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South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY

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1. Introduction

South Holland District Council values its customers and their feedback. This Customer Feedback Policy outlines how the Council will manage and respond to customer feedback, including suggestions, compliments, and complaints. The policy is designed to ensure the best possible experience for both customers and the Council.

Customer feedback is actively encouraged and used positively to improve services and make necessary changes. For example, identifying customer issues early in a new business process, or recognising patterns in repeat requests can help reduce complaints by resolving issues at the first point of contact.

The Council aims to have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments to take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified.

The Council's Customer Feedback Policy builds upon the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) model complaint handling code ('the code'), which was established in February 2024. The code sets out what organisations should do procedurally that will allow them to handle and respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The purpose of the code is to enable organisations to resolve complaints raised by individuals promptly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It also aims to help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and individuals.

This Customer Feedback Policy is designed to ensure the Council actively listens to its customers, understands their needs, and continuously improves its services. By systematically collecting, analysing, and acting on feedback, the Council can ensure that every interaction enhances the overall customer journey. Customer feedback is also an important part of our Customer Experience Strategy which can be found [here](#).

2. General feedback, suggestions, and compliments

Compliments

If you believe a service has performed well or a staff member has been particularly helpful, please let the Council know. Compliments are always appreciated and help managers recognise their team's good performance. The Council will ensure your compliment is shared with the relevant team or staff member.

Suggestions and General Feedback

The Council is constantly striving to improve its services to customers. If you would like to make a suggestion about the Council or any of its services, please get in touch. The Council will acknowledge receipt of your suggestion and will forward it on to the relevant officer to consider. Collecting feedback enables you to tell the Council where it is getting things right, and where it can do better. Feedback received will be used to learn from any mistakes that might be made and to shape services for the future, or where communications can be improved in order to manage customer expectations.

3. Definition of a service request and complaint

Effective complaint handling enables individuals to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a service request and what constitutes a complaint. In most cases the Council should be able to put things right through normal service delivery processes.

A service request is defined as:

“a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision.”

Service requests provide the Council with opportunities to resolve matters to an individual's satisfaction before they become a complaint. Service requests are not

complaints but may contain expressions of dissatisfaction. The Council will take the opportunity to deal with a service request before a complaint is made.

A complaint may arise if the individual is dissatisfied with the response to their service request, even if the request is still being handled. However, the Council will continue its efforts to resolve the service request even if a complaint is made. Service requests will be recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly.

A complaint is defined in line with the definition used by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) as follows:

“An expression of dissatisfaction 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.”

A complaint may be about lack of response, delays, ongoing service problems or the behaviour of Council employees. This includes where the Council is:

- Doing something wrong;
- Doing something it should not have done;
- Failing to do something it should have done;
- Behaving unfairly, unreasonably, or in a discriminatory manner;
- Not carrying out a service to an agreed standard;
- Not responding to a request for a service within its stated timescale.

Complaints which are aggressive, abusive, unreasonable, or unreasonably persistent, will be dealt with under the Council’s ‘Unreasonable Behaviour Policy’ which can be found on the Council’s website or by clicking [here](#).

4. Exclusions

There are occasions when it is **not** appropriate to respond to a complaint made under this Policy. These include:

- A Service request as defined in this Policy;
- A request for information;
- Complaints which are essentially criticisms of or disagreement with approved Council Policy or decisions properly taken;
- Any matter where a right of objection or appeal exists, (such as a grant or refusal of planning permission), unless the complaint relates specifically to the way the matter has been administered;
- Complaints which could reasonably be the subject of court or tribunal proceedings, or which need to be referred to the Council's insurers. (For example, action for compensation or personal injury);
- Any matter which falls within the remit of the Council's disciplinary procedure;
- Complaints about the conduct of a Councillor;
- An appeal made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, or Data Protection Act 2018;
- An appeal made under the Environmental Information Regulations;

- Complaints made by an employee of the Council relating to employment issues
- Complaints which have already been considered under the Council's Corporate Feedback Policy or by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
- Expressions of dissatisfaction made through a Council survey – the person completing the survey will be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to.

Where complaints are submitted more than 12 months from when the issue occurred, or the individual became aware of the issue, the Council will consider whether to apply discretion to accept a complaint made outside this time limit, where there are good reasons to do so.

Occasionally, complaints may be made when other procedures are underway, for example criminal investigations or court proceedings. The Council has the discretion not to commence, or to suspend, complaints investigations if to proceed could compromise another procedure. The complaint investigation may, if appropriate, start or resume once the concurrent process is discontinued or completed.

Where a complaint cannot be accepted by the Council, the Council will provide an explanation and also explain that this decision can be referred to the relevant Ombudsman.

5. How to get in touch

Complaints may originate in different ways; written, telephone, email, or via a personal visit. The Council aims to handle complaints at an early stage. If a complainant wishes to make a complaint, they will be requested to put the complaint in written form wherever possible.

Complaints can be received by any Officer or Councillor of the Council, as well as by any agents providing services on behalf of the Council. Complaints may also come in the form of letters from MPs.

By email: feedback@sholland.gov.uk

By telephone: 01775 761161

In writing: South Holland District Council, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom, PE11 2XE

In person: by raising directly with any Council Officer

Via the website or web chat: [Feedback - South Holland District Council](#)

Via your local Councillor: names and address of District Councillors are available by clicking [here](#) or by calling the above telephone number.

6. Accessibility and awareness

The Council recognises and values the diversity of its communities. It aims to reduce barriers and ensure that everyone has equal access to the complaints service. The Council is committed to making reasonable adjustments to accommodate a person's needs in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. This includes the following:

- Use of plain language;
- Accepting complaints over the phone or in person where it is not reasonable to request that they are submitted in writing;
- Providing information and responses in braille, large print, audio, easy read format, and other languages where needed; and
- Providing translators (including sign language translators) where needed.

While anonymous complaints are accepted, the decision to investigate them lies with the relevant manager. Anonymous complaints will be investigated to the extent possible and recorded in the Council's Complaint Register. They will also be included as part of any reporting.

Complaints made to the Council will be treated confidentially. However, customers who make their complaints public through the media may lose the expectation of anonymity.

In all complaint-related correspondence, the Council will provide individuals with information on how to engage with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

When the Council seeks feedback through surveys, it will also provide information on how individuals can provide feedback, compliments, or complaints.

7. Complaint handling resources

The Council will prioritise complaint handling and aims to have a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff are suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. Complaints are seen as a core service and resourced accordingly.

The Information Governance (IG) Team will maintain a register of complaints and ensure all received complaints are recorded. The IG Team is responsible for tracking and analysis of these complaints.

Investigating Officers (usually Team Leaders or Service Managers) will be responsible for providing a suitable Stage 1 response to any complaint.

The Stage 2 Investigating Officer will be an appropriate officer from the Corporate Management Team, usually from the affected service area.

8. The complaint handling process

This Customer Feedback Policy deals with complaints and individuals are given the option of raising a complaint where they express dissatisfaction that meets the definition of a complaint in our Customer Feedback Policy.

The process is as follows:

1. Complaints are directed to the Council's Information Governance Team to record and allocate;
2. Complaints are then directed to the most suitable Team for investigation;
3. The Investigating Officer will acknowledge the complainant, outlining their understanding of the complaint using the acknowledgement template.
4. Investigating Officers will use the Stage 1 or Stage 2 template to respond to the complainant.

Complaint levels.

- Stage 1: Response to the complaint by the relevant Council Service Team.
- Stage 2: Review by an officer from the Corporate Management Team.
- LGSCO: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman independent review.

9. Complaints stages (Stage 1)

The Council aims to fully respond to a complaint within 15 working days from receipt of the complaint to the final response (or 25 working days for complex cases). The IG team will log the initial complaint and refer this to the relevant Investigating Officer to deal with.

The Investigating Officer will acknowledge the complainant within 5 working days of the Council receiving the complaint to ensure that they clarify with the individual their complaint and to clarify the terms of the investigation.

The Investigating Officer will:

- Clarify through contact with the complainant what the scope of the complaint is;
- Deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;
- Give the individual a fair chance to set out their position;
- Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest;
- Consider all relevant information and evidence carefully;
- Ensure that a proper record of the investigation, correspondence and final response is recorded and lodged with the Information Governance Team.

An Investigating Officer, in undertaking an investigation, will carry out a full review including asking questions, obtaining facts, and recommending any changes to Council policies, procedures, actions or behaviour. Once an investigation has been concluded, a full response will be given to the complainant within 10 working days of the acknowledgement.

The Council can decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and will then inform complainants of the expected timescale for response. Any extension will be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to the complainant as early as possible.

A complaint response will be provided to the complainant when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will still be tracked and actioned promptly.

The Council will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate. The Council will make clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.

Where complainants continue to add additional material once a complaint has been acknowledged, other than by request the Council will either stop the clock or consider this behaviour under the unreasonable behaviour policy.

10. Complaints stages (Stage 2)

If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the individual's satisfaction at Stage 1, a complaint can be progressed to Stage 2. Stage 2 is the Council's final response.

Requests for progression to Stage 2 will be acknowledged and logged within 5 working days of the escalation request being received.

As part of the acknowledgement, Investigating Officers will set out their understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes the complainant is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the complainant will be asked for clarification.

However, individuals are not required to explain their reasons for requesting a Stage 2 consideration. The Council will make reasonable efforts to understand why an individual remains unhappy as part of its Stage 2 response.

Once an investigation has been concluded, a full response will be given to the complainant within 20 working days of the acknowledgement.

The Council can decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform complainants of the expected timescale for response. Any extension should be no more than a further 20 working days.

If a complaint has been through the Council's Stage 1 and Stage 2 process and a complainant feels that it has still not been resolved to their satisfaction, they may ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) to investigate. The Ombudsman is an independent investigator that looks into maladministration complaints against local authorities. A complainant may ask the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman to investigate their complaint at any time, however, the Ombudsman will usually only investigate complaints that have been through the

Council's complaints system first, in order that the Council has had a fair chance to investigate. The Ombudsman may be contacted as follows:

Address:

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman,
PO Box 4771,
Coventry
CV4 0EH.

Advice Line:

0300 061 0614.

Website:

www.lgo.org.uk

11. Putting things right

Where something has gone wrong, the Council will acknowledge this and set out actions that have been taken, or that will be taken to put thing right.

Any remedy offered will reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified.

The Council will take account of good practice guidance issued by the LGSCO when considering appropriate remedies. These can include:

- Apologising;
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance, or reasons;
- Taking action if there has been delay;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision;
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy, where appropriate;
- Changing policies, procedures, or practices.

12. Performance reporting and self-assessment

Performance reporting on complaints is necessary to identify trends, measure the effectiveness of the complaints process, and ensure that issues are addressed promptly and systematically, ultimately leading to improved service quality.

In accordance with the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code, the Council will produce and publish an annual complaints performance and service improvement report which will include:

- An annual self-assessment against the LGSCO's model Complaint Handling Code to ensure the Council's complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements;

- A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Council's complaint handling performance. This will include a summary of the types of complaints the Council has refused to accept;
- Any findings of non-compliance with the Code;
- The service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
- The annual letter about the Council's performance from the Ombudsman; and
- any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the Council.

The Council will also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.

In addition, data will be reported to the Council's Executive and relevant scrutiny committee on a quarterly basis regarding the percentage of complaints responded to within set timescales. (This data will be included in the quarterly Corporate Performance Report).

13. Scrutiny and oversight – continuous learning and improvement

The Council looks beyond the circumstances of individual complaints and considers whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from complaints.

The Council uses a complaints review panel to extract any lessons learnt for recent complaints to enable sharing across the organisation.

The Information Governance Manager reports to Senior Leadership Team on a regular basis on complaints received by the Council.

The Council's Monitoring Officer oversees the complaint handling performance. They work with the Information Governance Team to assess any themes or trends and identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.

The Portfolio Holder for the Customer Feedback Policy receives updates as follows:

- Regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;
- Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; and
- The annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

The Complaints Register, together with supporting documentation, is held by the Information Governance Team and kept available for inspection for at least 6 years.

14. Review and Revision

This Policy shall be reviewed annually. The Council's Monitoring Officer is authorised to make amendments to the Policy to ensure the Policy remains up to date and to reflect Complaint Handling Code guidance and recommendations issued by the Ombudsman.

Version Control			
Issue No	Author	Issue date	Reason For Issue
1.0	Assistant Director - Governance	TBC	Full update following new guidance, plus alignment to a single policy across the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (S&ELCP)

Approval		
Issue	Approval Authority	Approval Date
1.0	Cabinet	TBC