

**North East Derbyshire District Council**

**Cabinet**

**16 April 2026**

**Corporate Comments Compliments & Complaints Review**

**Report of the Assistant Director of Communities & Environmental Health**

Classification: This report is public

Report By: Lee Pepper – Assistant Director of Communities & Environmental Health

Contact Officer: Rachael Pope – Customer Service Manager

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**PURPOSE / SUMMARY**

To review the Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure, in line with the scheduled three-year review cycle. The last review was undertaken in June 2022.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the review of the Corporate Comments Compliments and Complaints Policy be noted.
2. That the formal response timescale for complaints be amended so that complaints are answered within 10 working days instead of the current 15 working days.

Approved by the Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Birkin

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**IMPLICATIONS**

**Finance and Risk:** Yes  No

**Details:** Whilst there are no direct financial implications with regard to the report, the Council is at risk of recommendations or decisions by the Local Government Ombudsman if complaints are not handled well. In cases of maladministration, financial penalties can be imposed by the Local Government Ombudsman.

Reducing the response timescale by 10 working days could place additional pressure on internal staff to complete investigations. There is a risk that, if not managed, more complaints could fall outside the standard timescale.

On Behalf of the Section 151 Officer

**Legal (including Data Protection):**                      **Yes**                      **No**

**Details:** In the case of complaints are not investigated properly and the LG&SCO finds maladministration, the Council may be fined. This risk exists under the current policy as well.

On Behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

**Staffing:**      **Yes**                      **No**

**Details:**

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

## DECISION INFORMATION

Decision Information	
<p><b>Is the decision a Key Decision?</b>            A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p><b>NEDDC:</b>  <b>Revenue - £125,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Capital - £310,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p><b>Is the decision subject to Call-In?</b>            (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</p>	No
<p><b>District Wards Significantly Affected</b></p>	None

<b>Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) details:</b>	
	Yes, superseded by stage 2
	Yes, appended. <b>Appendix C</b>
	Yes  Details:

<b>Links to Council Plan priorities;</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A great place that cares for the environment</b></li> <li>• <b>A great place to live well</b></li> <li>• <b>A great place to work</b></li> <li>• <b>A great place to access good public services</b></li> </ul>

## REPORT DETAILS

### 1 **Background** *(reasons for bringing the report)*

Every three years the Council undertakes a review of the organisations complaints policy and procedure to ensure its working in line with best practice. Reviewing any recommendations, made by the LG&SCO, any internal audits, benchmarking with other LA's and any consultations undertaken with NED residents.

#### 1.1 Complaints

##### • **Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution**

Verbal complaints are resolved immediately or by a supervisor within three working days, ensuring quick customer response

##### • **Stage 2 – Formal Investigations**

Written complaints are acknowledged within three working days and responded to within fifteen working days, following the investigation

- **Stage 3 – Internal Review**

Written complaints undergo an internal review (appeal), acknowledged within three working days and responded to within 20 working days

### **System Generated Reminders**

Reminders are automatically sent after set periods to officers managing complaints to ensure timely responses

**Formal Complaints** – Complaint handlers currently receive a reminder at 10 working days that the response is still required as it approaches the corporate standard of 15 working days.

Internal Review – Complaint handlers receive a reminder at 15 working days that the response is still required as it approaches the corporate standard of 20 working days.

### **Current Performance on Complaints & Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) – Independent Reviews**

During financial year 2023 / 2024, 2024 / 2025 the target for answering complaints within standard (timescale) was 100% for both formal and internal review complaints

Due to some complexities within some complaints, it was decided that the target of answering formal complaints should be reviewed and a revised target for financial year 2025 / 2026 the standard (timescale) for answering complaints. It was agreed from 01<sup>st</sup> April 2025 the standard for responses would be 98% for formal responses and 85% for internal review responses.

	<b>2023/ 2024</b>	<b>2024 / 2025</b>	<b>2025 /2026 - Quarter 1-3</b>
<b>Stage 2 Formal Complaints Received</b>	218	197	149
<b>% of formal complaints answered within standard (timescale)</b>	79%	91%	95%
<b>Stage 3 Internal Reviews (Appeals) Received</b>	26	30	32
<b>% of Internal Reviews answered within standard (timescale)</b>	85%	77%	78%
<b>LG&amp;SCO How many Ombudsman cases have been received</b>	14	7	5
<b>How many Ombudsman cases have been upheld</b>	3	0	0

## 1.2 Compliments

Total number of written compliments received for this financial year 01<sup>st</sup> April 2025 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 were 166.

A good cross section of compliments was received from customers appreciating excellent service, including 64 for the Street Scene Services Department, 64 for the Leisure centres, 22 for the Customer Services department, 5 for the Housing Options team, 4 for Environmental Health, 2 for each of the Elections, Facilities and Community Safety teams and 1 for the Revenues & Benefits department.

## 1.3 Comments

We had a total of 24 comments, and I am pleased to inform you that all 24 were acknowledged and passed on to the respective departments within our target timeframe of 3 working days. Once the comments are logged, it is at the department's or officer's discretion to respond back to the customer regarding their comment or implement any changes following receipt of their comments.

## 2. Details of Proposal or Information

### 2.1 Benchmarking undertaken

As part of our continuous improvement efforts, we have undertaken a benchmarking process with neighbouring authorities. This initiative aims to better understand the practices of other Councils concerning their Complaints procedures.

We have gathered data on the standards and timescales for responses to both formal and internal review complaints from various Councils. This information will be instrumental in helping us align our procedures with best practices and ensuring that we are providing the highest level of service to our constituents.

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Formal Complaint Response Standard (Timescale)</b>	<b>Internal Review Complaint Response Standard (Timescale)</b>
North East Derbyshire District Council	15 working days	20 working days
Bolsover District Council	10 working days	20 working days
High Peak Borough Council	10 working days	20 working days
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	10 working days	20 working days

Chesterfield Borough Council	10 working days	20 working days
Derbyshire Dales District Council	10 working days	10 working days
Derby City	10 working days	20 working days
Amber Valley	10 working days	10 working days
Erewash	10 working days	20 working days
Local Government & Social care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) <b>Best Practice Recommendation</b>	10 working days	20 working days

According to LG&SCO guidelines, formal complaints should be addressed within 10 working days, while internal reviews should be completed within 20 working days.

Additionally, if a complainant remains dissatisfied with our response, they have the option to request an independent review by the Ombudsman. It's crucial that we adhere to these timelines if possible but not mandatory to ensure that we provide the best possible service and maintain our commitment to transparency and accountability.

## 2.2 Internal Audit Review

In accordance with the 2025/26 annual audit plan a review of the processes and controls in respect of Corporate Complaints was undertaken during July 2025.

This audit has covered the policies / procedures and effectiveness of complaints handling and monitoring as per the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) requirements.

The assurance level outcome following the review was substantial with one recommendation (risk low) this being:

To ensure that policy review is undertaken promptly, and recommendations are made to harmonise NEDDC's Formal Investigation response timeline with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code of 10-working days. This change would:

- Align with internal audit recommendations.
- Align with neighbouring authorities.

- Reflect best practice as advised by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
- Align with customer recommendations for formal response timescale

### Scope & Exceptions

- **Rykneld Homes:** Complaints about Rykneld Homes fall outside the Council's Policy and Procedure. However, if Rykneld tenants exhaust the Rykneld complaints procedure, they may approach the Council, or the Housing Ombudsman may investigate. If maladministration is found, North East Derbyshire District Council, as landlord, may be fined.
- **Councillor Complaints:** These are outside the scope of the Council's complaints procedure and are independently investigated.

### 2.3 Public Consultation

We ran some external consultation on complaints via the website, social media and face to face. The consultation ran for a six-week period between 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025 until the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2026. Unfortunately, there were very little response with only 19 response during this period.

Unfortunately, the response rate was quite low, with only 19 individuals providing feedback during this time. When we asked about what they consider to be a reasonable timeframe for receiving a response, the feedback was as follows:

<b>What residents consider to be a reasonable response timeframe for Formal Complaints</b>		
	<b>Number of residents</b>	<b>Percentage of residents</b>
<b>5 working days</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>10 working days</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>15 working days</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Other (Specify)</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What residents consider to be a reasonable response timeframe for Internal review Complaints</b>		
<b>15 working days</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>20 working days</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>25 working days</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Other (specify)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5%</b>

\*For full consultation report on complaints see Appendix A

### 3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3 . To work in line with LGSCO recommendations and best practice.
- 3 To address audit recommendations following the internal audit review on complaints (July 2025), which recommended harmonising NEDDC’s formal complaints handling code to 10 working days – **See Appendix A**
- 3 A Complaints Procedure Survey was conducted from 15 December 2025 to 25 January 2026 to gather residents’ views on acceptable response times. Outcome above, for full complaints survey – **see Appendix B**
- 3 To align with other local neighbouring authorities
- 3 The proposed change will require clear communication to staff and adequate support to ensure compliance with the new timescale.
- 3 Ongoing monitoring will be necessary to assess the impact of the change on complaint handling performance and staff workload.
- 3 The policy should be reviewed again in three years, or sooner if further best practice guidance emerges.

#### **4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 4 Retain the current 15 working day timescale for the next three years. This option is not recommended as it does not align with best practice or audit recommendations.

#### **DOCUMENT INFORMATION**

<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix A	Internal Audit Complaints Process
Appendix B	Consultation on Complaints
Appendix C	EIA
<p><b>Background Papers</b> (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet you must provide copies of the background papers)</p>	