



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Complaint handling



Contents

1. Introduction	Page 3
2. Accessibility	Page 3
3. What is a complaint?	Page 3
4. What is not a complaint	Page 3
5. Who can make a complaint?	Page 4
6. How will we handle a complaint?	Page 4
7. Recording compliments and comments	Page 5

Introduction

West Oxfordshire District Council provides a wide range of services to its 105,000 residents and, whilst we aim to maintain the highest standards, there will be times when our service does not meet your expectations.

This document focuses primarily on complaint handling and explains how we respond and manage complaints we receive. However you may want to compliment us on our service or decisions or simply make a suggestion or comment that may help us shape our service going forward.

Accessibility

Accessibility to the procedure for our customers is through a number of publicised channels as well as in a clear and understandable format. Details about how to complain or comment are publicised through the following channels and managed by the Customer Service Manager:

- On our website – www.westoxon.gov.uk
- In leaflets written in plain English making it clear who you need to write to if you want to complain
- Through our Council communications such as the Creating Futures newsletter
- Verbally through our Customer Service Team either face to face or by telephone
- Information can be made available in alternative language formats

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about our actions or lack of action, or by the standard of service provided. It could be an action or service that was delivered directly by the Council or by a third party acting on our behalf. A complaint could be in relation to any of the following examples:

- We made a mistake in the way we provided a service.
- There has been a delay in providing a service
- We failed to deliver a service- this could relate to quality, standard or service level
- Our processes or policy have not been followed
- Our legal or regulatory requirements have not been met
- Our staff have been rude, unhelpful or not conducted themselves correctly

This is not an exhaustive list

What is not a complaint?

Some things cannot be treated as complaints under this procedure:

Informal service issues

We encourage all of our staff to work with customers and try to find a resolution to any expressions of dissatisfaction without the need to use the formal complaints process. In many cases we can resolve an issue very quickly – by putting the problem right straight away and to your satisfaction.

We consider these types of cases as informal service issues. An example might be where a refuse team has not picked up a customer's bin, but once the team is made aware of this the bin is picked up the same day. However, if you are unhappy about **the way that a service issue or request was handled**, this should be dealt with under this complaints procedure.

Regulatory and statutory procedures

A disagreement *about* a decision rather than *how* the decision was made. This relates particularly to regulatory and statutory procedures such as:

- Planning matters where a right of objection exists
- Licensing and some environmental health functions
- Benefits assessments or council tax recovery
- Some housing decisions – refer to the Head of Planning & Sustainable Communities and /or the Head of Housing Services
- Complaints against Parking Services (Issue of Penalty Charge Notice); -Following the decriminalisation of parking in the district there are strict legal procedures that need to be followed when challenging the issue of a penalty charge notice (PCN). This process falls outside the remit of the complaints handling procedure
- A matter which is or could reasonably be expected to be the subject of legal proceedings
- Anonymous complaints, see page 8 section 8.5.

Complaints against Elected Members

The behavior of elected Members is governed by the Council's Code of Conduct for Members. The Code applies when a Member is acting, or giving the impression of acting, in an official capacity.

A complaint in respect of the behavior of a Member should be reported to the Council's Monitoring Officer, who will consider the matter in accordance with a stand-alone complaints procedure, involving persons who are independent of the Council.

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who uses or is affected by our services can make a complaint e.g. :

- residents
- people who work in or visit the district
- local businesses
- community groups

A complaint can also be made by:

- a representative acting on behalf of a child
- a representative acting on behalf of someone who is unable to make the complaint themselves because of physical or mental incapacity
- a representative where they have been asked to act on behalf of a customer
- a representative acting on behalf of someone who has died.

How we handle a complaint

The Council recognises the importance of feedback from all users of its services. Comments, complaints and compliments are helpful as they show what we are doing well and where improvements need to be made.

The complaints procedure adopted is designed to give a consistent approach to complaint handling and recording across the Council. Every stage of the complaint is logged in an internal complaint log, including the end result and any actions taken to alleviate further complaints. This log is then monitored monthly by the Customer Services Manager and quarterly by the Senior Management Team.

If we cannot resolve a complaint verbally at the first point of contact then we will the customer to put it in writing by either letter or email to avoid us assuming or implying the content of the complaint. A written complaint also provides a clear audit trail if it is later referred to the Ombudsman. Staff can help customers do this if needed. Our complaint handling will also include (where appropriate) early direct contact and this

will be continued as necessary throughout the complaints process. This will ensure the customers knows that action is being taken and keep you informed about progress.

How to make a complaint.

- Online at www.westoxon.gov.uk/feedback
- By completing a Complaints, Comments and Compliment forms either straight from the website or by picking up a form at one of our Customer Service points.
- Through a local councillor www.westoxon.gov.uk/Councillors
- Or by writing to the Customer Service Manager, West Oxfordshire District Council, Woodgreen Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 1NB

When we receive a complaint we will:

- Acknowledge it in writing within 48 hours of receipt
- In the normal course of events, the customer will receive a full response within 10 working days. If we cannot respond in full within this time we will let them know why and when a full response can be expected.
- After this, if a customer still feels that we have not answered their complaint fully, they can then ask a Strategic Director to review the matter.
- Anyone still not satisfied has the right to refer the complaint to the ombudsman. Contact details can be found on our website www.westoxon.gov.uk/feedback

Recording compliments and comments

We don't just focus on the negative aspects of our work, what we sometimes get wrong; we also celebrate our successes and are proud to share them with colleagues across the council. Compliments and comments are also recorded reported alongside complaints to the Senior Management Team each quarter.