

Scrutiny Review

July 2001

Policy Review Scrutiny Panel

**A report
on the
Review of
Complaints,
Suggestions
and
Compliments**

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moving ahead



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Members of the Panel

Councillors:

Linda Kirby (Chair)
Charles Lucas
John Nelson-Jones

Officer Support:

Diane Bailey Head of Scrutiny and Policy
Ernest Obumselu Research and Community Engagement Officer

The recommendations in this report were endorsed by the Executive Committee on 4 July 2001

1. INTRODUCTION

The report on Review of Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments was passed to Scrutiny Commission on 21 February 2001 as an item of the Executive Committee. Scrutiny Commission decided that the item would not be called in to a Standing Scrutiny Panel but would bring the item forward to discuss at a future meeting.

The item was placed on the Scrutiny Commission agenda for their meeting of 27 March 2001. During this meeting members discussed at length the need for an efficient, uniform and standardised corporate complaints policy and stressed the importance of the Authority being responsive to change and developing a learning culture.

The possibility of auditing complaints which take longer than the prescribed 15 working days to address was also raised and it was considered that Scrutiny Commission itself may be able undertake a monitoring role.

The differences between the statutory complaints procedure employed within Social Services and that proposed for other departments was debated and the special nature of Social Services complaints was emphasised.

The particular problem of vexatious complainants was discussed, with the need to ensure that these are handled as fairly as other complainants. In addition, the need for a staff training programme, to enable staff to be able to deal effectively with difficult or abusive complainants, was highlighted.

Members acknowledged that this is a complex area of the Authority's service delivery, impacting on all levels of the Council's functions and that consistency of approach is a key issue. In view of this, it was agreed to pass the report to a Policy Review Scrutiny Panel to consider, using the comments made at Scrutiny Commission as a starting point for the review.

2. MEETING OF THE POLICY REVIEW SCRUTINY PANEL AND FINDINGS

The Panel met on 27 March 2001 to consider the report on Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments to the Council. The Terms of Reference for the Panel were agreed at the meeting and are shown in Appendix A.

The Panel discussed the review of the corporate complaints policy and procedures and agreed that the review had been comprehensive and addressed the principal issues. Due to this fact it was felt that one meeting would be sufficient to seek clarification on the report and make appropriate suggestions following which, the report should be forwarded to Scrutiny Committee with the Panel's recommendations which are listed overleaf.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations relate to all Council Departments

- There should be a clear monitoring process of complaints to pick up larger and more serious policy issues behind complaints. Complaints should be monitored for wider policy implications.
- The monitoring process should be linked to Members and the Scrutiny process. Members have a lot of anecdotal information around complaints that might be of use for quality monitoring complaints. Members should be able to feed appropriate information into the 'CONFIRM' system for complaints monitoring.
- Complaints "Hot Spots" should be monitored every 6 months and reported to Policy Review Panel.
- In the leaflet, the phrase "local manager" should be replaced by term "the manager of that section" in terms of who to report a complaint to.
- Complaints responses exceeding 15 days or complaints unresolved after 15 days (28 consecutive days for Social Services complaints) should be monitored every 6 months by the Corporate Complaints Officer.
- Vexatious complainants should not be excluded from the complaints process due to Human rights issues.

APPENDIX A

Policy Review Scrutiny Panel on Review of Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments to the Council

Terms of Reference

To examine the proposed Corporate Policy for dealing with complaints, suggestions and compliments to the Council.

1. To ensure that the proposed policy adequately addresses the need for an efficient, uniform and standardised approach to dealing with complaints, suggestions and compliments, whilst taking into account the specific nature of Social Services complainants
2. To consider the possibility of auditing complaints which take longer than the prescribed 15 days to address and the possibility of Scrutiny Commission undertaking a monitoring role.
3. To consider the issue of vexatious complainants to ensure that they are handled as fairly as other complainants.
4. To consider whether a staff training programme to ensure staff are able to deal with difficult or abusive complainants has been addressed adequately.
5. Where appropriate, to request and receive submissions and information from Members and officers, including their attendance at meetings where necessary.
6. To make recommendations to the Scrutiny Commission on the Panel's findings.