



<b>Report To:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> December 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Customer Feedback Policy
<b>Purpose:</b>	To present a draft updated Customer Feedback Policy for the Council
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Emma Cresswell, Portfolio Holder – Communities and People
<b>Report Of:</b>	John Medler, Assistant Director – Governance and Monitoring Officer
<b>Report Author:</b>	Richard Steele, Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All
<b>Exempt Report:</b>	No

### **Summary**

There is a clear need to manage feedback and complaints received by the Council and deal with them appropriately. This Policy is designed to achieve that aim, whilst ensuring that customers are dealt with fairly, consistently, and proportionately.

This draft document has been fully reviewed, updated, and aligned across the partnership. Reviewing the policy ensures any updates are captured in the new aligned policy, as well as ensuring the policy is still fit for purpose and complies with the LGSCO's Complaint Handling Code which was launched in 2024.

### **Recommendations**

1. That Cabinet approves the draft Customer Feedback Policy at Appendix 1; and
2. That Cabinet authorises the Monitoring Officer to make amendments to the Policy to ensure it remains up to date and to reflect Complaint Handling Code guidance and recommendations issued by the Ombudsman.

## Reasons for Recommendations

To ensure the Council has suitable procedures in place for responding to and dealing with feedback and complaints received.

## Other Options Considered

Keep current Policy – not recommended.

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Council is responsible for ensuring it has a suitable policy in place for dealing with feedback and in particular complaints.
- 1.2 The Council wants to deal with complaints in a way that is open, fair, and proportionate. A policy-led approach helps staff understand what is expected of them, what options for action are available, and who can authorise these actions. Having a policy that can be shared with complainants can help in managing their expectations.
- 1.3 Reviewing, updating, and aligning this policy means the Council has a clear policy for dealing with feedback in general, and more specifically with complaints received.

### 2. Report

- 2.1 This Policy, found at **Appendix 1** of the report, is being aligned to be the same across the 3 Councils in the S&ELCP – this will provide consistency for all staff when dealing with these incidences.
- 2.2 The policy gives the Council a framework to implement and take appropriate actions when dealing with complaints. It clearly defines what is and is not a complaint as well as steps that will be taken to address complaints.
- 2.3 This Policy:
  - Confirms how to give feedback or make a complaint.
  - Highlights any exceptions to the standard customer feedback procedure, for example where specific issues are treated by a defined complaints procedure.
  - Defines the standard of service, including response times, to expect when making a complaint.
  - Recognises the importance of customer feedback in providing insight to Council services and performance.
  - Sets out how the Council monitors customer feedback and uses information to improve services and identify training needs.
- 2.4 This Policy has been designed to include corporate oversight and monitoring and has also been reviewed against the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code (the Code). Some of the key updates in the Code relate to response times and performance reporting.

The Stage 1 response time has been changed to up to 15 working days to align with the updated LGSCO Code – previously at Boston the response time was 20 working days. The Policy also adopts the Code’s suggested definitions for ‘a service request’ and ‘a complaint’ and confirms the approach the Council will take when responding to these.

- 2.5 As part of the implementation of the Policy, training and guidance will be offered to ensure Officers are aware of their responsibilities when dealing with and responding to complaints. The Council plans to use a complaints review panel (a ‘complaints clinic’) to extract any lessons learnt from recent complaints to enable sharing across the organisation.
- 2.6 The Council will also produce and publish an annual complaints performance and service improvement report to assess and analyse performance and improvements. This report will cover a number of areas, all outlined within the Policy at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.7 **Adoption** of these processes will ensure the Council complies with the requirements of the Code and in doing so will support the Council to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements.

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1. The Policy has been fully reviewed and updated to ensure the information is easily accessible and understood by officers and members of the public alike, clearly setting out the processes for different situations. It has also been fully reviewed against the new LGSCO Complaint Handling Code to ensure best practice is being followed. A diagram setting out how the complaints process works in practice can be found at **Appendix 2**.

### **Implications**

#### **South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership**

This will be an aligned policy, so officers are working to a single policy and set of procedures, ensuring consistency for officers and residents alike. Updating and aligning the Policy will also provide an opportunity to promote the Policy and confirm procedures to ensure service areas are aware of their responsibilities in relation to feedback and complaints.

#### **Corporate Priorities**

None

#### **Staffing**

None

#### **Workforce Capacity Implications**

None

## **Constitutional and Legal Implications**

The impact on individuals Human Rights have been considered throughout the Policy. The LGSCO has issued the Code as “advice and guidance” for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. This means that councils should consider the Code when developing complaint handling policies and procedures and when responding to complaints. If a council decides not to follow the Code, the LGSCO expects it to have a good reason for this.

## **Data Protection**

The provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 (including UK GDPR) will be complied with at all times when dealing with people.

## **Financial**

None

## **Risk Management**

None

## **Stakeholder / Consultation / Timescales**

Consultation has been undertaken with relevant PSPS staff and officers from relevant service areas to ensure all necessary scenarios are captured. The Corporate & Community Committee scrutinised the Policy at its Meeting on 14 November 2024 and recommended that it be adopted by the Cabinet.

## **Reputation**

None

## **Contracts**

None

## **Crime and Disorder**

None

## **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights / Safeguarding**

There is a need to balance people’s right to access information against their individual needs. The Policy makes it clear that considerations must be made in respect to each person’s circumstances.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

The health and wellbeing of staff and members is paramount. Customers would be assessed in respect of their additional needs if their complaints are considered under the Policy.

## **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

None

## **Acronyms**

LGSCO – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

## **Appendices**

Appendices are listed below and attached to the back of the report:

Appendix 1	Draft Customer Feedback Policy
Appendix 2	Diagram to show complaints process

## **Background Papers**

No background papers as defined in Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the production of this report.

## **Chronological History of this Report**

<b>Name of Body</b>	<b>Date</b>
Corporate & Community Committee	14 <sup>th</sup> November 2024

## **Report Approval**

Report author:	Richard Steele – Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer
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Signed off by:	John Medler, Assistant Director – Governance & Monitoring Officer
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