



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

FEEDBACK

Comments, compliments and complaints



A guide to the Council's customer feedback policy and process

INTRODUCTION

Customer feedback is important to us as it provides us with valuable information about our performance and can help us to improve the services we provide.

This feedback policy details the Council's approach to dealing with the comments, compliments and complaints that we receive from our customers.

FEEDBACK - DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about the standard of service provided by us or our partners.

A general comment is an idea or suggestion to help us improve a service or aspect of customer care.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction because you haven't received a service that you should have or because the standard of service did not meet your expectations. To help you decide if your feedback should be logged as a complaint, the definition of a complaint is that you;

- have not received a service that you expected to be delivered
- have received a bad service
- are not happy with the service you have been provided
- are not happy about the way you have been treated by a Council employee.

Please note - if you are reporting something to us for the first time, are seeking information or seeking advice, these are considered as service requests rather than feedback. Please review our webpages and the Self Service page at <https://selfservice.plymouth.gov.uk/> to check whether there is a reporting form you can use to request a service instead.

HOW TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

If you have some feedback to give us and you are being served directly by a member of our staff please tell them so that they can try and take any action necessary at the time.

We aim to continuously improve the way we capture, record and respond to your feedback.

If you are not being served directly by a member of our staff, the easiest and most efficient method available is to submit your feedback using our online Self Service option, which you can access at www.plymouth.gov.uk/feedbackandcomplaints and complete the relevant online feedback form.

If you don't have access to a computer, tablet or smartphone, you can visit the 1st Stop Shop where one of our Customer Advisors will be happy to support you in completing the form online or call us on 01752 668000.

Complaints about our partners or contractors

We require any organisation that provides services on our behalf to comply with our policies. This means we require our contractors/partners to record and respond to customer feedback, provide us with information when requested and assist us with investigations as appropriate.

When making these complaints, please do so through the normal Self Service channels.

Complaints about our staff

If you are not happy about the way you have been treated by a Council employee we will investigate the complaint and deal with any resulting issues using the appropriate internal Council policy.

Anonymous complaints

In normal circumstances we are unlikely to be able to effectively deal with anonymous comments, compliments or complaints under this corporate customer feedback process, as we need to correspond with (and in some cases, meet with) the complainant in order to address their concerns.

Feedback response times

We will acknowledge your feedback and wherever possible let you know what we are doing/have done as a result. If you raise a complaint, we will let you know who will be investigating the complaint.

We aim to respond to complaints within a maximum of ten working days. Sometimes we might not be able to respond within this timescale, this might be because of the complexity of the issue. In such instances we will let you know why we can't respond within ten days and let you know when we anticipate to respond.

EXCLUSIONS TO THE FEEDBACK POLICY

There are some issues that we can't deal with through our feedback policy as they are either beyond our remit or there are statutory procedures that need to be followed. These exclusions include:

- service requests or reporting faults (e.g. faulty street light, missed bin or pothole)
www.plymouth.gov.uk/selfservice
- a complaint about a Councillor
www.plymouth.gov.uk/feedbackandcomplaints/makecomplaintaboutcouncillor
- a complaint or comment about adult social care
www.plymouth.gov.uk/adultcareandhealth/makecomplaintorcommentonadultsocialcare
- a complaint or comment about children's social care
www.plymouth.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies/makecomplaintorcommentonchildrensocialcare
- general school complaints – it is the schools responsibility to investigate these so please contact the school direct or for more information visit
www.plymouth.gov.uk/schoolsandeducation/makecomplaintaboutschoo
- environmental crime – the issue of on-the-spot fines for littering visit
www.plymouth.gov.uk/environmentandpollution/environmentalcrime

Matters where there is an existing right to appeal:

- Appeal a decision about work on a protected tree
www.plymouth.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/treesandhedges/appealdecisionaboutworkonprotectedtree
- Appeal a planning decision
www.plymouth.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningapplications/appealplanningdecision
- Appeal a planning enforcement notice
www.plymouth.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningapplications/howwedealunauthorisedplanning
- Housing Benefit
www.plymouth.gov.uk/benefitsandgrants/housingbenefit
- Parking and bus lane fines (penalty charge notices)
www.plymouth.gov.uk/parkingandtravel/parkingandbuslanefines
- School admissions
www.plymouth.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies/schoolseducationskillsandemployability/schooladmissions/appealschoolplace
- Council Tax
www.plymouth.gov.uk/home/counciltax/counciltaxsupport
- Objections to undecided planning applications
www.plymouth.gov.uk/planningandbuildingcontrol/planningapplications/searchandcommentonplanningapplication
- Freedom of Information
www.plymouth.gov.uk/aboutcouncil/accessinformation/freedominformationfoi

Complaint response options

When the investigation into your complaint is complete, we will respond to let you know what we found (also known as the outcome of the investigation). The possible outcomes we will use are defined below;

Upheld – your complaint was valid.

Not upheld – your complaint is not valid as we have been unable to find evidence of fault at our end.

Outside policy – your complaint cannot be dealt with through the Feedback Policy and has an alternative route/option through which it should be raised i.e. statutory appeal routes (see the Exclusions to the Feedback Policy section above for more information and examples).

Service Request – either the investigation found that you have not requested this service before raising a complaint OR that there is an existing process that is better suited to dealing with your complaint. In both cases we will close your complaint and raise a service request on your behalf so that you can receive the service within the relevant service standards (see the Exclusions to the Feedback Policy section above for more information and examples).

Valid complaints

If our investigation finds that your complaint was valid, we will confirm the reason why so that we can learn from the feedback you have provided. Reasons include;

Service not delivered – you did not receive the service you should have received.

Service delayed – there was an unacceptable delay in us providing the service to you.

Standard of service did not meet customer expectations
– you received the service but elements of it did not meet the professional standard expected from Plymouth City Council.

Staff behaviour – you did not receive the professional standard of service expected from staff at Plymouth City Council.

What to do if you are not happy with the response to your complaint

If you are not happy with the response you receive, you have the option to submit your complaint again for review by a senior manager. You have 28 days from the receipt of the response to submit your complaint again for this second stage.

The easiest and most efficient method available is to re-submit your complaint using our online Self Service option, which you can access at www.plymouth.gov.uk/feedbackandcomplaints. When you are asked if this is the first time you have told us about the issue, click no and provide the details of the original complaint as well as the reason why you are unhappy with our response.

You can also use the other options described in the 'How to provide feedback' section if you don't have access to a computer, tablet or smartphone.

The same timescales will be applied to the review as detailed in the 'Feedback response timescales' section.

If you remain unhappy after the senior manager review, you will be provided contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman (more detail on this can be found in the next section).

Local Government Ombudsman

Our complaints process does not affect your right to make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) at any time, but the LGO will expect you to give us the chance to solve the problem by following our feedback policy before you contact them.

If you remain unhappy after using the two stages in our feedback policy, the Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted using the details below;

www.lgo.org.uk

Complete an online complaint form at https://www.lgo.org.uk/forms/showForm.asp?nc=QGI&fm_fid=81

Telephone 0300 061 0614

Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants

In a minority of cases, people pursue complaints in a way that can impede the investigation of their complaint or can have significant resource implications for us.

We have adopted the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) definitions as follows:

- **Unreasonable behaviour and unreasonably persistent complainants** - are people who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with us, hinder our consideration of theirs, or other people's complaints.
- **Vexatious complaints** - are those made without sufficient grounds, but made especially so as to cause annoyance or disruption.

Where it is decided to treat you as an unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainant, we will write to tell you why your behaviour falls into that category and what action is being taken.

Performance and monitoring of customer feedback

We are committed to continually improving the services we deliver to our customers. Information gained from customer feedback is a valuable tool in identifying the needs of our customers and developing our services to meet those needs.

All feedback is recorded as part of our standard performance monitoring process. We may contact you again to find out how you found the feedback process.

If we change the way we do something as a result of what you have told us, we may publicise that the change has happened because of feedback we have received from our customers, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Ensuring equal access for all

We are committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make this Feedback Policy and Process easy to use and accessible to all of our customers, and we 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. This Policy and Process guide can be available in other formats on request.

THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

Compliments and Comments:

If you feel that we have done something well or you would like to make a suggestion about something we could improve, please tell us so that we can try and take any action necessary. Use one of the options described in the 'How to provide feedback' section.

Complaints:

If you feel that we have failed to do something or done something wrong, please tell us as quickly as possible so that we can aim to resolve the issue in question. Use one of the options described in the 'How to provide feedback' section.

We will acknowledge your complaint, investigate the complaint and respond within 10 days wherever possible.

If you are not happy with the response we provide to the complaint you have raised, you have the option to submit your complaint again for review by a senior manager. Use one of the options described in the 'How to provide feedback' section to log your second stage complaint within 28 days.

We will acknowledge your complaint, a senior manager will investigate the complaint and respond within 10 days wherever possible.

If you remain unhappy after using the two stages in our feedback policy, the Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted using the details in the 'Local Government Ombudsman' section.

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CONTACT

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