

Corporate Customer Feedback policy

This policy may be revised from time to time to reflect changes in legislation, good customer practice and operational requirements.

A current version of the policy can be accessed on the council website www.n-somerset.gov.uk and searching for “customer feedback policy”.

For any enquiries about this policy, please contact:

Customer Services team

North Somerset Council

Town Hall

Walliscote Grove Road

Weston-super-Mare

BS23 1UJ

Email: customer.services@n-somerset.gov.uk

Introduction

We value our customers and their feedback. This policy describes how we expect to manage and respond to customer feedback, whether suggestions, compliments or complaints. It reflects best practice both for the customer and the council. Please see Appendix 1 for details of complaints which are managed outside this policy.

The policy – purpose and definition

The main purpose of the customer feedback policy is to ensure customer feedback is logged and dealt with appropriately and consistently and that the customer receives a timely response.

Customer feedback may include:

- general feedback and suggestions for improvement
- reports about service failure
- compliments about good service
- complaints.

Customer feedback is tracked, monitored and used positively to make service improvements where appropriate. For example a number of repeat requests may indicate there is a problem and actively resolving this should decrease the number of complaints.

We aim to minimise complaints but where they do occur this policy defines how complainants should be fairly and courteously treated.

This policy:

- confirms how to give feedback or make a complaint
- highlights exceptions to the standard customer feedback procedure (see Appendix 1)
- defines the process, including response times, and what to expect when making a complaint
- recognises the importance of customer feedback in improving our services and performance
- sets out how we monitor customer feedback and use information to improve services and identify training needs.

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is defined as, “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.”

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Handling Code – updated 1 February 2024

You can complain about things like:

- not providing a service
- inadequate standard of service
- how we communicated with you
- how long we took to deal with your case
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff
- not following the appropriate administrative process.

This list does not cover everything and there may be other reasons to make a complaint.

Exclusions to this policy

1. This policy is not intended to include appeals against, or objections to, council decisions which should be pursued via the appropriate appeals procedure.
2. We will not normally investigate a complaint which we receive more than 12 months after the complainant became aware of the issue.
3. We will not consider a complaint that relates to matters that we do not deal with or that is covered by other legislation. For example, we are not responsible for protecting private land or property.
4. We will normally only consider a complaint from someone who has been personally affected by the issue.

The discretion about how to deal with a complaint lies with the council. In some circumstances we may decide that alternative means of dealing with complaints would be more appropriate and this may include mediation. The Customer Services team will decide this in consultation with the relevant service manager. In such cases we will inform the complainant of the alternative approach.

How we review and respond to complaints

We have a two-stage process with a third level of escalation to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) that reflects local government good practice:

- Stage 1 - response to the complaint by the relevant service
- Stage 2 - review by the relevant council director or deputy
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman independent review

If parts of your complaint concern other organisations it may require a joint investigation. We will advise you if we decide that the investigation is best led by another organisation and you will have the opportunity to challenge this.

Stage 1

When we receive a complaint, we will direct it to the appropriate service. We aim to respond to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days. If we cannot respond within the agreed timescales, we will let you know.

If you are not satisfied with our stage 1 response, we may respond to you further at stage 1 before progressing to stage 2.

If you are still not satisfied you can request an escalation to stage 2. We may ask you to clarify your stage 2 complaint.

Stage 2

The appropriate director, or their deputy will review the stage 1 complaint and any other relevant correspondence.

We aim to respond to stage 2 complaints within 17 working days. If we cannot respond within the agreed timescales, we will let you know.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your stage 2 complaint, the next stage is to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Role of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) looks at complaints about councils. It is a free service. Their role is to investigate complaints fairly and independently.

The LGSCO will generally not consider a complaint until it has completed the council's complaints procedure.

The LGSCO Advice Team contact details are:

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Website: www.lgo.org.uk/contact-us

Write to: LGSCO, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH

How to contact us to give feedback

Make a complaint

Complete our online form at www.n-somerset.gov.uk/complaints

Make a comment or suggestion

Complete our online form at www.n-somerset.gov.uk/comment

Give us a compliment

Complete our online form at www.n-somerset.gov.uk/compliment

Help to give feedback

Please contact us on 01934 888 802 if you need additional support.

How we use your feedback

We compile a quarterly report which we present to the Corporate Leadership team. It includes numbers of compliments and complaints received, information about trends and actions taken by services to try and prevent issues recurring.

Record retention

Please see our [privacy notice](#) on our website for details of how long we keep customer feedback records.

Unacceptable and unreasonable customer behaviour

Please see our [complainant behaviour policy](#) on our website.

Feedback on this policy

If you have any comments on this policy, please email us at customer.services@n-somerset.gov.uk or send them to:

Customer Services
North Somerset Council
Town Hall
Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

Appendix 1 - Complaints not dealt with via the corporate complaints procedure

Complaints about adult social care services

Please see our website for a link to the [adults social care complaints procedure](#) or contact complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk

We also deal with complaints about

- charges for services and financial assessments for service users
- safety and safeguarding
- some mental health services including Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) and the Approved Mental Health Service.

Complaints about children's social care and education services.

Complaints about children's social care and education services include

- child protection
- disabled children and children in need
- children and young people in care
- fostering and adoption
- SEND
- education (though not complaints about schools – see below)

These are dealt with under a separate [statutory complaints procedure](#) which is on our website. Complaints about other children's services such as school placements are dealt with under the corporate procedure. The Complaints and Directorate Governance Manager will determine which procedure to use (contact complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk).

Complaints about individual schools and academies

Schools have their own complaints procedures so complainants should be directed to the school in the first instance. Information about [how to escalate a complaint about a school](#) is on our website.

Right of appeal or other legal remedy

For example an appeal to the planning inspectorate for refused planning applications or an appeal to the valuation tribunal regarding council tax and benefits. In these circumstances we will advise the complainant how to submit an appeal.

Disagreements with council, executive and committee decisions

Please refer complainants to the [Council Constitution](#) on our website which explains citizens' rights and how people can have their say.

Complaints about councillors

There are links to the [code of conduct for councillors and the councillor complaint form](#) on our website.

Complaints about parking tickets and penalty charge notices

A penalty charge notice is a legal document so must be dealt with formally. Information about [how to appeal](#) is on our website.