

Committee :	The Language Committee
Date:	4 July 2017
Title :	The Corporate Complaints Procedure
Author:	Monitoring Officer
Purpose:	To present information relating to the complaints procedure and the arrangements for reporting to the Language Committee

Background

1. Since 1 April 2015, the Council has been operating a Corporate Complaints Policy that follows the Model Concerns and Complaints Policy, and the Guidance published by the Welsh Government, and formulated under the supervision of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
2. This is the procedure used to deal with complaints about all the Council's services, apart from complaints by social services users and relating to schools, where there are different, specific procedures. Complaints against the Council's services about their use of the Welsh Language therefore fall within the Corporate Complaints Procedure.
3. The procedure has two main functions:
 - (1) to resolve individual complaints and put right any injustices
 - (2) to ensure that lessons are learnt from complaints so as to improve the services provided to the people of Gwynedd

The Procedure

4. In summary, complaints are dealt with in two ways:

Informal Resolution

This stage offers an opportunity to resolve the complaint informally at the point of delivery the matter arises or very shortly afterwards

Formal Investigation

If the complainant is not satisfied he/she can refer the complaint for a formal investigation. This will usually be carried out by an officer from the service involved, with sufficient seniority and independence from the source of the complaint. This will be the authority's final response to the complaint

The Ombudsman and the Welsh Language Commissioner

5. If the complainant remains dissatisfied he/she can refer the matter to the Ombudsman, who investigates allegations of maladministration.
6. Furthermore, it is possible to complain to the Welsh Language Commissioner:
 - about an organisation's failure to comply with a standard
 - about an organisation's failure to implement its Welsh language scheme
 - if the complainant feels that someone has interfered with his/her freedom to use the Welsh language
7. The two bodies will consult each other in cases where there is an overlap in their terms of reference, and agree the most appropriate way to investigate a complaint.

The Role of Elected Members

8. There is no role for members to investigate individual complaints. If an elector contacts a member with a complaint he/she can put him/her in contact with the relevant service, which will then proceed to deal with the matter. There is no role for members to investigate individual complaints, but you can ask to be updated and informed of the outcome.
9. Members also have, of course, the right to raise issues that are of concern to them directly with council departments. The Complaints Procedure does not change that situation at all.

The Service Improvements and Complaints Team

10. When the current procedure was adopted the Service Improvements and Complaints Team was established to support it. The team consists of the Organisational Development Manager and the Service Improvement Officer (Corporate Support Department) and the Monitoring Officer and the Senior Solicitor (Corporate).
11. In addition to ensuring the proper operation of the Complaints Procedure, the team was established to make the most of the data and information gathered from complaints so as to improve the Council's services and to establish the appropriate culture across the authority. The team has a number of responsibilities in doing this:
 - offering guidance and advice to departments on how to deal with individual complaints.
 - introducing appropriate interventions in order to establish the desired culture
 - encouraging improvement on the basis of complaints or trends
 - identifying areas for general improvement
 - presenting relevant opportunities for improvement
 - reviewing the Council's Complaints Procedure

- raising the awareness of the procedure amongst the public and within the Council
- reporting on the procedure's performance

12. To assist the council in learning from complaints a procedure has been established where members of the Team will discuss complaints with the service where an opportunity to improve procedures has been identified. This can also lead to creating a service improvement plan.

Reports

13. The Team reports on a quarterly basis to the Cabinet Member and the Leadership Team and to the Cabinet annually.

14. The purpose of these reports is not only to report on the performance of the complaints procedure (numbers, response times etc.) but also on any patterns identified and how dealing with complaints has led to permanent improvements to the services that the people of Gwynedd receive.

The Role of the Language Committee

15. The Language Committee does not have a formal role within the Complaints Procedure. Historically, however, it has received information about language complaints, as part of its function of overseeing the operation of the Council's Language Policy.

16. It is believed that the arrangements for reporting to this Committee should be updated so that it complies with the Committee's functions and the provisions of the Complaints Procedure, and takes advantage of the regime now established to identify lessons from complaints and opportunities to improve services.

17. It is therefore intended to report on:

- The number and types of language complaints received.
- Any patterns identified from those complaints.
- Any service improvement plans created in response to complaints.

Any investigations by the Language Commissioner and any relevant reports by the Ombudsman will also be reported.

18. We would also welcome any suggestions from the Committee as to the type of information that it believes would be useful in carrying out its work.

Recommendations

19. The Committee is asked to:

Note the above arrangements

Suggest any information that it believes would be of benefit to it in relation to language complaints.