

Suffolk County Council

Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

Owner : Jamie Swinyard

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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.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Change History

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Authorisation (Responsible Owner)

Role	Name	Approval Date
Customer Experience Operations Manager	Jamie Swinyard	13/11/2023

Approval (Accountable Owner)

Role	Name	Approval Date
Head of Customer Experience and Service Improvement	Mark Burgess	24/11/2023

Reviewers (Consulted)

Role and Review Responsibilities	Name	Approval Date
Monitoring Officer	Nigel Inniss	24/11/2023
Deputy Chief Executive	Stephen Meah-Sims	24/11/2023

Review Period

Date Document to be Reviewed	By whom
October 2024	Customer Experience Operations Manager

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

1 Definition of a Complaint

1.1 Suffolk County Council's definition of a complaint is:

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.

2 Definition of a Compliment

2.1 A compliment is a positive comment intended to express praise or appreciation of an individual, team or service.

Compliments may include:

- Thanks for something done well or particularly well
- Praise for an individual worker
- Praise for a team or service
- Job or task completed above and beyond expected standard
- Exceptional levels of support received

3 Definition of a Comment

3.1 Examples of comments include:

- 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 (where the complainant wishes no action to be taken)

4 What can be complained about?

4.1 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
- 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

4.2 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. The procedure the complaint is being considered under will be confirmed when the complaint is acknowledged.

5 Alternative Routes

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

- Where a complaint is about matters of law or central government policy.
- Decisions that have been made by elected members. The Corporate Complaints procedure can however look at the accuracy or completeness of officer reports which informed those decisions.
- Complaints from staff about personnel matters, including appointments, dismissals, pay, pensions and discipline.
- Complaints where the customer or the Council has started (not threatened) legal proceedings.
- Complaints about the merits of an insurance claim or matters that would be more appropriately considered by an insurer.
- Social care complaints where they qualify under statutory obligations. There are separate and specific statutory regulations which relate to both Children and Adults complaints.
- Requests for Council services. Most commonly these relate to reports of defects in the Highway and in such cases the Council should be given a reasonable opportunity to respond to the issue before recording it as a complaint.

- Complaints that have already been decided by a court, independent tribunal or Ombudsman
- Where a complainant has been deemed unreasonable under the Council's Unreasonable Behaviour policy

5.2 This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other situations where the complaints policy cannot be applied. In these instances, the complainant will be advised of the reason why.

5.3 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

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

5.5 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.

6 Who can complain?

6.1 Any individual or organisation (or someone advocating on their behalf, with appropriate consent).

7 Anonymous Complaints

7.1 Anonymous complaints will be recorded and shared with the relevant County Council service for awareness. These will however not be registered as a formal complaint and a response will not be provided.

8 Complaint Stages and Timescales

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

8.2 The procedure consists of two stages:

Stage 1 - Local Resolution: The expectation is most 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 3 working days and a response should be provided within 20 working days.

- 8.3 If a complainant remains dissatisfied following receipt of their Stage 1 response, they should notify the Council within 20 working days confirming the reasons why they are dissatisfied.
- 8.4 Within 5 working days the complainant will be notified whether a further Stage 1 response is to be issued or that the complaint is to be investigated at Stage 2, or that the Council has completed its consideration of the complaint.
- 8.5 A further response may be issued at Stage 1 if additional information relating to the complaint is presented after the Stage 1 response is provided or if the initial response did not address all the points in the original complaint. This response will be issued within 10 working days from the date the Council agreed to issue a further response.
- 8.6 **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. Progression to Stage 2 is not automatic and the request to proceed to Stage 2 should be sent to the Customer Rights team within 20 working days of receiving the Stage 1 or further Stage 1 response.
- 8.7 Within 5 working days the complainant will be notified if the complaint is to be investigated at Stage 2. Independent investigations may be carried out by a Customer Experience Manager or an external investigator. Stage 2 investigations should normally be completed in 25 working days. This may be extended to a maximum of 65 working days for complex cases.
- 8.8 Responses to Stage 2 complaints will be signed by the relevant Director or Assistant Director.
- 8.9 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.
- 8.10 It should be possible for most complaints to be resolved at Stage 1. In exceptional cases the Customer Experience Manager has discretion to bypass Stage 1 and consider a complaint at Stage 2.

- 8.11 **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. The Council will make it clear in their response when the complaints process has been concluded.

9 Time limit for making a complaint

- 9.1 Complainants should normally complain to the Council within 12 months of knowing about the problem.
- 9.2 The Customer Experience Manager will decide on an individual case basis whether to consider complaints made outside the time limit. To assist this consideration, the Council expects a complainant to clarify any reason why the complaint was not raised within time.
- 9.3 If the Council decides not to consider a complaint outside of this time period, the Council 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.

10 Information about the Complaints Procedure

- 10.1 Information about the Council's Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure is available online by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/feedback, and can be provided in hardcopy format, as well as accessible versions for people who require it.
- 10.2 Compliments and complaints may be logged by completing the Council's online form, by email, by phone, face to face or in writing.
- 10.3 Where appropriate the Council will make reasonable adjustments in accordance with the needs of the complainant.

11 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- 11.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman independently investigates complaints made by complainants or their representatives.
- 11.2 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.

12 Learning from Complaints

- 12.1 The Council produces an annual report covering all comments, compliments and complaints handled under the corporate procedure. This is subject to oversight by the Council's Audit Committee. This report tables data around volumes, themes, and outcomes of complaints as well as learning that has been identified.
- 12.2 Learning from complaints and complaint intelligence is regularly shared with Directorate Leadership Teams and used to inform service improvements and prevent repeated complaints.
- 12.3 Recommendations from Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions are captured in action plans and tracked to ensure compliance.

13 Comments and Compliments

- 13.1 The Council welcomes comments and compliments. The Council will acknowledge compliments or comments and make sure the person or service it relates to receives it. Compliments are also used to share and reinforce good practice.
- 13.2 Learning from comments and compliments is regularly shared with Directorate Leadership Teams and used to inform service improvements.
- 13.3 This information is also reported to senior managers and Councillors to demonstrate where staff go the extra mile to help customers.

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