

# **CORPORATE COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS POLICY**

June 2025

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At Three Rivers District Council, we aim to provide high quality services to our customers. However, we recognise that sometimes things can go wrong. We value feedback and use it to improve our services.
- 1.2 The council considers compliments, comments and complaints as opportunities to learn and enhance our services.
- 1.3 This policy outlines how we handle complaints, what customers can expect, and how we align with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) guidance on good complaint handling.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This policy covers all services the council provides with a few notable exceptions.
- 2.2 The council is not able to except complaints where the matter is subject to other proceedings or investigation, where an alternative right of appeal exists or where a complaint has already been considered, such as:
  - Any matters already subject to or being considered by a civil or criminal court, tribunal, or via judicial review
  - Any matters where a court or tribunal has already ruled
  - Any matters where action being taken by or on behalf of any police authority in connection to the investigation or the prevention of crime
  - Any matters that are better handled via insurance claims
  - Any matters where there is a statutory right of appeal to a government minister or Secretary of State
  - Specific examples include:
    - Disputes over the issue of parking tickets are dealt with initially by the council's parking contractor, Hertsmere Borough Council, and a right of appeal then exists to the National Parking Adjudication Service.
    - Disputes over Housing Benefit claims can be dealt with by the Benefits Appeals Service.
    - Disputes about Council Tax liability can be dealt with by the Hertfordshire Valuation Tribunal.
  - Data protection, GDPR or Freedom of Information complaints, which can be escalated to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO)

- Complaints about councillors are handled under the Councillors' Code of Conduct and should be referred to the council's Monitoring Officer
- Any matters that have already been fully investigated, where the complaint has completed all stage of the council's corporate complaints process or been decided by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) will not be re-investigated

### 3. Aims of the policy

#### 3.1 Our compliments and complaints policy aims to:

- Provide our customers and residents with a well-publicised and easily accessible method of expressing feedback
- Offer a prompt and fair resolutions to problems
- Ensure consistency of approach to all complaints across all council services
- Record, monitor and analyse compliments and complaints to improve service quality
- Ensure all staff understand the importance of handling complaints effectively

### 4. What is a compliment?

- 4.1 The council defines a compliment as positive customer feedback on the way a service has been delivered or the way a member of staff has conducted themselves.
- 4.2 Compliments are an important part of the way the council monitors its performance and service delivery.
- 4.3 Compliments are recorded and shared with the relevant member of staff, Head of Service and Senior Leadership Team to encourage best practice across the organisation.

### 5. What is a complaint?

#### 5.1 The LGSCO define a complaint as:

***“an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.”***

#### 5.2 The council interprets this to be when:

- We have failed to do something we should have done
- We have done something we should not have done
- We provide a service, but it is below a reasonable standard
- We take too long to do something
- We treat a person unfairly
- Our staff or contractors have behaved inappropriately

## **6. What is not a complaint?**

- 6.1 A complaint should not be confused with a service request. A service request is:

***“a request that the council provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision”.***

- 6.2 Examples of service requests include:

- Reporting a missed bin
- Reporting an abandoned vehicle
- Reporting anti-social behaviour

## **7. Before making a complaint**

- 7.1 Before making a complaint, customers are encouraged to get in touch with the relevant service to let them know about their concerns. It may be a problem that can be resolved quickly without needing to use the complaints policy. We would suggest you search our services list on our website to find the specific request form where appropriate. These can be accessed at [www.threerivers.gov.uk](http://www.threerivers.gov.uk)

## **8. Making a complaint and accessibility**

- 8.1 The quickest and easiest way to make a complaint is by using the online complaints form on our website.

- 8.2 If access to our website is not possible, a complaint can be made in one of the following ways:

- By email: [enquiries@threerivers.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@threerivers.gov.uk)
- By telephone: 01923 776611
- In person at the Visitor Centre at Three Rivers House
- By letter addressed to: Complaints, Three Rivers District Council, Three Rivers House, Northway, Rickmansworth, WD3 1RL

- 8.3 We are committed to making our complaints process accessible to all. If you require assistance in making a complaint, then please contact the council by one of the methods above.

## **9. Time limits**

- 9.1 Complaints should be made within 12 months of the issue occurring. If a complaint is received after this time, it would not be accepted unless there are exceptional mitigating circumstances. This is because it is very difficult to effectively investigate historic issues.

## **10. Complaints process**

- 10.1 There are two stages to our complaints process.
- At Stage One we aim to acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days and investigate and respond to your complaint within **10 working days**.
  - At Stage Two we aim to acknowledge your escalation request within 3 working days and investigate and respond to your complaint within **15 working days**.
- 10.2 If an email address is not provided, acknowledgement and response may fall outside these timescales.
- 10.3 There may be occasions when the above timescales are not able to be met. In these cases, we will advise you when you can expect a full reply and include the reason for the delay.
- 10.4 Most complaints will be responded to under Stage One of the process in the first instance, however the Corporate Complaints Officer or a member of the Senior Leadership Team may decide, in exceptional circumstances, the matter is appropriate to move directly to Stage Two of the process.

## **11. Stage One - Departmental level**

- 11.1 The Head of Service or Service Manager of the department that you are dealing with will arrange for your complaint to be investigated by an appropriate officer who will then respond to you directly. We expect to be able to resolve most of our complaints at Stage One.
- 11.2 In your complaint you should include:
- What the issue is
  - When and where it occurred
  - Any impact it is having on you or others
  - Any previous attempts to resolve the issue
  - What you would like the council to do to resolve the issue

## **12. Stage Two - Executive level**

- 12.1 If you are dissatisfied with the Stage One response you can request a Stage Two review.
- 12.2 You must make this request within 30 calendar days of the date of the

Stage One response. If you have not responded within this timescale, the complaint will be closed.

12.3 In your request for review you need to state:

- What aspects of the Stage One response were you not satisfied with
- What outcome you would like

12.4 The review will be conducted by a member of the council's Senior Leadership Team. If the Stage One is conducted by a member of the Senior Leadership Team then a different member will conduct the Stage Two review to ensure impartiality.

12.5 Once a response has been sent following the review at Stage Two, this marks the end of the council's complaints process.

12.6 If you are still unhappy with the outcome after the Stage Two review, then you can refer your complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

### **13. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)**

13.1 The LGSCO is an independent body appointed by the Government to look into complaints against certain authorities.

13.2 The best way to make a complaint is via the [LGSCO website](#) which has an online form. For telephone help, you can call an LGSCO adviser, who will listen to you and say whether the LGSCO can consider your complaint. You can call 0300 061 0614 between the hours of 10.00am - 4.00pm, Monday to Friday (except public holidays).

### **14. Anonymous complaints**

14.1 We will not routinely investigate anonymous complaints. However, we may decide to investigate if they raise serious concerns about service failure, misconduct or public safety.

14.2 If no contact details are provided, we will not be able to provide a response in any circumstance.

### **15. Vexatious and unreasonably persistent complaints**

15.1 Where we consider a complaint to be vexatious or unreasonably persistent, we may, at any point in the process, refer it to the Vexatious & Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy, which will supersede the Corporate Compliments & Complaints Policy.

15.2 Full details of our Vexatious & Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy can be found on our website.

### **16. Remedies**

16.1 Our approach follows the LGSCO's advice on remedies which states:

***“The remedy needs to be appropriate to the injustice and should as far as possible put the complainant in the position they would have been in but for the maladministration.”***

16.2 Examples of remedies may include:

- Apologising
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- Taking action if there has been delay
- Reconsidering or changing a decision

## **17. Reporting and learning**

17.1 The council's Corporate Complaints Officer has responsibility for this policy on behalf of the Chief Executive. The Council's Corporate Complaints Officer is the Head of Customer Experience.

17.2 The Corporate Complaints Officer will monitor the number of complaints across the council identifying trends and key learning to improve performance and report them to the Corporate Management Team on a quarterly basis. Complaints data will also be published on the council's website.

17.3 All staff are responsible for being aware of what constitutes a complaint, so they can take a complaint in the first instance. This is to ensure that all complaints are registered and monitored, and customers can easily make a complaint.

17.4 The council's complaints handling performance is reported to the Corporate Management Team and the Joint Leadership Team annually for elected councillor oversight and governance.

## **18. Feedback on the complaints process**

18.1 After we have completed our investigation into your complaint, we may write to you and ask that you complete a satisfaction survey to comment on how we handled your complaint. These satisfaction surveys will help us to monitor how we are performing.

## **19. General conduct during complaints**

19.1 We understand that making a complaint can sometimes be frustrating, however we would ask that you treat our staff with courtesy and respect when we are dealing with your complaint. Abusive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. Any person acting in this way will have their complaint terminated immediately.

## **20. Other Support**

20.1 You can contact your local councillor at any stage of the complaints process. Contact details of councillors are available on our [website](#).

20.2 You can also get free and impartial advice from Citizens Advice Service. Visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

## **21. Policy Review**

21.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if required by changes in legislation, Ombudsman guidance or council procedures.

Policy review date:	June 2025
Policy reviewed by:	Head of Customer Experience
Summary of any amendments or updates:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Updated content to comply with the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code to be adopted by April 2026.</li><li>• Updated style and format.</li></ul>

Next policy review: June 2028



