

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Corporate Performance Panel		
DATE:	21 October 2019		
TITLE:	Corporate Complaint Policy		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Policy Development		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Performance		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Honor Howell – Assistant Director		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	Yes

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

<p>PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:</p> <p>The borough council strives to provide excellent services to our customers, visitors and businesses, and to deliver those services right first time. Occasionally, customers may be dissatisfied with council services and will make a complaint about the service they have received. The current process focusses on the administration of complaints so a thorough review of the process has been conducted to drive greater consistency, reflect best practice, improve customer experience, and to ensure all complaints are dealt with appropriately.</p>
<p>KEY ISSUES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The draft policy has been developed on best practice and according to advice from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman • Clear definitions of what constitutes a complaint are not currently available • Clearer timescales in the handling of complaints are required
<p>OPTIONS CONSIDERED:</p> <p>Not applicable</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS:</p> <p>The draft corporate complaints policy is presented to the Corporate Performance Panel for feedback and recommended approval.</p>
<p>REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:</p> <p>To ensure the council has a robust, consistent and easily accessible policy for both staff, members and customers to manage the complaints process and associated expectations.</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk aims to provide excellent services to customers and to deliver those services right first time. Occasionally things do go wrong and customers will make a complaint about the service they have received or about a decision or outcome they do not believe is correct.
- 1.2 A recent project to improve the monitoring and administration of corporate complaints highlighted a requirement to review the complaints policy to better reflect customer requirements, improve the effectiveness of services and to reflect best practice from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

2. Current Procedure

- 2.1 The existing procedure for corporate complaints does not always provide the appropriate mechanism to resolve an issue. The three stages can result in the same issues being covered repeatedly without further information or resolution; and the definition of a complaint is too broad. This can lead to dispute over policy and formal decisions that cannot be resolved through the complaints process. This causes delay and frustration for the customer.

3. Compliance with Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- 3.1 Complaints other than for social care are not subject to a statutory process. However, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) publishes good practice guidance for councils on running a complaints system. It includes advice on broad principles for effective complaints management and on key issues for policies and procedures. This guidance has been used in the review of the policy.

4. Proposed Policy

- 4.1 The draft policy places emphasis on the informal resolution of complaints at the point of service delivery level. For complaints entering the formal system, the policy is designed to enable efficient and effective resolution with a two-stage process and reduced overall timescales to avoid duplication and improve efficiency.

- 4.2 The policy incorporates:

- A clear definition of a complaint
- A two stage process with limits on timescales to bring the council in line with the LGO
- A fair approach to the escalation of a complaint

- 4.3 The explanation in the policy of complaints, which fall outside the scope of the policy, is not intended to discourage complaints from customers. The aim is to encourage customers to use the most appropriate path for their complaint. This could be an appeal or tribunal process. An example of this would be a customer filling in a complaint form in respect of a housing benefit claim, which should be classed as an appeal and should be processed as such.

5. Training

- 5.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman offer training to Councils to assist the administration of their complaints processes. The council has booked this training for spring 2020 and all members of staff involved in the administration of complaints will be attending.

6. Social Media Complaints

- 6.1 Some customers can raise issues/complaints via the council's social media outlets such as Facebook or twitter. These are usually service requests, which are straightforward to resolve. However, if it is clear it is a complaint, wherever possible, the council will attempt to take the complaint offline and communicate with the customer via email. They will be requested to complete a complaint form to enable the council to consider the complaint according to the full process.

7. Issues for the panel to consider

- 7.1 The panel is requested to review the new corporate complaints policy and to provide feedback and recommendation on the proposal.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 Cost of providing training, which is £1,500 for one day's training for up to 15 members of staff.

9. Any other implications/risks

None

10. Equal opportunity considerations

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) pre-screening has been completed and highlighted a requirement for a full EIA. This is due to be considered by the Corporate Equalities Group at the December meeting and will accompany the Cabinet report on 7th January 2020.
- 10.2 The council has a separate policy for the management of complaints when the person making the complaint believes that they have been treated differently or unfairly because of whom they are. This covers all protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 Consultation has taken place with the retired Chief Executive, Lorraine Gore, Chief Executive Officer, Management Team, Democratic Services Manager, Personnel, Policy and Performance Manager and the Assistant Director, Development Services.

12. Background Papers

<https://lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/guidance-notes>