



## **North Devon Council**

Report Date: Tuesday, 11 March 2025

Topic: Revised Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Report by: Sarah Higgins, Head of Customer Focus

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The process North Devon Council follows for handling complaints currently adheres to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling guidance.
- 1.2. This guidance is being revised in April 2025 with the expectation that local authorities will fully implement a new code by April 2026.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. To note the contents of this report.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. To give assurance that North Devon Council will adopt and implement the new Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Code for handling complaints before the deadline of April 2026.

### **4. REPORT**

- 4.1. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigates complaints about councils and focus on whether decisions are made fairly.
- 4.2. Their aim is to ensure fair, effective, and prompt complaint resolution, encouraging learning and improvement from feedback.
- 4.3. They are rolling out a new Complaint Handling Code from April 2025 with the expectation that local authorities will fully adopt the new code by April 2026.
- 4.4. North Devon Council's current process for handling complaints follows the existing advice and the Feedback team are in the process of adopting & embedding the changes in advance of April 2026.
- 4.5. The main areas where we are implementing changes are/will be:
  - Updating our policy and webpages to refer to the Code.
  - Altering the timescales. Our services currently have 8 weeks to complete a stage 1 investigation, which will be reduced to 2 weeks.
  - The entire complaints procedure from initial complaint receipt to the Stage 2 response must be completed within 45 days maximum.
  - Increasing our current pool of investigating officers.
  - Revised training for our investigating officers and third party contractors.



- Review our current letters and responses with a view of reducing the use of standard responses.
- Creation of an annual report for scrutiny.
- Lessons learnt from complaint investigations and delivering service improvements as a result.

4.6 The Feedback team are currently working with all services and most of the changes will be in place by April 2025, a year before the due implementation date.

## 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The reduced end to end timescale for complaints will impact on service resources during times of high level of demand.

## 6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1. This new code will have a positive effect for residents of North Devon as the timescales for a response to a complaint will be reduced.

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1. None

## 8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

8.1.1. Improving customer focus – the reduction of time of handling complaints will have a positive effective for our residents and service improvement as a result of lessons learnt from complaint investigations.

## 9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1. The decision in respect of the recommendations in this report can be made pursuant to paragraph 5 of Annexe 1 to Part 3 the Constitution.

## 10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report).

## 12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Sarah Higgins, Head of Customer Focus

