

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

14 NOVEMBER 2018

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider for adoption a revised Customer Complaints Policy, including the proposed changes to response timescales, escalation routes and complaint methods.
- 1.2 To consider for adoption as part of the overall Policy a new Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customer Policy, including the definition and subsequent management of such customers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That members approve the adoption of the Customer Complaints Policy as set out in Appendix 2 with immediate effect.**
- 2.2 **That members approve the adoption of the Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customer Policy as set out in Appendix 3 with immediate effect.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

Complaints Policy

- 3.1 The Council's existing Complaints Policy was approved in 2016 and can be accessed through the Council's website. For ease of reference a copy is attached at Appendix 1. It sets out amongst other things the methods by which customers can complain about services as well as describing what defines a complaint and how the Council expects to respond.
- 3.2 Following some operational difficulties and consideration of those by the Senior Management Team the existing process has been reviewed, clarified and updated. Our Service Strategy for Customers states that "we want to put matters right when things go wrong but also prevent them from happening again." In order to achieve this it is important that we manage the way we handle and respond to complaints in a customer focused way. We accept that complaints can be a rich source of information about how customers perceive the service they have received which, when handled effectively, can enable us to learn and improve our service delivery. It is therefore important that our complaints process is clear, accessible, flexible and forms part of the service provision for customers without overwhelming them.

3.3 The proposed Customer Complaints Policy at Appendix 2 provides a clear and concise methodology to both customers wishing to complain, and to officers managing the complaints process. Each escalation stage (para 3.14) is clearly defined, with reduced timescales of response and notification of the responsible management level providing the response.

3.4 Stage and expected response timescales

Stage	Aim	Response within
Early Resolution	Opportunity for front line staff to take immediate action that negates the need for the customer to progress the issue to a formal complaint, subject to the agreement of the complainant	Immediate
Stage 1 Investigation and Response	An appropriate Officer to investigate the Customer's complaint, ensuring the customer's voice is heard and a high quality response is provided. Guidance may be provided by a more senior officer if required. The default position would be a Service Team Leader but could be more senior officer.	15 working days
Stage 2 Request for review of stage 1	If the customer remains dissatisfied after a Stage 1 response it will be escalated to Stage 2 for an internal review. The complaint will be reviewed by an appropriate senior officer for the service. The response will be approved and signed by the relevant Director or Assistant Director. Occasionally, depending on the circumstances, this stage might involve a review by a senior officer who is independent of the service.	15 working days
Ombudsman Investigation - External	If the customer remains dissatisfied after a Stage 2 response they can submit a written complaint to the ombudsman	

3.5 When dealing with customers, front line staff will have the opportunity through the 'Early Resolution' stage to resolve issues before they are formally classified as a complaint at Stage 1.

- 3.6 Authorisation levels ensure that all complaints that have escalated to stage 2 will have been reviewed at senior levels within the Directorate, ensuring that the necessary oversight has been provided should a complaint escalate to the final, ombudsman investigation stage.
- 3.7 It is expected that the proposed Customer Complaints Policy will provide the framework to improve the Council's responses to complaints.
- 3.8 At times, the council can receive complaints or contacts from customers which can be viewed as unreasonably persistent or vexatious. The council does not currently have a policy covering these instances and, although these customers are relatively rare, it is good practice for the Council to have a formally adopted policy to guide officers.

Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Customer Policy

- 3.9 The proposed Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Customer Policy (Appendix 3) describes what levels of contact or complaint can result in unnecessarily extensive time and resource allocation or hinder the Council's consideration of their or other people's contact with the Council.
- 3.10 The policy also sets out in detail the responses available to the Council to address such customers and to ensure that officers are equipped to identify and resolve such issues within clearly defined procedures.
- 3.11 Decisions regarding unreasonably persistent or vexatious customers will be made by the relevant Service Director, alongside the Monitoring Officer and will be reviewed on a six monthly basis. The customer will be notified of any such decision, and subsequent action, and will have a right to appeal the decision.
- 3.12 The customer's legitimate right to request a service from the Council does not cease as a result of being categorised as unreasonably persistent or vexatious.

Links to the Compensation Policy

- 3.13 Both the Customer Complaints Policy and the Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Customer Policy will be used alongside the existing Compensation Policy when determining levels of compensation as a result of a complaint from a customer. A copy of the Compensation Policy is attached at Appendix 4.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to respond to customer complaints within clearly defined parameters. The proposed policies adhere to this responsibility and provide clear guidance to customers and officers to fulfil these requirements.
- 4.2 The attached policies link into the following Corporate Priority:
OG1 Delivering quality services to business and residents; understanding what really matters to our customers.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct financial or budgetary implications as a result of this report.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 The revised complaints policies continue to outline the process for report to the Ombudsman. The guidance note will ensure that data is maintained in line with the Data Protection Policy and as a result there are no other direct legal implications to the report.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 There are no Community Safety implications as a result of this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out for both the Customer Complaints Policy and Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Customer Policy

9.0 RISKS

9.1 .

L I K E L I H O O D	A	Very High				
	B	High				
	C	Significant				
	D	Low				
	E	Very Low	1	2		
	F	Almost Impossible				
			Negligible 1	Marginal 2	Critical 3	Catastrophic 4

IMPACT

Risk No	Risk Description
1	Non adoption of the policies leads to continued use of the existing Complaints Policy
2	Increased resource required to effectively manage unreasonably persistent or vexatious customers

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no Climate Change implications as a result of this report

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 No formal consultation has been undertaken

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All wards – the policies cover all customers using Melton Borough Council services

Contact Officer Albert Wilson

Date: 26 October 2018

Appendices : Appendix 1: Current Complaints Policy
Appendix 2: Proposed Customer Complaints Policy
Appendix 3: Proposed Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Customers Policy
Appendix 4: Current Compensation Policy

Background Papers: None

Reference : X:\Cttee, Council & Sub Cttees\People Committee\2018-19\Complaints Policy Report