

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Complaints Policy and Guidance

**Meeting/Date:** Standards Committee – 3 March 2016

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor Darren Tysoe – Executive Councillor for Customer Services

**Report by:** Adrian Dobbyne, Corporate Team Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

The Complaints Policy and Guidance has been reviewed but seen in a wider context of customer feedback to include suggestions and compliments. A stronger connection has been made to the Customer Services Strategy. The new policy is embedded into the Strategy and the Guidance updated to reflect this and to adopt a more flexible approach to managing feedback. Within complaints management, it enables a more immediate and less formal initial stage before operating a two stage formal process.

### **Recommendation(s):**

Members are invited to comment on the proposed new policy and guidance on customer feedback.

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## **1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on the updated Complaints Policy and Procedures.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Following the Corporate Team restructure in November 2014 responsibility for complaints was moved to a different service area within the Corporate Team. This provided an opportunity to take a fresh look at the complaints policy and internal processes currently being used for managing stage one and stage two complaints. The aims of the review were:

- to provide clarity of what is a complaint and when it should be recorded as a complaint
- to improve recording of stage one complaints
- to clarify responsibility for managing complaints
- to identify the level of independence required for stage two complaints
- to consider how we learn from complaints and how this is shared across the council.
- to consider how the council manages compliments and suggestions.

- 2.3 This report outlines the outcomes of this review

## **3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS**

- 3.1 To simplify the policy, the guidance given in the Customer Services Strategy is the policy. This one pager at the back of the Strategy outlines what is to be treated as a compliment and complaint or is just a service failure and explains our standards in managing such feedback and confirms the customer recourse to the Local Government Ombudsman. There is no need for a separate and additional policy statement, although we will update pages on our website to supplement this information.

- 3.2 Consideration was given to the stages in the process in managing a complaint and who can undertake these stages. The guidance suggests that there is a first informal stage of trying to resolve any complaint. This enables an issue to be treated as a service failure but resolved more immediately (e.g. missed bin collection), which need not go through to any formal stage. A typical resolution could be for example to collect the missed bin or to contact the complainant and give a verbal explanation.

- 3.3 The guidance now has two formal stages. The first is for the Services to manage. This is usually to be the manager of the team responsible but allows for another manager to be asked to manage the complaint if more appropriate (e.g. nature of the complaint, leave arrangements etc.). Stage 1 is formal and requires a written response. This advises the complainant of their right to seek further redress if dissatisfied.

- 3.4 Stage 2 is usually to be managed by the Head of Service responsible but also allows the flexibility to appoint another independent senior manager if more appropriate. This flexibility means we are not tied to a particular resolution route and means that we are more likely to meet timeframes and allows a more independent route into managing the complaint, but does not restrict the management to be independent of the service. It enables flexibility to be used appropriately, both efficiently and effectively.

3.5 The review has confirmed the importance of managing other feedback such as suggestions and compliments. The Guidance sets out the expectation for managing this, confirming the importance of acknowledgement to the sender and also passing on as appropriate to the relevant members of staff. It will also supplement create a culture of recognising staff, which is a theme in the Employee Survey Action Plan.

3.6 The review also confirmed that we can learn valuable lessons for all feedback. The Guidance refers to how managers should record these lessons and that there will be as collation of these in order to inform the annual report on customer feedback.

#### **4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS - HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?**

4.1 The management of customer feedback will supplement the principles of the Customer Services Strategy and should minimise the risk of the Council not managing feedback appropriately and enable lessons to be learnt from feedback to improve services.

#### **5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

5.1 The new guidance and policy will take immediate effect.

#### **6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN**

6.1 The policy links to the strategic priority of ensuring we are a customer focused and service led council.

#### **7. CONSULTATION**

7.1 The changes have been discussed with senior managers and has also been based on feedback received whilst managing the existing process.

#### **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None

#### **9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The policy clarifies responsibilities of managing complaints, compliments and suggestions. The policy itself will not lead to an increase in the volume received, but it may lead to a shift in where the resource comes from to manage customer feedback.

#### **10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (*Equalities, Environment, ICT, etc*)**

10.1 The continuing monitoring and management of customer feedback through a corporate system and management will enable the council to review feedback in the context of equality.

#### **11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

11.1 The policy and guidance has been updated to support a more flexible approach to managing customer feedback so that we retain a thoroughness and corporate management of the process.

## **12. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 - Customer Services Strategy (extract)

Appendix 2 - Customer Feedback Policy – Internal Guidance

### **CONTACT OFFICER**

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