

Board Paper

7th May 2015

Paper Title	Complaint Handling & Access to Information - Annual Reports (2014/15)
Paper Reference:	NRW B B 30.15
Paper Sponsored By: Paper Authored By:	Clive Thomas Geralene Mills

Purpose of Paper:	Scrutiny
Recommendation:	To note progress in the handling of complaints and requests for Information received for 2014/15 and to approve the Annual Reports
Decision Required:	Yes

Impact: To note – all headings might not be applicable to the topic	Adopting a customer care approach to complaint handling and developing a culture of viewing complaints as legitimate and a potentially valuable source of feedback on our service delivery should positively impact on the environment, economy and communities of Wales by increasing our knowledge and helping to encourage learning and improvement by Natural Resources Wales. Similarly, increasing transparency by fully complying with our Access to Information responsibilities should positively impact on the environment, economy and communities of Wales by increasing knowledge and helping to ensure a learning and improvement culture for Natural Resources Wales through the added scrutiny
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Issue

1. To update the Board on the progress and handling of complaints and requests for information received by Natural Resources Wales for 2014/15 and to approve the respective Annual Reports

Summary

2. This paper provides information to the Board on our statistical performance on Complaint Handling and Access to Information requests. Complaints are handled in line with our complaint handling procedure which follows the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Best Practice model policy. Access to Information requests are those made by an external source for information, data and records held by Natural Resources Wales that are considered under the following legislation:
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000
 - Environmental Information Regulations 2004
 - Data Protection Act 1998
 - The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005

Background

3. 2014/15 is the first year that complaints and access to information requests have been dealt with using policy & procedures developed by Natural Resources Wales. The Annual Report's for 2013/14 were largely based on legacy procedures.

In Year Progress – complaint handling

4. As a result of experience gained in 2013/14, we prioritised the review of our complaint handling policy and procedure. As a result we have developed a new approach which follows more closely the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Best Practice model policy, adapted to reflect the structure and accountabilities for the organisation.
5. This policy emphasises the following points
 - A Customer Care culture in respect of complaint handling. All staff are responsible and accountable for efficient handling of complaints at point of service whenever this is possible
 - A clear two stage process - Stage 1 Point of Service resolution. Stage 2 – Investigation leading to final conclusions and potential onward reference to the Ombudsman
 - Stage 2 - Investigate once and investigate well
 - Clear roles identified for Directors, Directorate Complaint Co-ordinators and Director of Governance
6. The new approach was formally launched internally and externally on 1 May 2014, using internal communication cascade routes and updates on the website and intranet. We have undertaken a systematic rollout of the new approach, delivering awareness sessions at Directorate Management team meetings and promoting the cascade from leadership team

members to all staff. We have particularly concentrated on rollout within our Operations Directorates, whose staff primarily face our customers.

7. Although implemented during the period of this Annual Report (Annex 1), the improvement in complaint handling performance is already evident.

In Year Progress – access to information

8. Our policies and procedures have been kept under review and additional guidance developed to ensure Natural Resources Wales is better able to comply with the relevant legislation
9. In addition, we have developed improved internal reporting on requests that are being handled, as well as developed a disclosure log to support the dissemination of the information that is disclosed
10. There will always be an interface between routine business requests and formalised Access to Information requests but the Annual Report (Annex 2) continues to show progress in our efficient and proportionate provision of information

Risks

11. Natural Resources Wales is subject to external regulation by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and the Information Commissioner and the risks of censure by either of these regulators, can result in reputational and potentially financial costs.
12. A failure to learn lessons from our handling of complaints and complex access to information requests can lead to repeated failures and significant costs. In addition, there is a risk of failing to capitalise on the learning to improve services and increase efficiency

Financial Implications

13. There are costs across the business of meeting our responsibilities for complaint handling and dealing with access to information requests but the optimal approach to minimising these costs is by adhering to our own policy & procedures.

Communications

14. The publication of these reports will be of interest to some stakeholders and staff and may attract interest externally.

Equality impact assessment (EqIA)

15. Not applicable

Index of Annex

Annex 1: Annual Report - Complaint Handling

Annex 2: Annual Report – Access to Information