

## **AMENDMENT TO THE CORPORATE COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY**

**Submitted by:** Head of Customer and ICT Services - Jeanette Hilton

**Portfolio:** Customer Service and Transformation

**Ward(s) affected:** Non specific

### **Purpose of the Report**

To seek Cabinet approval to amend the Corporate Complaints Procedure contained within the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy (the "3Cs policy") from a 3 Stage internal process to a 2 Stage internal process.

### **Recommendation**

**That the current internal 3 Stage complaints process be reduced to a 2 Stage process as detailed in the report.**

### **Reasons**

- (i) The current Corporate Complaints Procedure, contained within the 3Cs policy has been in place since 2008 and is therefore ready to be reviewed.
- (ii) To comply with the latest guidance from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) on complaints handling.
- (iii) To streamline the complaints process; reduce staff time processing complaints and make the policy simpler for members of the public to follow.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Council's approved a 3Cs policy in 2008. Since that time, significant progress has been made in the way in which the Council deals with complaints corporately, with a number of positive reports, noting these improvements, having been received from the LGO.
- 1.2 The Council currently follows an internal 3 Stage complaints procedure:-
  - Stage 1 – investigation by service manager
  - Stage 2 – investigation by customer relations officer
  - Stage 3 – review by complaints appeals panel

## **2. Issues**

- 2.1 Although the current procedure is very thorough, Stage 3 does take up considerable staff and senior management time whilst often delaying the customers' ability to take their complaint to the LGO for consideration. Current guidance from the LGO is that a 2 Stage procedure should give the Local Authority enough time to resolve a customer's complaint.
- 2.2 The proposed amendment does not limit the right of the customer to seek external advice at any time, but introduces the concept of a 2 Stage complaints approach for internal use, recognising the role Local Authorities have in resolving as many complaints as possible using their own internal procedures. It also introduces time limits on investigations, following LGO guidelines.

3. **Options Considered**

- (a) That the Council continues to operate a 3 stage complaints procedure;
- (b) That the Council amends the policy to facilitate a 2 stage complaints procedure.

4. **Proposal**

- 4.1 That the current Complaints Policy, contained within the approved 3Cs Policy 2008, be amended from a 3 Stage internal process to a 2 Stage internal process; the two stage process to be:
- 4.2 Stage 1 Review & Response - investigation and response by officer and department Stage 2 Independent Internal Appeal – investigation by the customer relations officer
- 4.3 The revised Policy also puts in place for the first time, a time limit for investigations following the same protocol as the Local Government Ombudsman i.e. 12 months.

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- (a) To simplify the complaints procedure;
- (b) To make the LGO more easily accessible for customers;
- (c) To reduce the amount of time taken to carry out the full complaints investigation process;
- (d) To bring NBC complaints procedure in line with most other Local Authorities' complaints procedures;
- (e) To follow the latest guidelines issued by the LGO.

6. **List of Appendices**

**Appendix A** - Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy 2008, Revised October 2011