

 <b>Executive</b> <b>29 September 2009</b>		<b>Agenda Item No.</b>
<b>Title</b>	Warwick District Council Corporate Complaints process	
<b>For further information about this report please contact</b>	Chris Elliott email <a href="mailto:chris.elliott@warwickdc.gov.uk">chris.elliott@warwickdc.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Service Area</b>	Chief Executive's Office	
<b>Wards of the District directly affected</b>	None	
<b>Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006</b>	No	
<b>Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number</b>	N/A	
<b>Background Papers</b>	Local Government Ombudsman Council First Procedure.	

<b>Contrary to the policy framework:</b>	No
<b>Contrary to the budgetary framework:</b>	No
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No
<b>Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)</b>	No

<b>Officer/Councillor Approval</b>		
With regard to officer approval all reports <i>must</i> be approved by the report authors relevant director, Finance, Legal Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).		
<b>Officer Approval</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>
Relevant Director	2/9/2009	Andy Jones
Chief Executive		
CMT	2/9/2009	CMT
Section 151 Officer	2/9/09	Mike Snow
Legal	24/8/2009	Peter Oliver
Finance		Marcus Miskinis
Portfolio Holder(s)	7/9/2009	Michael Doody
<b>Consultation Undertaken</b>		
Interim Deputy Chief Executive approved 24 August 2009		
<b>Final Decision?</b>		No
<b>Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)</b>		
Detailed in paragraph 7.8		

## 1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report brings forward the revised draft complaints policy for Executive for information because of the responsibility of Councillors outlined in the report and seeks funding from the contingency budget for the training of officers on the handling and investigation of complaints.

## 2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 The revised corporate complaints policy, subject to amendments by the Standards Committee, Local Government Ombudsman and Employment Committee be noted along with the roll out programme.
- 2.2 Funding, of up to £10,000, from the contingency budget be approved for the training seminars by the Local Government Ombudsman because the corporate training budget for this year has already been allocated.

## 3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 Recommendation 2.1 is required as the Corporate Training budget has been allocated and spent for this year.

## 4. **ALTERNATIVE OPTION CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 No alternatives have been considered as this report details the preferred approach of the Corporate Management Team.

## 5. **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 The training from the Local Government Ombudsman for front line staff and investigating officers will cost £10,000 but the corporate training budget for this year has been allocated. There is no central budget for complaints investigation, training or remedies that this could come from and because the Corporate Training Budget for this year has been allocated. It is possible to fund this training from the Contingency Budget which, prior to this meeting, had an unallocated balance of £253,600.

## 6. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 6.1 The revised complaints policy is key to upholding the Council's established values of honesty and openness and transparency, and fairness and equity.

## 7. **BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 The draft revised Council's Complaints Policy, attached at Appendix 1, has been under review for some time and this new policy now comes forward following changes to the procedures followed by the Local Government Ombudsman. There are no significant changes to how the Council handles complaints at present other than the prioritisation of complaints which falls in line with the recommendations from the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 7.2 The main aspect of this new policy is to ensure that all relevant officers are trained on how to investigate complaints. The Local Government Ombudsman offer two main training courses, both of which are single day courses. These are as follows:

- 7.2.1 **Good Complaint Handling – Identifying and Processing Complaints**  
A one-day course developed for local authority staff who have direct contact with members of the public and who receive complaints as part of their day-to-day work. Front line staff have a crucial role to play in presenting the face of the authority to the public, particularly when dealing with service users when they have problems. They can also play an important part in the early resolution of complaints, to the benefit of service users and the authority. This course has been devised to help staff make the most of this.
- 7.2.2 **Effective Complaint Handling – Investigating and Resolving Complaints**  
A one-day course devised for local authority staff involved in handling complaints in the higher stages of the authority's complaints procedures, after the informal stage and up to the point of deciding the complaint, including dealing with remedies. It is a course for managers, team leaders, departmental and corporate complaints officers. The course is designed to help those dealing with complaints to develop their skills in complaint investigation and resolution and to avoid the pitfalls that can result in dissatisfaction and referral to the Ombudsman.
- 7.3 The courses cost £1,025 for up to 15 participants or £1,735 for up to 30 participants. Regrettably due to the number of officers proposed for the training and ensuring there is no adverse effect to service it is more practicable for groups of 15 rather than 30.
- 7.4 The Local Government Ombudsman advises that front line staff should attend the Good Complaint Handling Course. Frontline service managers all believe that this would be beneficial to their staff although care would need to be taken to ensure that front line services are not adversely affected. Therefore the training for front line staff will run over four courses to ensure that sufficient cover can be provided. Sixty key front line officers have been identified for this course.
- 7.5 The Corporate Management Team and other officers have always highly recommended the previous training session run by the Local Government Ombudsman, and because the revised corporate complaints policy requires all officers who will undertake investigations to be trained by the Local Government Ombudsman. Based on this and ensuring that all senior officers are not away from Riverside House at one time it is felt most appropriate to hold four one-day courses for up to 15 officers to attend on each day. At present sixty officers have been identified for training on how to investigate complaints.
- 7.6 At each of the courses the Local Government Ombudsman would provide the opportunity for the Council to outline their complaints policy. It would be appropriate for either the Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executives to attend each course at the start to outline the importance of complaints and this training to the Council.
- 7.7 Set out at Appendix 2 are the communication and training plans for the roll out of the new complaints policy.

7.8 Overseeing and approval of the Corporate Complaints policy is the responsibility of the Standards Committee. They will be considering the policy at their meeting on 23 September 2009 and their decision will be reported to the Executive. The Local Government Ombudsman also needs to approve the policy and it has been sent to them for consideration. The comments from the Local Government Ombudsman will be reported to the Standards Committee. As the policy details how complaints about members of staff will be handled the Policy will also be considered by Employment Committee in due course