

# Customer Feedback Procedures

Date: December 2021



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 These procedures support the Libraries NI Customer Feedback Policy and should be read in conjunction with that Policy.
- 1.2 Libraries NI welcomes feedback, including complaints, from our customers. Feedback allows us to identify and repeat what is good, attempt to correct any problems with our service and helps us improve what we do and how we do it. These procedures are intended to support continuous improvement and to allow us to achieve the best outcomes in terms of high quality customer service.
- 1.3 Customer feedback may be a comment, a compliment or a complaint. It may be given verbally, in writing, by email, via the Libraries NI website or on social media. These procedures deal with each of these in turn.
- 1.4 Customer Feedback has been defined in the Policy and only correspondence that meets those definitions will be treated as Feedback
- 1.5 Sometimes customers use the feedback process to raise a query. Queries are not covered by these procedures and will instead be forwarded to the relevant manager for a response.

## **2. AWARENESS RAISING**

- 2.1 All branch libraries should display Customer Feedback Forms clearly. The Customer Feedback poster should also be displayed in branches and on mobiles. The Policy, Procedures, poster and forms are available on the Staff Web. The Policy is available on the Libraries NI website. The Policy and Procedures should be made available on request.

## **3. VERBAL FEEDBACK**

- 3.1 Customer feedback is often given verbally as part of the regular interaction between staff and customers. Staff should respond to feedback at the earliest opportunity, acknowledge compliments, deal proactively with complaints, take remedial action where possible to remedy the matter being complained about and check that the customer is satisfied with the action taken.
- 3.2 When dealing with a verbal complaint staff should ensure that customers are made aware of the Libraries NI Customer Feedback Policy and that if their initial verbal complaint remains unresolved they have the right to make their complaint in writing.

#### 4. WRITTEN FEEDBACK

##### 4.1 Actions required at all Libraries NI locations:

1. open all written feedback, unless addressed to a specific member of staff. Feedback addressed to a specific individual should be forwarded to that individual by the quickest method available
2. stamp or clearly write the date of receipt on the form/letter
3. within one working day of receipt scan, the form/letter as a PDF or JPEG and rename the resulting electronic document in the following way:  
  
date of receipt/customer surname or anonymous/Library Branch/location  
  
e.g. 3Nov2010/Smyth/BallymenaCentral or 15Dec2010/Anon/ChiefExecsOffice
4. this electronic document should then be forwarded by email, within one working day of receipt, to [customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk](mailto:customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk)
5. a 'Read Receipt' should be requested when sending the email to provide verification that the scanned document has been received. Alternatively contact should be made directly with Staff Development to confirm receipt prior to moving to step 6.
6. having confirmed the scanned document has been received by Staff Development and in consideration that the feedback forms or correspondence may contain personal data the original hard copy should now be securely destroyed. Staff Development will retain the 'e' copy as the only record containing personal data.

4.2 Feedback addressed to an individual should be dealt with by that individual as set out at 4.1

4.3 Correspondence that has been sent by email either directly to an individual member of staff or to a Branch inbox that contains either a comment, compliment or complaint should be forwarded to [customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk](mailto:customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk) within one working day of receipt. Where correspondence by email has been sent to multiple members of staff and/or Departments it should be dealt with in accordance with the instructions of the most senior recipient and in all instances should be forwarded to [customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk](mailto:customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk) within one day of receipt.

4.4 All customer feedback received at [customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk](mailto:customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk) will be dealt with by Staff Development.

- 4.5 Staff Development will forward all feedback in accordance with the following guidelines within two days of receipt by Libraries NI:
- network/branch specific feedback – relevant Deputy Head of Service (DHoS) and Service Development Manager (SDM Pillar specific feedback – relevant DHoS and Pillar lead
  - corporate feedback – relevant Director
  - feedback relating to Libraries NI website – Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications and relevant DHoS and SDM
  - feedback relating to Business Support – Director of Business Support and relevant Head of Section
  - other feedback – as deemed appropriate by Staff Development.
- 4.6 Staff Development will maintain a record of all feedback received.
- 4.7 Staff Development will arrange for an acknowledgement of all feedback to be issued to the customer within two working days of receipt by Libraries NI where an e-mail address has been provided. Where further correspondence is to be issued, i.e. in response to a complaint, the acknowledgement will indicate that:
- in most circumstances the customer is likely to receive a substantive reply within five working days from the date of receipt, or
  - in circumstances where this is not possible, i.e. an investigation is required, then a substantive reply will be issued by no later than 15 working days from the date of receipt.
- 4.8 Compliments, Comments or Both  
Feedback containing a compliment, a comment or both, will be acknowledged by Staff Development as long as an e-mail address has been provided. No action will be taken if an email address has not been supplied. This feedback will be forwarded to the relevant Senior Manager. No further response will be issued.
- 4.9 Complaints  
Feedback containing a complaint will be acknowledged by Staff Development (as long as an e-mail address has been provided). This feedback will be forwarded to the relevant Senior Manager in line with 4.5 for further action.
- 4.10 Response  
The response should be issued by the DHoS or a member of staff appointed to act on his/her behalf and should (a) refer to the feedback received (b) provide a response to all points raised by the correspondent and (c) clearly identify the person responding on behalf of Libraries NI together with their contact details.
- 4.11 Response Timescales  
The following timescales for a response should be adhered to at all times:

- for complaints that are straightforward and simple, requiring little or no investigation, the response should be issued within **five** working days of receipt
- where the complaint is complex, e.g. requiring an investigation or multi-Departmental consideration, the response should be issued no later than **15** working days from receipt.

4.12 Where a response has not been issued within five working days, Staff Development will contact the Officer responsible for issuing a response on the sixth day to prompt the need for a response within no more than 15 days from receipt.

4.13 In certain circumstances written customer feedback is best responded to through a direct conversation with the customer. Where a telephone or face to face response has been made then a letter summarising the conversation should be issued.

4.14 General guidance regarding complaints and letters of response:

- acknowledgements and responses will only be made where contact details have been provided. Only in exceptional circumstances, e.g. due to the nature of a complaint, will reasonable efforts be made to establish contact
- where an email address has been provided by the correspondent this should be used for all acknowledgements and responses
- all responses should be in line with Libraries NI stated Policies and Procedures
- where a Policy or Procedure is referred to a copy of that Policy or Procedure should be enclosed or a link provided to the website where the Policy or procedure can be found
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- all responses should be in line with the Libraries NI Style Guide
- where a complaint has been made and that complaint has been found to be valid or justified, the response should include an apology.

4.15 All responses to complaints should include the following wording:

*I trust that you are satisfied with how your complaint has been handled. If you remain dissatisfied then you are invited to write, stating so, to either the Chief Executive or the Chair of the Libraries NI Board. Both can be contacted at Lisburn City Library, 23 Linenhall Street, Lisburn BT28 1FJ. You are also reminded of your right to contact the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman should you be dissatisfied with how you have been*

*dealt with. The Ombudsman can be contacted at Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN, by telephone at 028 9023 3821, by Freephone 0800 34 34 24 or by email at [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk).*

#### 4.16 Responses taking longer than fifteen working days

In exceptional cases, where the response is likely to take longer than fifteen working days, a letter should be sent stating that the response will take more than fifteen working days to issue, provide an explanation for the delay and provide a date\* by which a response will be issued. This letter should be issued no later than ten working days after receipt of the feedback. In such cases an email should be sent to Staff Development setting out the reason/s for the delay and indicating when a response will be issued. This email should be sent no later than seven working days after receipt of the feedback.

\*In all circumstances, regardless of the complexity of the complaint, a substantive reply should be issued within **20** days of receipt.

#### 4.15 Working days

For the purposes of these Procedures, working days will be considered to be Monday to Friday, excluding any Statutory Holidays.

#### 4.16 Flowchart

A flowchart summarising these Customer Feedback Procedures has been included at Appendix One.

## 5. **FEEDBACK RECEIVED VIA SOCIAL MEDIA**

5.1 Libraries NI uses a range of social media at corporate and branch level. Different media platforms have distinctive purposes, tones and norms and therefore often require tailored approaches. The guidance below applies to all media unless otherwise stated.

5.2 Social media messaging either sent directly, or of relevance to, Libraries NI is monitored by Branch, Admin staff or Marketing staff. Social media messages that are queries or which are conversational in nature are not covered by this Policy.

5.3 All service comments, compliments and complaints should be responded to promptly either on the social media platform or by asking the customer to engage with Libraries NI via email, the Libraries NI website or Enquiries desk. In most circumstances, where it is a compliment or the comment is of a non-contentious nature, it is appropriate to respond on the social media platform. However, where the comment is considered contentious and/or the post contains a complaint every effort should be made to encourage the customer to communicate privately via email, the Libraries NI website

or the enquiries desk. Where the customer agrees to do so the ensuing correspondence should be dealt with in accordance with Para. 4.

- 5.4 Marketing, branch and Admin staff (Belfast Central only) should send relevant electronic copies or screen captures to [customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk](mailto:customerfeedback@librariesni.org.uk) for action and record keeping.
- 5.5 Where a correspondent declines to engage with Libraries NI using private means then Marketing will advise on an appropriate means of communication and the nature of that communication.
- 5.6 Responses should be appropriate and sufficiently informed and in line with the social media guidelines.
- 5.7 Responses that are made using social media platforms will need to take account of third party site rules and regulations including, for example, number of characters, abbreviated text, monitoring processes.
- 5.8 These procedures should be used to manage feedback on both branch and corporate social media platforms.

## 6. DEALING WITH ABUSIVE, PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS CORRESPONDENCE AND COMPLAINTS

- 6.1 While Libraries NI welcomes feedback, including complaints, from our customers and aims to deal with complaints equitably, comprehensively, and in a timely manner we also recognise that there are occasions when the behaviour of the individual inhibits dealing with their particular concern or where dealing with their concerns may have significant resource issues which are not justified by the nature of the concern.
- 6.2 This section of these procedures is intended to address those situations where a complainant persists in making unreasonable demands either by way of correspondence or complaints. Raising legitimate queries or criticisms of a complaints procedure as it progresses, for example if agreed timescales are not met, should not in itself lead to complaints being regarded as a vexatious or an unreasonably persistent complainant. Similarly, the fact that a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and seeks to challenge it once, or more than once, should not necessarily cause him or her to be labelled vexatious or unreasonably persistent. There are however times when reasonable persistence in pursuing an issue or a complaint can become unreasonable.
- 6.3 This procedure does NOT cover dealing with potentially vexatious requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance on this can be found on their website (<https://ico.org.uk/>).

#### 6.4 Vexatious, Persistent or Abusive Complaints

For the purposes of this procedure 'vexatious' is defined as being "*manifestly unjustified, inappropriate or improper use of a formal procedure or manifestly unjustified, inappropriate and improper contact*".

#### 6.5 Features of the types of complaint and behaviour that this procedure covers can include the following (the list is not exhaustive, nor does one single feature on its own necessarily imply that the person will be considered as being in this category):

- persisting in a complaint after being advised that there are insufficient or no grounds for their complaint or that Libraries NI is not the appropriate authority
- refusing to co-operate with the customer feedback process without good reason whilst still wanting their complaint to be resolved, including a failure or refusal to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of assistance, changing the basis of the complaint as inquiries are made and introducing trivial or irrelevant new information and expecting this to be taken into account and commented on
- submitting repeat complaints, after the complaints procedure has been completed, essentially about the same issues, with additions/variations which the complainant then insists on being treated as new complaints and put through the full complaints procedure again
- refusing to accept the outcome of the complaint procedure after its conclusion, repeatedly arguing the point, complaining about the outcome, and/or denying that an adequate response has been given
- harassing or verbally abusing or otherwise seeking to intimidate staff dealing with their complaint or correspondence, by using foul or inappropriate language, by the use of offensive and racist language and/or making what would appear to be groundless complaints about those staff
- making an unreasonable number of contacts with us, by any means, in relation to a specific complaint or correspondence including making persistent and unreasonable demands or expectations of staff and/or the procedure after the unreasonableness has been explained (such as insistence on immediate responses to numerous, frequent and/or complex letters, faxes, telephone calls or emails)
- recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other person involved
- unreasonably pursuing multiple lines of enquiry regarding the same issue, for instance, persistently pursuing a complaint or complaints not only with Libraries NI, but at the same time with a Member of Parliament, Assembly Members, or local Councillor.



## 6.6 Imposing Restrictions

Libraries NI will firstly ensure that correspondence and/or complaints are being, or have been, investigated properly according to the appropriate procedure. We recognise that failing to deal with an issue promptly or properly can lead people to behave in ways we might otherwise describe as vexatious.

6.7 Where a complaint has been formally recorded and all reasonable steps have been taken to engage with the complainant, respond to their concerns and/or offer rectification and the individual persists in making unreasonable demands either by way of correspondence or further complaints on the same matter, Libraries NI may consider whether a complaint has become vexatious, persistent, repetitive or otherwise an abuse of process.

6.8 Prior to any decision to treat a complaint or correspondent as vexatious etc. the relevant senior manager will issue a warning to the complainant. The complainant will be contacted either by phone, in writing or by email to explain why this behaviour is causing concern, and ask them to change this behaviour. They will also be warned of the actions that may be taken if the behaviour does not change.

6.9 If the behaviour continues, the relevant Head of Service (HoS) will decide whether to limit contact from the individual and to what extent. Any restriction that is imposed on contact will be appropriate and proportionate and may be subject to review. The kinds of restriction which may be imposed are:

- limiting contact to a specific mailbox or one named member of staff
- refusing to accept telephone calls
- only accepting telephone contact through a third party for example via a solicitor/Assembly Member/friend acting on their behalf
- indicating that correspondence will not be responded to unless substantially new matters are raised
- blocking the individual's e mail address so that it is not received by Libraries NI (this will only be done in extreme cases after all other avenues have been tried).

6.10 When the decision has been taken to apply this procedure, the individual will be written to with reasons for the decision and informed of what action Libraries NI is taking. That decision may be amended if the individual continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable.

6.11 Where the behaviour is so extreme or it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, Libraries NI may consider other options, for example

reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, Libraries NI may not give the individual prior warning of that action.

6.12 New complaints from individuals who are (or whose complaints are) treated as abusive, vexatious or persistent

New issues raised by people who have come under this procedure will be treated on their merits. Any imposed restrictions will not apply to new matters although the individual may be warned not to repeat behaviours which led to those restrictions.

6.12 Review

The status of an individual judged to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious will be reviewed by the relevant Head of Service after six months and at the end of every subsequent six months. The individual will be informed of the result of this review if the decision to apply this procedure to them has been changed or extended.

6.13 Flowchart

A flowchart summarising this procedure has been included at Appendix Two.

## 7. RECORD KEEPING

- 7.1 Staff Development will establish and retain a record of all feedback received, including acknowledgements, any relevant interim correspondence and the response. These records will be retained for a period of 5 years.

## 8. REPORTING ON FEEDBACK RECEIVED

- 8.1 Staff Development will prepare an annual (1<sup>st</sup> Oct. – 30<sup>th</sup> Sept.) report on feedback received which will be issued to the HR Manager and to the Director of Business Support and forwarded to the Senior Management Team for approval. Following approval, the Report will be presented to the Services and Business Support Committees for consideration and will subsequently be made available to the Board for information purposes. Copies of the report will be sent to the DHoS and SDMs.
- 8.2 A summary of compliments received will be posted to the Intranet on a monthly basis.

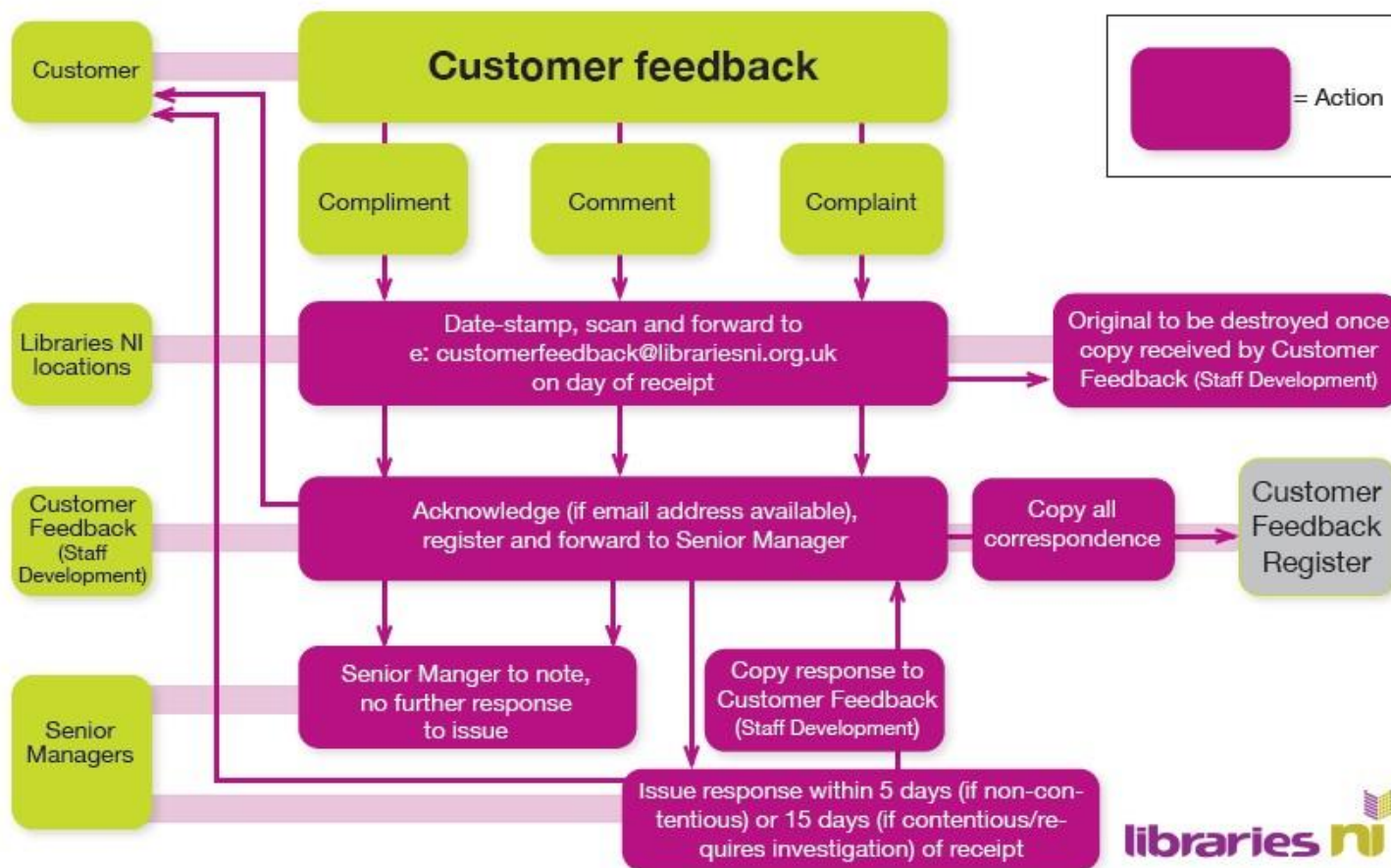
## 9. LEARNING FROM FEEDBACK RECEIVED

- 9.1 The Staff Development Manager will maintain a record of all responses made to feedback received.

- 9.2 Staff Development will prepare a monthly Customer Feedback summary report including information on common themes and issues. This report will be forwarded to the District Managers, Area Managers, SDMs, DHoS and copied to the HR Manager.
- 9.3 The SDMs will consider the summary reports and the yearly Feedback Report for emerging issues.

Flowchart: Handling Customer Feedback

## Handling Customer Feedback



Flowchart: Handling Abusive, Persistent and/or Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints

## Handling Abusive, Persistent and/or Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints

Customer Feedback Procedures Para.6

