

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

6th October 2010

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Geoff Denaro
Relevant Head of Service	Amanda de Warr
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report outlines recommendations for changes to the corporate customer feedback process with a view to providing a more effective means for a customer to make comments, compliments or complaints about services and staff. The recommendations aim to streamline the process to make it easy for customers to access and for staff to administer and to ensure staff have a consistent approach when dealing with customer feedback.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That members approve the Customer Feedback Policy as set out in Appendix 1.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 An appropriate customer feedback policy is necessary to:
- ensure that we obtain information about the public perceptions about our services,
 - inform future policy and service planning, and
 - provide customers with a mechanism to raise concerns about how we have dealt with something.
- 3.2 There are 6 overriding principles to good complaints handling that should be followed at all times:
1. Getting it right;
 2. Being customer focused;
 3. Being open and accountable;
 4. Acting fairly and proportionally;
 5. Putting things right;
 6. Improving as a result.
- 3.3 All forms of feedback help us to:
- understand what services people value and why;
 - share good practice;

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- make sure we learn and develop in a way which keeps providing a good service to customers;
 - recognise when staff 'go the extra mile'.
- 3.4 Customer feedback is a valuable source of customer insight and complaints provide a valuable source of data we can use to inform what we do in the future.
- 3.5 The process for customers should be straightforward and easy to understand. We should deal with customer complaints correctly, comprehensively and as quickly as possible.
- 3.6 Complaints procedures are not in place to give everyone who asks for one a different answer to their problem, but to ensure the answers we do give are correct, timely and take account of the individual's circumstances if it is possible to do so. However, where we have made a mistake, or not done as well as customers expect we should be able to admit this and learn from the feedback. The outcome of investigations should be clearly documented using plain English and we should empathise with the customer.
- 3.7 The proposed policy sets out a streamlined and customer focused approach to dealing with customer feedback, specifically customer complaints. It ensures that customers have the assurance that their complaint will be dealt with at a senior level and that complaints are reported to the Chief Executive and members. It also ensures that customer complaints are taken seriously, that there is a clear outcome, even if we cannot resolve their problem and that we have implemented changes where it possible to do so.
- 3.8 The major change to the procedure currently in use in Bromsgrove is the reduction in stages through which a complaint can progress. Data collected in respect of complaints taken to Stage 3 (review by Chief Executive) shows that the decision in respect of the complaint is almost never changed. Whilst this might give the customer the impression that they have taken their complaint to every possible level it is wasteful in terms of officer time and adds nothing to the outcome. The proposed scheme takes a streamlined, 'right first time' approach.
- 3.9 However, some form of appeal process is desirable and we must be clear in what circumstances these will be considered and action taken. For example, it may be there is new evidence or information in respect of the case which would lead us to believe that the case could not have been fully investigated, or a belief that the complaint had not been properly handled. Otherwise, the customer has the option of taking the matter to the Ombudsman, their MP, or their local member. If we get the process right up front there should be few which need to go to a further stage.

4. KEY ISSUES

Any changes to such policies must be led by a desire to improve it for customers. This can lead to some organisational concerns such as, will we be able to meet customer expectations without placing additional burdens on the organisation and its staff. The recommended policy and resulting procedure will be easy for all to understand, should result in a reduction in work as it reduces steps in the process, thus cutting out waste, whilst still ensuring customers have a robust mechanism through which to complain where it is necessary to do so.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Failure to handle complaints well may result in complaints to the Ombudsman which can result in financial recompense being ordered.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Failure to handle complaints appropriately can lead to further legal action being taken.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As set out in Appendix 1.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The recommended policy and procedure are in line with the Council's vision in respect of providing high quality access to services.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 Specific risks relating to the proposed policy and procedures are:-

- Failure to respond appropriately to complaints;
- Delay in responding to complaints;
- Not addressing concerns resulting in loss of public confidence;
- Failure to identify trends or recurring themes and acting upon them;
and
- Negative impact on the Council's reputation.

9.2 Heads of Service will be responsible for ensuring sufficient checks are in place to ensure complaints are dealt with appropriately, within the agreed

timescales and ensuring that the customer receives a high quality response. Additionally customer feedback will be monitored by the Head of Customer Services.

9.3 Identified risks have been included in the Customer Services Risk Register.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

An easy to understand and accessible complaints process shows commitment to customer service and will continue to drive improved customer satisfaction. The recommended process will show that we take complaints seriously and welcome them as a way of identifying service improvements.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

The process will apply to all customers and ensure that all complaints are handled consistently. An impact assessment based on the proposed procedure has been completed and there are no actions arising.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

Improvements in customer service generally results in a reduction of preventable contact which increases value for money, by increasing capacity to deal with other issues. Reducing the steps in the process and ensuring we provide a quality response first time will reduce further contact.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

None

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

None

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Clearer reporting will be possible by implementing a more streamlined process. A process that is consistent in Bromsgrove and Redditch will enable us to provide comparative data, and as we move into more shared services remove the need to operate separate systems. Reporting currently in place will remain, but will be improved by providing heads of service with details for their areas. In addition we will be including details of

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Ombudsman's complaints and MP enquiries in future reports as both can be an indication of areas for improvement.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

None

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

None

18. LESSONS LEARNT

None

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

None at this stage but in future users of the policy will be asked for their feedback and this will inform future amendments.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	Yes
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	Through CMT
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	Through CMT
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	Through CMT
Head of Service	Author
Head of Resources	Through CMT
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Through CMT
Corporate Procurement Team	Through CMT

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21. WARDS AFFECTED

All Wards

22. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Draft Customer feedback Policy.

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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