

Norwich City Council's Corporate Complaints Policy

Introduction

Norwich City Council is committed to ensuring that all services are tailored to meet the needs of everyone, taking account of age, gender, ethnicity, lifestyle or disability. All complaints received, by whichever means, within the Authority are taken seriously and must be recorded and investigated according to corporate procedure.

General Principles

- Customers should always know how they can raise concerns or lodge a formal complaint. Complaint procedures should be easily accessible and well publicised.
- Procedures should be as speedy as possible.
- Staff should be aware of the Complaints Procedure and training made available where appropriate.
- Details of any complaint should be fully recorded and maintained and data used to inform service improvement.
- Complaints can be received verbally and in writing and customers who make contact via social media will be asked to direct message to maintain confidentiality of their details.
- Where a complaint is upheld then appropriate action will be taken, any remedy offered should reflect the extent of any and all service failures, and the level of detriment caused to the customer as a result.

Definition

What is a complaint?

“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 usually about something specific for which we are responsible, such as:

- The standard of service provided by the council.
- Failure by the council to respond to a request for a service.
- Failure by the council to provide an agreed service.
- That the council has exceeded its powers.
- That the attitude or conduct of an officer has been unacceptable.
- The council has not followed an agreed procedure.
- Maladministration by the council.

What is not a complaint?

The complaints procedure does not cover:

- Requesting a service.
- Reporting a fault.
- Requesting information or explanation about a council policy or practice. This type of query should be captured in the comments process.
- Matters for which there is an existing right of appeal or legal remedy eg planning application appeals. These types of matters are dealt with according to the specific nature of the appeal.

The examples below are not dealt with under the complaints procedure, but have a specific appeals process and must be dealt with accordingly:

- parking ticket disputes
- planning application appeals
- housing benefit appeals
- Choice based lettings appeals

[See information relating to the process.](#)

We should not investigate complaints in the following circumstances unless there are exceptional reasons as to why the complaint could not be raised/corresponded to within the timeframes mentioned:

- The complaint has not been reported, but occurred more than 12 months previously.
- The complaint has been reported, but 12 months or more have passed since the date of last correspondence.

Unreasonably persistent complainant and unreasonable complainant behaviour

Unreasonably persistent complainants are people who, because of the frequency and/or nature of their contacts with us, hinder our consideration of other peoples' complaints.

If a complainant is deemed to be unreasonably persistent and he or she has been informed, all future correspondence will be read and placed on file, but not acknowledged.

See the [policy for unreasonably persistent complaints/complainants](#).

Complaints about the conduct of members of the council (councillors)

If you receive an allegation that a councillor has broken the authority's code of conduct, please provide the complainant with the following guidance:

[Councillors' Code of Conduct complaints procedure.](#)

Complaining on behalf of others

Norwich City Council will ensure it complies with the Data Protection Act. If a member of the public is complaining on behalf of someone else all correspondence relating to the complaint should be sent to the named complainant. Correspondence can only be sent to a named person other than the complainant if written evidence is provided stating that this should be the case (eg power of attorney).

Roles and responsibilities

Norwich City Council, our partners and agencies working on our behalf, do not tolerate abusive and violent behaviour against our staff.

A member of the public cannot refuse to be dealt with by a member of staff on the grounds of their ethnicity, culture, faith, disability, sexuality or any other protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

Data Protection Act 2018

Information we receive about complainants will be held on a computer or manual record, which members of the public have a right to see and check. Information may be shared with organisations we work with to provide services to the public. Information may also be used in connection with prevention and detection of fraud.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

The culture of the council is one of openness to the public based on a presumption that information which the council holds should be made available to the public unless such information is covered by a statutory exemption.

For further information see the [Publication Scheme](#).

Equality Act 2010

Norwich City Council is committed to equality for all residents of Norwich. This is through the delivery of accessible, fair services, as an employer, contractor of services and a community leader. Through its Equality Policy, the council commits to:

- communicate information clearly using plain language and different formats, such as translated services, large print, or Braille where appropriate
- make sure our services are accessible
- assess the needs of, and engage with, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups to ensure services do not negatively impact them
- monitor use of services
- promote positive images to counter discrimination
- respond proactively to reports of discrimination and harassment

- promote good relations between community groups
- monitor policies and procedures to assess their effectiveness for disadvantaged groups
- monitor effectiveness of contractors in their commitment to equalities
- consult internally and externally regarding our equality commitments

Complaints process

Stage 1

- The complaint will be reviewed by the relevant head of service.
- If further information or clarification is needed to enable investigation of the complaint, we would contact the complainant for this information by either phone or face to face.
- An investigation of the complaint will be carried out.
- A response will be sent within the complaints timeframe detailing the outcome of the investigation and including any actions required. This response will be sent in the manner preferred by the customer but, if verbal, this will be followed up with a written confirmation.
- Within this letter clear information is given relating to the actions open to the complainant if they disagree with the contents of the response.

Stage 2

Referral to a member of the corporate leadership team

- If the issue cannot be resolved at Stage 1, the complainant must put the complaint in writing to corporate leadership team.
- The member of corporate leadership team will arrange for the complaint to be investigated by an officer not involved in the stage 1 complaint.
- The nominated officer will investigate the complaint and advise the member of CLT of the outcome.
- The response will be sent within the corporate timeframes.
- The decision letter will state the options left to the complainant to consult the local government and social care ombudsman or, if it is a housing matter, the housing ombudsman.