

Customer Feedback Policy



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Introduction

West Lancashire Borough Council is committed to consistently providing an excellent service to all our customers. We value all feedback about our services and see this as an opportunity to learn, adapt and improve, so that our customers can have confidence in us to deliver a quality standard of service.

We recognise that occasionally things can go wrong. In these circumstances, we want to make it as quick and simple as possible for our customers to raise their concerns, so that we can resolve the issue in a timely way.

We also like to hear from our customers when they have had a positive experience or if we have exceeded their expectations. We will use this information to promote good practice throughout the organisation and give credit to our staff.

Purpose of the Customer Feedback policy

The purpose of this policy is to set out our approach to dealing with customer comments, compliments, and complaints, whilst adhering to the principles of both the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. We complete an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, which is published on our website.

We are committed to putting our customers at the heart of everything we do and make it easy for our customers to provide feedback.

Through the Customer Feedback policy, we will:

- Handle all feedback within the agreed timescales, effectively and fairly.
- Offer a range of channels for customers to make a comment, compliment, or complaint.
- Treat all customer feedback equally, regardless of channel.
- Keep customers informed throughout the process; our written correspondence will use plain language and avoid the use of jargon.
- Treat all our customers fairly and recognise all customers have a right to have a voice, be understood and respected.
- Record and analyse all feedback and use this information to identify opportunities for improvements.

We will promote this policy via:

- Our website
- Our Customer Services Points – see page 5 for details
- Our Independent Living schemes
- Our "New Tenant" information packs
- Our Housing Annual report
- Letters we send to our tenants and customers
- Our online customer feedback platform "Your Voice West Lancashire"

The definition of a Comment, Compliment and Complaint

What is a Comment? – A comment is a verbal or written remark expressing an opinion.

We recognise that you may want to express your views on the standard of service we have provided, without making a complaint. Comments on how we could improve services to better meet the needs of customers are always welcome.

We will ensure that we monitor any repetition of comments about the services we provide and take appropriate action to resolve these.

What is a Compliment? - A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about the standard of service provided.

Everyone likes to receive compliments and Council officers are no exception. More importantly, compliments can help us to identify what our customer's value and highlights when we have done a good job.

What is a Complaint? – A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Council, its own staff or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

What we cannot deal with under this policy

- **Requests for a service**

Common requests for service include, reporting a repair to a Council property, reporting a missed bin, fly tipping removal or litter picking. You can access and request a wide range of services through your [Self-Service account](#), by contacting Customer Services or visiting a Customer Service Point (see page 5 for details).

If we identify that feedback submitted through the Customer Feedback process is a service request, we will process this on your behalf to enable the relevant service area to resolve this for you. We will confirm this to you as part of our response to your feedback.

If after requesting a service, you are dissatisfied with the action taken or standard of service, you can raise a complaint, we may also choose to escalate this to a complaint on your behalf. We will always discuss this with you first.

- **Appeals**

Matters for which there is a right of appeal or a more appropriate or prescribed legal remedy e.g., Licences, Permits, Approvals, Consents, Permissions, Registrations, or any related [planning and enforcement action](#). This includes decisions in relation to the outcome of claims made against the Council.

When a decision is made and there is a right of appeal, you will be informed of the appeals process in the decision letter.

Please note, if your complaint relates to an active investigation (e.g., noise nuisance, planning enforcement) that we are undertaking and the outcome of this investigation has not yet been determined by our Officers, we reserve the right to close your complaint until the matter is concluded. If your complaint relates to a decision that has been lawfully made by the Council (e.g., Planning Permission) and you have a clear right of appeal in law against that decision, we reserve the right to close your complaint as the appeals process will take account of your relevant concerns. In either case, we will write to you to notify you of this.

- **Services provided by external organisations:**

- **Lancashire County Council:**

Lancashire County Council deliver various services in the Borough and complaints regarding their services must be directed to them. An example of some of the services that they provide include:

- Highway maintenance including potholes, gritting, roadworks, street lighting and temporary traffic lights
- Education
- Adult and Children's Social Care
- Libraries

For more information visit [Lancashire County Council](#)

- **The Valuation Office Agency (VOA)**

As a Local Authority the Council is responsible for maintaining the Council Tax Banding & Business Rates Rating List and ensuring bills are calculated in accordance with the Band/Rateable Value as set by the Valuation Office Agency.

The VOA is an executive agency of HM Revenues & Customs and as the Local Authority we can only alter any Council Tax banding & Business Rates RV reduction/amendments to the date from which any change to the list comes into effect following the VOA decision.

Appeals should be raised directly with the VOA:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/valuation-office-agency

- **Valuation Tribunal Service (VTS)**

You can appeal a decision made by the Council against the amount of council tax you have to pay for several reasons. E.g., if you think the council should give you a discount. The VTS are an independent body not connected with the Council and the tribunal will decide about liability on the evidence that the appellant and the Council present to it.

Further information relating to the VT the website address is:

www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk

- **Complaints about Freedom of Information requests (FOI)**

For further guidance, please visit our [website](#)

- **Requests for information or an explanation of Council policy or practice**
For example: decisions regarding the assessment of a Housing Application as an appeals process is in place as part of the Housing Allocations Policy.
- **Petitions**
For further guidance, please visit our [website](#)
- **Complaints regarding issues that occurred over 12 months ago**
In line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, we will only consider complaints that are received within 12 months of the issue occurring. We may consider complaints made outside of this time limit, where there is good reason to do so and each complaint will be considered on a case by case basis.
- **Matters that have previously been considered**

What you can expect from us if you make a comment

If you have a comment that you want to share with us, we will:

- Acknowledge your comment
- Review your comment for improvement opportunities
- Provide you with the outcome of the review

What you can expect from us if you provide a compliment

If you have a compliment that you want to share with us, we will:

- Acknowledge your compliment
- Share your compliment with the relevant services area/officer
- Identify opportunities to share best practices across the Council

What you can expect from us if you complain

If you have concerns that cannot be resolved at the first point of contact, we will:

- Acknowledge your complaint
- Keep you informed at all stages of the investigation, especially if the investigation is likely to take longer than the agreed timescales.
- Treat your complaint in confidence
- Always treat you with courtesy and fairness
- Provide you with the outcome of the complaint and reasons for any decisions made

What we expect from you if you complain

We hope that you will be fair and courteous in your dealings with us. We will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour/language towards our staff.

How to make a comment, give a compliment or make a complaint

The quickest and simplest way to make a comment, give a compliment or make a complaint is to submit a form, via our [website](#), however if you prefer, you can also contact our Customer Services team or write to us.

Online – www.westlancs.gov.uk

Call our Customer Services team on 01695 577177

Visit one of our Customer Service Points:

- 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk, West Lancashire, L39 2DF
- Unit 142, The Concourse Shopping Centre, Southway, Skelmersdale, WN8 6LN

Write to us at Customer Feedback, Business Support, West Lancashire Borough Council, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk, Lancashire, L39 2DF.

Reasonable adjustments

We are committed to ensuring that people are not disadvantaged in accessing our services. We will accept complaints from a representative on behalf of a customer. We will make reasonable adjustments for those people that need further assistance when making a complaint, depending on the individual's needs, this could include:

- Customers being accompanied by a representative at any meetings with the Council
- Providing information in an appropriate alternative format (e.g., large print, Braille)
- Extending of time limits (where it is lawful to do so)
- Using an agreed relevant communication channel
- Using plain English in our correspondence or provide an Easy Read service
- Communicate with you through your representative or intermediary

Asking for reasonable adjustments

You can ask us to make a reasonable adjustment when you first contact us or at any time during our consideration of your comment, compliment, or complaint.

Our response to requests for reasonable adjustments

We are committed to treating all customers fairly and we take equality and diversity into account in a positive way. We will make sure that individual needs are considered when applying this policy and that any reasonable adjustments are made as required.

Stages of the complaint's procedure

Our complaints procedure has two-stages

Stage One

This is the first opportunity for a Service Manager to investigate and respond to the complaint.

When submitting your complaint, please provide as much information as possible about your concerns and the outcome that you would like to achieve.

As part of our investigation, we will:

- Log and acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days.
- Provide you with the name of the person investigating the complaint.
- We will discuss with you the nature of the complaint and the desired outcome to assist with the investigation.
- Aim to respond to your complaint in full, within 10 working days of your complaint being acknowledged. However, if this is not possible, we will let you know why and confirm when you will receive a response. This should not exceed a further 10 working days.
- If we need longer to investigate your complaint fully, we will clearly explain the reasons for this and provide an expected timescale. Any extension to timescales will be no more than a further 10 working days without a good reason.
- For more information, please see section "Extending response times".
- Provide you with a final response, detailing the outcome of the investigation, reasons for any decisions made and any actions taken to resolve the complaint
- Close your complaint at this point and provide details of how to request a review if you are not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved

Stage Two

If you remain dissatisfied following our investigation and response at Stage one, you can request that a review of your complaint and the decision made is undertaken.

You can request a review:

Online – www.westlancs.gov.uk

By calling our Customer Services team on 01695 577177

By visiting one of our Customer Service Points:

- 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk, West Lancashire, L39 2DF
- Unit 142, The Concourse Shopping Centre, Southway, Skelmersdale, WN8 6LN

By writing to us at Customer Feedback, Business Support, West Lancashire Borough Council, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk, Lancashire, L39 2DF.

We will need to receive your request within 28 days from the date of our response to your Stage one complaint.

Please be aware that the review will only focus on the original complaint, we will not consider new issues. New issues that are unrelated to the original complaint must be submitted as a new complaint.

As part of our review:

- We will acknowledge your request within five working days.
- We may need to ask you for further information to assist with the investigation.
- We will aim to respond in full within 20 working days of your complaint being acknowledged. However, if this is not possible, we will let you know why and confirm when you will receive a response. This should not exceed a further 20 working days.
- If we need longer to investigate your complaint fully, we will clearly explain the reasons for this and provide an expected timescale. Any extension to timescales will be no more than a further 20 working days without a good reason.
- We will provide you with a final written response (which will usually be via email), detailing the outcome of the investigation (which will be carried out by a different senior manager to the investigation at stage 1), reasons for any decisions made and any actions taken to resolve the complaint.
- Close your complaint at this point.
- We will also provide details of how to escalate the matter to the relevant Ombudsman if you remain dissatisfied.

Extending response times

On the rare occasions that we need to use our discretion to extend our response times to enable us to respond to you fully, we will always tell you why. We will need to have a good reason to extend our response times by up to 10 working days at stage 1 or up to 20 working days at stage 2 and this could include:

- Waiting for information from a third party, e.g., a contractor acting on our behalf, to enable us to fully investigate and respond to you
- Needing more time to undertake interviews, e.g., staff interviews
- Needing longer to gather all the information we need from multiple sources to enable us to properly investigate, particularly if it is a long standing, complex case

Remedies

When the Council is at fault, we will put things right by acknowledging our mistakes and apologising for them, explaining why things went wrong and what we will do to prevent the same mistake happening again.

We will ensure that there is a mechanism in place to monitor incidents of the same type and take appropriate action to remedy this.

Where possible, we aim to put you back in the position you would have been had the fault not occurred. In such cases, the remedy could include:

- Taking specific action – such as reviewing a process or policy.
- Consider any financial impact upon you because of the upheld service failure.

We follow the guidelines issued by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman in deciding the appropriate remedy.

As a Landlord, the Council has a [Housing Services Goodwill & Discretionary Payment Policy](#). This outlines how Housing Services may determine if a goodwill gesture or discretionary payment will be considered, in relation to complaints regarding Housing Management services.

Escalation to the Ombudsman

Following our decision at Stage two, if you remain dissatisfied, you can ask the relevant Ombudsman to review how we have handled your complaint. Our final response will contain the contact details for the appropriate Ombudsman's office.

Note: if you are a Council Tenant and your complaint is in relation to Housing Management services, you can access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout your complaint for impartial advice and support.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman investigates individual complaints about Councils, all adult and social care providers and some other organisations providing public services. They investigate in a fair and independent way. The Ombudsman will expect you to have gone through all stages of our complaints policy before contacting them, to give us an opportunity to deal with your complaint and put matters right.

If we do not respond to you within a reasonable time (usually up to 12 weeks), they may decide to investigate the complaint anyway.

Contact Information

PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Service investigates complaints about housing organisations, the service is free, independent, and impartial.

You can access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout your complaint for impartial advice and support.

At the end of our complaints process, if you remain dissatisfied with our final response to your complaint, you can contact the Ombudsman directly for an assessment. Please note they will only investigate the complaint once we have completed our complaints process.

Contact information:

PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Website: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Who can complain?

Anyone who has been affected by decisions made by the Council, or the way services have been provided to them can make a complaint.

A representative can make a complaint on behalf of a person where they have been asked to represent them, or if the person is not able to make the complaint themselves.

If a complaint is made on behalf of another person, we require consent to be provided, to evidence that the person being represented is aware that the complaint is being made on their behalf and happy for information to be shared with the representative. Once consent is received, we will investigate the complaint and liaise directly with the representative.

Types of complaint

Complaints received via a local Councillor

When we receive a complaint via a local Councillor, we will handle the complaint in line with this feedback policy and we will respond directly to the Councillor.

Complaints against members of staff

If you have an issue about a member of staff (this includes people who volunteer on our behalf), we will investigate in line with this feedback policy and where necessary take appropriate action.

Complaints about the conduct of Councillors

If you want to complain about the conduct of a Councillor please visit our [website](#) where you can download and complete a Councillor complaint form.

Once completed please send it to the Monitoring Officer:

Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer,
West Lancashire Borough Council,
52 Derby Street,
Ormskirk,
West Lancashire,
L39 2DF

You can also put your complaint in writing and send it to us using the address above.

Complaints received by the Chief Executive

If a complaint is directed to the Chief Executive, it will be handled in line with this feedback policy. We would encourage all customers to submit complaints in the ways detailed in the "How to make a comment, give a compliment or make a complaint" section, to enable the complaint to be handled in a timely way.

Complaints relating to more than one Council service

Where a complaint covers more than one service within the Council, one officer will lead the investigation. We will aim to provide you with a single response wherever possible.

Anonymous complaints

Where the complainant provides sufficient information to identify the issue of concern, we will record and investigate the complaint as far as possible, however we will be unable to issue a formal response, without any contact details.

Dealing with unreasonably persistent complaints and unreasonable complainant behaviour or demands

West Lancashire Borough Council are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly.

We treat all complaints seriously and our officers will respond professionally and work positively with you to find a mutually acceptable resolution. However, there are occasions when a customer's actions and behaviour, or nature and frequency of their contacts with us adversely affects our ability to do our job and we consider such behaviour unreasonable.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman defines unreasonable behaviour as 'Complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contact with an organisation, hinder the organisation's consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour include:

- Refusing to co-operate with the complaint's policy
- Refusing to specify the grounds of the complaint
- Refusing to accept certain issues are not in scope of the complaints policy
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in a way which is incompatible with our complaints policy
- Making groundless complaints about staff dealing with the complaint and seeking to have them replaced
- Submitting falsified documentation/evidence
- Aggressive, abusive, offensive, or threatening language in any format, this is not just limited to actual physical or verbal abuse, but can include derogatory remarks, rudeness, inflammatory allegations, and threats of violence
- Pursuing a complaint or similar complaint at the same time with the authority and other members e.g., Councillor/Ombudsman
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations and insisting that this is a 'new' complaint
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Attempting to pursue parallel complaints on the same issue with various departments
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of officers with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous officers or detailed letters every few days and expecting immediate responses
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information and requesting these to be considered and commented on or raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are fully answered

- Sending large volumes of correspondence or an excessive number of contacts
- Refusing to accept the answer that has been provided, continuing to raise the same subject matter without providing any new evidence, continuously adding to, or changing the subject matter of the complaint
- Covertly recording meetings and conversations without prior consent of the other party
- Social media 'trolling'. Posting inflammatory, offensive, abusive, or confidential comments or information online

How we will inform you

If we believe your behaviour in pursuit of your complaint is unreasonable or unreasonably persistent, we will write to you and inform you why we find your behaviour to be unreasonable and the problems it is causing. We will also set out what we propose for future communication with you.

We may take the following actions:

- Requesting contact in a specific form (e.g., by letter only).
- Requesting contact be made with a named member of staff only.
- Setting the number and frequency of contact that will be accepted (e.g., once a week).
- Requiring any personal contact to take place in the presence of a witness and in a suitable location.
- Refusing to deal with future correspondence on the same matter if a decision has already been reached.

Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour, will be proportionate and have due regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

If you do not agree with our arrangements for contact, we will listen to your objections, but we may still impose the conditions. However, we will set a review period for the arrangements, and this will be no longer than six months. We will let you know in writing, the date the arrangements will be reviewed when we set out our arrangements for contact.

Once we have set out our new arrangements for contact, if you do not comply with them and we feel that your behaviour continues to be unreasonable, we may decide not to respond to your contacts. If we decide this, we will let you know.

If you still disagree with our arrangements, you can ask the Local Government Ombudsman & Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman to consider whether our decision is reasonable.

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