

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

Date 10th February 2016

REPORT TITLE: Amendments to the Corporate Complaints, Comments & Compliments Policy

Submitted by: Executive Director Resources & Support Services

Portfolio: Finance, ICT and Customer

Ward(s) affected: Non specific

Purpose of the Report

To seek Cabinet approval to incorporate amendments to specific sections of the existing Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy (3Cs Policy) as detailed in the report, to ensure the currency and consistency of the Policy.

Recommendation

That the amendments to the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy (3Cs Policy), as detailed in Appendix A of the report, be approved.

Reasons

1. The 3Cs Policy is a 'dynamic' policy in that it requires regular review and revision to ensure that it continues to reflect the changing needs of the Council and its customers.
2. The amendments to the Policy support the objectives of the Council's Customer Service Excellence programme by aiming to further improve the customer experience of Council services.

1. **Background**

- 1.1. The 3Cs Policy was last reviewed and updated in July 2014. The amendments made at that time ensured that the Policy fell in line with the new Regulators' Code, whereby businesses could access and utilise the Policy in the same way that individuals could.
- 1.2. Revisions to the 3Cs Policy are normally made as a result of legislative requirements, Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) guidelines, from listening to feedback from our customers and from changes to the business practices of the Council.
- 1.3. The Council is committed to improving its front line customer service through the use of the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Standard. The 3Cs Policy continues to incorporate those requirements¹.

2. **Issues**

¹ Criterion 4 of the CSE Standard is the Delivery of Services. Compliance with this part of the Standard is subject to the Council demonstrating it has a commitment to dealing with problems fully. This is achieved, in part, by "regularly reviewing and improving the complaints procedure, taking account of the views of customers, complainants and staff".

2.1. Although there are no current amendments required to the 3Cs Policy resulting from changes to legislation or LGO guidance, it has become clear that a number of revisions and insertions are necessary as a result of customer feedback and departmental requirements. The proposed revisions are highlighted in italics and underlined in the attached extracts from the existing Policy (Appendix A). In summary the main changes are:

- Section 4.2 - refers to complaints of a 'democratic nature' being referred to local councillors. However, these could be investigated as formal complaints; for example, failure to update the electoral register accurately or not processing a postal vote application form correctly. The revision aims to ensure that complaints referred to councillors are specific to their political role.
- Section 7
 - Section 7.1 update. The current Policy does not state the 'purpose' of a Stage 1 complaint. This needs to be explained and should therefore be added into Section 7.1 for consistency.
 - Sections 7.3 to 7.5. In instances where a department is unable to respond to a Stage 1 complaint within the Policy timeline of 20 days for legitimate reasons, it is essential that the Customer Relations Officer keeps the complainant informed of the delay; the reasons for the delay and details of when a response can be expected. Advising the customer of when a response is likely and why there is a delay is likely to encourage the customer to wait for the Stage 1 response rather than embark on a lengthy Stage 2 complaint. Sections 7.3 to 7.5 therefore require updating to incorporate these changes.
 - Section 7.7 Removal of the words 'resolved' and 'unresolved'. There may be instances where a complaint remains unresolved to the complainant's satisfaction even though all aspects of the policy have been applied. Section 7.8 further clarifies this point.
 - Section 7.10 should be deleted, as this issue is addressed in Section 7.8 of the existing Policy.

3 Options Considered

1. That the Council continues to operate its existing 3Cs Policy.
2. That the Council revises those sections of the 3Cs Policy defined in Section 2, and detailed in Appendix A of the report, to incorporate the proposed amendments.

4 Proposal

- 4.1. That the existing Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy be updated to incorporate the amendments shown in Appendix A.

5. Reasons for Preferred Solution

1. To ensure the 3Cs Policy continues to reflect Council and customer needs;
2. The revisions to the 3Cs Policy support the objectives of the Council's Customer Service Excellence programme by aiming to further improving the customer experience of Council services.

6. 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 continues to address customer and Council needs.

7. List of Appendices

Appendix A: Proposed Amendments to the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy; Sections 4.2, 7.1, 7.3 to 7.5, 7.7 and 7.10.

8. 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