

## **North Devon Council's self-assessment against the requirements of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code**

**April 2026**

Since November 2024, we have made significant progress in aligning our complaint handling processes with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. We have checked our complaints process against the standards set by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and this document outlines how we are aligned with the Code.

<b>Code section</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Do we follow the Code: Yes/No</b>	<b>Explanations and Commentary</b>
<b>1: Definition of a service request and complaint</b>	We recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint, and these are defined in our policies and procedures.	Yes	<p><a href="#">Link to complaints policy webpage.</a></p> <p>Our policy clearly distinguishes between a service request and a complaint. If a complaint is deemed to be a service request, the customer is notified with clear reference to the policy.</p> <p>Investigating officers and customer advisors receive training on these definitions and how to apply them in practice.</p>

<p><b>2: Exclusions</b></p>	<p>Our complaints policy sets out circumstances where we would not consider a complaint. These are reasonable and do not deny individuals access to redress.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p><a href="#">Link to complaints policy webpage.</a></p> <p>Our complaints policy sets out a clear list of appropriate and reasonable exclusions. These do not prevent individuals from accessing redress.</p> <p>Exclusions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requests for service</li> <li>• issues raised more than 12 months after they occurred or became known</li> <li>• complaints against a councillor</li> <li>• parking fines</li> <li>• council tax banding</li> <li>• housing benefits decisions</li> <li>• homeless decisions or allocated accommodation</li> <li>• planning decisions, listed building consents, and conservation matter</li> <li>• objections to undecided planning applications</li> </ul> <p>If a complaint request falls under the exclusions list, the customer is notified with clear reference to the policy and signposted to the Ombudsman and recorded for reporting purposes.</p> <p>We do not apply exclusions on a blanket basis and consider individual circumstances in each case. Investigating officers and customer advisors receive training on how to apply exclusions appropriately.</p> <p><a href="#">We also maintain an unreasonable customer behaviour policy here.</a></p>
<p><b>3: Accessibility and awareness</b></p>	<p>We provide different channels through which individuals can make</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p><a href="#">Link to complaints policy webpage</a></p> <p>Customers can complain via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online form on the website</li> <li>• By phone</li> </ul>

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	<p>complaints. These are accessible and we can make reasonable adjustments where necessary</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By letter</li> <li>• By email</li> <li>• Via an authorised independent advocate or third party</li> <li>• In person at a council premise</li> <li>• Directly to a council employee</li> <li>• Via service surveys</li> <li>• Through social media direct requests</li> </ul> <p>Advice and information can be provided in different languages or formats to meet individual's needs.</p> <p>Investigating officers and customer advisors receive training on handling feedback requests and assisting individuals.</p>

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<p><b>4: Complaint handling resources</b></p>	<p>We have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling. Complaints are viewed as a core service and resourced accordingly.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Feedback team are responsible for handling complaints, maintaining the complaints system and liaising with the Ombudsman. The Feedback team have access to staff at all levels.</p> <p>Complaints are administered by the Feedback team who distribute them to the relevant service investigating officers.</p> <p>The service investigating officers are responsible for investigating and responding to stage one complaints, except for stage one complaints where more than one service area is involved, in such case the Feedback team collate the service responses and co-ordinate a single reply to the customer. The service investigating officers have the authority and autonomy to resolve disputes.</p> <p>The Feedback team are responsible to investigating and responding to stage two complaints. The feedback officers have the authority and autonomy to resolve disputes.</p> <p>The Feedback team are responsible for responding to the Ombudsman's enquiries and investigations.</p> <p>We recognise that embedding a positive organisational culture around complaints is ongoing work. Ongoing training and internal communications are identified as being necessary to strengthen organisational culture around learning from complaints.</p>

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<b>5: The complaint handling process</b>	We have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code and individuals are given the option of raising a complaint where they express dissatisfaction that meets the definition of the complaint in our policy.	Yes	<p><a href="#">Link to complaints policy webpage.</a></p> <p>We operate a single, two-stage complaints policy covering all complaints. Staff are trained to support customers in raising complaints where dissatisfaction meets the defined criteria.</p>

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
<p><b>6: Complaints stages (Stage 1)</b></p>	<p>We process stage 1 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.</p>	<p>Partial</p>	<p>Our complaints policy is aligned with the timescales set out in the Code. We measure performance against this standard.</p> <p><u>Acknowledgment</u> Of the 460 complaints received, 99.6% were acknowledged within the 5 working days, with only two being acknowledged outside of the timeframe.</p> <p><u>Response time</u> 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.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> External contractors who handle complaints on our behalf require further guidance to ensure compliance with the Code.</p>

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
<p><b>6: Complaints stages (Stage 2)</b></p>	<p>We process stage 2 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.</p>	<p>Partial</p>	<p>Our complaints policy is aligned with the timescales set out in the Code. We measure performance against this standard.</p> <p><u>Acknowledgment</u> Of the 69 complaints received, 100% were acknowledged within the 5 working days timeframe.</p> <p><u>Response time</u> 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.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> External contractors who handle complaints on our behalf require further guidance to ensure compliance with the Code.</p>

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<b>7: Putting things right</b>	When something has gone wrong, we take action to put things right.	Yes	<p>Where, after investigation, a complaint is upheld, we will respond to the customer and acknowledge where we have gone wrong, what actions we have already taken and any further proposed resolutions.</p> <p>During investigations, we will also look at any wider lessons learnt or service improvements. Investigating officers receive training on identifying appropriate remedies and improvements.</p> <p>We record and track actions and learning centrally. Outcomes and actions are reported through quarterly and annual reporting</p> <p>We recognise that embedding a positive organisational culture around learning from complaints is ongoing work. Ongoing training and internal communications are identified as being necessary to strengthen organisational culture around learning from complaints.</p>

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<b>8: Performance reporting and self-assessment</b>	We produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge which includes a self-assessment against the Code.	Yes	<p>Internal quarterly performance reports are provided to the Senior Management Team and the Council's Leader. These include key elements required by the Code</p> <p>An annual complaints performance and service improvement report is submitted to the Senior Management Team and the Council's Leader and published on our website alongside this self-assessment.</p> <p>Although we comply with the Code, efficiency improvements have been identified to improve the capturing and reporting on complaints handled outside of timescales.</p>
<b>9: Scrutiny and Oversight</b>	We have appropriate senior leadership and governance oversight of the complaints process and performance.	Yes	The senior leader with responsibility for complaints under the remit of the Ombudsman is the Head of Customer Focus. The member with responsibility for complaints under the remit of the Ombudsman is the Council's Leader.