**Policy title: Complaints, Comment and Compliment Policy**



**Policy Control**

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| **Officer responsible:** | Assistant Director Corporate Services (Administration) |
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| **1** | **Title of policy** |
|  | Complaints, Comment and Compliment Policy. |
| **2** | **Statement**  Newry, Mourne and Down District Council approves this Complaints, Comment and Compliment Policy which will inform its management of feedback from customers about the quality of its services. The policy also safeguards the integrity and good reputation of Council. |
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| **3** | **Aim** |
|  | The aim of the policy is to ensure a consistent approach by all Council employees to the receipt and management of complaints, comments and compliments. Delivering on these elements of our service is critical to support Council’s priority of improving customer satisfaction.  Council is committed to putting our customers first by improving the quality of our services and our customers experience of them. We welcome our customers views. Complaints, comments and compliments are important in providing insight into what we are doing well and where we may need to focus improvements. This recorded feedback allows Council to monitor regularly what our customers tell us and use the information within our planning processes to help shape services that support our customers.  In addition, the overarching objectives for the handling of and learning from complaints and other feedback are:  **Consistency** – Council aims to give its customers a consistent, fair, impartial, structured, timely and easy to follow process when they are unhappy about Council services and want to complain.  **Quality** – Council wants to continually improve the quality of its services; encourage and promote best practice amongst its staff; operate within statutory, regulatory and legal frameworks; and listen and improve its relationship with its customers.  **Improvement** – The complaints procedure should be a positive experience for customers and staff alike, where the investigation outcome and resolution of complaints will be used to monitor Council’s performance and improve service delivery.  **Inclusion** - Council values customer opinions and so, wants to make it easy for anyone who wants to complain or make a comment. Information can be provided, in large print, Braille or via audio-tape. Translation and interpretation services can be provided if necessary. Council will always do its best to meet customers particular needs and make it easier for them to provide feedback.  **Learning** – Council aims to learn from complaints and comments, using customer feedback to inform service improvements or to develop training for staff.  **Openness and Accountability** – Council has flexible options for pursuing a complaint or registering a comment and effective support for those wishing to do so. |
| **4** | **Scope** |
|  | This policy applies to all Council employees and to employees and organisations who deliver services on behalf of Council.  This document sets out how Council manages and responds to complaints, comments and compliments. Wherever possible, Council aims to resolve the issue at first point of contact. Council also seeks to manage and respond to customer feedback in a consistent and professional manner. Council’s core values encourage us to be responsive and treat those who use our services as valued customers. Where complaints are upheld or partly upheld, the remedy chosen will be appropriate to the complaint, taking into account the customers desired outcome. An apology will be given where appropriate.  Anyone who is affected by our services can make a complaint, comment or offer a compliment. This includes:   * Residents * People who work in or visit the District * Local businesses * Community groups * Any person/s acting on behalf of an individual or group of individuals (provided that the person affected has given their written consent). |
| **5** | **Exceptions**  Certain types of issues and complaints fall outside Council’s corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments policy. These include:   * Requests for information, or an explanation of Council policy and practice; * Matters of law or central Government policy * Freedom of Information requests for reviews, or complaints about the decision, the information provided or how a request was handled. These are dealt with under a separate policy and procedure * Matters for which there is a legal remedy (eg insurance claims) and/or a statutory right of appeal * Complaints where a customer or Council has started legal proceedings but not where a customer has only threatened legal action * Complaints that have already been decided by a Court or independent Tribunal should not be accepted but complaints about the implementation of a Court or Tribunal’s decision should be investigated * Complaints from staff about HR issues including appointments, dismissals, pay, pensions and discipline are initially dealt with under Council’s Human Resource policies * Complaints concerning other organisations – advice on how to contact the relevant body will be provided * Allegations of abuse concerning children or vulnerable adults are dealt with under Council’s Safeguarding Policy * Allegations of fraud or corruption are dealt with under the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy * Disclosure by employees, or ex-employees of malpractice, including illegal acts or omissions at work are dealt with under the Confidential Reporting (Whistle-Blowing) at Work Policy * Complaints concerning a Councillor’s behaviour are referred by the Chief Executive to the Commissioner for Complaints to investigate * Complaints concerning the behaviour of the Chief Executive will be referred to the Chair of Council who will report to the appropriate Council Committee.   Where possible the customer will be signposted to the person or agency who can address the issues raised in their enquiry or complaint.  **Unreasonable and vexatious behaviour**  Council recognises that in addition to the right to complain, the public have responsibilities in the manner in which they interact with a public body when complaining of poor service. There may be circumstances when a complainant persists in pursuing a complaint, or series of complaints, when Council has taken all reasonable actions in response, or where another recognised process should be or has been undertaken. Council has a separate policy on the management of unacceptable actions and behaviours by customers.  **6 Making a complaint**  Customers can make a complaint, comment or compliment in the way that best suits them. Contact can be via:   * Council’s Complaint, Comment or Compliment form – on-line or hard copy * Letter * Fax * Email * Social media * In person at any Council Office or Venue * Telephone or textphone * Audio-tape.   Consideration will also be given to requests for other formats.  **7 Timescales**  Council has a 3 stage complaints procedure to support the effective management of complaints. The target time for a response, for each stage is as follows:  **Stage 1 - Initial contact response - 5 working days**  **Stage 2 - First Review - 15 working days**  **Stage 3 - Corporate Review - 15 working days.**  The member of staff who receives the complaint is responsible for ensuring the complaint is logged. These records will form the basis of regular reporting to Council on the management of complaints.  When a customer cannot be provided with a full response within the above timescales the customer will be notified and given a revised timescale for that reply. |
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| **8** | **Definitions** |
|  | **Complaint** – a complaint is a criticism or a direct expression of dissatisfaction. A complaint may be about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Council, its staff or contractors, affecting an individual or group of customers.  A complaint is defined as “**any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction about the service, actions or inaction of Council, however expressed, whether justified or not which requires a response**.”  **Comment** – a comment can be described as “**a personal opinion or belief, feedback or remark expressed by a customer**”.  **Compliment** – a compliment is defined as “**a customer statement of positive recognition or praise for a service or individual**”.  **9** **Related Policies and Legislation**  Access to Information Policy and Procedures  Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy  Employee Code of Conduct  HR Policies (including Safeguarding) |
|  | **10 Department and Officer responsible** |
|  | |  |  | | --- | --- | | Directorate / Department | Corporate Services/Administration | | Officer(s) responsible for developing the policy | Assistant Director Corporate Services (Administration) | |
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|  | **12 Review Date**  The policy will be reviewed in line with Council’s agreed policy review cycle i.e. every 4 years (as per Council’s Equality Scheme commitment 4.31), or sooner to ensure it remains reflective of legislative developments.  **13 Procedures and arrangements for monitoring the implementation and impact of the policy**  The Procedures and Timescale set out at 6 and 7 above should be adhered to in the delivery of this Policy.  **14 Equality Screening** |
|  | This Policy has been assessed under Newry, Mourne and Down District Council’s Equality Impact Assessment process and has been screened out as having no impact on any of the groups designated in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the decision of the Council is therefore that the policy is not to be subject to an EQIA and no mitigating measures are required.  **15 Rural Needs Impact Assessment** |
|  | |  | | --- | |  |   This Policy has been assessed under Newry, Mourne and Down District Council’s Rural Needs Impact Assessment process and no rural specific indicators have been set. |
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