



# Executive Committee

No Direct Ward Relevance

16<sup>th</sup> September 2009

## COMPLAINTS POLICY - REVIEWED PROCEDURE

(Report of the Head of Customer and IT Services)

### 1. Summary of Proposals

To review and refresh the existing Complaints Policy to bring it up to date. This includes clarifying the different stages of the policy and updating leaflets accordingly.

### 2. Recommendations

**The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that**

**the Complaints Policy be amended so that 'Informal Complaints' are removed at Stage One of the Complaints Policy.**

### 3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Sustainability Implications

#### Financial

3.1 There are no financial implications.

#### Legal

3.2 There are no legal implications.

#### Policy

3.3 The report proposes a change to an adopted policy.

#### Risk

3.4 There are no specific risks associated with the proposed action. The proposal will make the process easier to understand for the customer and easier and more effectively managed by the Council.

#### Sustainability / Environmental

3.5 There are no specific sustainability/environmental implications associated with this report.

### Report

#### 4. Background

4.1 The existing Complaints Policy was previously been reviewed and adopted in 2005.

4.2 The stages of the current Complaint Policy are as follows:

##### **Stage One**

Informal complaint or service failure.

##### **Stage Two**

Complaint considered and responded to by the relevant Director for that service area.

##### **Stage Three ( Appeal to Chief Executive)**

Complaint considered and responded to by the Joint Chief Executive.

##### **Stage Four (Member Complaint Appeal)**

Complaint considered and responded to by a Panel of Councillors.

If still dissatisfied with the outcome the complainant is then directed to the Ombudsman to investigate the complaint.

4.3 The Community Forum were asked their views on the process on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009 and made the following suggestions:

- a) Include reference to the Corporate Standards;
- b) Include a 'flow chart' within the policy showing the different stages;
- c) Review the colouring/font size of the public documents to ensure that they are accessible, especially for those people who are visually impaired;
- d) Include the response time at the end of each stage in Policy;
- e) Role of Advocacy promoted;
- f) Make the process simple, easy to understand and to access (confusion about the stages).

#### 5. Key Issues

5.1 A new Stage One (Informal Complaint) was introduced to the complaints policy in 2005. This stage was where services would

respond to a complaint at the first point of contact but it wouldn't be part of the formal process. However, this extra stage has proved confusing both to staff trying to operate it and customers trying to access the complaints process.

- 5.2 A national indicator has been introduced (NI 14) which requires councils to record and report on avoidable contact. A process is in place to record and report on this and will pick up service failure as well as other issues which have resulted in avoidable contact. Some systems have been adapted to record this information such as the Customer Relationship Management System operated by customer services staff. The results of this information gathering will be co-ordinated by the Strategy and Partnerships Team and will reported as part of the Council's Performance Management Framework. This will effectively take the place of the informal stage of the complaints process.
- 5.3 In addition, as part of the quarterly performance monitoring report there will be an update to Committee on complaints and compliments. The first of these reports will be presented on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September.
- 5.4 It is suggested that the complaints procedure has three distinct stages which make it more understandable for customers and easier to manage. In addition the process will be promoted and customer encouraged to use it when they are dissatisfied with the council's actions.
- 5.5 The suggested stages are:
- a) Stage One – Complaints investigated by the Head of Service or Director of the relevant service;
  - b) Stage Two - Complaint Appeal to the Chief Executive;
  - c) Stage Three – Members (Councillors) Appeal Panel.
- 5.6 The Complaints Policy, Employee Guide and Leaflets and Response Form will be updated accordingly and re-issued to staff, on the internet and public reception areas. The Complaints Leaflet at Appendix 2 has been redesigned to comply with accessibility guidelines.

## 6. Other Implications

Asset Management - None specific.

Community Safety - None specific.

Human Resources - None specific.

Social Exclusion - None specific.

### 7. **Lessons Learnt**

It is clear that having an informal stage for complaints has been confusing for customers and staff and has necessitated the need for a clearer more accessible complaints procedure.

### 8. **Background Papers**

The Council's Current Complaints policy:  
(<http://redditch.whub.org.uk/home/rbc-your-council-how-to-complain>)

### 9. **Consultation**

9.1 This report has been prepared in consultation with relevant Borough Council Officers.

9.2 Community Forum.

### 10. **Author of Report**

The author of this report is Jane Smith, Head of Customer & IT Services, who can be contacted on extension 3000 (e-mail: jane.smith@redditchbc.gov.uk ) for more information.

### 11. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Revised Complaints Policy;  
Appendix 2 - Revised Complaints Leaflet and Complaints Response Form.