

THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2017

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ASSETS AND FINANCE**REVISED TELL US POLICY****PURPOSE**

To update Cabinet of the changes to the existing Tell Us Policy. The introduction of these changes will:

- Seek to remove one stage of the complaints process - Tell Us Policy (stage 3)
- Put the ownership of more serious case/complaint reviews (current stage 3 complaints) back to the appropriate Heads of Service and service areas.
- Ensure that member's complaints follow the same recording process as all other complaints.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **That Cabinet endorse the changes to the Tell Us Policy.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'Tell Us' is widely used and understood by customers and provides a vehicle for customers to give feedback to the Council and in return provides a framework in which the Council can respond. The Policy and process ensures that the correct and consistent procedures, levels and standards of service are set and are followed regarding any issues raised by our customers.

As we work to continually transform the Council strategy, policy and process need to be reviewed and aligned to ensure that we are adapting to the changing needs of customers and adopting best practice guidance.

Best practice in relation to the investigation and handling of complaints has changed focus, and our ethos of first time resolution means that we should seek to resolve issues before they become complaints. This is becoming easier as we continue to build the Customer Services Centre.

Improvements in managing customers' expectations, providing them with an understanding of the services that the Council provides and the standards that we work to is an on-going journey and part of the evolution of corporate Customer Services. Customer behaviour towards the council is changing due to the Council enforcing its policies, becoming more proactive and a customer empowering organisation. The dependency relation that once existed between customers and the Council has historically led to the Council being reactive and potentially focussing resource on the wrong things. The Council aims to focus its resources on those who need it most and are most vulnerable.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Training on the changes to the policy and letter writing skills will be undertaken, but costs

can be met within existing budgetary provision.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

The Council must have a procedure in place whereby a customer can make a complaint before progression to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The Tell Us policy and procedure provides a framework to support those detailed in the Local Government Act 1974(Part iii, Section 26). The LGO's interpretation of this Act is "For a valid complaint to be made, a complainant must have suffered injustice through maladministration by the authority concerned. He/she should also have made use of the authority's own complaints procedure before approaching the LGO".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tell Us

In 2009, we introduced an additional stage in the Tell Us process – Stage 3. The purpose was to provide an independent investigation (conducted by the Head of Customer Services and presented to a member of the Corporate Management Team, independent from the service area being complained about) into escalated complaints and also to reduce the number of complaints referred to LGO. These objectives have been achieved;

- In 2009, 17 complaints were made to the LGO by customers, 10 of which were premature complaints and overall 8 investigated by the LGO.
- In 2017, 7 complaints were made to the LGO by customers, 0 complaints were premature and overall 2 were investigated by the LGO.

Additionally, the performance of the Council has also progressed significantly following the numerous transformation exercises undertaken, along with the quality of the information that we have in order to respond to and investigate complaints.

Changes to the Policy-

In line with best practice, it is recommended that the number of stages within the complaints process is reduced from three down to two:

1. First formal complaint – usually to be dealt with by service operations managers.
2. Second formal complaint – to the Head of Service.

The LGO states "The law does not allow us to investigate some issues. We cannot usually look at a complaint if:

- you have left it more than 12 months since knowing about the problem."

In line with the LGO recommendations we have introduced a time bound complaints process and increased the length of time to investigate escalated complaints.

The Head of Customer Services will oversee the Tell Us policy and process, provide advice on complaints where needed and will provide an annual summary performance report for Cabinet. All complaints about officer's conduct will be reviewed by the Head of Customer Services but will be dealt with in accordance with internal conduct procedures (if applicable).

Complaints about service made by elected members on behalf of constituents will also be recorded via the Tell Us process in order to ensure that those complaints are also recorded

and managed effectively. Intelligence gathered about these issues will be collated and analysed in the same way as if a customer is making direct representations. These will not however, be included in the two stages of the complaints process.

REPORT AUTHOR

Tracey Tudor

APPENDICES.

Appendix 1 Tell Us Policy.

Appendix 2 Community Impact Assessment.

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