

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
23 NOVEMBER 2020

REVISED CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To seek Committee approval of the revised Customer Feedback Policy, subject to final approval by the Policy & Finance Committee.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Prior to the re-integration of the housing services into the council, both Newark and Sherwood Homes and the Council operated their own customer feedback procedures.

2.2 The customer feedback policy needs to be revised to reflect the integration and to incorporate the latest best practice guidance from both the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman to ensure that the policy is fit for purpose and compliant with both codes of practice.

2.3 In June 2020, the Housing Ombudsman revised its Effective Complaint Handling guidance and the Council is required to undertake a self-assessment by 31 December 2020. This will be undertaken in conjunction with the Housing Advisory Group.

2.4 More recently in October 2020, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman issued its revised Effective Complaint Handling for local authorities which is reflected in the revised Feedback Policy.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 The revised Policy detailed in the attached appendix has a number of amendments:

- Upon receiving the complaint, the manager dealing with the complaint, speaks to the complainant as this is the best way to accurately define the complaint and the desired outcome
- Stage 1 complaints to be allocated to a manager instead of just to a business manager.
- Stage 2 complaints to be allocated to a business manager or director instead of just to a director.
- Complaints will not usually be accepted where the event giving rise to the complaint occurred more than six months ago.

3.2 The Housing Customer Feedback Policy did have an additional option stage that the tenant could request that the Tenants Panel reviews their complaint. The Housing Ombudsman does not believe a third stage is necessary as part of a complaints process but if a landlord believes strongly it requires one the reasons why should be detailed in the self-assessment.

3.3 It is proposed that this stage remains in the Policy for now as further changes may come out of the legislation following the Grenfell inquiry and the self-assessment by the Housing Advisory Group.

4.0 Next steps

- 4.1 A procedure guide will be produced for staff which will incorporate guidance from both Ombudsman Services to support them with investigating complaints. This will include template responses to ensure that all complainants are advised of the next steps they can take.
- 4.2 Consideration is being given to holding a training session for all managers who respond to complaints, delivered by the Local Government & Social Care/Housing Ombudsman to ensure that they fully understand the latest best practice
- 4.3 In conjunction with the Transformation and Communications Business Unit, a review is being undertaken of the current performance monitoring of customer feedback. This valuable insight gained will be reported to the Senior Leadership Team and relevant committees. Consideration will need to be given as to how this will involve tenants and the Housing Advisory Group.
- 4.4 The Council is required to complete a Housing Ombudsman self-assessment by 31 December 2020. The completed self-assessment will be reported to this committee.

5.0 Digital Implications

- 5.1 Customers have the option of submitting their feedback online. This functionality will be reviewed to ensure it reflects the revised policy and is a straightforward and seamless process for the customer.

6.0 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 The Policy is designed to enable all customers to submit feedback. This can be done via a host of contact channels or by an advocate on their behalf.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

- 8.1 The Customer Feedback Policy aligns with the following objectives:
- Increasing participation with the Council
 - Increase residents satisfaction with the Council

9.0 Comments of Directors

- 9.1 This policy brings together feedback arrangements across the whole Council and will enable feedback to be dealt with in a timely manner by a manager best placed to resolve the issue with appropriate escalation if matters are unresolved. This will be a strong foundation for using customer feedback to improve our services.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

That members of the committee support the revised Customer Feedback Policy and recommend it to the Policy and Finance Committee for final approval.

Reason for Recommendation(s)

To ensure the Customer Feedback Policy is fit for purpose and adheres to both of the Ombudsman's Code of Practices.

For further information please contact Jill Baker – Business Manager Customer Services on Ext 5810.

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