

# Norwich City Council's Corporate Complaints Policy

## 1. Introduction

Norwich City Councils aim is to deliver excellent services to our customers, ensuring that they meet the needs of everyone, taking account of age, gender, ethnicity, lifestyle, and disability. However, we recognise that there are times when we do not meet the expected level of service and where this is the case, it is important that we provide customers with a simple and accessible way to report this and that the complaints are resolved promptly, politely, and fairly.

Norwich City Council takes all complaints seriously and every complaint is seen as an opportunity for us to put things right, improve our services, and to provide vital intelligence on our performance, culture, and reputation.

This Policy outlines how we will resolve complaints and adhere to the expectations of the [Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code](#) and [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code](#).

Both Ombudsmen provide a free, independent, and impartial complaints service and complainants can contact them at any time throughout the complaint process for support in helping to resolve any dispute.

As part of our regular correspondence with residents we will:

- Publicise this policy, the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters & online.
- Provide contact information for both Ombudsmen.

The terms 'you' and 'your' in this Policy means the customer. The terms 'we,' 'our' and 'us' means Norwich City Council.

## 2. What is a complaint?

'A complaint is 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, 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 resident or group of residents.'

A complaint is when our service has failed and when you tell us you are unhappy with, you do not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such.

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### 3. What can you complain about?

You can complain about our standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Norwich City Council or anyone working for us (e.g., contractors) within 12 months of the issue happening.

There is a different process if you wish to complain about councillors. Please see [Code of conduct](#)

We may accept older complaints at the discretion of the manager responsible for the service e.g., there are exceptional reasons as to why the complaint could not be raised/corresponded to within the timeframes mentioned.

### 4. Exclusions

Norwich City Council will not accept a complaint if it falls within the following criteria:

- The complaint is being made more than 12 months since the issue arose.
- It is a request for a service to be provided or a request for information that should be considered under information law.
- The complaint is already being considered by the Local Government or Housing Ombudsman.
- If it is a complaint about a Councillor, which should be considered under the Council's process for handling councillor complaints. [Code of conduct](#)
- If it is not about a Council service or a matter for which we are responsible.
- If you make a complaint and we complete our process, we are unable to accept another complaint about the same issue.
- Matters for which there is an existing right of appeal or legal remedy, these types of matters are dealt with according to the specific nature of the appeal:
  - Parking ticket disputes.
  - Planning and licensing application appeals.
  - Housing benefit appeals.
  - Choice-based lettings appeals
  - Council Tax reduction appeals
  - Council Tax banding appeals

If we do not accept your complaint, we will provide a detailed explanation setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right for you to take that decision to the appropriate Ombudsman.

### 5. Who can make a complaint?

Anyone can make a complaint about the services we, or anyone working for us (e.g., contractors), provide.

If you prefer, you can authorise someone else to make a complaint on your behalf i.e., an 'advocate.' This could be a friend/relative or representative from an external organisation (such as Citizen Advice Bureau). If you authorise an advocate to act on your behalf, you must inform us in writing.

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We understand that if you need to make a complaint, it is because you may be feeling frustrated or angry. However, we expect people to behave reasonable and in an appropriate way when making a complaint. It is unacceptable for anyone making a complaint to be abusive, harass our employees or communicate in an inappropriate way.

In the case of unacceptable behaviour and unreasonable persistent complaints from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint the following policy will be applied [unreasonably persistent complaints/complainants](#).

### 6. How to make a complaint

- Norwich City Council website [Online form](#)
- Email: [listening@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:listening@norwich.gov.uk)
- Phone: 0344 980 3333
- Post: Norwich City Council, City Hall, Norwich, NR2 1NH
- Text Relay (for people who are hearing impaired): 18001 0344 980 3333

The Council does not currently accept complaints via social media as it is more effective for us to assist you via e-mail or our online form. Anyone seeking to raise complaints on social media will be directed to our website. [How to make a complaint](#)

### 7. Equality Act 2010

Norwich City Council will take into account your communication preferences and make reasonable adjustments in line with [the Equality Act 2010](#). View the council's full [equality policy](#).

### 2. Responsibilities

The table below sets out who is responsible for delivering this policy.

All Employees	Dealing with any dissatisfied customer where they are able to do so at the first point of contact.  If unable to resolve a customer's issue, then escalate the complaint to the Service area manager in line with this policy and our complaints procedure.
Managers	Managing all customer stage 1 complaints in line with this policy including, acknowledging, investigating, communicating, and resolving complaints.  Overall decision for discretion to be applied to complaints including refusals to investigate.

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Heads of service	Managing all customer stage 2 complaints in line with this policy including, acknowledging, investigating, communicating, and resolving complaints.  Overall decision for discretion to be applied to complaints including refusals to investigate.
Directors	Managing all Ombudsman escalations in line with this policy and is directed by the Ombudsman.
Customer experience Lead	Day to day monitoring to confirm compliance with this policy. Monitoring performance indicators and management information, reporting performance to key stakeholders.  Point of contact for the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman to ensure consistency of service.

### 9. Complaint process

Norwich City Council operates a two-stage complaints process. We will endeavour to resolve the complaint to the resident's satisfaction at stage one, however in the event this cannot be achieved, we will progress the complaint to stage two following an escalation request from the complainant.

You can contact the Ombudsman Service at any point throughout your complaint for advice. They will not investigate your complaint until you have completed our two-stage complaint process.

#### 9.1 Stage 1

We will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days and appoint a Service area manager to review the complaint. We will aim to give you a full response within 10 working days of the complaint being logged.

If further information or clarification is needed to enable investigation of the complaint, we would contact you for this information by either phone or face to face.

If more time is needed to investigate an explanation will be provided to you. If this should exceed 20 days, we will endeavour to agree this with you. If you are not in agreement, we will provide the contact details for the relevant Ombudsman so that you can challenge our plan for the proposed timeliness of our response.

The response will clearly address all points raised in the complaint and will confirm:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right

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- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if you are not satisfied with the outcome

Any additional complaints raised during the investigation will be incorporated into the stage one response if not issued or logged as a new complaint.

If you refuse to engage with us to resolve the complaint in line with our complaints process, we will have to close your complaint. We will confirm this to you in writing.

### 9.2 Stage 2

We will only escalate a request to stage two once it has completed stage one and once an escalation request has been received. You will have 15 working days from receipt of the stage one response in which to request an escalation.

On receipt of an escalation request, we will acknowledge your escalation within 5 working days and set out our understanding of the issues outstanding and the outcomes you are seeking as well as any clarification required.

We will appoint a different complaint handler to the person who considered the complaint at stage 1, and this will be the relevant Head of Service.

If we decline an escalation, we will advise in writing the reasons and confirm your right to approach the relevant Ombudsman about the decision. The reasons are outlined in section 4 above.

We will respond to the complaint within 20 working days of receiving the escalation request. The response will clearly address all points raised in the complaint and will confirm:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if you are dissatisfied with the outcome

If more time is needed to investigate, an explanation will be provided to you. Should this exceed 10 working days, we will endeavour to agree this with you. If you are not in agreement, we will provide the contact details for the relevant Ombudsman so that you can challenge our plan for the proposed timeliness of our response.

If you refuse to engage with us to resolve the complaint in line with our complaints process, we will have to close your complaint. We will confirm this to you in writing.

## 10. Unhappy with our decision?

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If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can contact the relevant Ombudsman, details of how to do this will be provided in your Stage 2 response. The Ombudsman will only accept complaints that have followed both stages of our complaints resolution process. Once the Ombudsman has reviewed your case, their decision is final. (Contact [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#) or [Housing Ombudsman](#))

### 11. Putting things right

Through its stage one and stage two responses, we will acknowledge when something has gone wrong and will set out actions to put things right.

Where a remedy is offered, this remedy will be achievable, will be fair, and will reflect the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the complainant as a result. What will happen and by when will be detailed and will be followed through to completion.

The Council does not, by default, offer compensation. We are responsible for public resources and any such decisions have to be carefully considered; compensation would usually only be provided where a complainant had suffered a genuine loss as a result of the Council's action and in most situations our focus is on offering a remedy to the situation.

### 12. Learning from complaints

We want to learn from complaints as this helps us improve our services. Once your complaint has been closed, we may contact you to ask for your views on the handling and outcome of your complaint.

We will conduct analysis on complaints received, identifying trends, and learning to continuously drive improvements.

Version	Author	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	Natasha Hullott	04/07/2022	Approval by SLT

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