

# Customer Feedback Policy

<b>Title:</b> Customer Feedback Policy	<b>Approved:</b> 04/04/2019	<b>Effective from:</b> 01/05/2019	<b>Next review:</b> 01/10/2021
<b>Version:</b> 2.1	<b>Author:</b> Hayley Kent Simpson		<b>Last review:</b> 02/10/2020
<b>Review Comments</b>	V2: Updated to include dealing with persistent and vexatious customers V2.1: updated to include preferred definition of the Housing Ombudsman		

## 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

Additionally, this policy considers actions available to North Kesteven District Council when dealing with unreasonable and vexatious customer behaviour through appendix 1.

## 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 the complaint is from a tenant in a council house, regarding a matter relating to their tenancy and they remain unhappy with the responses at both stage 1 and stage 2, then the complainant has a choice of one of the following steps:

- Ask for a review of the complaint outcome by the Housing Complaints Panel. This is an optional course for tenants. The Panel is there to help to resolve disputes between the tenant and landlord. If a resolution is not possible the complaint can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman.
- Or, contact a Designated Person, this is either a District Councillor or an MP. Designated persons are there to help to resolve disputes between tenants and their landlords and/or can refer the complainant in writing to the Housing Ombudsman.
- Or, wait for a minimum of eight weeks from the date on the letter of the complaint closure, to refer their own complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. (The Housing Ombudsman is independent of all government departments, councils and politicians).

### *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 – Managing unreasonable or vexatious behaviour

Appendix Two – Privacy Statement

Offensive Incidents and Exercise with Caution Register Policy

## **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.