

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 8th February 2016
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PORTFOLIO: Cllr Sharif – Commissioner for Performance and Accountability

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – CASEWORK TASK & FINISH GROUP

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to ask Cabinet to consider the report completed by the above Task & Finish Group, and its recommendations which were approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th January 2016.

2. Recommendations

The recommendations adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found on page 5 of the report included as appendix 1.

The Cabinet is asked to approve recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, namely:

- That the possibility of a system upgrade be investigated, with the system requiring the following elements to justify its procurement;
 - The ability to act as a central repository for casework, from submission to completion or final decision;
 - The ability to be interrogated by officers, allowing previous cases on the same policy matters to be found and used in decision making;
 - The ability to be accessed via Councillors' iPads; and
 - The ability to be accessed by residents via the Slough Borough Council (SBC) website to track the progress of their cases.
- For any such system to include automated escalation points, whereby inaction by an established deadline would cause responsible officers to receive an alert;
- SBC officers be asked to establish previous decisions made in comparable cases where applicable, in order to avoid any inconsistencies in decisions made, actions taken or advice given to residents;
- SBC officers to ensure that final responses are sent to residents, with the relevant Councillor copied into the response. Councillors are to be made aware that this is the standard procedure and should not act as spokespeople for decisions made by officers; and
- In cases where the decision made or the action taken has an impact across their ward, Councillors are to inform other Councillors in that ward.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

- 3.1 Slough Borough Council (SBC) is responsible for the receipt of and response to casework raised by local residents. As such, this casework may relate to any of the priorities of the above policy documents depending on the issues involved.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

Any resource implications of purchasing a new complaints management system would need to be considered by the relevant officers within existing resources.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no human rights act or other legal implications arising as a direct result of this report.

5 **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Concerns over the system used to resolve casework were raised by Members during the summer of 2015. As a result, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a Task & Finish Group to undertake a study of the matter, and adopted the proposed terms of reference for the Group on 10th September 2015. These terms of reference are available on page 4 of Appendix A.

- 5.2 The Task and Finish Group met on 17th September 2015 for its main meeting. This meeting examined the areas outlined in the terms of reference, and the information gathered is included in the main body of Appendix A.

- 5.3 A major concern of the Members of the Task and Finish Group was the current system being used. This had not been upgraded for a significant period of time, and thus a) had limited functionality and b) could become obsolete relatively soon. In terms of the functionality, there were particular concerns over the degree to which the progress of cases could be tracked by Councillors and the amount of officer time spent on pursuing updates. As a result, it was concluded that improved efficiency could be generated through investment in an upgraded system. These matters are covered in recommendations 1 and 2 in the final report.

- 5.4 In addition, Members discussed the level of standardisation of responses given by SBC. This is both in terms of the policies involved in making the decision (covered by recommendation 3) and the process used to convey the decision (covered in recommendation 4). It is intended that, by adopting these recommendations, all parties involved will become clearer as to exactly what has been decided and the reasoning behind that decision. Further to this, the Task and Finish Group did discuss the potential need to be clearer with residents about the resources available to SBC, and therefore the possible need for some work to be undertaken as budgets allowed. At present, Members felt that residents were being informed that an action could be fulfilled, only to discover subsequently that SBC could not complete the work due to financial or workforce restraints.

- 5.5 Recommendation 5 has been made in an attempt to increase efficiency through improved communications. It is hoped that, by ensuring that all ward Councillors are

aware of a decision which impacts on their ward, they can convey better quality information to local residents. As well as the improved relationships this should generate, it may also save on officer time as residents may already know the outcome of a case without the need to generate a new item of casework.

6 **Conclusion**

- 6.1 On the basis of the supporting information in appendix 1, the Cabinet is requested to decide upon recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the final report.

7 **Appendices**

'A' - Casework Task & Finish Group – Final Report

8 **Background Papers**

'1' - Agenda papers, Overview and Scrutiny Committee (20th January 2016)