

CUSTOMER COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Document History

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Revision History

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Approvals

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Introduction

In addition to our Customer Charter, it is important that staff are aware of how to progress a complaint from the Public. We aim to deliver the best possible service to the Public. If a member of the Public is dissatisfied with the quality of service they have received, they have the right to complain.

A complaint is “an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about an organisation’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of an organisation”.

The recommendation in the Customer Charter is that they discuss the matter initially with their usual contact within the Agency (Stage 1). This is an opportunity to respond to and resolve complaints early, close to the point where the service was delivered; however, if the matter cannot be resolved at Stage One, or the complainant remains dissatisfied, there is a process in place to progress a complaint to Stage Two.

All Stage 1 complaints received must be dealt with within 5 working days and Stage 2 within 20 working days.

The Agency retains a record of all complaints received and the action taken. The complaints register is updated by the HR/Office Manager.

Complaints matter because they are an early warning system for the Agency.

How to handle complaints

STAGE 1: FRONTLINE RESPONSE



Source: NIPSO.org.uk

There are several key stages when handling a complaint. When a call, visit or email is received with complaint content, the complainant should be responded to at the earliest opportunity.

LISTEN

- Thank the customer for complaining - We should consider the complaint an opportunity to improve instead of thinking of it as a wholly negative impact. Carry out the conversation in a tone that is respectful and friendly.
- Put yourself in the place of the customer and listen with empathy and compassion - This will help complainants feel valued and heard.
- Start with the view that the client has a valid point. By accepting that the customer may have a point, this may well trigger off ideas to enable you to provide an acceptable resolution - even if this is just to escalate it up the line. Avoid assumptions or defensiveness.

CLARIFY

- Get all the facts first, letting the customer give you all the information helps you fully understand the situation and if they are emotional, will give them time to calm down.
- Ask questions to clarify the complaint, its impact and what resolution the complainant seeks.
- Repeat key points to ensure understanding and clear up misunderstandings.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

- Set clear expectations about what our procedures can and cannot achieve.

RESOLVE

- If you are able to offer a solution to the problem, do so. Report the complaint to the Customer Services Co-Ordinator (Director of Corporate Services) so as the issue can be reviewed to ensure that it does not arise again.
- In circumstances where you feel that further inquiries need to be made about the complaint, it is important to explain this to the complainant and tell them that Stage 1 provides a timeframe of 5 working days to respond. Always keep them updated and provide a timeline of when you expect to respond.
- In exceptional circumstances where a response cannot be provided within 5 working days, there is an option to extend for a further 5 working days, but this must have a clear rationale. You must inform the complainant of the delay and explain the reason.
- Learn from every complaint, wherever possible let the complaining client know that they have helped you resolve a problem.
- Keep a record of any conversations and any resolution received. A file note will help you to recall important information later and may be useful if the complaint is escalated.
- Finally, at the end of Stage 1, always tell the complainant how to escalate to Stage 2 and the timeframe for doing so.

STAGE 2: INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS

If the problem cannot be resolved at Stage 1 or the complaint is complex, the complaint should be referred to the Customer Service Co-ordinator (contact details below) for Stage 2.

All Stage 2 complaints should be acknowledged within 3 working days in the format or method of contact they have requested.

Customer Service Co-ordinator

Ms Paula Knowles
HR/Office Manager
The Corn Exchange
31 Gordon Street
Belfast
BT 1 2LG

Email: pknowles@ulsterscotsagency.org.uk
Telephone: (028) 9026 1988

In the case of the complaint being in reference to the Customer Services Co-ordinator or associated role the complaint should be escalated to the Director of Corporate Services, details below:

Karen Stewart
Director of Corporate Services
The Corn Exchange
31 Gordon Street
Belfast
BT 1 2LG

Email: kstewart@ulsterscotsagency.org.uk
Telephone: (028) 9023 1113



Source: NIPSO.org.uk

DISCUSSIONS

- Define the complaint clearly – it's essential to agree the issues being investigated. This identifies their concerns, the impact and their desired outcome.
- Conduct a focused investigation
- Manage Expectations
- Discuss alternative resolutions
- Explain to the complainant how you are going to carry out the investigation, what evidence you will need and why and who else you may need to speak to.
- Tell the complainant the timeframe – Stage 2 complaints should be investigated and responded to within 20 working days.
- Keep regular contact as appropriate and always record any conversation with the complainant.

NOTIFY STAFF (IF APPROPRIATE)

- If the complaint is about the actions of another member of staff, it is good practice to notify the staff member. To ensure fairness, you should share the complaint with the staff member, advise them how the complaint will be handled and discuss alternative complaint resolution. You should sign post them to another member of staff who can offer support and information on what they can expect.

INVESTIGATION PLAN

- An investigation plan may be a helpful tool to work out what evidence you have, what further evidence you might need and where to obtain it.
- It is important to consider alternative complaint resolutions such as mediation and conciliation are appropriate.
- It may be helpful to meet with the complainant, but this should be agreed.
- In exceptional circumstances there may be reason to extend the 20-working day deadline, but this must have a clear rationale. You must inform the complainant of the delay and explain the reason as well as the expected response date. You should also notify any members of staff involved in the complaint (if appropriate).
- You should obtain approval from your line manager for the extension to the deadline, recording the rationale and actions taken to progress the complaint.
- Extensions should be an exception and an update should be issued at least once every 20 working days.

CLOSING

- When closing a Stage 2 complaint you should also provide a response in writing. Make it clear and easy to understand.
 - Avoid technical terms
 - Address all the areas of the complaint
 - Include a rationale
 - Include a clear apology where appropriate and any learning or service improvements.
 - Highlight areas of disagreement and the reason no further action can be taken.
 - Include details of whether the complaint was upheld, not upheld or partially upheld.

- Always tell the complainant they can bring their complaint to The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and include this in your written response. If you don't, you should write to the complainant within 2 weeks to tell them the complaints procedure has been completed and inform them of their right to bring their complaint to NIPSO.
- If the complainant contacts you after they receive your written response, it is ok to discuss the findings with them for clarity purposes. However, if the complainant does not accept the findings, it is important not to delay the proceedings any further and they should be signposted to NIPSO.

How to contact Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

Address

Progressive House
33 Wellington Place,
Belfast, BT1 6HN

Telephone

02890 233821

Freephone

0800 34 34 24

Email

nipso@nipso.org.uk

Freepost:

Freepost NIPSO