

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and High Peak Borough Council Joint Complaints, Compliments & Comments Procedure

Principles

The following principles will inform the way in which the Councils engage with our customers and respond to both positive and negative customer feedback about service delivery.

We will ensure that it is easy for our customers to make their views known.

On receipt of a complaint:

- We will engage with our customer and seek to fully understand the cause of the complaint;
- If the complainant has a representative we will check that they have the complainant's consent to act on their behalf, and satisfy ourselves that they are acting in the complainant's best interests
- We will ensure that staff are empowered to respond and deal with complaints;
- We will seek to reach a speedy and equitable resolution of all complaints;
- We will learn from complaints, and apply what we learn to ensure that the problem that caused the complaint is not repeated.

We need to be clear whether we have received a complaint, rather than a request for a service or a request for an explanation of a decision.

We use the following definition, from the Local Government Ombudsman, to decide if a complaint has been made:

“A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.”

This includes:

- failure to respond to a routine service request
- inadequate or unsatisfactory service
- failure to follow policies, standards or procedures
- undue delay in taking action
- inaccurate or misleading information
- disrespectful or unhelpful staff

Exceptions

Although most complaints will fall into this definition there are some cases that won't be dealt with through our complaints process:

- complaints that a councilor has broken the code of conduct are assessed by the monitoring officer
- Freedom of Information, Environmental Information and Subject Access Requests and complaints about responses have their own council review system and right of appeal to the Information Commissioner

- any complaints arising out of actions or omissions which occurred more than 12 months previously

Corporate Complaints Procedure

Where applicable we will resolve the issue informally by raising a request for service or discussing with the service area involved .The customer will receive a response within 15 working days advising of the action taken .

If the complaint is to follow the formal complaints process then the following will apply

Stage 1

All complaints will be acknowledged within three days of receipt and be resolved within 15 days of receipt.

Where it is not possible to resolve a complaint in this time frame the customer will be contacted and a full explanation given of the reason for the delay, along with a date when they can expect the matter to be resolved.

Stage 2

Where a customer is dissatisfied with the action taken at Stage 1 they will be advised to raise the matter with the Executive Director or Head of Service with responsibility for the service concerned.

All complaints at this stage will be acknowledged in three days and resolved in 20 days.

Where it is not possible to resolve a complaint in this time frame the customer will be contacted and a full explanation given of the reason for the delay, along with a date when they can expect the matter to be resolved

Final option

Where the Council is satisfied that the complaint has been afforded appropriate consideration they will advise the customer accordingly and provide contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman.

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/> or

Housing Ombudsman

<http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>

as appropriate

The Local Government Ombudsman is an independent body who investigates complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services

The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law to look at complaints about the housing organisations that are registered with them.

Unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour

The majority of complaints made to the council will be dealt with in a timely and effective manner through the appropriate application of the complaints procedures .In a minority of cases however the way in which complainants pursue their complaint can impede investigations , the council has adopted the Local Government Ombudsman guidance in relation to unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complaints

Link to guidance on managing unreasonable complainant behaviour

<https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/advice-and-guidance/guidance-notes/guidance-on-managing-unreasonable-complainant-behaviour>

Compliments

On receipt of a compliment:

- We will acknowledge receipt, where this is appropriate or required;
- We will ensure that it is shared with the relevant individual or team;
- We will learn from the good practice and apply the learning across both Councils.

Comments

On receipt of comments or suggestions:

- We will acknowledge receipt, where this is appropriate or required;
- We welcome your suggestions on how we can improve our services.