



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Procedures for Handling and Monitoring Commendations, Comments and Complaints

Putting Our Customers First
A Corporate Approach
Section 1-The Procedure

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Procedures for Handling and Monitoring Commendations, Comments and Complaints

Introduction

The aim of this document is to provide a consistent, corporate system for handling commendations, comments and complaints. This system applies to internal back office and support services in the same way as external frontline services.

Aim

The aims of these procedures are to:

- Recognise good service provision through the recording of commendations and compliments,
- Improve the services we provide to customers by responding positively to comments and complaints and, where appropriate, making changes to the way in which we deliver services,
- Promote a consistent approach in terms of both quality and timeliness of service,
- Make it as easy as possible for staff and customers to have their say and help put things right when things go wrong.

Section 1 – Definitions and General Procedures

Definitions

Commendations

Definition of a Commendation – A significant expression of satisfaction with an individual or team for a job well done. The standard of service provided would not necessarily be an expected part of the individual or teams normal duties and responsibilities. Ultimately this would be an example of an individual or team going the extra mile, providing a service over and above what they are required to.

Compliments

Definition of a Compliment – An expression of thanks or appreciation with an individual or team for a job well done. The standard of service provided would, however much appreciated, be an expected part of the individual or teams normal duties and responsibilities.

Comments

Definition of a Comment - A remark, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Council, its staff, or contractors or agents providing services on behalf of the Council affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

Complaints

Definition of a Complaint – A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Council, its staff, or contractors or agents providing services on behalf of the Council affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

This does not include complaints about a third person i.e. a complaint received about a noisy neighbour or where a customer is reporting a situation that requires attention e.g. a street light not working. These are requests for service and only become complaints if the customer is dissatisfied with our response to the request for service.

General Procedures

Complaints

Stage 1 - The Response

1. Forward the complaint to the appropriate officer.
2. The officer handling the complaint will forward an acknowledgement to the complainant if a full reply cannot be given quickly or if received by email.
3. It is expected that a full response will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days. However issues involving Childrens Services or Adults and Health Care may take up to 20 working days. Should an extension to timescale be required, the complainant will be informed of the date by which a full response will be sent to them. A paragraph should be included in the final response advising the complainant of any further action they can take should they not be satisfied with the response.
4. Details of the complaint, the response time and the action taken to resolve the complaint should be passed to the complaints officer for logging purposes.

If no response is received from that officer the complaints officer will issue a reminder to him/her after 7 workings days.
5. If there has been no response in 10 working days the complaints officer will contact the line manager. The line manager will ensure the complainant is informed of the new timescale for reply.
6. The complaints officer will send out regular reports to managers showing the complaints outstanding.

Anonymous Complaints

Definition of Anonymous - Under the Council's complaints, compliments, comments and commendations procedure and anonymous complaint is defined as one where we do not hold any contact details for the complainant (i.e. we do not hold any of the following: name, telephone number, emails address, twitter, blog or facebook contact details.)

If an anonymous complaint is received it should be considered and recorded, although because of its anonymous nature, it is recognised that a conclusion for all stages of the complaints procedure may not be possible.

Anonymous complaints can still provide us with useful information which may help improve future service delivery. Everyone has a right to complain; and as a result, anonymous complaints should be actioned to the best of our ability.

Dealing with anonymous emails

If a complaint is received anonymously via email it should where possible, be treated and responded to in the same manner as any other. If a valid email address is provided the complaint should not be classed as anonymous purely because no postal address or name has been supplied. However it is recognised that a remedy may not always be possible where a complainant wishes to remain anonymous.

It is important at all times to remember the definition of a complaint.

A complainant is not satisfied with the response or the way a complaint has been handled

Where a complainant is not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled, or with the outcome, they can make their views known and have them considered by a senior officer.

The officer will review how the complaint has been handled and/or the determination made, and advise the complainant of the outcome within 20 working days. Included in the body of the letter should be a paragraph advising the complainant of what action, if any, they can take if they are still not satisfied with the outcome following a review.

Complaints

Stage 2 - A Review

1. Forward the request for review to the appropriate Manager/Head of Service.
2. The Manager/Head of Service will
 - Write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the review request.
 - Review the response to the complaint.
 - Write to the complainant within 20 working days advising them of the outcome of the review. A paragraph should be included in this letter advising the person of any further action they can take if they are not satisfied with the response following the review.

If it is not possible to review the complaint in that time then the complainant should be advised of this and informed of when a response will be sent to them.

- Advise the complaints officer of the result of the review and the length of time taken to respond.

The complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the review

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a review and wishes to appeal, a Senior Manager/Head of Service will determine if the complaint should be referred to:-

1. A statutory appeal body, eg the Planning Inspectorate, the Information Commissioner, Education Exclusions/Admissions Panel, Social Services Complaints and Review Panel, the Courts Services, or
2. The Local Government Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH
3. The Council's Appeals and Complaints Committee

To provide consistency in referrals, the Senior Manager/Head of Service will consult with the Head of Legal Services on the appropriate appeal process prior to the complainant being contacted further.

A referral to the Council's Appeals and Complaints Committee should not be made in cases where the Council has no discretion in the matter or where referral to another body eg Local Government Ombudsman is considered to be more appropriate.

Complainants should only be advised to contact the Local Government Ombudsman where the Council's internal procedures have been exhausted and where a statutory appeal process is not available.

Complaints

Stage 3 - Appeals

1. Record receipt of the appeal and send details to the Complaints, Comments and Commendation Officer (CCCO) and to the appropriate Senior Manager/Head of Service.
2. A Senior Information Governance Officer reviews the grounds for an appeal and, after consultation the Information Governance Steering Group, informs the Complainant of the appropriate appeal procedure or Local Government Ombudsman's details.
3. Where appropriate, the Senior Information Governance Officer will refer the details to Democratic Services and request that a meeting of the Appeals & Complaints Committee is arranged. Whenever possible, an appeal hearing should take place within 20 working days of the Senior Manager/Head of Service informing the Complainant of the referral to the Appeals and Complaints Committee.

Dealing with complaints and comments that involve more than one service

Where correspondence is received that involves a number of services the aim is to ensure the complainant receives just one response. Where however it is evident that it is going to take one service much longer to respond than the rest, then separate responses may be appropriate.

Complaints about more than one service

1. If the correspondence involves more than one service but all services are in the same Service Group, forward the details to the manager to whom the greater proportion of the correspondence relates.
2. If the issue involves services in more than one Service Group, forward the details to the manager to whom the greater proportion of the correspondence refers. Managers have been advised that they will be responsible for forwarding details to other managers and collating the response, (with the exception of Health and Social Care where a separate statutory complaints procedure applies).
3. Where it is evident that collating a joint response is going to result in a poorer service being provided to the complainant, the manager may decide that separate responses are appropriate.
4. For monitoring purposes, depending on the nature of the issue and the way in which it is presented, it may be appropriate to record more than one commendation, comment or complaint. The details should be referred to the most appropriate complaints officer.

Complaints To The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman investigates complaints involving maladministration. The Ombudsman is independent and would generally expect complainants to have made use of the Councils complaints system before being approached and becoming involved. The six most common causes of maladministration are:-

- Unreasonable delay in taking appropriate action
- Taking incorrect action
- Failure to provide adequate information, explanation or advice to customers
- Failure to compile and maintain adequate records
- Failure to take appropriate action
- Failure to take relevant or taking irrelevant considerations into account in making a decision.

A complaint can be submitted to the Ombudsman [online](#) or via the details below.

Telephone

0300 0610614

Text 'call back'

0762 4811595

Website

www.lgo.org.uk

Responsible Officers

Commendations, Comments and Complaints Officer (CCCO) – Every Service Group has a minimum of one officer appointed to fulfil this role. It is their responsibility to ensure that the necessary information is reported and used for monitoring purposes.

These officers are:-

- Customer Services – Dave Jackson and Sarah Mullen
- Revenues & Benefits Service – Dawn Logan
- All Other Service Areas – Gemma Jackson and Mehnaz Rashid