



## **Report to: Performance Scrutiny Committee**

### **Subject: Report of the Complaints and Compliments Scrutiny Working Group**

**Date: 5<sup>th</sup> July 2010**

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#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To provide Performance Scrutiny Members with a summary of the Compliments and Complaints working group review and present its recommendations.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

The most recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment had highlighted the lack of relationship of Scrutiny to complaints management and monitoring, prompting this review.

#### **Aims of the review**

- To achieve a greater contribution by Scrutiny to the development of the Complaints Procedure, adding value to what is currently being done through the Gedling Transformation Programme and Fast Forward, which is the implementation phase of the programme.
- To establish a cycle of reporting of Complaints Performance Management information to Performance Scrutiny and Personnel and Resources Committee and SMT in the future.
- To put forward recommendations in support of a centralised and standardised process for the recording, analysis and review of complaints and compliments
- To enhance opportunities for members of the public to submit compliments to the Council

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The working group makes the following recommendations to Councillor J. Parr, portfolio holder for Customer and Member Services:**

- 3.1 Gedling Borough Council's compliments and complaints procedure is subject to comprehensive redesign and re launch between April and October 2010.
- 3.2 Taking account of Members detailed comments, I.T. systems are streamlined and data entry formats are improved, in order to improve the recording and tracking of compliments and complaints.
- 3.3 Again taking account of Members detailed comments, the compliments / complaints procedure is made more accessible and accountable to the public as follows:
  - Clearer online access to the procedure and links to other opportunities for the public to have their say.
  - A complaints/compliments form that refers to our service promises and is Freepost, as well as being accessible online
  - Improved response times and standardised methods of recompense
  - A "How did you feel your complaint was handled?" response form to be issued to all complainants and responses to be logged and collated for the purpose of evaluation.
- 3.4 Corporate arrangements are implemented to ensure that compliments / complaints are used as a tool for organisational and staff development, supported by staff training, Personal Development Reviews and departmental/ team briefings.
- 3.5 The reconciliation of compliments/complaints is coordinated by Customer services, to include the collation of statistical reports for SMT and Committees
- 3.6 All outstanding actions on individual complaints in the current system are carried out, particularly the closing off of previous year complaints.

#### **Reporting of compliments / complaints**

- 3.7 An analysis report of complaints / compliments is submitted to Performance Scrutiny and to Personnel and Resources Committee twice yearly (Quarter 2 and Quarter 4) and to Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis.
- 3.8 A report of Ombudsman complaints is made to the Performance Scrutiny Committee (Q2 and Q4) in July and November.
- 3.9 A meeting of the working group is scheduled in January 2011 to review the impact of the revised policy, to which the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Organisational Development will be invited.

## **4. INFORMATION GATHERING**

4.1 The working group held a series of four meetings; the first to establish the aims and agree the review process, the second with J. Brothwell, Head of Customer Services and Organisational Development, to gain an understanding of current compliments/complaints management procedures and plans for improvement, and the third with J. Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive, to gain an understanding of his role in Complaints and his views on how systems could be improved. A final meeting was then held with both J. Brothwell and J. Robinson to examine the Complaints management I.T. system, finalise recommendations and agree timescales.

### **4.2 The following information has been gathered during the course of the review:**

- A summary of current procedures and statistical breakdown **(Appendix 2)**
- A summary of Ombudsman's procedures and statistical breakdown **(Appendix 3)**
- A summary of MPs letters/Complaints to Chief Exec and statistical breakdown **(Appendix 4)**
- Departmental samples of complaints (confidential)
- The current draft Complaints Form **(Appendix 5)**
- Web based examples of the Complaints Procedures of other agencies

## **5. FINDINGS**

5.1 The detailed findings of the review and recommended actions are set out in the attached **Summary of Complaints Review (Appendix 1)** under the following themed headings:

### **5.2 Public Access and Accountability**

Public access to the system was limited, and the complaints form itself was in need of revision.

### **5.3 Management of complaints**

Members found that there was a marked lack of parity in the way in which different departments were interpreting the complaints/ compliments process.

There are three separate I.T. systems used to record complaints/compliments, Ombudsman decisions and M.P's letters, however no link exists between them to enable the effective tracking of complaints.

#### **5.4 Complaints as a resource for learning and improvement**

There were no corporate arrangements for learning from complaints, and review and evaluation was limited, due in part to out of date systems of analysis which did not reflect the current departmental structure and designation of services.

#### **5.5 Performance review and evaluation**

There were no reporting arrangements to committees in place, and, until this review, no regular review of complaints data by Senior Management Team.

#### **5.6 I.T. Systems**

Anomalies in the I.T system made the accurate recording of complaints difficult. Consequently records were not always up to date, actions taken were sometimes unclear, and there were indications of underreporting by some departments.

### **6. CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 The working group concluded that the current compliments/complaints system at Gedling Borough Council is not operating to the required capacity and needed a comprehensive overhaul.

6.2 Members were aware that proposals for doing so were underway, and linked to a new content management I.T. system as part of the GTP process, however were pleased to be involved from the outset in developing the new policy and protocols alongside senior officers.

6.3 By participating in the detailed review of systems and processes, the working group were able to test out their ideas for improvements and establish an achievable and time bound set of recommendations that will benefit both members of the public when making a complaint, and the authority when receiving it.

6.4 At the review point in January 2011, the working group are particularly interested in discovering to what extent implementation of the new policy has increased the number of compliments received by the Council.

### **7. PROPOSALS**

Performance Scrutiny Members are asked to consider and approve this report for submission to Cabinet.

### **8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The working group would like to thank John Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive) and Janet Brothwell (Head of Customer Services and Organisational Development) for their co operation with this review, and also Helen Barrington (Senior Solicitor), Steve Yallop (Customer Services Manager) and Sarah Klapkowski (P.A. to the Chief Executive) for providing the additional detailed information requested by Members.

### **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Minutes of meetings  
Information gathered as set out at 4.2