

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

DATE OF MEETING:	15 FEBRUARY 2022
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROPOSING AMENDMENTS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE COMPLAINT POLICY
Report of:	TASK AND FINISH PANEL
Cabinet Portfolio:	Leader and Strategic Direction and Partnerships
Key Decision	No
Confidentiality	Non-Exempt

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This is a report from the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel which was providing guidance and advice on how the Council's Corporate Complaint Policy could be updated and improved.

2 TASK AND FINISH PANEL RECOMMENDATION

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Subject to any comments,
 - a. Endorses the new Corporate Complaint Policy and recommends to Cabinet it's formal adoption.
 - b. Endorses the anticipated web information that will be available for residents
2. Notes the intention, that once the new policy and systems are in place, that high level trend data on complaints will be provided to Overview and Scrutiny as part of the corporate suite of data provided on a quarterly basis.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Work is underway to review the Council's approach to the management of complaints. This will include further training for staff and the development of an organisational wide complaints platform to encourage greater consistency in handing, monitoring and reporting. However, fundamental to the Council's approach will be the Complaints Policy itself and ensuring that is accessible and easily understandable by our residents and can be implemented effectively by our staff.
- 3.2 At the November meeting of Overview and Scrutiny, a request was made to establish a cross-party Task and Finish panel to assist in the refresh and updating of the Councils Corporate Complaint Policy. Councillors Davies, Dorn, Drage, and Smith were nominated.

- 3.3 The Task and Finish panel have met twice to consider the policy in detail and recommend a series of changes.
- 3.4 Running alongside the Task and Finish group was consultation with residents, managers and operational staff. Opportunities to be involved have taken place since November. Views from all groups including Change Champions have been considered and the policy has been refined accordingly. As part of the website review, residents were asked their views of the current complaint pages and inputted on the draft webpage.

4 MAIN ISSUES

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Panel met on 1 December 2021 with key officers, looking in considerable depth at the current policy and the approach taken by the Local Government Ombudsman and other Councils to help inform the debate. This productive discussion created a new draft Complaints Policy which was circulated to the Task and Finish Panel, which enabled ongoing and effective feedback via an online conversation.
- 4.2 Once an advanced draft had been created, the policy was brought to both Leadership Team and Management Team for consideration and comment.
- 4.3 The policy returned to the Task and Finish Panel on 25 January 2022 when final consideration and finessing of the complaints policy, as set out in Appendix 1, was finalised.
- 4.4 The main changes to the draft policy for Overview and Scrutiny to note are:
- Creation of an informal stage for issues to be resolved quickly and efficiently
 - Creation of a two-stage process:
 - Stage 1 to be considered by Officers
 - Stage 2 to be considered by Heads of Service and reviewed by Joint Chief Executive
 - Enhanced user experience on the website to find information about the complaints process and make a complaint or compliment. This includes:
 - Straightforward information published on the website to summarise the complaints process
 - Revised complaints form
 - Develop complaints workflow system using Power Automate app within Office 365 suite for internal use to log, monitor and report on Stage 1 and 2 complaints
 - Analyse and report to Management Team and Overview and Scrutiny on a quarterly basis

A high-level view of the policy has been created from initial issue through to Ombudsman to provide guidance for staff and complainants. This is included within the policy itself. Appendix 2 sets out the changes from the existing policy in more detail.

- 4.5 The proposed next steps for the development and launch of the policy will be:

4-11 February	Create webform and test with Task & Finish group (external) and Change Champions (internal)
4-11 February	Demo and testing of corporate complaints workflow system for logging of formal complaints by Change Champions and other internal stakeholders
15 February	Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comments and endorsement
15 February	Senior Leadership and Management Teams for further consultation on latest draft
23 February	Virtual Staff Briefing to introduce the draft policy and outline the proposed changes
3 March	Cabinet approval
Throughout March (to be planned)	Training for all staff on the new policy and how to use the new complaints system
30 March	Virtual Staff Briefing to confirm new policy go-live
1 April	Publish the webpage and form on the corporate site. Policy is live
July	Initial review and update to Task and Finish group
Reporting due in July, Oct and Jan for previous quarter	Monitoring and reporting of corporate complaints, with information being provided to Management Team to oversee key issues and trends, as well as provision of trend data via the quarterly performance reports to Overview and Scrutiny.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 5.1 It is key that our residents have an accessible and efficient way to provide feedback to the Council, including through complaint processes.
- 5.2 The review of the current three-stage process has demonstrated that the existing approach should not be continued due to complexity, effectiveness, and cost reasons. The do-nothing option was therefore rejected.

6 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or The Hart Vision 2040

This policy is relevant to the priority within the Corporate Plan to deliver an effective and efficient Council and is reflected in the operating model highlighted within the Hart Vision 2040, of a Council that delivers welcoming services that are inclusive and engaging

Service Plan

Is the proposal identified in the Service Plan?	No
Is the proposal being funded from current budgets?	Yes
Have staffing resources already been identified and set aside for this proposal?	Yes

Legal and Constitutional Issues

Councils must provide a clear and transparent opportunity for residents to express concerns regarding the services they receive, this policy will meet that obligation

Financial and Resource Implications

Adoption and training on the new Complaints Policy will be met within existing budget. At present the system for recording complaints is anticipated to utilise existing IT platforms. Should this not be possible, a business case will be brought forward to Cabinet for consideration.

Risk Management

The provision of a refreshed and updated Corporate Complaints Policy reduces the Council's risk of

- failing to meet our residents' expectations
- inconsistent application of the complaints policy by staff
- ombudsman cases found against the council
- loss of reputation

As with any project of this nature, there are potential risks of delays such as IT implementation issues, and data security issues that will need to be resolved. As highlighted above it is anticipated that the Council will be using well used and trusted existing systems, if this is not the case then further work may be required to install a bespoke complaints system. The resource implications of which would be brought back to Cabinet for consideration.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 Under equality legislation, the Council has a legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief.

The recommendations set out in this report should not have any impact on any of the protected characteristics highlighted above.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no direct carbon/environmental implications arising from the recommendation.

