



**City of Westminster**

# Standards Committee

**Date:** 15 November 2010

**Classification:** For General Release

**Title:** **A Review of the Council's Complaints Handling of Ethical Standards and Related Matters**

**Report of:** **Customer and Complaints Manager**

**Wards Involved:** **Not applicable**

**Policy Context:** **High Ethical Standards**

**Financial Summary:** **There are no financial implications arising from this report**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Standards Committee have previously asked that a review of the Council's Complaints Handling procedure be undertaken particularly to ensure that ethical governance issues are highlighted to enable corrective action to be taken, if necessary.
- 1.2 This report sets out what work was done as part of this review and how the Council will ensure that ethical governance issues are identified and managed within the complaints procedure.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the report be noted and that the actions/recommendations proposed in **item 6** be endorsed.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Standards Committee on 15 November 2009, asked that there be a review of the Council's Complaints Handling procedure particularly to ensure that ethical governance issues are highlighted to enable corrective action to be taken, if necessary.
- 3.2 The issue under review is whether the staff are fully aware of what constitutes an ethical governance complaint, and that once such a matter is identified, recorded on the complaints database and forwarded to the relevant parties to resolve.
- 3.3 This review has been carried out and the conclusions are set out below.

### **4. What is an ethical complaint?**

- 4.1 For the purposes of the review, the definition of an ethical governance complaint as endorsed by the Standards Committee is as follows:

‘An alleged breach of the high standards of ethical conduct set out in the codes of conduct for officers and Members.’

### **5. Complaint Handling Review – conclusions and recommendations**

- 5.1 The functionality and operation of the current complaint recording system, Respond, in relation to how ethical complaints work within it, has been assessed as part of this review. The Customer and Complaints Manager has identified the following issues with the current system:

- No common understanding of what constitutes an ethical complaint.
- No formal tracking and forwarding of ethical complaints through the mainstream complaints system (although it is good and accepted practice that such complaints are promptly forwarded to Human Resources or the Fraud Team as appropriate).
- Need to raise awareness amongst complaints staff to ensure that these complaints are tracked and forwarded appropriately.

### **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 The Customer and Complaints Manager recommends the following actions to address these issues:

- That the Customer and Complaints Manager will continue to raise awareness of this issue through a quarterly reminder to all Delivery Support Units on what constitutes an ethical governance complaint, and to ask if any have been dealt with under the Council's Complaint procedure. The first reminder will be sent at the end of the third financial quarter.
- Future bespoke training provided by the Customer and Complaints Team to include a module on what constitutes an ethical governance issue.
- That an amendment be made to the current Respond application to add the category of "ethical governance complaint" to the system so to allow those Service Delivery Support units which use this system to record their data electronically. This can be implemented before the end December 2010, and there will be no cost to the Council as such a change to the current Respond applications are covered under the annual Support Renewal Agreement and are free.
- There are also some discussions within the Council to revise the current complaints process, possibly involving a new two stage complaints process (from the current three stage approach), and if the Council rolls out a new Customer Relationship System this will include a new complaints recording function. The Customer and Complaints Manager will ensure that any new system includes a training module on what constitutes an ethical governance issue will be included in the complaint training programme rolled out prior to the new procedure going live.

**7. Legal Implications:** None.

**8. Financial Implications:** None.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact:**

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Local Government Act 1972 - None