

## PART A

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny Panel  
**Date of Meeting:** 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015  
**Report Of:** Customer Service Section Head  
**Title:** Corporate Complaints and Comments

### **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the councils management and performance in responding to complaints and comments.
- 1.2 The council wants its customers to be satisfied with the services it provides but like all organisations we know that sometimes mistakes do happen and things do go wrong. Effective complaint management is an important element in maintaining the councils reputation. Complaints also provide a valuable way to understand customers expectations of service delivery and are an essential part of identifying service improvements and promoting good practice across the council.

### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Panel to note the content of this report

#### **Contact Officer:**

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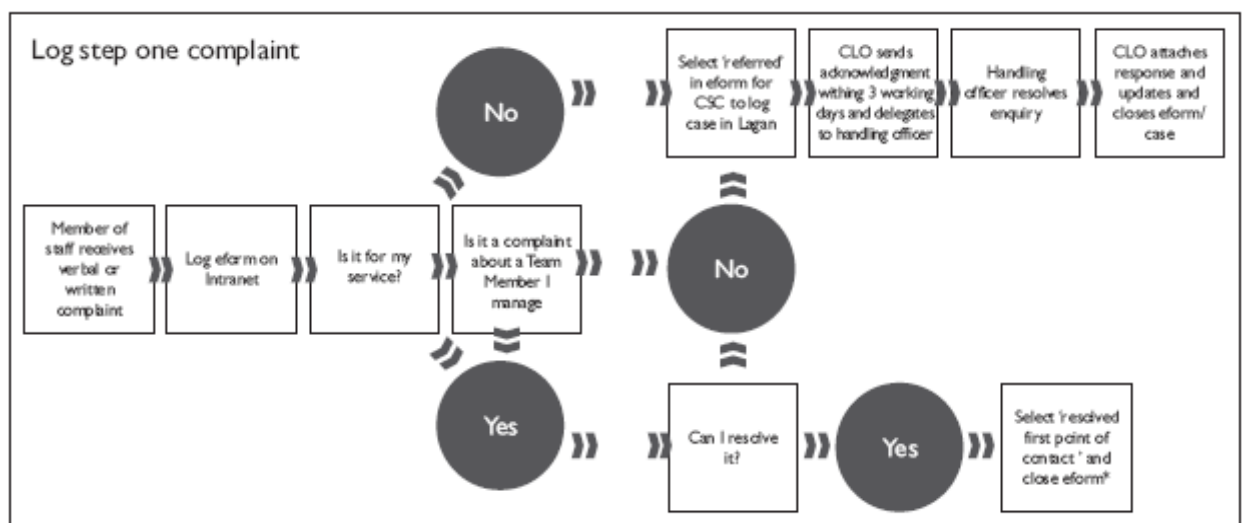
#### **Report approved by:**

Alan Gough, Head of Community and Customer Services.

### 3.0 Detailed Proposal

#### The Corporate Complaints procedure

- 3.1 The council has a two stage complaints procedure. All complaints should be resolved within 10 working days at both stages.
- 3.2 The complaints procedure, gives our customers the chance to raise any concerns and gives us the chance to put things right. It is a vital way for the council to find out what people think of the services it provides. All customer feedback help the council to improve the quality of services to better meet peoples' needs.
- 3.3 **Stage 1**  
Customers can make a stage 1 complaint either verbally or in writing. Most complaints received at stage 1 are resolved at this initial contact.
- 3.4 Complaints should be logged by the member of staff who takes the complaint on the complaints e-form available via the intranet. However, there have been significant issues with the eform that IT are currently working to resolve, as an interim measure services are using a spreadsheet to record details of the complaint and actions.
- 3.5 Officers should acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days and investigate and respond to the complaint within 10 working days. Where they are not able to provide a full response within 10 working days, i.e. for a very complex complaint, officer should contact the customer and agree a revised timescale by when they can expect a full reply.
- 3.6 The following flow chart explains the process for logging and resolving stage 1 complaints.

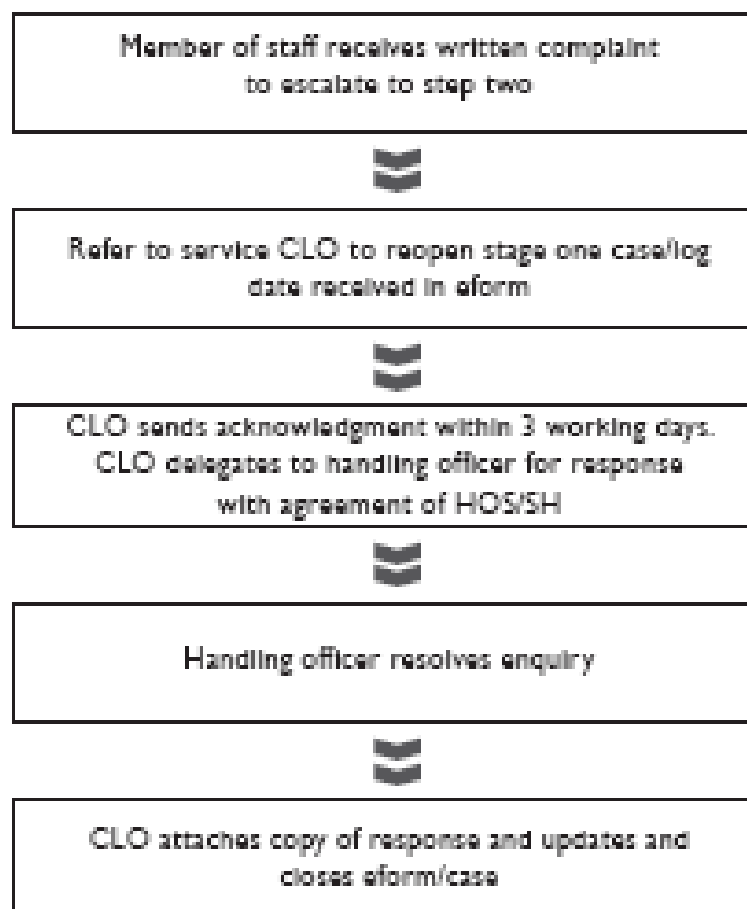


### 3.7 Stage 2

If a customer is unhappy with the response provided under Stage 1 of the procedure, they can escalate the complaint to stage 2 by contacting the council in writing within 15 working days of receiving the stage 1 response.

- 3.8 On receipt of a stage 2 complaint the service Customer Liaison Officer will reopen the initial complaint and with agreement from the service Section Head or if necessary Head of Service refer the complaint to an appropriate handling officer for investigation and response.

### Log step two complaint



### 3.9 Ombudsmen Complaints

If the customer remains dissatisfied at the end of the complaints procedure, they can approach the Local Government Ombudsman who will decide whether to carry out an independent investigation into the complaint.

### 3.10 Comments

No comments have been logged by services this year.

3.11 Comments relating to the quality of service customers receive when they telephone or visit the CSC are captured via the GovMetric customer satisfaction system. These are reviewed by the Customer Service Management team and passed onto services on a monthly basis to review and take action where necessary.

**3.12 Managing the procedure**

The Council's Customer Service Section Head has overall responsibility for the procedure on behalf of the Council. The level of complaints across the authority is monitored by the Customer Service Section Head and reported to Services on a quarterly basis so that trends in complaints can be identified and service improvements made where necessary. Council wide performance against corporate response times and successful resolution of complaints and actions as a result of complaints are reported by service areas to Portfolio Holder's at quarterly meetings.

3.13 Every member of staff is responsible for being aware of what constitutes a complaint, and for taking ownership of the complaint in the first instance. This is to ensure that all complaints are registered and responses are monitored.

3.14 Comprehensive guidance for responding to complaints is available for staff on the council intranet site.

**3.15 Complaints Analysis**

Overall the number of complaints received in year is very low when considered in the context of the total volume of customer interactions than have taken place across the council. Year to date the council has handled 19,500 face to face visitors, over 200,000 telephone contacts and 800,000 hits to our website.

3.16 A total of 16 complaints have been received this financial year. This is a reduction of 21 complaints on the same period the previous year, when 37 where received.

**3.17 Number of Complaints received ytd 2015/16 compared to 2014/15**

|                                  | <b>FY<br/>2014/2015</b> | <b>FY<br/>2015/2016(ytd)</b> |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Total Complaints Received</b> | 54                      | 18                           |
| <b>Stage 1 Complaints</b>        | 45                      | 9                            |
| <b>Stage 2 Complaints</b>        | 5                       | 3                            |
| <b>Ombudsmen Complaints</b>      | 4                       | 6                            |

### 3.18 Complaints and Compliments Received by service FY2015/2016

|  | Complaints | Compliments | Notes<br>Complaints   | Notes<br>Compliments        |
|--|------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Corporate Strategy and Client Services | 5          |             |                       |                             |
| Community and Customer Services        | 6          | 26          | 4 - EH&L, 2 - Housing | 7 - CSC, 17 EHL, 2 Housing, |
| Corporate Management                   | 0          |             |                       |                             |
| Democracy and Governance               | 0          | 12          |                       | 12 - Democracy              |
| Finance                                | 0          |             |                       |                             |
| Human Resources                        | 0          |             |                       |                             |
| Regeneration and Development           | 3          | 1           |                       | 1 - Planning                |
| Revenues and Benefits                  | 2          |             |                       |                             |
| Multiple Service Complaints            | 0          | 1           |                       | 1- Planning/CSC             |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>16</b>  | <b>40</b>   |                       |                             |

#### 3.19 Complaint Analysis – Key Points

Corporate Strategy and Client Services - 4 of the 5 complaints received were from the same complainant about the same issue. This complaint was not upheld.

3.20 Of the 4 EH&L complaints, one was escalated to stage 2. This complaint remains outstanding as clarification of the exact issues raised within the complaint is outstanding.

#### 3.21 Complaints resolved within 10 working days at stage 1

78% of complaints at stage 1 have been resolved within 10 working days. Where the target has not been achieved, in 2 out of 9 stage 1 cases, this have related to more complex complaints where significant investigation was required, resulting in an extended response time.

#### 3.22 Complaints progressed to stage 2

18% or 3 of 16 cases of complaints progresses to stage 2. Two of these related to the same complainant complaining about the same issue – loose dogs disturbing chickens on an allotment site.

#### 3.23 Ombudsman complaints

A total of 6 complaints have been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman year to date. This compares to 4 complaints the previous year. 3 cases related to Regeneration and Development, 2 cases related to Housing and 1 case to Corporate Strategy and Client Services.

The ombudsmen concluded that 5 of the complaints should be dealt with through the councils complaints process in the first instance, whilst 1 case relating to Housing remains under review.

### **3.24 Trends**

The annual trend has shown that there has been a 43% year on year reduction in the volumes of complaints received. This significant reduction is mainly due to the improvements that have been delivered within the Revenues and Benefits Service, who previously had the highest level of complaints of all council services. It is also acknowledged that there has been a reduction in the level of complaints being formally logged due to the ongoing issue with the complaints eform.

3.25 Year to date, there have been no noticeable trends in the reasons for complaints across services resulting in changes to service or policy.

### **3.26 Service Improvements and learning from Complaints**

Although this year there have been no identifiable trends in complaints resulting in service improvements, previously where issues have been identified action has been taken to improve service delivery. Most notably within the Revenues and Benefits service which historically received relatively high volumes of complaints regarding the customer experience.

3.27 A number of key improvements to frontline service delivery have been implemented over the previous 12 months: The Customer Service team broadened the range of Revenues and Benefits enquiries that they dealt with to include summons and reminder calls. They now deal with around 80% of calls and enquiries for Revenues. This has reducing call wait times and allowed Revenues officers to deal with case work and more complex cases.

3.28 A fast track Benefits assessment process has been introduced in the CSC, allowing Benefits claims to be verified by Customer Service staff and processed and approved by a Benefits officer within 1 working day. The result of this is a reduction in benefits claim turn around times and reduced customer chase calls or visits regarding pending claims.

3.29 Finally, the call centre technology deployed in the Customer Service Centre has been utilised by the Revenues and Benefits team. Revenues and Benefits staff are based in the call centre to take calls. This has had the benefit of sharing knowledge with CSC staff, so they can more confidently deal with a wider range of enquiries relating to Revenues and Benefits. Managers in the Revenues and Benefits team also have access to live time call data. At busy times they can overflow calls to the back office to staff who have access to the call system and reduce wait times.

3.30 These improvements have resulted in a reduction of complaints relating to the Revenues and Benefits service of 93%

### **3.31 Other matters**

The issues with the eform preventing the effective logging and reporting of complaints are still being investigated by Capita and our customer relationship management system (CRM) supplier, Kana. It has been acknowledged by Capita that the length of time it has taken to resolve the issues being experienced is not acceptable.

3.32 Once the eform issues are resolved, a full refresher and training programme to staff of the corporate complaints process will be required to ensure an understanding of complaints and their importance to the organisation and how to log them according to the corporate guidance.

3.33 A specific piece of work is underway to review the current CRM solution and identify if an upgrade or replacement is recommended. In light of the issues experienced with a timely resolution of the eform issue, the process for logging of compliments and complaints will be a feature of this review.

3.34 Currently complaints through social media are not logged through the corporate complaints process. They are low level and monitored by Communications and Customers Services. Customer Services respond to customer enquiries and issues received through this channel. This arrangement will remain under constant review to monitor if a more formal logging of issues raised via social media is required.

3.35 The following are not dealt with through the councils corporate complaints procedure and are dealt with through appeals or other procedures:

- Rehousing
- Offers of housing
- Council Tax bills and Council Tax, Benefit decisions
- Housing Benefit decisions
- Licensing decisions
- Planning decisions
- Parking tickets
- Appeals to legal notices
- Decisions our councillors have made
- Complaints about something that has been to court or is going to court
- Formal cautions such as those about noise nuisance
- Insurance claims against us such as claims for damage caused to property
- Complaints against councillors

## **4.0 Implications**

### **4.1 Financial**

4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications in this report.

4.1.2 .

### **4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in this report.

File Reference

None