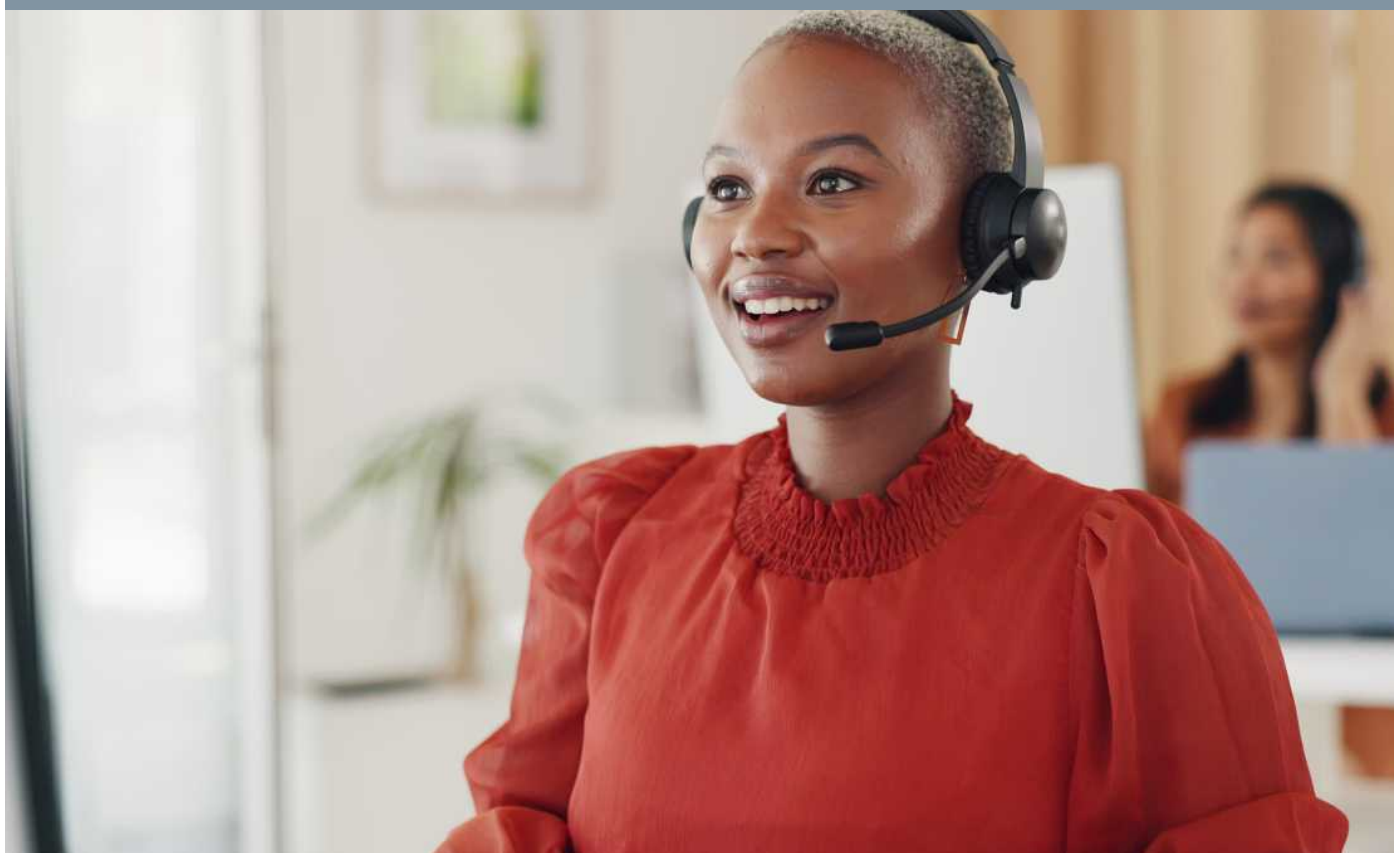




Customer Feedback Policy

Comments, Compliments and Complaints



Customer Feedback Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

South Staffordshire Council continues to being a committed customer focused organisation and wants to work with customers to develop and improve services. The way we handle customer feedback is a key component in this process and the council welcomes comments, compliments, and complaints.

Comments

South Staffordshire Council welcomes all feedback and recognises that customers may wish to comment on services or decisions. These comments can play an important part in improving service delivery and will be recorded and forwarded to the relevant service area for consideration and action.

Compliments

Customers may also provide compliments or expressions of gratitude to particular employees or council teams. These are equally useful and very much welcomed as they tell us that we are doing things right. These will also be recorded and forwarded on to the relevant service area for feedback to their teams.

Customer feedback can be made by email, social media, telephone, in writing or by completing the council's feedback form.

We will also ensure we deliver better services by continuously monitoring our performance when dealing with comments, compliments and complaints, by following a standard procedure to achieve consistency and will ensure that we use the feedback to improve council services.

Complaints

It is important to remember that reporting a fault or a problem is not necessarily a complaint, but may simply be a request for service, such as reporting a missed bin collection which can be resolved quickly. It might also relate to a minor fault, such as a broken locker at a leisure centre, which will usually be dealt with immediately. It is only if the customer remains dissatisfied with our response or there is evidence of multiple service failures for the same request that the complaints procedure (outlined below) will apply.

Feedback, including complaints, can be made by:

- Email: **customerfeedback@sstaffs.gov.uk**
- Website: **Comments, compliments and complaints**
- X: **@south_staffs**
- Facebook: **facebook.com/southstaffs**
- Post: **South Staffordshire Council, Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, WV8 1PX**
- Telephone: **01902 696000**
- In person by visiting the council premises

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2. TIMESCALES FOR MAKING A COMPLAINT

Complaints must be made no later than three months after the date on which the matter occurred. If there are good reasons for not having made the complaint within the above time frame and, if it is still possible for the council to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly, we may decide to still consider the complaint.

3. WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

The council, takes complaints seriously and has adopted the following definition from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

“A complaint or concern is an expression of dissatisfaction about an act, omission or decision of the council (whether that is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner on our behalf) either verbally or in writing, and whether justified or not, which requires a response”

Any person receiving a service from the council can make a complaint if they feel that there has been a failure in the service, they have received which includes the following:

- Delay in providing a service requested.
- A failure to provide a service as detailed in the council's published standards.
- The unhelpful attitude or conduct of a council employee or contractor.
- Neglect or unreasonable delay in responding to a request for service.
- A failure to follow the council's agreed policies, rules or procedures.
- Malice, bias or discrimination.

Note - there is currently a consultation by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to introduce a new complaint handling code which will become the single gold standard for the local government sector – we will update this policy when the code is finalised.

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4. COMPLAINTS THAT CANNOT BE CONSIDERED UNDER THIS POLICY

Certain types of complaints are not intended to be dealt with by this policy and will be dealt with through other channels by a more appropriately placed member of staff in the organisation, including our customer advisors. We will aim to deal with these in line with our commitment to providing good customer service and we will always explain why a complaint cannot be dealt with and of any alternative rights of appeal or review where appropriate. These include:

- Some matters raised with us are requests for service and will be responded to without being treated as complaint.
- Complaints relating to established council policy or the council's implementation of government policy.
- Matters for which there is a right of appeal (either within the council or via an employment tribunal), or a legal remedy (e.g., a penalty charge notice, parking ticket, housing benefits, and planning applications); although a complaint regarding how the process was carried out will be considered.
- Insurance claims.
- Requests for the council to engage with a third party over a problem which the council may have some control/regulating function.
- Ombudsman complaints (except for those which the ombudsman asks the council to deal with through its complaints procedure).
- Complaints from former and existing staff about human resources issues, including appointments, dismissals, pay, pensions and discipline.
- Commercial or contractual matters, for example contracts for the supply of goods and services to the council.
- Freedom of information, and data protection subject access requests, or complaints about the decision, the information provided or how a request was handled.
- A complaint that is to be dealt with or has already been dealt with by a court or other statutory body.
- Complaints about restrictive contact arrangements, such as but not limited to, single point of contact arrangements and bans.
- Complaints that are the subject of on-going legal action, which also includes complainants who themselves are subject to an investigation for any breaches of legislation enforced by the council.
- A complaint or an allegation of criminal or unlawful conduct should be made to the councils monitoring officer by emailing **monitoring_officer@sstaffs.gov.uk**
- Allegations of fraud or corruption by council staff should be made to the Counter Fraud Manager either by emailing **fraud@staffordshire.gov.uk** or by ringing the fraud telephone line on **0800 7311 890**
- Complaints that are unreasonably persistent or vexatious.

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5. COMPLAINT STAGES

Stage 1 - Complaint

You will receive immediate confirmation that we have received the complaint and we will investigate and aim to provide a full response to your complaint within 10 working days.

If we need more time, we will let you know and when you can expect a response.

In a response to your complaint, we will explain whether the complaint has been upheld or not, the reason for the decision and let you know the grounds on which you are able to appeal should you disagree with the outcome.

If you are unable to make the complaint yourself you may ask someone else to do this.

Stage 2 - Review

Once you have received your stage 1 response, if you are still not satisfied, you may ask for a review.

Examples when an outcome may be reviewed:

- **Not all aspects of the complaint were addressed at Stage 1 (in these circumstances the original investigating officer may be asked to look at the complaint again).**
- **If the complainant feels the response to their original complaint was not fully addressed and any wrong has not been adequately addressed or rectified.**

The complainant will be expected to explain, the grounds for seeking a review and give clear reasons why.

You must ask for a review no later than 20 working days from our initial stage 1 reply.

We will immediately acknowledge receipt of your request for a review. A detailed response will be made within 20 working days. If we cannot meet this target, you will be sent a progress report.

There are some circumstances in which the council will decide it not appropriate to review the complaint further and, in these circumstances, you will receive a response providing you reasons as to why this is the case.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or the way the complaint was managed, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Details are on page 9 (section 10).

You may ask someone else to do this on your behalf.

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What will happen when you send us a comment?

You will receive an acknowledgment of your comment and it will be sent to the service.

What will happen when you send us a compliment?

You will receive an acknowledgment of your compliment and it will be sent to the service.

What will happen when you complain to us?

You should complain to us within three months of the matter occurring.

We will try to resolve the matter for you.

If you are not satisfied we investigate the matter and respond to you within 10 days.

If we feel that the matter does not need to be investigated we will inform you of this and our reasons for the decision.



If you disagree with our response to your complaint

You should get back to us within 20 working days explaining why you think the matter hasn't been resolved.

We will consider your request and if we agree with you then we will investigate further and get back to you within 20 working days.

If we feel that the matter has been fully investigated we will inform you of this and our reasons for this decision.



If you still disagree with our response you may wish to raise the matter with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

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6. COMPLAINTS AND ENQUIRES FROM AN MP OR COUNCILLOR

The complaints policy is intended for individual residents to seek resolution to an issue.

The council has a separate process for residents who decide to escalate their issues via a Member of Parliament or councillor.

7. PUTTING THINGS RIGHT

The objective of redress is to rectify any mistakes or problems at the earliest opportunity. The council will acknowledge faults when they occur and take responsibility for putting things right and avoiding a reoccurrence.

Following an investigation into a complaint, if it is recognised that the service did not meet the required standards, the council will:

- Apologise.
- Rectify the mistake or problem within an agreed time frame and provide you with the service you should have received.
- Review practice, policy or procedure as appropriate.

8. DATA RIGHTS

In the process of handling a comment, compliment or complaint the council will be required to collect personal data and, in some circumstances, this would fall under the category of sensitive personal data. It is necessary to collect, store and use this data to administer the process and to investigate all complaints made.

Confidentiality of this information is maintained by storing on a system which is purpose built for recording feedback with limited users being allowed access. This system also maintains the function to fully audit any access to the system.

The council will keep information relating to complaints for a period in line with the latest data retention policies. After this the information will be securely destroyed.

9. EQUALITY MONITORING

Anyone completing the online feedback form will be requested to voluntarily provide equality monitoring information to help the council assess whether those who access and use the feedback system are treated fairly.

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10. ROLE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint or the way the complaint was handled, they can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, who is completely independent and can investigate complaints about most council matters. The Ombudsman will normally expect complaints to go through all stages of the council's Complaints Procedure before they will consider it.

Full details of how the Local Government Ombudsman deals with complaints can be found on the ombudsman website www.lgo.org.uk. Contact details as follows:

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

PO Box 4771,

Coventry,

CV4 0EH.

Tel: 0300 061 0614

11. EVALUATING OUR RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK

It is important that feedback monitoring is effective, and that information is recorded consistently across different council services. A comprehensive monitoring system has been established to allow this to happen. Feedback monitoring will be incorporated into the performance management framework so that managers and councillors can learn from feedback and services can be improved.

Key information relating to feedback including the numbers received, numbers acknowledge and responded to, and service improvements made as a result of feedback will be reported regularly at senior management.

An annual publicly available report will also be produced and will be posted on the council's website.

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