

Contracts Management/ Future Complaints Handling meeting

Present: Grant Galloway, Director of Development (GG)
 Ian Barber, Head of Property Services & Housing Repairs (IB)
 Ann Bedford, Customer Standards and Complaints Officer/ Ombudsman
 Link Officer (AB)

Date/time: Friday 30th April 2021, 12.00 noon

Purpose of the meeting:

- to discuss future complaints handling in relation to contractors providing service on behalf of the Council in the light of a recent Ombudsman decision
- to confirm and adopt the amended practices as standard for the same.

It was identified when looking into a recent complaint, which was the subject of a Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigation, that the complaints handling process was not working as smoothly as it should in relation to work carried out by contractors on the Council's behalf.

Despite residents being advised of the complaints process in the original information to householders, the resident's group had become involved with accepting complaints and were not following the procedure laid out by the Council and the contractors at the beginning of the contract. This led to complainants not being advised of the progress of their complaints, complaints not being resolved, not being advised of their right of escalation and individual residents pursuing their complaints with multiple audiences (contractor/ sub-contractor/ architects or operatives on site) as well as with the resident's group.

Action	During the course of the contract, to ensure that no service issues or complaints were missed and all contact was properly recorded it was agreed that, going forward, to emphasise that any first stage complaint or issue regarding the project was to be reported in the first instance directly to the contractor through the Resident Liaison Officer (RLO), to try to find a resolution at site level (as per the original information to householders). If agreement could not be reached, the process was to escalate it to the contractors' formal complaint policy and if a resident was still not satisfied with the resolution, then it was to be directed to Bolsover District Council's (BDC) formal complaint process (at stage two – formal complaint).	IB	Completed

Appendix 2

Action	The residents group were advised, on more than one occasion, that any further complaints they received should then to be signposted to the correct complaint process, rather than continuing to try to resolve them direct with the contractor/ sub-contractor/ architects or operatives on site.	IB/ AB	Completed
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This particular complaint has established that, whilst we appreciate community involvement and will continue with community involvement events/ meetings throughout the life of the contracts, residents groups do not always have the necessary expertise to handle or assess complaints in a structured way.

Agreed action:	We will ensure future contracts will have this defined clear complaints process approach with regard to complaints handling and the role of residents groups. This will ensure that residents know how the scheme will work and how they can make complaints and to whom (signposting residents to the contractor in the first instance and referring to the Council's process for formal complaints).	GG/ IB	Date as yet unknown (any future contract)
Agreed action:	The complaints process will be reiterated during future community involvement events.	GG/ IB	Date as yet unknown (any future contract)

In this particular instance, the Council had experienced delays from the complainant and an unwillingness to engage, however the Council was unable to evidence this due to the volume of contacts and 'scattergun' approach.

Action	Officers have been reminded of the need to make file notes of any contact (however made) from residents.	AB	Completed
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Separately, the Council's Scrutiny Committee have looked into issues around the regeneration project. The report has yet to be finalised and it is anticipated that this will go to a meeting in June/ July 2021. Following this, it will need to go to the Council's Executive Committee for formal adoption. Their findings will feed into refining the complaints process, where the Council uses contractors to deliver services on its behalf, in the interests of improving the customer's experience. The Council's Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy will be amended to reflect any further recommendations by Committee (s).

Appendix 2

Agreed action:	The Council's Compliments/ Comments and Complaints Policy to be updated to incorporate any recommendations/ amendments as required	AB	Date as yet unknown (following recommendations)
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Ann Bedford

Customer Standards and Complaints Officer/ Ombudsman Link Officer

30th April 2021