



Customer Feedback Policy

SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the Customer Feedback Policy for approval following a review of complaints in 2013. The policy provides updated definitions and a simplified procedure for giving customer feedback, including making a complaint.
- 1.2 The proposed policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and review by Corporate Scrutiny and Climate Change Board and Plain English Panel prior to being finalised. Scrutiny Boards will play a role in monitoring implementation of the policy and reviewing how effectively services are using feedback to inform learning.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To approve the Customer Feedback Policy (which will replace the Council's complaints procedure).

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Performance levels for responding to and learning from customer feedback is an area for improvement. Poor management of complaints can lead to lower satisfaction levels and reputational damage to the organisation. The Customer Feedback Policy provides an accessible and simplified process for customers to use.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 4.1 Customer feedback encompasses comments, compliments and complaints from service users. For any organisation, customer feedback provides invaluable information regarding actual service delivery and perceptions of service. Feedback can be received via many channels, both informal and formal. The importance of capturing this feedback and using it proactively to drive service improvement cannot be underestimated.

- 4.2 Processes for recording comments and compliments currently vary between services. The corporate complaints procedure (published in 2006) sets out the stages for complaints investigation and resolution:

Stage	Description
Stage 1	Complaint is received via email, web form, letter or phone and acknowledged. The service investigates and responds to the complaint within service standard: Neighbourhoods & Corporate – 10 working days Children's – 20 working days Adult's – up to 42 days as agreed with customer
Stage 2	Complaint appeal is conducted by Chief Executive or nominated representative.
Stage 3	Review by Standards Committee.
Stage 4	Complaint referred to Local Government Ombudsman - LGO (this can happen at any stage of the process after Stage 1).

- 4.3 It is worth noting that separate procedures are in place for complaints governed by statutory requirements such as Children's and Adult's Social Care. Complaints regarding the conduct of elected members also follow a separate procedure through the Council's Standards Board.
- 4.4 A review of complaints in 2013 found:
- The corporate complaints procedure is widely understood but needs updating to reflect new roles and responsibilities and highlight the Council's wider aims around customer experience. A consolidated Customer Feedback Policy across all services (including Adults and Children's) would create a consistent approach for customers and staff alike.
 - Tracking of complaints at Stages 2 – 4 of complaints, which includes LGO complaints, could be improved. It is suggested these could be monitored the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in the same way as Stage 1 (some are already but it is not used consistently).
 - There is scope for simplifying the procedure, for example removing Stage 3 – referral to Standards Committee (which has never occurred in recent times). Instead, improved reporting on learning from complaints to Directorate Management Teams and Scrutiny Boards could be more effective.
- 4.5 The review findings, which were endorsed by Council Cabinet and Corporate Scrutiny and Climate Change Board, also found that the Council would benefit from more analysis of comments, complaints and compliments to inform service redesign and learning. It is important that going forward, all staff, councillors and partners are encouraged to record customer feedback in a systematic way to ensure we can use feedback intelligently to drive our business.

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- 4.6 The Customer Feedback Policy in draft can be found in **Appendix 2**.

4.7 The proposed policy introduces the following key changes:

- Standard definitions for comments, compliments and complaints with service standards for acknowledgement and response.
- A simplified two stage process based on investigation and appeal to service directors (or nominated representatives).
- Improved signposting for customers as to how they can give unsolicited feedback via different channels.
- Clear and consistent timescales for dealing and responding to feedback.
- Revised guidance for dealing with unreasonable complainant behaviour.
- Updated to reflect new equality legislation.
- Updated to reflect the latest roles and responsibilities within the Council.

4.8 The new approach reflects the Local Government Ombudsman good practice guidance on complaints, which emphasises the principles of accessibility, communication, timeliness, fairness, credibility and accountability. The policy implementation will be supported by improved tools for staff including more templates and e-forms available on CRM, training for staff and better analysis and reporting of trends.

4.9 The policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment which can be found in **Appendix 3**. The policy has also been reviewed by the Corporate Scrutiny and Climate Change Board on 22 March 2014 and Plan English Board on 1 April 2014 with comments incorporated into the policy shown in Appendix 2.

4.10 It has been agreed that Scrutiny Boards would play an important role in monitoring the implementation of the policy and reviewing how effectively services are using feedback to inform learning.

4.11 Subject to approval by Council Cabinet, the policy will replace the existing complaints procedure from May 2014 and will be publicised via website and leaflets in reception areas. The policy will be promoted to vulnerable groups in line with the Equality Assessment.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Director of Customer Management Director of Strategic Services and Transformation Head of Customer Management
For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Heather Greenan 01332 643462 e-mail heather.greenan@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications

	Appendix 2 – Customer Feedback Policy Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment
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IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 The management of complaints by organisations can impact on perceptions of value for money by service users.

Legal

- 2.1 The Policy addresses statutory requirements relating to adults and children's social care. A number of the Council's functions are governed by their own statutory requirements which include statutory complaints mechanisms, which fall outside of this policy.

Personnel

- 3.1 None noted.

Equalities Impact

- 4.1 The policy reflects the updated Equality Act legislation. An equality impact assessment has been carried out prior to the policy being finalised.

Health and Safety

- 5.1 None noted.

Environmental Sustainability

- 6.1 None noted.

Asset Management

- 7.1 None noted.

Risk Management

- 8.1 The risk of reputational damage to the organisation from failure to deal with complaints and customer feedback effectively is high. The Policy will support more effective capture, review and analysis of customer feedback.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 9.1 The Council Plan 2013-15 contains objectives to provide more efficient and effective processes with greater focus on learning from customer feedback to drive service improvement.

