Northamptonshire County Council

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK
(Complaints, Compliments and Comments)

Policy and Procedure

(May 2019)
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Listening, Responding, Learning

Introduction:

Northamptonshire County Council aims to deliver high quality services where the customer is at the heart of everything we do. We welcome all customer feedback and aim to deal with customers’ concerns in a fair, consistent and timely way.

The Council wants to listen to its customers' views and values their contributions. We want to learn from good practice as well as any mistakes and build upon past experiences to improve the future of our services.

Key Principles:

A customer or others acting on their behalf has a right to:

- Complain
- Be listened to
- Have their complaint investigated and resolved as quickly as possible
- Have their concerns taken seriously

Our procedure is designed to:-

- Be accessible and uncomplicated
- Promote customer satisfaction
- Identify areas where services can be improved
- Learn from good practice
- Learn from mistakes
- Implement improvements in processes and procedures

Scope of Policy / Procedure:

This Policy and Procedure applies to the whole of Northamptonshire County Council, with the exception of complaints about individual Schools and Social Services which are covered by other statutory procedures or other processes. These exemptions are listed in Appendix 1. The Council’s Complaints Procedure will not be used where another method of getting appropriate compensation or making an appeal exists.

Our Policy:

Northamptonshire County Council promotes the right of its customers to raise a concern or make a complaint if they think something has been done incorrectly or if they feel it has been addressed poorly. Similarly customers may complain if they feel something that ought to have been done has not been done.
The Council also promotes the right of customers to ‘comment’ on a Policy or Council decision which may affect them and express a compliment if things have gone well for them.

Information about how to make a complaint or express a compliment is easily accessible. There is information on the Council’s website and access to our online form here.

In addition, on request, we will provide information on how to give feedback in other community languages, on audiotape and in Braille.

Customers wishing to make a complaint will be offered help with following this procedure.

Complaints will be investigated objectively, fairly and thoroughly in a positive problem-solving manner.

No service will be delayed, suspended or withdrawn because a complaint has been made.

We will have mechanisms in place to ensure that any required lessons and service improvements have been achieved following customer feedback.

What is a complaint, comment or compliment?

**COMPLAINT:** a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet with the quality of a service or with a failure to provide a previously agreed service, or with the attitude or behaviour of a member of staff.

Examples:

- a customer complains that the Council has failed to follow its own procedures and that the member of staff dealing with them was rude and unhelpful;

- a customer requested several months ago that a pothole outside their house needed sorting out and despite several calls to the Council nothing has been done

- a customer is not happy with the decision to locate a bus stop outside their house and would like it to be removed

- a customer who attends an Adult Education Class complains that when they turned up for their class it had been cancelled and no one had let them know.

**COMMENT:** a comment is a general statement about policies, practices or a service as a whole, which have an impact on everyone and not just one individual. A comment can be positive or negative in nature. Comments may question policies and practices, make suggestions for new services or for improving existing services.
Examples:

Positive Comments

- I am very happy that the Council has decided to introduce a self-serve system within the Library Service.
- I am pleased to see that I can now access more services on-line, in my own time when I want to.

Negative Comments

- I am unhappy with the Council's decision to introduce parking charges at its country parks.
- I am not happy with the Policy to charge for overdue Library Books.

COMPLIMENT: an expression of praise. It is a positive statement about a service provided by or on behalf of the Council, or about the helpfulness, attitude or approach of a member of staff.

Examples:

- I would like to thank the Customer Service Advisor for the prompt and efficient way in which they answered the phone and dealt with my query. They were most helpful and friendly.
- I was very grateful when I needed to see someone about the difficulties I was having that the Council Officer was able and willing to meet with me in the evening.

What might be complained about?

Some examples of complaints:

- An unwelcome or disputed decision
- Concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service
- Delay in decision making or provision of services
- Delivery or non-delivery of services
- Quantity, frequency or change of a service
- Attitude or behaviour of staff
- Refusal to answer reasonable questions
- Giving misleading or unsuitable advice
Time Limit for making a Complaint:

Our aim is to put things right if they go wrong as quickly as possible, therefore there is a one year time limit for making a complaint.

However, the time limit may be extended if it is still possible to consider the complaint effectively and efficiently or if there are other circumstances which may enable resolution of the complaint.

The Director of the Service and the Complaints Manager will take the following factors into consideration when deciding if a complaint should be accepted outside the one year time limit:

- Is it a genuine issue of vulnerability?
- If an investigation were to be conducted, what would be the benefit to the customer and what could we as an organisation learn from it?
- Is there likely to be sufficient access to information or individuals involved at the time the problem occurred to enable an effective and fair investigation to be carried out?
- Other special factors
Our Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

How to give your feedback:

You can make a complaint, compliment or comment either in person or by:

- Telephone 0300 126 1000 or the number you have for the service.
- Email: complaints@northamptonshire.gov.uk OR compliments@northamptonshire.gov.uk
- In writing to:
  The Complaints and Compliments Team
  Northamptonshire County Council
  One Angel Square
  Northampton
  NN1 1ED
- Via our website https://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/council-and-democracy/have-your-say/Pages/compliments-comments-and-complaints.aspx
- By contacting your local County Councillor – Find your Councillor: https://cmis.northamptonshire.gov.uk/CMIS5Live/Councillors.aspx#_ga=2.11668429.4.1830903306.1560158543-1511071275.1446633127
Complaints:

Our aim is to deal with all complaints in a timely and efficient way. We want to ensure that decisions have been explained clearly and that where possible customers are put back into a position that they would have been in, were it not for the complaint.

All staff are trained to deal with routine difficulties as they arise and Managers responsible for delivery of our services receive training in investigating complaints objectively and fairly.

What Happens Next?

The complaints process can be explained using the following steps:

- **Recording your complaint**: the person receiving your complaint will record it centrally with the Complaints and Compliments Team. This enables us to monitor the number and type of complaints received.

- **Acknowledging your complaint**: whenever possible your complaint will be dealt with at the first point of contact. If this is not possible your complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days and you will be given the details of the person looking into the matter.

- **Responding to your complaint**: the person responsible for responding to your complaint will contact you to agree the best way to deal with your particular complaint. Our aim is to give you a full response within 10 working days. If for any reason we cannot do this we will let you know when you can expect to receive a response. In any event we would endeavour to respond within 20 working days.

- **Room for error**: if we have made a mistake we will apologise and try to put things right. We will explain what actions we intend to take as a result of your complaint.

- **Your right to respond**: on receipt of a response you have up to 20 working days in which to decide whether to accept or reject the actions/recommendations we have stated to resolve your complaint.

If you are not satisfied you should contact the person who responded to your complaint or our Complaints Manager. We may offer you the opportunity to meet with a Manager of the Service you are unhappy with. If the matter cannot be resolved by the Manager, the Complaints Manager will discuss with you the best way forward.
Complex Complaints:

Some complaints may involve several services or agencies or the complaint may implicate the whole service complained about. In such instances we will identify an Investigating Officer to investigate your complaint. We will provide you with their contact details.

The Investigating Officer will have received training in the investigation of complaints and will carry out a fair and objective investigation.

The Investigating Officer will meet with you and confirm the nature and details of your complaint and the outcome you are seeking.

Once you have agreed your complaint with the Investigating Officer we will aim to complete the investigation and respond within 25 working days. If this is not possible we will advise you when you can expect a response. In any event the overall timescale will only be extended to a maximum of 60 working days.

The Investigating Officer will investigate the issues and will submit a report to the appropriate Senior Manager of the Service to consider and respond to. If any failings or mistakes have been identified, then recommendations for improvements will be made by the Investigating officer in the Report.

In their response the senior manager will offer an apology if mistakes have been found to have been made and will explain what actions the Council will take as a result of the findings and recommendations of the investigation.

You may also be offered the opportunity to meet with a Senior Manager to discuss the outcome of your complaint.

Once we have responded you then have 20 working days in which to decide whether to accept or reject the proposed actions to resolve your complaint.

How Will We Put Things Right?

If we have made a mistake we will apologise and tell you what action we will take to ensure the same situation does not arise again for you or future customers. The apology would be given by the Manager on behalf of the relevant service.

If a mistake has resulted in financial loss to you, the question of financial redress will be considered on an individual basis. As the County Council is publicly funded we must make certain that it meets only justifiable and deserving claims. Any financial recompense offered as an outcome to a complaint will be made consideration of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance on Remedies, a copy of which may be viewed on their website here.

All Services have to report on any changes and improvements to their area as a result of customer feedback.
What happens if you are not satisfied with our response?

If you are not satisfied you should contact the Head of Service or our Complaints Manager. A meeting will be offered with a Senior Manager which may include the Investigator and Complaints Manager. If the matter cannot be resolved to your satisfaction then the Complaints Manager will discuss with you the best way forward.

If at the end of the Council’s Complaints Process you are not satisfied you can refer your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is independent of all government departments, councils and politicians. It gives a service which is confidential and free of charge. The Ombudsman has the same powers as the High Court to obtain information and documents.

The Ombudsman will normally only accept a complaint if the Council’s Complaints Procedure has been correctly and fully followed.

Contact details:

**Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman**
The Oaks No. 2
Westwood Way
Westwood Business Park
Coventry
CV4 8JB
Web: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)
Tel: 0845 602 1983

You can complete an online form [here](http://www.lgo.org.uk)
Comments:

If you wish to make a comment, either negative or positive in relation to a policy decision, practice or service, this will be recorded and your comment will be acknowledged within 3 working days. The relevant Director of the Service will be notified to enable them to take any action if necessary. When we review our Policies we take into consideration any comments made about a Policy.

Compliments:

If you wish to express a compliment this will recorded and shared with the Service/or member of staff it relates to.

All compliment statistics will be reported in Quarterly and Annual Reports and the information gathered from them will assist in improving our service to all our customers.

Record Management and Data Protection:

All aspects of the Customer Feedback Procedure meets the requirements of the legislation regarding Data Protection, Freedom of Information and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Any personal information obtained in relation to a complaint is only to be used for that purpose.

Details about how you may obtain information that the Council holds about you may be found on our website [here](#).

Evaluation and Monitoring:

We will ensure that full records are kept of the nature and treatment of every complaint, comment and compliment considered under this procedure. Particular attention will be paid to the lessons learnt, nature of complaints and trends, the timeliness of responses and resolutions.

We will report quarterly and annually on all complaints, comments and compliments to the Chief Executive and Directors and a monthly monitoring report will be sent to the Head of each Service.

Each Service will be responsible for ensuring that it publishes details of the number and type of feedback received and improvements the Service has made as a result of the outcome of customer feedback.

The Council will review this procedure annually using the feedback from our customers and will make any necessary changes.
Glossary of Terms

**Director of Service:**
Person who has strategic responsibility for a service area.

**Head of Service:**
Person with overall managerial and operational responsibility for a division within a service area.

**Investigating Officer (IO):**
Person responsible for investigating the complaint.

**Manager:**
Person responsible for managing a Team in a service area.

**Senior Manager:**
Person with overall operational responsibility for a service area.
Appendix 1:

Services and areas not covered by this Procedure

Schools:

- Parents’/carers’ complaints about schools – each School is required to have its own complaints procedure, such complaints should be directed to the Head of the School or the Chair of its Governing Body.
- Admission to schools information, which includes information about what parents can do if they are not satisfied with the school place they are offered for their child may be found on our website: [https://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/schools-and-education/school-admissions/Pages/default.aspx](https://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/schools-and-education/school-admissions/Pages/default.aspx)
- Religious education and collective worship
- National Curriculum issues

Health and Adult Social Services and Children, Young People and Families Complaints:

There are statutory requirements that the County Council has a complaints procedure specifically dealing with complaints about services provided by Health and Adult Social Services and Children, Young People and Families Division.

The complaints procedure for Children and Young People’s complaints may be found [here](https://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/SEND/send-support-for-children/Pages/school-admissions-arrangements-for-children-with-send.aspx)

The complaints procedure for Adult Health and Social Care complaints may be found [here](https://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/SEND/send-support-for-children/Pages/school-admissions-arrangements-for-children-with-send.aspx)

Parking Services:

Penalty Charges Notices

Road Traffic Act 1991 - Any Penalty Charge Notice issued prior to 30th March 2008 is issued under this act.

Traffic Management Act 2004 - Any Penalty Charge Notice issued from 30th March 2008 is issued under this act.

Insurance Claims:

If a third party claim for damage or injury is made against the Council’s Insurers then there is no further redress through the complaints procedure in relation to an unsuccessful claim. The claimant would need to seek independent legal advice. The complaints procedure does not award
compensation and any such claims should be directed to 
insuranceclaims@northamptonshire.gov.uk

**Complaints about the conduct of contracted services:**

Complaints relating to these services and / or their employees should in the first instance be directed to the relevant company/organisation to afford them an opportunity to put things right.

Northamptonshire County Council has a responsibility as a contractor of services to ensure that they are fit for purpose and are meeting the needs of our customers. This includes any feedback in relation to **Public Health** services that the Council currently commissions, for example; The Coroner’s Service, Drug and Alcohol Services, School Nurses, Health Visitors, CAHMS, Breastfeeding Services, Sexual Health and Wellbeing Services.

Information about our **Public Health** services may be found [here](#)

Any complaints shared with us relating to a contracted service will be shared with the Council’s Commissioning Team. If you remain dissatisfied with the response that you received from a contracted provider of the Council, then please discuss this with the Complaints Team.

**Local Government Shared Services (LGSS) / Employee Services:**

The services provided to the Council and our employees by LGSS include;

- Audit and risk
- Business systems
- Democratic services
- Digital services and solutions
- Finance
- Health and safety
- Human Resources (HR)
- Insurance
- IT services
- Language services
- Learning and development
- Legal services
- Payroll and HR transactions
- Pensions
- Procurement
- Revenues and benefits
- Wellbeing

Complaints relating to these services are not considered under this procedure. A copy the LGSS Complaints and Compliments procedure and their online form may be found on their webpage [here](#)

**Complaints about the conduct of a County Councillor:**

Are not considered under this procedure. The council's arrangements for dealing with complaints about councillors are available [here](#)