



STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 24TH NOVEMBER 2014

SUBJECT: OVERVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

REPORT BY: INTERIM HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES AND MONITORING OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members of the Standards Committee with an overview of the Council's Corporate Complaints policy and how it links to the Standards Committee when considering and referring reports from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides members of the Standards Committee with an overview of the Council's Corporate Complaints policy.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Monitoring of the Council's corporate complaints and successful resolution of those complaints supports the provision of higher quality and more effective services to the public across all service areas.

4. THE REPORT

Background

- 4.1 On the 1st April 2013 the Council implemented a new Corporate Complaints Policy (referred to as the Policy in this report) in order to reflect the model policy introduced by the Welsh Government.
- 4.2 The Policy was introduced to ensure that complaints are dealt with in a consistent manner across Wales. The Policy has introduced a two-stage process to be undertaken within the Council. Stage 1 complaints are intended to be dealt with within 10 working days and Stage 2 within 20 working days. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 2 response, he/she will have the opportunity to refer the matter to the Public Ombudsman for Wales.
- 4.3 The Corporate Complaints Policy is available to view on the Council's website. In addition a booklet entitled "How to make a complaint" has been published and is available from Council offices, libraries, customer first centres etc. Complainants can make a complaint in a number of ways including by telephone, by post in writing, by using the complaint form included in the booklet or by email.

New Process and reporting mechanism

- 4.4 To coincide with the implementation of the new Policy a Learning from Complaints Group (referred to throughout this report as “the Group”) was established. The Group is chaired by the Interim Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, and includes Complaints Officers from across the Council, a representative from the Council’s Performance Management Unit and the Council’s Senior Policy Officer Equalities and Welsh Language. The Group meet on a quarterly basis.
- 4.5 The Group’s objectives in its Terms of Reference are as follows: -
- 4.5.1 To receive detailed statistics and reports from each Directorate in order to monitor, analyse and review qualitative complaints statistics having particular regard to trends and themes.
- 4.5.2 Where trends are identified and analysed to make appropriate recommendations to ensure that lessons have been learnt including changes in practice and procedures.
- 4.5.3 To report the findings of the Group on a six monthly basis to the Audit Committee which will draw out lessons learnt over this period and demonstrating how they have contributed to improved service delivery.
- 4.5.4 To consider and make recommendations for the review of policies and procedures including the introduction of associated policies and procedures arising from the implementation of the complaints policy.
- 4.5.5 The Group meet on a quarterly basis in order to consider complaints statistics, identify trends and where appropriate review policies and procedures including the introduction of associated policies and procedures arising from the implementation of the complaints policy. The Group’s findings are then reported to the Audit Committee on a six monthly basis.
- 4.6 At the time of writing this report the Audit Committee has received three reports on the Corporate Complaints policy since its implementation on 1st April 2013. Members of the Standards Committee will recall having received a copy of the report presented to the Audit Committee on 10th September 2014.
- 4.7 Members will note the information contained in each report includes the following
- 4.7.1 The total number of corporate complaints received across the authority during the specific reporting period.
- 4.7.2 A breakdown of the number of complaints received at Stage 1 and 2 in each of the following directorates; Corporate Services, Environment, Housing, Education and Social Services. Members are advised that in relation to Social Services and Education complaints, the numbers received are lower than those received for example for Environment or Housing. The reason for this difference is that Social Services operate a separate complaints procedure for services users whilst in Education, schools deal with their own complaints.
- 4.7.3 In addition the report advises members, whether the target response times have been met and the outcomes of each complaint ie. whether the complaint has been upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. This is additional information that was not collected at the outset and was implemented following discussions at the Group.
- 4.7.4 If there are any trends in the detail of the data collected for each specific department this is also reported to the Audit Committee. In addition a brief description of the types of complaints received are provided which are generally wide ranging and include council tax, maintenance and housing repairs, pest control, planning issues and school transport.

- 4.7.5 The report also advises of the number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman and whether the Ombudsman has decided to investigate the complaint.

Links with the Scrutiny Process

- 4.8 Members will be aware that the terms of reference of the Standards Committee have been recently expanded; the Committee may now consider referring a report from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales where there is a finding of maladministration to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, where in the opinion of the Standards Committee there has been a serious failure in service delivery that would benefit from further consideration by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee. Where the committee decides on this course of action a report setting out the reason for referral will be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committee along with the report from the Ombudsman. The Chair of Standards Committee (or a nominee) will be invited to attend the respective Scrutiny Committee when the report is presented.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Corporate Complaints policy addresses the Councils statutory duties under the Equalities Act 2012.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications associated with this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 This report is for information only and as such no formal consultation has been necessary.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 It is recommended Members note the contents of this report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To provide members of the Standards Committee with an overview of the Corporate Complaints process.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Local Government Act 1972 – 2003.
Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2005.

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Cllr C Forehead Cabinet member for HR Governance and Business Manager.

Background Papers:

Report to Audit Committee – 10th September 2014 – Update on the Implementation of the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy

Corporate Complaints Policy