



Payment Terms

The Creditors Section

The Creditors section within Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is responsible for the issuing of payment against invoices received.

Payment

Historically the creditor payment system has released payments to suppliers in accordance with the individual supplier's terms and conditions.

However the Council recognises that it is an important customer to a large number of local suppliers, many of them relatively small businesses. In the current economic climate, the Council acknowledges the importance of prompt payments to suppliers vulnerable to potential cash flow problems. The Authority has a policy for payment of all undisputed invoices, is monitoring performance against this target and is taking the appropriate action where necessary. The Creditors Section will also advise any supplier if there is a delay in making payment.

The preferred method of paying invoices is through the BAC's system. The bank requires three working days from receipt of the payment information to release of the payment to the individual supplier. All suppliers must supply their bank details to facilitate this function.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is seeking to become an approved signatory of the 'Prompt Payment Code' which is an initiative devised by central government and The Institute of Credit Management (ICM) to tackle the crucial issue of late payment. A fundamental aim of the code is to give suppliers the confidence that companies who have signed up to the code will ensure payment within clearly defined terms, and provide a proper process for dealing with any payments that are in dispute.

Help and advice on payments

If you are experiencing difficulties in receiving your payment, please contact us by either telephoning (01782) 742108 or you can visit us at The Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle ST5 1PW.

Procedure for dealing with complaints and disputes

The Council recognises the right of its customers to complain and indeed welcomes complaints as a valuable form of feedback about its services. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is committed to using information gained from complaints to help drive forward improvements to services and to better meet the needs of customers

Anyone who wishes to make a complaint may do so in person, by telephone, or in writing (by letter, fax or e-mail.) Complaints need not be made to the actual service that is the subject of the complaint. Any

member of staff will be able to accept a complaint. Complaints of any type can also be made via a local Councillor.

Stage 1 Informal stage

The officer who takes the contact will either deal with the complaint on the spot or refer it to the appropriate department for action, and relate this information to the complainant

The department will respond to the complainant in writing within **THREE** working days setting out their complaint. If the complaint cannot be resolved straight away, such as in cases where further investigation is required, they may need to send a holding reply telling the customer when they can expect a full reply.

It is important at this stage that the complainant be reassured that their complaint will be treated as confidential, their identity will not be made public, they will not receive adverse treatment from the Council because of the complaint and the complaint is being taken seriously

If the complaint cannot be resolved within **TWENTY** working days of the original complaint, the complainant will be informed of the reasons in writing and the complainant will be offered the opportunity to progress to Stage 2. We will regard this as a formal complaint under the Complaints Procedure and the contact should be referred immediately to the Customer Relations Officer.

Stage 2 Formal Investigation

The Customer Relations Officer will be the single point of contact used to deal with all formal customer complaints. The promotion of a single point of contact will prove beneficial for both customers and the Council as it will provide a coordinated approach to complaints handling

The purpose of Stage 2 is to formally investigate the concern or complaint, consider the findings and make a decision about the outcome. Complaints will be escalated to Stage 2 where the response at Stage 1 is considered to be incomplete, unclear or unhelpful

In requesting escalation, the customer should identify which elements of their complaint they feel have not been adequately addressed.

The Customer Relations Officer will:

- Formally record the complaint details
- Summarise the main issues to be resolved, and agree these with the customer
- Investigate the complaint
- Provide a detailed response to the customer setting out the findings and the reasons for the findings

The Customer Relations Officer will normally require the co-operation of staff from his/her own service and possibly other services to help investigate and resolve the complaint. Any requested information must be provided to the investigating officer within **FIVE** working days.

Stage 2 complaints may involve a meeting between the customer and the Customer Relations Officer. The Customer Relations Officer will aim to respond fully to stage 2 complaints within **TWENTY** working

days. If this is not possible, a response will be sent to inform the complainant of what is being done to deal with the complaint, and when you can expect the full reply.

Stage 3 Local Government Ombudsman investigation

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council hopes to resolve most complaints internally, but if you are not satisfied with the Stage 2 response, or if we do not give you an answer within a reasonable time, you can ask the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate your complaint. The Ombudsman is an independent, impartial and free service

The Ombudsman may ask you about what efforts, if any, you have made to resolve your concerns personally and locally with us and will encourage and assist you to make this effort.

Although you can approach the Ombudsman at any time (in writing, by email, telephone or text), it must be stressed that before making a complaint at this level, you should have given the Council a proper chance to deal with it. The Ombudsman will not investigate decisions that individuals simply do not like, but only the way they have been made

If residents wish to contact the Local Government Ombudsman, they can write to:-
The Local Government Ombudsman,
The Oaks No 2,
Westwood Way,
Westwood Business Park,
Coventry
CV4 8JB

Alternatively, they can telephone 024 7682 0000; fax 024 7682 0001 or e-mail: enquiries@lgo.org.uk.

The Local Government Ombudsman also has an Adviceline which is 0845 602 1983 and the web site address is www.lgo.org.uk