

Customer Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

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Distribution List

Internal	External
	External website

Links associated with this document

Link
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Housing Ombudsman Service
North Northamptonshire Council Equality Policy and Strategy

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1.0 Introduction / foreword

1.1 North Northamptonshire council supports thousands of residents every year and welcomes feedback on the services it provides. Feedback is key in helping the council develop and improve the services it offers. We are committed to delivering our services to a high standard and are guided by our values:

- Customer-focused
- Respectful
- Efficient
- Supportive
- Trustworthy

We want residents to share their ideas on how we can do things better. Let us know when we're doing things well, so we continue to do so. Tell us when things have gone wrong so we can put things right. Feedback helps us learn and build modern public services to support our community.

2.0 Scope

2.1 This policy sets out how we will respond to comments, compliments, and complaints.

2.2 This policy does not apply to everything we do. Some decisions and services are out of scope of this policy because they fall under statutory regulations or other policies including:

- Complaints about the conduct of Senior Officers are dealt with by the Chief Executive Officer
- Complaints about the conduct of the Chief Executive Officer are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer
- Complaints about the conduct of a Councillor are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer

2.3 Other matters out of scope of this policy include:

- Appeals – decisions subject to appeals, for example
 - school travel assistance decisions
 - planning application decisions
 - school admission/exclusion decisions
 - housing benefit decisions
 - statutory homeless reviews requested under section 202 of the Housing Act 1996
 - homeless application reviews requested under part 6 of the Housing Act 1996
- Parking fines and penalty charge notices
- Fixed penalty charges
- Recharge fees for repairs
- Planning consultation responses
- Expressions of dissatisfaction made through a survey.
- Matters under consideration by courts or tribunals
- Matters subject to legal action
- Matters for insurance claims
- Matters not related to the actions or decisions of the council or anybody acting on its behalf
- Political comments
- Matters raised by Members of Parliament (MPs) are responded to directly
- Matters raised by Councillors are responded to directly
- Matters raised by employees which fall under internal policy
- Matters subject to internal disciplinary or grievance procedures
- HR Recruitment complaints
- Complaints about matters which occurred more than 12 months earlier
- Complaints already concluded under this policy
- Complaints on matters which an Ombudsman Service has concluded no fault to the council

2.4 Complaints about some matters fall under different processes.

- Complaints about Children and Young People’s Services are dealt with under the process detailed at Appendix A
- Complaints about Adult Social Care are dealt with under the process detailed at Appendix B

3.0 Policy outcomes

3.1 This policy supports the council’s key commitment to delivering modern public services. From time to time there are occasions when our service falls short of expectations. This policy will explain how to provide feedback and what we will do when things have gone wrong. It has been developed using the complaint handling codes of practice of [the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Service](#) and [the Housing Ombudsman Service](#). These complaint handling codes set out the best practice in dealing with complaints to achieve a better service to residents.

4.0 Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

What is feedback and how it can be made

4.1 A *comment* is feedback about a service or a suggestion about how we can improve it or do it differently. You will receive an acknowledgement for your comment and if further information is required you will be contacted.

4.2 A *compliment* is feedback when you think we’ve done something well. You will receive an acknowledgement for your compliment and if further information is required you will be contacted.

4.3 A *complaint* is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions, or lack of actions by the organization, its staff, or those acting on behalf of the organization. It may affect an individual or group of individuals.

4.4 A *service request* is a request for the provision or improvement of a service, a request to fix a problem or reconsider a decision. Action to address a service request will not stop if a complaint is raised about the issue while action is still ongoing. You can [contact us](#) online, by telephone, in writing or in person to submit a service request. If you submit a service request as a comment, compliment, or complaint it will be acknowledged and recorded and forwarded to the relevant service to action and respond in line with that service’s policies and processes.

4.5 Comments, compliments and complaints may be made on someone else's behalf with their written consent.

4.6 Anonymous comments, compliments or complaints may be made however, we may not be able to respond to them and a complaint may not be able to be investigated without enough information to search our records.

4.7 Please contact us as soon as practically possible about the matter you wish to raise. Complaints must be made within 12 months of the issue arising, or when you become aware of the issue.

4.8 Comments, compliments, complaints may be made in a variety of methods to ensure accessibility. The quickest way to give feedback is to complete our [online feedback form](#). You can also submit a complaint in writing, via email, by telephone or in person at our offices. We will ask if adjustments are required and if so will endeavour to ensure reasonable adjustments are made. We will acknowledge your feedback within 5 working days of receipt.

How complaints will be handled

4.9.1 Your complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. If further information is required you will be contacted. Ombudsman Services details will be provided with the acknowledgment.

4.9.2 The complaint will be investigated by a senior officer of the service being complained about.

4.9.3 A response will be provided within 10 working days of the date your complaint was acknowledged.

4.9.4 If a response cannot be provided within 10 working days you will be contacted with an explanation and updated with a date for resolution.

4.9.5 If further related matters are raised about the complaint while it is still being investigated, these will be incorporated and responded to unless it would unreasonably delay the response.

4.9.6 Our response to you will set out the issues investigated, the background to the case, the evidence used in assessing the case, the reasons for the findings or decisions made. If we identify we did something wrong we will explain what went wrong and why and take appropriate steps to remedy the service failure in line with appropriate policy.

4.9.7 If you remain dissatisfied with the response you can ask for your complaint to be looked at again; this should be done immediately or as soon as reasonably practical.

What happens if you ask for the complaint to be looked at again

4.10.1 Your request will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. If further information is required you will be contacted.

4.10.2 The complaint will be investigated by a different senior officer, for example, a service manager.

4.10.3 A response will be provided within 20 working days of the date your request was acknowledged.

4.10.4 If a response cannot be provided within 20 working days you will be advised why and when it will be provided.

4.10.5 Our response to you will set out the issues investigated, the background to the case, the evidence used in assessing the case, the reasons for the findings or decisions made. If we identify we did something wrong we will explain what went wrong and why and take appropriate steps to remedy the service failure in line with appropriate policy.

4.10.6 This response, once provided to you, concludes the council's complaint procedure.

4.10.7 If you remain dissatisfied with the response you have received you can raise the matter with the appropriate Ombudsman Service; this should be done immediately or as soon as reasonably practical.

4.10.8 You can complain directly to the appropriate Ombudsman Service within the 12 months deadline.

Unacceptable Behaviour

4.11.1 We appreciate that sometimes upset can cause people to act of character in unacceptable ways. We aim to deal with feedback including complaints empathetically. However, sometimes behaviours can cross the line of what is acceptable and these unacceptable behaviours will be managed under the council's Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy which can be found [here](#).

5.0 Considerations

5.1 Consultation

There are no consultation requirements associated with this update to policy.

5.2 Equality Implications

The council is fully committed to treating people fairly and understands its statutory duties under the Equality Act (2010). The equality implications have been considered. This policy has positive implications for several protected groups. It has been written in an inclusive manner to ensure ease of understanding by the widest possible audience. It has been written in plain English to ensure ease of translation.

We want to ensure our services are accessible for our customers to provide feedback. We will ensure a variety of access methods are available to customers. We will monitor and evaluate our processes to ensure that they continue to be accessible to our customers. We will seek to accommodate reasonable adjustments and preferred methods of contact. Where a complaint has equality implications, the equality team will be notified to advise accordingly.

5.3 Health Assessments and inequalities

After consideration, there are positive health implications arising from this procedure. This policy will help to support health and wellbeing. The policy clearly sets out how the council will use feedback to improve services and address dissatisfaction, providing assurance of outcomes. This assurance on how matters will be handled should help reduce anxiety arising from dissatisfaction when things go wrong.

5.4 Climate Impact

After consideration, there are no climate implications arising from this procedure. This policy has no overall impact on energy consumption and resource utilisation of council resources. It will not increase overall demand for this service. Low resource accessibility options such as digital mitigate resource expenditure on more manual methods of contact.

5.5 Community Impact

After consideration, there are no community implications arising from this procedure.

5.6 Crime and Disorder Impact

After consideration, there are no crime and disorder implications arising from this procedure.

5.7 Data Protection Implications

After consideration, there are no data protection implications arising from this procedure. Full details on how the council handles personal data can be found on our [data protection and privacy information page](#).

5.8 Legal and Governance

After consideration, there are no legal implications arising from this procedure.

5.9 Resources and Financial

After consideration, there are no financial and / or resource implications arising from this procedure.

5.10 Risk

After consideration, there are no significant risks, positive or adverse arising from this procedure.

Appendix A



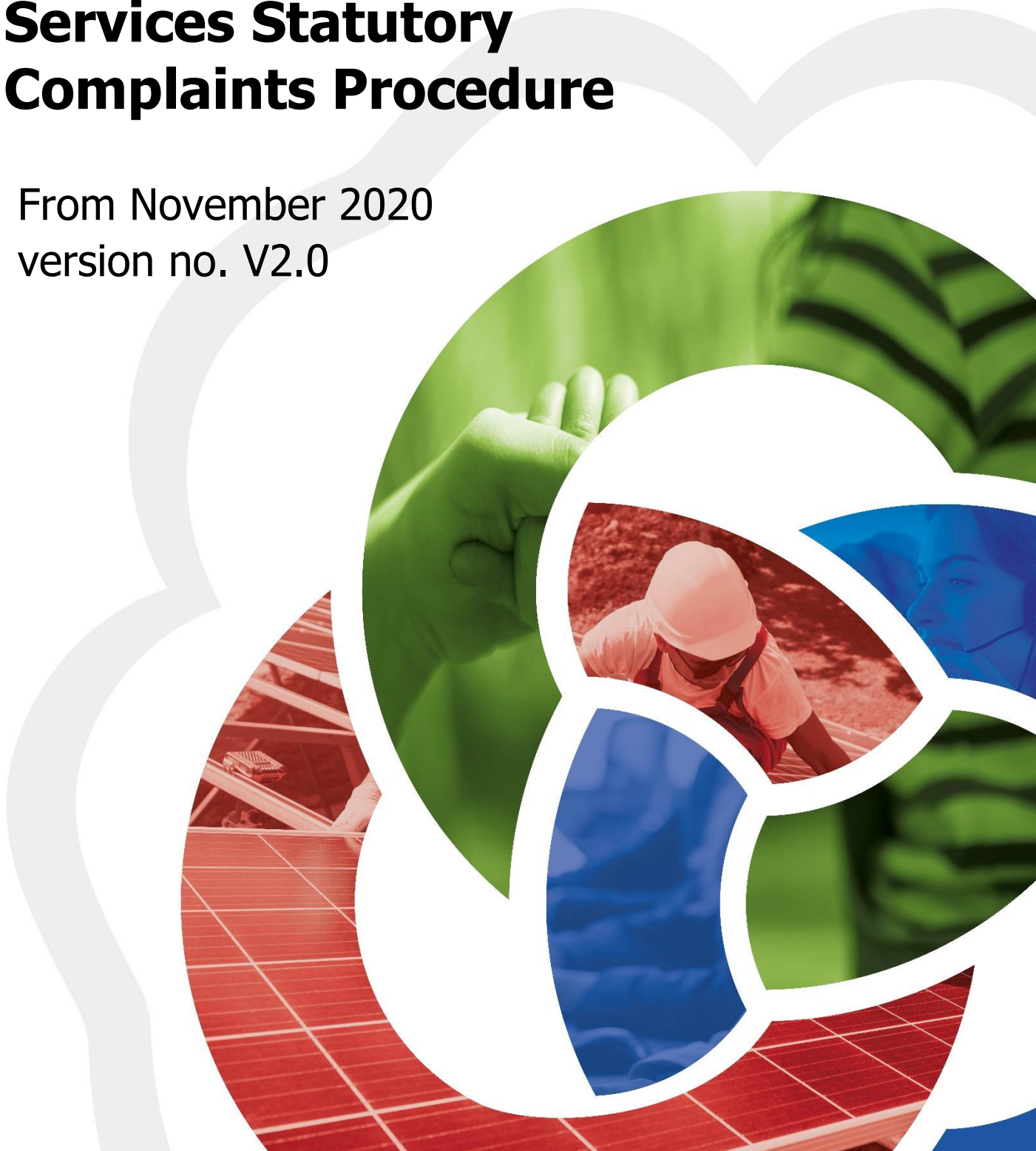
**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

In partnership with



Children & Young Peoples Services Statutory Complaints Procedure

From November 2020
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V.1.0	November 2020	To be read in conjunction with the Councils' Compliments, Comments & Complaints Policy
V.2.0	April 2022	Reviewed and updated web links and language

Consultees

Internal	External
Director of Childrens Services, WNC	Northamptonshire Childrens Trust (NCT)

Distribution List

Internal	External
All / Public Document	All / Public Document

Links to other documents

Document	Link
Councils' Compliments, Comments & Complaints Policy	Comments, compliments, and complaints West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk)
Unacceptable & Unreasonable Customer Behavior Policy	Comments, compliments, and complaints West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk)
Getting the Best from Complaints	Microsoft Word - Complaints Guidance.doc (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Additional Comments to note

This detailed procedure document sets out the expected practice referred to in Appendix 1 of the Councils' Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure.

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1.0 Introduction / foreword

1.1 It is our aim that all children within the county of Northamptonshire are safe and that each of them can fulfil their potential. We are committed to delivering a high-quality service to children, young people, their families, and carers.

We recognise that sometimes we do not get things right first time or you might feel that we could have given you a better service. This document sets out our procedure for managing Complaints and feedback received in relation to children and young peoples social care services.

We welcome everything you have to tell us, both 'the good bits' and the 'bad bits', so that we can continue to learn and improve.

Making a complaint should not affect the service you are currently receiving from us or our communications with you.

2.0 Scope

2.1 The Children's Act 1989 places a statutory duty on all councils to establish and publicise a procedure for the consideration of complaints and representations made about services provided under the Act [view a full copy of the legislation.](#)

The purpose of this document is to set out our procedure for handling complaints and feedback on behalf of Northamptonshire Childrens Trust (NCT) and associated procedures in relation to children and young people's social care services, so you know what to expect if you want to provide feedback.

This procedure applies to the provision of children’s social services by and on behalf of West Northants Council (WNC), including the process of Child Protection Conferences. If your complaint falls outside this remit, it may be covered by the [Council’s Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure](#) for non-statutory services.

3.0 Policy outcomes

3.1 This document will:

- define what representations, complaints, compliments, and comments are
- explain how you can contact the Council if you wish to make a complaint, compliment, or comment/suggestion
- detail the processes that we will follow to resolve a complaint and the standard of service you can expect to receive
- set out how we will monitor complaints and use the information to improve the services that we provide

4.0 Children & Young People's Services Statutory Complaints Procedure

4.1 Our key principles for dealing with all feedback relating to children and young people's social care services are:

A customer or others acting on their behalf has a right to:

- Complain
- Be listened to
- Have their complaint investigated and resolved as quickly as possible
- Have their concerns taken seriously

Our procedure is designed to: -

- Be accessible and uncomplicated
- Promote customer satisfaction
- Identify areas where services can be improved
- Learn from good practice
- Learn from mistakes
- Implement improvements in processes and procedures

Types of feedback

There are four types of customer feedback which we are likely to receive in relation to Children and young people's social care services.

- Representations
- Complaints
- Compliments
- Comments/suggestions

Representations

A representation is a 'minor' issue you may have about a service that can quickly be resolved within a short period (normally 48 hours)

Complaints

A complaint is something that the Council or our staff may have done or not done that has caused you to be unhappy with our service. Our definition of a complaint is detailed below.

'A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet with the quality of a service or with a failure to provide a previously agreed service, or with the attitude or behaviour of a member of staff.'

Some examples of why you may complain might be:

- a 'problem that hasn't been sorted out'

- a member of staff has been rude to you
- we have not done something that we said we would
- we have taken too long to decide or provide a service
- we have given poor advice
- we have not treated you fairly
- you are unhappy about a change we have made

Compliments

A compliment is an expression of praise. It is a positive statement about a service provided by or on behalf of the Council, or about the helpfulness, attitude, or approach of a member of staff.

Comments/Suggestions

A comment is a general statement about a Council service or policy, that affects all customers not just one individual. A comment can be negative or positive or it might suggest a new service or an improvement to an existing service.

Who can complain under this procedure?

- Any child or young person (or their parent or someone who has parental responsibility) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need.
- Any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies)
- Children leaving care
- Special Guardians
- A child or young person (or their parent) to whom a Special Guardian Order (SGO) is in force
- Any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F (3) or (4) of the Care Act.
- Any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians
- Persons wishing to adopt a child
- Any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend to
- Adopted persons, their parents, natural parents, and former guardians; and such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant his representations being considered by them.

Where a representative makes a complaint on behalf of a customer, the Local Authority must be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the complaint to be made by the representative.

Any decision that a complainant is not a qualifying complainant will be made by the Complaints Manager, in consultation with the appropriate Service Manager, and the complainant informed in writing. See section on ***'Data Protection and Confidentiality'***

Complaints relating to a child

Where eligibility is not automatic, the Council has the discretion to decide whether an individual has sufficient interest in the child's welfare to justify raising a complaint. In reaching a decision, the Complaints Team will check with the child or young person (subject to their age and understanding) that they are content for the complaint to be made.

If you are a professional involved in the care management for a young person and have concerns about the case management, please consult the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership, case, and conflict resolution protocol before considering making a complaint. A full copy can be read [here](#)

Telephone: 07872 148334

Email: nscp@northnorthants.gov.uk

Complaints made on behalf of a child

Subject to the child/young person's understanding, the Council will always confirm whether the complaint is being made on their behalf and that the complaint submitted reflects their views. Where a complaint is received from a representative acting on behalf of someone in these circumstances, the Council has the discretion to decide whether the person is suitable to act as a representative or has sufficient interest in the individual's welfare.

If the Complaints Manager considers that the representative is unsuitable or does not have sufficient interest, they must notify the complainant in writing, explaining that no further action will be taken. The Complaints Manager should discuss this decision with relevant operational managers as appropriate.

Complaints made by a child or young person

The Local Authority takes complaints made by children and young people very seriously. The 'Voice of the Child' is monitored throughout all complaints

If you are a child or young person and you have a social worker or are a care leaver, you can contact the Children's Rights Service and request an advocate to support you.

This can be done by you or on your behalf by a social worker, foster carer, teacher, or anyone who knows you. Children's Rights Advocacy Service contact details:

Email: ChildrensRights@nctrust.co.uk

To find out more about Children's Rights and to access the online form on the Young Northants Website [click here](#)

How to contact us with your feedback

You can make a complaint or compliment or offer a comment or suggestion to any member of staff at the Council OR by contacting the Complaints and Compliments Team directly.

If your feedback relates to a complaint, and you feel comfortable doing so, try and speak to the member of staff you have been dealing with directly, or their manager, in the first instance. This enables the opportunity for the complaint to be resolved straight away. If you are unsure of who you need to speak to you should contact the Council's Complaints and Compliments Team.

Telephone:

Complaints and Compliments Team on **0300 126 7000**

Email:

MyFeedback@westnorthants.gov.uk

In writing to:

The Complaints and Compliments Team

One Angel Square
Angel Street
Northampton
NN1 1ED

Via our website:

[Visit the Council website](#)

Via your local County Councillor: By contacting your local Councillor – Find your Councillor [contact your Councillor](#)

In addition, any complaint, compliment, or comment can also be made or handed in at any of the Council's offices.

Advocacy and Support:

If you need help to give your feedback or would like support whilst the matter is being investigated for you, then we will be happy to put you in touch with someone locally who can offer independent advice and guidance and will help you to make sure that your views are represented.

Information for professionals can be found on the [Northamptonshire Childrens Trust \(NCT\) website](#)

Anonymous Feedback:

Any anonymous feedback received will be recorded and acted upon. However, it is helpful if contact details are provided in order that we can inform you what has been done. There is no need for you to share your personal details if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

Our Complaints Procedure

We recognise that occasionally things can go wrong. In these circumstances we want to make it as simple and quick as possible for you to raise concerns with us. We will learn from your feedback and try to improve so that the situation does not arise again.

This complaints procedure has four stages – one informal stage and three formal stages. In addition, there is also the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) should our formal procedure be exhausted. The process is there to support complainants and staff to reach a satisfactory resolution to any complaint.

The four stages within our process are:

Informal	Representations
Formal	Stage 1: Local Resolution Stage 2: Formal Investigation Stage 3: Review Panel meeting
Independent	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

A flow chart showing the process is set out in **Appendix A**.

Representations

If you have an issue or want to share a problem you are experiencing, but do not wish to make a formal complaint, you can make a Representation to inform us of any concerns you have. Representations can be made to any member of staff but are best directed to the team which the issue relates to deal with the matter at the first point of contact.

If we receive a Representation, we will investigate your issue and try and resolve it within **2 working days (48hrs)**. All staff are encouraged to use their initiative to deal with and resolve issues informally, efficiently, and effectively for the benefit both of service users and the service.

All staff receiving Representations are asked to record them so that we can monitor feedback which assists the Council in its future planning and development of services.

Stage 1: Local Resolution

If you feel that your issue has not been resolved by making an 'informal' Representation, or you wish to make a 'formal' complaint, you can contact the Council by any one of the methods set out above. Once your complaint has been received by the Council, a member of the Complaints and Compliments Team will record the details on our customer feedback database. This system is **confidential** and is only used by the members of the Complaints and Compliments Team who will be supporting you throughout the complaint process. The Complaints and Compliments Team will assess your complaint and agree with you the best approach to deal with the issues you have raised. When we receive a complaint, our Complaints and Compliments Team will ensure that it is directed to the appropriate service / team that is responsible for the issues raised in the complaint, they will do this within **3 working days** of receipt.

Your complaint will be investigated by the Manager of the Service which the complaint relates to, or a nominated member of staff on their behalf. The representative from the Service should contact you at an early stage, either by meeting with you or speaking to you over the telephone, to make sure they have fully understood your complaint and the steps required to resolve the issue.

Following investigation of the issues raised, the representative from the Service will provide you with a written response. In their response, the Service representative will make recommendations or suggestions that they feel will help to 'put right' the issues that you have raised within your complaint.

We aim to resolve complaints with a single response but acknowledge that this is not always possible. Where this is the case, we encourage a continued dialogue and between the customer and Council until the issue is resolved to a satisfactory conclusion.

We will always aim to provide you with a response to your complaint within **10 working days** following allocation to the appropriate Manager, but the procedure allows a **maximum of 20 working days** for us to respond to you should we need the extra time. We will always discuss with you if we need a little longer to ensure everything has been investigated properly.

If you are unhappy with a 'delayed' response or do not agree to an extension of the timescales, then you may request to escalate your complaint to the next stage. However, please anticipate that we may still require a response to be made to you at stage one before we instruct an independent investigation.

Once you have received our reply then you have **20 working days** in which to decide whether to accept or reject the proposed actions to resolve your complaint. If you accept the decision and proposed actions, the complaint will be closed on our system.

If you are still not happy with the outcome of your complaint, you may request a Stage 2 investigation of your complaint.

Stage 2: Formal investigation

Stage 2 of the process will see a formal investigation take place and an independent investigating officer (IO) and an independent person (IP) will be appointed to undertake the investigation. An independent investigator may be another Manager from within the Council who has not been directly involved in your case or someone from outside of the Council who is identified by the Complaints and Compliments Manager as having reasonable experience to undertake an investigation of the complaint.

The Investigating Officer will have received training in the investigation of complaints and will carry out a fair and objective investigation. The Investigating Officer and / or the Independent Person will meet with you and confirm the nature and details of your complaint and the outcome you are seeking. This is called a 'Record of Complaint'.

The timescales for stage 2 start from the point that you request your complaint is escalated. We will aim to complete the investigation and respond to you within **25 working days**.

If this is not possible, we will advise you when you can expect a response. In any event the overall timescale may only be extended to a **maximum of 65 working days**. Any delays to timescales will be discussed with you.

The Investigating Officer will investigate the points of complaint that you have agreed in your 'Record of Complaint' and will submit a report to the appropriate Senior Manager of the Service to consider and respond to. If any failings or mistakes have been identified, then recommendations for improvements will be made by the Investigating Officer in the report.

In their response the Senior Manager will offer an apology if mistakes have been found to have been made and will explain what actions the Council will take because of the findings and recommendations of the investigation.

You may also be offered the opportunity to meet with a Senior Manager to discuss the outcome of your complaint, in the presence of the Investigating Officer and the Complaints Manager as appropriate.

Stage 3: Panel Review Panel

If, following a full investigation at Stage 2, you are still unhappy with the findings and recommendations, you can request that your complaint is progressed to Stage 3. You should confirm your request to escalate your complaint by writing to the Complaints Team within 20 working days of the stage two response being made to you. You should explain the reasons why you remain unhappy and identify any aspects of the stage 2 response and / or report that you disagree with. At Stage 3 a Review Panel is formed to independently review your complaint. The Panel is not intended to consider new complaints but to review the initial complaint made and the process that has been followed to investigate your complaint at stage 2. A Stage 3 Panel Review Meeting must take place within **30 working days** from receiving your request to escalate your complaint.

The purpose of a Panel Review Meeting is to:

- listen to all parties
- consider the accuracy of the Stage 2 Investigation Report
- share any further information or advice that may help to resolve the complaint
- focus on achieving a resolution that everyone is happy with
- make recommendations and offer solutions

A Review Panel is made up of the following people:

- a chairperson (from outside the Council)
- two independent people (from outside the Council)
- an advisor to the Panel (this is usually a member of staff who can offer guidance to the meeting about local policy and procedures)
- **You** and/or the person making the complaint on your behalf are invited to attend the panel to talk about the complaint and what you feel should happen to put things right. Your attendance at the Panel is optional.
- the Stage 2 Investigating Officer and a member of the Complaints and Compliments Team may also be asked to attend

If you are unable to attend the Panel Meeting, then the Independent Chairperson will decide whether your attendance is essential to the progression of the panel and the panel may take place without you.

After the Panel Review Meeting, the Panel will meet in private to discuss the complaint and agree their findings and conclusions. The Chair of the Panel will then write to Director of the service within **5 working days** of the Panel Meeting to explain what they have agreed.

Having received the Panel's report, the relevant Director will consider the recommendations that have been made by the Panel and will write to you within **15 working days** to explain what the Council may do to put things right.

Early Referrals:

Where we are satisfied that a full and robust response has been provided at Stage 2 and the involvement of an independent panel is unlikely to achieve a different outcome i.e., where all the complaints have already been 'upheld', then we will discuss with you the option of referring the complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman sooner, negating the need for a Stage 3 Review Panel.

This decision will only be taken in discussion with the customer and at the discretion of the Ombudsman service.

What if you are still not happy?

If you are still unhappy following the completion of Stage 3, then please contact the Complaints and Compliments Team to discuss this with us. If the Council considers that we have offered the best response we can, and there is nothing further we can do to try and put things right for you, we will give you advice about how you can pursue the matter with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO):

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is independent of all government departments, councils, and politicians. It offers a service which is confidential and free of charge. The Ombudsman has the same powers as the High Court to obtain information and documents from the Council to support complaints investigations.

Any member of the public can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman regarding council services. However, the Ombudsman will normally only accept a complaint if the respective Council's complaints procedure has been correctly and fully followed.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's contact details are listed below:

- **Telephone:** 0300 061 0614
- **Website:** www.lgo.org.uk

Is there a time limit for making a complaint to the Council?

There is a one-year (12 month) time limit for making a complaint from when the events you are complaining about occurred. Our aim is to put things right as quickly as possible, and it can be hard for us to do this if a long time has passed, and services have changed, or staff have left the Council.

However, if it is still possible to consider the complaint or there is something that we can do to help put things right for you, we will give this consideration.

The Complaints Manager will consider each case on its own merits and will discuss the decision on whether to investigate a complaint outside the one-year time limit with the customer.

The following factors may be relevant in deciding if a complaint should be accepted outside the one-year time limit: -

- Is it a genuine issue of vulnerability?
- If an investigation were to be conducted, how much benefit could be gained from it?
- Is there likely to be sufficient access to information or individuals involved, at the time, to enable an effective and fair investigation to be carried out now?

Withdrawing a complaint:

You may withdraw or stop a complaint at any stage of the procedure, and you do not need to tell us why. However, please bear in mind that if you do want to pick up the complaint again then the above time limit may apply.

If you stop your complaint then the Council may still consider that it is important to investigate the issues that you have raised, so that we can continue to learn and improve, but we will not contact you unless you would like us to.

Suspending a complaint:

Your complaint may be suspended if there are concurrent proceedings underway, this may include, court proceedings, criminal investigations or safeguarding concerns. Once these other procedures have been concluded, you can contact the Complaints and Compliments Team to ask that your complaint is reconsidered. The Council cannot review decisions that have already been made by another organisation or body.

Putting things right (redress and compensation):

If we have made a mistake we will apologise and tell you what action, we will take to ensure the same situation does not arise again for you or future customers. The apology would be given by the Manager on behalf of the relevant service.

If a mistake has resulted in financial loss to you, the question of financial redress will be considered on an individual basis. As the County Council is publicly funded, we must make certain that it meets only justifiable and deserving claims. Any financial recompense offered as an outcome to a complaint

will be made consideration of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance on Remedies, a copy of which may be viewed on their website [here](#)

Insurance Claims:

If a third-party claim for damage or injury is made against the Council's Insurers, then there is no further redress through the complaint's procedure in relation to an unsuccessful claim. The claimant would need to seek independent legal advice. The complaints procedure does not award compensation.

Unacceptable and / or Unreasonable Customer Behaviour:

West Northants Council is committed to dealing with all complaints and requests for information fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who make them.

However, on a small number of occasions we will encounter individuals who demonstrate unreasonable behaviour and whose frequency of contact with us, or their behaviour, hinder our consideration of their and other people's complaints or requests.

We have a separate policy and procedure which sets out how we manage customers who may be unreasonable, persistent, or vexatious. A copy of the policy can be found on Complaints, Comments and Compliments page of our [website](#)

Multi-organisation complaints:

It is possible that your complaint may have elements which need to be answered by a few different people or services, for example if your case has had involvement from the Police or NHS, a private childcare organisation, or the probation service.

If your complaint requires a 'joint response' or needs to be directed to another organisation, then we will discuss this with you and make sure that the roles and responsibilities of all the parties are clear. Information relating to your complaint will not be shared with any other organisation without your consent. The response to multi-organisation complaints will be shared with all parties to inform learning and improvement.

Our Compliments Procedure:

You can make a compliment by using one of the methods outlined in section 5 of this policy. On receipt of any compliments, you make about the Council, the Complaints and Compliments Team will record these onto the customer feedback database. We will share the compliments with the Service and/or member of staff it relates to.

All compliments will be reported within internal management reports and included within Annual Reports and the information gathered from them will assist in improving our service to all our customers.

Our Comments Procedure

You can make a comment by using one of the methods outlined in section 5 of this policy.

On receipt of any comments you make about Council services, either positive or negative, the Complaints and Compliments Team will record these onto the customer feedback database. We will acknowledge receipt of your comments within **3 working days**. Unless otherwise agreed with you, we will not provide a full response to comments, other than acknowledgement of receipt of the comment.

Comments will be shared with the managers of the service they relate to so that they can act if necessary. We will use comments received to help us when we are reviewing our services.

Learning from customer feedback

We are committed to learning from all customer feedback we receive and will use the information to improve our services. The Complaints and Compliments Team will keep a record of all the complaints, comments and compliments that are made to the Council.

This information will be used to allow the Council to:

- understand what customers are complaining about
- understand why customers are complaining
- improve services through implementing learning from complaints
- understand what customers are complimenting the Council about

An annual report will be produced by the Council about the number, type, and outcome of complaints. This will also include reference to the learning from complaints, effectiveness of this procedure and adherence to timescales. The report will be published on the Council's website.

Safeguarding Children and Young People

The safeguarding of a vulnerable child or young person takes precedence over any complaint, as our priority must be to protect anyone at risk. If we believe that the complaint you have raised has identified a potentially abusive or neglectful situation, we will discuss this with you and ensure that the matter is reported immediately to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and, if required, the Police.

If it is necessary for the Council and its partners to investigate the situation your complaint may be put 'on hold' / 'suspended' until they have completed this work. Where possible we will continue to investigate any issues of your complaint that will not otherwise be addressed as part of the Child Protection procedures.

To report concerns relating to Children & Young People you can contact the Council by using one of the following methods:

Telephone: 0300 126 700 (Monday to Friday 8am-6pm)
01604 626 938 (outside above times)

Email: mash@nctrust.co.uk

Further information can be found by visiting the Child Protection pages of the Northamptonshire Childrens' Trust (NCT) website by clicking [here](#)

The Complaints and Compliments Team work very closely with the MASH to ensure that any complaints that suggest an act of abuse has occurred are reported and investigated under the correct procedure.

Complaints about the **process** of Child Protection Conferences (rather than the decision made) will be dealt with under this procedure.

Complaints that relate solely to section 47 Safeguarding investigations will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Corporate Complaints procedure.

Complaints relating to the Designated Officer (formerly Local Authority Designated Officer - LADO)

The local authority has a Designated Officer (DO) role (formerly known as LADO). DOs are involved in the management and oversight of individual cases of allegations of abuse made against people who work with children. Their role is to offer consultation, give advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations, liaise with the Police and other agencies, and oversee the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible and follow a thorough and fair process.

As with a complaint about any other officer employed by the Council, if you are unhappy with the way that the DO has managed a case involving allegations of abuse, you can make a complaint following the process set out above.

Any complaint relating to the DO is likely to be linked to other investigation processes - whether this is a safeguarding investigation, an HR investigation being carried out by the organisation involved, or possible criminal investigations. In such instances, we may continue with investigations into a complaint regarding the actions of the DO if it is reasonable to do so and will not interfere with other investigation processes. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Complaints about the DO will follow the three-stage process set out in this Procedure.

All access to the investigation by the DO would need to be facilitated through a subject access request, this would be risk assessed to protect potential victims or media attention.

Confidentiality / Data Protection and Consent

All complaints are treated confidentially and only the Complaints and Compliments Team and the officer dealing with the complaint should know that it has been received. If for any reason it is necessary for us to inform another department or organisation about your complaint, we will discuss this with you first.

If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else or raising an issue which directly involves a customer who receives social care, then it may be necessary for us to seek consent from that person to ensure:

- they agree to a complaint being made
- they are happy for the Council, agency, or partner to correspond with you on their behalf
- where necessary, and in the interest of resolving their complaint, they are happy for their details to be shared with another agency or partner employed by the Council or Health Service

- If you are making a complaint on behalf of a child or young person then when appropriate we may need to discuss this with them, to ensure that they agree to the complaint being made and when necessary, they are happy for their information to be discussed

All aspects of this procedure meet the requirements of the legislation regarding Data Protection, Freedom of Information, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Any personal information obtained in relation to a complaint is only to be used for that purpose.

Details about how you may obtain information that the Council holds about you may be found on our website [here](#) OR by E-mailing: dpo@nctrust.co.uk

Equality and Diversity:

The Council is committed to delivering services and applying policies equally and fairly. We will not discriminate against you because of your age, disability, gender reassignment status, marital status, religion or belief, race or ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation or because you are pregnant or have recently had a baby.

This applies just as much during the complaints procedure as it does during the delivery of services.

We may ask you equality monitoring questions as part of recording the details of your complaint on our database. This is only used to help us monitor access to our complaint's procedure. Responses to the questions are voluntary and you can choose to answer some but not all the questions if you would like. If you choose not to answer the questions, this will not affect the way your complaint is dealt with.

5.0 Glossary of terms

This section gives definitions to any words / acronyms that require explanation:

Term	Definition
WNC	West Northants Council
NCT	Northamptonshire Childrens Trust
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
NSCP	Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership
LGSCO	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
IO	Independent Investigating Officer
IP	Independent Person
DO	Designated Officer
DPO	Data Protection Officer
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation

Appendix A: Flow diagram of Children and Young People's complaint process:

Informal process

On the spot resolution

If you inform us that you have an issue we will try and resolve the problem within 2 working days. We will do this by:

- confirming with you what the issue is and the outcome you would like
- investigating the issue and trying to resolve it
- checking that you are happy with the resolution.

Formal process

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

A Team Manager, or senior member of staff on their behalf, will be assigned to look at your complaint. They should:

- contact you to confirm and fully understand your complaint
- look into your complaint and send you a response within 10 working days – if they need more time, they will discuss this with you and try to resolve the issue within a total of 20 days

Stage 2 – Formal investigation

If you are unhappy with our response at Stage 1:

- we will offer you the option to meet with a Senior Manager and a Complaints Officer to discuss how best we can resolve your outstanding complaints
- if no resolution is reached during this meeting, or you do not wish to meet with us, an independent investigator will be assigned to carry out a full review of the original complaint, supported by an independent person from outside of the Authority
- an investigation will be undertaken, and a response sent to you within 25 working days. If we need longer, we will discuss this with you
- once the investigator's report is received, a senior manager will consider the findings and recommendations and write to you to inform you of what we will be doing to remedy any failings

Stage 3 – Panel Review Meeting

If you are unhappy with our response at Stage 2 or the actions, we have taken to remedy the findings:

- you can request a review of the investigation
- a Review Panel, made up of people independent to the Council, will be formed to independently review the complaint
- following the meeting, the Panel will meet to agree findings and conclusions and inform both you and the Council in 5 working days.
- The Director of the Children's Trust will then be asked to respond to you to confirm the actions to be taken within 15 working days

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

If all stages of our complaint's procedure have been exhausted and you are still not happy with our response, you can ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to carry out a review. You can approach the Ombudsman at any stage of the process; however, they may advise that they expect the Authority to have first exhausted all stages of the complaints process.

Appendix B: Services/ areas not covered by this procedure

The following Council services and areas are not covered by this procedure.

Schools:

- **Parents'/carers' complaints about schools:**

Each school is required to have its own complaints procedure, such complaints should be directed to the Head of the School or the Chair of its Governing Body.

- **Admission to schools:**

Visit the School Admissions section of our website which gives details of how to appeal if you are not satisfied with the place allocated to your child [School Admissions Page](#)

- **Exclusion from school:**

For more information go to our website [Attendance and Behaviour Support](#)

- **Special Educational Provision:** Please visit the Special Educational Needs and Disability Support pages of our website [Special Education Needs and Disabilities Support](#)

- Religious education and collective worship

- National Curriculum issues

Other West Northants Council provided services

Please refer to our [Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy](#)

Complaints about the conduct of contracted services employees:

Complaints relating to these services and / or their employees should in the first instance be directed to the relevant company/organisation to afford them an opportunity to put things right.

West Northants Council has a responsibility as a contractor of services to ensure that they are fit for purpose and are meeting the needs of our customers.

Any complaints shared with us relating to a contracted service will be shared with the Council's Commissioning Team. If you remain dissatisfied with the response that you received from a contracted provider of the Council, then please discuss this with the Complaints Team.

Other

Issues that should be dealt with by other proceedings including:

- Court Proceedings
- Criminal Proceedings
- Disciplinary Proceedings
- Grievance Proceedings
- Tribunals

Appendix B

Adult Social Care Complaints Process

Purpose:

This appendix explains the way in which comments, compliments, and complaints made about Northamptonshire Adult Social Care services will be addressed under The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and The Care Act 2014.

Complaints process for Adult Social Care

Once we have received the complaint, the service's Complaints Manager will contact you to discuss your complaint and clarify the feedback you wish to make and any outcome you are seeking.

We will then take appropriate steps to try and resolve any issues you are experiencing as soon as possible. This may result in Adult Social Care working with you until a satisfactory resolution is reached. You may receive formal correspondence from us outlining the steps we have taken, potential resolutions or points of clarity. We would normally expect this step within the process to be 20 working days.

If a resolution cannot be reached or you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you can ask for it to be reviewed. The complaint will be investigated by a different manager and a final response given.

The timescale for responding to an escalated resolution Adult Social Care complaints is 12 weeks, however Adult Social Care will endeavour to respond to a complaint in a much shorter timeframe wherever possible. If a complaint is complex, it may take longer (up to 6 months) to investigate and if so, you will be updated with a revised response date.

What you can do if you remain unhappy at the end of this process

Once you have received the result of our investigation into your complaint, you may feel that we have not sorted things out in the way you expected, or you may disagree with our findings.

The next thing you can do is to make a complaint to the **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman**.

Contact details for the are shown below:

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

Tel: 0300 061 0614

visit <https://www.lgo.org.uk/> for more information

Opening hours: Monday to Friday - 10am to 4pm (except public holidays)

The arrangements detailed in this appendix apply to all customers who meet the definitions below and is intended to support the principles of the main Compliments, Comments and Complaints procedure.

The services to which these arrangements apply are social care services to:

- People aged 65 and over
- adults with a physical disability
- adults with a learning disability
- adults with mental health problems
- Other vulnerable adults eligible for support under the Care Act 2014.

If the complaint is about a proposed change to a care plan, a placement or a service, we will discuss with you whether the matter would be better treated as an appeal. In exceptional circumstances a decision may need to be deferred (frozen) until the complaint or appeal has been heard. Consideration by a Senior

Manager from Adult Services in consultation with the Adult Social Care Complaints Officer will always be given to deferring a decision that will have a significant effect upon the individual's care. Your right to make a complaint should not impact on the care being provided.

A complaint can be made by:

- A person who receives or has received services from Adult Social Services
- A person who is affected, or likely to be affected by the action, omission or decision of Adult Social Services
- A representative of a person who has died or a person who is unable to make the complaint themselves due to physical incapacity or lack of capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005
- A representative of a person who has requested that the representative act on their behalf
- or on behalf of someone to whom the Council may have the duty or power to provide a service

Best Interests and Consent

Where a representative makes a complaint on behalf of a customer, the Council must be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the complaint to be made by the representative and that the appropriate consent is given by the customer, whenever this is possible.

It may be necessary for us to ask for the 'service user' to provide written consent to allow us to access their records or share the details of a complaints with one of our partners / contracted care providers to ensure the matter is fully addressed.

Where a person is unable to consent to a complaint being raised on their behalf, then a decision will be made as to whether that complaint is being made in their 'best interests' and the impact that any findings or outcomes to the complaint may have on that individual.

Any decision that a complainant is not a qualifying complainant will be made by the Complaints Team, in consultation with the appropriate Senior Manager and the complainant will be informed of the reasons in writing.