

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET BOARD

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – K.JONES

(27TH NOVEMBER 2014)

SECTION B – MATTER FOR INFORMATION

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS - ANNUAL REPORT

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with details of the annual report regarding complaints compliments and comments.

Background

This report provides an overview of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Authority during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

Introduction

In July 2011 the Welsh Government issued a model Concerns and Complaints Policy for adoption by public service providers in Wales to create a standard, streamlined and seamless process for handling these aspects raised by members of the public. This two stage model was adopted as Council policy by the Authority in August 2011.

Complainants who are dissatisfied with the Council's response under the policy may refer their complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales or other appropriate organisation for independent external consideration. The Ombudsman must normally be satisfied that the matter has been raised with the Authority and that it has had a reasonable opportunity to investigate and respond.

Two stage policy overview

Stage 1 - informal resolution - complaint is handled by the staff directly responsible for delivering the service and a response should be provided within 10 working days.

Stage Two- formal investigation- complaint is formally investigated by the designated complaints officer within the relevant Directorate and a response should be provided within 20 working days.

Independent external consideration – referral to another organisation for external consideration e.g. the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The Council has a Corporate Complaints Group the members of which are responsible for implementing the policy and co-ordinating responses to complaints for the relevant directorate in which they work.

Complaints regarding Social Services have, since 2006, been subject to a separate 3 stage statutory procedure (local resolution, formal consideration and referral to an independent panel). This procedure is due to be superseded by a new 2 Stage process, with removal of the independent panel stage, in August 2014. Social Services must prepare a separate annual report to summarise their dealings.

Reporting Processes

The designated departmental Complaints Officer should provide bi- annual scrutiny committee reports on stage 1 and stage 2 complaints, and an overview of stage 2 complaints as per Council policy. The Committee and Democratic Services team schedules the scrutiny work programmes to incorporate the reporting of complaints, compliments and comments aligned with other quarterly monitoring information and sickness reports.

The Head of Legal Services reports annually to the Policy and Resources Committee on complaints referred to the Ombudsman following receipt of the Ombudsman's Annual Report to enable comparisons between this authority and other Welsh Councils.

In accordance with the set Welsh Language Commission deadlines, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services reports annually on complaints regarding the Council's Welsh Language provision to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Complaints recording

Although there is no one integrated common complaints recording system, the Customer Relationship Management System used by Customer Services staff record significant numbers of Council enquiries at the first point of contact to provide data on volumes and recurring issues which are then highlighted to the relevant service area. The designated directorate complaints officers also collate and track information on information dealt with by them. The analysis of recurring themes, responses and remedial actions including learning and improved future outcomes lies with the responsible service manager.

Members of the Environment and Highways Scrutiny Committee can better scrutinise demands on service and identify potential areas for improvement following a task and finish review which ended in March 2014. Officers presented a way forward to Members which would involve different services reporting quarterly and one service at a time being “under the spotlight”.

This information allows Members to undertake detailed scrutiny of different service areas and the volume of contact with the Customer Services Team who act as the first point of contact for this service area. Members agreed that this will improve the information they receive to have a better understanding of the demand on services and customer satisfaction outcomes. This approach could be replicated for other service areas besides.

Summary/Overview 2013/2014 **Social Services Health and Housing**

Social Services Health and Housing separately reported information on 23 January 2014 to specifically cover complaints received, therefore, only a brief reference is provided below.

Complaints Resolved at Stage 1

The vast majority of the resolved complaints during this period were alleged communication difficulties and quality of social work support. Complaints resolved under The Children Act 1989 reduced compared to the previous year with children making 31 of these complaints.

Eighty complaints were considered and resolved under the Community Care Act and nine were resolved for Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Housing related services.

Complaints Resolved at Stage 2

Ten complaints were resolved at Stage 2 of the procedure in 2013 compared with 19 in the previous financial year. The dedicated Complaints Team found that mediation has been a useful tool in promoting a resolution to some complaints without recourse to a formal investigation.

Complaints Resolved at Stage 3

Three complaints were resolved at Stage 3 (Independent Panel) which is the same as the previous financial year. Apart from a requirement to apologise in a variety of circumstances the resulting action plans highlighted several recommendations in order to improve future service delivery;

Education and Lifelong Learning

There were 17 complaints, mainly involving children with special education needs, their statements and transport. All were resolved at Stage 1 of the process with the circumstances addressed on their own merit to deal with the particular challenges involved.

Some complaints related to Margam Park charges and animal welfare aspects. The service has responded to those complaints by erecting a notice that provides Rangers telephone numbers for animal welfare concerns and the seating area was re-arranged to be more user friendly. There were 3 comments concerning signage and parking at Margam Park resulting in the signage being updated to provide better directions.

There were 8 compliments concerning Margam Park regarding the excellent surroundings and the helpful and professional manner of the staff.

Environment

There have been 7 stage 1 complaints and 16 stage 2 complaints with 30 compliments.

Stage 1 Complaints

These mainly relate to refuse and recycling issues which were not dealt with on first contact with the Authority, although it is worth noting that all were addressed by the section concerned and did not escalate to a Stage 2.

For example a resident's recycling receptacles were missed during the planned collection schedule. A call was logged via the Contact Centre and passed to officers for action as a first time service request, however, the problem remained unresolved. After repeated calls from the customer the complaint escalated to a Stage 1 complaint and referred to the manager of the service for investigation and subsequent action.

Stage 2 Complaints

Stage 2 complaints are often more in depth in nature and diverse due to the myriad of services delivered by the Environment Directorate.

Many of the investigations required input from Legal Services due to their complexity and legislative nature, an example being that a complaint was received in relation to how an out of hour incident was logged and dealt with. The matter was investigated and found that some reporting procedures had not been correctly followed. In this instance, as proper procedures were already in place, staff were reminded of the importance of adhering to these and therefore no other action was required.

In an example where a complaint was not upheld, a member of the public had contested that the Authority was not complying with current legislation within the Disability Act in providing play facilities for disabled children in a new park. The complaint was investigated and legal advice sought however the complaint was not upheld.

Compliments

A Cadoxton resident complimented the workforce on all the work done to keep the culvert clean on Main Road, Cadoxton at the junction of Stanley Place/Bryn Catwg.

A resident of Victoria Road Port Talbot thanked the Directorate for the excellent work carried out regarding residents parking in Victoria Road.

A Sustrans volunteer thanked the workforce for keeping the cycle paths clear in the County thus making their use a pleasure.

Finance and Corporate Services

Nineteen complaints were received relating mainly to council tax disputes, Benefits arrears and one for office closure on New Year's Day. Ten complaints were dealt with at stage 1 and 9 at stage 2 of the policy. An example of a stage 2

complaint related to arrears which had been inadvertently passed to a collection bailiff - but as payment had already been made an apology was provided for this oversight.

Twenty six compliments or thank you letters were received about the professional and helpful staff, help and time given to support training models and patience and understanding displayed in dealing with customer enquiries.

Summary

The Welsh Government's guidance makes it clear that the number of stages in a complaints handling process should be kept to a minimum. The guiding principle underlying the policy is to "investigate once, investigate well". The majority of complaints were considered under stage 1 of the policy (informal resolution) and not escalated to a stage 2.

The Corporate Complaints group agreed improvements to commonly capture and record complaints information, which may indicate an increase in activity, therefore, this data will be monitored and analysed to identify any changes or recurring themes.

Moving forward, it is intended that Complaints and Compliments activity will be integrated in to the Council's wider performance management arrangements to better support Members to overview performance on a holistic basis.

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None

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