



## POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3RD MARCH 2009

**SUBJECT: ANONYMOUS CORRESPONDENCE**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide information to members on how anonymous correspondence is managed.

### 2. SUMMARY

2.1 The majority of anonymous correspondence received by the authority is either a complaint or allegation about another person or group, a council service or another public service.

2.2 In general the level of response to anonymous correspondence is related to the level of risk involved, as judged by the service area dealing with that correspondence.

2.3 Anonymous allegations or complaints about council services or staff should be forwarded to Internal Audit Services in Corporate Finance.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

3.1 The management of anonymous correspondence is linked to a number of the Key Priorities in the Improvement plan, in particular:

- Protecting children from abuse and promoting development opportunities for children in need.
- Maximising the safety and independence of vulnerable adults.
- Enabling people to feel safe in their communities.
- Delivering a high standard of customer care.

### 4. THE REPORT

4.1 Members have requested information on how officers respond to anonymous correspondence, in particular correspondence that relates to a complaint or allegation.

4.2 In general, officers make a considered judgement on the level of risk and impact of an anonymous allegation or complaint before responding to it. Where the correspondence indicates that the issue is of a minor nature, the work that would be involved in an investigation was significant and there would be little that could be done as a result of the complaint, a decision would be made to just note the correspondence. Where the impact or risk was high, then it is likely that an investigation would be undertaken. In some services, e.g. Children's Services, all anonymous complaints are followed up. Officers also have to be mindful that some anonymous complaints or allegations may be of a malicious nature.

- 4.3 At present anonymous complaints/allegations are in the main vetted by Internal Audit Services in line with Financial Regulations with the aim being to ensure that proper consideration is given to all concerns. Service specific issues are generally passed on to be dealt with by the relevant service area but issues around Council Officers and system failures may be dealt with directly by Internal Audit Services
- 4.4 Any alleged breach of the Members code of conduct, or an allegation that the Authority through its members or officers has acted illegally will be brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer
- 4.5 There is currently no specific guidance in the current complaints policy about anonymous complaints apart from a general statement that we will accept anonymous complaints and investigate them. However, the current practice for dealing with anonymous complaints is as set out in 4.2.
- 4.6 Work is currently being undertaken to review the complaints policy and procedure. The contents of this report will be taken in to consideration as part of that review.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report.

## **6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no personnel implications as a direct result of this report

## **7. CONSULTATIONS**

- 7.1 The views of consultees are incorporated into the report

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 That the content of the report be noted

## **9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 The reasons for the recommendations are as set out in the report.

## **10. STATUTORY POWER**

- 10.1 Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000. This is a Cabinet function

Author: David Titley, Corporate Customer Services Manager, davidtitley@caerphilly.gov.uk  
Consultees: Phil Evans, Head of ICT and Property Services, evansps@caerphilly.gov.uk  
Dan Perkins, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer,  
perkid@aerphilly.gov.uk  
Richard Harris, Audit Group Leader, harrirm@caerphilly.gov.uk