

**PAPER NO. 5**

**REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEETING OF 15 August 2011**

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**Status:** Decision  
**Title:** Complaints Procedure  
**Originator:** Peter Rowbotham, Head of Customer and Community Services  
**Where from:** Scrutiny People  
**Where to next:** Implementation

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1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Handling complaints properly is an important part of the Council's 'Customer First' initiative. It demonstrates that we listen to our customers, learn from our mistakes and continually try to improve our services. This Procedure demonstrates how we capture, analyse and respond to this information.

2 Recommendations:

- 2.1 To approve the revised procedure for the recording and monitoring of complaints concerning the Council's services.

3 Summary of Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council collects considerable statistical information as part of day to day service delivery. This includes service requests including 'complaints, comments, compliments and suggestions' (CCCS). As a Council it is important that the information collected is analysed and informs future service delivery as part of the business planning process.
- 3.2 Information collected from the CCCS process is a free feedback service and this is the best form of market research.
- 3.3 Every organisation receives complaints. The main benefits of having a council complaints procedure is that we will be able to listen and respond to our customers and partners and improve service delivery through a process which understood and is followed throughout the Council.

4 Impact on Communities

- 4.1 Enabling communities to feedback into the Council promotes both civic participation and the feeling of being capable of influencing decisions in the locality.

## 5 Key Facts

5.1 This Complaints Procedure will provide:

- **A system that is better for our customers.** Everyone knows how to complain and the way their complaint will be handled.
- **A system that is better for staff.** We can be confident about what to do when a complaint is received.
- **A system that is fairer.** Everyone is treated fairly.
- **A system that helps the Council to improve its services.** When all complaints are going through one system we can easily analyse these and then see how to make services better and more responsive.
- **A system that identifies persistent complainants.** This will identify those considered vexatious and how to deal with such situations.

## 6 Legal Issues

6.1 The Council has a duty to respond to all complaints. It also has a duty 'to involve' the community in its activities.

## 7 Resource Issues

7.1 The Customer Services Team will keep a record of the numbers and nature of 1<sup>st</sup> stage (informal) complaints and information necessary to ensure that response times are met. The Corporate Services Team will keep similar records for the second stage onwards.

7.2 Monitoring will be carried out monthly and a comprehensive report will be produced for the Management Board. The report will also be sent to councillors for information by using the all Councillor e-Newsletter.

7.3 All staff will be provided with customer care training – either direct or via the Learning Pool. This will be dependant on the individual's role within the organisation. There will also be training on complaints handling which will be provided by the local Ombudsman.

## 8 Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached. Although there are no implications on 'feedback', the process needs to be accessible to all. Therefore, there is a need to collect equalities information to monitor the effectiveness to ensure 'Equality and Fairness'. This is met by including an Equality Monitoring questionnaire within the recording process.

## 9 Impact on the Organisation

- 9.1 The complaints procedure is a key element of the Council's overall approach to the 'customer first' approach. By following the procedure we can help maintain and improve the level and quality of service the Council provides to its customers and the people within the Harborough District. We can identify where mistakes have been made and genuine grievances have arisen to ensure that these are rectified to the satisfaction of the customer and that similar circumstances do not recur.

## 10 Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 All feedback on Community Safety issues would be fed into the Community Safety business plan, and if necessary, shared with partners such as the Police. Complaints on lack of action by the Council on community safety issues (such as anti social behaviour) would be processed in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.

## 11. Carbon Management Implications

- 11.1 No implications.

## 12. Risk Management Implications

- 12.1 A corporate approach to complaints must be adopted or there is a risk of the Council not being fully aware of its overall performance. The Business Plan would also not reflect the priorities expressed through the various feedback mechanisms.
- 12.2 Not responding effectively to complaints would lead to a risk of losing customer confidence and receiving negative publicity.

## 13. Consultation

- 13.1 There has been internal consultation in producing this report. There will be further work carried out to embed this procedure fully within the Council.
- 13.2 For on-going consultation and feedback, a small focus group, made up from the Citizens' Panel, should be brought together to comment on the revised Complaints Procedure.

## 14 Options Considered

- 14.1 None.

## 15. Background Papers

- 15.1 None.

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**Previous report(s):** Scrutiny People

**Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure:** ~~Y~~ N

**Ward Members Notified:** Y ~~N~~

**Appendices:** *list any appendices here including title and filename in brackets (e.g. Performance Data 2010 (perfddata.doc)).*

- A. **Complaints Procedure** (August 2011)
- B. **Equality Impact Assessment**