

Three Rivers District Council

Corporate Compliments & Complaints Policy

September 2022

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At Three Rivers District Council, we aim to provide high quality services to our customers. On occasions, however, things can go wrong. We want to know when something has gone wrong, so that we can put things right and learn from our mistakes.
- 1.2 The Council considers compliments, comments and complaints as opportunities for customers to provide valuable feedback, and for the Council to help improve our services.
- 1.3 This policy outlines the aims of the Council in dealing with complaints and sets out what our customers can expect when making a complaint regarding a Council service.

2. Aims of the policy

- 2.1 The aims of our compliments and complaints policy are:
 - To provide our customers and residents with a well-publicised and easily accessible method of expressing feedback about the way in which the Council provides its services.
 - To offer prompt action and a speedy resolution to problems.
 - To provide consistency of approach to all complaints throughout the Council's services.
 - To record, monitor and analyse compliments and complaints in order to systematically improve service performance.
 - To enable all Council employees to understand the importance of a speedy and effective response to complaints from customers.

3. What is a compliment?

- 3.1 The Council defines a compliment as positive customer feedback on the way a service has been delivered or the way a member of staff has conducted themselves.
- 3.2 Compliments are an important part of the way the Council monitors its performance and service delivery.
- 3.3 Compliments are recorded and shared with the relevant member of staff, Head of Service and Senior Leadership Team to encourage best practice across the organisation.

4. What is a complaint?

- 4.1 The Local Government Ombudsman defines a complaint as ***'an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.'***

4.2 The Council interprets this to be when:

- We have failed to do something we should have done
- We have done something we should not have done
- We provide a service but it is below a reasonable standard
- We take too long to do something
- We treat you unfairly
- Our staff or contractors have behaved inappropriately

5. What is not a complaint?

5.1 A complaint should not be confused with a request for service. For example:

- Reporting a missed bin is a service request and not a complaint

5.2 Where issues have a separate mechanism for a right of appeal, then this avenue should be pursued rather than using the complaints procedure. Examples of this are:

- Disputes over the issue of parking tickets are dealt with initially by the Council's parking contractor, Hertsmere Borough Council, and a right of appeal then exists to the National Parking Adjudication Service.
- Disputes over Housing Benefit claims can be dealt with by the Benefits Appeals Service.
- Disputes about Council Tax liability can be dealt with by the Hertfordshire Valuation Tribunal.

6. Before making a complaint

6.1 Before making a complaint, customers are encouraged to get in touch with the relevant service to let them know about their concerns. It may be a problem that can be resolved quickly without needing to use the complaints procedure. We would suggest you search our services list on our website to find the specific request form where appropriate. These can be accessed at www.threerivers.gov.uk

7. Making a complaint

7.1 The quickest and easiest way to make a complaint is by using the online complaints form on our website.

7.2 If access to our website is not possible, a complaint can be made in one of the following ways:

- By email
- By telephone
- In person in the Visitor Centre at Three Rivers House

- By letter

7.3 A complaint can be made by anyone who lives, works or travels in the Three Rivers area, and those that receive or are looking for a service from the Council.

7.4 We are unable to investigate a complaint if it is received more than 90 calendar days after the complainant is aware of the issue or incident(s) specified in the complaint. This is because it is very difficult to effectively investigate after a long period of time. If a complaint is received after this time we would not accept it unless there are exceptional mitigating circumstances.

8. Complaints Policy process

8.1 There are two stages to our complaints procedure. At both stages we will aim to acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days, and investigate and respond to your complaint within 10 working days. (N.B. if an email address is not provided, acknowledgement and response may fall outside these timescales)

8.2 When we acknowledge your complaint we will give you the contact details for the officer who is dealing with it.

8.3 There may be occasions when the above timescales are not able to be met due to the complexity of the complaint. In these cases we will acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days and advise when you can expect a full reply.

8.4 Most complaints will be responded to under Stage One of the procedure in the first instance, however the Corporate Complaints Officer or a member of the Senior Leadership Team may decide, in exceptional circumstances, the matter is appropriate to move directly to Stage Two and respond to it under Stage Two of the process.

9. Stage One - Departmental Level

9.1 The Head of Service of the department that you are dealing with will arrange for your complaint to be investigated by an appropriate manager or officer who will then respond to you directly. We expect to be able to resolve most of our complaints at this stage.

9.2 Whilst we are looking into your complaint, we will always consider any practical solutions that could provide a suitable remedy. It would be helpful, therefore, if you would let us know at the outset, what you think the Council should do to put things right.

10. Stage Two - Executive Level

10.1 If you are unhappy with the response that you have been provided with under Stage One of the procedure, you can request that the complaint

be reviewed again.

10.2 You must make this request within 30 calendar days of the date of the Stage One response. However if you have not responded within this timescale, the complaint will be closed and classified as resolved by the Council.

10.3 In your request for review you need to:

- Make it clear what aspects of the first response you were not satisfied with
- What outcome you would like

10.4 A member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team will review your complaint further and one of them will reply to you. The Senior Leadership Team consists of:

- Chief Executive
- Director of Community and Environment
- Director of Finance
- Executive Head of Services
- Solicitor to the Council

10.5 Once a response has been sent following the review at Stage Two, this marks the end of the Council's complaints procedure.

10.6 If you are still unhappy with the decision after the Stage Two review, then you may wish to refer your complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

11. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO)

11.1 The LGO is an independent body appointed by the Government to look into complaints against certain authorities.

11.2 The best way to make a complaint is via the LGO website - <https://www.lgo.org.uk/> - which has an online form.

11.3 For telephone help, you can call an LGO adviser, who will listen to you and say whether the LGO can consider your complaint.

11.4 You can call 0300 061 0614 between the hours of 10.00am - 4.00pm, Monday to Friday (except public holidays).

12. Complaints about Councillors

12.1 A complaint about an elected Three Rivers District Councillor should be directed to the Solicitor to the Council who is the Council's Monitoring Officer.

13. Vexatious and unreasonably persistent complaints

- 13.1 Where we consider a complaint to be vexatious or unreasonably persistent, we may, at any point in the process, refer it to the Vexatious and Unreasonably Persistent Complaints Policy, which will supersede the Corporate Compliments & Complaints Policy.
- 13.2 Full details of our Vexatious & Unreasonably Persistent Complaints Policy can be found on our website.

14. Anonymous complaints

- 14.1 We understand that complaining can be difficult. The Council is unable to investigate complaints if you do not provide us with a contact name and email address or postal address, or the complaint is anonymous. In these instances no response or any action will be taken.

15. Managing the procedure

- 15.1 The Council's Corporate Complaints Officer has overall responsibility for the policy on behalf of the Chief Executive. The Corporate Complaints Officer will monitor the level of complaints across the authority and report them to the Senior Leadership Team on a quarterly basis in order to improve our performance, identify trends, and learn from any mistakes. The Council's Corporate Complaints Officer is the Head of Customer Experience.
- 15.2 Every member of staff is responsible for being aware of what constitutes a complaint, and for logging the complaint in the first instance. This is to ensure that all complaints are registered and monitored.

16. Remedies

- 16.1 We aim to follow the Local Government Ombudsman's advice on remedies which states:

"The remedy needs to be appropriate to the injustice, and should as far as possible put the complainant in the position they would have been in but for the maladministration."

17. Follow up

- 17.1 After we have completed our investigation into your complaint, we may write to you and ask that you complete a satisfaction form to comment on how we handled your complaint. These satisfaction forms will help us to monitor how we are performing.

18. General

- 18.1 We understand that making a complaint can sometimes be a frustrating matter, however we would ask that you treat our staff with courtesy and

respect when we are processing your complaint. We will not tolerate any verbal or physical harassment of our staff, and anyone using threatening or abusive behaviour during the process, will have their complaint terminated immediately.

19. Other Help

19.1 You can contact your local Councillor at any stage of the complaints procedure. Contact details of Councillors are available on our [website](#).

19.2 You can also get free and impartial advice from [Citizen's Advice](#).

Policy review date: September 2023

