

Corporate Complaints

Standards/ Procedures

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(This document should be used conjunction with the Procedures Flow Chart)

The council's official definition of a complaint is:

A complaint is a way of informing the Council that you are not happy with a particular service. It may be about the standard of service you have received, delay, lack of communication, discourtesy or failure to consult. So please let us know if:

- You think we have done something wrong;
- We have not done something we said we would do;
or
- You are not satisfied with a particular service or set of services that we provide.

Please note: We do not class an initial request for service as a complaint. For example, when you first let us know about a street light not working, this is not considered to be a complaint.

Complaints are brought into the council in a variety of ways. They can be written, either through the 'Your Voice Counts' leaflet or personal letter, or verbal; face-to-face or over the telephone, via Area Board meetings, Councillors and Members of Parliament. No matter what method of communication is used the following procedures must be adhered to.

Working with the definition of a complaint above, if a request for service is being made it should be handled in the necessary manner. If it is a complaint and is communicated verbal try and solve the issue at first point of contact by talking to the customer, showing an understanding to their situation if possible. If necessary ask your line manager to speak to the customer.

If it is obvious the complaint can not be solved by this method then ask the customer if they wish to put the complaint in writing. They could complete the 'Your Voice Counts' leaflet, write a letter or send an e-mail if they so wished. A verbal complaint can be taken by any officer and this information must then be sent in writing to the appropriate complaints officer for action. The timescales set must be adhered to i.e. 5 days for an acknowledgement and 20 days for a full response irrespective of how the complaint has been received. The complainant must be told of the process, timescales and when they can expect a response.

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Once the complaint has been received by the complaints officer the following procedure must be followed:

1. When a written complaint comes into the council it needs to be dated before being sent to be investigated, always keep in mind the set timescales for the complaints procedure:
 - 5 working days to send an acknowledgement; and
 - 20 working days for the full response
2. Once the complaint has been received the first task is to log it on the corporate complaints system. This system will generate a reference number, which should be written on the original complaint.
3. Choose the relevant acknowledgement letter from the standard letters provided, fill in the required details and print a copy to send to the customer, saving a copy in your own filing system.
4. As the council is moving towards paperless office working the holding of complaints documents should be electronic where possible. Where this is not possible then photocopies of documents should be kept in a manual file.
5. The original complaint then needs to be forwarded to the investigating officer, along with any relevant communications.
6. Post the acknowledgement to the customer.
 - 6a. If the complaints contents identify two or more different departmental issues the first complaints officer must liaise with the complaints officer/s from the other department/s, ensuring all relevant correspondence is delivered and communication channels are open.
 - 6b. All complaints offices must make investigators aware of the fact that the full response is a dual response, and that they must not send their communication direct to the customer, but instead send it to their complaints officer.
 - 6c. The full response must be a joint effort with the first officer co-ordinating the response to ensure the customer receives one reply where possible. This will ensure good customer services and show that the different sections of the council are working together with regards to their issues.
If there is a delay in part of the response this should be communicated to the complainant as to what further action is to take place.

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7. For a singular response once the investigating officer has completed the response it must be sent direct to the customer with a copy being sent to the complaints officer.
 - 7a. Once the complaint officer has received the response from the investigating officer they must forward them a learning proforma to complete, along with the accompanying notes and time scales for completion and return.
 - 7b. When the learning proforma has been returned the information should be logged on the Learned Outcomes data sheet Customer Services Administrator on a monthly basis.
 - 7c. Complaints officers must forward their Learning Outcomes data sheet to the
8. When the full response has been sent to the customer and the case is closed enter the details in the complaints system, marking the complaint as complete.
9. Complaints should be monitored on a regular basis, ensuring time lines of correspondence are being adhered to and chasing up investigating officers if not.
10. There may be times when an extension for a reply is required. If this happens the complaints officer must complete the extended letter template explaining the reason for the delay and indicating a new time-line for the full reply.
11. Statistics on complaint's, learned outcomes and problems raised must be compiled by the departmental complaints officers and distributed to their respective management teams/departments on a monthly basis for discussion.
12. The handling and learning from Complaints will be a standard item on Departmental Management Team meetings.
13. This information will then be shared with the Complaints Officer Group who will review complaint handling, highlight successes and monitor performance.
14. Learning outcomes will be sent to the Customer Services Administrator for collation and posting onto the shared learning website. The outcomes will then be discussed at the monthly Complaints Officers meeting to learn from mistakes or best practice.