



Solihull Council Corporate Complaints and Customer Feedback Policy and Guidance

Version 2

Version Control

Version Number	Description
0.1	Submitted to Customer Services DLT for review 14/12/2011
0.2	Updated with comments from DLT and input from member of the public
0.3	Submitted to OLT for comment 19/12/2011
0.4	Updated with co-ordinators comments 20/01/2012
0.5	Submitted to OLT final 13/02/2012
0.6	Submitted to CLT 14/02/2012
0.7	Submitted to OSMB 05/03/2012
0.8	Updated with comments from CLT
0.9	Updated with comments from colleagues
0.10	Updated with guidance on learning
0.11	Appendices B and C written and attached
0.12	Changes reviewed and accepted
0.13	Updated as per guidance from the LGO
0.14	Proof read for final draft
0.15	Feedback from FTA Steering Group
1.0	Final version approved by CLT on (to be added)
2.0	CLT feedback amendments.
3.0	Change to stage two time scale

Policy Statement

We are committed to providing the best service we can to our customers. We want to be told if there has been a problem with a service we have provided or when a customer is very happy with something we have done. Complaints, compliments and comments are valuable feedback. It gives us a chance to learn and most importantly a chance to improve services. To ensure we listen and improve we have a two stage Corporate Complaints and Customer Feedback process.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all our employees including those on temporary or fixed contract. It is intended for publication. Guidance and a complaints leaflet will be available for customers on the web (link updated when final policy agreed)

It does not apply to.

- Schools (which are covered by a separate policy)
- Complaints about Social Care matters which are dealt with under Statutory Legislation.
- Internal complaints about services or other employees.

Definition

The area of difficulty in dealing with complaints is actually defining a complaint. If we do not have a shared understanding across the organisation of what a complaint is, we run the risk of treating customers in an inconsistent way. For clarity in Solihull, the definition of a complaint is:

Adverse comments about services provided, or not provided by this Council. It is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standards of service, action or lack of action, decisions taken by the Council, or the way in which our employees/contractors do their job.

In everyday terms this means that a complaint can be made where it refers to:

- Dissatisfaction in the way we have delivered or have failed to deliver a service
- Dissatisfaction with the way we apply policies, decisions or procedures
- Refusal to answer reasonable questions or misleading or unsuitable advice.
- Impoliteness, rudeness, unfairness, bias or prejudice.
- An inappropriate use of personal information.

The Complaint Procedure

Responsibilities

We all should take pride in what we do and champion the concerns of our community. This responsibility includes listening to, recording and acting on complaints in order to help improve services.

We will treat all customers with respect, dignity and fairness ensuring we adhere to our policies and legal obligations in terms of customers' circumstances and protective characteristics. To ensure that the policy is applied fairly sample monitoring will be undertaken and reported to the Corporate Equality and Diversity Group as required.

All staff must:

- Be aware of the Corporate Complaints and Customer Feedback Policy.
- Assist customers who wish to make a complaint, give feedback or make a compliment.
- Record customer complaints, comments in Oracle CRM or Intranet web form.
- Where necessary, pass complaints to the relevant service area as quickly as possible.
- Proactively seek learning from customer feedback.

However, some people have additional responsibilities in relation to complaints and compliments.

Corporate Leadership Team will:

- Review monitoring reports
- Agree corporate action where appropriate in light of customer feedback

Heads of Service must:

- Ensure that all staff are aware of the Corporate Complaints and Feedback Policy and their relevant roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that their service area has resources allocated, and roles defined so that it can fully implement the Council's Corporate Complaints and Feedback Policy.
- Delegate the role of complaint co-ordinator to appropriate individual(s) and ensure training/support is made available when required.
- Support the Complaint Coordinator and enable them to fulfil the requirements of this Policy.
- Take full ownership for the co-ordination and resolution of complaints within the responsibilities of this Policy.
- Review and authorise any request to utilise the 30 day maximum timescale for complex complaints.
- Ensure where appropriate that all Directors for service area complaints are made aware of any complex and or escalated complaints.
- Where a complaint progresses to stage 2 check and review that the complaints process has been followed and all reasonable steps have been taken to try and resolve the complaint. The Head of Service can ask this review to be conducted by another Head of Service if deemed appropriate.
- If the Head of Service has been involved with the dealing of the complaint at stage one of the process they must ensure that a Head of Service from another service area will review the complaint at Stage 2.
- Determine whether to treat a complaint as persistent or unreasonable (see Appendix A for details of how to handle these types of complaints).

Complaint Co-ordinators will:

- Monitor Oracle CRM Notifications and emails on a daily basis for complaints.
- Determine the complexity of the complaint and determine the amount of time it will need to be dealt with in conjunction with the Head of Service if required.
- Ensure the Head of Service is advised of all complaints and how they are to be dealt with.
- Allocate an investigator from their service area for each complaint without delay.
- Ensure all investigators clarify complaints and their resolution with the customer.
- Ensure all investigators are aware of the complaints procedure and timescales required.
- Ensure that all complaints are investigated and Oracle CRM is updated to reflect the activities and outcomes associated with the investigation details. Record learning once the complaint has been dealt with.
- Co-ordinate the response for complaints that cover two or more service areas.
- Ensure that any complaint received in error is sent to the correct service area without delay. Co-ordinators will be provided with an up to date list of co-ordinators via the Intranet [Solnet - Corporate Complaints and Compliments](#)
- Where necessary and access to CRM is not available to the allocated investigator the Complaint Co-ordinator should attach any documents and record any learning to the complaint on their behalf.
- Bring to the attention of the Head of Service for review and final response all complaints escalated to stage 2.
- Review all learning and follow up action points to ensure improvements/changes have been acted upon.

Co-ordinators must also:

- Regularly monitor and review the Service Area's handling of complaints and provide reports to Heads of Service or Service Managers as they require. Reports will be made available to co-ordinators via the Complaints Team.
- Report learning and improvements made in response to customer complaints and feedback.
- Ensure identified learning is implemented and reported.
- Performance Information regarding the handling of complaints will be available

Investigators will:

- Work within the timescales for resolving complaints.
- Make initial contact with the customer (using the customers preferred method of contact) within the set timescales (please refer to Timescale table on page 13).
- Where the complaint is made by an advocate or on behalf of the customer, confirm that the customer is happy to proceed.
- Review any points raised within the complaint with the customer and agree to respond fully at stage 1.
- Agree with the customer, where a complaint may be complex or cover an investigation involving a long period of time, to utilise the 30 day investigation time or give an estimated time scale for the complaint to be answered in. This must be agreed with the Head of Service.
- Keep accurate records to show if there is a delay, the reason, and how the customer has been told of this delay.
- Prepare response for all complaints and respond using the contact method requested by the customer including the closing template required for all corporate complaints.
- Record any learning from complaints investigations on CRM and attach any written communication or where there is no CRM access return to the co-ordinator to do so.

Role of the Ombudsman

Customers who are not happy with the outcome or response to a complaint and have been through the corporate complaints process will be advised they may ask for the complaint to be reviewed by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The LGO will consider the complaint in regard to maladministration or service failure and injustice. Examples of what this can include is;

- Delay,
- Incorrect action or failure to take any action,
- Failure to follow procedures or the law,
- Failure to provide information,
- Inadequate record-keeping,
- Failure to investigate,
- Failure to reply,
- Misleading or inaccurate statements,
- Inadequate liaison,
- Inadequate consultation,
- Broken promises.

For more information regarding the role of the LGO please go to <http://www.lgo.org.uk/> .

Occasionally you may feel that it is impossible to resolve a complaint because of the unreasonable or persistent actions of the customer. In this is the case, please refer to Appendix A for details of how to manage this type of complaint.

Guidance for recording a complaint

Complaints can be received in a variety of ways; by letter, fax, email, telephone and or in person. In all cases the complaint must be formally logged on the Council's Customer Relationship Management system, Oracle CRM. Training will need to be completed by all users before access is given. (To request access and training please contact connectss@solihull.gov.uk or log an IT help desk call).

Where a person makes contact but wishes to remain anonymous a complaint cannot be logged as there is no-one for an investigating officer to contact for more information and no-one to respond to. However the information being provided may enable us to learn and improve so this contact should be recorded on CRM as a 'comment' rather than a 'complaint'.

Where you do not have access to CRM please follow this guidance

- Any member of staff with access to the Intranet will be able to open up the Council's complaints and compliments web form [Solnet - Corporate Complaints and Compliments](#)
- When this form has been completed and submitted this results in the complaint or compliment being logged on Oracle CRM. A unique reference number will then be allocated.
- This reference number stays the same throughout the length of the time the complaint is being looked into. The reference number must be provided to the customer. This is important as a customer may decide to contact the Council at some point seeking an update on the complaint.
- The co-ordinator will receive the complaint as a notification within Oracle. If required the notification can also be received via email. The notification contains all of the information relating to the complaint to enable an investigation to be undertaken. All compliments will be received in the same way.

Guidance for investigating a complaint

All officers responsible for investigating a complaint must follow this procedure and be aware of their responsibilities.

Clarifying the complaint

In order to properly deal with a complaint it is essential that you are very clear about the precise nature of the complaint and exactly what resolution the customer is expecting so that time and effort are not spent resolving the wrong issues. It also helpful in managing customers' expectations of what can and cannot realistically be achieved.

Often a complaint and expected resolution will be self-explanatory, for instance a complaint about a delay to delivering a service may have an obvious resolution, however, where there is any doubt you should always clarify with the customer the precise complaint and resolutions they are expecting.

Category of complaint

It is important that we understand why complaints are made. To enable us to do this we have categorised the types of complaints. These are;

- Dissatisfaction in service delivery

- Dissatisfaction with the way we apply policy, a decision or a procedure
- Refusal to answer reasonable questions, misleading or unsuitable advice
- Impoliteness, rudeness, unfairness, bias or prejudice
- Inappropriate use of personal information.

These categories will be recorded on CRM. This information will then form part of performance information that will be shared with the organisation. For examples of these please see Appendix B.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

The customer must be made aware that in order to investigate their complaint you may need to share their personal details with other members of staff or perhaps external organisations. Any sharing must be on a need to know basis only.

Likewise, you must therefore ensure that information which could be described as personal, private or confidential is NOT disclosed to the customer or any third party. For more information regarding data protection and confidentiality go to <http://solnet/performance/Dataprotection/datamain.htm>

Acknowledging the Complaint

Complaints must be acknowledged within 5 working days from first report. The notification from Oracle CRM will include details of how the customer wishes to be contacted so contact should be made via the customer's preferred method. This contact and acknowledgement must be recorded on Oracle CRM.

When acknowledging customer complaints please always:

- Confirm receipt of the complaint.
- Gather any further details so that you fully understand what the complaint is about.
- Agree the details of the complaint and discuss what resolution is expected.
- Ensure that the customer has the complaint reference number and your name.

Recording Progress and Actions

It is essential that key information is captured before any investigation is resolved on CRM, including the specific service to which the complaint related to, this is to enable more accurate monitoring and learning.

When resolving complaints you must always;

- Use Oracle CRM to record key actions and progress during the investigation of the complaint.
- Attach any letters, photographs or other electronic files to provide a complete record of all actions taken.
- Where an investigator does not have access to Oracle all notes and actions should be passed to the co-ordinator who will complete this action on CRM.
- On completion of the investigation and having captured learning the Oracle notification can be resolved. The outcome of the complaint must be shared with the customer via their preferred method of contact and this recorded in Oracle CRM.

Guidance about how to identify and implement learning

Learning will be categorised into the following areas.

- Improved service delivery process

- Customer comments included in review of how we apply policies, decisions and procedures.
- Improvements in communication.
- Review behaviours, training development for individuals or a team.
- Review of confidentiality procedures. These should be carried out in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

These broad categories will be recorded on CRM to help us understand what we have learnt as a result of complaints. For an example of the type of learning that needs to be recorded please see Appendix C.

Stage Two Complaints

If a customer is not satisfied with the response received at stage one, a request can be made to progress their complaint to the second stage of the process. Reasons to progress to the second stage would be;

- The response did not answer all of the points raised
- and/or they are not happy with the resolution

The review of the complaint at stage 2 should be co-ordinated by or on behalf of the Head of Service and a final response sent to the customer. The response must be reviewed by the Head of Service who must ensure that the complaints process has been followed and all of the customers concerns responded to.

As part of the review the following should be considered:

- Has the customer given clear reasons why they remain dissatisfied? If not please contact the customer to seek further clarification before the review takes place.
- Have any new complaints been included within the request to progress the complaint to the final stage. If yes, decide if these should be dealt with as new complaint(s) or would benefit the customer to include these within the review.
- Do you know what the customer is seeking as an outcome to resolve their complaint? If not seek clarification.
- Looking at the original complaint was it clearly understood and summarised correctly
- Reviewing the response that was sent did it answer all complaints and points raised by the customer?
- Did the response include reference to and respond to any desired outcomes that were requested by the customer?
- Was the complaint investigated appropriately?
- Were time scales adhered to? If there were delays was the customer informed of this.
- Do you need to comment or consider about any recommendations or points of learning that have been identified as a result of the complaint.
- If after an initial review has taken place there is no benefit to the customer to conduct a Stage 2 review the Head of Service must discuss this with the Corporate Complaints Team, prior to any decision being made. If a refusal to progress is made the customer must receive an explanation of the reasons why.

A review should take place and a response sent to the customer within ten working days. However where a complaint is more complex or further advice is needed to be sought this can be extended to twenty working days.

A Stage 2 response should always include advice that this is the final stage of the complaints process and the next step for the customer if they remain dissatisfied is for them to contact the Local Government Ombudsman service contact details for which must be also included (see page 7)

Guidance for complaints made about the conduct of a member of staff.

Sometimes we investigate complaints which implicate members of staff or we receive complaints directly about members of staff. In either case this can lead to or involve HR, Audit or Information Security Policies. These policies exist to protect the rights of staff and the Council and as such it is important that appropriate Policies and Guidance are followed as soon as it is felt that there may be an internal matter that needs to be examined.

If this situation arises the Complaint Co-ordinator, Investigating Officer or affected member(s) of staff must bring this to the attention of the Head of Service without delay.

The Head of Service will:

- Consult with the appropriate HR, Audit or Information Governance Officer and follow the relevant Policies and Guidance.
- Decide how best to resolve any outstanding complaints whilst internal enquiries are taking place.
- Inform the customer of any changes to the planned timeframes for investigation of their complaint and the reason if appropriate

Complaints about External Service Providers or contractors

It is expected that the relevant organisation will be made aware of the complaint, they should provide an explanation to the customer and look to put things right. Staff within the relevant service areas have a dual responsibility in these circumstances: supporting the complainant in making their concerns known to the service provider, and monitoring the complaint to ensure the customer receives a satisfactory response

Advocacy & Support

Customers may find it difficult to talk about their concerns. They may:

- be worried that complaining will lead to a reduction in service or some form of 'repercussion'
- find it difficult to speak out because of their disability, their communication skills, or their racial, cultural or religious background.

Some people may need support and advice and practical help from someone they trust either within or outside the Council to pursue their complaint.

Those people who give help in writing down the complaint must ensure that it accurately reflects what the complainant wishes to say and ask the complainant to sign it to confirm it accurately reflects their views. If a member of staff is asked to help this should not be anyone directly associated with the complaint.

If a customer is unable to read or write a taped record of their complaint is acceptable.

It will normally be the responsibility of the person responding to the complaint to make any necessary arrangements to provide advocacy, interpretation, translation, signing or other necessary support services.

If there is a complaint regarding prejudices please refer to Council's Code of Employee Conduct and also contact the Equality and Diversity Team. Consider appointing an investigating officer that is of an equivalent background when investigating or responding to the complaint.

Who can be an advocate?

An advocate can be a family member, a friend, a professional who already supports the customer or an advocacy service. Contact details for advocacy services are below.

Solihull Mind

14/16 Faulkner Road
Solihull
West Midlands
B92 8SY

Telephone: 0121 742 4941/743 4237

Fax: 0121 742 9817

Email: contact@solihullmind.org.uk

National Youth Advisory Service

Telephone: 0151 342 7852
Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm
Or call freephone 0800 616 101
Monday - Friday 3.30pm - 9.30pm
Saturday - Sunday 2pm - 8pm
Fax: 0151 342 3174
Email: help@nyas.net

Timescales for Acknowledging and Responding to Complaints

<p>Stage 1 Determine complexity</p> <p>Determine the complexity of the complaint and the required timescales for investigation. A complaint may be considered complex due to the length of time the incident is relating to or requires investigation across a number of service areas and /or the impact on the customer.</p> <p>Acknowledge Complaint</p> <p>There must be an acknowledgement of the complaint with the customer. The investigator must confirm their name and contact details for the complaint investigation.</p>	<p>Acknowledgement within the first 5 working days of complaint reported</p> <p>Working days is defined as Monday to Friday)</p>
<p>Stage 1 Investigation and outcome (low complexity)</p> <p>If the complaint is of low complexity the complaint must be responded to within a maximum 20 days from the first date it was reported. It is expected that most complaints will be of this level of complexity.</p> <p>Once you (the investigator) are clear about the elements of the complaint that need investigating and the customer's expected resolution you have 20 working days from the first date reported in which to investigate and fully respond to the complaint.</p> <p>Oracle CRM must be updated to show the response and any communication. A response should always include advising the customer of the next stage of the policy if they are not satisfied and details of the Local Government Ombudsman service (see page 7).</p>	<p>Complaints should be dealt with as quickly as possible to ensure a swift resolution to a complaint. It is expected that will usually take 10 days however a response may take up to a maximum 20 working days from the first day of being reported</p>
<p>Stage 1 Investigation and outcome (Medium to high complexity)</p> <p>If the complaint is more complex and more time is required to fully investigate any extension in the time scales must be negotiated with the customer and with the agreement of your Head of Service. The complaint must also be updated on Oracle CRM to display the extension and the reason.</p> <p>A response should always include the stage 2 process and details of the Local Government Ombudsman service (see page 7).</p> <p>All complaints must be where possible completed in no longer than 30days from first report. If there is a need for extensions to this time scale this must be agreed with the customer and Head of Service. Reasons for the extension must be documented.</p>	<p>A complaint even though complex should be dealt with as swiftly as possible. Response within a maximum of 30 working days from the first day of being reported</p> <p>This is in agreement with Head of Service and the customer</p>
<p>Escalated Stage 2 Complaint</p> <p>If the customer is not satisfied that the investigator's response has answered all of the points raised and/or they are not happy with the resolution they can request to proceed to stage 2 of the policy.</p> <p>The review of the complaint at stage 2 should be co-ordinated by or on behalf of the Head of Service and a final response sent to the customer. The response must be reviewed by the Head of Service to ensure our process has been followed.</p> <p>A response should always include advice this is the final stage of the complaints process and details of the Local Government Ombudsman service included (see page 7)</p>	<p>Response within 10 working days. If a complaint is more complex or further information is required for a review to take place this can be extended to twenty working days, This response should come from the Head of Service</p>

Compliments and Customer Feedback

Compliments are positive comments about the services provided by or on behalf of the Council. A system for registering all compliments is very important. They provide hard evidence of the high quality services we provide, act as recognition for good practice, enable learning through sharing best practice and record and recognise professional conduct in staff. In everyday terms this means that a compliment can be made where it refers to:

- Named employee.
- High standard of service exceeded expectation.
- Improvement to services through change or decision.
- Other.

Compliments can be received in a variety of ways: by letter, fax, email and telephone or in person;

- When they are received, they need to be logged directly on to Oracle CRM or on the compliment web form which anyone with access to the Council's Intranet site can access. [Solnet - Corporate Complaints and Compliments](#)
- All Compliments will be recorded on Oracle CRM the Council's central customer database and where possible examples of good practice will be shared.
- All compliments once submitted by web form or directly on to CRM will be recorded and sent to co-ordinators or named officers for recognition and review.
- Compliments will also be reported as part of the quarterly and half year monitoring report.

Customer Feedback Comments

Sometimes our customers want to share their views with us but do not want to make a formal complaint or register a compliment. Comments would be;

- Suggestions for improvement
- Feedback on communication
- Acknowledging well planned change
- Comments about change implementation with suggestions.

Comments are gathered through our website, via the telephone or by completing the corporate complaints, compliments and comments form. Comments are recorded via CRM and shared with the service area that the comment relates to.

Customer Satisfaction

So that we have a good understanding of how our complaints policy is working, we will seek comments from our customers who have used the complaints process. A 'random selection' of customers will receive a satisfaction questionnaire six weeks after their complaint has been concluded.

We will seek comments and suggestions on how we can improve the way we handle complaints.

We will carry out appropriate equality monitoring as part of the customer satisfaction process.

Appendix A – Dealing with Persistent or Unreasonable Customers when dealing with Complaints

This guidance primarily has been produced to give guidance on how to deal with persistent or unreasonable customers when dealing with complaints. However, this can be used as a guidance document when dealing with persistent or unreasonable customers in other situations.

Why do we need guidance for dealing with Persistent or Unreasonable Customers?

There are times when the behaviour of customers may be considered as persistent or unreasonable.

By adopting the following guidance we can ensure that those people viewed as persistent or unreasonable customers are responded to fairly and consistently.

The decision to apply this guidance should only be taken as a last resort when all other avenues of resolution have failed.

What do we mean by 'Persistent' or 'Unreasonable' behaviour

Because a customer is constantly chasing up the progress of their complaint or scrutinising responses in detail and perhaps asking for clarification here and there, this does not make them a persistent or an unreasonable complainant. There are however times when customer behaviour should be classed as persistent or unreasonable such as;

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaint investigation process.
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint procedure.
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with our complaint procedure or with good practice.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Denying or changing statements made at an earlier stage.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a late stage.
- Raising numerous, detailed but unimportant questions; insisting that they are answered.
- Covertly recording meetings and conversations.
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others.
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with a variety of other staff or organisations.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy telephone calls, emails to numerous council staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses. Such criteria are subjective and it is important to consider each situation separately. Advice should always be sought from the Corporate Complaints Team when considering these criteria.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations that the customer insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.
- Unreasonable requests to speak to Senior Managers on numerous occasions.

Considerations Prior to taking action

Prior to action being taken the following should be considered:

If we think the complaint has been concluded and are considering ending all communication with the customer, firstly consider the option of referring the customer to the Local Government Ombudsman.

If the customer's complaint is still under consideration steps must be taken to try and manage the customer's behaviour. We must deal with the complaint until its conclusion.

If a decision is made to restrict a person's access to an employee or to the Local Authority the following must be satisfied;

- The complaint is being or has been investigated properly.
- That decisions that have been reached about a complaint are correct.
- Communication with the customer has been adequate.
- The customer is not providing any new information that might affect the view or outcome of the complaint.
- That there is a full record of the history of complaint and how it has been handled.

You should also consider the customer's personal circumstances;

- Are you aware of any care packages in place which would indicate the person is vulnerable or give an explanation for the unreasonable behaviour?
- Are there equality issues to consider?
- Consider any other family or personal circumstances which would contribute to the behaviour.

When making the decision that a person is being persistent or behaving unreasonably, consider taking the following steps.

- Offering the customer a meeting to explore how the complaint can be resolved.
- Share the persistent policy with the customer and give a warning that if a person's behaviour continues that restrictions may be applied.
- Set up a cross strategy meeting to agree a cross departmental approach.
- Nominate one officer to deal with the customer.
- Suggest to the customer that an advocate assists with the complaint.

Consideration of other corporate policies

When making a decision to implement the guidance this must be done in conjunction with other corporate policies such as;

- Equality and Diversity.
- Health and Safety.
- Risk Management.
- Guidance to Council staff on the Data Protection Act.
- Corporate Warning Marker Policy - consideration of whether there is a need to share information about potential abusive customers across the organisation. If appropriate this information can be recorded on our corporate register in accordance with the Warning Marker Policy.
- Other relevant legislation

Risk Assessments

If a customer is to be classified as persistent a risk assessment must be conducted by the appropriate manager on how to deliver services to the customer. You can seek advice about this from our Health and Safety Team.

Safety of Staff

When dealing with persistent or unreasonable customers consider how staff can be supported. When delivering a service consider:

- Not meeting the customer alone.
- Arrange meetings to take place in a safe/official place.
- Consider additional training for staff such as dealing with abusive phone calls, stress policy etc.

Who can decide to take Action?

Any action that is taken should be proportionate and must be with the agreement of the Head of Service.

Options for taking Action

The main focus should be how a customer's complaint can be concluded as quickly as possible without further distractions.

Any action should not prevent the customer access to any other services. A person's circumstances should also be considered when deciding how to proceed.

Options to consider are;

- Place a limit on the amount of contact that is made by the customer.
- Give a specific time frame when calls can be made.
- Limit the complainant's contact to one medium such as letter, email or telephone.
- Nominate a designated member of staff as the contact.
- Refuse to register and process further complaints about the same matter and advise the customer of the reason why.
- If further correspondence is received the customer can be advised that the comments will be placed on file but will not be acted upon.

How to deal with complaints that contain offensive or unacceptable language.

We do not expect staff to tolerate behaviour from customers which is unacceptable, for example the use of abusive or offensive language. Before responding to the customer seek advice regarding how to deal with the complaint in terms of the unacceptable content and to establish if the complaint should be responded to. Contact the Equality and Diversity Team, the appropriate Head of Service the complaint relates to or the Corporate Complaints Team.

How to inform the complainant of the decision

If the decision is made to implement the policy you must write to the customer explaining why the decision has been made and enclose a copy of the policy. A copy of the letter should be attached to CRM by the relevant complaint co-ordinator. The letter must include the following;

- Why the decision has been taken.
- What this means to the customer when contacting the organisation.
- How long any restrictions will last.
- What the customer can do to challenge the decision.
- Explain how a customer can request assistance on other matters.
- The final letter should be attached to Oracle CRM.

You must keep adequate records to show:

- The history of the complaint so far. Any contact made and any correspondence that has been sent to the customer advising of the decision to apply the guidance. Or,
- When a decision is made not to apply the guidance when requested by a member of staff and the reasons why. Or,
- When a decision is made not to put further complaints made by the customer through the corporate complaints and customer feedback policy. Or,
- When the decision is taken not to respond to further correspondence that it is checked to ensure no new information has been included within it.

Future contact

When new complaints are received from the customer about new issues raised, these should be treated on their merits. You should consider whether any restrictions previously applied are still appropriate and necessary.

Customer Challenges

It may be difficult for a customer to accept the decision that has been made. If the customer is dissatisfied with the outcome, the customer should be directed to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Appendix B - Categories of Complaints

Complaints are invaluable feedback about our services and help us to improve. As well as learning from our complaints, it is important to understand what has prompted a customer to complain in the first instance. Complaints may fall into more than one category.

- Dissatisfaction in service delivery
- Dissatisfaction with the way we apply policy, a decision or a procedure
- Refusal to answer reasonable questions, misleading or unsuitable advice
- Inappropriate use of personal information.
- Impoliteness, rudeness, unfairness, bias or prejudice

The following examples are to clarify the above categories

Dissatisfaction with service delivery.

When a customer is asking for a service to be provided.

Customers will make complaints when requests for service are not acknowledged, there is a broken promise, an avoidable delay or a customer has had to make repeated contact to obtain a service from us.

An example of this would be:

A customer reports that their refuse collection has been missed. It is agreed that the waste collection crew will return to collect. This does not happen. The customer calls again to complain that the refuse has still not been collected. The customer makes a formal complaint.

Dissatisfaction with the way we apply policy, a decision or a procedure

When a decision is made on how a service will be delivered, we make a decision or how we follow a procedure can cause complaints.

When decisions are made to change a service it is important to understand that if the reasons for the change are poorly communicated customers will make complaints.

It is accepted that complaints about policy are difficult to address. However, a complaint can still be registered.

For example,

We may make the decision to change how we charge for a service. A customer may object to this change as the cost of the service will increase. If the customer feels that this is unfair or we have poorly communicated the reasons for the increase in charges a customer may wish to make a complaint about this.

Policies and procedures can be subject to interpretation. If a customer feels that the way we have made a decision is unfair or we have not interpreted a policy fairly a customer may wish to make a complaint about this. Usually complaints of this nature are about poor communication, or that a change in policy or procedure may have been caused by an avoidable delay.

Refusal to answer reasonable questions, misleading or unsuitable advice

Poor communication with our customers can lead to complaints. Usually complaints are made when customers feel they have not been listened to, receive a poor explanation or their enquiry has not been fully addressed.

An example would be a letter is received by a service area; the letter may include several questions. The service area fails to address all these. The customer asks for further clarification but this is not received. The customer then wishes to make a formal complaint about this.

Impoliteness, rudeness, unfairness, bias or prejudice

Complaints of this nature are made as a result of poor communication or as a result of a broken promise.

Complaints about a member of staff speaking to a customer in an inappropriate manner or the customer feeling that they have been treated in an unfair manner can be registered as a complaint.

Some examples of this are; a customer contacts us by telephone to make an enquiry. As a result of how the enquiry has been dealt with feels that they have not been listened to, or have been treated in a dismissive manner.

A member of staff meets with the customer on arrival it is clear that the member of staff is under the influence of alcohol.

A community feels that a decision we have made has not taken into account their needs when making the decision.

If there is a complaint regarding prejudice please refers to our guidance about a member of staffs conduct and also contact our Equalities and Diversity Team.

Inappropriate use of personal information

Under the Data Protection Act we have a legal duty to protect any personal information we collect from customers. We should not pass customers details to any third party or organisation unless we have sought the permission of the customer or the law/requires or permits us to do so.

An example of this type of complaint would be a customer is expecting to receive a response to a query that is private and confidential. The customer does not receive the letter and it is discovered that it has been sent to an incorrect address.

Any complaints received about a breach in confidentiality should also be highlighted to the Information Governance Team.

We sometimes receive complaints about how a request for information has been dealt with under the Data Protection Act or the Freedom of Information Act.

In these cases, the complaint will be registered and will be dealt with using the same process but dealt with by the Information Governance Team.

How to record a category of complaint

When complaints are registered the category of complaint will be registered on CRM. The complaint service request will retain this information.

Why it is important to record the category of complaint.

This information will be used corporately to understand our customers and the reasons why complaints are made. This will help us understand our customers better and the services that we provide.

Appendix C – Learning from Complaints

Learning from complaints is invaluable. It is important that we understand why a complaint has been made and what we can learn as a result of it. It is essential that we record what changes we have made and how we have improved our services.

Learning can be categorised into the following:

- Improved revised service delivery process
- Customer comments included in review of how we apply policies, decisions and procedures.
- Improvements in communication.
- Review behaviours developments for individuals or a team.
- Review of confidentiality procedures. These should be carried out in accordance with the Data Protections Act.

We want to record what we have learnt so we can share best practise with the whole of the organisation. This means we can then identify how we need to improve corporately and ensure our customers have the best customer experience possible.

When a complaint has been resolved the response, outcome and learning will be recorded using the categories above. As well as the category we want to know what improvement has been made. Please see the examples below that show what we mean by learning.

Improved revised service delivery process.

Complaints about service delivery could mean that a process or procedure that has not worked properly needs to be reviewed this could be a small change or a review of the whole procedure. Clearly the type of review required is dependant upon the complaint that has been received, this could include a review of our own processes or those of our partner organisations that deliver services on our behalf.

Customer comments included in review of how we apply policies, decisions and procedures

If a procedure has undergone a review, and complaints have been received as a result of this change; it is unlikely that a new process that is currently being embedded will undergo a further review at that time. However, feedback could be retained so when a planned review of the process/service takes place the learning received could be included.

Improvements in communication.

An example of learning could be that due to poor communication a customer misunderstood the level of service that could be provided. By reviewing contact letters, website information, how telephone calls are dealt with, the content of any information included in leaflets is reviewed, communication with our customers will be improved. Any of these examples could be recorded as learning.

Review behaviours, training development for individuals or a team

Where a complaint has been received about a member of staff or team, learning could be the training needs of an individual or team have been identified. A record should be kept of when training has taken place and the how the behaviour of the individual or team is to be monitored.

Review of confidentiality procedures. These should be carried out in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

As a result of a breach of confidentiality, the service area should review how the breach occurred, what was the consequence of the breach and considered any remedial action that is needed to be taken. Once the error has been identified learning could be the review of the process to ensure the breach will not happen again. A training issue could be identified for a team or a member of staff and recorded as learning.

Where will learning be recorded?

Learning points should be identified by anyone who has had an involvement of the complaint. The coordinator dealing with the complaint can record the category and any additional information about the complaint on CRM. A complaint can not be resolved until this information has been recorded upon the complaint service request.

Review of learning

Where actions have been identified as a result of learning, these must be reviewed and implemented. Heads of Service will be responsible for ensuring that this happens.