

Suffolk County Council

Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

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We will on request produce this Policy, or particular parts of it, in other languages and formats, in order that everyone can use and comment upon its content.

Suffolk County Council Complaints Procedure

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Change History

Issues No	Date	Amended By	Summary of Changes
1.0	February 2017	Pauline Martin/ John Godward	Version 1.0
2.0	June 2018	Jane Swift	Version 2.0

Authorisation (Responsible Owner)

Role	Name	Approval Date
Customer Experience Operations Manager	Jane Swift	June 2018

Approval (Accountable Owner)

Role	Name	Approval Date
Senior Customer Experience Manager	Mark Burgess	June 2018

Reviewers (Consulted)

Role and Review Responsibilities	Name	Approval Date
Assistant Director Monitoring and Scrutiny	Tim Ryder	July 2018
Assistant Director Customer Services and Technical Advisor	Tracy Lindeman	July 2018

Distribution List - Once authorised (informed)

Name	Organisation

Review Period

Date Document to be Reviewed	By whom
June 2022	Customer Experience Operations Manager

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE COMPLAINTS AND CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY

SCOPE OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1 Definition of a Complaint

Suffolk County Council's definition of a complaint is:

- 1.1 "An expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions, or lack of actions by the County Council, its staff or anyone operating on behalf of the County Council".
- 1.2 Everyone whose complaint fits the above definition has a right to his/her complaint being looked at under the County Council's Complaints Procedure.
- 1.3 Some complaints may be eligible to be considered under the Council's statutory complaint procedures – see point 3

2 Definition of a Representation

A representation may not always be a complaint; it may also be a positive comment or idea that needs a response.

Representations include:

- Thanks for something done well or particularly well.
- Suggestions for improving services.
- Suggestions for new services.
- Request to use or access a service
- Requests for clarification.
- Approaches to the Council by groups of service recipients or residents who wish to give their opinions about a service.
- Complaints made but where the complainant wishes no action to be taken.

3 What can be complained about?

Anything that falls under the responsibility of the County Council can potentially be complained about. While this is not an exhaustive list, it could include the following:

- Delivery or non-delivery of services, including complaints procedures.
- Quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service.
- Council policy
- Staff behaviour and attitude.
- Quality of communication.
- Delays in making decisions or provision of services.

Some complaints may be considered under the Council's statutory complaint procedures. This will often be the case if the complaint relates to a social care issue. It will be at the discretion of the Customer Experience Operations Manager as to whether the matter should be treated as a Corporate or Statutory complaint.

4 Exemptions

4.1 The Complaints Procedure does not apply in the following circumstances:

- The complaint is not about the actions or decisions of the Council, or of any body acting on its behalf.
- The same complaint has already been dealt with at all stages of the complaints procedure.
- The person wishing to complain does not meet the requirements of 'who may complain' and is not acting on behalf of someone who is eligible to complain.

4.2 The Council has discretion in deciding whether to consider complaints where doing so may prejudice the following concurrent investigations:

- Court proceedings
- Tribunals
- Appeals
- Disciplinary proceedings
- Criminal proceedings

If a decision is made not to consider, or further consider, such complaints, the Customer Experience Team Leader will write to the complainant to confirm this, and to explain the reason why.

Once the other proceedings have been completed, the complainant may request the complaint be considered, provided this is within one year of the conclusion of other proceedings or longer if there are exceptional circumstances.

5 Who can complain?

Any individual or organisation (or someone advocating on their behalf)

6 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints can be made and will be recorded as such.

7 Complaint Stages and Timescales

The Council tries to resolve corporate complaints and handle representations as soon as reasonably practical and within specific timescales.

The procedure consists of two stages:

- 7.1 **Stage 1 - Local Resolution.** The expectation is the majority of complaints should be considered and resolved at Stage 1. It should be resolved as close to the point of contact with the person making the complaint as possible. This will usually require the relevant manager to respond in writing to the complaint. Complaints should be acknowledged within 5 working days and a response should be provided within 20 working days.
- 7.2 **Stage 2 - Investigation.** If attempts to resolve the complaint at Stage 1 are not successful, the complainant can ask for the outstanding issues to be considered at Stage 2. The request to proceed to Stage 2

should be sent to the Customer Rights team within 20 working days of receiving the Stage 1 complaint response.

Within 5 working days the complainant will be notified if the complaint is to be investigated at Stage 2. A reasonable timescale for investigation should be agreed with the complainant. Stage 2 should normally be completed in 25 working days. This may be extended to a maximum of 65 working days for particularly complex cases.

If the complaint is not to be progressed to Stage 2, the complainant will be notified of the decision and the reason why within 5 working days.

- 7.3 **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.** If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the complaint or is dissatisfied with how the Council has dealt with their concerns, they can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

8 Time limit for making a complaint

- 8.1 Complainants should normally complain to the Council within 12 months of the events of the complaint taking place. There is no requirement on the Council to consider complaints made outside this time. If the Council decides not to consider such a complaint, the Customer Experience Team Leader will write to the complainant, to explain why this is so. The letter will also advise how to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 8.2 Decisions will be made on a case by case basis and discretion may be used to consider complaints made outside the time limit.

9 Information about the Complaints Procedure

- 9.1 The Factsheet for Corporate Complaints is available online by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/feedback and can be provided in hardcopy format, as well as age appropriate versions and an accessible version for people who require it.
- 9.2 Complaints may be made on-line, by email, verbally or in writing
- 9.3 The Council will make reasonable adjustments in accordance to the needs of the complainant and will consider receiving face-to-face feedback if appropriate. This may include provision of translation services.

10 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

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The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman independently investigates complaints made by complainants or their representatives.

The Ombudsman will usually only investigate complaints against the council when complainants have exhausted the council's own complaints procedure. The main aim of the Ombudsman is to look for injustice caused to the complainant, which may have been caused by maladministration. The Ombudsman can be contacted on 0300 061 0614 or by visiting www.lgo.org.uk