

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

CABINET – 12 MAY 2009

REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the following reference from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 26 March 2009.

2. Complaints

- 2.1 The Commission has considered a report outlining how the process for the recording of and dealing with complaints was operated.
- 2.2 It was explained that the report dealt only with complaints formally logged through the complaints system which were sent either direct to the Standards Officer, via letter or email, or where the complainant had contacted the Council via the generic email address or by telephone. It did not include complaints made direct to service areas.
- 2.3 There was no comparative performance with other authorities on complaints, other than that for complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 2.4 In answer to a question, the Standards Officer advised Members that she was only aware of three complaints that had been escalated up to the top level 3 and referred to the Ombudsman.
- 2.5 Members have noted that the fact that some complaints might not be captured and formally logged in the system because they were received and dealt with directly at the service area meant that the picture could be distorted and the situation could be not as good as it appeared. So far as letters of complaint slipping through the post room check were concerned, the Standards Officer undertook to liaise with the service representatives to see if there was any way of picking these up when the post was delivered to departments. However, this would not address the issue of complaints sent by email direct to an officer.
- 2.6 While some matters might well be resolved to the customer's satisfaction over the telephone, if all complaints were not logged, the Council could be missing a pattern of incidents. The Standards Officer explained that the complaints policy provided that if the same complaint occurred twice, it had to be formally logged as such.
- 2.7 It was also recognised that everyone within the Council needed to adhere to the procedures for recording complaints.
- 2.8 The Strategic Director felt that while some comparison work with other Councils could be done, there was a danger that the comparison might not be like for like, since figures and measurements could vary from authority to authority. However, the Council did undertake public satisfaction surveys and the results from those did give an indication of performance levels.
- 2.9 It was also acknowledged that the Council did get positive feedback on the way it dealt with complaints and the Council also had a compliments page on the website and did receive a lot of compliments as well.
- 2.10 A member suggested that it should be incumbent on senior managers to use their discretion to decide what complaints should be logged and passed to the Standards Officer and that there should be a protocol to that effect, and to explain the

mechanisms in place to escalate a complaint through the three levels. In this way, it was felt the Council would have a much more complete picture of the numbers and types of issues being raised by the public.

2.11 So far as the complaints relating to ARP were concerned, the Commission has agreed to incorporate those issues in the ARP Partnership Scrutiny Review, which is now scheduled to be considered at the Commission's meeting on 30 April 2009.

2.12 In conclusion, the Commission

RECOMMEND to the Cabinet to require that a clear protocol is put in place for the reference of complaints through senior managers to ensure all complaints are logged into the system as appropriate, as suggested above.