****

**Mid Ulster District Council**

Annual Complaints Handling Data

1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025

**1.0 Complaints Handling**

In accordance with guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), the Council adopted new Complaints Handling Procedures (CHP) on 1 January 2024.

These procedures provide a governance framework for the capture of complaints across Mid Ulster District Council. The Council is required to publish complaints data on a 6-monthly and annual basis.

The Complaints handling procedures ensures

* A standardised approach to dealing with customer complaints across the public sector in NI
* A simplified consistent process for customers to follow when lodging a complaint
* Staff and Customer confidence in complaints handling; and
* Encourages the Council to make best use of lessons learned from complaints

All complaints are progressed in accordance with the new internal governance procedures and in line with statutory requirements established by the Public Services Ombudsman Act (NI) 2016.

**2.0 Definition of a Complaint**

The Council’s definition of a complaint is **‘An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council’s action of lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council’**

**Stage 1: Frontline Response** provides the opportunity to resolve or respond to complaints quickly and effectively, immediate action may be taken to resolve the complaint. Response should be sent within 5 working days.

**Stage 2: Investigation** is appropriate where the customer is dissatisfied with the frontline response. It will require a more in-depth and detailed investigation to establish the relevant facts given the complexity or serious nature of the issue. Response should be sent within 20 working days.

**3.0 Complaint Handling Indicators**

**1April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Mid Ulster District Council is committed to providing a high standard of customer service to all its citizens.

***‘We value complaints and use them to help improve our services’***

All Complaints received are managed under a two stage complaints process:

**Stage 1: Frontline**

For the period 1April 2024 to 31 March 2025 Mid Ulster District Council received 69 Stage 1 complaints, of which 11 were escalated to Stage 2 investigation. Out of the 69 Stage 1 complaints received, 55 were resolved within 5 working days, with the remaining 14 complaints being resolved following a limited extension period as permitted under the regulations.

**Stage 2: Investigation**

In terms of the Stage 2 Complaints, all 11 complaints were heard within the prescribed 20 working days.

Under the CHP process, the Council during the same period, also received 22 service requests (customers seeking a specific service or action that was not considered a complaint). In addition, 23 enquiries were assessed and signposted to the relevant authority (whereby the customer is directed to the appropriate statutory agency or authority).

**4.0 Complaint Categorisation**

Most complaints fell under the category of ‘inadequate quality or standard of service’ (59%), with the remaining complaints categorised as detailed below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Complaint Categories:** | **(Based on a total of 69 complaints)** |
| Inadequate quality or standard of service | 68% |
| Conduct of Staff | 18% |
| Failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services | 10% |
| Failure to follow the appropriate administrative process | 3% |
| Disagreement with a decision (except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process) | 1% |

Complaints received for the period 1April 2024 – 31 March 2025 were investigated in line with statutory guidelines and closed based on the following outcomes:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Complaint Outcomes**  |  |
| Resolved | 94% |
| Upheld | 2% |
| Partially Upheld | 2% |
| Not Upheld  | 2% |

Complaints are received through several ways. The following data from 1April 2024 – 31 March 2025 provides a breakdown of the channels used by citizens to engage with the Council when logging a complaint.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Channels** |  |
| Email | 37% |
| Telephone | 8% |
| Letter | 8% |
| Online Complaints Form | 47% |

**5.0 Lessons Learned**

The Council will systematically review and analyse complaints to ensure that lessons have been learned, services improved, and appropriate action taken.

Detailed below are examples of service improvements as a result of the administration of the complaints handling procedures:

1. **Improve communication**
	* Ensure emails received to departmental inboxes are circulated to operational staff in a timely manner
	* Improve internal communication, especially regarding pool session availability and customer service policies
	* Consider feedback from customers to improve services
2. **Staff Training and Conduct**:
	* Retrain reception team and staff on customer service policies
	* Ensure staff are briefed on arrangements around events- accommodating dogs and better information for general public queries
	* Remind staff of facility closing times and the need to be courteous to the public
3. **Operational Adjustments**:
	* Monitor daily facility cleaning procedures
	* Ensure telephone lines are managed effectively
	* Streamline facility check-in processes to reduce delays and manage crowds effectively
	* Maintain consistent teaching staff for swimming lessons
	* Provide additional hairdryers in pool facilities and identify safe areas for installation
4. **Customer Engagement and Marketing**:
	* Improve marketing for booking processes and consider moving to online booking
	* Engage students consistently in classes and ensure instructors are attentive
	* Advertise quiet spaces more effectively

**6.0 Continuous Improvement**

The Council is committed to a high standard of customer service, continuous improvement in service delivery and compliance with the following complaint principles to ensure effective complaints handling:

**Complaint Principles**

|  |
| --- |
| * Our complaints procedure will be customer-focussed, clear, accessible and simple
* Our complaint handling will be fair and impartial
* Our complaints handling will be timely, sensitive, effective and consistent
* We will be accountable, acknowledge and apologise for our mistakes and put things right wherever possible
* We will strive to use complaints as an opportunity to deliver continuous improvement in the design and delivery of our services
 |

For further information on our Complaints Handling Procedures please visit <https://www.midulstercouncil.org/complaints> or email our Customer Services Team at customerservices@midulstercouncil.org