



**SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL**

**Finance, Economic Development and  
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

7 September 2021

**Report of:** Councillor Linda Wootten,

Cabinet Member for Corporate  
Governance



## Progress on the New Customer Feedback Process

This report provides the Committee an update on a new customer feedback process.

### Report Author

Debbie Roberts, Interim Organisational Development and Change Manager



01476 406080



debbie.roberts@southkesteven.gov.uk

Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Administrative	Administrative	All Wards

<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Alan Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive	26 August 2021
<b>Approved by:</b>	Karen Bradford, Chief Executive	27 August 2021
<b>Signed off by:</b>	Councillor Linda Wootten, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance	27 August 2021

### Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

1. Notes the update regarding a new customer feedback process and software system.
2. Discusses and endorses the new draft customer feedback policy and provides any comments prior to making a recommendation to Cabinet that the new policy is adopted.
3. Delegates to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance to continue exploring costs a new software system for complaints and provide regular updates on progress to the Committee.

# 1 The Background to the Report

- 1.1 The Council has operated a Customer Feedback Process, Compliments, Comments and Complaints since 2013. A report to start the project to review this was brought to the previous meeting which provided details of the stages of a compliment, complaint or comment and it was agreed a short update would be provided at this meeting.
- 1.2 An internal officer project team has been formed and is meeting regularly to progress the new process and, if required, any new software to support implementation and appropriate governance.
- 1.3 Appendix 1 to the report is an updated Project Initiation Document for noting.
- 1.4 Appendix 2 is the new draft Customer Feedback Process, Compliments, Complaints and Comments 2021 for the Committees consideration. This new process outlines how the Council will respond to compliments, complaints and comments which is following a two stage process which is aligned to the Housing Feedback Process which was adopted in July 2021 by Cabinet.
- 1.5 **New Draft Customer Feedback Process**
- 1.6 Under the new process customer can still get in touch via the same routes (telephone, email, letter, completion of the feedback form online) and the following timelines are:
- 1.7 **Compliments** - 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.
- 1.8 **Comments** - 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.
- 1.9 **Complaints Process** - Appendix 1 - Complaint's 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.
- 1.10 **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.
- 1.11 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.
- 1.12 **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:
1. why you feel the response has not addressed your complaint
  2. what outcome you would want from the stage 2 review
  3. The Council will acknowledge your request for stage 2 within 3 working days.

- 1.13 **Stage 2** - Within 30 days of receiving your stage 1 response, you requested a review of your complaint at stage 2.
- 1.14 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.
- 1.15 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.
- 1.16 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 Council's response.
- 1.17 **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.
- 1.18 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.
- 1.19 The Ombudsman will not usually consider a complaint until the Council has had a chance to resolve the matter through its own procedure.
- 1.20 **Housing and feedback review**
- 1.21 The Housing service have been required to design and implement a Housing specific complaints process. The Housing Ombudsman complaint code was issued to Council's last year. The code details how complaints should be handled and the structure of the complaints process, this includes the timeframes and the stages to follow. This new Housing policy has been approved by Cabinet.
- 1.22 **Software Update**
- 1.23 The existing software used to log compliments, complaints and comments feedback is being reviewed and there are a number of alternative software providers that are being explored that the Council currently use for other processes.
- 1.24 Initial quotes that have been obtained indicate that the new software could be purchased from existing budgets and therefore no additional budget is required. Two costs received to date are between £8,000- £10,000.

## **2 Consultation and Feedback Received, Including Overview and Scrutiny**

- 2.1 The indicative timeline by the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is:
- 20 July 2021: Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Approved for the project commencing to Project Initiation stage

- July - Sept 2021 an internal project led by the Deputy Chief Executive as Project Sponsor will meet to progress the complaints procedures.
- 7 Sept 2021 - Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the draft customer feedback process and provide comments and recommend the new policy is adopted by Cabinet in October 2021. Endorse any additional software purchased.
- Oct 2021 – Cabinet to receive recommendation from Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 23 November 2021: Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – review progress on implementation.

### **3 Financial Implications**

The Council currently manages its complaints using a third party software provider. The licence to use this software is included in a corporate licence that is an annual cost. Any variations to this current arrangement may incur additional software licence costs if there is any proposal to introduce a new complaint monitoring software.

**Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Section 151 Officer**

### **4 Legal and Governance Implications**

- 4.1 As there are proposed changes to legislation and the introduction of a new housing Complaint Handling Code, it is now a requirement (and not best practice), to handle housing complaints and feedback in accordance with the Code.
- 4.2 From a governance point of view, although there has been no change in legislation regarding how the Council deals with corporate customer feedback, for best practice, it would be appropriate that corporate customer complaints are dealt with in the same response timeframes and the current three stages of the complaints procedure reduced to two stages, in line with the housing complaints procedure.

**Legal Implications reviewed by: Graham Watts, Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer**

### **5 Equality and Safeguarding Implications**

- 5.1 The Council will support customers in submitting feedback, where requested, to ensure no one is unable to provide feedback (e.g. due to language or disability issues). We will monitor all feedback to ensure our approach is fair and accessible to all customers. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the project initiation.

### **6 Risk and Mitigation**

- 6.1 The risks were identified in the previous report to the Committee. Mitigation measures include the implementation of a new system, full training for all officers to fully understand the process and ownership from Directorates.

### **7 Community Safety Implications**

- 7.1 No significant implications have been identified.

## 8 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council's declaration of a climate emergency?

- 8.1 The contents of this report do not have a direct impact on the council's carbon emissions or the carbon emissions of the wider district. More detailed information on carbon impact of individual projects or activities are outlined within the relevant project documentation or service plans.

## 9 Background Papers

- 9.1 Agenda and background reports on Housing Feedback and Policy Changes  
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=164&MId=4115&Ver=4>
- 9.2 Agenda and action notes from the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021.
- 9.3 Report to Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 July 2021 and action notes.

## 10 Appendices

- 10.1 Appendix 1 – Amended Project Initiation Document
- 10.2 Appendix 2 – New Draft Customer Feedback Process 2021

<b>Report Timeline:</b>	Previously Considered by: Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	20 July 2021
	Final Decision date	23 November 2021