

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE**  
**CABINET**

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014**

**REPORT TITLE**            Review of the Corporate Complaints, Comments  
   & Compliments Policy

**Submitted by:**        Executive Director (Resources & Support Services)

**Portfolio:**            Economic Regeneration, Business and Town Centres

**Ward(s) affected:**    Non specific

**Purpose of the Report**

To seek Cabinet approval of the revisions to the Council's Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

**Recommendation**

That Cabinet approve the revisions to the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

**Reasons**

1. The existing Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments (3Cs Policy) has been in place since 2008. A review has been undertaken and as a result the Policy has been revised and updated to ensure it continues to incorporate best practice and guidance from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).
2. There are elements of the new Regulator's Code, April 2014, that affect local authorities' complaints processes and therefore need to be incorporated into this Policy.
3. The revisions improve the robustness of the Council's 3Cs Policy.

**1.    Background**

1.1 On 21<sup>st</sup> May 2008, Cabinet approved the introduction of a 3Cs Policy detailing corporate standards and guidelines for staff to ensure consistency in the way that customer complaints, comments and compliments are dealt with.

**2.    Issues**

2.1 It is both important and good practice to regularly review existing Council policies to ensure that they continue to reflect current procedures and guidelines. The specific drivers for this review are:

- feedback from the Local Government Ombudsman and benchmarking with other local authorities;
- to incorporate those elements of the new Regulator's Code, April 2014 that relate to the Council's complaints processes.

2.2 The new Regulators' Code sets out Government's expectations in respect of the provision by local authorities of clear and accessible complaints and appeals processes, for use by businesses and others that they regulate. Section 2 of the Code includes provisions for clear, impartial and accessible complaints and appeals processes. Section 6 of the Code includes provisions to ensure transparency around the Council's complaints and appeals processes. In particular, the Code requires the definition of a complaint to include an example of a business customer complaint as well as an individual customer complaint, and for businesses to be recognised as an entity in the complaints process. The Code is intended to act as a framework to help the LGO in assessing any future complaints received from those regulated by local authorities who feel that the Council has not acted properly. Examples of regulatory service areas include Planning and Building Control, Environmental Protection and Licensing.

2.3 The proposed revisions are highlighted in italics in the Policy, attached as Appendix A. In summary the main changes are:

- Section 1 – Revised to include reference to business, as required by the new Regulator's Code, and to incorporate the Council priority relevant to the Policy. Section 1.9 states the Council's commitment to fair treatment across all service areas.
- Section 2 – Revised to expand the definition of a complaint to include a business customer and an example of a business complaint, as required by the Code. Inclusion of the facility for on-line forms to encourage web submissions.
- Section 4 – Revised to include reference to the Waste Management Strategy as an exclusion from the complaints procedure. Inclusion of a reference to the Customer Case Management Policy.
- Section 7:
  - Section 7.1 - Revised to reflect changes in service delivery. In many cases it will be Customer Services staff who will record the complaint details.
  - Section 7.2 - Amended process whereby the Customer Relations Officer sends an acknowledgement.
  - Section 7.5 - Clarification of 'working days' as those days that the Civic Offices and Customer Service Centres are open to customers.
  - Revision of the heading of the Stage 2 process from 'Appeal' to 'Review'
  - Section 7.7 & 7.8 - Revision of the Stage 2 complaints process to eliminate complaints where the customer is dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, but provides no reason why or any additional information.
  - Section 7.12 has been inserted to take account of a new process by which the Customer Relations Officer may extend the response time if the customer wishes to submit additional information during the process of the investigation.

- Section 8 – Revised address for the Local Government Ombudsman.
- Section 9 – Revision to delete the ‘Vexatious Complaints’ section which has now been superseded by the Customer Case Management Policy. A summary of the Customer Case Management Policy has been inserted.

### **3 Outcomes linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

The Policy supports becoming a Cooperative Council delivering high quality community driven services, by providing a current Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy which enhances transparency and provides consistency in our dealing with customers.

### **4 Legal and Statutory Implications**

The new Regulator’s Code came into force on 6th April 2014. From this date, local authorities are under a statutory duty to have regard to the Code in developing the principles and policies which guide their regulatory activities in relation to complaints and appeals.

### **5 Equality Impact Assessment**

An equalities impact assessment review is undertaken regularly.

### **6 Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no financial or resource implications associated with the approval of this Policy.

### **7 Major Risks**

The failure to implement an effective corporate complaints system may result in:

- greater numbers of Ombudsman complaints;
- increased customer dissatisfaction with services;
- reputational damage;
- impact on the Council’s ability to deliver and achieve excellent status in Customer Services.

### **8 Earlier Cabinet Resolutions**

Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy 21<sup>st</sup> May 2008

### **9 Recommendation**

That Cabinet approve the revisions to the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy, as detailed in the report and highlighted in the revised Policy.

### **10 List of Appendices**

Appendix A: - Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy Revised July 2014

## **11 Background Papers**

The previously approved Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy is available to view on the Council's Intranet site at:-

[http://svint/utilities\\_page.asp?id=SX7874-A77FF1B0](http://svint/utilities_page.asp?id=SX7874-A77FF1B0)