

Customer Feedback Policy

Internal Guidance

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. It supplements the Customer Service Strategy published January 2016. Included in that Strategy is the guidance on how to raise a complaint and give compliment.

2. AIMS

All suggestions, compliments and complaints are helpful for us to improve our services. Customers will be encouraged to provide feedback in person, in writing, by e-mail, 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 Bureau
- 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, but is not limited to, 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- A service has been removed or withdrawn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. The Head of Service / Manager should consider the suggestion and send a response within 20 working days to:

- Thank the customer for taking an interest in our services
- 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 compliment should be logged by the relevant service who should acknowledge receipt of the customer's comments within five working days. The Head of Service / Manager will inform the employee and/or the team to:

- Advise them of the compliment
- 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
- Services should learn from the complaints received and make sure that this learning influences delivery next time
- 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.

There are some situations that we wouldn't take through the complaints process, for example a single incident of a service failure such as one missed bin collection, as we should be given the opportunity to put this right; or where there is a disagreement with the result of a process that has its own appeal process such as planning or benefits decisions and parking fines.

7.1 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.

7.2 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
- b. Submitting the complaint electronically via:
<https://applications.huntsdc.gov.uk/forms/complaints/complaints.htm>
- c. Taking details of the complaint in person or over the telephone

If c. 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
- e. In what form the customer would prefer the response

In all cases the information should then be entered onto the Customer Feedback System on SharePoint.

7.3 Who?

This should be dealt with by the relevant Manager or Investigating Officer nominated by the Head of Service in the service area that the complaint is within. It may or may not be the Manager who was involved at the local resolution stage.

7.4 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 they will receive a written response within 20 working days.

The entry on the Customer Feedback SharePoint site should be completed.

Investigate the complaint, consider the response including any remedy, and write to the complainant within the maximum of 20 working days. If after appropriate investigation the complaint is considered not justified, inform the complainant accordingly. At this stage advise the complainant that they should write or contact the Policy, Performance and Transformation Manager if they wish to pursue the complaint further (see Stage 2).

If this timescale is unable to be met, write to the complainant and tell them why, what action is being taken and when a substantive response can be expected.

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.

7.5 Stage 2 – Head of Service or Independent Manager

7.6 Who?

This should be investigated by the relevant Head of Service. It could be appropriate to be managed by another member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) or Management Team, who is independent of the service area to which the complaint relates. In such circumstances, this is decided by the Corporate Team Manager.

7.7 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 20 working days.

The entry on the Customer Feedback SharePoint site should be completed.

Investigate and consider the response to the complainant including any remedy and write to the complainant, telling them why, what action is being taken and when a substantive response can be expected.

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.

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 Team Manager and Policy, Performance and Transformation Manager on behalf of the Managing Director.

9. PERSISTENT, VEXATIOUS AND / OR UNREASONABLE 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, refer to the Management of Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy. The two stages of the complaints procedure will need to have been completed before the Management of Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy is invoked. Further advice should be sought from the Corporate Team Manager.

10. REMEDIES

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, as far as possible, put the customer back to the position that he/she would have been in if it wasn't 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. SERVICE FEEDBACK OFFICER

A consideration to be resolved is if through this Policy we require the designation in each Service 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 Service Feedback Officers' role will be to record all suggestions, compliments and complaints and ensure all information is passed on for corporate monitoring through the correct channels. For the purposes of monitoring referred to in Section 12, only those complaints that reach stage 1 of the complaints procedure will be regarded as formal complaints and these all must be recorded on SharePoint.

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. SHAREPOINT

The Council operates a Customer Feedback System on SharePoint. All action in relation to formal complaints (Stages 1 and 2) should be entered on to the system.