

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy

The Council is committed to continually improving the quality of, and access to, the services it provides. This policy covers all services delivered by the Council, or for which it has responsibility, it does not include services where there are separate complaints procedures, for example the conduct of elections, the conduct of Councillors or requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations or Data Protection Act. In addition, issues which are in court or have already been heard by a court or tribunal fall outside this policy.

A clear and accessible Complaints, Compliments and Comments process allows the Council to demonstrate its commitment to managing customer feedback effectively.

This purpose of this Policy is to ensure that:

- Providing feedback to the Council is made as easy as possible.
- Feedback is dealt with promptly and efficiently.
- There is effective communication between council staff and both the person making the complaint and any other partners involved in the complaint from an early stage.
- Every effort is made to resolve any complaints that are received at an early stage.
- The Council learns from all feedback received taking appropriate steps to improve service provision or celebrate good feedback.
- There is clarity on the roles of staff with the process.
- Credibility and accountability are maintained through meaningful review and monitoring.

Definitions

For the purpose of this Policy “feedback” includes compliments, comments and complaints and the following definitions will be used;

Compliments

Compliments are specific expressions of satisfaction from customers concerning a function or a service provided by the Council. A simple thank you, usually at the end of a contact, would not normally be considered a compliment.

Comments

Comments are views or suggestions that customers may have about a service that is provided by the Council or an initial request for a service.

Complaints

There is often confusion about what constitutes a complaint, which leads to complaints mistakenly being labelled as requests for service. A request for service is not a situation where the Customer is requesting an item or service that is missing/has been missed, this is a complaint. However a complaint about a taxi driver or noisy neighbour would be treated as a request for service.

Where there is any doubt whether the customer’s feedback is a complaint, a comment or a request for service, it is to be treated as a complaint.

A complaint is also any expression of dissatisfaction with the standard of a service that is provided by the Council. This may include the action or lack of action taken by the Council and/or the way in which the service has been provided, including the conduct of staff. This will also include situations where customers state that the perceived failure has repeatedly occurred.

This may include complaints about:

- failure to provide a service, or inadequate standard of service
- how we met a customer's needs
- how we communicated with a customer
- how long we took to deal with a case
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff
- failure to follow the appropriate administrative process.

The above definitions also extend to complaints in respect of partners or contractors providing services on behalf of the Council, in these cases the contracting/managing department is responsible for ensuring that complaints are investigated, resolved and responded to.

There is no difference between a formal and an informal complaint. Both are expressions of dissatisfaction that require attention as a complaint and a response.

Whistleblowing

A complaint of a serious nature which gives rise to concerns about fraud or corruption will be dealt with under the Council's Whistleblowing procedures.

English language requirement for Public Sector workers

The Council is under a duty to ensure that all staff in customer facing roles are fluent in spoken English to the extent necessary to enable them to perform their role effectively.

If a customer feels that a member of staff in a customer facing role has insufficient proficiency in spoken English for the performance of their role they can complain to the Council. This complaint will then be investigated and a response provided in accordance with the Policy.

Please note that a complaint about a member of staff's accent, dialect, origin or nationality will not be considered a legitimate complaint.

How a customer may provide feedback

A customer may provide feedback either;

- by using the on-line complaints form on the Council's website
- by telephone
- in writing (by email or letter)
- in person
- via a Councillor

We will respond to customers in writing, unless it is appropriate to respond via other channels of contact (for example the telephone or in person).

Customers are encouraged to put their complaints in writing to give as much information as possible to aid investigation. If they are making a verbal complaint, we will take down their details and confirm with them that they wish the complaint to be investigated and how to contact them with the outcome of the investigation. Standard forms are available on the Council's website and at all Council reception areas.

The Council's Leisure Centres have 'comments books' available for customers in the Reception areas. The Manager of the Leisure Centre reviews these each day and provides a response in the book, this can be checked by the customer who made the comment, and other customers which ensures there is comprehensive feedback.

The Council will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help customers access and use the Council's services. The Council will provide assistance to those who may struggle with providing feedback or require information in another language or format.

Recording compliments, complaints and comments

The Service Manager (Customer Services and Communications) is responsible for the Council's compliments, complaints and comments system.

To ensure that there is consistency across the different Council departments, Service Managers must designate appropriate staff to receive and deal with any feedback regarding their service area. They must also ensure that relevant staff in their departments are aware of the importance of recognising what compliments and complaints are and are dealt with and recorded on the Council's compliments, complaints and comments system.

All compliments and complaints must be recorded promptly in the Council's compliments, complaints and comments system and dealt with in the agreed timescales. This will allow the Council to; take into account customer feedback, pass on compliments to relevant staff, learn from mistakes, identify improvements to service delivery and identify training needs.

Where there is a complaint involving more than one department of the Council then the departments involved will identify a lead officer to investigate and deal with the complaint.

If a complaint involves more than one organisation, for example Nottinghamshire County Council, the dealing department should ensure that communication is made with the third party to ensure the Customer receives a proper response and to avoid customers being passed back and forth between organisations.

Guidance for managing compliments

All compliments should be acknowledged and, if relating to a specific individual or team, relevant staff informed that a compliment has been received.

Guidance for managing comments

All comments should be acknowledged, appropriate action taken and, where relevant, feedback given to the customer within 10 days of receipt.

Framework for managing complaints

The Council has a three stage complaint process:

For the purposes of calculating the timescales set out below, day 1 is the first full working day following receipt of the complaint.

“Appropriate Director” means the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive or Director responsible for the relevant service area.

Stage 1 - Service Department Complaint (Investigated at point of service delivery)

1. An acknowledgement should be sent within 2 working days of receipt of the complaint.
2. A full response should be sent within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible because of the complexity of the complaint, *the timescale may be extended up to a maximum of 20 working days at the discretion of the appropriate Director. This discretion will only be exercised in exceptional cases.* The customer will be advised that the investigation is continuing and *given the new timescale for a full response* ~~giving an indication of when it will be completed.~~
3. The customer will be advised in the Council's response of what they need to do to progress to stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint.

Stage 2 - Service Department Reviews

1. An acknowledgement should be sent within 2 working days of receipt of the request for a review.
2. The relevant Service Manager (or Director if the stage 1 complaint was dealt with by the Service Manager) will ensure that an objective review is carried out for any stage 2 complaint that is received. As well as reviewing the original complaint and the Council's response under stage 1 of the complaints procedure it will also take in to account any further relevant information provided by the customer.
3. A full response should be sent within 10 working days of the request for a review. If this is not possible, because of the complexity of the complaint, *the timescale may be extended up to a maximum of 20 working days at the discretion of the appropriate Director (or Chief Executive where the Director is dealing with the response). This discretion will only be exercised in exceptional cases.* The customer will be advised that the investigation is continuing and *given the new timescale for a full response* ~~giving an indication of when it will be completed.~~ Regular contact should be maintained until the complaint is resolved.
4. The customer will be advised in the response that they may complain further to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome and sent details of their procedure.

Stage 3 – Referral to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (Ombudsman)

Any correspondence received from/sent to the Ombudsman will be handled by the Council's Service Manager: Legal Services on behalf of the Council's Monitoring Officer ~~who will enter the referral on to the LGO system.~~ The actual referral will also be sent to the relevant Service Manager for their comments.

Feedback relating to staff behaviour

Notifying staff of compliments made about them can improve staff satisfaction, staff morale, customer service and performance. Where a complaint relates to a specific member of staff, the complaint will be investigated in an appropriate way, which may include consideration under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

Remedies

Where a complaint investigation identifies that things have gone wrong an appropriate remedy will be determined. Appropriate remedies could include:

- An apology
- An explanation of what went wrong
- Actions to put things right
- Some form of compensation to the customer (in line with delegated powers)

The guiding principle must be that, where possible, the customer is put back in the position they would have been if things had not gone wrong.

Evaluating our response to customers

Customer Services may contact customers, following resolution, asking them to complete a satisfaction form. The aim of this is to provide information to help the Council determine:

- Whether the complaint procedure was accessible and easy to use.
- Levels of satisfaction with the way the complaint was handled and remedy offered

Monitoring

Service Managers should ensure that they monitor and review outcomes of all feedback that they receive within their departments to identify trends and to use them for discussion at team meetings, staff development and PDRs.

Each quarter, the Service Manager (Customer Services and Communications) will collate details relating to the number of compliments and complaints received by the Council for each Service area. These details will be entered onto the Council's Corporate Performance Management System. Following this the Customer Insight Officer will prepare a report and analysis for consideration by Senior Leadership Team.

Unreasonably persistent complainants

On occasions certain complaints can be difficult to resolve and can cause anxiety and distress to customers and employees. Whilst the aim of the council is always to try to find a way to resolve matters, there are occasions when customers become unreasonable or unreasonably persistent in their actions to obtain the outcome that they want.

There is a need to ensure that these complaints are dealt with fairly. However, there is also a need to ensure that Council resources are used effectively and that other customers or employees do not suffer any detriment as a result of their behaviour. There is a separate policy to deal with any unreasonably persistent complainants.