

Report for:	Shadow Executive (Formal)
Meeting Date:	03 December 2019

Title of Report:	New Customer Service Standards and Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Policy
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Recommendations:	That Formal Shadow Executive approves for the proposed, new Customer Service Standards and Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Policy as detailed below.
Corporate Implications:	There are no legal or financial implications.
Options: (If any)	None – The single service standard and policy harmonises best practice across each of the existing authorities.
Reason:	A single new Service Standards, Feedback, Compliments and Complaints policy and set of SLAs were identified as a must-have for vesting day.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Customer and Digital workstream are seeking approval for the proposed, new set of Customer Service Standards and Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Policy to be adopted by Buckinghamshire Council.

- 1.2 Customer Service Standards help to define what our customers can expect when they engage with the Council's services and act as a reminder for employees and management across the new Council of the commitment we all have to deliver high-quality customer service.
- 1.3 The policy proposes that the ownership falls within the remit of the Monitoring Officer and confirmation of this is also sought.

2. Background

- 2.1 At present, each of the five local authorities has an individual policy and individual standards. The proposed policy presented in this paper incorporates the best practice from each of the existing policies and is built on the six principles for complaint handling, as recommended by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 2.2 The new policy supports the requirement to deliver a consistent level of quality assurance and oversight for all complaints and that this is done by complaints officers as the customer advocates (rather than within service teams).
- 2.3 The policy also requires that Stage 2 complaints are reviewed independently i.e. investigated by Stage 2 complaints officers, for a degree of separation from the service and the complaints officer that handled the original Stage 1 complaint.
- 2.4 The Feedback, Compliments and Complaints policy as set out in Appendix A below will be published on the new Buckinghamshire Council website and also accessible from the legacy Council websites. The Customer Service Standards are located in Appendix B.
- 2.5 The proposed standards have included the best practice from all 5 authorities as well as best practice from across the sector.


3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 None – this paper is about the Customer Service Standards and the Feedback, Compliments and Complaints policy and not the system implementation.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 N/A

5. Other Key Risks

- 5.1 Buckinghamshire Council will do everything to meet and exceed the proposed set of customer service standards. However, if a customer receives a perceived poor level customer service, there is a risk that they will make a complaint.
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5.2 However, we plan to publish our performance against these standards and will act on the insight we gather through all forms of feedback, including complaints, to ensure that we are continually improving the customer service that we deliver.

5.3 Example of performance stats to be published

Interaction	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020
Number of calls	4956	5242	4126
Calls answered	4918	5184	4090
Calls abandoned	37	58	36
Average wait time	00:45	00:43	00:35
Calls dealt with at 1 st point of contact	70%	73%	80%
Emails/online forms received	6321	6581	5000
Webchat offered	1100	1199	1300
Webchat dealt with at the 1 st point of contact	90%	91%	94%

5.4 If a consistent approach and policy are not agreed then this may impact on customer experience.

6. Dependencies

6.1 There is a dependency on the implementation of a single IT system for Comments, Compliments, Complaints (CCC) and Information Requests (FOIs, SARs, etc) by 1st April 2020. Approval was given to proceed with the implementation of a single IT system (Aptean Respond) at the 30 October Resources Board.

6.2 There is a dependency on the HR workstream for the additional FTE recruitment/secondment activities.

6.3 Website updates including publication of the new policy will be managed by the Customer & Digital workstream.

6.4 The Customer Service Standards should be adopted by all service areas across the authority although performance measures may vary between services.

7. Consultation

7.1 No formal consultation. However, service standards have been discussed with a sample of employees and customers and feedback has been incorporated into this proposal.



- 7.2 Input for the single policy has been sought from key stakeholders across each of the authorities whilst developing the single policy.

8. Communications Plan

- 8.1 The new Customer Service Standards and Feedback, Compliments and Complaints policy will be published on the new Buckinghamshire Council website and will be accessible from all of the existing, rebranded Council websites.
- 8.2 The new service standards will be shared with staff to ensure that they are aware of the new standards and their obligation to delivering excellent customer service.
- 8.3 This includes incorporation into the Customer Training Programme – the current BCC Customer Service e-learning module will be updated and be rolled out to all staff. The training programme will begin in January 2020.
- 8.4 We will work with Comms and the web team to ensure that the Service Standards meet with the required accessibility standards moving forward.

9. Equalities Implications

- 9.1 Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken as part of both the Customer Service Standards and Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Policy. They are currently awaiting approval.

10. Data Implications

- 10.1 Data Privacy implications will be considered as part of the project to implement a single IT solution. There will be no private information captured or published as part of the Customer Service Standards.

11. Next Steps

- 11.1 The new customer service standards will help to define the expectation for both our customers and employees. The easy part is to define the standards and publish them on our website(s). Therefore, we must monitor our performance regularly to ensure that we are constantly delivering exceptional customer service.
- 11.2 Customer Services will analyse monthly performance against the agreed internal key performance indicators, using analytics and customer feedback. These measures will support customer management teams to ensure that resources are used to best effect and contribute towards performance objectives for customer-facing staff.



Appendix A

Buckinghamshire Council
Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Policy

Introduction/Overview

Buckinghamshire Council welcomes feedback from its customers. This document explains how we record and act upon this feedback, listening to the experiences of our customers - positive or negative - to make improvements in services.

This policy deals with compliments, complaints and suggestions for improvement. It does not cover social care complaints for children's or adults services, because there are separate legal processes for dealing with those complaints.

Why does the council have this policy?

We want to make sure that:

- We hear people's views and experiences of our services.
- We learn from complaints and use them to improve our services and ways of working.
- There are simple and effective ways for people to make a complaint.
- We deal with complaints fairly and consistently.
- People who send us a complaint get a full response within the agreed timescales (unless there is a valid reason as to why this is not possible).
- We encourage an open and transparent environment that people trust and engage with.

Our approach is built on six principles for successful complaint handling, as recommended by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman:

<i>Accessibility</i>	The complaints process will be well publicised and we will ensure that it is understood by both staff and customers.
<i>Communication</i>	There will be early and continuous contact with the person making the complaint. Appropriate communication will exist between council staff and customers and between council staff and partner organisations.
<i>Fairness</i>	The organisation will deal with complaints in an impartial, open and honest way and the response will be proportionate to the complaint made.
<i>Timeliness</i>	The organisation will aim to deal with complaints in a timely manner. It should take no longer than 12 weeks to resolve a complaint from receipt to resolution.



Credibility	We will manage the complaints system effectively ensuring that there is challenge in the system to allow for any necessary changes to be made. We will ensure that the complaints process has a high profile across the council.
Accountability	We will provide clear and open information. We will follow up on learning and actions to be taken as a result of complaints.

How Will We Receive Complaints, Compliments or Feedback?

- Email: Email address TBC
- Online form: Online form URL TBC
- Letter: Correspondence address TBC
- Telephone: Telephone Number TBC

What is a complaint?

Any expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.¹

The council uses this definition from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman to assess complaints. There is a close link between service requests and complaints. We may record first time contacts as service requests, rather than complaints, and encourage services to work with the customer to resolve the issue. This is sometimes called 'local resolution'. Where local resolution hasn't happened, invariably the customer will come back to us to make a complaint.

When assessing what is a complaint, we look at:

- the tone of the correspondence
- whether the customer has said they want to make a complaint
- what the issue is and
- what the customer would like to happen next.

This is not an exhaustive list and we do consider each issue individually.

We accept complaints from anyone using a service from the council, or anyone acting on behalf of a person or organisation using a service from the council.

¹ From the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's *Guidance on Running a Complaints System*

What is a comment?

A comment is any feedback sent to the council following contact with a council department or service. This could include a suggestion for service improvement or information regarding how well a service was performed.

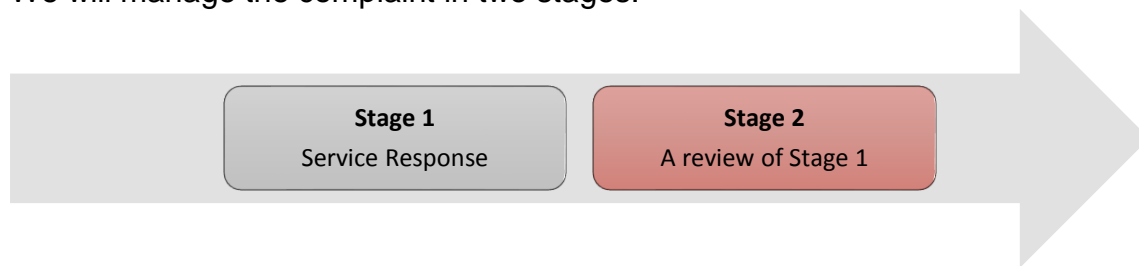
What is a compliment?

A compliment is an expression of praise to the council or any member of council staff. It could include an occasion where assistance given by a staff member was above and beyond the standard expected, or a service provided exceeded expectations. Once we receive a compliment the Council records it on a central system so that it can be shared with the relevant manager and member of staff.

Corporate Complaints Policy

This policy covers all complaints except for children's and adult social care complaints. A complete list of exceptions can be found on Appendix 1.

We will manage the complaint in two stages:



Stage 1

- When a customer raises an issue, we will check to see whether we should treat it as a complaint under this procedure.
- We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint by email, post or phone within three working days.
- A senior officer from the service being complained about will oversee an investigation to try and resolve the issues.
- We will provide a written response within 20 working days, but wherever possible, we aim to respond within 10 working days. If we are not able to do this, we can extend the timescale and we will let the customer know.

Stage 2

- If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1, they can ask for the Deputy Monitoring Officer to oversee a review of their complaint. This will be carried out by a central team who will independently review the stage 1

response and provide a response to the stage 2 complaint.

- The customer should provide full details in writing of which parts of the complaint remain unresolved. In addition, a desired outcome should be given. Email: **Email Address TBC** or write to: **Correspondence Address TBC**
- Once we receive the request, the Deputy Monitoring Officer will consider whether a Stage 2 review is appropriate. We will write to the customer within 5 working days to tell them how we are going to proceed.
- If accepted, the Deputy Monitoring Officer will conduct a Stage 2 review independently from the service being complained about, and send the customer their response.
- We will aim to provide a written response within 20 working days. If we are not able to do this, we will let the customer know and give a new timescale.

We reserve the right to refuse a complaint at either stage 1 or stage 2 of the complaints procedure for example if there is any other process available to deal with the issue. If we do refuse a complaint, we will explain why and tell the person making the complaint where else they can take their complaint (e.g. to Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman).

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

If the customer is not satisfied after receiving the Stage 2 response, they can refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. To contact the ombudsman please see their website: www.lgo.org.uk

Once the Council receives notification from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman that they are investigating a complaint we will coordinate the request corresponding with the Ombudsman where necessary.

Learning from Complaints

Our customers' opinions are really important to us. We are open to learning from complaints and using them to improve our services. We record compliments, complaints and concerns on our corporate complaints management system. We provide information about complaints to senior managers across the council. We also track the learning and changes made as a result of complaints.

An annual report will be drafted at the end of each financial year summarising compliments and complaints received throughout the year. The report will identify trends and highlight any action taken as a result of feedback given. The annual report will be signed off by senior officers and members of the council and will be published on our web pages.



Complaints About Commissioned Services

If a customer has a complaint about an organisation who are providing a service on behalf of the Council we recommend that they approach the provider and ask them to consider the complaint in the first instance. Once this has happened and if the customer remains dissatisfied then we will consider their complaint under the relevant complaints procedure.

Vexatious and Persistent Complainants

Occasionally, service users act in an abusive, unreasonably persistent or vexatious manner. When this happens, we follow guidelines from our Vexatious and Persistent Complainants Policy: **Policy URL TBC**

Review of the Policy

The council's Monitoring Officer will review this Feedback and Complaints Policy every year.



Appendix 1

Scope of the Feedback, Compliments & Complaints Policy

What is not covered by this policy:

- Enquiries from members of parliament will be dealt with through our MP Enquiries process.
- Complaints about parish or town councils should be sent directly to the relevant parish or town using the information provided on their websites.
- Statutory complaints about Children's or Adults Social Care Services (there are separate processes to deal with these). For more information, or to make a complaint about Children's or Adults Social Care Services, please contact:

Email -
Telephone –
Address –

- Requests for a service - for example, a missed bin report.
- School complaints, unless the complaint is about the Council's statutory education responsibilities. Customers should send complaints to the relevant school, as schools have their own complaints procedures.
- Where there is already an appeals process for decisions made by the council (home to school transport, school admissions, planning decisions, housing benefit decisions, council tax, business rates & recovery, parking charge notices' housing allocations). We can only investigate the handling of the application under our complaints procedure, not the decision itself.
- Complaints about councillors. The council's Monitoring Officer deals with these under a separate policy and procedure. Customers can contact the Monitoring Officer using an online form on our web site: **Online form URL TBC**
- All potential insurance claims. The council's insurance team deals with these. **URL TBC**
- Potential data incidents or data breaches under the Data Protection Act 2018. These must be reported to the Council's Data Protection Officer as soon as possible so an investigation can be undertaken, and a referral made to the Office of the Information Commissioner if necessary. Email: **Email Address TBC**
- Where a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome or processing of a Freedom of Information or Environmental Information Request or a Subject Access Request. There is a separate process of internal review and then

escalation to the Office of the Information Commissioner should the applicant remain dissatisfied.

- Complaints about an issue that was known about for more than 12 months before the complaint was made to the Council, unless there is a good reason for the delay
- Objections from a third party about a planning application under consideration by the Council (which will be added as representations to the application)
- Complaints about matters that have already exhausted the complaints process, or have been investigated by the Ombudsman
- Disagreements with a council policy or rule of law
- Complaints by an employee about a personnel matter (which are dealt with under the Council's personnel procedures)
- Complaints about Local Government Pensions. There is a separate procedure for these (please see our website for more information).
- Where any parallel legal processes have already started (or where it is considered appropriate for the complainant to start legal proceedings). Please note that if the complainant wishes to submit a further complaint after the conclusion of those legal proceedings, we are not able to consider any points which the court has (directly or indirectly) considered. In these circumstances we reserve the right to refuse to accept any/all aspects of the complaint, as appropriate.
- Anonymous complaints are logged as service requests, unless the complaint raises issues of wider concern to the council that can be dealt with without further input from the complainant.



Appendix B

Buckinghamshire Council Customer Service Standards

Buckinghamshire Council is committed to improving and modernising our services to provide high standards of customer service to the people who contact Buckinghamshire Council, regardless of how you choose to contact us.

We will:

- Give you a range of ways to contact us
- When we contact you we will use your preferred method of communication
- Try our best to get things right the first time
- Tell you our name and the department we work in, so you know whom you're dealing with
- Deal with things quickly and tell you when there's a delay
- Explain our decisions clearly
- Apologise when we get things wrong
- Treat you with respect
- Listen to your feedback
- Keep your information and data secure in compliance with GDPR

We will measure how well we do by:

We will publish our performance statistics online as part of our commitment to providing an open and transparent service.

∞ [Link to agreed performance measures](#)

In return, we ask that you:

As a Buckinghamshire Council customer, you can expect to be treated fairly and with respect and we ask that you in return when you contact us:

- Be polite and be prepared to listen
- Don't use abusive language or behaviour when dealing with our staff or contractors
- Provide accurate and honest information so that we can deal with your request as promptly as possible.
- Let us know in good time if you need to cancel or rearrange an appointment
- Tell us if your circumstances or contact details change so that we can continue to meet your needs and keep you informed.
- Tell us if you have been having problems so that we can work together to resolve them

∞ [link to new unreasonable persistent/vexatious behaviour policy](#)

Complaints, comments and compliments

We welcome feedback that helps us improve our service to you. You can make a complaint, comment and compliment about any aspect of our service:

∞ [link to CCC content on the website](#)

