



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

CABINET

11 FEBRUARY 2013

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

Report of the Cabinet Member for Communications - Councillor Mark Loveday

Open Report. Yes

Classification - For Decision

Key Decision: Yes

Wards Affected: All

Accountable Executive Director: Jane West, Executive Director for Finance & Corporate Governance.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Council currently has a three stage complaints policy. Since the introduction of icasework in 2010 the Council's overall management of complaints has improved to the extent that we are now in a position to introduce a streamlined two stage complaints policy that will be less time consuming and have other tangible benefits to customers and the Council.
- 1.2. This report explains why officers consider that it is now time to update the complaints policy, what the new policy comprises of and the steps that have been taken to ensure a smooth transition.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the new Corporate Complaints Policy be approved and implemented with effect from 1 April 2013.
- 2.2 That the new model for managing Stage 2 complaints be agreed and implemented for all Stage 2 complaints recorded after 31 March 2013.

3. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 3.1. The volume of complaints being made and the proportion of these escalating is decreasing to such an extent that it is now considered possible to remove the third, and final, stage of the current complaints procedure, in order to bring about swifter resolutions for our residents and customers.
- 3.2. Support at the front end of the process with more emphasis on resolving the complaint at the earliest opportunity. In addition to being more convenient to the customer, the early resolution of a complaint avoids the need for a potentially costly investigation and reduces the likelihood of having to award compensation because of delays in remedying the problem.
- 3.3. Training continues to be carried out in department to improve the effectiveness of complaints handling; also we are developing an eLearning package.
- 3.4. We are currently in discussion with our Tri-borough colleagues to explore the possibility of aligning processes.
- 3.5. The London Boroughs of Brent, Islington, Haringey and Camden has adopted a two stage process.

4. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 4.1. The current Corporate Complaints Policy was approved by Cabinet in March 2009.

5. PROPOSAL AND ISSUES

- 5.1 In order to continue to meet new challenges and rising customer demand, the following five key initiatives have been undertaken:
 - **Localism and swifter resolutions**
 - Increasingly, due to the Localism Act and the introduction of a new Housing Ombudsman Scheme on 1 April 2013, pressure will be put on the Council to resolve matters locally. The Council's h&f InTouch Team will add value here to all parties.
 - **Promoting service improvement**
 - Using trend analysis to drive down complaints demand. Highlighting customer experiences and sharing case studies to promote learning from these and to improve services. Where best practice has been recognised, this will also be

shared and promoted across the organisation. Internally publishing decisions and the rationale for these.

- **Channel migration**
 - Increase the use of the H&F My Account portal for the submission of complaints and requests for information;
 - reducing telephone transactions

- **Impact of the New Ways of Working**
 - Customer Satisfaction: as a result of the introduction of self-service, it is now possible for customers, specifically complainants, to record their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with how their complaint was handled. Such feedback is in its infancy as this functionality was only introduced on the 2 July 2012, the number of satisfaction surveys being submitted is increasing on a weekly basis.

- **Managing internal customer demand**
 - Reviewing the Council's internet and intranet pages
 - eLearning and Training.

5.1. The full rationale for change is set out in Appendix 1 of the attached report. Appendix 2 is the proposed revised Corporate Complaints Policy.

6. OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

6.1 To reduce the number of Stages in the Council's complaints procedure to 2 and to introduce an option for mediation between the Council and the customer lead by h&f InTouch.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1. The proposals set out in the report have been shared with Executive Directors and have received favourable feedback.

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Sections 6.2 and 7.3 of the policy set out the Council's application of equality, and human rights considerations (respectively). These remain unchanged in the updated policy.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Both the Local Government and the Housing Ombudsman require the Council to have a proper and effective complaints system. Removing

stage three from the complaints procedure does not have any legal implications.

10. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The change to a new two stage complaints system will contribute to the delivery of these savings highlighted as part of the Business Support Review.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT

11.1. The rationale for change is set out in Appendix 1 of the attached report. It is not considered that there are any risks resulting from the proposed change in process.

12. PROCUREMENT AND IT STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

12.1. None.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT**

No.	Description of Background Papers	Name/Ext of holder of file/copy	Department/ Location
1.	Strategic Review of the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy	James Filus (020 8753 2020)	Executive Services

LIST OF APPENDICES:

- 1. Rationale for Change**
- 2. Draft revised Corporate Complaints policy**