

# **Suggestions, Compliments and Complaints Procedure**

**Customer Feedback Policy**

**Internal Guidance**

# Suggestions, Compliments and Complaints Procedure

## Our Customer Feedback Policy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The District Council is committed to a constant review of and improvements to the delivery of the Council's services for all of our customers. We value customer feedback to help us maintain and improve our services. This note sets out the Council's Customer Feedback Policy for suggestions, compliments and complaints.

### 2. AIMS

All suggestions, compliments and complaints will be recorded to help us analyse feedback. Customers will be encouraged to provide feedback in person, in writing, by e-mail, by fax, by telephone or via the website. Customers will be advised of our response targets for responding to feedback.

### 3. PUBLICITY

Customers will be encouraged to provide feedback and information on how they can do this will be publicised:-

- In the Council's Customer Service Centre and customer service outlets, including leisure centres
- In libraries
- In Citizens Advice Bureaux
- On our website

### 4. DEFINITIONS

#### What is a suggestion?

A suggestion is made when a customer gives us feedback on how we can improve our delivery of a service or procedure.

#### What is a compliment?

A customer gives a compliment when he/she provides us with feedback about how well we deliver a service or how helpful an employee has been to them.

#### What is a complaint?

A complaint should not be defined too narrowly. It is an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether justified or not and whether the action or service was taken or provided by the Council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council.

The definition could include any one of the following situations for our customers:-

- A delay in providing a service

- Failure to provide a service, achieve the Council's published service standards or fulfil statutory responsibilities
- A poor quality service or a mistake has been made
- An inappropriate service
- A service has been removed or withdrawn
- An inappropriate cost has been charged for a service
- An employee's behaviour causes upset
- A policy unreasonably disadvantages one or more members of the public
- Unfair or bias discrimination

Comments which are criticisms or disagreements with Council policies rather than the way they have been carried out should not be regarded as a complaint.

## 5. HOW TO DEAL WITH A SUGGESTION

- Details of the suggestion should be logged by the relevant service who should acknowledge receipt of the customer's comments within five working days.
- Head of Service/Activity Manager should consider the suggestion and send a response within 20 working days to:
  - thank the customer for taking an interest in our services; and
  - explain to the customer how we will implement their suggestion or explain why we are unable to do so.

## 6. HOW TO DEAL WITH A COMPLIMENT

- Details of the feedback should be logged by the relevant service who should acknowledge receipt of the customer's comments within five working days.
- Head of Service/Activity Manager will write to the team or employee to advise them of the compliment and thank them for providing a high quality service to the customer.

## 7. HOW TO DEAL WITH A COMPLAINT

The principles that underpin the complaints procedure are that:

- The customer is the most important person in any transaction and has a right to decent, agreed standards of service and care;
- Customers should have easy access to clear information;
- Both the customer and the Council should have a clear understanding of what is expected from each other;
- Systems of redress and compensation should be clearly explained and understood; and
- Services should learn from the complaints received and make sure that this learning influences delivery next time.

### Initial Stage – Service Resolution

The employee or service provider who receives the complaint initially should make every effort to resolve the problem straight away. If a complainant remains dissatisfied, or feels that his/her problem has not been looked at properly, or not been fully understood they will often want someone else to investigate it further. In this situation, the customer should be informed that they can progress the complaint to the next stage.

A separate procedure exists for Call Centre employees and the complaint is covered by the Ops Service Alert system. In this case a Formal Complaint Service Request should be raised. The Call Centre has its own guide to dealing with complaints via the Customer Relationship Management system.

The identity of the person making a complaint should be made known only to those who need to consider the complaint; and should not be revealed to any other person or made public. Care should be taken to maintain confidentiality where particular circumstances demand it.

### **Formal Complaint Stage 1 – Service Investigation**

If a customer says he/she wishes to make a formal complaint the employee should give the customer the options of:

- a. making the complaint in writing – send the customer the Council's Suggestions, Compliments and Complaints feedback pack;
- b. submitting the complaint electronically via:  
<https://applications.huntsdc.gov.uk/forms/complaints/complaints.htm>
- c. Making the complaint via fax; or
- d. taking details of the complaint in person or over the telephone.

If d. is chosen, employees should take down the following information:

- a. complainant's details;
- b. complaint details;
- c. what action the customer has already taken;
- d. what resolution the customer is expecting; and
- e. in what form the customer would prefer the response.

In all cases the information should then be forwarded to the Central Services Manager in the Administration Division, who will initiate the formal complaints procedure.

### **Who?**

This should be dealt with by a Head of Service or investigating officer nominated by the Head of Service in the service area that the complaint is within. Generally, it should be a senior manager who was not involved at the local resolution stage.

### **How?**

- Acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible and in any event within five working days. Advise the complainant that unless there are exceptional circumstances, he/she will receive a written response within twenty working days.
- Complete a monitoring form (available from your Departmental Feedback Officer).
- Investigate the complaint, consider your response including any remedy and write to the complainant within the maximum of twenty working days. If after appropriate investigation you consider that the complaint is not justified inform the complaint accordingly. At this stage advise the complainant that he/she should write or contact the Chief Officer if they wish to pursue the complaint further.

- If you are unable to meet this timescale write to the complainant and tell them why, what action you are taking and when you expect to provide a substantive response.
- The complaint remains open for a period of 30 working days to make sure that the customer is satisfied with the response. Advise the complainant that they have 30 working days from receipt of the response to take the complaint to the next stage. Following this timescale the complaint will be closed.
- Pass the complete complaint log form to your Departmental Feedback Officer.

## **Formal Complaint Stage 2 – Chief Officer**

### **Who?**

This should be investigated by the Chief Executive or a Director who is independent of the service area to which the complaint relates.

### **How?**

- Acknowledge the complaint within five working days and advise the complainant that, unless there are exceptional circumstances, he/she will receive a written response within twenty working days.
- Complete the monitoring form to record details of the third stage of investigation.
- Investigate and consider the response to the complainant including any remedy and write to the complainant, and tell them why, what action you are taking and when you expect to make a substantive response.
- Inform the customer that the complaint has been fully addressed through the Council's internal complaints procedure and will not be pursued further by the Council.
- Advise the customer of their right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman or to obtain their own independent legal advice if they remain dissatisfied with our response.
- Pass the complaint monitoring form to the Departmental Feedback Officer.

## **8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN**

The Ombudsman will not usually investigate a complaint until the Council has had an opportunity to investigate and answer it first.

Complaints involving the Ombudsman will be dealt with by the Corporate Director on behalf of the Chief Executive. Any correspondence from the Ombudsman or concerning a complaint referred to the Ombudsman should be sent immediately to the Corporate Director.

## **9. PERSISTENT AND/OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS**

We will respond sympathetically and patiently to the needs of all complainants, but sometimes we may be unable to do any more to assist them, or to resolve a real or perceived problem. If a complainant is persistently contacting the Council with regard to a complaint, long after the point where a conclusion can be reached to the complainants' satisfaction, you should refer to the Persistent and/or Vexatious Complaints Policy. The two stages of the complaints

procedure will need to have been completed before the Persistent and/or Vexatious Complaints Policy is invoked. Further advice should be sought from the Central Services Manager.

#### **10. REMEDIES [TO BE AMENDED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE IN 2009]**

Where a complaint is found to be justified consideration needs to be given to an appropriate remedy to the complaint. We will try to take some practical action to put things right and will always, so far as possible, put the customer back to the position that he/she would have been in but for our mistake.

One or more of the following may need to be done to put things right:-

- Apologise to the customer
- Provide an explanation and information to the customer
- Provide a service desired by the customer
- Review customer information (leaflets, posters etc)
- Review of working procedures
- Request to review a policy
- Arrange training or guidance for employees
- Financial compensation in exceptional circumstances

#### **11. DEPARTMENTAL FEEDBACK OFFICER**

The Suggestions, Compliments and Complaints Procedure requires the designation in each Department of a Feedback Officer(s). They will need to make sure that all staff are aware of the procedure for dealing with feedback and that feedback forms are displayed in public areas.

The Departmental Feedback Officers' role will be to record all suggestions, compliments and complaints and ensure all information is passed on for corporate monitoring. For the purposes of monitoring referred to in Section 12, only those complaints that reach stage 2 of the complaints procedure will be regarded as formal complaints.

#### **12. MONITORING**

We will monitor trends and performance in our handling of customer feedback and produce reports to the Corporate Governance Panel on a quarterly basis.

#### **13. SOFTWARE SYSTEM**

The Council operates a corporate complaints management system. All action in relation to formal complaints should be entered on to the system. It is important that departments are rigorous in closing complaints that have run their course.