

Customer feedback policy

March 2020

Introduction

Complaints, comments and compliments help us to improve services. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible. Complaints should be made to us in writing.

Customer Channels

Online: www.southlakeland.gov.uk

In writing: Complaints, South Lakeland District Council, South Lakeland House, Lowther Street, Kendal LA9 4DQ

1. Compliments and comments

Feedback is always welcome and helps us to plan and deliver better services. Compliments will be passed to the relevant staff. Customers can make compliments or comments using the same channels as complaints.

2. Complaints

Some complaints can be resolved quickly and informally by working with the service involved. Where this isn't possible, your complaint will progress through the formal process set out below.

We will acknowledge your complaint within two working days and aim to respond fully to both stage one and stage two complaints within 10 working days. In complex cases which may require a lengthy investigation we will inform customers of a date when they can expect a response.

Stage one: formal complaint dealt with by an appropriate officer or manager

Stage two: a member of the Leadership Team will review the stage one investigation process. Please note that a complaint can be only escalated within 28 days of receiving the stage one response.

Stage three: if a customer feels that they have exhausted all channels they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman at www.lgo.org.uk or by calling 0300 061 0614.

3. Complaints about councillors

Complaints about councillors are dealt with through the council's standards arrangements. They should be sent to the monitoringofficer@southlakeland.gov.uk or by post to the Monitoring Officer, South Lakeland District Council, South Lakeland House, Lowther Street, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 4DQ.

www.southlakeland.gov.uk



4. Issues which fall outside of this policy

Certain types of issues and complaints fall outside of this policy because there are other processes more suitable for dealing with them. These include:

- Freedom of Information or Environmental Information Requests
- Commercial or contractual matters (unless the complaint is about the negotiation of council leases or the disposal of council land)
- Services for which there are alternative statutory appeal or tribunal processes, for example planning appeals or parking appeals

5. Persistent or vexatious complaints

Complainants may be deemed to be persistent or vexatious if they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Persist with a complaint when our process has been properly implemented and exhausted.
- Persistently change the substance of a complaint or continually raise new issues, seeking to prolong contact, whilst the complaint is being addressed. (Care must be taken not to disregard fresh issues which may form separate complaints)
- Are repeatedly unwilling to accept documented evidence or deny receipt of an adequate response or don't accept that facts can be difficult to verify after a long period of time.
- Repeatedly do not clearly identify the issues they wish to be investigated despite our reasonable efforts to help them, and when their concerns are not within the remit of SLDC.
- Regularly focus on a trivial matter out of proportion to its significance. Determining what a trivial matter is can be subjective and careful judgement will be used in applying this criteria.
- Have threatened or used physical violence towards employees. Any complainant who does this will be regarded as vexatious and informed of this in writing with notification of how future contact is to be made.
- Have harassed or been verbally abusive more than once towards employees dealing with the complaint. People may act out of character in times of distress or suffer from a mental illness and we will make reasonable allowances for this.
- Make unreasonable demands and fail to accept these are unreasonable, for example, insist on responses being provided more urgently than within our recognised procedures.
- Make unreasonable complaints which seem designed to cause disruption or annoyance, or can be characterised as obsessive.
- Make repetitive complaints which ignore previously supplied replies.

Options for dealing with vexatious complainants

These can be used singularly or in combination.

- An email or letter setting out our responsibilities and what we require if we are to continue processing the complaint. If not adhered to we may implement other action as below.
- Decline contact with the complainant, either in person, by phone, letter, email, or any combination of these, except for matters relating to statutory functions. This may include only

one member of staff being nominated to maintain contact (and a named deputy in their absence). The complainant will be notified.

- If a customer is directed to a single point of contact or where communication with the customer is to be restricted, an officer at Operational Manager level or above will consider the initial time period for the measures.
- This will be communicated in writing and reviewed at the end of the relevant time period. The customer will be notified of the outcome.
- Notify the complainant by email or in writing that SLDC has responded fully and has tried to resolve the complaint but there is nothing more to add. They will be notified that correspondence is at an end, they are being treated as a persistent or vexatious complainant, and SLDC will not engage in further correspondence on this matter.
- Inform the complainant that in extreme circumstances SLDC will seek legal advice.
- Temporarily suspend all contact with the complainant relating to the matter while seeking advice or guidance from SLDC's solicitor or other relevant agencies.