



## Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy

<b>Version Control:</b>	
<b>Document Name:</b>	Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy
<b>Version:</b>	Version 4.0
<b>Author:</b>	Corporate Support Manager
<b>Approved by:</b>	Full Council
<b>Date Approved:</b>	March 2019
<b>Minor changes Approved by:</b>	Senior Management Team
<b>Date Approved:</b>	28 <sup>th</sup> June 2021
<b>Review Date</b>	June 2024

## **Policy Statement**

Barrow Borough Council is committed to delivering efficient and effective services as outlined in our Customer Services Strategy. We welcome and value your feedback to help us to understand your experience of using our services. We want to learn from our successes and also from when things go wrong and we will use feedback and complaints to help us deliver user focussed services.

The aim of this policy is to provide a fair, consistent and structured process for our customers when they are dissatisfied with a service they have received. The service concerned will place emphasis on resolving complaints as quickly as possible.

Our complaints handling procedure reflects our commitment to valuing feedback from our customers. It seeks to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of customer complaints.

Our complaints handling procedure aims to address customer dissatisfaction and also prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again. Handled well, complaints can give our customers a form of redress when things go wrong, and can also help us continuously improve our services.

## **Customer feedback**

We value customer feedback based on your experience of using Council services because it enables us to understand what works well. By gathering customer feedback we will endeavour to refine our services to meet and exceed our customer's expectations. If we have done something well we appreciate customers taking the time to tell us. Everyone likes to know that their work is appreciated and it helps us to know what our customers think is important. Compliments will be passed onto the person concerned and their Manager.

## **How can you give us feedback?**

Feedback can be submitted by: -

Filling in our online form;

Phone the Council's Customer Service Team, 01229 876543;

Email [customerservices@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@barrowbc.gov.uk)

Send us a letter; or completing and returning the feedback/complaints form to,

Barrow Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Duke Street Barrow in Furness  
LA14 2LD

Feedback can also be given directly to staff who can then share it more widely to enable other teams to benefit from the feedback.

Feedback can also be given anonymously but we would not be able to:

- ) Contact you to thank you for feedback,
- ) Clarify any points you have made.
- ) Let you know directly how your feedback has resulted in changes or improvements.

## **Service failures and complaints**

We acknowledge that sometimes we do not meet customer expectations. When this happens we value and welcome the opportunity to put things right. Most service issues can be dealt with quickly and satisfactorily by the front-line staff that provide the service. This is the first opportunity for a service to resolve a customer's dissatisfaction at an informal stage. The member of staff who receives the initial complaint, will ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to resolve the customers' issue at this stage.

If it is not possible to resolve the issue informally then the customer may lodge a formal complaint. This informal stage is not mandatory as some issues merit an immediate formal complaint.

## **What is a complaint?**

We define a complaint as: an expression of dissatisfaction by a customer about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council for which a response is required.

A complaint may relate to:

- Failure to provide a service;
- Inadequate standard of service;
- Treatment by or attitude of a member of staff;
- The local authority's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process.

A complaint is not:

- A routine first time request for a service;
- A request for compensation;
- Issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal;
- Disagreement with a decision where a statutory right of appeal exists, for example in relation to housing benefit or planning;
- An attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision.

## **Who can make a complaint?**

Anyone who receives, requests or is affected by our services can make a complaint. Sometimes a customer may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own. We will accept complaints brought by third parties including Councillors and the Member of Parliament as long as the customer has given their consent.

## **Can complaints be made anonymously?**

All complaints, including anonymous complaints, are taken seriously and we will consider them further, if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide enough information to enable us to take further action, we may decide not to pursue it further.

Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint will be logged.

If we pursue an anonymous complaint further, we will record the issues as an anonymous complaint on the complaints system. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow us to take corrective action where appropriate.

If an anonymous complaint makes serious allegations, we will refer it to the relevant Senior Manager immediately.

## **How to make a complaint**

Complaints can be submitted by: -

Filling in our online form;

Email [customerservices@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@barrowbc.gov.uk)

Phone the Council's Customer Service Team, 01229 876543;

Send us a letter; or completing and returning the feedback/complaints form to,

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## **Confidentiality and freedom of information**

All feedback or complaints received will be dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the data protection regulations 2018, and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Under data protection the Council will not disclose the complainant's personal data under FOI.

The complaints procedure sets a time limit of 12 months from when the customer first knew of the problem, within which time they may ask us to consider the complaint, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time. This mirrors the Local Government Ombudsman time limit.

## **Accessibility**

Barrow Borough Council is committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make this procedure easy to use and accessible to all of our customers.

## **The complaints handling process**

Complaints are administered by the Democratic Services Department.

An initial decision will be taken to decide whether the issue can be defined as a complaint.

We will make sure we understand:

- What the customer's complaint is?
- What the customer wants to achieve from this complaint?
- Can this be achieved, or can we explain why not?
- Who is the right Service Manager to deal with the investigation?

We will log the complaint and give it a unique reference number. We will send an acknowledgement of your complaint within 5 working days.

Our complaints handling process aims to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process for resolving complaints early in the complaints process. Our complaints process provides two opportunities to formally resolve complaints internally; investigation and appeal. This is summarised below.

### **The Stage 1 process - Investigation**

The main principle is to seek early resolution, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible.

The complaint is logged and assigned to a relevant Service Manager who will investigate the complaint and provide a response to the complainant as soon as possible but not later than 10 working days from the time we received the complaint for investigation. The investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response.

In exceptional circumstances, where there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so, we may agree an extension of no more than 5 working days with the customer. We will tell the customer about the reasons for the delay, and when they can expect a full response. If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, this must be agreed with a member of the Senior Management Team. We will tell the customer about the delay and explain the reason for the decision to grant the extension.

We aim to resolve any complaint at Stage 1. If you believe that the response you received has not fully and satisfactorily addressed your complaint, you may take the complaint to Stage 2 for further investigation. This is the appeal stage and you will need to tell us specifically where you believe the Stage 1 response did not address your original complaint. At Stage 2 we will only consider the original complaint, the customer cannot introduce a new line of complaint at the appeal stage. If there are new issues they need to be recorded as a separate complaint.

A Stage 2 appeal must be lodged within 30 days of the written response to the investigation stage.

### **The Stage 2 process - Appeal**

The appeal is logged using the original reference number and assigned to a senior manager who is completely independent of the service to which the complaint relates.

The senior manager assigned, will review the particulars, consult with the officer who handled the investigation if required, and provide our final response as soon as possible but not later than 20 working days from the time we received the appeal for review. The customer will be informed of the outcome of the appeal in writing including further steps the complainant may take if they are not satisfied with the outcome.

Officers dealing with complaint appeals will liaise with Democratic Services when responding, to ensure that these are logged and recorded throughout the process.

### **External review**

With the exception of housing management issues, after the appeal stage, dissatisfied customers may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Local Government Ombudsman's contact details are:

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

For housing management issues only; tenants have the right to appoint a Designated Person; this may be an MP, a local councillor or the Tenant's Complaints Panel.

A Designated Person will help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; try and resolve the complaint themselves or if they can't resolve it themselves, refer the complaint to the Ombudsman. Complaints to the Ombudsman do not have to be referred by a designated person but if they are, there must be at least 8 weeks from the end of the Council's Complaints Procedure before the Ombudsman can consider the case.

Alternatively the tenant can contact the Ombudsman themselves.

The Housing Ombudsman's contact details are:

Housing Ombudsman Service

Exchange Tower

Harbour Exchange Square

London

E14 9GE

Telephone: 03001 113 000

### **Unacceptable Behaviour**

The Council aims to treat all complainants fairly and will, as far as possible, ensure that any complaint is addressed.

Where the Council considers a complainant unreasonably persistent, vexatious or aggressive, it will take action to protect our staff from unacceptable behaviour.

. Examples of unacceptable behaviours include:

- refusing to co-operate with the complaints process;
- making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issue, and seeking to have them replaced;
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- introducing trivial or irrelevant information at a later stage;
- frequent, lengthy contacts and repetitive information;
- refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

Below is a link to the Council's Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

<https://www.barrowbc.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=4998>