

SHADOW EXECUTIVE

17 March 2009

SUBJECT	Corporate Customer Feedback Procedures (The report details the recommendation for the Executive to reach agreement on the corporate feedback procedure for Central Beds Council to promote effective and streamlined feedback handling. The feedback procedure covers compliments, comments and complaints.)
REPORT OF	Director of Business Transformation <i>Contact Officer: Sonya Branagan, Customer Relations Manager</i>

IMPLICATIONS

SUSTAINABILITY	None
FINANCIAL	There are none for embedding the procedure but there will be financial implications for delivering a customer feedback IT system.
LEGAL	<p>The Local Government Ombudsman, who have jurisdiction to investigate the Councils complaints, will expect the Council to have a clear policy and procedure. The lack of or non-adherence to a policy and procedure can amount to a finding against the Council of maladministration.</p>
PERSONNEL/EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES	<p>Staff will need to be trained to use the new procedure.</p> <p>Any feedback procedure should be accessible to all of the Council's customers. The three stage process will ensure there is maximum opportunity for customer's to have their complaints heard.</p> <p>The vexatious and unreasonable complainants policy is designed to be a policy of last resort to ensure vulnerable customers are not closed down when making complaints and individual's needs are taken into account.</p>

COMMUNITY DEV/SAFETY	By adopting an open and transparent feedback procedure the Council invites its customer to tell them about problems with Council services relating to community safety issues.
TRADES UNION	None
HUMAN RIGHTS	By adopting a customer feedback procedure the Council promotes the right to a fair trial by ensuring there is a rigorous process for dealing with complaints that includes the option of independent scrutiny.
KEY ISSUE	Yes
BUDGET/POLICY FRAMEWORK	No

OTHER DOCUMENTS RELEVANT TO REPORT

Corporate Customer Feedback Procedure Vexatious and Unreasonable Complainants Procedure Customer Charter

RECOMMENDATION(S)

<p>That the Shadow Executive adopt the proposed corporate procedures for handling and responding to customer feedback as set out in Appendices A and B.</p>

<p><i>Reason for Recommendation:</i> The Council will need to have in place a customer feedback procedure detailing how it will deal with compliments, comments and complaints. By adopting the procedure the Council will meet the expectations of the Local Government Ombudsman to have a defined procedure that includes independent scrutiny of complaints. Customers will have access to an open and transparent approach to customer feedback. Officers will have a tool to promote the capture of customers' issues to inform service improvement.</p>

1.0 BACKGROUND

Corporate Customer Feedback Procedures

- 1.1 Central Bedfordshire will need to have a robust procedure in place to ensure both customers and staff are aware of how customers can give feedback about all of its services and how the council will handle the feedback.
- 1.2 The procedure will need to be agreed and in place from 1 April 2009.

- 1.3 The procedure will need to be appropriate to all if its services with the exception of social care where a statutory procedure is required. However, the procedures should be aligned, as far as possible, to ensure consistency of approach.
- 1.4 The existing procedure in place for Children's Services is fit for purpose. However, there is a proposal to go to the Director of Children, Families & Learning to streamline the procedures.
- 1.5 The existing Adults' Social Care Service also has a procedure fit for purpose. However, there is a national reform agenda which will reform how health and social care will respond to complaints. The Regulations have not yet been released. Work is underway to ensure Central Bedfordshire can respond to the changes by 1 April 2009. This work will include aligning the procedure as far as practicable to the corporate procedures adopted in the new Council.
- 1.6 The proposed corporate feedback procedure (Appendix A) was designed to meet the needs of a large organisation. It is aligned to the Local Government Ombudsman publication 'Running a Complaints System Guidance on Good Practice' which includes a three stage process.
- 1.7 By giving customers the right to access a three stage process, including independent scrutiny, it provides transparency and promotes a listening and learning organisation.
- 1.8 The procedure has recently been reviewed and incorporates Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) which offers flexibility in responding to feedback. ADR has a proven track record of success in the statutory social care arena in reducing escalated complaints and offering speedier effective resolution for customers.
- 1.9 The procedure has been aligned to the existing statutory procedures for social care where practicable. Statutory procedures are designed to protect the most vulnerable customers and there are specific duties contained in the statutory procedure that do not apply to all council services. However, by incorporating the same principles and best practice into both procedures this will promote consistency and will ensure the authority demonstrates a flexible, open and transparent approach to responding to customers when things go wrong.
- 1.10 The procedure has been process mapped and incorporated into a feedback database with case handling functionality (I Casework, NonStopGov). If the procedure is adopted by the authority along with the system this will provide a sound platform towards delivering effective complaints handling and performance management to ensure organisational learning as a direct result of customer feedback.

- 1.11 The procedure is supported by a Vexatious and Unreasonable Complainants Policy & Procedure (Appendix B) which includes guidance for staff on how to manage difficult customers. The policy ensures customers are treated fairly when they present with difficult or unreasonable behaviours when making complaints, and staff are supported to manage the difficulties. The procedure was drawn up with reference to the social care statutory guidance on dealing with vexatious and unreasonable complainants.

2.0 CONCLUSION

- 2.1 The key aims of the procedure are to ensure customer feedback is used to develop and design services to meet the needs of the local community and to ensure customers feel confident that their views and concerns will be taken seriously. The Council needs a clear policy on customer feedback and a procedure defining the minimum standards customers can expect when they make comments, compliments and/or complaints.
- 2.2 The three stage process will promote an open and transparent approach to responding to customer feedback and will ensure comprehensive local scrutiny of complaints. This will promote effective resolution and minimise the risk of customers escalating complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 2.3 This is the procedural framework that needs to be in place from 1 April 2009 and is just the start of the process that will link to the Customer Charter and will involve a training programme for staff not used to these procedures.
- 2.4 The process will need to build on this procedure with a more customer focussed culture that welcomes customer feedback of any form and uses it to build relationships and improves services and efficiency as set out in NI14 (unavoidable contact).

Background Papers:

Location of Papers:

File Reference: