



Customer Complaints, Compliments and Contacts Policy

16 September 2016

Version Final

Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	2
Our Customers	3
Compliments	3
Complaints	3
Complaints Procedure	4
Responding to Complaints	5
Unreasonably Persistent Complainants	6
Learning from Complaints	6
Confidentiality	7
Document Information and Version Control	7

Introduction

This policy sets out how customers can make a complaint about Council services, and how we will respond to and learn from complaints received.

North Norfolk District Council is committed to delivering excellent customer service. Listening to our customers and learning from customer feedback enables the Council to improve its services and meet the needs of customers more effectively.

We want to make it as easy as possible for customers to let us know their views, including how to make a complaint.

Compliments, Complaints and Suggestions can be made through any of our contact channels:

- In person
- Telephone
- Email
- Website
- Letter
- Social media

Compliments, Complaints and Suggestions can be received by a variety of people:

- Customer Services Team
- Service area teams
- CEO/Director
- Corporate PA team
- Any member of staff

- Councillors (personally or on behalf of residents/constituents)

All compliments, complaints and suggestions however received must be logged onto the Corporate Customer Contact database. The Corporate Customer Contact Co-ordinator will ensure that the customer is sent an acknowledgement and will monitor and review the progress of the contact to ensure compliance with the policy.

Having a corporate repository of all customer contacts for compliments, complaints and suggestions will ensure consistency of the standard of replies to customers and will enable analysis of trends and reporting across the Council.

Our Customers

This policy applies to any customer of the Council, or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council.

A customer of the Council is anyone who:

- accesses, uses or receives any Council service
- is affected by any Council policy or action
- contacts the Council to seek or report information

Compliments

Definition of a compliment:

A compliment is an expression of praise for an action completed or a standard of service delivered. This includes compliments to the Council by a customer relating to the quality of service provided by individual staff members or service teams.

Once the compliment is logged on the corporate customer contact database, a thank you letter will be sent to the customer and a copy will be passed through to the appropriate Head of Service, the Corporate PA Team and Communications Team.

The Head of Service or Service Manager will notify the member of staff or team members in person either by letter or email to thank them for the excellent service delivered.

The coordinator will provide a summary of compliments received to be included in the monthly data report to Management Team.

Complaints

Definition of a complaint:

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action (or lack of action) or about the standard of service, regardless of whether the action was taken. This includes standards of service provided by the Council itself or by a person or body acting on behalf of the Council.

The response may be to put things right straightaway, or to investigate the matter further. A complaint could include any of the following concerns:

- a customer cannot access a service
- we delay or fail to deliver a service
- we provide a poor quality service
- we reduce or withdraw a service
- a policy is inappropriately applied or disadvantages a customer
- a policy unfairly discriminates against a customer
- a member of staff's attitude or competence causes concern
- we fail to meet our statutory responsibilities

A complaint is not:

- a first request for service
- avoidable contact (although this can be)
- dissatisfaction about other bodies i.e. central government, etc.

The Customer Complaints Policy does not apply under certain circumstances or conditions including:

- employee complaints relating to employment issues or disciplinary and grievance processes – which are dealt with through the Council's Human Resource policies and procedures
- Council decisions where there is an existing appeals process, such as planning applications
- matters that are already subject to legal proceedings
- complaints relating to ongoing insurance claims against the Council
- issues that have arisen and are being handled through the Council's 'Whistleblowers' scheme

Complaints Procedure

Customers may make a complaint about the Council:

- In person
- Telephone
- Email
- Website
- Letter
- Social media

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

Wherever possible we aim to resolve complaints at the point of service delivery and as quickly as possible but within a maximum of 15 working days.

We encourage customers in the first instance to contact the service they wish to complain about. Service staff will do all they can to put things right and resolve the issue informally.

If a customer is unsure they should call Customer Services to identify who they should contact.

If it is not possible to resolve a customer's complaint informally, the complaint will be investigated through the Council's formal procedure.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution - Complaints Process

We will acknowledge all formal customer complaints within 3 working days. The corporate complaints coordinator will ensure an appropriate service manager investigates the complaint and provides the customer with a full response within 28 working days.

If the customer is not satisfied with the Stage 2 response, they will be required to identify why they feel the response failed to satisfy their complaint and ask for the complaint to be reconsidered – within 28 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

Stage 3 – Formal Resolution – Review

A Corporate Director (or a senior officer nominated by a Director) will investigate the complaint – re-examining the complaint and the Stage 1 and 2 responses; a response will be sent to the complainant in the Corporate Director's name within 28 working days.

How to appeal against the outcome of a complaint

Where a complaint has progressed through all stages of the Council's complaints procedure and the customer is still not satisfied, they may appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Exceptions

Where a customer complains about the behaviour of a Director or Senior Manager, the complaints coordinator should seek advice from the Chief Executive or Leader of the Council, who will advise on the most appropriate person to investigate the complaint.

Responding to Complaints

On receipt of a formal complaint we will:

- At each stage respond to complaints or send a holding letter or email to the customer in line with the timescales indicated in the 3 stage procedure.
- We will, at all times, deal with customer complaints courteously, openly and fairly.

Complaints – Upheld

Where we have made a mistake or failed to provide the expected standard or quality of service, we will acknowledge and apologise for this. We will also set out the actions we will take to put things right and improve our services. This could include:

- reinstating a service to a customer
- changing how we deliver our services
- reviewing and amending information about our services
- reviewing Council policies or procedures
- providing appropriate staff training and guidance

Complaints – Not Upheld

Where we have investigated and do not uphold the complaint, we will:

- explain the reasons for our decision clearly
- provide any relevant evidence to support the decision
- inform customers how to progress their complaint if they remain dissatisfied

The coordinator will provide a summary of the complaints received to be included in the monthly data report to management team.

Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

We aim to respond to all complaints positively, and ensure that customers are satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

Very occasionally, a complainant will persist in communicating about a matter after they have received a full response to their complaint which impacts on Council resources and capacity to respond to the complaint effectively.

Continuing to respond to these complainants can take up a lot of time and reduce capacity to deal with other complaints effectively.

The Council has adopted an Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy that should be followed if an officer considers that a complainant's actions or behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonable.

Learning from Complaints

We collect and review feedback from our customers, and use this information to drive service improvement.

All formal customer complaints are recorded on the Council's corporate tracking system. Data about complaints is collated and shared across the Council to identify performance trends and review how we handle and respond to customer feedback. This includes:

- how well we meet our target response times
- how effective we are in capturing complaints across the Council
- how customers prefer to contact us

Customer complaints are regularly reviewed across the Council to identify how we can improve our services. This includes:

- service managers making operational improvements in response to specific complaints
- regular review of upheld complaints at directorate and corporate performance reviews to identify issues that need addressing
- development of action plans to improve services, based on specific issues or trends in complaints

The Council will publish information about complaints – to inform customers about how we handle complaints and show how we make changes as a result of customer feedback.

Confidentiality

Any personal data provided to the Council will be managed in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1988. The Council will use this information to respond to the customer and improve services.

Personal data will be kept anonymous in producing and sharing information about complaints with other services and partners.

Document Information and Version Control

Document Name	Customer Complaints, Compliments and Contacts Policy
Document Description	This policy sets out how customers can make a complaint about Council services, and how we will respond to and learn from complaints received.
Document Status	Current
Lead Officer	David Williams
Sponsor	Nick Baker
Produced by (service name)	Customer Services
Relevant to the services listed or all NNDC	All NNDC
Approved by	CLT
Approval date	September 2016
Type of document	Policy
Equality Impact Assessment details	Required
Review interval	Every 5 years
Next review date	September 2021

Version	Originator	Description including reason for changes	Date
1.0	David Williams		16/9/2016
Final	Helen	Minor amendments and layout changes	20/09/2016

	Thomas		
--	--------	--	--