
Executive

29 March 2011

Report of the Assistant Director of Governance and ICT

Customer Complaints Policy Review – Final Report

Summary

1. This report presents the final report from the Task Group set up by the Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny Committee to carry out a review of Customer Complaints procedures. The report asks the Executive to approve the resulting recommendations. Councillor Firth, Chair of the Task Group, will be attendance to present the report.

Background

2. In coming to a decision to review this topic, the Committee recognised certain key objectives and the following remit was agreed:

3. **Aim**

To inform the design and priorities within the new complaints function in order to ensure its future effectiveness, identifying any revisions required to the Feedback Policy.

Objectives

Having regard to the impact of traffic congestion (based on external evidence and those measures already implemented in LTP1 or proposed in LTP2), recommend and prioritise specific improvements to:

- i. Reduce the number of common or repeat complaints.
- ii. Reduce the number of complaints to the Ombudsman.
- iii. Contribute to possible further efficiency savings
- iv. Improve the customer experience (customer satisfaction to be measured and monitored).

Consultation

4. The Assistant Director Customers & People attended all the meetings of the Task Group to assist them in their work on this review.
5. Also, at a meeting on 8 December 2010, the Task Group met with representatives from Directorates to discuss complaint statistics gathered from each directorate and their current working practices.

Options

6. Having considered the findings contained within the final report the Executive may chose to support all, some or none of the recommendations shown below.

Summary of Recommendations Arising from the Review

7. The Effective Organisation Overview & Committee agreed the following recommendations, as proposed by the Task Group:

Recommendation	Executive Comments
<p>1. To assist the public, the new corporate policy to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • definitions of a service request and a stage 1 complaint • the adult social services and children’s social care services complaints procedures as appendices 	
<p>2. Wording of policy to be revised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at Stage 1 to be revised as per paragraph 10 • at stage 2 to be revised to reflect that a complainant does not have to set out their complaint again at Stage 2, as per paragraph 11 • Removal of wording at Stage 3 – ‘or a member of staff independent of the service acting on the Director’s behalf’ 	
<p>3. In regard to training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and provide relevant training for the different stages of complaint handling/investigation for key officers within the corporate complaints team • provide Councillors with training in a range of formats to suit their individual needs 	
<p>4. Service requests to be recorded, tracked and monitored by Directorates to allow for early identification of required service improvements, without being fed into the customer complaints data analysis and reports</p>	
<p>5. Provide suitable access to the Complaints Team :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain dedicated telephone number for social care clients • Provide dedicated email address for team 	
<p>6. In regard to customer feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For stage one complaints, no acknowledgement letter is required • All written responses to complaints to be 	

checked and sent out by the central team	
7. In regard to Questionnaires: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For stage one, only be sent out to every 20th complainant • For stage two & three complaints, to be sent out with all response letters 	
8. Following the introduction of the new policy, Effective Organisation O & S Committee to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receive 6-monthly monitoring reports on its implementation • be consulted on any future revisions • receive annual report on complaints statistics at the beginning of each municipal year 	

11. As the scrutiny review took place at the same time as the new Customer Complaints Policy was being drafted by officers, many of the changes recommended by the Task Group above, have already been taken on board and any associated changes required to the draft policy were made as part of the process.

Corporate Strategy

12. This review supports the Council's Effective Organisation priority around 'providing what customers want'.

Implications

13. **Financial & HR** - More for York savings are associated with the centralisation of complaints teams. In regard to Recommendation 3, the Task Group recognised that front line staff have a crucial role to play in presenting the face of the authority to the public, particularly when dealing with service users when they have problems. They also play an important part in the early resolution of complaints, to the benefit of service users and the authority and the Task Group agreed it was therefore essential they were appropriately trained in how to:
- properly identify and handle the type of enquiry being received e.g. the type of issues that can be resolved at first point of contact.
 - maintain a corporate record of them using the processes and procedures in place
 - provide appropriate feedback to customers
14. The Task Group agreed that key officers within the new corporate complaints team would benefit from receiving the complaints training offered by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). It was noted that they run a range of one-day courses aimed at helping local authorities to improve their responses to complaints. All their courses are presented by experienced investigators who have genuine practical expertise in complaint handling, giving participants the opportunity to practise the skills needed to deal with complaints positively and efficiently. Those key officers could then disseminate the training to others in the complaints team.

15. There will be a financial implication associated with providing this training to key officers. The cost of the LGO courses depends on the number of delegates i.e. courses for up to 15 people - £1,025, Courses for up to 30 - £1,735. If a course was to be shared with other local authorities, the cost per delegate would be £130 (costs correct as of December 2010).
16. **Equalities** All proposals contained in the Customer Strategy have been fully consulted upon and the work is covered by an Equalities Impact Assessment.
17. **Legal** Improvement of complaints handling may contribute to less cases reaching the Ombudsman. Centralisation of Freedom of Information requests will aid compliance with legislation on this matter.
18. **Information Technology (IT)** Resources are committed to providing the technology necessary for the newly centralised team.
19. There are no Crime and Disorder, Property or other implications.

Risk Management

20. Improvement in the management of complaints and resulting service improvement will reduce the risk of negative publicity and the Ombudsman publicly criticising the council for maladministration. Improvement in the processing of Freedom of Information requests will minimise risks of the Information Commissioner imposing large fines on the organisation relating to its use of information.

Recommendations

21. The Executive are recommended to approve the recommendations arising from the Customer Complaints Policy Scrutiny Review.

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Specialist Implications Officer(s): N/A

Wards Affected: All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: N/A

Annexes: Annex A – Final Report (A5 Booklet Form)