
LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out a revised process to ensure corporate learning from complaints. It also contains the complaints statistics for April – December 2007.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In December 2006 the Audit Commission undertook an access to services inspection, and the report produced by the inspection team was considered by the former Policy, Finance and Strategic Performance Committee on 19 April 2007.
- 2.2 The report recommended that the Council better utilise information from complaints to build knowledge and understanding of the specific needs and preferences of all community groups.
- 2.3 This was followed up by the Ethical Governance Health Check in March 2007. This produced an action plan that recommended an improved use of complaints monitoring to inform decision-making.

3 DISCUSSION AND PROPOSALS

Existing Complaints Handling System

- 3.1 The Council receives a quite limited number of complaints: in 2005/06 we received 176 and, in 2006/07, 177.
- 3.2 The complaints recorded from April – December 2007 total 111 and are summarised in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 In the existing system complaints are recorded in each division, and these figures are then collated centrally. This process captures limited information about each complaint. On the basis that complaints should be resolved at the lowest possible level, complaints are discussed within each division and there are examples of service improvement as a result. However, there is limited corporate learning from complaints analysis and thus work has focussed on developing a more co-ordinated mechanism to learn on a corporate basis to add to the existing processes.
- 3.4 Satisfaction with complaints handling has improved; in the 2003 best value survey we were 4th quartile but in the 2007 survey we had improved to 2nd quartile.

Improved Comments, Compliments and Complaints Handling System

- 3.5 In looking at ways in which we can learn from others to improve our complaints handling, we have sought best practice from colleagues in Essex

and elsewhere. In particular we have learnt from Watford Borough Council, which has progressed from a weak to a good authority. Its CPA corporate assessment report in July 2007 describes effective procedures for dealing with complaints, which the Council then uses to inform service development. This includes regular reporting to the corporate management board, and officers taking on the role of customer liaison officer in each service ensuring that learning is shared and that service improvements are put in place.

- 3.6 As a result of this learning we are introducing a new system to record all customer feedback, whether a comment, compliment or complaint. This will be by the use of a corporate excel spreadsheet, that will record details not just of any comment, compliment or complaint received, but also the action taken as a result. This will enable the automatic production of management information such as type of complaint and time taken to respond, as well as ensuring that we capture all types of customer feedback to help us improve our services.
- 3.7 As part of this process, we will designate an officer in each division as “service feedback champion” whose role will be to ensure the timely and accurate recording of all customer feedback received, to monitor responses within the division, and to ensure that lessons are learnt. There will also be a designated “corporate feedback co-ordinator” who will maintain an overview of the operation of the customer feedback process, monitor the Council’s performance on a corporate basis, provide management information and co-ordination and ensure information is shared and lessons learnt corporately.
- 3.8 To ensure the Council learns from customer feedback we have developed a flowchart that shows how we will share learning. This includes discussion within teams and divisions on a monthly basis, and then at management level and Executive Board on a quarterly basis. All staff and customers will also be updated on a regular basis. The flowchart is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.9 As part of the process we will also ask complainants how satisfied they have been with the way their complaint was handled. Information obtained will then be reported by the corporate feedback co-ordinator through the quarterly reporting process to management and the Executive Board.
- 3.10 As we are improving our processes, we are taking the opportunity to revise the staff guidance about how to deal with customer feedback and the guide for customers. Our website will also be updated.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are implications for the CPA re-inspection if the Council does not show progress in implementing service improvements highlighted in previous inspections.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The revisions to the procedures for handling customer feedback can be accommodated within existing resources.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Board **RESOLVES**
- (1) to note the complaints statistics for April – December 2007.
 - (2) to agree the improved procedures for handling all customer feedback.

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Background Papers:-

CPA Corporate Assessment Report Watford Borough Council July 2007.

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