

West Wiltshire District Council

Cabinet

5 May 2004

Review of Complaints Procedure

1. Purpose

To revise the complaints policy/procedure so that the Council learns from any complaints and can use them to improve services.

2. Background

The Council's corporate procedure for handling complaints was examined as part of a routine inspection by the Audit Commission in 2003. The Audit Commission recommended a number of improvements which were accepted by officers, and the Legal Services Manager has revised the procedure.

The draft procedure was reported to and approved by the Standards Committee on the 17 March 2004.

3. Key Issues

How the procedure will work: the procedure will, as at present, handle complaints in 3 stages:

- Stage 1 - The officer handling the matter or the relevant service manager will try to resolve the complaint within 5 days.
- Stage 2 - The service manager will try to resolve the complaint within 10 days.
- Stage 3 - The complaint will be handled by or on behalf of the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder), who will respond within 10 days.

Monitoring: At each stage a record of the following will be made:

- Basic facts such as the name of the complainant, summary of the complaint, the name of any officer complained about and the date and nature of any resolution; and
- What has been learnt from the complaint and any changes that are needed/have been made to services

This information will be reported every 6 months as shown below:

- the Corporate Team will decide whether any corrective action is needed at a corporate level to address recurrent problems;
- the Cabinet will consider whether any changes in service delivery are needed; and
- The Standards Committee will assess whether there are any ethical implications from the complaints; and
- the Internal Overview Committee will scrutinise what has taken place to ensure that all necessary improvements have been made.

Satisfaction with how complaints are handled is a best value performance indicator, but it is only measured once every 3 years. In the intervening years we will survey satisfaction levels in a randomly selected sample of 10% of complainants.

Implementation: Once adopted a comprehensive training programme will begin as shown below. The training will be combined with training for all staff on the new customer care standards which are currently being drawn up.

- All members and staff will be made aware of the new procedure
- Service managers will receive training on all complaints handling.

The Audit Commission recommends that the revised procedure should be included in the Constitution. This will be a good way to demonstrate the Council's commitment to and raise the profile of the policy/procedure.

4. Options

2 possible options are outlined below:

- i. **Approve policy/procedure as drafted:** The draft policy/procedure will involve more work than the current policy because of the requirement to record all complaints. How much extra time this will consume is unclear because we have no data on which to judge how many stage 1 complaints we receive. This part of the policy may therefore have to be reviewed if it proves to be too onerous.

There are no other significant implications to this option.

- ii. **Record stage 2 + 3 complaints only:** The present complaints procedure only requires stage 2 + 3 complaints to be recorded. This means that the Council has little or no data on which to judge the number of stage 1 complaints or how effectively they are handled. It is, however, less resource intensive.

This option has no financial or legal implications

5. Background Papers

Audit Commission report dated 30.6.03 (File Ref: Chief Exec/45 Room F.10)
Draft complaints policy/procedure (File Ref: Chief Exec/45 Room F.10)

6. Recommendation

That the complaints policy/procedure is approved and recommended to the Council for inclusion in the Constitution.



Plain English guidance given

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Deputy Leader

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Legal Services Manager

Appendix 1: Draft complaints policy/procedure (available on the web site, on request and in the members' room)

Date of preparation: 16.4.04