



HILLINGDON
LONDON

London Borough Of Hillingdon

Complaints Procedure

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Some complaints (Social Services) or appeals are dealt with differently for legal reasons. If this is the case, the complaints coordinator will be able to give you details.

This document is designed to assist staff in receiving and dealing with complaints to the corporate standard.

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The Council is committed to putting people at the centre of everything we do and the way we respond to complaints is a vital element in this policy.
- 1.2 The policy of the Council is to look at complaints in a positive manner as it allows the council to incorporate feedback into the improvement of services to its customers.

2. Introduction – The need for a Corporate Complaints Policy

- 2.1 Hillingdon Council is committed to providing responsive and effective services to all our customers. Complaints provide useful information for the improvement and development of services to meet the expectations of our customers.
- 2.2 The effective handling and promotion of the complaints policy demonstrates the Council's commitment to listening to customers, learning from the feedback and improving services in response to it.
- 2.3 A good complaints procedure provides the Council with an opportunity for us to show that
 - We are open and honest
 - We care about providing good services
 - We are willing to listen and develop services with a customer focus
- 2.4 Staff at all levels will receive complaints and so they need to be:
 - Positive
 - Understanding
 - Open-minded
 - Helpful
 - They should let it be seen that the Council takes complaints seriously and deals with them sympathetically and fairly
- 2.5 The feedback given by complaints can help to improve services and adapt them to the needs of the public.
- 2.6 Where a complainant has a justified grievance there is a duty to put things right at the earliest opportunity.

3. Definition of a complaint

- 3.1 A complaint is defined as

“An expression of dissatisfaction by telephone, personal visit or in writing, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the council or its staff affecting an individual or group of customers.”

- 3.2 A request for service will not be classified as a complaint. However should this request not be responded to or meet the customer's satisfaction, any subsequent reporting will be processed as a complaint.

Examples of Service Requests:

- Libraries: “You haven’t got the book I want.” This is not a complaint; this is a service request for the book to be procured for use by the customer.
- Environment: “My bins have been missed today and every week for the last 6 weeks!” A service request can resolve the problem this week but the customer should be asked if they want to make a complaint based on repetitive poor service.

3.3 If you are unclear as to whether the contact being made should be dealt with as a complaint or as a service request then speak to a service manager.

4. Scope of Policy

4.1 This policy applies to all expressions of dissatisfaction that are received within 12 months of any service being provided and relate to the provision of any service provided by, or on behalf of the, Council.

4.2 All staff are responsible for ensuring adherence to the policy in the processing of any complaints they receive.

4.3 All complaints will be handled in accordance with this policy. Certain complaints are also covered under separate legislation or Council procedures and will be dealt with accordingly. The corporate complaints procedure complements established arrangements for dealing with specific complaints relating to:

- Complaints under the Children’s Act
- Complaint under the Community Care Act
- Consumer complaints to Trading Standards
- Complaints about Schools

4.4 Each complaint will be logged onto the [Onyx](#) system and categorised using the following headings.

- **Policy** – does not meet the needs or expectations of the customer, e.g. complaint against the level of service charges, or assessment of housing need.
- **Service Failure** – where the council has failed to perform its duties, e.g. Failure to assess Housing Benefit correctly, or failure to advise client of changes to charges.
- **Staff Attitude** – where a member of the public feels that an officer of the council has behaved in an unprofessional manner, e.g. failure to return telephone calls, or rudeness to a customer.
- **Slow Service** – where the member of the public has received the service but feels that the service delivered has taken too long to deliver, e.g. length of time taken to carry out a repair, dustbins collected but rubbish left in the road.
- **Racial Allegation** – where the complainant perceives that the service they are receiving is being affected by their race e.g. length of time taken to carry out a repair, dustbins not collected.

4.5 Each complaint will only be investigated once at each level of the procedure (we call the complaint steps stages i.e. Stage 1, Stage 2 etc), and any investigation will be handled at the appropriate level for the level of the complaint. Any subsequent submissions of the same issue from the same customer will be linked to the original and one response provided from a nominated officer.

5. Attitude to Complaints

- 5.1 It is vital that staff deal with complaints in a patient, sympathetic and helpful manner.
- 5.2 Staff should always try to put themselves in the place of the complainant and remember what it is like when they complain against a large organisation.
- Avoid being defensive or showing irritation.
 - Never blame other Sections or Groups and always remember that the complaint is against the Council. Passing the buck solves nothing and is likely to increase the complainant's sense of grievance.
- 5.3 Large organisations rarely apologise for their actions or inaction. The policy of the Council is that we should not be afraid to apologise if the Council has made a mistake.

6. Assistance for a complainant

- 6.1 A complainant may at any time be accompanied by a friend or advocate when presenting his or her case.
- 6.2 If a complainant has difficulty in putting forward the complaint because of speech, language or other problems he/she should be offered assistance.

7. Procedure

7.1 Stage 1 - Initial Complaint

Step 1	<p>The Complaints Coordinator (see section 16) or any member of staff trained on the use of Onyx will log the complaint onto the Onyx system; the complaint will then be allocated to the relevant officer for investigation and resolution.</p> <p>If the complaint is received at a remote location (Leisure Centre, Library, Adult Education Centre) the receiving officer, which is likely to be the location manager, should whenever possible contact the complainant by telephone to acknowledge receipt.</p> <p>The officer should then contact the Customer Liaison Manager for P&CS, or the complaints coordinator for their area, or another member of staff trained on Onyx (e.g. Contact Centre Staff, Staff in Leisure Facilities) to advise them that a complaint has been received and the action that has been taken. Following this contact, which can be via email or telephone, the complaint will be logged onto Onyx.</p> <p>If a complaint is received in writing the letter should immediately be sent into the Civic Centre marked for the attention of the Customer Liaison Manager or the Complaints Coordinator. A copy of the letter should be retained at the remote location</p>
Step 2	<p>Whenever possible the relevant officer should contact the complainant by telephone.</p> <p>If it is not possible to contact the complainant by phone, then written acknowledgement of the complaint, including details of the Officer dealing with it, is sent out within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint.</p>
Step 3	<p>The appropriate officer will investigate the complaint and aim to respond fully within 10 working days from the initial receipt of the complaint to the Council. If a full response cannot be given within the 10 days, a holding letter must be sent within 5 working days providing a date for the full resolution of the complaint and reasons for the delay.</p>

Step 4	The response to the complaint should either uphold the complainant's reason for dissatisfaction including an apology and indication of how the issue will be addressed, or acknowledge the complaint but justify the action of the Council
Step 5	The response will be attached electronically to the complaint record on Onyx.
Step 6	The letter detailing the findings of the investigating officer will include standard paragraph for the complainant to request to proceed to Stage 2 should he/she remain dissatisfied with the way that the complaint has been handled.

7.2 Stage 2 – First Appeal (Dealt with by the Corporate Director).

Step 1	<p>The Complaints Coordinator (see section 16) or any member of staff trained on the use of Onyx will log the complaint onto the Onyx system. Whilst logging the complaint on to the system, the officer will check to see if there is an open complaint or if this is an appeal to a stage 1 complaint response. If this is an appeal, it will then be allocated to the relevant Group Director or Nominated Officer for investigation and resolution.</p> <p>If the appeal is received at a remote location (Leisure Centre, Library, Adult Education Centre) the receiving officer, which is likely to be the location manager, should whenever possible contact the complainant by telephone to acknowledge receipt.</p> <p>The officer should then contact the Customer Liaison Manager for P&CS, or the complaints coordinator for their area, or another member of staff trained on Onyx (e.g. Contact Centre Staff, Staff in Leisure Facilities) to advise them that a complaint has been received and the action that has been taken. Following this contact, which can be via email or telephone, the complaint, will be logged onto Onyx.</p> <p>If a complaint is received in writing the letter should immediately be sent into the Civic Centre marked for the attention of the Customer Liaison Manager or the Complaints Coordinator. A copy of the letter should be retained at the remote location</p>
Step 2	<p>If it is felt to be appropriate, the nominated officer will contact the complainant by telephone.</p> <p>If it is not possible to contact the complainant by phone, then written acknowledgement of the complaint, including details of the Officer dealing with it is sent out within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint.</p>
Step 3	The appropriate officer will investigate the original complaint and aim to respond fully within 10 working days from the initial receipt of the appeal to the Council. If a full response cannot be given within the 10 days, a holding letter must be sent within 5 days providing a date for the full resolution of the complaint and reasons for the delay.
Step 4	The response to the appeal should either uphold the complainant's reason for dissatisfaction with the initial handling of the complaint including an apology and indication of how the issue will be addressed, or acknowledge the appeal but justify the reasons behind the initial findings of the Council
Step 5	The response will be attached electronically to the complaint record on Complaints System
Step 6	The letter from the Corporate Director detailing the findings of the investigating officer will include a paragraph advising the complainant of the right of appeal, and progressing the complaint to Stage 3 should he/she not be satisfied with the way that the complaint has been handled.

7.3 Stage 3 – Second Appeal (Dealt with on behalf of the Chief Executive).

Step 1	<p>The Complaints Coordinator (see section 16) or any member of staff trained on the use of Onyx will log the complaint onto the Onyx system; whilst logging the complaint on to the system, the officer will check to see if there is an open complaint or if this is an appeal to a stage 2 complaint response. If this is an appeal, it will be allocated to the Head of Democratic Services for investigation on behalf of the Chief Executive.</p> <p>If the complaint is received at a remote location (Leisure Centre, Library, Adult Education Centre) the receiving officer, which is likely to be the location manager, should whenever possible contact the complainant by telephone to acknowledge receipt.</p> <p>The officer should then contact the Customer Liaison Manager for P&CS, or the complaints coordinator for their area, or another member of staff trained on Onyx (e.g. Contact Centre Staff, Staff in Leisure Facilities) to advise them that a complaint has been received and the action that has been taken. Following this contact, which can be via email or telephone, the complaint, will be logged onto Onyx.</p> <p>If a complaint is received in writing the letter should immediately be sent into the Civic Centre marked for the attention of the Customer Liaison Manager or the Complaints Coordinator. A copy of the letter should be retained at the remote location</p>
Step 2	Written acknowledgement of the appeal, including details of the Officer dealing with it is sent out within 3 working days of receipt of the appeal.
Step 3	The Head of Democratic Services will request all documentation relating to the complaint from the Officer who dealt with the Stage 2 investigation.
Step 4	If sufficient information is not available in the existing documentation, an interview with the complainant may be requested in order to clarify the precise details of the complaint and reasons for dissatisfaction with the responses received.
Step 5	The Head of Democratic Services will review all documentation concerning the complaint and aim to respond fully within 15 working days from the initial receipt of the appeal to the Council. If a full response cannot be given within the 10 days, a holding letter must be sent providing a date for the full resolution of the complaint and reasons for the delay.
Step 6	The response from the Chief Executive should either uphold the complainant's reason for dissatisfaction with the initial handling of the complaint including an apology and indication of how the issue will be addressed, or acknowledge the appeal but justify the reasons behind the initial findings of the Council
Step 7	The response will be attached electronically to the complaint record on Complaints System
Step 8	<p>Responses to Stage 3 complaints will include details of how to refer the findings to the Local Government Ombudsman should the complainant remain dissatisfied.</p> <p>If a complainant is still dissatisfied at the end of stage 3, the complainant should be advised that they have exhausted the council's complaints procedure and the complaint will be closed, unless they wish to take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.</p>

7.4 [Persistent Complainants](#)

Determination of unreasonably persistent complainants or a complainant whose behaviour is unreasonable can be made at any of the above stages in the procedure.

Step 1	<p>Before deciding that the complainant is persistent, the Officer needs to ensure that they are satisfied that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complaint is being or has been investigated properly; • The decision reached is the right one; • Communications with the complainant have been adequate; • The complainant is not now providing any significant new information that might affect the authority's view on the complaint.
Step 2	<p>If the Officer is satisfied on the points in step 1, and before deciding whether the complainant is persistent then consider the following points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a meeting with the complainant and an officer/officers (if appropriate to do so) • Arrange mediation as this may help remedy the complaint • If more than one department is involved (check with Onyx), then set up a strategy meeting to agree a cross council approach and designate a key officer to co-ordinate the council's response • Offer an independent advocate • Send a warning to the complainant advising him / her that if their behaviour continues then they may be treated as an unreasonably persistent complainant
Step 3	<p>Having decided to classify the complainant as a persistent or unreasonable, the Group Director and Head of Democratic Services then determine the appropriate type of action to be taken. This can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions on the length or number of telephone calls and personal contact • Restriction to the type of contact (phone, letter, email etc) • Restriction to complainant contacting one named officer • Requiring personal contacts to take place in front of a witness • Refusing to register and process further complaints about the same matter • Provide complainant with acknowledgement of letters, emails and faxes. • Advising complainant that all future complaints will be read and placed on file but not acknowledged – if this is the course of action taken a key officer needs to be designated to read all future correspondence.
Step 4	<p>Having reached the decision, the council will write to the complainant advising them that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision has been taken • What impact this has on his / her contact with the council • How long the restrictions will last • What steps the complainant can take to have the decision reviewed. <p>The letter will include a copy of the persistent complaints policy.</p>
Step 5	<p>Make a note on the Onyx stating what the restrictions are and how long they are in effect for.</p>
Step 6	<p>Review the restrictions placed on the complainant after 6 months. If no new complaints have been received then the position will be reviewed and a decision taken on whether the restrictions should be lifted.</p>

7.5 [Compensation](#)

Step 1	Determine if there has been a case of maladministration and the complainant has been adversely affected as a result and whether compensation should be considered.
Step 2	Speak to complainant to determine the remedy they are looking for. Remedies could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking a specific action• Apologising
Step 3	Head of Service or Complaints Managers should determine the amount of compensation to be paid. When making the determination on the amount of compensation to be paid, they should take into account all the facts of the case, these should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The effects of the complainant's own actions• Whether money due to the complainant has not been paid• Quantifiable loss – costs incurred by the complainant following actions taken by the council• Loss of non-monetary benefits• Loss of value• Lost opportunity• Distress• Professional fees• Time and trouble in pursuing the complaint Determine if any part of the compensation is covered by the Council's insurance arrangements, if so this should be passed to the Council's insurance section (ext 0660)
Step 4	Submit request for compensation to relevant Head of Service and the Head of Democratic Services.
Step 5.	The complaints officer will send a letter to the complainant making offer of compensation on behalf of the department, including the words 'without prejudice'
Step 6.	Record compensation paid onto Onyx, this will need to be registered against the relevant cost centre for each group (compensation payments). Payments over £1,000 need Member approval.

The Local Government Ombudsman has [guidance on remedies](#) that should be referred to when making an assessment.

8. Local Government Ombudsman.

- 8.1 The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of alleged injustice concerning Local Authorities.
- 8.2 A customer can refer their complaint to the Ombudsman at any time. However the Ombudsman will normally give the Council the opportunity to resolve the complaint via their internal procedure first unless the nature of the complaint is felt to warrant immediate intervention
- 8.3 The Ombudsman office for complaints about Hillingdon Council is as follows:
Local Government Ombudsman
10th Floor, Millbank Tower
Millbank
London SW1P 4QP
- 8.4 Complaints referred by the Ombudsman are addressed to the Chief Executive and forwarded to the Democratic Services Section where they will be logged onto the Complaints System, and linked to the original complaint record.

- 8.5 Details of the complaint and the action taken with regard to it will be requested from an appropriate Senior Manager responsible for the service the complaint relates to. These details will be forwarded to the Head of Democratic Services.
- 8.6 The Head of Democratic Services will respond to the Ombudsman ensuring that a complete response, covering all points raised and including copies of any related documentation, is made.
- 8.7 The findings of the Ombudsman will be logged onto the Complaints System. Any actions required by the Ombudsman will be reported to the Executive for discussion and policy review where necessary.

9. Complaints received via Members or MP's

- 9.1 All contact received from a Member or a MP will be checked by the Member's Liaison Officers to determine if the contact is an Enquiry and dealt with under the [Member's Enquiry procedure](#) or a complaint and dealt with under the Complaints Policy.
- 9.2 If the complaint is already open on the system, the investigating officer will be asked to advise the MP or Member of their response to the customer.
- 9.3 If it is not already open, the complaint will be logged onto the Council Complaints system and electronically assigned to an officer to investigate.
- 9.4 The complaint will then be investigated as per the above procedures, and the response will be sent to the Member or MP as well as the customer.

10. Complaints against individual officers

- 10.1 A manager must investigate any complaints against an individual officer. If the complaint involves a manager in any way another officer nominated by a senior manager will carry out the investigation.
- 10.2 It must never be assumed that any officer about whom a complaint is made is automatically in the right or automatically in the wrong. He or she also has the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or other companion at any meetings held as part of a complaints investigation. Full regard must be had to the rights and procedures embodied in the approved disciplinary arrangements and advice should be sought from Personnel on any complaint against a member of staff.
- 10.3 Complaints of a very serious nature alleging misconduct by an officer such as assault, dishonesty, theft or racist or sexist behaviour should be dealt with under the [disciplinary process](#).

11. Anonymous complaints

- 11.1 Anonymous complaints will only be dealt with if they involve individual or public safety, corruption, waste or other impropriety' and where there is sufficient information to allow an investigation to proceed.
- 11.2 Anonymous complaints must be recorded.

12. Monitoring, analysis and reporting

- 12.1 All complaints will be logged onto the Corporate Complaints System and this information analysed by the Performance Improvement Team.
- 12.2 Monitoring is done on a quarterly basis to Corporate Management Team, and Cabinet. The Corporate Performance Improvement Team compiles the report in both instances.
- 12.3 Complaints letters may be quality checked as part of the monthly letter monitoring, to ensure that they meet the corporate letter standards.
- 12.4 Complaints will be analysed by the Groups to determine if there are any patterns showing in their areas about council policies, service failures, staff attitudes, racial allegations, and slow service delivery.
- 12.5 The results of the initial analysis that has identified the reason, will then be followed up to ensure that where appropriate, the complaint (if upheld) is leading to:-
- Changes in Council Policy
 - Improvements in Service Delivery
 - The addressing of Staff Attitudes

13. The Media and Complaints

- 13.1 If the complaint is likely to lead to media coverage, please contact the corporate communications team so they can be briefed on the main issues of the complaint.

14. Glossary of terms

Council's Complaints System / Onyx: The council's networked database used for logging and monitoring customer complaints.

Complaints Coordinator: Officers in each group of the council with responsibility for logging and monitoring complaints on the Council Complaints System.

Maladministration: To administer badly, inefficiently or dishonestly.

Service Managers: Officers within groups with the responsibility for making judgements and responding to complaints.

Unreasonably persistent complainant: Complainant who because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the authority, hinder the authority's consideration of their, or other people's complaints.

15. Related Documents

- 15.1 [Complaints & Compensation Policy](#) (agreed by Cabinet 12/06/2007)
- 15.2 [Persistent Complainants Policy](#) (agreed by Cabinet 12/06/2007)
- 15.3 Customer Focus Strategy
- 15.4 Member's Enquiries Procedure (agreed by CMT)
- 15.5 [CEO Online complaints form](#)
- 15.6 [Education Services Online complaints form](#)
- 15.7 [Environment & Consumer Protection Online complaints form](#)
- 15.8 [Finance & Resources Online complaints form](#)
- 15.9 [Housing / Hillingdon Homes Online complaints form](#)
- 15.10 [Planning & Community Services Online complaints form](#)
- 15.11 [Social Services \(Adult & Children's\) Online complaints form](#)
- 15.12 Corporate compliments & complaints leaflet, including complaints form
- 15.13 [Complaints Process Map](#)
- 15.14 [Acknowledgement letter - Onyx](#)
- 15.15 [Performance summary statements](#)
- 15.16 [Good practice guidance – Investigation of complaints](#)

16. Complaints coordinators

Service Department	Departmental Complaints Co-coordinator	Telephone Number	E-mail address
Deputy Chief Executive's Office	Jayne Menzies	01895 250274	Complaints-ceo@hillington.gov.uk
Education	Sukwinder Mehmi	01895 277468	education-complaints@hillington.gov.uk
Environment and Consumer Protection	David Jones (all complaints are logged by Contact Centre)	01895 556000	Contactcentre1@hillington.gov.uk
Planning and Community Services	David Thackeray	01895 277683	complaints-planning@hillington.gov.uk
Finance and Resources	Christine Bliss	01895 556430	Complaints-finance@hillington.gov.uk
Housing Services and Hillingdon Homes	Deirdre Barber	01895 250366	complaintsmailbox@hillington.gov.uk
Adult Social Care and Children's Services	Lesley Rappaport	01895 277800	Complaints-social@hillington.gov.uk

17. Flow Chart – Stage 1 Complaints

1

The complaint is received & recorded

(Received by any member of staff, recorded by staff with access to Onyx)

If in person or over the telephone, listen carefully, take the complaint seriously, explain the process and emphasis that it will be dealt with efficiently and fully investigated.

2

The complaint is acknowledged

An acknowledgement letter is sent straight away (within 3 days).

3

The Manager Responsible for the Service Investigates

The Manager or his or her representative carries out an investigation and responds to the complainant, within 10 days, if not a full explanation must be given within 5 days and a time when the complainant can expect a full response.

4

Respond to the complainant

The response to the complaint should either uphold the complainant's reason for complaint or apologise. The response should include a paragraph advising the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied with the way that the complaint has been handled then they have the right to appeal.

18. Flow Chart – Stage 2 Complaints

1

The complaint is received & recorded

(Received by any member of staff, recorded by staff with access to Onyx)

If in person or over the telephone, listen carefully, take the complaint seriously, explain the process and emphasis that it will be dealt with efficiently and fully investigated.

2

The complaint is acknowledged

An acknowledgement letter is sent straight away (within 3 days).

3

The Corporate Director Responsible for the Service Investigates

The Corporate Director or his or her representative carries out an investigation and responds to the complainant, within 10 days, if not a full explanation must be given within 5 days and a time when the complainant can expect a full response.

4

Respond to the complainant

The response to the complaint should either uphold the complainant's reason for complaint or apologise. The response should include a paragraph advising the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied with the way that the complaint has been handled then they have the right to appeal.

19. Flow Chart – Stage 3 Complaints

1

The complaint is received & recorded

(Received by any member of staff, recorded by staff with access to Onyx)

If in person or over the telephone, listen carefully, take the complaint seriously, explain the process and emphasis that it will be dealt with efficiently and fully investigated.

2

The complaint is acknowledged

An acknowledgement letter is sent straight away (within 3 days).

3

The Head of Democratic Services Investigates

The Head of Democratic Services (on behalf of the CEO) or his or her representative carries out an investigation and responds to the complainant, within 10 days, if not a full explanation must be given within 5 days and a time when the complainant can expect a full response.

4

Respond to the complainant

The response to the complaint should either uphold the complainant's reason for complaint or apologise. The response should include a paragraph advising the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied with the way that the complaint has been handled then they have the right to appeal.