

## **Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure**

Stoke-on-Trent City Council actively encourages all customer feedback about its services. Please let us know if you are not satisfied, or have a suggestion about how we could do things differently. We also welcome comments and compliments.

We are committed to:

- dealing with complaints and comments quickly and effectively; and
- using complaints, comments and compliments to review and improve our services

If you feel that we have got it wrong or have given you a poor service tell the member of staff or their supervisor as this can often be the quickest way of sorting things out. They will not treat your comments as a formal complaint (unless you ask them to) but they will use your comments and take appropriate action, or give you information.

If you do not want to do this or are unhappy with the response you get, you can make a complaint.

### **What is a complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Stoke-on-Trent city council, its own staff, those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

### **How to complain**

#### **Stage 1**

You can make a complaint either in person, by phone, in writing or by email. Or, you can fill in the Customer Feedback Form online. Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing within two working days and you will be given information about who is dealing with your complaint. We aim to respond to you within 10 working days. If the complaint is more complicated we may take longer to sort it out but we will keep you informed.

#### **Stage 2**

If you are still not happy, you can ask to have the matter investigated by an independent investigator within the council. You need to request this within 10 working days of receiving your Stage 1 complaint response. This review will be conducted by a Customer Feedback Officer together with a senior manager not involved in the stage 1 complaint investigation. We will acknowledge your complaint within two working days and reach a decision within 20 working days. To request a Stage 2, please outline in writing the reasons why you are still dissatisfied and the outcome you require. This should be sent to the Customer Feedback Team, Civic Centre, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1HH or by email to:- [customer.feedback@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@stoke.gov.uk)

## **Ombudsman**

If you have been through stages 1 and 2 and are still not satisfied, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or for Housing related complaints, The Housing Ombudsman Service and their contact details are:

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH

You can get more information on the Local Government Ombudsman by calling their advice line on 0300 061 0614 or visiting their website at [Local Government Ombudsman](#)

## **Housing Related Complaints**

From 1 April 2013 the Housing Ombudsman Service will consider complaints about a local authority's landlord function. This means complaints about the relationship of the council as landlord with its tenants and leaseholders need to be made to the Housing Ombudsman Service and NOT the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Housing Ombudsman can only consider complaints that have been referred by either:

- a 'designated person' (MP, councillor or recognised tenant panel), or
- by the tenant themselves where the designated person was unable to resolve the matter OR
- by the tenant themselves after 8 weeks have passed from the completion of the council's internal complaint process (where a designated person is NOT used).

## **Role of the Designated Person**

The role of the designated person is to assist in resolving tenant complaints. They are there to provide an independent perspective on problems and work with tenants and landlords to find local solutions to housing related complaints. They may also if appropriate refer a complaint direct to the Housing Ombudsman Service

A "designated person" is:

1. A Designated Tenant Panel
2. Your Member of Parliament (MP)
3. Your local Councillor

The Designated Tenant Panel has been recognised by Stoke on Trent City Council and is made up of representatives from the council's Tenants Board.

You can contact the chair of the Tenants Panel by:

email [Tenants.board@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:Tenants.board@stoke.gov.uk) or

in writing to the Chair of the Complaints Panel c/o Customer Feedback, Floor 2, Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke on Trent ST4 1HH.

You may also contact your local councilor or MP details of which can be found at [Stoke-on-Trent City Council Councillor and MP Details](#).

### **What to do Next**

If you are unhappy with the response to your stage 2 housing related complaint you can contact one of the designated persons straight away for assistance.

The designated person can refer your complaint straight away to the Housing Ombudsman Service or can assist you in resolving the complaint. If the designated person cannot help or refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service you may now contact the Housing Ombudsman Service direct.

If you choose not to use a designated person you can still refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman service but you must wait 8 weeks from the date of the response to your stage 2 complaint.

The Housing Ombudsman's contact details are:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO Box 152  
Liverpool  
L33 7WQ

You can get more information on the Housing Ombudsman Service by calling their advice line on 0300 111 3000 or visiting their website at [Housing Ombudsman](#)

### **Remedies**

Where a complaint investigation identifies that things have gone wrong an appropriate remedy will be determined. The general principle in determining a remedy is that, as far as possible, you should be put in the position you would have been in had things not gone wrong.

Possible remedies include:

- An apology
- An explanation of what went wrong
- Delivery of a service (although the complaints procedure is not appropriate for dealing with first time requests for a service)
- Action to put things right
- Financial compensation – this is in exceptional cases. The Council will follow the Local Government Ombudsman’s guidance on good practice when determining the appropriateness and level of any financial compensation.

## **Exclusions**

The following are covered by different procedures so we may not accept these types of complaints.

- Complaints where you have known about the incident being complained about for more than 12 months. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint please tell us why.
- From organisations that we fund about their funding or related issues.
- From Employees about issues relating to their employment.
- From Councillors, unless they are complaining as ordinary members of the public or as an ‘advocate’, (representing the interests of someone else).
- Where legal limits are in place, for example:
  - Refusing planning permission;
  - School admission or exclusion appeals;
  - Cases where legal action is already started;
  - Cases covered by our insurance procedures;
  - Where a complaint has already been dealt with in another way – for example, by the courts or Local Government Ombudsman; or
  - Where there is right of appeal or tribunal.
- Where a complaint is being investigated under statutory procedures for Social Care complaints, e.g. Adult and Children’s Social Care have a separate procedure.
- About parking and traffic offences.
- About refusing disabled badges for parking exemption.
- Schools have a separate complaint procedure and complaints should be sent to the Head Teacher or schools governing body.
- Conduct of Councillors and other elected members are dealt with through the Standards Committee.

- Community Centres are run by a separate management committee and complaints should be sent to them direct.

### **Unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints**

The Council acknowledges that certain complaints can be difficult to resolve and can cause anxiety and distress to complainants, employees and Councillors. Whilst the Council's aim is to try to find a way to resolve matters, from time to time complainants are encountered who become unreasonably persistent or vexatious in their quest to obtain the outcome they want.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council wants to ensure that, in using the complaints procedure, complainants who are unreasonably persistent or vexatious are dealt with fairly, honestly and properly, that the resources of the Council are used effectively as possible and that other service users or employees of the Council do not suffer any detriment as a result of their behaviour. All reasonable measures will be taken to try to resolve complaints through the complaints procedure. The policy and procedure on unreasonably persistent complainants can be found at [Stoke-on-Trent City Council Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy Statement](#)

### **Making Complaints, Comments & Compliments**

To make a complaint, comment or compliment about a council service or member of staff please complete the online Customer Feedback Form which can be accessed via our website [Stoke-on-Trent City Council Customer Feedback](#).

### **What you can expect**

- We aim to acknowledge your complaint within two working days. We aim to acknowledge your request for a Stage 2 within two working days.
- Our target is to give you a full response within 10 working days at Stage 1 and within 20 working days at Stage 2. However, if your complaint is complicated it may take longer to sort out, but we will keep you informed.
- We will treat your complaint confidentially, and fairly, and you should not be treated negatively as a result of making a complaint.
- We run the 'compliments, comments and complaints' procedure in line with our equalities policy.
- Where we are at fault, we will do our best to put things right.

## **Monitoring and Reporting**

Systems have been established to ensure that complaints information is recorded consistently across the different Council Directorates and services.

Complaints monitoring and reporting are incorporated within the performance management framework so that managers and Councilors can learn from complaints and services can be improved.

A report reviewing the issues raised through complaints for the Council as a whole will be produced annually. This report includes the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter, which provides statistics on complaints received and decisions made, together with general feedback on performance, and is published on the Council's website

[Stoke-on-Trent City Council Website](#)

## **How to contact us**

Write to us at:

Customer Feedback Team  
Corporate Services Directorate  
Civic Centre, Glebe Street  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST4 1HH

Phone: 01782 234234 (Mon to Thurs, 8.45am to 5.00pm, Fri 8.45am to 4.30pm)

E-mail: [customer.feedback@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@stoke.gov.uk)

Or by visiting the website at [Stoke-on-Trent City Council Customer Feedback](#) and completing the online form.

We can also provide this information in alternative formats upon request.

## **Other Customer Feedback**

Stoke-on-Trent City Council also welcomes various other types of feedback outlined below which can also be submitted via the [online Customer Feedback form](#)

- Information Requests
- Customer Enquiries
- Comments/Suggestions
- Compliments