

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 17th March 2026

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 7th April 2026

Report of: Chief Executive

Title: Corporate Complaints Policy

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report seeks Executive approval for the revised Corporate Complaints Policy, (Appendix A), which provides the Council's single, consistent framework for handling all non-housing complaints. The policy has been updated to ensure compliance with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Handling Code, (Appendix B), which will be used in LGSCO reviews from April 2026, and to deliver greater alignment with the Council's Housing Complaints Policy, (Appendix C), which is governed by the Housing Ombudsman's statutory Complaint Handling Code.

1.2 The new Corporate Complaints Policy introduces clearer standards, strengthened governance, consistent definitions, improved accessibility, and fully aligned response times and processes across service areas wherever appropriate. The update also ensures the policy reflects current best practice, supports organisational learning, and improves accountability.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That the Executive recommend to Council approval of the revised Corporate Complaints Policy.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 LGSCO Code Compliance: The Code mandates clear, fair, accessible and timely complaint handling. The new policy responds to the updated guidance, to meet its recommendations in relation to timescales, annual self-assessment, senior oversight and performance reporting.

3.2 Alignment with the Housing Complaints Policy: Housing Services already operate under a statutory Ombudsman Code. Aligning corporate processes with these standards improves consistency for customers, simplifies staff training, and ensures clearer pathways for residents whose complaints cross both housing and corporate service areas.

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3.3 Clearer definitions & scope: The new policy adopts a unified definition of a complaint (“expression of dissatisfaction, however made”) and clarifies the difference between service requests and complaints—bringing the corporate process in line with Housing Services.

3.4 Improved accessibility & reasonable adjustments: The revised policy explicitly permits complaints via any channel, records agreed reasonable adjustments and ensures that individuals with additional needs can fully engage with the process.

3.5 Strengthened governance: The policy establishes oversight roles, including a Member Responsible for Corporate Complaints, consistent with both Ombudsman frameworks.

3.6 Consistency & learning: Annual data publication, quarterly review, dashboards, and a cross-service complaints group will standardise learning and support continuous improvement.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources:

4.1 No additional staffing resources are required. The revised process will be delivered within existing structures in Customers & Communities, with support from responsible officers across the Council. Some officer time will be required for: updated training; annual LGSCO self-assessment; production of quarterly and annual performance reporting; and operation of the cross-council complaints group. These activities form part of normal service responsibilities.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no financial implications contained in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 The revised Corporate Complaints Policy ensures compliance with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and statutory requirements for signposting residents to the relevant Ombudsman (LGSCO or Housing Ombudsman). It also reflects the Monitoring Officer’s duty to report upheld LGSCO findings in accordance with Section 5/5A of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989.

6.2 The Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code is a statutory code from 1 April 2024 for social landlords, creating a legal duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance and on landlords to self-assess and publish annual performance. The LGSCO’s Complaint Handling Code applies to local authorities as best practice guidance and does not have the same statutory footing, but authorities are expected to comply and self-assess annually; the LGSCO may take compliance with the code into account when determining maladministration.

7. Monitoring Officer’s comments:

7.1 As Members will note, the purpose of the new proposed policy is to provide a single consistent framework in order to deal with all non-housing complaints and in compliance with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.

8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

8.1 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equality Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention, (Appendix D).

9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

9.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

10. Report details:

10.1 The revised policy ensures full alignment with the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code of Guidance in the following ways:

- adoption of a clear, Code-compliant two-stage process with revised timescales
- strengthened governance and clearly defined responsibilities, including formalising member responsibility for Corporate Complaints
- clearer requirements for response content, covering findings, remedy, learning, and the tracking and reporting of actions and performance metrics
- establishment of a cross-council complaints learning and improvement group to support organisational learning
- remedies guidance and consistent differentiation between service requests and complaints
- enhanced transparency through stronger reporting, including annual self-assessment and annual publication.

10.2 Whilst adhering to the LGSCO code of guidance the policy also provides greater alignment with Housing policy:

- consistent definitions ("expression of dissatisfaction, however made")
- aligned Stage 1 and Stage 2 response times (10 + 10 days at Stage 1; 20 + 20 days at Stage 2)
- consistent approach to early resolution
- clear escalation pathways
- coordinated approach for mixed housing/corporate complaints.

11. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

11.1 The policy supports customer excellence, transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. It strengthens resident trust, improves service consistency, and ensures that feedback is used to improve outcomes.

12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

12.1 Non-compliance with the LGSCO Code presents a higher risk of Ombudsman findings of maladministration, inconsistent standards across services, reputational damage, reduced learning and poorer customer experience. The revised policy directly addresses compliance, standardisation, governance, and oversight.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 The alternative is to retain the existing corporate complaints policy. This is not recommended as it would leave the Council misaligned with current Ombudsman guidance, limit improvements in consistency, and expose the organisation to avoidable risk.

Chief Executive, Bindu Arjoon

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

List of Appendices:

- Appendix A: Corporate Complaints Policy
- Appendix B: Housing Complaints Policy
- Appendix C: LGSCO Code of Guidance
- Appendix D: EQIA