



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Agenda Item No: 11

Report title: Review of Governance Policies and Annual Report

To: Audit and Governance Committee

Meeting Date: 25 June 2021

From: Robert Parkin
Monitoring Officer

Key decision: No

Recommendations: The Audit and Governance Committee is recommended to:

- a) Comment on and note the corporate whistleblowing and complaints procedures previously approved by the committee in March 2018 and May 2020 respectively
- b) Review the procedures and either reaffirm approval for the policies or recommend a review
- c) Note that the Monitoring Officer has delegated authority to make any changes recommended by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsmen or resulting out of the Audit and Governance Committee function to monitor the complaints procedures
- d) Note the data on corporate complaints and Freedom of Information requests from June 2020 – May 2021

Voting arrangements: A simple majority of all Members.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Audit & Governance Committee has responsibility, through its terms of reference for monitoring the Combined Authority's whistleblowing policy and the complaints process and for reviewing the Combined Authority's corporate governance arrangements. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on those matters to the Committee.

- 1.2 This report provides the Committee with the opportunity to review and reaffirm its approvals of the corporate complaints and whistleblowing procedures.
- 1.3 This report provides data related to the number of corporate complaints and Freedom of Information (Fol) requests received during the period June 2020-May 2021.

2. Background

Corporate Complaints Policy

- 2.1 An effective complaints procedure is one of the key elements of ensuring good customer care, quality assurance and a quest for excellence. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has produced guidance to assist Combined Authorities to produce a complaints procedure which sets out the principles for creating a simple integrated complaints system.
- 2.2 The Ombudsman's guidance states with the creation or expansion of every combined authority, there is the opportunity, and the necessity, to create a simple, integrated complaints system that will be:
 - better for the public
 - better for local accountability and scrutiny, and
 - better value for money
- 2.3 The guidance goes on to state the design of complaints systems and procedures is a matter for each authority but that their guidance sets out the key benchmarks authorities will want to use, to ensure their complaints procedures are simple, fair and encourage organisational improvement.
- 2.4 The Audit and Governance Committee considered the revised Complaints Policy [at Appendix 1] of the Combined Authority, which was produced in line with Ombudsman principles, at its meeting on 26 May 2020 and recommended that the Combined Authority Board approved and adopted the procedure; and notified the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman of its decision to approved and adopt the procedure. The Combined Authority Board accepted these recommendations at its meeting on 3 June 2020.
- 2.5 The procedure aims to resolve complaints as soon as possible after they are identified, and to enable the complainant to complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman without unnecessary delay if they feel the authority has not dealt with their complaint appropriately.

Corporate Whistleblowing Policy

- 2.7 The Combined Authority has received no Whistleblowing disclosures since its establishment in 2017. The Whistleblowing Policy [at Appendix 2] was reviewed by the Committee in March 2018 and adopted by the Combined Authority Board in May 2018.

Corporate Complaints June 2020- May 2021

2.8 During the period 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021 the Combined Authority received four complaints. All were responding to within the statutory timeline.

- 2.9 The complaints received were related to:
- A10 pre-consultation issues
 - The process involved in applying for grants
 - Procurement issues

Two of the complaints received were related to application for grants

Freedom of Information Requests June 2020-May 2021

During the period 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021 the Combined Authority received 32 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and a further three requests for information under the Environmental Information Regulations. All requests and responses are published on the Combined Authority's website. The main topics upon which Freedom of Information requests were made included:

Public bodies are required to respond to Freedom of Information requests within 20 working days. Performance for this period was as follows:

- Six late responses [five were provided within an additional 11 days, due to complexity of the additional request; one further response took an additional 22 days due to the large number of documents that needed to be reviewed as a result of the initial Fol request]
- Nil late responses to Environmental Information request

3. Financial Implications

3.1 All of the work has been carried out in-house, therefore there are no significant financial implications to this activity.

4. Legal Implications

The Monitoring Officer has a statutory duty to report any findings of maladministration to the combined authority board. This means that the Monitoring Officer is primarily responsible for ensuring complaints are dealt with effectively as part of their role.

5. Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1 – Corporate Complaints Procedure

6.2 Appendix 2 – Corporate Whistleblowing Procedure

<u>Source Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>
Principles of complaint handling in combined authorities and devolved settings by Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/advice-and-guidance/guidance-notes/principles-combined-authorities