

Customer Feedback Policy



North Kesteven
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title: Customer Feedback Policy	Approved: 04/04/2019	Effective from: 01/05/2019	Next review: 01/10/2023
Version: 2.3	Author: Hayley Kent Simpson		Last review: 01/10/2022
Review Comments	V2: Updated to include dealing with persistent and vexatious customers V2.1: updated to include preferred definition of the Housing Ombudsman V2.2: updated to remove appendices and reference to persistent and vexatious behaviour – which is now included in the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy V2.3: updated to remove reference to 'designated person' for housing complaints		

Aim

As part of North Kesteven District Council's vision the council recognises one of its objectives to be 'Transforming Services to meet the changing needs of the District'. In order to meet this objective the council must listen to its customers – this policy seeks to outline how the council will achieve this through direct customer feedback.

Through this policy NKDC aims to capture, investigate, respond to and learn from its customers feedback so that it may help shape council services in the future.

Scope

This policy is designed to cover compliments, comments and complaints received through any channel that a customer wishes to use, with regards to council services.

It does not cover

- initial requests for a service to be delivered
- complaints about other customers
- complaints about councillors
- any matter where there is an alternative statutory process or council appeals process

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, definitions will be as follows

Compliment - An expression of praise or thanks

Comment - A remark expressing an opinion or reaction

Complaint - A statement that an injustice has been sustained as a consequence of maladministration. An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council, its own colleagues or those acting on its behalf affecting residents.

Appeal - An application for a decision to be reversed

Maladministration – examples include

- delay
- incorrect action or failure to take action
- failure to follow procedures or the law
- failure to provide information
- inadequate record keeping
- failure to investigate
- failure to reply
- misleading or inaccurate statement
- inadequate liaison
- inadequate consultation
- broken promises

Principles

All Feedback

Feedback can be offered to the council via any method that suits the customer, such as via the telephone, online, in writing or face to face. If the customer chooses to leave feedback via a public forum such as social media, the council will look to move that conversation in to a private message to ensure confidentiality and GDPR compliance.

The Council aims to provide accessible services to all residents. If a customer needs additional support or reasonable adjustments to provide their feedback, the council will ensure that this is provided.

Compliments

NKDC knows that its not always possible to let the council know, but if a customer has been pleased with a council service or experience they have received the council wants to hear about it. NKDC will share that feedback with the service it relates to and with specific individuals if they are mentioned. The council will learn from that positive experience and look how it can replicate it across the council.

Comments

NKDC may not always be able to implement or make changes as a result of a customer's comments but they are still important because it is feedback which might influence decisions the council makes in the future.

If correspondence details are provided, the council will respond to comments within 15 working days to explain why the relevant decision was made or a relevant process exists, what it might do differently or why it won't be able to change things in the future.

Complaints

The council always tries to give all of its customers a positive experience, even if the subject matter is difficult, sensitive or upsetting. However, NKDC also recognises that if it leaves someone feeling dissatisfied, it needs to understand that customers experience and explore whether it could have done things differently. The council will do this through a two stage internal process.

For Council tenants, who wish to complain about a matter relating to their tenancy, they can make contact with the Housing Ombudsman at any point for additional support, and do not have to complete the councils full complaints process before they do so.

Other complainants are required to exhaust the councils process before they approach the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. This difference is as a result of requirements of the two separate Ombudsman services, and not North Kesteven District Council.

Stage 1

If correspondence details are provided, the council will acknowledge complaints within four working days and will advise the customer of the date when they can expect to receive a response. This will be 15 days from the point that we received and actioned the complaint. The complaint will be forwarded to the service that the complaint is about. A senior officer within the team who is not implicated in the complaint will conduct a full and objective investigation, by looking over relevant documents, exploring the transaction that took place and talking to any officers involved. Each point raised within the complaint will be addressed in full in the response. This will be signed off by the relevant Head of Service and the customer will receive a response in the allocated timescale. If the customer requires clarification of any part of the response or feels the council has not addressed certain points raised within their complaint, they should contact NKDC and the response will be reviewed.

Stage 2

If the customer is unhappy with the outcome of the stage 1 complaint they can request it to go to stage 2. This request must be received by the council within 3 months of the stage 1 response being sent. At this point the complaint will be reviewed by the Head of Corporate & Customer Services who is independent to the service which the complaint is about. If the complaint relates to Corporate & Customer services, another head of service will be chosen to review the complaint to ensure an independent view point is still achieved. A full and final Stage 2 response will be given within 15 working days

If the customer remains dissatisfied - complaints from council house tenants

If at this point the customer is still unhappy with the outcome of the complaint they can refer it to the Housing Ombudsman.

If the customer remains dissatisfied – all other complaints

If at this point the customer is still unhappy with the outcome of the complaint they can refer it to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

Both Ombudman are independent of all government departments, councils and politicians

In some, very rare cases, the relationship between North Kesteven District Council and a customer can break down while complaints are under investigation and there is little prospect of achieving a satisfactory outcome. In such circumstances there is often little purpose in following through all stages of the Council's complaints procedure and where this occurs the Ombudsman may be prepared to consider complaints before complaints procedures have

been exhausted. The Head of Corporate & Customer Services will decide whether an early referral to the Ombudsman is appropriate.

Our feedback process is not designed as an appeal system to question formal decisions of the Council, which were properly taken or to challenge policy. It is to check that everything that should have been done, has been done and that the procedures and policies have been followed appropriately.

Feedback that we cannot consider as a corporate complaint include:

- Requests for Council services, such as reporting an abandoned vehicle or graffiti. These may become complaints if they are not dealt with correctly or quickly enough;
- Requests for information or explanations of Council policy or practice. However, we will acknowledge and record these as comments against a Council policy so they can be reviewed;
- Complaints that have a legal remedy;
- Complaints about the conduct of Councillors – these will be passed to our monitoring officer and will be reviewed under a separate process.

Matters for which there is a right of appeal or review: by a Government Minister; external tribunal or board; or within the Council. We will advise you who to contact to pursue and appeal.

Responsibilities of the Council in relation Customer Feedback

- to acknowledge and respond to feedback within the defined timescales
- advise the customer of the expected date for a full response to any complaint made
- advise the customer of the name of the head of service who is responsible for responding to their complaint
- if the complaint is complex and cannot be responded to within the defined timescales, the customer will be kept fully informed
- When responding, the council will advise the customer what it is able to do, or is not able to do as a result of the feedback
- admit when a mistake has been made and apologise
- Learn from feedback and share that learning across the council
- If this policy does not cover the customers complaint, the council will advise what to do next
- Co-operate with the Ombudsman if the customer decides to take their complaint further

Responsibilities of customers complaining to the council

- Provide as much detail as possible to enable the council to conduct a full investigation
- Allow the council to conduct the investigation and respond within the defined timescales
- If further contact is made regarding the complaint, ensure reference numbers are provided
- Follow our staged process and move on to the Ombudsman if they remain unhappy
- Not be aggressive or abusive to council officers

Supporting procedures

Customer Feedback Leaflet – information for Customer (external document)

Appendix One – Privacy Statement

Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed every two years against its aims. This will be done through discussions with officers involved in customer feedback management and a number of performance measures designed to identify the success of the policy.

Appendix 1

Privacy Notice – Customer Feedback Policy

Our Commitment to Your Privacy

As part of our commitment to protecting your information, we have updated our Privacy Notice to explain how we collect, store and handle your personal data.

We have always been careful to protect your information, but this is part of our ongoing commitment to be transparent about how we use your information and keep it safe. This will also give you more clarity over how your information is being managed.

Through our revised privacy notice, we have addressed the new standards introduced by the European data protection law, known as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Who we are

North Kesteven District Council is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a 'data controller' under Z5680267. This means we will process and hold your personal data following receipt of your feedback.

What information do we collect?

We collect and process your personal information when you provide details as part of your feedback, such as, your name and contact details, which may include your postal address, email address or telephone number. We may also process additional information relating to your feedback, which may contain sensitive personal data, such as, information about your financial circumstances or your health, if this is relevant to your feedback. If you choose not to supply your name and contact details, it may not be possible to investigate or respond to your complaint.

Why we collect your data

We collect your personal data to enable us to manage your feedback, to investigate feedback complaints and comments, and to contact you, either to request further information or to send you a response. It will also enable us to contact the relevant Team or Council contractor about whom your feedback is made and take any remedial action, if necessary. We log all complaints, comments and compliments as part of the Council's commitment to customer care, whereby improvements to services are made as a result of customer feedback.

Additionally, as per Appendix 1 of the Customer Feedback Policy, if we identify your customer contact to be unreasonable and/or vexatious, we will notify you and store your data to ensure that any contact you make with us is in line with that notification.

How we collect your data

Local authorities are required to have a published complaints policy (which is incorporated into our feedback policy) to enable customers who are in receipt of any service to contact the Council. Therefore, we provide the feedback service for the 'performance of a public task', which is carried out in the public interest and is also in the exercise of official authority vested in us as a Public Authority. However, if you choose not to supply your name and contact details, it may not be possible to investigate or respond to your feedback.

When we'll share your data

Your information will only be passed to Officers within the relevant Teams who are responsible for handling, investigating and responding to customer feedback, therefore they may contact you for further information. In addition, we may have to share your personal data with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, if you seek to pursue your complaint further with them.

We may also share your information with organisations that we are contracted with or who are currently working with you. For example, if your feedback was about a service that is provided by a third party organisation on behalf of the Council, we may need to contact them to verify information during the course of an investigation. As they are delivering services on our behalf the Council, they must keep your details safe and secure and, as the data controller, we will make sure that they comply with our required information sharing standards and protocols. Even though we are required to share your information with authorised partner organisations, we will ensure this is done in a secure manner, and the information is proportionate in order for us to deal with your feedback.

Sometimes we have a legal duty to provide personal information to other organisations or if there is a good reason that is more important than protecting your privacy. This does not happen often, but we may share your information with the police in order to find and stop crime and fraud, for example.

We do not sell your personal information to anyone outside of North Kesteven District Council and will never share your information for marketing purposes.

Know your rights

You have many rights regarding your personal data, which include seeing what personal information we hold about you. In addition, you can ask us to correct inaccuracies, sometimes delete and restrict the personal information we hold. You are legally entitled to request access to any information we hold about you. We try to ensure that any information we hold is accurate and you have the right to ask us to correct this if it is found to be incorrect.

If you want to contact us with regards to your rights, please contact dataprotection@n-kesteven.gov.uk

How we protect your information

We comply with all laws concerning the protection of personal information and have security measures in place to reduce the risk of theft, loss, destruction, misuse or inappropriate disclosure of personal information.

How long do we keep your information?

The information we collect is recorded and stored on our secure server. We will keep your information for 7 years after the date we close your complaint, comment or compliment, after which we will securely delete the information. This will allow us to ensure information is retained, particularly in the case of a complaint that may be escalated, and to ensure that any action agreed as a result of the complaint is followed up.

Where can I get advice

If you have any concerns or questions about how your personal information is handled, please contact our Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@n-kesteven.gov.uk or by calling 01529 414155.

For independent advice about data protection, privacy and data sharing issues, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Tel: 0303 123 1113 (local rate) or 01625 545 745 if you prefer to use a national rate number.

Alternatively, visit ico.org.uk or email casework@ico.org.uk.