

Our customer feedback policy

Feedback from our customers gives Devon County Council opportunities to learn and improve. We value feedback about our services and recognise the right of our customers to make a complaint, compliment or suggestion about our services. We are committed to using customer feedback to improve our services and focus on the needs of our customers. Devon County Council's customers, like our staff, are not cold statistics. We are all human beings who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Who are our customers?

Our definition of a customer is: "If you contact us for any reason, or you are affected by anything we do, you are one of our customers".

Our key aims

We will:

- Encourage easy access - customers can give feedback online, in writing, in person, by fax, by Minicom, SMS (text) message or by phone
- Record and analyse all complaints, compliments and suggestions
- Use plain language in all communications
- Set and monitor targets for responding to feedback
- Contact the customer, where we cannot resolve a complaint straight away, giving them a named contact officer, phone number, e-mail address and target date for a response
- Keep customers informed when we cannot send them a response within our target time
- Inform customers about their right to escalate a complaint when dissatisfied with our response
- Review each piece of feedback carefully to establish what lessons we can learn and if we can improve our services as a result.

How do we publicise the customer feedback policy?

We will publicise our customer feedback scheme by making information available:

- In our service information leaflets and publications, such as Devontalk
- In all of our customer reception areas and local service points, such as libraries, social services' offices and schools
- To local Citizen Advice Bureaux, law centres and other advice agencies
- Community Centres, Community Groups and representative organisations (such as carers' organisations and Tenant and Resident Associations)
- On our web site (www.devon.gov.uk)

We will make sure that all our reception areas advertise our customer feedback scheme. We will also publish regular articles in Devontalk magazine and on our web site on how we use customer feedback to improve our services.

How do we promote equality of access?

We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to the customer feedback scheme. To achieve this we will:

- Make sure that interpreters are available when they are needed and cover the cost
- Communicate with customers in the language of their choice and using the method of their choice
- Provide access to advocacy services
- Promote the customer feedback scheme so that all sections of the community understand it and are confident to use it
- Train our staff and councillors to be sensitive to the needs of people from different cultures and communities
- Treat people with respect and be open to ideas about how we can make access easier.

Who can advise customers on how to feedback about our services?

A customer can get advice from any employee, any of the directorate Complaints Officers or managers.

Who can advise employees on the operation of the customer feedback scheme?

Any employee can get advice from any of the directorate Complaints Officers or managers.

Local Resolution

We aim to deal with all feedback at the point of service delivery.

What is a compliment?

A compliment is when a customer gives us feedback about how we exceeded expectations in delivering a service or how an employee has gone the “extra mile” to serve them.

- We will record details and acknowledge receipt within **3** working days.

A senior manager will write to the local service manager or individual employee to thank them for providing an excellent service to the customer.

What is a suggestion?

A suggestion is when a customer comments on how we can improve our delivery of a service.

How will we deal with a suggestion?

We will:

- Record details and acknowledge receipt within **3** working days .
- Send a response to the customer within **10** working days (up to 20 working days for a suggestion about the social care of an adult or child) that either explains how we will implement the suggestion, or that we will investigate it further, or why we are unable to implement the suggestion
- Keep the customer informed about any delays

What is a complaint?

“Any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about our services, employees or policies”

A complaint could include one or more of the following problems:

- We **delay** in providing a service
- We **fail or refuse to provide** a service
- We provide a **poor quality** service or make a mistake
- We provide an **inappropriate** service
- We **remove** or withdraw a service
- We charge an inappropriate **cost** for a service
- An **employee’s behaviour** causes upset
- A **policy** unreasonably disadvantages a customer
- We unfairly **discriminate** against a customer
- A customer is unable to access a service

Stage 1: Local Resolution

The employee receiving the initial complaint will:

- Try to resolve the problem straight away
- Record details of the complaint

If we cannot resolve the complaint straight away, we will:

- Contact the customer within **3** working days to tell them who is dealing with the complaint and give them a deadline for our response
- Respond to the customer within **10** working days *(or a maximum of 20 days for complaints about social care of an adult or a child)*
- If we have made a mistake, make sure we take action to put things right
- Keep the customer informed about any delays
- Inform the customer about their right to complain to the next stage if they are dissatisfied with our response

Stage 2: Service Investigation

A senior manager, who was not involved at the local resolution stage, will arrange a review of a complaint when:

- A customer complains that they are dissatisfied with our local resolution response
- We unreasonably fail to reply at the local resolution stage
- A senior manager requests a special investigation

A complaint about the social care of an adult or a child will always be dealt with by an external or Independent Investigating Officer who will undertake a full investigation and produce a report.

The senior manager will:

- Record details and acknowledge the complaint within **3** working days
- Respond to the customer within **25** working days (*this timeframe can be extended to 65 days for complaints about the social care of an adult or a child. A customer will be notified if this extension applies and the reasons for the extension*)
- If we have made a mistake, make sure we take action to put things right
- Keep the customer informed about any delays
- Inform the customer about their right to complain to the Chief Executive if they are dissatisfied with our response.
- If the complaint is about the social care of an adult or a child the customer will be advised of their right to a Review Panel Hearing if they are dissatisfied with the report of the Independent Investigating Officer

Stage 3: Corporate Review

The Chief Executive (or Monitoring Officer on behalf of the Chief Executive) will arrange a corporate review of the complaint, independent of the service directorate, when:

- A customer complains when they are dissatisfied with a service investigation
- We unreasonably fail to carry out a service investigation
- A senior manager requests an independent review

A complaint about the social care of an adult or a child is subject to a separate process and further guidance is available from the directorate Complaints Officers.

The person carrying out the Corporate Review will:

- Record details and acknowledge the complaint within **3** working days
- Respond to the customer within **30** working days
- If we made a mistake, make sure we take action to put things right
- Keep the customer informed about any delays
- Inform the customer about their right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with our response

What action can we take to put things right when things go wrong?

If we make a mistake, we will apologise and try to take some practical action to put things right. We may ask the customer to suggest what they would like us to do. We will always try to put the customer back to the position that he or she would have been in but for our mistake.

We will also try to ensure that the same mistake does not happen again.

We may decide that one or more of the following can be done to put things right:

- Provide or change a service to the customer
- Provide an explanation or information to the customer
- Review customer literature (leaflets, website, poster and so on)
- Review a policy or procedure
- Arrange training or guidance for employees
- Take employee action (such as standards setting or change of key worker)

- Give a refund in appropriate circumstances

How do we deal with customers who remain dissatisfied after we have fully responded to their complaint?

We will advise any customer who has completed all stages of our customer feedback scheme to contact the Local Government Ombudsman. If the customer complains again about the same issue, our Chief Executive may write to them informing them that we will not respond to future correspondence about the complaint unless the customer provides new evidence or makes a complaint about a different issue.

How do we deal with complaints under the Children Act 1989 and the NHS and Community Care Act 1991?

We will manage these complaints using this policy but Stage 2 and Stage 3 will be dealt with using the relevant statutory procedures. Please contact the Social Services' Customer Services Team for more information.

How do we deal with feedback about our contractors or partner agencies?

We require any organisation providing services on our behalf to comply with this scheme. We will develop protocols with partner agencies to make sure that feedback about a partnership organisation's services is managed effectively.

We require our contractors to:

- Record and respond to customer feedback at the Local Resolution stage;
- Provide us with information when requested;
- Assist us with complaint investigations where necessary.

How do we deal with feedback received from elected representatives?

We will use this Customer Feedback Policy to deal with feedback received from an elected representative (Councillor, Member of Parliament and so on) when made on behalf of a constituent.

How do we learn from feedback?

Each piece of feedback from the public will be reviewed carefully to establish what we can learn and if we can improve our services. Service managers and staff should make operational improvements based on this feedback wherever possible. Learning from customer feedback must be included on the agenda for Directorate Management Team meetings.

We will monitor trends and performance in our handling of customer feedback by producing regular reports for local and senior managers. We will produce a regular report on the operation of our customer feedback policy for senior management, members and our customers.

We will use performance indicators to track the performance of the scheme in each directorate. We will regularly review:

- Type of feedback received (complaints, compliments, suggestions)
- Methods used to contact us (by phone, in writing, email and so on)
- Feedback from Elected Members
- Time taken to acknowledge and respond to customer feedback
- Responses completed in or outside of target time and outstanding responses
- Compliment types
- Suggestion types and outcomes
- Complaint types and outcomes
- Complaint remedies