

Corporate & Community Services

Customer Feedback Policy

V2.4 MARCH 2023



North Kesteven
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Date of Approval:

30 March 2023

Approved by:

Executive Board

New or existing policy:

Existing



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'. 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.

Copies of this policy are available in alternative languages and formats upon request

Kopie niniejszej polityki są dostępne w alternatywnych językach i formatach na żądanie.

Paprašius, šios kompanijos tvarkos taisyklių galima gauti kitomis kalbomis ir formatais.

Copii ale acestei politică sunt disponibile în limbi și formate alternativă la cerere.

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 because 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 act
- 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 it's 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 because 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 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 customer's experience and explore whether it could have done things differently. The council will do this through a two-stage internal process. There may be occasions when the Council cannot accept a complaint from an individual or escalate a complaint to the next internal stage, in such cases it will be clearly explained, in writing why this is the case and what alternative actions the Council will take, if any OR what alternative options the individual has to raise their concern. In these cases, the individual has the right to raise this decision with the respective Ombudsman if they wish. Reasons the Council may be unable to accept a complaint or

escalate it to the second internal stage include (but are not limited to):

- it is considered that the feedback is an initial request for a service to be delivered
- it is a complaint about another customers
- it is a complaint about a councillor (there is an alternative process for these complaints)
- there is an alternative statutory process or appeals process to deal with the specific issue raised

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

Other complainants are required to exhaust NKDC's process before they approach the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – unless the Council has made it clear that the issue cannot be dealt with as a complaint. This difference is because of requirements of the two separate Ombudsman services, and not North Kesteven District Council.

Individuals do not have to state they wish to make a complaint or use the word “complaint” in order for an issue to be considered as such. Additionally, complaints will be accepted from third parties or representatives, while ensuring that the General Data Protection Regulations are taken into consideration. That representative can continue to be the point of contact for that complaint and represent or accompany the complainant throughout the process with the complainant's consent

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 working days from the point that the complaint is acknowledged. (In the case of complaints received from council tenants, about tenancy related matters the complaint will be responded to within 10 working days, in line with requirements from the Housing Ombudsman.) 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.

If a complainant raises additional complaints during the investigation and the stage one response has not been issued these will be incorporated into the response if they are relevant. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the additional issues will be logged as a new complaint.

This will be signed off by the relevant Assistant Director 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 should be received by the council within 3 months of the stage 1 response being sent – although consideration will be given to circumstances if this time period is passed. At this point the complaint will be reviewed by the Assistant Director for Corporate & Customer Services who is independent to the service which the complaint is about. If the complaint relates to Corporate & Customer services, another Assistant Director will be chosen to review the complaint to ensure an independent viewpoint is still achieved. A full and final Stage 2 response will be given

within 15 working days

If the customer remains dissatisfied

If at this point the customer is still unhappy with the outcome of the complaint, they can refer it to the Housing Ombudsman or the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – depending on the nature of the complaint. The Council will advise which Ombudsman is the most appropriate in the stage 2, final response.

Both Ombudsmen 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 Assistant Director for 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 – although where possible the Council will consider whether it is still able to offer a resolution through the complaints process by obtaining legal advice
- 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.

Roles and Responsibilities

Customer Engagement Manager

- Policy owner
- Council lead on complaint management, providing guidance to investigating officers and service leads on appropriate and consistent outcomes
- Support Assistant Directors with investigations

- Monitor implementation of outcomes of complaints across the Council
- Share learning from feedback across the Council and seek wider service improvements from lessons learnt
- Link Officer for Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
- Point of Contact for Housing Ombudsman
- Provide reports to Senior Management team, Executive Board, Audit Committee & the appropriate Scrutiny Committee on a regular and ad-hoc basis

Senior Customer Service Advisor

- Day to Day management of inbound and outbound customer feedback
- Point of contact for investigating officers and Assistant Directors on customer feedback policy and internal procedures
- Monitor feedback responses, ensuring timeframes are met and responses are in line with policy guidance and Ombudsman best practise
- Support the Customer Engagement Manager to monitor & analyse feedback outcomes & trends and in the preparation of reports.

Assistant Directors

- Responsible for the management of the complaint received for services in their division
- Responsible for identifying appropriate officers to support the investigation
- The Assistant Director for Corporate & Community Services is responsible for the management of stage 2 complaints – except for those about Corporate & Community Services
- All other Assistant Directors to take on the role of management of stage 2 complaints about Corporate & Community Service, when requested.
- To ensure delivery of outcomes of complaints in their division and ensure lessons are learnt to avoid repeat complaints

Senior Management Team

- Receive regular reports
- To support Customer Feedback Policy and ensure sufficient resources are allocated to facilitate its effective implementation.
- To receive information about feedback being received by the Council
- To satisfy themselves that complaints have been investigated and appropriate lessons learnt have been implemented as a result

North Kesteven District Council will

- 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 Assistant Director who is responsible for responding to their complaint
- if the complaint is complex and cannot be responded to within the defined timescales, keep the customer fully informed and seek agreement from the complainant on a suitable extension time. Where agreement over an extension cannot be reached, the Council will provide the relevant Ombudsman's contact details so the individual can challenge the Council's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of the response.
- When responding, advise the customer what it can 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, advise what to do next
- co-operate with the Ombudsman if the customer decides to take their complaint further

North Kesteven District Council expects customers to

- 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 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman if they remain unhappy or, in the case of Council tenants complaining about housing related matter, approach the Housing Ombudsman for support if needed.
- Not be aggressive or abusive to council officers

Supporting Policies

- Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
- Discretionary Payments to Tenants 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.

Version History

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
V2.4	wording updated to reflect improvements to complement the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code



North Kesteven
DISTRICT COUNCIL

District Council Offices, Kesteven Street, Sleaford, Lincolnshire NG34 7EF

Telephone Number: (01529) 414155

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