



**North
Herts
Council**

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure

November 2025

To be reviewed November 2028

SUMMARY

This policy sets out how the Council determines and deals with comments, compliments, and complaints (3C's). 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 can be simplified as follows: (or a helpful flow chart can be found at Appendix B)

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. The Council encourages use of the website [e-form](#) as this will help to ensure that all the relevant information is captured. The policy itself can be found on our website, or a hard copy is available at the District Council Offices in reception. The contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) can also be found on our website or within this policy. (Appendix A - 3.5)

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

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.

If dissatisfied following a stage 2 investigation, a further complaint can be made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At North Herts Council, we endeavour to provide high quality services to 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 try to 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 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. As a co-operative Council, we value and build accountability, fairness, and responsibility into all that we do.
- 1.3 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 3C's. Whilst we welcome feedback on all aspects of 3C's, this policy and process 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 may be identifying opportunities to make changes to services or processes can 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 (CRM system) 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 CRM system will be kept in accordance with our data retention schedules.

3. Complaints

3.1 What is a complaint?

- 3.2 As a guide, we define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by North Herts Council, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals. (Appendix A – 1.2) The complaint will usually fall 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

Complaints will be accepted unless there is a valid reason not to do so, in accordance with the above categories. (Appendix A - 2.1)

- 3.3 Occasionally something may be originally received as a complaint when it needs to be dealt with in a different way. A service request is defined as a request from an individual to North Herts Council requiring action to be taken to put something right. (Appendix A – 1.4) Some further examples 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.

- 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.
- [A missed bin](#) would be processed as a request for service by our contractor. However, repeated (justified) missed bins or failure to deal with an issue correctly could lead to a complaint.
- The same or similar complaint that has already been logged by someone else who resides in the same household while the original complaint is open and being investigated.
- Council Tax bandings – if you disagree with the band of your property, you can appeal to the Listing Officer at the VOA. [Council Tax valuation bands | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- Challenging a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN). A procedure for challenging a PCN along with an external appeals process is already in place. [Challenge a Penalty Charge Notice | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- Planning objections. A separate process exists for planning objections to be submitted. [View or comment on a planning application | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- A complaint in relation to housing benefit for which there is a statutory appeals process. [Appeal against a benefit decision | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- Councillor complaints (District or local Council) are dealt with in the manner set out via this link and not via the 3C's route: [Complain about a Councillor | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- A complaint about an issue that was known about for than 12 months before the complaint was made to the Council, unless there is a good reason for the delay.

- Anything that falls under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Act. Complaints about an FOI request or SAR will not be accepted. These should be directed towards the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) [Make a complaint | ICO](#)
- The Community Trigger is separate from the Complaints Policy. [Further details including the process for activating the Community Trigger can be found on our website.](#)
- Hate crime reports not linked to the Council. These are facilitated through our responsibility as a Hate Crime reporting centre.
- A complaint relating to another organisation. We cannot consider these within our policy, however, we will signpost customers to contact organisations directly.

We do not exclude complaints about safeguarding, or health and safety issues. (Appendix A - 2.3)

4. How to make a complaint

- 4.1.1 A complaint can be made in writing (via the [website e-form](#), by email (services@north-herts.gov.uk), hard copy complaint form ([available online](#) or at Council offices) or by letter) or by telephone (01464 474000) or in person with any member of staff (Appendix A - 3.2). We encourage complaints to be made in writing via the online form wherever possible so we can ensure we have a clear understanding of the complaint. It's important to us that we capture the injustice caused to you so that we get the chance to rectify this where possible. We will respond to complaints in writing wherever possible so there is a record of the outcome.
- 4.2.1 We can provide information on how to complain in different languages and formats and can provide assistance to people who need it.
- 4.3 To ensure that we capture all the relevant and correct information, we do not accept anonymous complaints. We also do not accept complaints from third parties except in circumstances where the customer has a disability and / or a representative acting on their behalf. In these circumstances, customer service staff will provide appropriate assistance. We will not usually handle letters in the local newspapers or messages on social media 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. The customer 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 the customer may escalate the complaint to be handled through our process. Contractor feedback is monitored through regular contract management meetings.

4.5 The complaints process

We will always seek to resolve a complaint or an issue as quickly as possible. Sometimes issues are raised as complaints in the hope of getting an immediate response. If we know we will be able to resolve an issue quickly for you then we may deal with it as a service issue, so we can provide an earlier resolution. An example of this could be a missed bin which, if it is not an

ongoing problem, can be resolved quickly by using the relevant [online form](#) or with a phone call to our contractors.

Stage 1

- Once a formal complaint is received, it will be recorded on our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and an acknowledgment 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.
- We aim to respond to 80% of complaints within 10 working days. This considers the fact that some complaints can be very complex and take longer to complete.
- If we cannot fully respond to your complaint within 10 working days, then we will contact you to provide you with an update and advise when we expect to provide a full response.
- 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 28 calendar 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. Requests for stage 2 will be acknowledged and logged within five working days of receipt. (Appendix A - 6.13) Stage 2 consideration is a review of the adequacy of the stage 1 response as well as any new and relevant information not previously considered. Stage 2 is not a more thorough, detailed investigation of the complaint. (Appendix A - 6.15)

If your complaint does not meet the criteria to escalate to a Stage 2 but you are dissatisfied with our response, then you may wish to refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), details of which can be found in section 5 of this document.

4.6 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.

5. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

- 5.1 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.

The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH
www.lgo.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 061 0614

6. Unreasonable Complainant (& Contact) Policy

- 6.1 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 unreasonably.
- 6.2 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 organisation. Any restrictions placed on an individual's contact due to unacceptable behaviour are proportionate and have regard to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. (Appendix A - 5.13)
- 6.3 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 (& Contact) Policy).

8 Complaints made to Councillors

Councillors cannot make formal complaints on your behalf as this would be considered a third-party complaint as covered in section 4. However, they can provide guidance on how a complaint can be made to the Council through the established 3C's process.

Councillors can refer matters on your behalf to officers of the Council to be investigated; however, it can only be treated as a formal complaint once the Council has:

- Discussed the matter with you directly
- Agreed the formal route with you
- Established that you wish the Councillor to act as an advocate for you

Councillors can also discuss matters of policy with you; however, policy matters are not usually covered by the complaints policy because policy decisions have been made through a democratic process.

8 Social media comments

We recognise that social media is a platform used by many of our customers, and as such have a separate policy covering this. We proactively use social media to engage with our residents and our Customer Services team respond to specific requests for service made via our own social media pages, including [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [Nextdoor](#).

We also recognise that many comments made on social media are general expressions of opinion or public discussion and mostly informal in nature. For that reason, we will not usually handle them through our formal 3C's process. That is not to suggest that we do not take social media comments seriously, more that we understand that the users of social media do not usually expect their comments to be processed in a formal manner and often such comments are of a general nature and not about a specific incident that the Council can investigate. However, if a comment clearly fits within our 3C's criteria, we will contact you directly to follow up and handle the matter through our formal process as appropriate. Requests for service will be processed in the same way as if received via other channels. However, ongoing, or unresolved issues may be treated as a complaint.

We can report through our social media platform on the volumes, types, and sentiment of interactions on our social media pages, and this information may be used in conjunction with our standard 3C's reports.

10 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 annually to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. [The reports are published on our website.](#)