



Report for:	Cabinet
Date of meeting:	28 June 2016
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	New Complaints Policy And Procedure
Contact:	<p>Cllr Neil Harden, Portfolio Holder for Resident and Corporate Services</p> <p>Author/Responsible Officers;</p> <p>Robert Smyth, Assistant Director (Performance, People & Innovation)</p> <p>Matt Rawdon, Group Manager (People & Performance)</p>
Purpose of report:	For Cabinet to review and approve the implementation of a new ' <i>Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure</i> '.
Recommendations	That Cabinet approve the implementation of a new ' <i>Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure</i> '
Corporate Objectives:	Modern and Efficient Council – The effective management of complaints is vital to ensure that we deliver services which respond to the needs of residents.
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>Managing complaints ensures that we improve the quality of services and target our resources in the most effective way..</p>
Value For Money Implications'	<p><u>Operational</u></p> <p>The failure to properly address issues raised in complaints (and to learn lessons) could lead to operational service issues.</p> <p><u>Value for Money</u></p> <p>Effective management of complaints supports the achievement of value for money in the pursuit of the Council's objectives</p>

Risk Implications	A robust Asset Management Strategy (AMS) mitigates the risk of the Council not being able to deliver the benefits described above.
Community Impact	Community Impact Assessment carried out
Health And Safety Implications	None
Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer Comments	<p>Monitoring Officer:</p> <p>This policy will ensure that residents have a right to request that decisions, actions or omissions of the Council are reviewed at an appropriately level of management within the Council. The policy balances that right with the need to manage complaints in an efficient manner.</p> <p>S.151 Officer</p> <p>There are no direct financial implications of this decision.</p>
Consultees:	Corporate Management Team Officers Finance & Resources Committee
Background papers:	<i>'Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure'</i> .
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	LGO AD CIMS

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Having an approach that enables the Council to manage and learn from complaints is vital if it is going to deliver high quality services that offer real value for money.
- 1.2 The Improvement and Innovation team recently completed a review of the existing complaints policy and in doing so, it identified a number of issues and areas of concern.
- 1.3 The following report (and new *Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure*) therefore proposes a number of changes and improvements to the way we manage complaints.

2. Key Changes

- 2.1 The key changes fall into three categories; policy, process and system.

2.1.1 **Policy**

Change 1 (P3, sec. 3.3)

We have introduced a time-limit of 90 days for a complaint to be lodged in response to an incident or issue. Previously we had no time-limit.

This will ensure that the evidence is still available and that we are not subject to spurious or false claims for historical incidents that cannot be properly assessed.

Change 2 (P6, sec 5)

We have introduced a clear policy for dealing with inappropriate, unreasonable or vexatious complainers. We currently have no formal policy on this issue.

This will ensure that we have the tools and approach to deal with unwanted behaviour, including restricting people's contact. This is necessary because vexatious complainers take time away from genuine complainants.

2.1.2 **Process**

Change 3 (P4, sec 4 Stage 1)

We have reduced the number of complaints steps from three to two. This is in line with LGO guidance and it streamlines our approach in line with many other local authorities.

As we have reduced the process we have also revised down the amount of time allowed for Stage 1 from 20 days to 15 days. This is in line with good practice in other areas. However for channel shift purposes we have only committed to this for

individuals who complaint via our online form. For off-line contact we note that a response could still take up to 20 days.

Change 4 (P4, sec 4 Stage 2)

At present if anyone is unhappy, for any reason, they can ask for progression to Stage 2 and Stage 3. This is not an effective use of resources and it means we are likely to spend disproportionate amounts of time dealing with unreasonable demands and expectations.

We have introduced a new test that means a complainant has to evidence why the Stage 1 investigation was incorrect or unfair.

If a complainant cannot provide that evidence, we will not progress their complaint to Stage 2. An AD will write to the complainant explaining why the case was closed (and that if they are still unhappy they can go to the Ombudsman having exhausted our process).

Change 5 (P4, sec 4.6)

We can often receive the same complaint from a resident and an MP, if they have chosen to send details of their issue to multiple parties. This makes it time consuming and difficult to manage, because in effect we are handling (and responding to) the same complaint twice. It can also delay the process.

We have introduced a new policy that if we receive a duplicate complaint, we will close down the resident complaint and treat it as a single complaint, dealing directly with the MP.

This will ensure we are not double handling issues and that we can focus our attention on the problems identified.

2.1.3 **System**

If these changes are accepted we will need to undertake some re-development work with our existing system.

In the medium term we are planning to introduce a new complaints system as part of the re-development of MS Dynamics, however in the meantime we will make some improvements to CIMS.