



Report of the Chief Customer Services Officer

Corporate Governance & Audit Committee

Date: 10th February 2010

Subject: Access Routes and Publicity of the Corporate Complaints Process.

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. This report was requested by Board Members to provide clarity on the various access routes the Council have for customers to obtain information about the Councils Corporate Complaints Process and the Local Government Ombudsman.
2. As a Council we are committed to making it easier for our customers to provide feedback to us, and then use this feedback to improve our services. To do this we provide customers with a number of different access routes to the complaints process so that they can provide us with feedback in whichever format is their preferred access route, as detailed within this report.
3. Certain services have different response times to the corporate standard and/or have a different numbers of stages to their complaints process. Each service therefore confirms the relevant timescales for a full response to the customers complaint within it's acknowledgement to the customer. To provide the Board with clarity on the different stages and timescales, a table is provided at page 4 of this report, detailing all of the differing processes.
4. Members are asked to note the information detailed within this report.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 The Council has a Corporate Compliments and Complaints Policy. The aim of the policy is to provide clear guidelines for customers and staff as to what standard of service they can expect and within what timescale.
- 1.2 One of the main aims of the policy is to make the complaints route accessible to all. As a learning organisation we welcome feedback from our customers. To obtain that feedback we need to be accessible by a number of routes so that customers can use their preferred method for letting us know about their issues.
- 1.3 This report was requested by Members to provide clarity on the various access routes the Council has for customers to obtain information about the Councils Corporate Compliments Process and the Local Government Ombudsman.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The mission of Leeds City Council is 'to bring the benefits of a prosperous, vibrant and attractive City to all the people of Leeds'.
- 2.2 Within this, we recognize the need to provide a first class public service, which is responsive to the expressed views of our customers and this is reflected in our core value of “putting customers first”.
- 2.3 Through our Compliments and Complaints Policy and associated procedural guidance document, we resolve to deal with customer complaints speedily, effectively and fairly. We commit to making it easier for our customers to provide feedback to us, and then use this feedback to improve our services.
- 2.4 To do this we provide the customer with a number of different access routes to the complaints process so that they can provide us with feedback by their preferred access route, as detailed below.
- 2.5 We also have a network of officers around the council known as Departmental Customer Relations Officers (DCRO) whose role it is to allocate complaints to Investigating Officers within their services. The DCRO will also ensure that responses are provided within the relevant timescales and lessons are learnt. The Corporate Customer Relations Manager meets with the DCRO's on a six weekly basis to discuss issues and develop skills.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 By Post

The Council has a leaflet available to all customers giving information and access to the complaints process. The leaflet is called “Let us Know” (attached at Appendix 1) and can be obtained from any council public access site – eg: One Stop Centres, Libraries, Sports Centres, public reception areas in all council buildings. Once the form is completed it can be handed in at any site or return to us by post. The return address on the leaflet is a freepost address to ensure that there is no cost to the customer.

- 3.2 Customers wishing to send a letter to the council will also be given the freepost address to ensure no cost to the customer.
- 3.3 The “Let Us Know” leaflet publicises all of the different access routes detailed in this paper and gives a brief overview of the councils complaints process but only details how to access the process and confirm that the customers’ complaint will be acknowledged by the relevant service within 3 working days.
- 3.4 The reason for only providing limited information on the complaints process on the leaflet is that the Corporate Let Us Know leaflet is available for all customers throughout Leeds to provide feedback on all Council services, however certain services have different response times to the corporate standard and/or have a different numbers of stages to their complaints process. Each service therefore confirms the relevant timescales for a full response within it’s acknowledgement to the customer.
- 3.5 Due to the differing response times detailed above certain services – the ALMO’s, Adult Social Services & Children’s Social Care have their own complaints leaflets – these are available at all their public access sites also.
- 3.6 To provide clarity on the different stages and timescales, table 1 details all of the differing processes.

**3.7 Table 1
Complaint Response Times**

Name of Process	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Corporate	15 working days	15 working days	N/A
Adult Social Care (Statutory Timescale)	Informal = 20 working days Formal = 65 working days	N/A	N/A
Children’s’ Services (Statutory Timescale)	20 working days	65 working days	30 working days
ALMO’s – ENEHL	10 working days	15 working days	5 working days to book stage 3 hearing – outcome notified within 5 working days of the hearing.
ALMO - WNWHL	10 working days	10 working days	20 working days
ALMO – AVH	10 working days	10 working days	N/A

Note: When reporting to Customer Strategy Board on response times on complaints, all services (including ALMO’s) except Adult and Children’s’ Services currently report against the corporate 15 working day timescales. Adult and Children’s Services report against their 20 day statutory timescale.

3.8 Reasonable Adjustments

The Complaints Policy does not require customers to provide initial feedback in writing. All customer feedback will be treated equally whether it is by leaflet, telephone, letter, fax, email or other communication routes.

- 3.9 There may be times where we will request information in written format e.g. at stage II of the process, when a complaint is about members of staff or where there are multiple issues raised. However, reasonable adjustments will always be made for customers who would have difficulties providing information to the Council in writing – ie – we will write it down for the customer and read it back to them for them to agree the content.

3.10 Customers Whose First Language is not English

It is no longer policy to provide pre printed stocks of Let Us Know Leaflets in community languages without them being requested. If a customer requires the information within a Let Us Know Leaflet translating into their first language, this can be requested via the Customer Relations Team within Customer Services.

- 3.11 Customers who require interpretation and/or translation can be referred to the Council's' Interpreting and Translating Unit. Details of how staff can access these services for a customer can be found on the intranet and within the Procedural Guidance for Staff on the Compliments and Complaints policy.

3.12 Telephone

Any customer should be able to complain direct to the relevant service *if* the service has a public access phone lines. Most telephone complaints are however received via the dedicated Customer Relations line at the Corporate Contact Centre. The Corporate Contact Centre also provides access to the Minicom service for customers with hearing or speech impediments. Complaint calls can be taken at the Contact Centre between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday.

- 3.13 The Customer Relations line in the Contact Centre takes on average 30 calls per day although a high number of these calls do not go on to become formal complaints. The Customer Services Officers' taking the calls will endeavour to assist the customer with resolving any issues / service request they have during the call. If however they cannot resolve the customers' issue and the customer wishes to make a complaint, the Officer will take the details of the complaint and send it on to the relevant service to be investigated and responded to.

3.14 Face to Face

Customers can visit any Council site where there is public access. If the customer visits any of the city's 15 One Stop Centres, they will be seen by a Customer Services Officer who will assist them with any issues / service request they have. If they cannot resolve the customers' issue and the customer wishes to make a complaint, the Officer will take the details of the complaint and send it on to the relevant service to be investigated and responded to.

- 3.15 If the customer visits a council site where we do not have dedicated Customer Services Officer's but they do have reception / counter staff (eg: Libraries or Sports Centres), an LCC feedback leaflet known as "Let Us Know" can be given to the customer or receipted back from them.

3.16 Internet

Customers wishing to access the complaints process via the internet can access this via the Leeds City Council home page in the “get involved” box. The page then opens up and provides a link to the following information and access routes:-

- An e-mail address which will when used will send all correspondence directly to complaints @leeds.gov.uk.
- An on line form that the customer can complete.
- Facility to view or download a “Let Us Know” leaflet to send to the Council by freepost.
- To ensure transparency, customers can also access the full Compliments and Complaints policy.
- The page also confirm the other access routes – telephone number for Customer Relations in the Corporate Contact Centre and addresses and maps for all Customer Services One Stop Centre face to face sites.
- There is also a sign language video explaining how a customer can complain to the council.

3.17 Intranet

Council staff/Members wishing to access information on the complaints process can do so by the intranet by choosing -C- on the “site index” and then scrolling down to “Compliments and Complaints”. The page which opens is the same page available to customers on the internet with all of the same information detailed above.

3.18 Access to Information on the Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman is an independent body appointed by the Government to investigate Council’s if a customer is dissatisfied with the standard of service provided, the actions or lack of action by the Council.

3.19 From April 2009, the Local Government Ombudsman will not accept complaints from customers if they have not been through the council’s full complaints process.

3.20 When a customer comes to the end of the relevant complaints process, in the final response, the service is required to advise the customer that there next recourse should they remain dissatisfied would be to the Ombudsman – full contact details for the Ombudsman will then be provided as detailed below at 3.25

3.21 As a Council we also provide the following access routes to information about the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

3.22 Face to Face

If a customer visits a Council site a Let Us Know leaflet can be given, detailing all of the access routes for the LGO.

3.23 Internet

To access information about the LGO on the internet a customer need only type in Local Government Ombudsman or LGO for a number of web links to be made available to them.

3.24 If the customer chooses to log into the Leeds City Council website, information about how to contact the Ombudsman can be found in the Let Us Know leaflet

which can be viewed or downloaded. Contact details for the Ombudsman can also be found in the Compliments and Complaints Policy. – The policy states:-

- 3.25 the customer will be informed of their right to take the complaint further if they remain dissatisfied. The response should contain the contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman's Office.

*Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH*

Tel : 0845 602 1983 or 024 7682 1960

Email : advice@lgo.org.uk

Text : 0762 48 4323

3.26 Intranet

Council staff/Members wishing to access information on the Ombudsman can do so by the intranet by choosing -O- on the "site index" and then scrolling down to "Ombudsman. Within this page is a link to the Local Government Ombudsman's website.

3.27 Telephone

Officers around the council with access to the intranet can access the relevant information to provide it to a customer, if requested. Officers within Customer Services also have access to OASIS which links to the same information.

3.28 OASIS

Customer Services have a web based system for staff which holds relevant information that customers may need to know and full details of the Ombudsman, their role and contact details are available on this application.

3.29 LGO Information Leaflets

A stock of LGO leaflets are ordered from the Ombudsman each year and distributed to all services via their Customer Relations Officers. Stocks are also provided to public access sites such as Planning, Sports Centres and One Stop Centres.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 As this report was commissioned by the Board to provide information only on the ways in which the Council's complaints system and the role of the Ombudsman are published by the Council, there are no implications for Council policy and Governance.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 As this report is only providing information on the different ways customers can raise concerns with the Council or the Local Government Ombudsman, it is not considered to have any specific legal implications.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Leeds City Council provides a wide variety of information points and access routes for customers and staff on how to access the complaints process for the Council or contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the information and if appropriate signpost constituents to the various routes open to them to raise concerns with the Council or Local Government Ombudsman.
- 7.2 Members are further asked to highlight any areas where they may believe that customers are not being given full access to the complaints process so that the Corporate Customer Relations Manager can investigate and address as required.

8.0 Background Documents

The Corporate Compliments & Complaints Policy - Policy Owner - Corporate Customer Relations Manager - Wendy Allinson.

The “Let Us Know” Corporate feedback / complaints leaflet - Corporate Owner - Corporate Customer Relations Manager - Wendy Allinson. (attached at Appendix 1)

Both available on the Internet / Intranet.