

## **Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy**

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### **1.0 Overview**

- 1.1 Newark & Sherwood District Council recognises the importance of listening to the views of its residents about the service they receive from us.
- 1.2 One of our values is to be “Welcoming and Responsive”. To achieve this, we strive to be approachable, open to feedback and challenge and swift to act. This policy seeks to outline how we will achieve this through customer feedback.
- 1.3 We aim to provide services which are accessible to all residents. If a customer needs additional support or reasonable adjustments to provide their feedback, we will ensure this is provided.
- 1.4 This policy provides us with the opportunity to capture, investigate, respond, and learn from customer feedback to assist with the delivery and shaping of our services in the future.
- 1.5 This policy should be read in conjunction with:
  - Reasonable Adjustments Policy
  - Managing Unreasonable Behaviour Policy
  - Compensation Policy (Housing)

## **2.0 Scope of the policy**

2.1 This policy is designed to cover complaints, praise, comments and suggestions received through any channel related to the services we provide.

2.2 Whilst we welcome all customer feedback, there are some circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint. Neither does this policy cover issues where there is a separate process for reporting a matter to us or there is a statutory right of appeal. These include:

- service requests e.g. reporting a missed bin collection, anti-social behaviour or a repair to a Council property
- an expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey
- complaints regarding formal decisions taken by a committee for which there is an existing right of appeal – either within the Council itself or to an independent tribunal
- any matter where there is an alternative statutory process or appeal process
- complaints about Councillors
- requests for information or explanations of our policies or practices
- The issue happened over 12 months ago, or you found out about it more than 12 months ago.
- housing disrepair claims
- complaints raised about a Council service through elected members (Councillors or MPs), which are handled as Member Enquiries
- where legal proceedings have started; this is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court
- matters that have previously been considered under this policy
- complaints about the handling of personal data which will be dealt with by our Data Protection Officer in accordance with the Data Use and Access Act 2025

2.3 If, upon reviewing the complaint, we determine that it is not appropriate for a complaint to be escalated through our feedback process, we will advise the complainant of what the process or right of appeal is and withdraw the complaint.

## **3.0 Reporting Feedback**

3.1 A customer may feel hesitant in submitting feedback, especially if wanting to make a complaint, as they might be concerned in doing so, they could receive poor service or suffer unpleasant consequences of their action. It is important for customers to understand that making a complaint will not have a detrimental impact on the level of service we provide.

3.2 Feedback can be made either directly by the complainant or by someone appointed to act on their behalf e.g. a friend, relative or a voluntary agency, providing we have their consent.

3.3 Individuals may make a complaint in the way most suitable for them. Our preferred way is to complete our online form.

[Formal Complaint Information | Customer Complaints | Newark and Sherwood District Council.](#)

Alternative methods to submit feedback or make a complaint are:

- By telephone – 01636 650 000
- By email – [comments@newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk](mailto:comments@newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk)
- Through a representative - for example your Councillor, MP or a person providing support to you
- To any of our staff
- Visiting us in person Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, NG24 1BY or Ollerton Advice Office, Sycamore Road, Ollerton, NG22 9PS.
- By post to Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, NG24 1BY

If a customer submits a complaint via social media, they will be contacted to be advised for the complaint to be progressed via a different method to ensure confidentiality and privacy is maintained.

#### **4.0 Complaints – what is a complaint?**

- 4.1 Complaints provide an opportunity for us to learn from feedback as well as providing an insight into the drivers of customer satisfaction. We use complaints to review and improve the services we deliver.
- 4.2 A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Council, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents”. This is whether the service is provided directly by us or by one of our contractors or partners. The word complaint does not need to be used for it to be treated as one.
- 4.3 We acknowledge that customers will at times feel dissatisfied with the service they have received. We are committed to providing all our customers with a positive experience no matter what the circumstances are. In the first instance, the customer will be encouraged to resolve their issue directly with the staff member or service area and if applicable a service request will be raised.
- 4.4 A service request is a request from a customer to the Council, requiring action to be taken to put something right e.g. to report a missed bin collection or to carry out a repair. Service requests will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly. They can be defined as a request that the council provides or improves a service, fixes a problem, or reconsiders a decision.
- 4.5 If the customer raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, or it cannot be resolved in the above manner, or if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or the customer requests it, then the issue will be logged as a stage 1 complaint, even when the handling of the service request is ongoing. Treating these as complaints will not have an impact on the ongoing actions required. The customer always has the option to raise a complaint.

- 4.6 Each complaint will be considered on its own merit. We will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. There are certain issues which we cannot treat as a complaint and where this is the case, we will let the customer know by setting out the reasons why it is not suitable for the complaints process. These are detailed in section 2.2 above.
- 4.7 There may be occasions when the Council cannot accept a complaint or escalate to the next stage, which are not detailed in section 2.2. In these cases, it will be clearly explained in writing why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and what alternative options the Council will take, if any, or what alternative options the customer has to raise their concern. Should this occur, the customer can raise this decision with the relevant Ombudsman. The written response does not include those complaints which are deemed to be a service request.
- 4.8 A complaint can be made either directly by the complainant or by someone appointed to act on their behalf e.g. friend, relative, voluntary agency, elected member or other third party/representative, providing the complainant provides the consent for them to act on their behalf.
- 4.9 An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint. Surveys carried out by the Council will include details on how residents can submit a complaint.

## **5.0 The Complaint Process**

- 5.1 We will accept complaints within twelve months of the issue occurring or the complainant becomes aware of the issue, unless the complaint is excluded as per the reasons detailed in section 2.2. We will consider whether to apply our discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so. If we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide an explanation setting out the reasons why and provide details of your right to take our decision to the relevant Ombudsman and record all correspondence on our system.
- 5.2 The investigating officer will discuss with the complainant any reasonable adjustments which are required during the complaint process, including being given the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint and to be represented/accompanied at any meeting. Other adjustments may include for decisions or letters to be discussed in person or by telephone prior to being issued, home visits or less telephone contact. These adjustments also apply to making this Policy accessible.
- 5.3 Complaints will be responded to when the answer/remedy is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. These actions will be tracked and actioned with appropriate updates given to the complainant.
- 5.4 If, during an investigation, additional complaints are raised, if they relate to the existing complaint and the stage 1 response has not been issued, they will be incorporated into the response. Where matters are unrelated or it would be unreasonable to delay the response further or the initial stage 1 response has been issued, the additional issues will be logged as a new complaint.

5.5 Where a complaint is regarding the conduct of a member of staff, the complaint will be dealt with through the Council's HR processes. It may not be possible to advise the complainant of the outcome, only that the complaint will be investigated.

## **6.0 Complaint stages**

6.1 There are two stages to our process.

### **6.2 Stage 1**

Once a complaint has been received by channels mentioned in section 3.3, it will be recorded by a customer services team leader or senior advisor. They will allocate the complaint to the relevant service area, and an officer will then, where appropriate, speak to the complainant. This enables them to:

- check their understanding of the issue the complainant wants investigating and confirm it is a complaint which we can investigate
- understand any reasonable adjustments required and any support needed during the complaint process
- identify opportunities to resolve the complaint at the earliest opportunity
- manage the customer's expectations and answer any questions about the process
- hear the complainant's view of what has gone wrong and how they say it has affected them
- understand the outcome they are wanting and explain if the desired outcome is unreasonable or realistic

The contact stage between the Council and complainant is valuable. It is a way of finding out whether the complainant needs assistance to pursue the complaint and to agree to a way of dealing with and responding to the complaint.

Within **5 working days** of making the complaint, the investigating officer will issue an acknowledgement email or letter which will include our understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the complainant is seeking and any aspects we are not responsible for. This is known as the "complaint definition".

The investigating officer will conduct a thorough investigation of the complaint and provide a response directly to the complainant within **10 working days** from the date the acknowledgement was issued.

Where it is not possible to provide a full response within this timescale, prior to the 10 day deadline, the investigating officer will contact the complainant and explain why this is the case and advise of an estimated date of response. This extension will not exceed a further **10 working days** without good reason. The reason for the extension will be clearly explained to the complainant and timescales agreed with them to provide updates.

If an extension is proposed, the customer will be advised of their right to contact the relevant Ombudsman at this stage.

### 6.3 Stage 2

If the complainant is unhappy with part or all the outcome of the stage 1 complaint, it will progress to stage 2. This request should be received by the council within 12 months of the stage 1 response being sent – although consideration will be given to circumstances if this time has passed.

The stage 2 complaint will be investigated by a director, head of service or suitable officer appointed by the director who was not involved in the stage 1 complaint. The allocation and acknowledgment processes are the same as for a stage 1 complaint. The investigating officer will contact the complainant, where appropriate, to ensure that the nature of the stage 2 complaint is understood, any outstanding issues and the desired outcome as well as any reasonable adjustments required. Where this is not possible, the stage 2 investigation will be a review of the stage 1 response.

The investigating officer will conduct a thorough investigation of the complaint including a review of the response provided at stage 1. The response will be issued within **20 working days** from the date the 5-day acknowledgment was issued.

Where it is not possible to provide a full response within this timescale, prior to the 20 day deadline, the investigating officer will contact the complainant and explain why this is the case and advise of an estimated date of response. This extension will not exceed a further **20 working days** without good reason.

The reason for the extension will be clearly explained to the complainant and timescales agreed with them to provide updates. The customer will be advised of their right to contact the relevant Ombudsman at this point.

## 7.0 Ombudsman information and additional information for Council tenants

- 7.1 If the complaint relates to a housing service, at the end of the stage 2 process, the tenant remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, they can refer it to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The Housing Ombudsman Service also welcomes tenants to contact them at any point for additional support, and they do not have to complete the Council's full complaints process before doing so.

### **If the complainant remains dissatisfied – all other complaints**

If after receiving the stage 2 response, the customer is still unhappy with the outcome they can refer it to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

In most circumstances the Ombudsman will expect the complainant to have followed the Council's complaint process. However, it is acknowledged that in some very rare cases, there is nothing to be gained from progressing with both stages. In these situations, the

Ombudsman may be prepared to consider complaints without both stages being completed.

## **8.0 Anonymous complaints**

- 8.1 Customers are encouraged to provide their identity when submitting a complaint. Complaints may be made anonymously and will still be treated with the same degree of importance and within the relevant timescales set out in our procedure above. Anonymous complaints may be more difficult to investigate, and therefore in most cases will be recorded as a service request to the appropriate service area. They will be investigated by the relevant senior officer.

It is at the discretion of the relevant head of service who receives an anonymous complaint whether to investigate it or not. The head of service will consider the following when making the decision:

- seriousness of the complaint
- credibility of the complaint
- likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources
- whether the allegations have been investigated previously

## **9.0 Complaint outcomes**

- 9.1 The complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation of their complaint, including what we have found and how and why we came to that conclusion. If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we will advise of this and explain how we plan to change things to stop it happening again. If we have got something wrong, we will apologise.

- 9.2 If you raise concerns about the behaviour of a council officer, we will tell you if we believe we have got it wrong. Matters relating to any potential disciplinary action will not be shared as these need to remain confidential.

In our response, we will also explain how you can take your complaint further, should you remain dissatisfied.

- 9.3 We understand that not everyone will be happy with the outcome of their complaint. However, if we find that we have done something wrong, we will apologise and do our best to put things right.

We ask everyone to treat our staff with courtesy and respect while we investigate complaints. We will not accept abusive, threatening, or unreasonable behaviour towards our staff.

## **10.0 Praise**

- 10.1 Praise is an expression of satisfaction, a compliment, thanks or congratulations. This provides

an additional overview for us to learn from when we have done something well and allows us to gather valuable insight into customer satisfaction.

It is appreciated when a customer takes the time to thank or praise us or our staff when we have done something well.

## **11.0 Comments and Suggestions**

- 11.1 A comment is something you tell us about our services, policies, or the way we work. Comments can be positive or negative. A suggestion is an idea about how we could improve what we do.

We welcome comments and suggestions because they help us understand how we can improve our services.

We may not always be able to make changes based on every comment or suggestion. However, your feedback is important and may help us make decisions in the future.

## **12.0 Publicising the Complaints and Feedback Policy**

- 12.1 It is important that customers understand that there is a policy. As a minimum it will be published:

- on our website
- in our customer facing buildings
- in regular social media campaigns
- in tenant communications e.g. newsletters and rent statements including guidance on how to make a complaint and our complaint process.

- 12.2 The details of the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, including links to their Complaint Handling Codes, are published on our website.

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/>

## **13.0 Managing Unreasonable Behaviour**

- 13.1 In a minority of cases, complainants pursue their complaints in a way which is unreasonable. They may behave unacceptably or be unreasonably persistent in their contacts and submission of information. This can impede investigating their complaint (or complaints by others) and can have significant resource issues for us. These actions can occur either while their complaint is being investigated, or once we have finished the complaint investigation.

- 13.2 A copy of our policy detailing how we manage these customers can be found on our website. [Managing unreasonable behaviour policy | Newark and Sherwood District Council](#)

## 14.0 Review

- 14.1 The Policy is to be reviewed every two years or in response to changes in relevant legislation and/or other Newark & Sherwood District Council policies, procedures, and agreements.

### Approval, Consultation and Review Timetable

|                     |                                                            |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Document title      | Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy                    |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Version number      | Version 3 – replaces 1 May 2024 and 1 February 2022 policy | Protective marking      | Official                                                                                                                                         |
| Lead Director       | Director Customer Services and Organisational Development  |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Lead Service area   | Customer Services                                          |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Lead Contact        | Head of Customer Services                                  |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Date approved (SLT) | 14 May 2024                                                | Date approved (Members) | Version 3 – Portfolio Holder decision 1 March 2026. Effective date 01 April 2026.<br><br>Version 2 - 31 July 2024 Audit and Governance Committee |
| Reviews due:        | March 2028                                                 |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
|                     |                                                            |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Consultation        |                                                            |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Consultee           | Date                                                       | Comments received       | Material change requested (yes/no)                                                                                                               |
| Involved tenants    |                                                            |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| PPIC                |                                                            |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
|                     |                                                            |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Revision to Policy  |                                                            |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Date of revision    | April 2026                                                 |                         |                                                                                                                                                  |

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|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Revisions</b>        | <p>Section 2.2 - confirmation of requests raised with Elected Members and MPs and complaints relating to data protection.</p> <p>Section 4.7 - additional wording regarding withdrawing and or not accepting a complaint.</p> <p>Section 5.6 - clarification of process relating to complaints about staff.</p> <p>Section 6.2 - removal of “senior” as the investigating officer.</p> <p>Section 6.3 - addition of timescale to escalate a complaint to a stage 2 and who can investigate a stage 2 complaint.</p> |
| <b>Date of approval</b> | Operational change – not required                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## **Additions to consider**

### **MP enquiries**

Where complaints are received from MPs, colleagues should be aware these are managed centrally by the Chief Executive's office. The complaint should be initially directed to the Customer Services Manager [Team Leaders or HOS?] as soon as possible on the same working day to ensure the correspondence can be acknowledged and responded to within 5 working days by the Chief Executive.



