Feedback Policy

Accountable member	Councillor Alex Hegenbarth, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Accountable officer	Judy Hibbert, Customer Services Manager
Ward(s) affected	All
Key Decision	Yes
Executive summary	<p>The updated Corporate Complaints and Feedback Policy seeks to improve the customer experience throughout the complaint process. It allows the council to be flexible and pragmatic in the way complaints are handled depending upon the complaint and the complainant.</p> <p>The two clear stages of Investigate and Review, together with a supporting operational protocol, will help to ensure that a full investigation takes place at the Stage 1 Investigation stage, and simplifies the process for the customer. Many other local authorities have already moved away from a three stage process in favour of the two stage process. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman is supportive of a two stage process provided that matters are thoroughly investigated and reviewed during the two stage process.</p> <p>The policy and supporting protocol will help drive greater consistency in our responses to complaints and improve the customer experience through openness and transparency.</p> <p>This new policy has been developed on latest best practice and in line with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) new guidance on effective complaint handling (October 2020).</p>
Recommendations	<p>Cabinet is recommended to approve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adoption of the updated draft Corporate Complaints and Feedback Policy 2. Regular reporting of Key Performance information using the Clearview reporting system with an annual report to Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive Leadership team together with a summary of learning. 3. To delegate authority to the Customer Services Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, in respect of future updates to this policy.

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Financial implications	None as a direct result of this report Contact officer: Clare Williams, clare.williams@publicagroup.uk 01285 623472
Legal implications	None as a direct result of this report. Contact officer: One Legal, legal.services@tewkesbury.gov.uk, 01684 272012
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	None as a direct result of this report however once approved the new policy will need to be cascaded to all relevant employees and training on the new policy rolled out. Contact officer: Julie McCarthy julie.mccarthy@publicagroup.uk 01242 264355
Key risks	Risk Assessment in Appendix 1
Corporate and community plan Implications	This update supports the council's corporate priority ' <i>Delivering services to meet the needs of our residents and communities</i> '. Listening to and learning from customer feedback will inform decisions in respect of the services delivered A community impact assessment has not been completed as the proposed changes will not impact upon any service delivery for any citizens.
Environmental and climate change implications	None as a direct result of this report
Property/Asset Implications	None as a direct result of this report

1. Background

- 1.1** The Council is committed to providing excellent customer service first time, every time. We realise that sometimes we fall short and where customers are not satisfied then a clear and simple complaints process is required to put this right. We welcome feedback, positive or negative. We want to recognise individuals and teams who have provided excellent service and work hard to improve service where it is not as good as it should be.
- 1.2** The current policy in respect of complaints and feedback and the supporting processes were last reviewed over 10 years ago. A review was required to ensure that the council provides the best experience for complainants, takes on board learnings and also recognises complimentary feedback regarding services.
- 1.3** Over the past ten years the council's working environment has become more complex, with an increasing number of services being provided by third party organisations on its behalf. The complaints policy needs to reflect these new working arrangements as well as best practice in complaints management.
- 1.4** The current three stage policy creates a lengthy and drawn out process which is frustrating for the customer and is not cost effective for the council. Creating a dynamic and flexible 2 stage approach will enable the council to adopt a clear and transparent approach to complaint handling and enable complaints to be resolved in the most effective and efficient way.
- 1.5** Historic arrangements have resulted in built environment complaints being recorded in a separate register. This has previously led to delayed responses to complaints and increased customer dissatisfaction. In future built environment complaints will be recorded on the corporate complaints register.
- 1.6** Current reporting on complaints is minimal; updating the policy will allow us to determine the scope and timeframe of reporting to provide learning for the service areas and council. Identifying learnings from complaints and implementing changes reduces the likelihood of maladministration, compensation awards and reputational damage.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1** The LGSCO released new best practise guidance on complaint handling in October 2020; the timing of our update coincides to allow us to align our policy with their recommendations.
- 2.2** A dynamic and flexible approach will allow each complaint to be investigated on its own merits, providing the best approach for each complainant.
- 2.3** The new policy provides an opportunity to change attitudes towards complaints; moving to a strategic focus on learning rather than number of complaints will drive the right culture around complaint handling.
- 2.4** The new two stage policy and supporting protocols will improve the standard of investigations and responses, ensuring that a consistent level of investigation and review is adopted across all service areas.
- 2.5** The two clear stages of Investigate and Review, together with a supporting operational protocol, will help to ensure that a full investigation takes place at the Stage 1 Investigation stage. The

focus will be on the investigating officer undertaking a thorough investigation at the outset. There will no longer be a stage two for a follow-up investigation. Stage 2 will be the review stage; as well as reviewing the complaint it will review the investigation, thereby providing a robust two stage process. The Investigate and Review stages will be undertaken by different officers.

- 2.6 The Customer Relations Officer will support investigators and undertake quality and completeness checks of responses prior to them being issued. The check will also assess language and tone of the response, proposed remedies and also that a suitable apology has been made where appropriate.

3. **Alternative options considered**

- 3.1 **Not changing the policy.** This option was disregarded as the current 3 stage approach does not provide the best customer experience and does not make the best use of council resources. The current reporting does not provide for learnings.

4. **How this initiative contributes to the corporate plan**

- 4.1 Complaints can be seen as a barometer of external opinion and as an early warning of problems that might otherwise stay unseen. One of the priorities of the 2019-2023 Corporate Plan is to ***deliver services to meet the needs of our residents and communities***; we cannot succeed in this without listening to and learning from customer feedback.
- 4.2 Improving services; early resolution to issues and identifying learning will increase customer satisfaction and better utilise our resource.
- 4.3 We can achieve value for money for the tax payer by providing resource efficiencies and limiting maladministration compensation through effective complaint handling and learnings.

5. **Consultation and feedback**

- 5.1 As part of the consultation and research the complaints policies of 10 other local authorities were reviewed.
- 5.2 A recent audit of the complaints procedure made the following recommendations:
- All complaints to be logged centrally.
 - Bringing the reporting together with the use of Clearview.

- 5.3 A number of service managers have been consulted and are supportive of the proposals

6. **Performance management –monitoring and review**

- 6.1 Updating the policy creates the opportunity to introduce Complaint KPIs.
- 6.2 The LGSCO recommends reporting on complaint handling at least annually and to make this information available to the public.
- 6.3 Reporting will focus on the learnings from complaints, and on implementing the recommendations for improvements that help prevent the same thing from going wrong again.

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Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Risk Assessment 2. Draft Updated Corporate Complaints and Feedback Policy 3. Third Parties arrangements
Background information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) guidance on effective complaint handling (October 2020)

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
1	Risk of reputational damage if there is not a robust policy in place	Judy Hibbert	08/01/21	2	1	2	Accept	Cabinet approves the policy for implementation	08/01/21	Judy Hibbert	

Explanatory notes

Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)

Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6
(1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)

Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close