
MEETING	CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS SCRUTINY REVIEW TASK GROUP
DATE	19 NOVEMBER 2010
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS FIRTH (CHAIR), CRISP AND GUNNELL

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda. None were declared.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes from the last meeting, held on 4 November 2010, be approved as a correct record.

7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak under the council's Public Participation Scheme.

8. CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS REVIEW - INTERIM REPORT.

Members considered a report that presented information gathered to date in support of the Customer Complaints scrutiny review. The report also asked Members to identify relevant consultees and any additional information required in support of the review.

Members discussed the following issues:

(i) Corporate Customer Feedback Policy

Further consideration was given to the proposed wording of the Corporate Customer Feedback Policy in respect of Stage 1 complaints. It was agreed that the following wording should be included "*The process for escalating a service request to Stage 1 of the complaints procedure is in the hands of the complainant who will indicate, either verbally to an officer or in writing, that they are not satisfied with the response to/outcome of their service request*".

(ii) Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

Consideration was given to the Table of Complaints received by LGO in 2009/10 and to the LGO annual report detailing CYC complaints (Annexes A and B of the report).

Members agreed that although there were not an excessive number of complaints, there was room for improvement. The intention should also be to deal with any complaint as early as possible.

Members were concerned to note that the council's average response time had worsened and was significantly outside the target time of 28 days. Officers stated that the new corporate tracking system should ensure that complaints were dealt with in a timely basis and could be more effectively controlled. Members suggested that, as part of the flag system, the Chief Executive should be notified of any complaints that reached the red stage.

It was noted that each of the stages would be time limited and that data would be provided to ensure that management teams were aware of their progress. Members suggested that data on complaints should be presented to managers on a monthly basis. It was noted that managers and directors would also have access to the IT system to enable them to track the progress of a particular complaint.

Members requested that LGO forms were made more widely available in council buildings.¹

(iii) Number and Type of Complaints Received by CYC since 1 January 2010

Consideration was given to the statistics in regard to Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs), complaints from the public, Councillor requests/enquiries and LGO referrals for 2010, as detailed in Annex C of the report.

Members were concerned to note the inconsistency between directorates in respect of the recording of complaints.

Members queried the accuracy of some of the figures, including those relating to the number of Stage 1 complaints in the Chief Executive's Office, although it was noted that some of these were then passed to the relevant department which may have resulted in double counts. They also queried why the cumulative totals for the two periods were significantly different. It was agreed that further information was required on these issues.

(iv) Members' Reporting of Complaints

It was noted that, partly because of the lack of confidence in the Members' Portal, Members were currently reporting complaints in a variety of ways, including contacting senior officers direct. Whilst it

was acknowledged that Members had been seeking to resolve problems as soon as possible, it was recognised that by not using a central point of contact, it was difficult to maintain accurate statistics in respect of the number of complaints or to track their progress. There needed to be a clear gateway in place to receive Members' complaints and for these to be recorded and speedily forwarded to the relevant officer.

(v) Training

Consideration was given to the information that had been provided in respect of the training offered by the LGO. Members agreed that one of the recommendations arising from the review would be to ensure that appropriate training on complaints was provided for staff and Members. They put forward the following suggestions in respect of the training:

- Relevant officers should attend the LGO training on the handling of complaints and could then cascade the information to other members of staff.
- Training requirements should be reviewed on an annual basis.
- Consideration should be given to sharing training opportunities and costs with other authorities; this could possibly involve the North Yorkshire Connect Partnership.

(vi) Social Care Complaints

It was noted that statutory procedures were in place in respect of the handling of complaints about social care. It was intended to use this example of best practice in developing processes for the handling of complaints about other aspects of the council's services. The experience and expertise of the team that handled the social care complaints would also be utilised.

(vii) Member Scrutiny of Complaints

Consideration was given as to how best there could be Member scrutiny regarding complaints processes and data. Members suggested that the data should be presented to a relevant committee on an annual basis.

(viii) Service Standards

At the request of Members, officers gave details of current service standards and proposed amendments that would be considered by CMT and Executive. Members suggested that, in the recording of complaints, a box should be included to indicate whether the complaint had escalated from a service request. It was noted that the new system should be a driver for service improvement and therefore it was important to identify how complaints had resulted in service improvements.

(ix) Ongoing Changes to New Corporate Customer Feedback Policy

Officers gave a verbal update on changes to the new Corporate Customer Feedback Policy. It was proposed that the draft policy would incorporate suggestions put forward by the Task Group and that it would form an annex to the final report. Members agreed that the draft revised policy should be considered by the Task Group at the meeting scheduled for 5 January 2011.

RESOLVED: That the Task Group's workplan be updated to reflect the following:

- (i) Officers from directorates to be requested to attend the next meeting to provide further information on the following issues:
 - Explanation of the complaints statistics for their directorate
 - Current procedures (including response timescales)
 - How the statistics have been used to drive service improvements
- (ii) The draft of the "New Corporate Customer Feedback Policy" to be considered at the meeting on 11 January 2011 with a view to this forming an annex to the final report.

REASON: To progress this review in line with scrutiny procedures, protocols and workplans.

Action Required

1. Check LGO forms are readily available

PS

Councillor P Firth, Chair

[The meeting started at 2.30 pm and finished at 3.45 pm].