
MEETING	CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS SCRUTINY REVIEW TASK GROUP
DATE	4 NOVEMBER 2010
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS CRISP, FIRTH AND GUNNELL

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED: That Councillor Firth be appointed as Chair of the Customer Complaints Scrutiny Review Task Group.

2. 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.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

4. CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS REVIEW - SCOPING REPORT.

Members considered a report which provided information gathered to date in support of the Customer Complaints scrutiny review.

Consideration was given to the remit and timeframe for the review, as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report.

Members discussed the following issues:

(i) Complaints to the Ombudsman

Members requested that information on complaints to the Ombudsman be presented at the next meeting. It was hoped that this would identify whether there were a number of complaints that the council may have been able to resolve at an earlier stage.

(ii) Complaints Project Plan

Consideration was given to progress in implementing the Complaints Project Plan, as detailed in Annex C of the report. Members queried why some of the timescales within the plan had not been met. Officers gave details of the prioritisation that was

taking place in respect of IT development work, including the officer time that was currently allocated to the CANs developments.

Details were given of the way in which Members would be able to use the system to record complaints and to monitor their progress. Members expressed their support for a central recording system but stated that, in addition to this, they would wish to retain direct access to the relevant officers.

At the request of Members, details were given of the procedures that would be in place to ensure that deadlines in respect of the handling of complaints were met, including the use of electronic flag alerts.

Officers confirmed that there would be the time and opportunity for recommendations from the task group to be taken into account when the developments were made and before the system went live. It would also be helpful to involve Members at the testing stage.

(iii) Possible Revisions to Policy and Procedures

Consideration was given to the Corporate Customer Feedback Policy and Procedures dated April 2009. It was noted that officers had already identified some possible changes on which it would be helpful to consult with the task group.

Members raised the following issues in respect of the policy:

- There needed to be greater clarity in defining service requests and complaints. Whilst it was recognised that there were benefits in recording service requests for analysis by service areas, it was important that these were not included in the data on the number of complaints.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the requirement to “escalate” a complaint to Stage 1 and the lack of clarity as to how this was implemented. It was suggested that the complaints procedure should commence at Stage 1.
- The wording at Stage 1 of the procedure should be amended to read “should be advised of the outcome within 10 working days *or advised of any delay and when they can expect the outcome...*”
- It was not appropriate for a complainant to have to set out their complaint again at Stage 2. It may be antagonistic to expect the complainant to provide information that they had already supplied at Stage 1 of the procedure.
- At Stage 3 of the procedure, the wording “*or a member of staff independent of the service acting on the Director’s behalf*” should be removed. Whilst it was acknowledged that a Director might delegate the investigation of a complaint to an Assistant Director, it was important that the procedure recognised that the responsibility for handling the complaint rested with the Director.

(iv) Training

- It was essential that staff were appropriately trained in how to handle complaints, including the processes and procedures in place to maintain a corporate record of complaints and feedback.
- Consideration could be given to using the complaints training offered by the Ombudsman. Officers were requested to look into this possibility, including the costs involved, and report back to the next meeting. Consideration could also be given to sharing training with other authorities.
- Training should be offered to Members on the capabilities and use of the new Complaints IT system.

Consideration was given to the workplan for the review, including future meeting dates.

RESOLVED: (i) That future meeting dates be as follows:

Friday 19 November 2010 at 2.30 pm:

Receive interim report presenting:

- Information on national best practice regarding the handling of complaints etc by local authorities e.g. centralised or not and relevant extracts from the most recent annual Ombudsman Report.
- Directorate information on number and type of complaints received since 1 January 2010 including:
 - Complaints from public
 - Councillor requests/inquiries
 - Complaints to Ombudsman
 - FOIs
- Information on complaints training offered by the Ombudsman and the associated costs.
- Current leaflet detailing complaints procedure
- An update on progress on the Complaints Project Plan

Identify:

- Relevant consultees and any issues to be addressed through consultation at the next meeting
- Any additional information required

Wednesday 8 December 2010 at 2.00 pm:

Receive interim report and consult with relevant parties.

Based on information gathered, suggest any:

- Possible further efficiency savings
- Further improvements to customer experience

Wednesday 5 January 2011 at 2.00 pm:

Consider final report containing suggested recommendations.

- (ii) That the approval of the Effective Organisation Overview and Scrutiny Committee be sought for the final report to be presented to the committee at their meeting on Tuesday 22 February 2011 rather than 11 January 2011 should this prove necessary.

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

Councillor P Firth, Chair

[The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 2.45 pm].