

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: TUESDAY, 26 MARCH 2013
title: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE REVIEW WORKING GROUP
submitted by: MARSHAL SCOTT – CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: BILL ALKER – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To report on the second meeting of the Complaints Procedure Review Working Group which was formed in September 2012.

1.2 To seek approval to a number of proposed changes to the Complaints Procedure recommended by the working group.

1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – To treat everyone equally and ensure that access to services is available to all including our most vulnerable citizens. To engage with all our communities to ensure we deliver services to meet customer needs and expectations.
- Corporate Priorities – To be a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 I took a report to Policy and Finance Committee in September 2012 asking Members to review how the Council's complaints procedure was operating.

2.2 Members and Officers had separately expressed some misgivings about certain aspects of the procedure and it was felt that a review was appropriate.

2.3 Previously complaints monitoring had been carried out by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis but with the demise of that Committee the responsibility now rests with Policy and Finance Committee.

2.4 A working group consisting of Councillors Hirst, Hore and A Knox was set up to investigate how best to improve the Council's procedure.

2.5 The working group's remit covered the following areas:

- Review of the procedure – reporting back to Policy and Finance.
- Look at how a complaint should be lodged.
- Who should vet and reject complaints if required.
- How investigations were carried out.
- Whether the Complaints Panel should continue in its present form.
- When and how notification should be carried out.

2.6 The working group held its first meeting on 6 November 2012 and its second meeting was held on 26 February 2013. This second meeting met to discuss further the ways in which the complaints system could be improved and the process be made more effective and transparent.

3 ISSUES

3.1 The working group again addressed the 7 specific questions and considered officer updates.

3.2 As a result of the meeting of the working group it was agreed that the complaints leaflet would need to be redrafted to reflect the following key changes which are recommended to the procedure:

- All complainants must complete the complaints form either on line or via a paper copy. Receipt of this completed form “triggers” the complaints procedure.
- Filtering criteria to be established, filtering to be carried out by Diane Rice or Bill Alker and alternative staff to be identified if either Diane or Bill are conflicted out.
- Director or Head of Service to be informed on receipt of complaint – they will be expected to make the necessary staff available to investigate the issues raised by the complainant.
- Need for guidance for staff involved in or the subject of a complaints investigation.
- Recommend that complainants be given one calendar month to move to stage 2 of the procedure from the date of receipt of the result of the investigation at stage 1.
- Amend complaints form to include an item about whether Ward Members should be notified about a complaint.
- Amend complaint form to make clear that Councillors should not be lobbied.
- Complainants be given the opportunity to submit their own documents as part of a “joint bundle”. This to be ready for distribution to panel members at least 5 working days before the panel meets.
- Complainants to be advised that any presentation to a complaints panel should ideally not take more than 30 minutes.
- Decide how or if the Ward Member is to be informed of the outcome of the deliberations of the panel.
- Consider the extension from 3 to 5 working days for the sending of the decision notice from the complaints panel.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – None.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None.
- Political – None.
- Reputation – By reviewing and revising the Complaints Procedure, this will enhance the reputation of the Council as a well-run authority.
- Equality and Diversity – It is important to have a Complaints Policy that is accessible to all our customers.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Note this report.
- 5.2 Agree to the changes to both the Complaints Procedure and complaints leaflet detailed at paragraph 3.3 above.
- 5.3 Revised Complaints Leaflet and supporting documents be submitted to the Working Group prior to introduction..

BILL ALKER
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

MARSHAL SCOTT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

For further information please ask for Bill Alker, extension 4412.

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