

Corporate Comments and Complaints Overview

Our Principles of Complaints Handling:

Anyone who wishes to make a complaint should know that:

1. The complaints procedure is available to any customer, or their representative acting with their permission and on their behalf, who wishes to make a complaint.
2. All services are responsible for dealing with their concerns about their service and will take the opportunity when they first become aware of an issue to put it right as quickly as possible, however, this does not affect the customer's ability to make a formal complaint.
3. You will be given a nominated and named officer who will be responsible for investigating the complaint and responding within the set time scales.
4. You will be informed of the outcome of the complaint and the right to progress your complaint to the next stage if you remain dissatisfied.
5. You will be asked what you would like the outcome of your complaint to be so we are clear from the start what your expectations are.
6. You will be told when to expect a response. Any delays or alterations to these timescales will be communicated to you at the earliest opportunity

What can be complained about?

A clear and accessible Complaints, Compliments and Comments process allows the Council to demonstrate its commitment to managing customer feedback effectively.

This purpose of this Policy is to ensure that the Council:

- Deals effectively with complaints / concerns;
- Continually reviews/improves its services;
- Learns from mistakes;
- Receives feedback;
- Ensures all complaints are dealt with in a fair, consistent and thorough manner

The Council's Corporate Complaints Policy covers all services delivered by the Council, or for which it has responsibility. Complaints can include:

1. Poor Quality Services
2. Unreasonable Behaviour
3. Unreasonable Delay
4. An informal response failed to resolve an issue
- 5. Correct processes not followed**

What is not a complaint under this policy?

The Policy does not include services where they have not been directed to the service in the first instance and / or have a separate complaints procedures, for example:

1. Initial Service Requests;
2. Requests under Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection;
3. Third Party Complaints;
4. Where there is another right of appeal;
5. Complaints about regulatory decisions e.g. licensing, planning unless it is about how it was administered or where a policy has not been followed
6. Complaints about statutory duties e.g. council tax setting, homelessness decisions unless it is about how it was administered or where a policy has not been followed
7. Matters which are subject to Court or Tribunal proceedings;
8. Complaints about Elected Member Conduct;
9. Complaints under the Whistleblowing policy;
10. Complaints which amount to a petition
11. Elections
12. Employment complaints e.g. grievances, disciplinary

Complaints Procedure Overview:

Complaints will be considered at a number of different stages; generally starting at an informal stage (Immediate Resolution) followed by two formal stages (Stages 1 and 2).

The key difference between an informal complaint and a formal complaint is that the 'Early Resolution' stage offers front line staff the opportunity to take immediate action to put things right for you, the customer, thus resolving the situation decisively and without the need for further investigation.

If immediate action is not possible or appropriate, or you would like to complain formally following this informal stage then it should be progressed to a formal stage.

Any formal complaint will be directed to the appropriate officer as determined by the complaints stage or by the severity of the complaint.

Should you remain dissatisfied after the Council's internal process has been completed, you will be directed to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Services Ombudsman in the respect of Landlord Services.

Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Customers

On occasions certain complaints can be difficult to resolve and can cause anxiety and distress to customers and employees. Whilst the aim of the council is always to try to find a way to resolve matters, there are occasions when customers become unreasonable or unreasonably persistent in their actions to obtain the outcome that they want.

There is a need to ensure that these complaints are dealt with fairly. However, there is also a need to ensure that Council resources are used effectively and that other customers or employees do not suffer any detriment as a result of their behaviour. There is a separate policy to deal with any unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainants which identifies situations where a customer, either individually or as part of a group, or a group of customers, might be considered to be 'unreasonably persistent or vexatious' and proportionate ways of responding to these situations.