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**To: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee**

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**Subject: Complaints Policy and Procedure Task and Finish Group**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To inform Scrutiny Co-ordination of the recommendations from the Complaints Policy and Procedure Task and Finish Group

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee are recommended to recommend:
- 1) That the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources:
    - a. Updates the Complaints Policy and Process as suggested by the T&F Group (Appendix A)
    - b. Identifies timescales for implementation of the electronic complaints system to deal with complaints,
    - c. Considers future strategic planning opportunities including the budgetary implications for savings from an alternative CRM system.
  - 2) That a report on progress on the recommendations made to the Cabinet Member above be added to the Work Programme for the Municipal year 2024-25.

## **3 Information and Background**

- 3.1 At their meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023, Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to be involved in a review of the Council Complaints Policy and Procedure.
- 3.2 Membership of the task and finish group was:
- Cllr N Akhtar (Chair)
  - Cllr Ali
  - Cllr Gardiner
  - Cllr R Singh
  - Cllr Thomas
- 3.3 As part of their annual summary of complaint statistics the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman included the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee,

as an opportunity to “to encourage effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer such valuable opportunities to learn and improve”.

- 3.4 The letter and report are considered in detail by the Leader at his Cabinet Member meeting, as well as Ethics Committee and Audit and Procurement Committee.
- 3.5 The Task and Finish Group were invited to be involved in the review of the Complaints Policy and Procedure to ensure that the process is easy to access and understandable for everyone involved, particularly members of the public.

#### **4 Meetings of the Task and Finish Group**

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group met three times. The first meeting was to agree the scope of the Task and Finish Group, as well as to provide some background on context to the work being planned. The scoping document can be found at Appendix B.
- 4.2 Officers provided a presentation to members of the Task and Finish Group, which covered the wider aspects of the CovConnects programme which the complaints policy and procedure was part of. The presentation covered the previous approach to dealing with complaints as well as identifying areas of improvement and areas for re-design.
- 4.3 Members discussed the following:
  - There are unlikely to be savings but better service provision.
  - Need to have the right processes before a system can be built.
  - Links with Members Casework Management tool to be explored.
  - Training for staff to deal with complaints and soft skills to manage engagement with residents.
  - Where complaints come in from Members – the need to be kept involved in the process and updated to be built into the process design.
  - The possibility of including surveys of complainants to be shared with elected members at some point in the future.
- 4.4 It was agreed that a renewed policy should include the following:
  - Differentiation between contacting the Council, service requests and complaints.
  - Some case studies or flow charts as to how a complaint will be handled.
- 4.5 The next meeting enabled members of the Task and Finish Group to go through the amended complaints policy in detail. Comments and amendments made by the Task and Finish Group can be seen in the annotated draft Complaints Policy and Procedure in Appendix A, including a flow chart of the process in Appendix 4 of the draft Policy.
- 4.6 Meeting three enabled members of the Task and Finish Group to understand the updated complaints procedure in more detail as well as identify next steps and recommendations to the Cabinet Member.
- 4.7 Members considered a presentation (Appendix C) on progress and discussed the following:
  - The benefits and challenges of the informal resolution stage for complaints and how it has reduced the number of formal complaints by 68%.

- The structure and capacity of the complaints service and the introduction of the new service manager who will start on the 1st of May.
- The areas that still need to be worked on, such as checking the Ombudsman code, creating training and response standards, reporting, and learning from complaints, and reviewing the templates and systems.
- The issues around a single point of contact and potentially violent persons processes and how they can be improved and aligned with data protection and customer service principles.
- The opportunities and implications of exploring Customer Relationship Management systems and how they can support the complaints process and the resident experience.
- The feedback and suggestions from the task and finish group on the draft policy and process and how they will be incorporated into the final document.

4.8 Members of the Group identified recommendations for the Cabinet Member and requested that a progress report come back to Scrutiny Co ordination Committee during the next Municipal year.

Appendix A: Annotated draft Complaints Policy and Procedure

Appendix B: Scoping Document

Appendix C: Progress Presentation

Gennie Holmes  
Scrutiny Co-ordinator  
Law and Governance  
[gennie.holmes@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:gennie.holmes@coventry.gov.uk)