

Complaints:

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff affecting an individual customer or group of customers'.

When a complaint falls into the failure to deliver category, it is important to distinguish between a complaint and a request for a service. In most cases a good way to define this is to think, is the customer complaining about a service area that should be carried out routinely as part of the workload or as part of a policy or charter. If the answer is yes, this is a complaint. However if this is a no, that is classed as a service request.

Can you correctly identify the following?

- Q.** I visited your office today with a rather sensitive matter and felt I was spoken to rather abruptly with a lack of respect. I had tried to call but the phone just rang and rang hence my visit.
- A.** This is a complaint as it breaches our Customer Charter on two points, firstly, by not treating the customer with respect and in a friendly manner and secondly, our Customer Charter states we should answer the phone within 4 rings.
- Q.** I was travelling to work and noticed that a huge lorry was unloading commercial waste in a lay-by.
- A.** This is a service request, as the council do not routinely check every part of the district for anywhere that someone may have fly tipped. Unless the member of the public reported this it may not be picked up unless whilst on route the team saw it.
- Q.** I have rung SSDC twice over the last month to report a fly tip incident and still the rubbish remains.
- A.** This is a complaint as we have failed to deliver a service.

Note – Services requests are not complaints and should not be recorded.

What details will I need to collect upon receiving a complaint?

- Date complaint made
- Receiving Officer - could be a Customer Advisor, CA
- Name – include title, initial and surname
- Address (including postcode)
- Contact – Telephone number AND/ OR Email Address
- Officer dealing – should be HOS or Officer complaint has been delegated to

What else do we need to collect to enable us to monitor complaints received?

(Red indicates a required field)

1. Access method

How accessible is it to the public, we should welcome complaints as they provide valuable customer feedback which can lead to service improvements and therefore providing a better service.

If you have any queries about the complaints procedure please contact The Performance Team on EXT 2112.

2. Type

Failure to deliver is 'where SSDC has failed to deliver a promised or identified service within a reasonable timescale'.

Example – “I reported a food complaint a week ago, I have heard nothing and your service standards state that you are meant to respond within 3 working days.”

Issue with policy/ decision is 'an issue whereby a customer disagrees with a SSDC formal policy.

Example - Household waste being collected once a fortnight.

Staff handling is where the 'customer is unhappy with the manner of the staff member handling their query/request'.

Example – “I felt your member of staff was abrupt and rude”.

Equality 'an issue regarding unfair treatment relating to the gender, age, race, disability, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation'.

Example – “I feel that I received unfair treatment and was discriminated against because of my age.”

Issue with content or publication is where the customer feels a publication is not clear or is disappointed with the content being provided.

Example – “I do not think that your latest programme was very exciting”.

Not SSDC responsibility it is important to log when a complaint is made to SSDC about areas that fall outside the council's responsibility to control and monitor how effectively service responsibilities are being communicated to the public.

Example – “I wish to complain about a pot hole that has been on a public road for 3 months”.

This would be a County Council issue and a member of staff would provide Highways contact details.

Other type items should only be categorised within this type if you are 100% certain that the complaint does not fit into one of the above-mentioned types. Where other type is indicated a brief description will be required.

Example – An incident of alleged harassment by a stranger in an SSDC owned car park.

3. Stage

SSDC operate a stage scheme to monitor what level the complaints are being resolved at. It is vital that this is recorded to ensure good data quality. In the majority of cases it will be resolved at stage one. However when a case is escalated to either a stage two or three the record for the complaint will need to be updated what stage it is at.

Note – The service should record the complaint; each of the 29 services will have a responsible office that updates the TEN Performance and Risk Management system on a quarterly basis.

What is the process and stages?

STAGE ONE – Assistant Director

Any South Somerset District Council officer receiving a complaint will:

1. Establish the exact nature of your complaint (this may be recorded by our Customer Services team).
2. Forward your complaint to the Assistant Director responsible for the relevant Service.
3. The Assistant Director will acknowledge your complaint in writing. A full reply will be posted to you within 10 working days; however if we are unable to reply to you within that period, we will acknowledge receipt of your letter within 5 working days and give you a realistic timescale.

STAGE TWO – Strategic Director

If you are not satisfied with the response, please ask for your complaint to be referred to the Strategic Director responsible for the Service. The Strategic Director will investigate the matter and respond to you in full within 10 working days or 5 working days for a holding reply (which will give you a realistic timescale to expect your response).

STAGE THREE – CEO

If you feel your complaint has not been resolved by stage 2, you may wish to appeal to the Chief Executive of South Somerset District Council. The Chief Executive will ask a senior officer unconnected with the complaint to review the case. This stage of the procedure will be completed within 20 working days.

STAGE FOUR – Local Government Ombudsman – Recorded by PA to CEO

If you feel your complaint has not been resolved after stage 3, you may wish to pursue your complaint through the Local Government Ombudsman. You will be forwarded the contact details for the Ombudsman after Stage 3.

4. Compensation

This is not a required field, as the majority of cases will not result in any compensation being issued. If a service has issued compensation, which includes issuing a free ticket to an event/service, **the actual cost** will need to be recorded to enable an analysis to be completed of the total cost to the authority.

5. Actions as a result of the complaint

In this section you will need to indicate any actions that resulted from the complaint being made.

The categories are:

- Changes in working practice/ procedure required
- Staff training required
- Improved monitoring of service delivery
- Improved partnership working
- Improved communication
- Problem rectified
- No action required/ taken

Where the complaint was investigated but no further action was necessary this would be classed as no action required/ taken.

6. Closed

This is vital part of monitoring complaints received by the council, you will need to ensure you update the record when the complaint has been closed, for example, complaint investigated, complainant informed of outcome and happy, no further action required, closed.

When completing this section please ensure that you complete what level the complaint was resolved at. This will highlight where cases are ongoing and ensure that complaints are followed up.

7. Other Comments

Only add extra comments if necessary and ensure that the items have not already been covered.

Data Quality – your responsibilities:

Data is used to help build policies and make operational decisions about services. The integrity of the Council is therefore directly related to data quality; from first capture, through handling to analysis and communication. We are committed to continuous improvement within the organisation and in our partnership with others.

Therefore, it is VITAL that you ensure the integrity of the data is maintained. There are 5 main aspects to ensuring data quality*:

- **Accuracy** - how well information within a database reflects what was supposed to be collected. Its reliability and validity in relation to the purpose for which it is intended.
- **Timeliness** - examines whether the data is relevant to time periods and up to date
- **Comparability** - refers to the extent to which datasets are comparable with other similar datasets
- **Usability** - describes how easily the storage and documentation of data allows one access to make intelligent use of the data.
- **Relevance** - incorporates all of the above dimensions to some degree, but focuses specifically on value and adaptability.

*(*Extract taken from the Data Quality Strategy)*

The full Data Quality Strategy can be found on InSite under the Performance pages and it is important to familiarise yourself with these data checks and to bear them in mind when you are collecting and inputting data.

What happens to the data?

The Performance Team will monitor the data on a quarterly basis.

A report on the data will be presented to Management Board on a quarterly basis. This will form part of an end of year report which will also go to Management Board and will highlight any trends for the year and therefore possible actions that need to be taken to ensure the we are providing the best possible service to the public.

What will I need to do with the data?

An email reminder will be sent to all services on the end of each quarter requesting that the complaints information be entered on TEN. Please visit [insite/ten](#) for instructions on how to use TEN.

The complaints webpage on InSite will be updated each financial year with the reporting deadlines.

Please note, if you have received no complaints you will still need to update TEN Performance and Risk Management System.

How do I input the data into the spreadsheet?

Please see overleaf...

If you have any queries about the complaints procedure please contact The Performance Team on EXT 2112.

Complete your service title

In the type please enter a '1' in the relevant box to ensure the tally system works.
Note there may be more than one type.

Please enter amount in GBP.

In action by SSDC please enter a '1' in the relevant box to ensure the tally system works. There may be more than one type.
Where the complaint has been investigated, the complainant informed and no further action was necessary this would be classed as no action required.

Complaints Monitoring 2009/10

Service:

Complaint Details								Access Method						Type				Stage				Action by SSDC													
Ref	Description	Date Received	Receiving Officer	Name	Address	Contact - Telephone and/ or Email	Officer dealing	Phone	In person	Letter	Email	Via CS	Other	Failure to deliver	Issue with Policy Decision	Staff handling	Equality	Issue with content/ publication/ timetable	Not SSDC responsibility	Other type	1	2	3	4	Compensation issued?	Changes in working practice/ procedure required	Staff training required	Improved monitoring of service delivery	Improved partnership working	Improved Communication	Problem rectified	No Action required	Completed		
								0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Can use own ref number system. Suggest ddmmyy - HoS initials-complaint number of the day. Ensure the number is unique.

Please complete all sections of the complaint details, if the complaint is anonymous please indicate this in the name column.

In the access method please enter a '1' in the relevant box to ensure the tally system works.
Note there may be more than one access method.

Please remember to update the stage of the complaint it is **vital** that this is completed for each complaint. Enter a '1' in the relevant box.

Once the complaint has been dealt with please enter a '1' in the completed column to aid monitoring of complaints to ensure they are followed up.