

Annual feedback report 2025/2026



Introduction

This report provides an overview of complaints and feedback received by North Devon Council during 2025/2026. It explains how we have handled complaints, what we have learned, and how services have improved as a result.

The report is published in line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code to ensure transparency and accountability.

Since November 2024, we have made significant progress in aligning our complaint handling processes with the Complaint Handling Code. We have checked our complaints process against the standards set by the Ombudsman.

How to make a complaint

We want to make it easy for residents to raise concerns or provide feedback. Customers can submit feedback to us via:

- Online form on the website
- By phone
- By letter
- By email
- Via an authorised independent advocate or third party
- In person at a council premise
- Directly to a council employee
- Via service surveys
- Through social media direct requests

Advice and information can be provided in different languages or formats to meet individual's needs.

Staff receive training on handling feedback requests and assisting individuals.

Our complaints process

We operate a clear two-stage complaints process aligned with the timescales set out in the Complaint Handling Code.

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after completing our process, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Complaints received

This section provides an overview of the number and type of complaints and feedback received during the year, including outcomes across different services.

A breakdown of the complaints investigated by stage and whether we upheld the complaint is set out in Table 1. We record a complaint as upheld where we found that mistakes were made and/or we have provided a level of service below the standard we aim to achieve. We record a complaint as not upheld where we have not found fault.

Table 1 Justified and unjustified complaints

Stage	Total handled	Total justified	Justified %	Total unjustified	Unjustified %
Stage 1	391	244	62	147	38
Stage 2	69	36	52	33	48

Performance against timescales

We aim to respond to complaints within our published timescales to ensure a timely and effective service. This section shows our performance at each stage of the complaints process.

Stage one

Acknowledgment

Stage one complaints should be acknowledged by the Feedback team within 5 working days of the request being received.

Of the 460 complaints received, 99.6% were acknowledged within the 5 working days, with only two being acknowledged outside of the timeframe.

Response time

Stage one complaints should be responded to by the service within 10 working days of acknowledgment. Where complaints are more complex, the Code allows for a response timeframe of up to 20 working days in total, with the customer being advised accordingly.

97% of the stage one complaints were responded to in line with the Code requirements, however, 14 were responded to over the 10 working days timeframe without informing the customer there would be a delay.

Stage two

Acknowledgment

Stage two complaints should be acknowledged by the Feedback team within 5 working days of the request being received.

Of the 69 complaints received, 100% were acknowledged within the 5 working days timeframe.

Response time

Stage two complaints should be responded to by the Feedback team within 20 working days of acknowledgment. Where complaints are more complex, the Code allows for a response timeframe of up to 40 working days total, with the customer being advised accordingly.

94.2% of the stage two complaints were responded to in line with the Code requirements, however, 4 were responded to over the 40 working days total.

Remedies

Where, following investigation, we have upheld a complaint, we put measures in place to remedy the complaint.

The breakdown of remedies for upheld complaints is set out in Table 2.

Table 2 Complaint remedies

Stage	Apology	Explained our oversight / error	Staff training	Compensation	Process change	Disciplinary action
Stage 1	52	25	80	18	13	1
Stage 2	8	3	5	6	6	0

Learning and service improvements

We use complaints and customer feedback to help improve our services and identify areas where changes are needed. Complaints provide valuable learning opportunities and help ensure services continue to develop and improve.

During 2025/26, improvements made as a result of complaints and feedback included staff training and updates to training materials, improvements to website information and customer contact forms, policy and procedure updates to improve efficiency, enhanced monitoring of waste and recycling collections, and maintenance and signage improvements within public car parks.

Services will continue to use complaint outcomes and customer feedback to support ongoing improvements during 2026/27.

Complaints not accepted

In some cases, customers request to make a complaint that cannot be accepted under our complaints procedure. Where this applies, customers are advised of the appropriate route to raise or escalate their concerns and, where relevant, are signposted to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

During 2025/26, we received 31 requests that were not progressed through the complaints procedure. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the main reasons why these complaints were not accepted.

Table 3 Reason for complaint being rejected

	Separate route of appeal	Separate review of decision	Objection to undecided planning applications	Doesn't meet feedback requirements	Open police investigation	Previously exhausted complaints procedure	Civil matter
Total number	4	1	0	22	2	1	1

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman activity

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman independently reviews complaints about councils. This section summarises cases referred to the Ombudsman and their outcomes.

Annual Review Letter

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman publishes an annual review letter summarising our performance. The latest and previous letters are available on our feedback webpage.

Compliance with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

This section summarises our level of compliance, areas for improvement, and the actions we are taking.

What we're doing well

We are mostly meeting the standards and are doing the following points well:

- **Clear process** - We have a simple, two-stage complaints process that is published on our website.
- **Easy to complain** - You can complain in different ways – online, by email, phone, in writing, or in person.
- **Fair approach** - If we decide something isn't a complaint, we explain why and tell you how to contact the Ombudsman if you disagree.
- **Senior oversight** - Senior managers regularly review complaints and how we are performing.

What we still need to improve

We have an ongoing programme of improvements in place, including enhanced contractor guidance, process improvements, stronger follow-up on actions and better data collection and reporting.

Our full self-assessment is available on our website.

Governance and oversight

Complaints performance is regularly reviewed to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. Quarterly and annual reports are considered by our Senior Management Team and council Leader, with oversight from the Head of Customer Focus in line with the Complaint Handling Code.

Other types of feedback

In addition to complaints, the Feedback team handle customer comments and suggestions and compliments.

We use customer comments and suggestions to drive service improvements.

We handled 202 comments and suggestions and received 115 compliments.