

Document Name	Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy
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Date for Review	To be reviewed every two years or in response to changes in relevant legislation and/or other Newark and Sherwood District Council policies, procedures, and agreements.
Version Number 1	APPROVED
Version Number 2	5 July 2022 Minor amendment to reflect Housing Ombudsman referral criteria
Version Number 3	1 October 2022 Minor amendment to remove reference of designated person for housing tenants
Version Number 4	1 July 2023 Minor amendment to title Minor amendment to change Compliment to Praise Minor amendment to reflect Housing Ombudsman referral criteria Additional section on outcomes of complaints
Approved by	Senior Leadership Team Homes & Communities Committee Policy & Finance Committee
Responsible Business Manager	Business Manager Customer Services

Customer Feedback Policy

1.0 Overview

- 1.1 The Council recognises the importance of listening to the views of its residents about the service they receive from us.
- 1.2 One of the Council's values is to be "Welcoming and Responsive". To achieve this the Council strives to be approachable, open to feedback and challenge and swift to act. This policy seeks to outline how the Council will achieve this through customer feedback.
- 1.3 This policy provides the Council with the opportunity to capture, investigate, respond and learn from customer feedback to assist with the delivery and shaping of Council services in the future.

2.0 Scope of the policy

- 2.1 This policy is designed to cover compliments, comments and suggestions, and complaints received through any channel related to Council services.
- 2.2 Whilst the Council welcomes all customer feedback, this policy does not cover issues where there is a separate process for reporting a matter to the Council or there is a statutory right of appeal. These include:
 - Requests for a service e.g. reporting a missed bin collection or a repair to a Council property
 - 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 Council appeal process
 - Complaints about Councillors
 - Requests for information or explanations of Council policy or practice.

3.0 Principals

3.1 Praise

It is appreciated when a customer takes the time to thank or praise the Council or staff for the service they have received. Compliments provide an additional opportunity for the Council to learn from feedback and gives insight into the drivers of customer satisfaction.

3.2 **Comments and Suggestions**

These are welcomed as valuable sources of information as to how the Council could improve the service it delivers. It may not always be possible to implement or make changes because of a customer's comment or suggestion, but they are still important as the feedback might influence decisions that the Council makes in the future.

3.3 **Complaints**

A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents which requires a response. This is whether the service is provided directly by the Council or by one of its contractors or partners.

Complaints provide an opportunity for the Council to learn from feedback and gives insight into the drivers of customer satisfaction. The Council uses complaints to review the services it delivers.

The Council acknowledges that customers will at times feel dissatisfied with the service they have received. It is committed to providing all its 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 business unit. Where the issue cannot be resolved in the above manner, or where this is not appropriate, the matter will be treated as a formal complaint.

You do not need to use the word complaint for it to be treated it as one

Complaints will not usually be accepted where the event giving rise to the complaint occurred more than six months ago. This is because a significant lapse of time makes a thorough and meaningful investigation more challenging.

The complaint can be made either directly by the complainant or by someone appointed to act on their behalf e.g. friend, relative or a voluntary agency.

3.4 The Council has a two stage complaints process with. There is an optional review stage for Council Tenants.

Stage 1

The complaint will be received and recorded by customer services who will send an acknowledgement within **3 working days** of receiving the complaint.

The complaint will be allocated to the relevant senior officer. The senior officer will where appropriate, speak to the complainant. This enables the manager to:

- Check their understanding of the issue the complainant wants investigating and confirm it is a complaint which the Council can investigate.

- Identify opportunities to resolve the complaint at the earliest opportunity.
- Manage the complainant'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.

The contact stage between the Council and complainant is valuable. As well as the issues listed above, it is also a way of finding out whether the complainant needs assistance to pursue the complaint and to agree a way of dealing with and responding to the complaint.

The senior officer will conduct a thorough investigation of the complaint and provide a response directly to the customer within **10 working days** of having received the initial complaint.

Where it is not possible to provide a full response within this timescale, prior to the deadline the senior officer will contact the complainant and explain why this is the case and advise of an estimated date of response. This will not exceed a further **10 working days** without good reason.

If an extension beyond **20 working days** is required to enable the Council to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.

Stage 2

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the stage 1 complaint, they can request it progresses to stage 2. This request must be received by the Council within three months of the stage 1 response being sent.

The stage 2 complaint will be investigated by a Director or Business Manager not involved in the stage 1 complaint. Where appropriate, the Director or Business Manager will contact the complainant to ensure that the nature of the stage 2 complaint is understood and the desired outcome they seek.

The Director or Business Manager will conduct a thorough investigation of the complaint and the response provided at stage 1. The response will be issued within **15 working days** of having received the stage 2 complaint.

Where it is not possible to provide a full response within this timescale, prior to the deadline the Director or Business Manager will contact the complainant and explain why this is the case and advise of an estimated date of response. This will not exceed a further **10 working days** without good reason.

Optional for Council Tenants.

Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached for a stage 1 complaint, the Council will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the

customer can challenge the Council's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of their response.

If 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.

The Housing Ombudsman 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 two response, the complainant 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.

4.0 Reporting Feedback

- 4.1 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 formal complaint will not have a detrimental impact on the level of service provided.
- 4.2 Feedback can be made either directly by the complainant or by someone appointed to act on their behalf e.g. friend, relative or a voluntary agency.
- 4.3 An anonymous complaint can be made but it is at the discretion of the relevant Business Manager receiving the complaint whether to investigate it or not. The Business Manager 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
- 4.4 It is imperative that a customer can submit feedback via any channel
 - Online – via the online form
 - Email
 - To any of our staff including by telephone

- Letter
- Social media

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.

5.0 Complaints Outcome

- 5.1 The customer 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 tell you what it is and how we plan to change things to stop it happening again. If we got something wrong, we will apologise. Where issues have been raised regarding the conduct of officers, we will tell you if we think we have got it wrong but matters relating to any potential disciplinary action will not be divulged as these need to remain confidential. Within the response to your complaint, we will advise you how you can escalate your complaint should you remain dissatisfied.
- 5.2 Customers should appreciate that not all complaints may be resolved to their satisfaction; however, we will always apologise and try to make things right if we find we are at fault. We will not tolerate abusive or unreasonable behaviour whilst investigating your complaint and ask that our staff are treated with courtesy and respect.

5.0 Vexatious and persistent complaints

- 5.1 There are occasions when a small minority of complainants become persistent complainers or make complaints that are vexatious, in that they persist unreasonably with their complaints, or make a high number of complaints to make life difficult for particular Council employees or the Council in general. This may involve making serial complaints about different matters or continuing to raise the same or similar matters repeatedly.
- 5.2 A copy of the Policy on Unreasonably Persistent Complaints and Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour can be found on the Council's website <http://www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/contactus/>

6.0 Review

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