

**SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL
CUSTOMER FEEDBACK PROCESS
Compliments, Comments & Complaints
July 2021**

Customer Feedback Procedure Introduction

South Kesteven District Council are committed to delivering an excellent quality of service and want to hear what you think of us, whether you were really pleased with your experience, felt we could have done better or simply want to share your thoughts. We want to learn from what our customers have to say and improve service delivery.

Customer feedback means

- Comments - general feedback on the service provided
- Compliments - satisfaction with the service provided
- Complaints - dissatisfaction with the service provided

We aim to:

- Enable our customers to give us their feedback
- Ensure all feedback is responded to fully and efficiently within reasonable timescales
- Learn important lessons from all feedback given and share it with the organisation

Why do we want your feedback?

All colleagues within South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) work in line with the Values and Behaviours of the organisation and when it comes to customer feedback, there is no exception. Your feedback is vital to the Council for improving service delivery.

“We listen and respond to our customers”

- We know who our customers are both external and internal
- We listen to our customers and make decisions based on their needs
- We put ourselves in our customers shoes
- We do not pass the buck when something goes wrong
- We are honest when we get things wrong and learn from the feedback given

Accessibility

If you require assistance in completing the feedback form, please contact us via phone or call into your nearest customer service centre where SKDC staff will be happy to help you.

To ensure everyone has access to our information it is available in a range of different formats: British Sign Language, Braille. Interpreter service and we can also offer officer assistant for those who may find it difficult to read or write.

What type of feedback can you give?

Tell us what you liked.....

This could be about a person, a service, a single event or a chain of circumstances that made your experience a positive one.

Definition of **compliment – noun**

- ✓ A polite expression of praise or admiration
- ✓ An act or circumstance that implies praise or respect

Tell us what you thought.....

About a standard of service, policy or decision made by SKDC or a service. Maybe you have a suggestion about something we could do differently.

Definition of **comment – noun**

- ✓ A verbal or written remark expressing an opinion or reaction

Tell us what you didn't like.....

Perhaps about a standard of service, a failure to meet your expectations, an action or a lack of action or because you found it difficult to access our services, or Officer conduct. Anything which you feel is unacceptable.

Definition of **complaint – noun**

- ✓ A statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable

Confidentiality

All information will be collected and stored and managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018.

Details of a complaint will only be provided to employees of SKDC and appropriate representatives in order to provide a response to your feedback.

Is there anything that we won't include in this process?

An initial request for a service to be delivered is not a complaint.

We are also unable to include matters that have an alternative statutory appeals process.

For example:

- appeals about parking fines/penalty charge certificates
- appeals about homeless decision
- appeals about points allocation in your application for council housing
- appeals about planning applications/decisions
- planning consultation responses
- appeals about recharge fees for repairs
- appeals about fixed penalties
- matters subject to legal action
- political comments
- complaints from staff about personnel issues

This list is not exhaustive.

What will we do when we receive your feedback?

- acknowledge and respond to your feedback within the timeframes outlined in this procedure
- in our acknowledgement, tell you the name of the person or service that will deal with your feedback
- if the investigation results in complexities which mean we can't meet our own timescales we will keep you fully informed
- in our response tell you what we are able to do or what we are not able to do and why
- admit when things go wrong
- learn from your feedback, and share that learning across the organisation
- if this process does not cover your complaint (eg if there is a statutory right of appeal etc) we will advise you the course of action you need to take

The process

We want to make it as easy as possible for you to feedback to us, you can do this by:

- filling in a feedback form online <http://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/CustomerFeedback>
- email Customer services customerservices@southkesteven.gov.uk
- customer contact with SKDC service areas
- call our customer service team on 01476 406080
- fill in a feedback form – available from our customer service centres in Grantham and Bourne
- write us a letter and send it to:
[Service name]

South Kesteven District Council
Council Offices
St Peters Hill
Grantham Lincs
NG31 6PZ

Compliments

Customer's don't always have the time to let us know if they have been particularly pleased with our service so when they do we want to make sure we learn from what we did right and do it more!

We will ensure that the positive feedback is shared with the service and if appropriate the individual involved and acknowledge your compliment with a response within 3 working days.

Comments

These are important because it could help us shape the ways services look or influence decisions we make in the future.

We can't guarantee that we can always make the suggested or requested changes but we will reply in full within 15 working days to explain why a decision or process exists in its current form, what we might do differently or why we won't be able to change things in the future.

Complaints Process

[Appendix 1 - Complaints procedure workflow](#)

The Council operate a two stage complaints process, after which the complaint is closed. The complainant can then escalate the complaint to the Ombudsman for independent review.

Stage 1

The Council will acknowledge a formal complaint within 3 working days and will tell you the name of the Officer who will be processing the complaint. This is likely to be a service manager for the service area the complaint relates to. You will be provided with a full response within 10 working days or an explanation stating why the response will not be ready and when the response can be expected.

When the response at stage 1 has been sent the complaint will be classified as pending for 30 days, if you have not requested the complaint to be reviewed at stage 2 within the 30 days the complaint will be closed.

Request escalation to stage 2

If you are not satisfied with the Stage 1 response, you may ask for the response to be reviewed at Stage 2. Your request should include details of:

- why you feel the response has not addressed your complaint
- what outcome you would want from the stage 2 review

The Council will acknowledge your request for stage 2 within 3 working days.

Stage 2

Within 30 days of receiving your stage 1 response, you requested a review of your complaint at stage 2.

Stage 2 complaints are assigned to a senior manager who is not responsible for the service area the complaint relates to. The senior manager will review the previous decision and decide if it was fair and reasonable. The senior manager may contact you for further information.

The stage 2 response will explain the outcome of the review and provide details of any actions that may be agreed. You will receive a response within 20 working days or an explanation stating why the response will not be ready and when the response can be expected but no more than a further 10 working days.

Stage 2 is the final stage in our complaints process and the response will explain the options if you are still not satisfied with the Councils response.

Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been processed, you have the right to ask the Local Government Ombudsman, an independent body, to investigate allegations of maladministration causing an injustice to anybody who has complained.

This means there has been a fault in the way the Council has or has not done something and it has created difficulties for you personally. The Ombudsman does not usually criticise the merits of a decision which has been properly taken simply because someone may disagree with it. They will however look at the way the decision was made.

The Ombudsman will not usually consider a complaint until the Council has had a chance to resolve the matter through its own procedure.

Their contact details are:

The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH
Tel: 0300 061 0614
Fax 024 7682 0001
Web www.lgo.org.uk

When we cannot deal with a complaint:

- More than 3 months have passed since the problem occurred
- The new complaint is a previous concluded complaint or you are wanting a previous complaint reconsidered
- It has not personally affected you
- If you do not escalate the complaint within 30 days

Closing a complaint

We will close a complaint:

- When stage 1 investigation has been completed and you have not requested a review within 30 working days.
- When a stage 2 response has been sent.
- When the complainant has told us they do not want to progress the complaint any further.
- When a resolution has been agreed between yourself as the complainant and the Council. If we fail to do as we say we would, the complaint can be reopened at the stage at which it was closed and continue as a complaint.
- The matter is part of a legal ruling or in litigation.
- We have explained there is nothing more we can do to resolve the matter.
- The complainant acts in an unreasonable manner in their demands or refuses to cooperate with us in resolving the matter.

We will inform you of the complaint being closed and our reasons for this. The complaint may be reopened if there is sufficient reason such as new information relating to the initial complaint.

Tenant complaints

The Council has a Housing Service complaints policy and procedure, this is made available to you on the SKDC website and copies will be placed in the customer services centres in the sheltered housing schemes. Information on how to complain will be part of the tenant's handbook and will be featured in the tenant's newsletter.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced changes including that, from April 2013, tenants have a right to access a designated person to assist in their complaints about housing being resolved at a more local level. This designated person could be any MP or a councillor.

In addition to this, Housing complaints which are referred to the Ombudsman service will now go to the Ombudsman for Housing rather than, as previously, to the Local Government Ombudsman. This is intended to ensure that all tenants of councils and other social landlords are treated consistently.

Monitoring and Learning from complaints

Complaints are important to the Council as they help identify where service improvements are required, this can impact and change how we deliver Council services. We will record and monitor all complaints. This information will be used to help and inform Council learning from complaints and improve service delivery.

The Council will report this information to:

- Relevant Council committees
- Corporate management team
- Statutory Officers (Senior Management Team)

Unreasonable persistent complaints

On rare occasions we may have to make a difficult decision about a complainant who we feel is being unfair or persistent in the manner or frequency of their contact.

The decision to do this will not be taken easily and will be taken by the Health and Safety Officer.

The options that will be considered on such occasions are likely to be:

- identifying a single point of contact within the organisation that a customer may contact in relation to their complaint(s)
- only accepting contact through a particular channel (only by letter for example)

In some cases we may decide that the only option is to:

1. Refer the complaint to the Ombudsman before we have completed all the stages of our complaints process – this is the result of an agreement between South Kesteven District Council and the complainant.
2. Advise the complainant that we cannot assist with the complaint any further and advise them that the next option available is to approach the Ombudsman – this may be necessary when South Kesteven District Council and the complainant cannot agree on a way forward. In these cases, we will not contact the ombudsman but will advise the complainant in writing that we will not be responding to the complaint any further.

In all cases of unreasonable or persistent complaints the Health and Safety Officer will arrange for the service area to write to the complainant to explain why we feel the complaint falls into this category and what action we are taking.

Complaints about a SKDC Councillor

If you wish to complain about your local Councillor, contact:

SKDC Monitoring Officer at legal@southkesteven.gov.uk

Or by post:

Legal Services Team

South Kesteven District Council

Council Offices

St Peters Hill

Grantham Lincs

NG31 6PZ

Complaints and Whistleblowing

If a complaint or allegation is made against a member of staff, elected Member, contractor or volunteer working on behalf of the Council which relates to the safeguarding of children the matter should be referred initially to the Council's Lead Safeguarding Officer.

The complaint/allegation will be investigated internally and, if necessary and appropriate will be referred to the Police and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) within the Lincolnshire County Council as per the procedures set out in the Council's Safeguarding Policy.

If any complaint or allegation is substantiated and the person is dismissed, resigns or ceases to provide his/her services or the Council ceases to use the person's services the Service Manager for Human Resources will refer the allegation details directly to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Whistleblowing is the raising of a concern, either within the workplace or externally, about a danger, risk, malpractice or wrongdoing which affects others. It refers to a person who

raises an honest and reasonable concern, in the public interest, about a possible fraud, crime, danger or other serious risk that could threaten colleagues, service users, customers, members of the public or the success and reputation of the organisation.

To report wrongdoing please visit: <http://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/wrongdoing>

Anonymous complaints

Complaining anonymously is not encouraged, however, we will do our best to investigate and deal with the complaint in the best way possible. We prefer to know who you are so that we can keep in touch with you in regards to any queries or the outcome of the complaint.

Appendix 1 - Complaints Procedure

