

Decision Session - Cabinet Member for
Corporate Services

20 December 2011

Report of the Director of CBSS

Customer Feedback Policy & Procedures

Summary

1. This report presents a revision of the council's Customer Complaints Policy (now referred to as the draft Customer Feedback Policy) for approval, incorporating changes as identified in a review of complaints by the Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny Committee published on 21 January 2011 (see appendix A for recommendations).
2. The Cabinet Member is asked to consider a further amendment to include a new 5 day response deadline for Stage 1 complaints in line with a Cabinet priority for 2011/12.

Background

3. In late 2010 the Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny Committee established a Task Group to review customer complaints and as a result there were a number of recommendations made to improve arrangements and produce a revised Policy. Members of the Committee agreed on 21 January 2011 that the draft Policy (see Appendix B) would be submitted for approval to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, at the point that the new Customer Feedback Team (CFT) had been formed.
4. The CFT (from November 2011) now forms part of Customer Services within the Customer & Business Support Directorate, having previously formed the core of the Housing and Social Care team in the Adults, Children and Education Directorate. The existing team with current workloads continue to work in the same capacity as before, and will do so until the draft policy is approved or otherwise.

5. Further resources are required to supplement the team in order to provide a council-wide service. In the meantime the team will work with contacts in all directorates on the implementation of the new policy. This will be for an interim period to assess resourcing needs and then further recommendations will be made to senior management on the appropriate structure to deliver the full service for all directorates.
6. One of the Cabinet's promises to residents from May 2011 was to implement a 5 day response time to all complaints. This commitment was made a number of months after the work of the Scrutiny Committee which confirmed the following timescales for each stage of the Feedback process:
 - a. Stage 1 – 10 day response*
 - b. Stage 2 – 20 day response
 - c. Stage 3 – 20 day response

**The complainant will be advised of the outcome within 10 working days or advised of any delay and when they can expect an outcome.*

Consultation

7. Directorate staff who process complaints within directorates were involved in the data collection for the original proposals as part of the Customer Services MoreforYork workstream and then for the scrutiny review.
8. The development of a centralised resource and a single approach to complaints processing was briefly discussed at the Equalities Advisory Group (EAG) Fair held in November 2011. The approach to bringing together the handling and monitoring of complaints/feedback was well received and positive comments made. No negative comments or issues were raised.

Options

9.
 - a. The Cabinet Member is asked to approve the revised Customer Feedback Policy, as recommended by Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny Committee (21 January 2011).

- b. Alternatively the Cabinet Member is asked to approve the revised Feedback Policy, as recommended by the Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny Committee (21 January 2011) with the following amendment to Stage 1 of the process:

The complainant will be advised of the outcome within 5 working days or advised of any delay and when they can expect an outcome.

Analysis

10. As transparency of the monitoring of complaints, feedback and eventually Freedom of Information requests improves, it is expected that, initially, the number of transactions will increase during the initial period of implementation. The size of this increase is unknown at this stage.
11. The implementation of a 5 day response may result in an increase in failure to meet the target or a high rate of holding responses in the system which would need tracking very carefully.
12. Conversely the implementation of a 5 day response rate could result in a greater level of satisfaction from a resident in having their concern addressed quickly and efficiently.

Council Plan

13. The creation of the Customer Feedback Team in Customer & Business Support Services, and the development of the Policy has links both with the Cabinet's objectives and the Council's corporate priorities, as set out in the Council's Plan 2011-15, to help to deliver its **Core Capabilities**. The effective use of customer feedback and complaints will enable us to remove service / council wide inefficiencies and add value to customer experience and satisfaction.

Implications

14. **Financial** – After an interim period, proposals will be made to the Director of CBSS on the appropriate resources needed to centralise all complaints, feedback and Freedom of Information activity within the new team in Customer Services.

- **Human Resources (HR)** – As above. Efficiencies could result in a reduction in posts needed across the council to deal with customer feedback activities.
- **Equalities** – See consultation activity above. In the future the customer IT system in use in Customer Services could be developed to include customer feedback activities, and will allow us to hold details of residents' protected characteristics. Customer Feedback questionnaires include equalities questions as per the council's standard approach.
- **Legal** - There are no implications (see risks below, however).
- **Crime and Disorder** - There are no implications
- **Information Technology (IT)** - There are no implications in relation to the initial team setup, however, this may change if the processes can be delivered through the customer system in use in Customer Services.
- **Property** - There are no implications
- **Other** – The new processes could result in an initial increase in the number of complaints recorded. The majority of these are likely to be at Stage 1.

Risk Management

15. There would be potentially a significant reputational and financial impact if the new processes are not delivered effectively and result in lengthening response times to complaints and Freedom of Information requests. This could result in a greater likelihood of complaints and complaints to the Information Commissioner, resulting in possible financial penalties and negative publicity.

Recommendation

16. The Cabinet Member is asked to approve the revised policy as recommended by the Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 21 January 2011 with the following amendment at Stage 1 of the process:

The complainant will be advised of the outcome within 5 working days or advised of any delay and when they can expect an outcome.

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**Report
Approved**

Date 6th Dec 2011

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**Report
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Date 6th Dec 2011

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Corporate Customer Complaints Policy

Annexes

- A. Recommendations of the Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny Committee Review into Customer Complaints
- B. Revised Draft Customer Feedback Policy & Procedures