

Standards Committee

25th June 2013



Future reporting arrangements for complaints, compliments and suggestions

Report of Terry Collins, Corporate Director of Neighbourhood Services and Lorraine O'Donnell Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To note proposals for aligning reporting of complaints, compliments and suggestions from Standards Committee to Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee, linked to wider performance management reporting, and following consideration by Constitution Working Group.

Background

- 2 Since the new Unitary Council was formed. The Standards Committee has had 14 key areas of responsibility which are set out in the Council's constitution under Article 9, as follows:
 - a. promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, Independent Members and Co-opted Members;
 - b. assisting the Councillors, Independent Members, Co-opted Members and Parish and Town Council Members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct and where appropriate, the Planning Code of Practice;
 - c. advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct and the Planning Code;
 - d. monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct and Planning Code;
 - e. advising, training or arranging to train Councillors, Independent Members, Co-opted Members and Parish and Town Council Members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct and Planning Code;
 - f. granting dispensations to Councillors, Independent Members, Co-opted Members and Parish and Town Council Members from requirements

- relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct and Planning Code;
- g. the exercise of any functions under Regulations made under Section 54(4) of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended);
 - h. the assessment, investigation and determination of allegations of misconduct on the part of Members;
 - i. dealing with any alleged breach by a Member of a Council Protocol, in accordance with procedures approved by the Committee;
 - j. overview of the Officers' Code of Conduct;
 - k. overview of the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations;
 - l. overview of complaints handling and Ombudsman investigations;
 - m. power to make payments or provide other benefits in cases of maladministration etc;
 - n. the exercise of (a) – (h) in relation to Parish and Town Council Members.
- 3 The responsibilities of the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee include consideration of the Council Plan and the Notice of Key Decisions and to monitor performance against these plans. A key element of this work is a focus on customer services performance monitoring. Under the current constitution, this overview and scrutiny work in relation to customer services is limited by the lack of consideration of service complaints, compliments and suggestions information as a key part of the customer services' performance picture.

Proposed change in reporting arrangements

- 4 At present, as 1 of its 14 functions, the standards committee receives the following reports in relation to customer complaints, compliments and suggestions:
- Quarterly reports on the Council's overall position in relation to complaints compliments and suggestions – these reports provide information in relation to the "Corporate" and Statutory complaints received into the Council during the period in question; there is an overview of the overall position in terms of numbers and response rates followed by a detailed breakdown in relation to each Service Grouping, including a description of learning outcomes as a result of analysing trends and identification of service improvements as a result of the complaint. Reports cover Stage1, Stage 2 and Ombudsman complaints.
 - Annual representations reports in relation to both Children's and Adult Services.

- 5 In addition the Standards Committee receives reports in relation to individual Code of Conduct complaints:
 - Part B report for each meeting details Code of Conduct complaints against elected Members.
- 6 In future it is proposed that the Part B Code of Conduct complaints reports remain with the Standards Committee, but the quarterly reports and annual representation reports relating to customer services are realigned and in future reported to Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to inform customer services performance overview work.
- 7 This proposed change aligns to the Council's Customer First Strategy which stresses the importance of using customer feedback to inform service improvement. By linking reporting of customer complaints, compliments and suggestions to reporting of service performance, the scrutiny function will be able to ensure that customers' views fully inform their work.
- 8 Analysis of the complaints received over the last financial year shows that the feedback received has reflected key changes which the Council has implemented either as a result of harmonisation or through having to meet savings targets as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan. The main areas of complaint have related to delays in Benefits processing due to system changes; the introduction of alternate weekly collection of household refuse and charges for services such as replacement bins and pest control. This information is useful when considered alongside the performance report in order to provide the customer perspective in relation to changes and service delivery at that point in time.
- 9 If the change is agreed, then further development work will be undertaken to align complaints reporting more strongly with quarterly performance management reporting to members. In particular, there is an opportunity to strengthen reporting as part of the quarterly performance report received by Cabinet as well as the scrutiny function. By realigning the way in which we report this data and intelligence, we can ensure customer feedback forms a key part of our performance discussions.
- 10 The change proposals have been considered and agreed in principle by Constitution Working Group, and subject to comments from the Standards Committee will be submitted to the July meeting of full Council for approval.

Recommendations

- 11 Members are recommended to note the proposals which will be forwarded to full council for approval:
- a. Align reporting of customer complaints, compliments and suggestions information from Standards Committee to Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - b. Amend the constitution to reflect this change, specifically:
 - i. For the Standards Committee, to limit consideration of complaints information to that relating to Code of Conduct complaints by removing 2 (L) from Article 9.
 - ii. For Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to include an overview of customer complaints, compliments and suggestions.

Background papers

Quarterly performance management reports received by Cabinet and Scrutiny

Quarterly complaints, compliments and suggestions reports, and annual representation reports received by Standards Committee.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing – None

Risk – should reduce risk of customer feedback information not adequately informing overview and scrutiny review work

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - none

Accommodation - none

Crime and Disorder - none

Human Rights - none

Consultation - none

Procurement - none

Disability Issues - none

Legal Implications – this change will need to be reflected within the Council's constitution.