

CUSTOMER SERVICES AND FUTURE COMPLAINTS POLICY INFORMAL TASK GROUP
APPROVED RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 – Customer Services

- (1) That all complaints to Lancaster City Council be logged, monitored and dealt with, where possible, centrally by the Customer Services Team.
- (2) That each member of staff is responsible for customer service throughout the Council's range of services.
- (3) That the Council should take more responsibility as the 'go to' Council. Where possible avoid making referrals to other agencies and contact other organisations or agencies on behalf of complainants. where appropriate
- (4) That it be recognised across all Council services and teams that the Customer Services Team is the ultimate source of information regarding all complaints where possible.
- (5) That the Task Group notes that the City Council has no officer as part of the complaints handling process who specifically deals with mental health or vulnerable people. The Task Group however, noted that these issues were dealt with positively by officers but recommend that this situation is kept under review.

Recommendation 2 – Customer Service Strategy

- (1) That the Directorate for Communities and the Environment draft a brief statement on the Customer Service Strategy, based on our attitudes and behaviours to customer service.
- (2) To support the Customer Service Strategy that two simple flow charts be produced, one for internal complainants and one for external complainants, outlining in simple, accessible language the basic complaints procedure.

Recommendation 3 – Amendments to the Complaints Policy and Guidance on Handling Complaints

- (1) That the term “Service Users” be replaced with “Customers” throughout both the Complaints Policy and the Guidance on Handling Complaints.
- (2) That the following amendments be made to the Complaints Policy;
 - a. That at Paragraph 5.2, “*complaints*” be replaced with “*problems*”.
 - b. That at Paragraph 9.4, add “*welcome comments, but*” after “*The council...*”
 - c. That at Paragraph 11.5 “Within each Service” be deleted.
- (3) That the following amendments be made to the Guidance on Handling Complaints:
 - a. That wording at paragraph be added at Paragraph 7 to include guidance on how Managers and Supervisors should support frontline staff to resolve problems at the point of service delivery and reference to Line Managers responsibilities.
 - b. At Paragraph 13.1, “complaint” be replaced with “problem”.
 - c. At Paragraph 13.2, add in “find out what the complainant wants/desired outcomes”.
 - d. At Paragraph 13.36, add wording on the tone of response letters to complainants and guidance on the way to respond.
 - e. At Paragraph 14, include further guidance on what should be expected from Stage 1 of the complaints process and that where necessary, after informing the complainant, complaints should be sent back to Stage 1 if the Stage 2 handler feels there is more work to be undertaken to resolve the problem.

Recommendation 4 – Training

- (1) Provision of training on complaints handling to be provided to all new Councillors.
- (2) Training to be provided to officers on letter writing, particularly with regard to the handling of complaints.
- (3) That the Task Group recommends the continued positive use of social media by the Council in order to promote the services provided by the Council and to highlight best practice.

Recommendation 5 – Plain English Mark

- (1) The Council explore the possibility of signing up to the Plain English Mark.

Recommendation 6 – Executive Team

- (1) That Complaints be a standing item on all Lancaster City Council Executive Team agenda and that the Team be briefed at each meeting on current complaints and any of the lessons that can be learnt.
- (2) That Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are set for all senior managers on handling of complaints and customer satisfaction in accordance with the Council Plan.
- (3) That the Customer Complaints Survey results from this review be circulated to the Executive Team and other relevant officers.
- (4) That it be noted that a press release has been issued to inform of results and, those persons completing the survey have been thanked.

Recommendation 7 – Persistent Complainants

- (1) That reports to Lancaster City Council's Executive Team on the designation and review of Persistent Complainers be shared with the complainant, with comments sought and taken into consideration prior to being reported to Executive Team.
- (2) Once the Council has gone through the designation process, we will share with the complainant what we will do and what we expect from them.
- (3) The system should separate genuine complaints from vexatious complaints and this process should sit with the Customers Services Team for them to review and manage.
- (4) Once a complainant is designated as "Persistent" further contact should be directed through the Customer Services Team who will, where possible, deal with any genuine service requests and alternative complaints separately to the main complaint for which the designation of Persistent Complainer has been applied.

Recommendation 8 – Stage 2 Complaints

- (1) All possible efforts to be made by Officers to ensure that complaints are resolved at Stage 1 rather than moving to Stage 2. This should include senior officer advice and conflict resolution where appropriate.
- (2) If the Stage 2 officer feels that the matter has not been dealt with thoroughly then the complaint should be referred back to the Stage 1 Officer for further investigation.