

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision 05 September 2022

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Complaints Procedure</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Leisure and Community
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Dynamic, Prudent and Progressive Council

**Purpose:**

This report presents a revised Corporate Complaints Procedure.

**Executive summary:**

The current Corporate Complaints Procedure is a two-stage process, with formal complaints received by the Council being directed to the appropriate Head of Service at the first stage before being escalated, if necessary, to the Director.

The two-stage process has been reviewed in response to concerns that service areas are not being given the opportunity to resolve issues prior to a formal complaint being made. A three-stage process is recommended, with the first stage directing the complaint to the Manager of the service area involved.

**Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

It is recommended that the Executive agrees the revised Complaints Procedure as attached at Appendix A to this report.

**Reason:**

To ensure that teams have the opportunity to rectify issues prior to escalation to Head of Service – and then onto the Director – ensuring customer complaints are resolved at the earliest and most appropriate point.

**Cost of proposals:**  
Within current budget.

**Appendices:**            **A.** Proposed updates to Complaints Procedure webpage

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## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Executive Briefing Paper

<b>Date:</b>	05 September 2022
<b>Subject:</b>	Complaints Procedure
<b>Briefing by:</b>	Director of Leisure and Community
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources

#### INTRODUCTION

1. This report presents proposals to improve the Council's corporate complaints procedure to allow for issues to be resolved in a swifter and more efficient way.

#### BACKGROUND

2. The Council is committed to always providing high quality services and deals with a large number of customer enquiries daily. Most customer enquiries are dealt with first time, quickly and effectively and with a positive outcome for the customer. There are times, however, where a customer is dissatisfied with the response to their enquiry, at which point they can escalate their complaint using the Council's corporate complaints procedure.

#### CURRENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

3. The current Corporate Complaints Procedure is a two-stage process:
4. Stage 1 - At the first stage the responsible Head of Service will investigate the complaint.
5. Stage 2 - If the customer is unhappy with our response, the responsible Director will review the complaint to confirm that the correct procedures and processes have been adhered to.
6. If a complainant is unhappy with the response under Stages 1 and 2, they can escalate to either the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman Service for an independent review. These are both free independent services and contact details are included in our complaints guidance.
7. Over the past two years, a total of 22 complaints have been escalated to the Ombudsman. A number of these were either closed after initial enquiries or because our complaints procedure had not been completed, only 2 were upheld.

## **IDENTIFIED ISSUES**

8. Concerns have been raised that the Council's current complaints procedure is not as responsive as it could be. This is because complaints are forwarded to Heads of Service in the first instance, when the teams directly involved in serving the customer are often best placed to resolve complaints. This can result in complaints taking longer to resolve, which in turn could increase the risk of complaints being escalated to the Ombudsmen before the full Council procedure is completed.
9. There is an opportunity to improve the Council's complaints procedure by ensuring that the teams involved have had an opportunity to resolve the issues prior to escalation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

10. To ensure that teams involved are given an opportunity to resolve issues and complaints at an early stage, it is proposed that the existing two-stage procedure be extended to include an earlier stage as follows:
  - Stage 0: Customer to speak directly with the Manager of the team involved who will usually be able to resolve concerns prior to escalating through the formal complaint procedure.
  - Stage 1: If still unresolved, a formal complaint can then be raised. At this stage the Head of Service in the department responsible for the service will investigate the complaint.
  - Stage 2: At this stage the Director of the Department responsible for the service reviews the handling of the complaint to confirm that the correct procedures and processes have been adhered to.
11. If approved, the updated procedure would provide greater clarity to customers and enable complaints to be resolved in a more effective manner. The complaints guidance and complaints form would be updated to reflect the new approach.
12. Appendix A sets out the revised wording as it would appear on the Fareham Borough Council Complaints Procedure webpage.

## **CONCLUSION**

13. The proposed three-stage complaints procedure will help resolve customer complaints at the earliest and most appropriate point, saving Council resource and customer time.

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Kat Hillman (Ext 4443)