

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	31 March 2021
Subject:	Formal Complaints Policy
Report of:	Head of Corporate Services
Corporate Lead:	Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Customer Focus
Number of Appendices:	Two

Executive Summary:

A review of our formal complaints policy has resulted in a new 'Have Your Say' approach being proposed, which will sit alongside our formal complaints policy.

The Have Your Say approach introduces four 'Cs': Compliments, Comments, Concerns and Complaints.

This report provides Executive Committee with details of the formal complaints review, the new 'Have Your Say' approach, as well as how the new digital platform will help the Council to ensure feedback from customers is responded to appropriately – and that the process is made to be as streamlined and simple as possible.

This report and policy were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which endorsed the proposals and recommended approval at Executive Committee.

Recommendation:

To APPROVE the proposed Have Your Say approach and Formal Complaints Policy.

Reasons for Recommendation:

Our Have Your Say approach and our Formal Complaints Policy will ensure that all feedback from customers is managed effectively and is responded to in a timely manner, with lessons being learned where possible.

The supporting digital system will provide an even better customer experience, and some additional benefits for our reporting capability too.

Resource Implications:

The outcome arising from complaints handling, including the findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, may impact upon the resources of the authority.

Legal Implications:

None directly arising from this report.

Risk Management Implications:

If complaints are not handled in accordance with the Formal Complaints Policy and the Council does not learn from the complaints received, then there is a potential risk to the Council's reputation. Complaints will need to be handled in line with our General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) policy.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Our new digital system will allow for more detail to be provided on customer feedback, which will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis and quarterly to the Corporate Management Team.

Environmental Implications:

None directly arising from this report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Our current Formal Complaints Policy was introduced in 2016 following an audit review, which found the previous complaints process to be flawed with many different ways of formal complaints being recorded. The new process introduced in 2016 offered a clear policy as well as an online system where customer could log their complaints, and officers could respond, report and learn from them.
- 1.2** As it has been four years since our current policy was introduced, and because we are now moving over to a new digital platform, it felt prudent to carry out a review of our complaints policy and system.
- 1.3** Encouragingly, the number of complaints we receive each year is low – and that indicates to us that, on the whole, customers are satisfied with how we run things. However, we are not a Council to rest on our laurels, and our complaints review introduces new ways for customers to give us feedback to ensure we are capturing all issues.
- 1.4** The following Have Your Say approach and Formal Complaints Policy were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in February. A discussion took place around the importance of customer feedback and giving the public a range of options to give feedback will help us to get a clearer picture of common concerns or complaints. The Committee also welcomed the option for Ward Councillors to receive more detailed information on complaints in their areas.
- The Committee endorsed the new approach and policy and recommended its approval.

2.0 A NEW HAVE YOUR SAY APPROACH

- 2.1** Following a previous discussion with Members at Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2020, it was agreed that introducing more ways for customers to feedback to us would give us a clearer picture of residents' satisfaction. It would also prevent some issues which are currently logged as formal complaints to be treated more as a service issue – for example one-off missed bin reports.
- 2.2** In a follow-up conversation with Officers, Councillor Jill Smith put forward the suggestion of introducing four Cs – compliments, comments, concerns and complaints - an approach successfully used in the NHS.

- 2.3** It was agreed that by introducing the four Cs, we would be encouraging a range of feedback from customers, while at the same time ensuring that feedback is responded to in the appropriate way.
- 2.4** The description for our four Cs is attached at Appendix 1. This document will support the information on the Have Your Say approach on our website, and we will also promote it more widely on social media and through posters to Parish Councils and libraries once it is appropriate to do so.
- 2.5** The only feedback channel which requires a supporting policy is the formal complaints due to the statutory process we are required to follow, and our new Formal Complaints Policy is attached at Appendix 2.

3.0 FORMAL COMPLAINTS POLICY

- 3.1** Our new Formal Complaints Policy is largely based on our previous policy. It sets out what the customer should expect when they complain, and how and in what timescale we will manage and respond to the complaint. It also details how any appeals will be managed and responded to. The policy was developed in accordance with guidance from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, to ensure compliance with audit recommendations and data protection requirements.
- 3.2** In terms of changes from our previous policy, the policy attached at Appendix 2 has been updated to ensure clarity on a number of issues including:
1. What cannot be dealt with under our Formal Complaints Policy.
 2. Accepting formal complaints via email (our previous policy did not accept them in this format).
 3. Further detail around our process for handling stage 2 complaints.

4.0 MONITORING OF COMPLAINTS ON OUR NEW DIGITAL PLATFORM

- 4.1** We currently use a case management system to ensure that all complaints are handled to the same standard, and their progress is monitored so that responses are sent within the correct timeframe. As part of this process, our Corporate Services Officer monitors the progress of complaints and ensures they are responded to on time and any lessons learned are recorded.
- 4.2** Our new digital platform will replace this case management system and offer the following additional benefits:
1. Customers will be given the option to log their issue as a concern or comment before accessing the formal complaints system – and the benefits of doing this will be highlighted. It will also be made clear to customers that if they wish for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to consider their issue, then it must be dealt with through our formal complaints system first.
 2. Customers will choose which service area their complaint is sent to from a detailed drop-down list. This will ensure the complaint reaches the appropriate officer sooner than it currently does. At the minute, complaints are triaged by Customer Services but this can add an unnecessary delay during busy periods.
 3. If the Officer receiving the complaint does not feel it has been allocated correctly, they will have the option to reallocate it.

4. Currently the allocation of stage 2 complaints is dealt with outside of the system, but the entire process will now be done through our new digital platform – allowing for quicker response times, better monitoring and improved reporting.
5. The level of reporting will be vastly improved, including the option for Members to receive details on the number and type of complaints in their ward and not just at borough level.

5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Operational Managers' Group.

7.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

7.1 Council Plan 2020 to 2024.
Digital Strategy.
Customer Care Strategy.

8.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

8.1 None.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

9.1 Managed within current resources and budget.

10.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

10.1 None.

11.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

11.1 None.

12.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

12.1 None.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices: 1. Have your say approach.
2. Formal Complaints Policy.