



**“Putting our
customers at the
heart of everything
we do”**

Comments, compliments and complaints

Policy and procedure

September 2022. To be reviewed September 2025



**North
Herts**
Council

Summary

We know that people make North Herts work. We value all our residents, businesses, staff, contractors, Councillors, and other partners, and place them at the heart of everything we do. As part of our 'People First' commitment, the 3C's process welcomes and encourages feedback from all around us. In line with our [customer service strategy](#), we will aim to respond to you quickly and courteously, within the timescales where possible, regardless of how you log your comment, compliment or complaint (3C's). As a co-operative council, we value and build accountability, fairness, and responsibility into all that we do.

This policy sets out how the council determines and deals with comments, compliments, and complaints. It also covers how the council is very willing to receive feedback, which can help to improve services and highlight areas of good practice.

Submitting a comment, compliment, or complaint

A comment, compliment, or complaint can be made in writing (via the website e-form, email, hard copy complaint form or letter), by telephone, or in person.

1



Your stage 1 complaint will be allocated to an investigating manager who will respond within 10 working days. This will either be with a full response, or an explanation on why more time is required.

2



If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the stage 1 complaint, you can make a **stage 2 complaint**, which if accepted will be further investigated by a different member of staff or more senior manager, who has had no previous dealings with the complaint. Officers will aim to respond within 10 working days, and will usually be the final word on the matter.

3



If you remain dissatisfied after receiving our response to your stage 2 complaint, you may be able to refer your complaint to the **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At North Herts Council, we endeavour to provide high quality services to all our customers. However, we recognise that on occasion, despite our best efforts things can go wrong. By welcoming feedback through our 3C's process, we can remedy situations that have gone wrong and continue to improve our services. We can also learn from examples of positive feedback about things that have been done well.
- 1.2 All council employees receive training on the 3C's process as part of the corporate induction and have access to a range of information and guidance to support effective [handling of the 3C's](#). Whilst we welcome feedback on all aspects of the 3C's, this policy and procedure is mainly focussed on complaint handling and shall apply to complaint handling for all services within North Herts Council unless it is overridden by the alternative processes set out in section 3.4.

2. Comments and compliments

- 2.1 Comments and compliments are welcomed so that we can learn from examples of where things have worked well and to recognise when council staff and contractors provide exceptional levels of service.
- 2.2 Compliments received are anonymised and then shared and celebrated with the council through the monthly internal staff magazine.
- 2.3 Comments which identify opportunities to make changes to services or processes help us understand our customers views on matters and provide valuable customer insight into our services.
- 2.4 All customer feedback whether it is a comment, compliment or complaint is recorded on a central database and passed on to the relevant service manager for review and to deal with as appropriate.
- 2.5 Data relating to comments, compliments and complaints will be reported at high level without disclosing any personal details to senior management and Councillors. All data held within the database will be kept in accordance with our data retention schedules.

3. Complaints

3.1 What is a complaint?

3.2 We define a complaint as being a specific expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of a service provided by the council, usually falling under one of the following categories:

1. We have failed to do something we should have
2. We have done something badly or in the wrong way
3. A customer feels they have been treated unfairly or discourteously

3.3 Sometimes you might complain that a service hasn't been delivered. Rather than treating this as a complaint we will look to get the service delivered for you, and then if you remain dissatisfied we'll look into any further concerns you have. Some other examples of things we'll try and work with you to fix rather than treat as complaints are included below.

3.4 Examples of what is not covered by our Complaints Policy

The list below is not exhaustive but gives examples of things that are not dealt with as complaints. We have also included useful links to signpost you to the relevant reporting process.



A missed bin would be processed as a request for service by our contractor. However, repeated missed bins or failure to deal with an issue correctly could lead to a complaint. If you need to log a missed bin, you can do so here: www.north-herts.gov.uk/report-missed-bin



Disagreement with a policy decision. We still welcome this feedback but will record it as a comment and it will be dealt with outside of the complaints policy. You can also discuss this with your local Councillor.



Council Tax bandings. If you disagree with the band of your property, you can appeal to the Listing Officer at the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). [Council Tax valuation bands | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://Council Tax valuation bands | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk))



Challenging a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN). If you wish to challenge a PCN you can do so here: [Challenge a Penalty Charge Notice | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://Challenge a Penalty Charge Notice | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk))



Planning objections. If you wish to submit a planning objection you can do so here: [View or comment on a planning application | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://View or comment on a planning application | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk))



Housing Benefit. We have an appeals process which you can find here: [Appeal against a benefit decision | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://Appeal against a benefit decision | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk))



Complaints about councillors are handled separately to our main complaints procedure. If you have a complaint about a councillor you can raise it here: [Complain about a Councillor | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://Complain about a Councillor | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk))



Complaints on social media. Our social media pages are generally used for responding to service requests or customer service enquiries. More information can be found here: www.north-herts.gov.uk/social-media-acceptable-use-policy



Anything that falls under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. Complaints about an FOI request should be directed to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) [Make a complaint | ICO](#)



Hate crime reports not linked to the council. You can report hate crimes via www.north-herts.gov.uk/report-hate-crime



A complaint relating to another organisation. If you have a complaint about one of our contractors, or another organisation we will help you engage with their complaint process.



In line with LGO practice, we won't normally look at complaints about things that happened, or you were aware of, more than 12 months ago.

4. How to make a complaint

- 4.1 A complaint can be made in writing (via the [website e-form](#), email (services@north-herts.gov.uk), hard copy complaint form (available online or at council offices) or letter) or by telephone (01462 474000) or in person. If you can, we encourage you to make your complaint in writing to help us understand all of your concerns. But if you can't do this we will work with you to ensure we fully understand your concerns. It's important to us that we capture the injustice caused to you so that we get the chance to rectify this where possible. When you make your complaint please tell us how you'd like us to communicate the outcome. If you prefer a verbal response, we will follow this up in writing so you have a record of our response.
- 4.2 We don't accept anonymous complaints as we can't communicate a response. But we will listen to any feedback provided anonymously and bear it in mind going forwards. A representative can bring a complaint on your behalf. This could include Citizens Advice, Councillors or similar. We ask that authority from you for them to represent you in the complaint is provided. If at any time you wish to withdraw your consent for a third party to represent you, please let us know.
- 4.3 We will not usually handle letters in the local newspapers or messages on social media through our newspapers through our 3C's process, however if you have supplied contact details we may try and contact you directly to follow up on your comments if appropriate to do so.
- 4.4 Complaints regarding contractors who provide services on our behalf should, wherever possible, be directed to the contractors in the first instance. This allows the contractor the opportunity to resolve the matter quickly and avoids potential duplication. You may choose not to deal with the contractor directly. In which case, we will handle the matter through our own complaints process. Likewise, if the matter is not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor, then you may escalate the complaint to be handled through our process. Contractor feedback is monitored through regular contract management meetings.
- 4.5 We can provide information on how to complain in different languages and formats and can provide assistance to people who need it.

5. The complaints process

We aim to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity. We aim to deal with all complaints within 10 working days. If we need more time, we'll let you know, and say when we hope to give you an answer.

5.1 Stage 1

Once a formal complaint is received, it will be recorded on our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and an acknowledgement with a reference number will be sent to you within two working days.



Details of your complaint will be sent to an appropriate officer to investigate. If your complaint concerns a member of staff, then that staff member would not be the investigating officer. There may be some exceptions to this rule, particularly where the officer mentioned is best placed to respond due to their level of knowledge or expertise on the subject matter. A complaint about a member of staff may be referred to Human Resources for a separate internal investigation if appropriate; details of any action resulting from an HR investigation would be confidential.



Complaints regarding the Managing Director will be responded to by the Leader of the council.



We may need to contact you to discuss the complaint or obtain further information to ensure that we fully understand the complaint and can investigate it thoroughly.



If you are dissatisfied with the stage 1 response, you may have the right to escalate the complaint to stage 2 of the process. We will review complaints under stage 2 of the process only if one or more of the following circumstances is applicable:

1. The complaint has not been fully understood or investigated thoroughly due to a misunderstanding of the original complaint.
2. That all points raised in the complaint have not been fully responded to.
3. You have not had a response to the Stage 1 complaint within the prescribed timescales and have not had an indication as to when a response can be expected.

To request a review under stage 2 you should contact the Customer Service Centre within 14 working days of our response to you, advising why you are dissatisfied with the complaint outcome. A complaint can only be escalated to stage 2 if it has been through stage 1 of the process and meets one or more of the criteria for escalation. Details of how to request this will also be included in your stage 1 outcome letter.

If your complaint does not meet the criteria to escalate to stage 2 but you are dissatisfied with our response, then you may refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), details of which can be found in section 6 of this document.

5.2 Stage 2

Stage 2 follows the same process as stage 1 of our procedure. In most cases, your complaint will be reviewed by a Senior Manager who will not have investigated the complaint at Stage 1, unless it is not appropriate for them to do so, and in which case will be passed to the most suitable member of staff.

6. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

- 6.1 The LGO can investigate complaints about the council, however in most cases before they will investigate a complaint, the council must have had the chance to put things right first through the first and/or second stage of the complaints process. The Ombudsman will not usually consider complaints that are over 12 months old unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

Contact the Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

www.lgo.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

7. Unreasonable complainant (and contact) policy

- 7.1 We have a duty to make sure that public money is spent wisely and achieves value for complainants and the wider public. In a very small number of cases, despite exhausting our complaints policy and possibly that of the LGO, a complainant may continue to pursue a complaint or line of contact unreasonably.
- 7.2 While we do not normally limit the contact complainants have with us or Councillors, in some cases it is necessary to do so because the nature or frequency of a complainant's contact hinders our ability to consider their and other customers' complaints. We refer to these as serial, persistent, or vexatious complainants. This can be defined as a complaint where it is readily apparent that the customer is pursuing a complaint which is entirely without merit and made with the intention of causing inconvenience, harassment, or expense to the council.
- 7.3 We have internal guidance in place which sets out how staff and Councillors should deal with unreasonable complainant behaviour. This includes that contact could be limited, restricted or in some cases stopped altogether. (More information can be found at Appendix A – Unreasonable complainant (and contact) policy).

8. Performance monitoring and reporting

Key complaints data specifically relating to volumes and performance is collated and analysed on an ongoing basis. This data is reported twice a year to the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The reports are published on [our website](#).