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**Derry City & Strabane**  
District Council

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# **A Guide to Making Comments, Compliments and Complaints**

## Policy and Guidance

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February 2024



## 1.0 Introduction

Derry City and Strabane District Council aims to provide good quality services for all our communities. We have set out in our Customer Service Charter the standards that you can expect when contacting the Council by telephone, by letter, e-mail or in person.

In many areas, there are also specific service standards, which are set out in Departmental Plans. To help us deliver our objectives and ensure that we are meeting your needs, we would welcome your comments, compliments, or complaints.

### How can I give my comments or compliments?

We want to make it as easy as possible for you to give us your comments and compliments. You can let us know your comments/ compliments by :

- **completing the Comments, Compliments or Complaints Form:**
- **in person (at any of our receptions),**
- **in writing,**
- **by e-mailing [customerfeedback@derrystrabane.com](mailto:customerfeedback@derrystrabane.com),**
- **by telephone 02871 253253 Ext 6606**
- **through our website [www.derrystrabane.com](http://www.derrystrabane.com).**

### What is our complaint handling process?

The Council defines a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf”.

Council considers complaints as an opportunity to review and improve the services we provide.

In dealing with a complaint, we will apply the following principles:

- **start off right**
- **fix it early**
- **focus on what matters**
- **be fair**
- **be honest**
- **learn and improve**



We hope that the services you receive from us are of the quality that you expect. However, if things go wrong, we need to know about them so that we can learn from them and put them right. This will help us improve our performance.

## Examples of things you may wish to complain about include:

- a failure or refusal to provide a service
- inadequate quality or standard of service
- unreasonable delay in the providing a service
- dissatisfaction with a policy or its impact on the individual
- failure to properly apply law, procedure, or guidance when delivering services
- failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (except where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves)
- a concern about the actions or service of an organisation who is delivering services on our behalf
- disagreement with a decision, (except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process)
- dissatisfaction with how an element of a planning/pension decision was administrated.

If you want to make a complaint, we have a simple two-stage procedure.

If a matter is not a complaint, or not suitable to be handled under the Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP), we will explain why this is the case and advise of any action we will take.

## Time limit for making complaints

You should raise your complaint within six months of when you first knew of the problem, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time (for example, where a person was not able to complain due to serious illness or recent bereavement or was unaware of the issue).

Where a customer has received a stage 1 response, and wishes to escalate to stage 2, unless there are special circumstances, they should request this within 30 days of receiving their stage 1 response.

We will not apply the above time limits in a rigid fashion. In determining whether to



apply discretion outside these time limits, the following factors are relevant: taking into account the seriousness of the issue, the availability of relevant records and staff involved, how long ago the events occurred, and the likelihood that an investigation will lead to a practical benefit for the customer or useful learning for the organisation.

At the conclusion of the complaints procedure, the complainant has the right to complain to NIPSO and the time limit for this is usually within six months of completing our complaints procedure. However, NIPSO has discretion to waive this time limit and may do so if NIPSO considers special circumstances apply.

## Supporting the customer

All members of the public have the right to equal access to our complaints procedure. It is important to recognise the barriers that some customers may face barriers to complaining. These may be physical, sensory, communication or language barriers, but can also include their anxieties and concerns. Customers may need support to overcome these barriers.

All necessary efforts will be made to ensure that people with particular needs, such as physical or sensory impairments, learning disabilities and stakeholders, who are less familiar with English, have full access to these procedures.

Forms can be provided in large print, Braille, audio and translated into community languages as required. In some specific circumstances, the Council will offer face-to-face support or advocacy to those who may need help in making a complaint or in response. Derry City and Strabane District Council encourages people to seek support from friends and other representatives, and the Council will assist people in finding such support where possible.



## Stage 1: Frontline Response

We aim to provide excellent customer service at all times. If you think that we have failed to do this, the first person you should contact, if you want to make a complaint, is the manager of the service / facility you are unhappy with.

If you complain in person, we will try to respond at the time. If we cannot, we will explain this to you.

You can also complain by letter, e-mail, phone or by completing our Comments, Compliments or Complaints Form. If you do so, you should receive a full response within 5 working days.

If this is not possible, we will contact you explaining why there is a delay and say when you will receive a full response. This will be within a maximum of 10 working days in total from the date of receipt.

If we are unable to resolve the complaint within 10 working days, we will contact you and discuss progressing the complaint to Stage 2.

If you consider that the complaint is serious or complex and needs an in-depth investigation, we will, after discussion and agreement with you, look at it at Stage 2

At all times we will try to sort things out honestly, politely, professionally, and as quickly as possible.

## Stage 2: Investigation

Complaints that clearly require in-depth investigation will be discussed with you and if agreed, will be dealt with as a Stage 2 Investigation.

Also if you are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 you can ask us to look at your complaint again - you should tell us why - and we will progress it to Stage 2.

### You can request this:

- **In writing (letter, e-mail etc.)**
- **Verbally (in which case a written record will be kept)**
- **Via a representative organisation / individual**
- **By completing the on-line form on our website, or**
- **By completing the Comments, Compliments or Complaints Form.**

The email address for complaints is: [customer.feedback@derrystrabane.com](mailto:customer.feedback@derrystrabane.com)



Your complaint will then be forwarded to the appropriate Head of Service. You will receive an acknowledgement of your complaint in writing (or another appropriate format) within 3 working days.

This acknowledgement will give you the name and contact details of the senior officer nominated by the Head of Service to investigate your complaint. This will not be the same person who has dealt with your complaint at Stage 1.

The Head of Service will ensure that an investigation is carried out. You may be contacted, if appropriate, to discuss your complaint and /or get further information.

The Head of Service will also ensure that a report on the outcome of the investigation is prepared and that you receive a full written response within 20 working days of you submitting your initial complaint.

If we are unable to meet these timescales, we will tell you about any delay and give you a new date for when you should receive a response.

Comments, Compliments or Complaints

We will tell you what we are doing to put things right or explain what has gone wrong.

We will apologise if we have made a mistake.

## What's next?

If you are not satisfied with our response, you can ask the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) to look at your complaint.

**NIPSO's contact details are:**  
**The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman**  
**33 Wellington Place**  
**Belfast**  
**BT1 6HN**

**Tel Freephone: 0800 34 34 24**

**Email: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)**

**Web: [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)**

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**This information is available upon request in a number of formats including large print, Braille, PDF, audio formats (CD, MP3, DAISY) and minority languages.**

**For further information on alternative formats please contact T: 028 71 253253 or [equality@derrystrabane.com](mailto:equality@derrystrabane.com)**