

Ref. No.	CO/CO/1
Category:	
People	
Place	
Corporate	Yes
In Constitution	

Dorset Council Complaints Policy

Policy Details

What is this policy for?	We want to ensure that all customers are satisfied with our services. Where this is not the case, this policy details how Dorset Council will manage any complaints made.
Who does this policy affect?	All staff, and all customers who make a complaint about council services.
Keywords	Complaint, Feedback, Ombudsman, Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)
Author	Tony Bygrave Senior Assurance Officer
Dorset Council policy adopted from	Dorset Council. This policy applies across the Dorset Council area.
Does this policy relate to any laws?	This does not include Social Care Complaints which are covered by a separate policy and process and governed by statutory requirements
Is this policy linked to any other Dorset Council policies?	Dorset Council Unreasonable Complainants Policy
Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	An EqIA has been completed
Other Impact Assessments	None.

Status and Approvals

Status	Live	Version	Version 2.0
Last review date	June 21	Next review date	June 24
Approved by (Director)	Corporate Theme Board, Shaping Dorset Council	Date approved	
Member/ Partnership Board Approval	Not required	Date approved	

Complaints

Dorset Council Whole Authority Complaints Policy / Procedure

Statement of intent: We want to ensure that you are satisfied with our services. We have a policy for managing your complaints if you are not happy with our services. We will seek speedy resolutions and provide mediation between customers and staff. We will listen to and respond to feedback from customers and act to implement improvements to our service. We embrace the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)'s principles for effective complaint handling:

- Accessibility – the policy is well publicised, easily accessed and understood
- Communication – effective, timely communication between all parties
- Timeliness – it takes no longer than 12 weeks from receipt to resolution
- Fairness – dealt with in a proportionate, open-minded and impartial way
- Credibility – effective leadership to ensure complaints and learning has a high profile
- Accountability – managed in a proper and open way

We will always try to resolve things that go wrong quickly, and to give customers the best possible outcome. We aim to achieve this on an informal basis. So, as a first step, the customers should talk to staff at the point of service delivery to try to reach an informal agreement. We can also try to resolve any concerns informally but, failing this, we can provide advice on how to make a formal complaint. We will seek to achieve this through the following key aims and objectives:

- Creating a culture of learning and improvement
- Providing customers lots of ways to give feedback
- Leadership in sharing lessons across the council
- Be customer focussed
- Reach the optimum resolution or outcome
- Resolve the problem quickly if possible

Scope of this policy: A complaint is when a customer of a council service is unhappy with the way they have been treated and believe that the council (including a contractor or other body providing services on behalf of the council) has done something wrong. The customer will expect the council to investigate the matter and respond to them. The customer may feel dissatisfied or that they have suffered delay or inconvenience. A complaint may be about:

- the standard of a service or information provided
- the timeliness of a service (delay, or not provided)
- the way a person has been treated (unfairly or discourteously)
- dissatisfaction with any aspect of our service

How will we deal with a complaint? Upon receipt of your complaint we will investigate the issues in order to fully understand and attempt to resolve matters where possible. If the council has done something wrong, we will apologise and try to put things right. We will also consider if, and how, we can improve things to ensure that similar problems do not happen again through proactively learning from complaints. For example, we could provide an explanation or information, review a policy or procedure, provide training and guidance for employees.

Help in making a complaint: If you should need help in making your complaint, please see www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or contact your local council office who will be able to advise you.

Informal local resolution – initial contact: We will try to resolve things that go wrong quickly, and to give customers the best possible outcome. We aim to achieve this without the need for a formal complaint. So, as a first step, we will talk to the customer in an attempt to reach an agreement informally and learn from any mistakes made on our part. If we believe that the matter is not a complaint, as defined by this policy, we will say so and advise the customer how best to take it forward.

Formal complaint resolution: If your concerns cannot be immediately resolved, we can register them within the complaints procedure. Complainants will be asked to provide all the relevant information about them and their complaint, so it can be dealt with. All information received by email, letter, telephone or online form will be recorded in line with our data protection policy. Within the first 3 working days of the council receiving the complaint we will send an acknowledgement to the customer. The team manager will investigate your complaint. We aim to respond to all formal complaints within 20 working days of the submission date. In some circumstances where this is not possible, after the initial 20 working day period, we will update you every 10 working days to a maximum of 60 working days.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGSCO): If things are still not right

We try to resolve most complaints internally, but if you are still unhappy you can refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), who will carry out an independent review. The LGO will not normally accept a complaint which has not been considered under the council's internal process first.

Compliments and feedback: We value our staff and it is important to us that they know when they have done a good job or exceeded expectations. Once received, they are recorded and then fed back to the relevant team member. We also like to receive feedback on our services which is helpful in making improvements and amendments as necessary. As a learning organisation we welcome all feedback.

Unreasonable complaints: We will try to resolve things that go wrong as soon as possible, and to give customers an outcome that they are satisfied with. However,

if a customer behaves in an unacceptable manner, or is unreasonably persistent, we may decide to restrict the ways that they can deal with us or refuse to consider further complaints about the same matter. For example, if a customer makes multiple complaints about the same matter, or if their complaint has been considered and found to be unjustified but they are not prepared to accept this conclusion.

In such circumstances, the council will consider evidence available including how we have responded to the complaint and if necessary, can decide that the complaints are vexatious and unduly time-consuming. We may then decide to restrict access, giving the customer a single named point of contact with the council, or refuse to consider any further complaints about the same matter, unless any significant new information is provided.

We will inform the customer about this, explaining why the decision has been taken, what restrictions will be applied, for how long, and how the complainant may appeal against such a decision in accordance with the Council's Unreasonable Behaviours Protocol.

What issues are outside the scope of this policy? We will usually consider complaints under this policy, however there are some exceptions to this policy which include:

- Complaints about adult's and children's social care services
- Claims for financial compensation and insurance claims
- A routine first-time request for a service
- Complaints about the conduct of Councillors
- Complaints about schools or academies
- Complaints where there is a statutory right of appeal such as Special Educational Needs (SEN), School Admissions, entitlement to School Transport, Council Tax, Non – Domestic Rates, Blue Badges, Housing Benefit, Planning
- Housing Benefit (including discretionary housing payment decision), housing allocations or homeless applications
- Matters subject to any arbitration process
- Staff disciplinary matters and grievances
- Legal matters or issues that have already been heard by a court/tribunal
- Police matters
- Safeguarding matters
- Freedom of Information matters
- Claims relating to inaccurate personal information
- Policy decisions made by the Council's Executive
- Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's)
- An attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
- complaints about services that are not the responsibility of Dorset Council

Further Information

If you would like further information, please contact

Complaints Team

Dorset Council
County Hall
Dorchester
DT1 1XJ

Tel: 01305 221061

Email: complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Webpages www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

Following completion of our complaints procedure, complaints may be referred to the LGSCO.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Advice line: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983

www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint