

# 'Have your say'

A guide to Plymouth City Council's compliments,  
suggestions and complaints scheme

# Have your say...

## **We want to know when we get things wrong so we can put them right**

We want to provide you with the best possible service, but with more than 240,000 residents, 100,000 visitors each year and providing such a wide range of services we realise that we can't always get it right. It is really important that when things go wrong our customers tell us, so that we can apologise, put them right and try not to let them happen again.

## **We want to continue improving**

We also like to hear from our customers when we have done a good job. This way we can share what we do well to increase customer satisfaction across all our services. It is also important for you to tell us if you have a suggestion on how we could do better.

## **The aims of this scheme**

We hope that by providing this scheme and dealing with all complaints, compliments and suggestions effectively, we will:

- Ensure we have a simple and efficient way for our customers to tell us what they think about how we provide our services
- Enable everyone, including those from diverse or minority groups to have an equal chance to tell us what they think and to ensure that we give extra help to those who need it
- Actively encourage feedback and make sure we use it to improve our services
- Provide clear guidance and expectations to our employees on how to deal with complaints, compliments and suggestions so that our customers get the same high quality service from all our staff however they choose to contact us
- Increase customer satisfaction by handling complaints efficiently and by spreading good practice across the Council
- Learn from our mistakes, first time, every time by ensuring we change things so that we don't make the same mistake again.

Some customers may think that it is a waste of time contacting us and that it will get lost in such a large organisation, but we want to assure you that Plymouth City Council is committed to improving the services we offer and we can only do this if you tell us.

The purpose of this document is to tell you:

- What the Have Your Say scheme covers
- When and how to make a complaint, suggestion or compliment
- How we will deal with your feedback
- What to do if you remain dissatisfied.

## **What does the scheme cover?**

Any complaint, compliment or suggestion from a customer, user of a service, organisation or member of the public. That includes:

- All Council services except those with a special legal complaints process (detailed below)
- All services provided by partner organisations or contractors on behalf of the Council
- Complaints about discriminatory behaviour such as racist or homophobic incidents
- Complaints about how we may have dealt with a Freedom of Information or Data Protection request
- Complaints made to councillors that we pass on to the appropriate services to respond.

All complaints, compliments or suggestions need to be about something specific and they are likely to be about one or more of the following:

- The standard or speed of service provided by the Council
- The Council's failure to provide an agreed service
- The attitude or conduct of a member of staff has been unacceptable
- That the Council has failed to follow an agreed process or procedure
- Maladministration by the Council (for example delay, bias or confusion)
- The Council has not followed the Equal Opportunities Policy by failing to provide services fairly to all members of the community.

## **What is not covered?**

- Requests for a service or reporting faults (for example, a faulty street light or to report a pothole in the road)
- Matters where there is an existing right to appeal, including appeals against:
  - parking Penalty Charge Notices
  - pupil exclusions, statements of special educational needs or schools admissions
  - council tax liability
  - housing benefit decisions
  - homeless decisions or allocated accommodation
  - planning decisions, listed building consents and conservation area consents, or objections to undecided planning applications or unauthorised works
- Complaints about social care for adults and children, which should be made to:

Social Services Customer Relations

Plymouth City Council

Plymouth, PL1 2AA

Phone: 0800 068 1249 or 01752 307304

Email: [complaintssocialservices@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:complaintssocialservices@plymouth.gov.uk)

- Complaints about elected members, which should be made in writing to:

The Standards Committee  
c/o Head of Legal Services  
Plymouth City Council  
Civic Centre  
Plymouth, PL1 5AA

## Compliments, comments and suggestions

Our aim is to provide an excellent service to our customers, and compliments, comments and suggestions are an important source of information to help us to improve.

The Council is committed to encouraging feedback from everyone and will respect and cater for differences in age, gender, race, culture, religion, language, literacy, disability or sexual orientation.

We will treat everyone fairly. We will help those who need it and try to make arrangements so that everyone has an equal chance to tell us what they think, in a way that is easy for them.

Compliments, comments and suggestions can be made directly to a service in person, by telephone, e-mail, via the web or in writing. Making a complaint has been made as easy as possible by providing a single phone number, 01752 668000, a single email address: [haveyoursay@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@plymouth.gov.uk) and a single postal address:

Customer Services  
Plymouth City Council  
Plymouth  
PL1 2AA

Feedback can also be given via the “Have Your Say” leaflet which guides customers through writing a complaint or comment and is available in all Council public buildings and on the website. This is also available in the main community languages, large print or audio format and can be provided on request in other languages or in Braille.

Officers will, where possible, arrange translation or interpretation services if requested by the customer or their representative, for example, other languages, audio format, British Sign Language, large print or Braille for customers who do not use English as their main language or for those who have disabilities which require this.

If taking a complaint verbally from a customer, officers will ask customers to say how they would like to receive their response, for example, by phone or letter in order to meet their particular needs.

Officers will help customers, where necessary, to write down the details of their complaint or will record details of verbal complaints on behalf of the customer. Some issues may be confidential and officers will make arrangements to ensure privacy if necessary.

# How to make a complaint

## On the spot complaint

If you feel that the Council has done something wrong, or badly, or failed to do something, wherever possible please tell the service concerned by telephone or in person, as we may be able to solve the problem straight away. If you are happy with the solution offered we will record your complaint so we can use the feedback to improve our service, but we will not provide a written reply unless you ask for one.

## Stage one complaint

If you are not satisfied at this stage or have been unable to solve your complaint on the spot, you may wish to make a formal complaint. You can do this in writing, in person, by e-mail, via our website or using the Have Your Say complaints form. To help us deal with your complaint effectively you will need to tell us:

- what the problem is and how it occurred
- how it has effected you and
- what you consider should be done to put it right.

## **How we will deal with your complaint**

1. We will log your complaint onto our database and you will receive written acknowledgement within three working days.
2. We will send your complaint to an investigating officer for the department that provides the service you are complaining about.
3. Your complaint will be investigated by a team leader or supervisor who is senior to any officer(s) involved in the issue you are complaining about.

A full written response will be sent to you within ten working days. If this is not possible we will tell you why and let you know when you can expect a response.

## Stage two complaint

If you are not happy with our response at stage one or feel that we have failed to put something right, you can ask us to look at the complaint again. Your complaint will then be considered as a stage two complaint, which you can make in person, by e-mail, via our website or using the Have Your Say complaints form.

Stage two will not be a repeat of the original stage one complaint. The investigating officer will contact you to find out what part of the stage one decision you would like us to look at again. All the files will be looked at again and where necessary we will talk to the officers involved.

## **How we will deal with your complaint**

1. We will log your complaint onto our database and you will receive written acknowledgement within three working days.
2. We will send your complaint to an investigating officer for the department that provides the service you are complaining about.
3. Your complaint will be investigated by a senior manager or head of service for the department that provides the service you are complaining about. If this is not possible a senior officer from a different service area will investigate your complaint.
4. A full written response will be sent to you within 25 working days. If this is not possible, we will tell you why and let you know when you can expect a response.

## **The Local Government Ombudsman**

We'd hope your complaint would have been solved before now, but if you are unhappy with our responses or feel we have failed to put things right you can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman is an independent organisation that looks at complaints about councils. The Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice as a result of maladministration and will not question whether our decision is right or wrong, but will look at whether we have dealt with your complaint correctly. You can contact the Ombudsman at the address below:

The Local Government Ombudsman  
The Oaks, No 2  
Westwood Way  
Westwood Business Park  
Coventry CV4 8JB  
Telephone: 024 7682 0000  
Fax: 024 7682 0001  
Email: [enquiries.Coventry@lgo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.Coventry@lgo.org.uk)

Further information about the Ombudsman service is available on the Local Government Ombudsman website. [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

From 1 April 2008, a new advice service was launched – the LGO Advice Team. You can call an adviser, who will listen to you and say whether the LGO will consider your complaint. If your complaint can be considered the adviser will take down your details, explain their role and tell you what will happen next. They can be contacted on 0845 602 1983 or 024 7682 1960

## **The Information Commissioner**

The Information Commissioner deals with complaints about how councils deal with request that come under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Commissioner can be contacted at the following address:

Freedom of Information  
Information Commissioner  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
SK9 5AF  
Telephone enquiries: 01625 545 700  
Fax enquiries: 01625 524 510  
Or look at the website at [www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk)

### **Using feedback to improve services**

All feedback is logged onto our database and is looked at by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Standards Committee. Departmental directors also get feedback about complaints and compliments, showing areas for improvement or areas where good practice could be shared and summaries of suggestions. This information helps us decide what our future services should be like.

### **Data Protection**

Customers are entitled to ask for a copy of the personal data we hold about them under the Data Protection Act 1998. When a customer makes a request like this it is sometimes called a 'subject access request'. We currently charge £10 for this.

We must only use information like this for the reason we are collecting it. In this case personal information is collected because of a comment, suggestion or complaint. The information may also be used to contact anyone who has complained to see if they are satisfied with how their complaint was dealt with.

The information will not be used for any other reason.

### **Unacceptable behaviour**

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, providing a high quality service to those who make them. As part of this service we do not normally limit the contact people have with our offices.

However there are a small number of people who, because of the number of times they contact our offices, hinder our complaints work. We consider this unacceptable behaviour and if we have to we will take action.

We also do not expect our staff to tolerate behaviour that is unacceptable, for example, abusive, offensive or threatening and we will take action to protect staff from that behaviour.

When we consider someone's behaviour is unacceptable we will tell them why and ask them to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict their contact with our offices.

The decision to restrict access to our offices will be taken at Assistant Director level or above and will normally follow a warning. Any restrictions will be appropriate and proportionate. The action we are most likely to take is:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only)
- requiring contact to take place with a named officer
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times
- asking the someone to enter into an agreement about their future contact with us.

In all cases where we decide someone's behaviour is unacceptable we will write to tell them why, what action we are taking and how long it will last. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it.

If action is taken because of unacceptable behaviour and we are still investigating their complaint six months later, we will carry out a review and decide if restrictions will continue.

If someone's complaint is closed but they keep contacting us about it, we may decide to end contact with them. In such cases, we will read all information received, but unless there is new evidence that affects our decision on the complaint, we will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.

New complaints from people whose behaviour has been unacceptable in the past will be looked at without bias on their own merits.

If someone continues to behave in an unacceptable way, we may decide to end contact with them and stop their complaint.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety or welfare of the Council's staff, we will consider reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give prior warning of that action.