

# Two Councils - One Team

## South Norfolk Council Complaints Policy

### Introduction

This complaint policy sits alongside our overall customer satisfaction strategy and should be considered alongside our customer charter.

At South Norfolk Council we are committed to continually improving our services and ensure that we put our communities and residents at the heart of everything we do.

In order to do this, we encourage, our residents, businesses, visitors, community groups and any other group or individual that uses or are affected by our services (referred in this policy as complainants) to tell us when things go wrong. This is important because then we can put things right and learn from our mistakes.

This policy sets out how we handle complaints from our complainants in a simple and timely way that is open and transparent.

#### Our definition of 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.”

#### The following steps are applied to all complaints received and we will:

- 1 •Receive your complaint
- 2 •Listen to you and understand your complaint
- 3 •Agree with you what we are going to do
- 4 •Do what we said we were going to do
- 5 •Inform you about what we have done, when we have done it
- 6 •Learn from what has happened to prevent it being repeated

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## Good complaint handling means:

### Being customer focussed

We will ensure our complaints process is easy to find and use and keep our complainants informed.

### Being open and accountable

We will have a process that is transparent and admit when things have gone wrong.

### Acting fairly and proportionately

We will base our decisions on sound evidence and explain clearly why they were made

### Putting things right

When we have done something wrong, we will apologise and take steps to put it right

### Seeking continuous improvement

We will learn from complaints received and use this to improve our services

### Getting it right

We will comply with the law and follow our own policies.

## Stages of Complaint

Our aim is to resolve complaints for our complainants as quickly and simply as possible. Our principle is to provide a high-quality response which resolves the issues raised by the complainant and finds a suitable outcome.

### Stage 1

- This is the investigation stage.
- Responsibility sits with the manager responsible for the service.
- The purpose is to fully investigate the complaint and the emphasis is on trying to reach a resolution. If a resolution cannot be reached, the complainant has the right to escalate their complaint to Stage 2.

### Stage 2

- This is the review stage.
- Responsibility sits with the Director of the relevant service area
- To carry out a review of the response we provided to the complaint at Stage 1 to and to review any new relevant information provided by the complainant.

### When we receive a Stage 1 and 2 complaint, we will:

- Acknowledge the complaint.
- Contact the complainant to discuss the complaint and agree what we are going to do.
- Investigate the complaint and do what we say we will do to resolve the complaint.

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- Keep the complainant informed and notify them if there is a delay and commit to a new timescale in which they will receive a response.
- Contact the complainant to tell them what we have done and why we have done it (the outcome and reasons for the decision).

## **For Stage 2 complaints we will also:**

- Establish why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response at Stage 1.
- Try to deal with the cause of the dissatisfaction before it escalates to Stage 2.
- If there are no grounds to investigate at Stage 2, contact the complainant to explain our decision.
- If there are grounds for a review at Stage 2 then follow the above procedures for all complaints

## **In our responses where applicable:**

We will:

- Acknowledge when things go wrong
- Apologise when appropriate
- Improve procedures so similar problems do not happen again

## **Response Times**

We aim to resolve all complaints within 15 working days. However, if a complaint can be resolved sooner, then we will make every effort to do so. Some more complex cases may take longer but we will ensure you are kept informed.

## **Next Steps**

If you have been through all stages of our complaints procedure and are still dissatisfied, you can ask the Local Government Ombudsman to review your complaint.

The Ombudsman investigates complaints in a fair and independent way - it does not take sides. It is a free service.

The Ombudsman expects you to have given us chance to deal with your complaint, before you contact them. If you have not heard from us within a reasonable time, it may decide to look into your complaint anyway, this is usually up to 12 weeks.

The Local Government Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services.

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## Contact

Website: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Opening hours

Monday to Friday: 10am to 4pm (except public holidays)

## Continuous Improvement

We are committed to learning from the complaints we receive and promoting a culture of continuous improvement. To do this we will:

- Regularly report the complaints received to senior leaders along with lessons learned.
- Review and make changes to policies and procedures where necessary.
- Provide relevant training to staff.

## Other types of feedback or enquiries

The following will not be dealt with under this policy but will be dealt with under their own policy/procedure:

- Complaints of fraud or corruption
- Whistleblowing
- Hate incidents
- Information requests
- Member misconduct

## Retention Guidelines

The following sets out our retention guidelines for all complaints received:

### Stage 1 & Stage 2 Complaints

- Destroy 2 years after the closure of the complaint. Unless the complaint has been escalated to the Ombudsmen (see Ombudsmen retention guidance).
- Files will be reviewed and destroyed on a monthly basis.

### Ombudsmen Complaints

- Destroy 6 years after the closure of the complaint.
- Files will be reviewed and destroyed on a quarterly basis.