

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ADJUDICATION AND REVIEW SUB COMMITTEE
Town Hall
26 October 2011 (7.30 - 9.30 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group Osman Dervish (Chairman), Frederick Thompson (Vice-Chair), Eric Munday, Barry Oddy and Linda Trew

Residents' Group Barbara Matthews (Vice-Chair) and John Mylod

Labour Group Denis O'Flynn

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillor Robert Benham.

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

1 MINUTES

The Chairman reminded Members that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2011 were those of the Adjudication and Review **Committee** and had been agreed by the Governance Committee on 2 June. They were here only as a reminder of what had taken place at that meeting, but Members were invited to comment if they so wished.

2 ADULT SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS REPORT 2010 - 2011

The Sub-Committee received the Annual Complaints, Comments and Compliments Report from Adult Social Care for the year 2010 – 2011. This report had been presented to the Individuals Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 July 2011. Members were informed about the changes taking place within the service and about the impact changes to service provision were having on complaints.

Members commented on the detail of the information presented to them – which they found comprehensive enough – but expressed a desire for the service to review how it was presented in future asking for less detail and for there to be greater concentration on outcomes as they considered that it was more important for them to understand what lessons had been learned

(and what changes had flowed from those lessons) than simply to be presented with raw data.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

3 **SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING (CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES) ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS REPORT 2010 / 11**

This report had yet to be presented to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Members were informed about the proposed changes in the way in which Children's and Adult Social Services was likely to impact on the Service. Members were also provided with details concerning complaints recorded during the past year and observed that there was far too much concentration on the presentation of raw data and nothing about outcomes. Members asked whether it would be possible for future reports to provide less statistical material and more outcomes. The Sub-Committee was of the view that it was more important for Councillors to know how the Service incorporated lessons learnt into its processes, procedures and policies than simply receive streams of detail.

A Member asked why the Report made no mention – within the costs associated with Ombudsman investigations – of a significant sum paid to a complainant as part of a settlement. On being informed that this cost was not directly associated with Children's Services (a refund of school fees), it was pointed out that because the matter fell within the (then) Social Care and Learning directorate, its omission was, at the least misleading as the proper OSC for receiving that information was Children's and it seemed as though this was an oversight which dramatically affected the overall figures. The Sub-Committee asked for this to be addressed.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

4 **CRM DEVELOPMENT**

Will Edge (current Transformation Programme Manager) introduced his colleague Cheryl Bennett who would be taking over the role of TPM within the next few days and then provided the Sub-Committee with a review of the changes already brought about under Phase One of the programme and the scope of Phase Two which included Members' Correspondence, Housing, Adult Social care and Development and Building Control among others due for completion before the end of April 2012. Phase Three would then work on the remaining services during the remainder of 2012. Members were informed that in Phase One, some 71 processes had already been "transformed" with back-office functions being moved to the Contact Centre and service delivery being reviewed and in many cases rationalised. In discussion, the Sub-Committee was reminded that there were in excess of a thousand distinct "processes" making up the current

range of service delivery. A number of Members expressed an interest in learning more about this.

Members' understanding of the changes they had previously sought was updated with the information that work on the website was making access to all aspects of the Council easier whilst the intention to place contact with the Council on a 24 hour footing was being developed and different options and models explored.

Members wished to know how all these changes impacted on staff and whether they were being demoralised or encouraged. In reply they were assured that the rate of change was being managed to ensure that staff could absorb the new ways of working in a manner which was neither threatening nor overwhelming. Ms Bennett observed that the current programme represented a "huge change for staff" and so it had to be managed carefully, but that now the systems being used were better understood, staff were becoming more confident and new processes could be added without the system – or individuals – being stressed.

The oral report was **accepted**.

Mr Edge was thanked by the Sub-Committee for the presentation and wished well for the future. Ms Bennett was welcomed and asked to provide a similar report at the next meeting.

5 CRM STATISTICAL UPDATE

The Customer Services Manager reported that after a disappointing (but not an entirely unexpected) drop in the completion of Stage One complaints during July and August (due to staff holidays), the success rate was back at 93% for September. He explained that the new Contact Centre (located in Mercury House and equipped with state of the art telephony) was now passed its "settling down" phase and, as members of staff became familiar with the processes and technology being used the Centre was improving the way in which it managed complaints. Staff were able to cope with a higher turn-over of cases and as they became more familiar with the routines, were able to increase productivity so that some 28,000 calls could be handled by three fewer staff than could previously manage 20,000.

The new CRM system continued to be rolled-out across the Council and the intention was for service areas hitherto outside the corporate complaints system (in particular Social Services) to be brought within the corporate profile, as the service processes were evaluated and updated, and that in due course, more of the corporate aspects of their work would be handled by the Contact Centre.

A Councillor observed that the Sub-Committee had been presented with a very large amount of raw data, but whilst it was necessary for the purpose of understanding the scale or focus of issues being reported, there was nothing to show Members what the outcomes were – what, in fact had been learned by the services involved and what (if any) changes had come about

because of that learning process. Other members agreed with this point and the Customer Services Manager was asked to, in future, provide formal reports which focused on outcomes and changes made to the way the Council delivered its services and that data provision was reduced to show only salient issues and support of the conclusions in the report. This was particularly important now that Adjudication and Review was only likely to meet a couple of times a year. The Customer Services Manager confirmed that this request would be met for all future meetings.

The oral report was **accepted**.

6 THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - ANNUAL LETTER 2010 - 2011

The Clerk introduced this item and reminded the Sub-Committee of the significance of the LGO Annual Letter, what its purpose was and how it was likely to be changing. He explained that the Ombudsman had not been immune to public sector cuts and had lost some 37% of her grant. This was bound to have an impact of the manner in which the LGO delivered its service even though part of the cut reflected the shift of housing repair complaints from the Local Government to the Housing Ombudsman.

A further factor which was likely to have an impact on the next annual letter was the recent introduction of a new computer system which had “not gone according to plan” (he said that this statement had been made earlier that day by a senior Investigator from the London LGO office to a meeting of the Public Sector Complaints Network) which he had attended. In addition, the content of the Annual Letter was being challenged by a number of authorities where it was felt that it was neither informative nor particularly helpful. The letter remained, however, the principle means by which the LGO interacted with councils (apart from her decisions in individual cases).

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report

7 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - STATISTICS 1 APRIL - 30 SEPTEMBER 2011

The Clerk provided the Sub-Committee with an oral report of the Ombudsman statistics for the past six months. He explained how the investigations had resulted (so far) in very few findings against the Council (three local settlements where a penalty had been applied, one without) compared with 26 in which the Ombudsman either did not commence an investigation or withdrew having found no fault with the Council.

The Clerk then announced that within the past few days, the Council had received notice of the closure of a number of investigations which meant that, at the time of the meeting, there were only two investigations “open” – one of which already had a “Provisional View” and so was in its final stage – while two complaints had been referred by the Advice Team for

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consideration by the Council (although neither were corporate complaints as they were both Social Services and both covered by statutory process). He added that this meant that at that moment in time, involvement of the Ombudsman in Council matters was at the lowest level on record. In summary, during September and October, 13 cases had been closed and only five notified.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

Chairman