

Report sponsor: Don McLure, Strategic Director
of Corporate Resources
Report author: Bernard Fenton, Head of
Customer Management

Customer Feedback Policy

Purpose

- 1.1 Customer Feedback and complaints are an important part of understanding the experience of customers, and offer valuable insight into what we are doing well, as well as what we need to improve on and learn from.
- 1.2 In 2014 the Council adopted a new Customer Feedback Policy and reviewed its processes to ensure adequate capture of complaints, monitoring of performance and management oversight of learning outcomes. However, currently this is not being consistently applied across the Council and there are opportunities to make the policy and processes more accessible to our citizens.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to obtain Cabinet approval for an updated Customer Feedback Policy and an improved complaints process.

Recommendation

- 2.1 To approve the changes to the Customer Feedback Policy and endorse its use by everyone across the organisation.

Reason

- 3.1 The Council has a duty to respond to complaints from service users and there are statutory procedures in place to formally address complaints relating to children's and adults social care.

Supporting information

- 4.1 In 2014 a Customer Feedback Policy was approved by Cabinet to give a consistent framework for managing and responding to complaints, including a streamlined procedure and clearer roles and responsibilities. In December 2016, Executive Scrutiny received a report highlighting performance around complaints and data quality issues that were undermining the accuracy and completeness of complaints monitoring.
- 4.2 It is important that both the Customer Feedback Policy and its underpinning processes and systems are as accessible as possible. Feedback is valuable to us in helping the Council deliver optimum and value for money services for local citizens.
- 4.3 A review of the policy has been undertaken to simplify the wording and make it easier for customers to understand the process. Key changes are shown in Appendix 1

including:

- improved information for those making a complaint on a customer's behalf or via social media;
- the timescales for responding to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities complaints have been extended from 10 to 20 days due to their complexity (this aligns with social care complaints);
- the appeal stage has been re-titled as stage two (note this does not apply to adult social care complaints).

4.4 The updated policy is shown in Appendix 2. In February 2019, the Council introduced a new Customer Relationship Management system module (Firmstep) for recording complaints. To embed the new policy, a number of improvements / changes are suggested to improve the consistency and quality of responses including:

- all complaints, including stage two and Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) complaints will be recorded via the central system to facilitate a one council approach;
- greater use of templates to ensure a consistent response;
- improved analysis and monitoring of learning via Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Directorate Management Teams (DMTs).

Public/stakeholder engagement

5.1 The Customer Feedback Policy was reviewed by the Corporate Policy Group in January 2019. Feedback was also received from Directorate Management Teams.

Other options

6.1 None.

Financial and value for money issues

7.1 Learning from complaints will support the Council to manage and reduce unnecessary demands. Complaints upheld by the Ombudsman can result in financial penalties.

Legal implications

8.1 Any complaint can be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Other significant implications

9.1 A comprehensive equality impact assessment was completed in 2014 involving our Equality Hubs and Forums. Following discussions with the Lead on Equality and Diversity, it was agreed that it was not necessary to do a follow up due to the minimal changes. Once the changes have been approved, Customer Management will work with our Deaf and Hearing Impaired People's Commitment Group to produce a British Sign Language video to make the policy accessible for Deaf people.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Emily Feenan, Monitoring Officer	01/04/2019
Finance	Toni Nash, Head of Finance	01/04/2019
Service Director(s)		
Report sponsor	Don McLure, Strategic Director of Corporate Resources	01/04/2019
Other(s)	Ann Webster, Lead on Equality and Diversity	01/04/2019
	Heather Greenan, Director of Policy, Insight and Communications	01/04/2019

Background papers:	
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Changes to 2014 Customer Feedback Policy Appendix 2 – Customer Feedback Policy

Key Changes to the 2014 Customer Feedback Policy

In general, the content of the policy is the same. It has been reworded and simplified to make it easier for customers to understand.

Change	Page number	
	2014 Review	2018 review
The introduction has been shortened and reworded to make it easier to understand, and now include the sections on Principles and Purpose and Scope .	3	3
Information on other people making a complaint on a customer's behalf has been included in the introduction. This is also more explicit in terms of MP/councillor complaints on behalf of a customer being logged as a formal complaint where this is at the request of the customer.	x	3
Information on what is not covered in the policy has been included within the introduction; this was previously an appendix. Links will be added to all relevant parts when the policy is uploaded to the website so that customers have easy access to raise other issues with the Council.	11	3
Instructions on how to give feedback have been moved to earlier in the document to make it easier for customers to find the information they need.	5	4
Complaints made via social media have been included in the policy for the first time.	X	4
Removed reference to managers receiving training on investigating complaints as this is not accurate. It is not consistent across the Council that complaints are dealt with by managers and routine training is not in place.	6	X
The timescales for complaints relating to services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has been increased from 10 to 20 days following discussion at the SEND improvement board due to the complexity of the investigations.	x	5
Adult social care complaints do not have a stage 2 , these are referred directly to the LGO, in line with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service complaints (England) Regulations 2009.	x	5
'Appeal' has been renamed ' Stage 2 complaints '. This section no longer specifies a stage 2 complaint will be investigated by a service director. Response times for stage 2 complaints have been added.	8	6
The section on ' How we will use your feedback ' has been removed, this is covered in simple terms (i.e. service improvement) throughout the document, and ' Dealing with unreasonable complainant behaviour ' has been removed as this is the same as we would deal with any unreasonable behaviour and doesn't need to be included here.	8 and 9	x
A summary of the process diagram has been added to aid customer understanding.	x	7