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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ADJUDICATION AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

Town Hall

11 April 2013 (7.30 - 8.30 pm)

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Ted Eden (Chairman), Frederick Thompson (Vice-Chair), Robert Benham, Eric Munday, Barry Oddy and Linda Trew
Residents' Group	John Mylod
Labour Group	Denis O'Flynn

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillor Barbara Matthews.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.
There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

17 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 November 2012 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

18 **ORAL UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS**

The Head of Customer Services provided Members with an oral report of corporate complaints and MP/Member enquiries for the four month period 1 October 2012 to the end of January 2013. The Head of Customer Services apologised for the shortened period but explained that whilst the CRM system had been updated, there had been problems (notably with a failure of the automatic reminders) along with other issues and this situation had been exacerbated by the demise of the software company 2e2 – though he was able to reassure Members that efforts had been made to secure the services of as many programmers as possible and bring them “in house” in order to complete the work and ensure CRM's continued integrity.

He also informed Members that the problems with the system accounted for some of the poorer performance figures within the report.

Members were disappointed with the problems being experienced, but considered that staff were to be commended for coping with the increase in both complaints and Member/MP enquiries whilst having to work around the CRM problems.

The Head of Customer Services further explained that due to the problems currently being experienced, it had not been possible to deliver either of the Committee's requests which had been the outcome of his presentation in November. He assured the Committee that once the problems had been resolved he would arrange for Members to see the CRM system in action and also ensure that all OSCs received regular updates.

The Committee **noted** the oral report and repeated its request for the Head of Customer Services to make arrangements for:

- Information concerning complaints etc to be made available to each of the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny committees on a regular basis and
- To make arrangements for Members to see the CRM System in action, once it became feasible to do so.

19 **CHANGES WITHIN STAGE THREE OF THE CORPORATE HEARINGS PROCESS**

Members were informed that the report before them was for the IAPs to be formally incorporated into the Constitution. The Committee was reminded that IAPs had been modelled on those of the former Standards Committee to sift out matters which were not appropriate for full hearings, whilst still fulfilling the requirement that they be considered by Councillors.

Over the past three years, the IAPs had evolved into an integral part of the Stage Three process with its meetings being set up as regular monthly meetings (formal hearings would remain ad-hoc). There was some concern that in order to avoid any awkwardness in the future if a complainant challenged the validity of an IAP decision not to allow a hearing, it would now be appropriate for the IAP to be included in the Constitution so that its status could not be challenged.

The Committee **approved** the continued use of Initial Assessment Panels and **resolved** to invite the Governance Committee to **recommend** to Council that the following changes should be made to the Constitution Part 3, 1.2 Functions delegated to general council committees:

Add wording in "Hearings Panels, General hearings" to read:

"Initial Assessment Panels – To assess complaints referred to Members for their adjudication under the agreed Corporate Complaints procedure"

And amend existing wording to read:

"To consider complaints by service users referred to them by Initial Assessment Panels relating to the service made available to them in accordance with the authority's agreed Corporate Complaints procedure."

20 **CHANGES BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN AFFECTING HAVERING**

The Committee was informed that recent changes to the funding of the LGO's office meant that she had to radically reorganise the way in which her service interacted with both complainants and councils. The most significant impact on the Council was a dramatic reduction in Ombudsman investigation activity. The LGO was now referring more complainants back to councils and there had been a rise in the number of enquiries and "premature" complaints had taken the place of investigations. Where investigators had assessed – or reviewed – complaints, the only notifications from the LGO had been either outside jurisdiction or decisions not to investigate. Members were informed that at 31 March, there had been no live investigations to be carried forward to 2013/14. This had been unprecedented.

The Committee was alerted to the possibility of an increase in requests for complaints to progress to Stage Three. Members were reminded that with the return of housing to the Council, all the complaint handling which had been the responsibility of Homes in Havering would – once the reintegration had been completed – impact on the Council's complaints statistics. Escalated housing complaints were already beginning to appear on the IAP listing.

Members were reminded that as from 1 April 2013, complaints about repair and maintenance of the Council-owned housing stock had been transferred to the Housing Services Ombudsman whilst the Local Government Ombudsman retained jurisdiction for other housing related issues. How this would work in practice could not be predicted as the Ombudsmen themselves had no clear idea what the practical implications would be. The Committee would be kept fully informed about developments.

The Committee **noted** the report.

Chairman

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