

Standards Committee

22nd October, 2018

Update Regarding the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Process Review

Summary of report:

This report has been prepared to update Members on the review the Council's approach to Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and accompanying procedures.

At the previous Committee on the 9th July 2018 Members requested and update on the progress of the review. This report provides a detailed update on progress and next steps for the review.

Recommendation

1. Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report
2. Committee is recommended to agree the next steps of the review
3. Committee is recommended to agree to receiving the draft Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy at the next meeting

1.0 Background

1.1 Context

Complaints, Comments and Compliments provide vital insight into the way the Council conducts its business. It enables the Council to take a holistic view of areas of service feedback from across the Council, understanding where we can improve in addition to offering the opportunity to acknowledge and reflect when we are doing things well. Feedback helps to understand resident expectations of services, where we can improve and where we fall short of these expectations. Listening to feedback is essential in all organisations who want to provide good service-user experiences and in public bodies like Walsall Council in order to help to build trust, strengthen our reputation and ensure we can have pride in the services we provide as a Council.

The Council's recently revised Corporate Plan sets out the priorities for the organisation to 2021. One of the six priorities is to have an 'Internal Focus' and to ensure 'all services are efficient and effective'. An effective approach to receiving, logging, tracking and learning from complaints, comments and compliments is central to the Council's drive towards efficient and effective services.

Walsall Council has been undertaking a review and improve its corporate approach to receiving, logging and analysing Complaints, Comments and Compliments, and both the Policy and Procedural frameworks that underpin the approach. This is a key aspect of the Customer Experience Project as the Council seeks to embed the 'Voice of the Customer' at the heart of its service improvement journey.

The Council has had a corporate complaints, comments and compliments handling procedure, called 'Tell Us', for many years, this was most recently updated in 2015.

1.2 Summarising the Challenges – Member Feedback

At the previous Standards Board in July 2018 Members provided a broad range of feedback on the current corporate approach to complaints with some of the themes summarised below;

- Members felt there was a lack of consistency in the Council's approach to managing resident feedback including inconsistent complaint handling standards and the associated timescales for receiving responses
- Concerns were raised that complaints were not replied to promptly and that there was poor customer communication throughout the process regarding any updates to more complex and lengthy complaint investigations
- Members proposed that the Council should have more information easily available on its website for 'popular' queries or concerns to help reduce the number of enquiries and to enable customers to seek information themselves
- There was feedback to suggest that complaints involving other agencies – e.g. WHG – need a more joined up approach to ensure matters are fully resolved. It was discussed that potentially locality meetings could be a useful forum to stop things falling between the gaps in service providers and ensuring ownership of feedback and resolution of cases
- Members believed that there was an opportunity for complaints to be used as a means of learning and service improvement. It was suggested that this might include developing a means of reviewing clusters of complaints to understand service users' needs and expectations, help ensure services provided are effective and efficient
- There was concern raised about the level of consistency across the organisation in relation to both responding to Councillor Enquiries and Complaints from residents
- Examples were issued where the acknowledgement from Officers following a Councillor's query with the consequence that Councillors are unable to provide definitive timeframes to their constituents;
- A minimum policy should be adopted and adhered to Council wide for both statutory and non-statutory issues;
- All officers should include their contact details / telephone number on the Council's People Finder;
- All officers to receive training when the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Process Review completed to ensure everyone fully conversant;
- Members requested that their enquiries formed part of the review into this area.

1.3 Progress of the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Review

An officer working group with representation from across the Council has been convened each month since July 2018. The team have discussed current challenges with the Council's approach and what prevents officers delivering an effective service.

Some key themes that have arisen are as follows;

- Officers are unclear constitutes a request for service and the differences to a complaint and a standardised approach is needed to ensure consistency
- The existing 'Tell Us' procedure is being inconsistently used across the Council and officers welcome a refresh of the approach
- Officers feel a Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and accompanying procedure would be helpful to help ensure expectations are met
- Officers need to feel better at analysing corporate complaints to identify themes and trends and ensure actions are taken to address these
- There is legacy IT associated with the management of Complaints, Comments and Compliments – and this means that officers are spending a lot of time manually chasing responses and issuing reminders when this could be simplified via the implementation of an improved underpinning complaints management system.

The working group has subsequently developed a draft Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy which will first go to CMT in November for feedback and Comments before returning to the next Standards Committee for feedback and comment before seeking Cabinet approval.

In addition to this the following actions have been progressed by the Complaints Working Group;

1.4 Getting the Basics Right

Having issued feedback from the Standards Committee to CMT in August, CMT approved the recommendation to issue a communication to all Council staff as a Core Brief item to the management team and following this an all staff email was issued by CMT.

The communication set out a series of agreed 'basics' for colleagues from across the Council to adhere to.

This included;

- **Telephony Basics** – ensuring that Officers are logged in every working day and that when they are not available calls divert to an appropriate colleague, or a suitable voicemail option is provided (with messages being promptly responded to.
- **People Finder** – ensuring that all colleagues have an appropriate entry (now over 75% of colleagues have an entry) with the majority of the 25% operating in roles that are not desk based or they may not have a personal phone line.

- **Councillor Enquiries** – ensuring that Officers are issuing timely acknowledgements and updates are regularly provided when there are delays in responses being issued
- **Email signatures and out of office messages** – should follow corporate standard to clearly identify how officers can be contacted and when they are unavailable
- **Working from Home** – CMT set out expectations that when officers are working from home they are fully contactable
- **Owning an Enquiry** – ensuring that services do not simply say ‘that’s not us’ but they will point Councillors or residents in the direction of a suitable colleague to resolve the matter.

A series of detailed guidance to support this communication was issued to Officers and this is enclosed within Appendix One.

1.5 Respond Case Management Solution

The Council has acknowledged that it currently does not have optimal technology to support an effective complaints, comments, complements or Councillor Enquiry management approach.

A Business Case was developed to explore a suitable solution to underpin a new procedure and this is currently at the procurement phase with a preferred supplier agreed. The business case has been approved by the Council’s IT Board and the Customer Experience Transformation Board and is due for implementation this calendar year. The solution has several features that will enable an improved customer experience including;

- Opportunity to optimise process workflow for complaints, comments, complements and member enquiries
- Self-service portal capability so complainants and councillors can view the progress of an enquiry and receive updates
- Opportunity to issue automated reminders to Complaints/ Councillor enquiry response leads & build in an escalation process to senior managers when responses are not issues within agreed corporate standards
- Dashboard and analytics functionality to help identify themes and trends in customer and councillor feedback as well as automating analysis on issues such as adherence of services to respond in full within agreed service standards
- The solution will also be primarily used by the Corporate Assurance and Information Governance Teams to log and track freedom of information request and subject access requests as well as corporate complaints within one database

1.6 Corporate Web Content

In October 2x full time Digital Content Officers joined the authority and will begin to develop improved online content for councillors and residents. This includes in relation to the web pages on the Council’s website associated with Complaints, Comments and Complements. Their approach will be to provide information on frequently asked questions to help residents, who want to, to be able to resolve

enquiries themselves, including if there is a multitude of complaints relating to a single issue. The scope of work undertaken by the

1.7 Customer Experience Project and the Corporate Stock Take

Members will be aware that the Council's transformation programme is currently under review. Proposals to implement a new approach to delivery of front line customer contact face to face, over the telephone and online are being shaped and developed to deliver the holistic change required to deliver an improved customer experience for all residents, service users and of course councillors.

Further information on the shape and design of the approach will follow once a Cabinet have endorsed the revised transformation approach in October 18. The Council will then enter a mobilisation phase for the next phase of the transformation programme.

1.8 Next Steps for the Review

The following steps are recommended for Committee to further progress the review;

1) Complaints, Comments and Complements Policy & Accompanying Procedure & Update Corporate Web Pages with the New Approach

To supplement this a new Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy is being developed with CMT for Standards Committee to provide comment and help to share for eventual Cabinet approval.

2) Councillor Enquiry Management Workshops (Starting with Standards Committee)

To hold a series of workshops with Councillors to invite further feedback from them on the challenges they face and understand their expectations in contacting the Council.. These workshops will help to understand the common enquiry types for Councillors and how these can be effectively managed by the Council on their behalf so we design a corporate approach that works for them.

3) Implement new Enabling Technology

To release the multitude of benefits of new complaints management technology solution and release capacity to engage proactively to resolve complaints.

4) Undertake Training for all suitable staff in the new policy and procedure and accompanying technology.

Ensure that those who manage complaints and councillor enquiries receive training on new technologies and how to use this, and to ensure they are briefed on the new corporate approach when the new policy and procedure has been approved.

2.0 Resource and legal considerations:

2.1 The council is required by statute to have complaints procedures in relation to social care services in accordance with relevant statute.

2.2 Standards Committee as part of its wider governance remit deals with elements of complaints and has received reports in relation to the Local Government Ombudsman on an annual basis.

3.0 Performance and Risk Management issues:

3.1 Complaints, comments and compliments provide a valuable source of information about the performance of council services and routine monitoring and measuring will form part of future corporate performance monitoring at CMT.

3.2 Managing complaints effectively will help to mitigate corporate risks by building an awareness of themes and trends and identifying where remedial action where be required to mitigate risks before these escalate.

4.0 Equality Implications:

4.1 It is important that the council's complaints, comments and compliments procedures are delivered, and that complaints are processed, fairly and in an open and transparent manner.

5.0 Consultation:

5.1 Any future Policy and Procedure will go through a formal EQIA and consultation process in line with Council procedures.

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Getting the Basics Right



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR **PAST** OUR **PRESENT** AND FOR OUR **FUTURE**

Getting the Basics Right

Telephone Cover and Good Practice

- Please ensure you log on to your phone first thing each morning when you are in the office
- Please ensure that when answering the phone you have an agreed and consistent opening for the call as a team – we recommend ‘Good morning/afternoon you are through to Walsall Council’s (insert your directorate or team name), you are speaking to (first name), how can I help?’
- It is also good practice to recap any next steps at the end of the call before politely closing the call
- Teams (particularly front-facing teams) should have cover on the phones during agreed hours of service opening – this includes ensuring there is telephone cover for team meetings. Do not simply leave phones unanswered, ringing indefinitely without suitable messaging (and this does NOT mean – ‘We are not available, please call back later’). Better still try and put a plan in place as a team, where possible, to cover the phone lines.
- Colleagues should look to setup a divert/ hunt group/ voice mail message to help ensure phones are covered and do not simply run dead or engaged. Please take steps to ensure your phone line redirects when you are not available to speak to people. Self-service information on how to do this can be found [here](#) Or alternatively please contact the IT Service Desk to create a permanent telephone divert or hunt group.
- Please always follow up with voicemails as soon as you are able to
- Try to answer all internal telephone lines within **6 rings/25 seconds** – don’t ignore phones if members of your team are away from their desk (we realise this standard won’t always be possible in some front line services with exceptionally high telephony demand)
- When working remotely, as many colleagues do regularly, please ensure you carry your work mobile and your contact number is on your corporate signature and People Finder

Getting the Basics Right

Councillor Enquiries	Email Signatures	Own an Enquiry
<p>Ensure that Councillor enquiries are acknowledged and responded to and never ignored, this includes advising a Councillor if you are not responsible for the enquiry – and ensuring you politely redirect the enquiry to the appropriate section as best as you are able to.</p> <p>It is also good practice to provide indicative timescales as to when Councillors can expect a response, and to update the Councillor later down the line if a response in this timescale does not look achievable.</p>	<p>Follow the corporate standard for email signatures and out of office messaging (including who can be contacted in your absence) and ensure these messages are routinely placed when you go on holiday or are out of office.</p> <p>More information on the corporate standards for email signatures and out of office messages can be found here</p>	<p>Own an enquiry – if it isn't you that is responsible tell the customer/colleague who is and direct them to the appropriate team to help them, whether that be a call or an email. Don't assume it has been dealt with or simply say that it is not you or your team who is responsible.</p>

Getting the Basics Right

Working from Home

- Please ensure that when working from home you are contactable for important issues, and your diary clearly states that you are working from home and your colleagues know how to reach you if they need to. *If you are in the office and pick up a call for a colleague who is working from home – just because someone is working from home it does not mean they are not contactable. You are able to put them through for important matters or provide email contact details so they can respond directly.
- When planning to work from home transfer your desk line to your work mobile as you leave the day before so calls are automatically forwarded – *Again these [guides](#) should help you to do this

People Finder

- We would again remind colleagues to keep their People Finder updated. Colleagues can check their own details by clicking the People Finder tab on the Walsall Intranet or via the following [link](#)
- In the free text box update your telephone numbers to ensure they are accurate then press save
- Please note that we would encourage colleagues not to put their personal mobile on People Finder, even if they use this for work purposes. Colleagues who do put personal mobiles in people finder do so at their own risk and should be aware that this will potentially be available to all council staff via People Finder