

Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is committed to delivering the highest quality public services to the residents of, and visitors to, this area. As part of our policy of continuous improvement the Council welcomes all comments on the services and facilities that it offers.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council recognises, however, that there will be occasions when its services and actions do not meet the reasonable expectations of the public. To maintain the highest level of service the Council needs to know when things go wrong or if we are not meeting the needs of the public. In line with the Council's desire to be able to respond to customer demands the following complaints policy and procedure has been established as a means of effectively receiving, dealing with and assessing complaints.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Clarify how the public may make a complaint;
- Define the standards the public can expect when they make a complaint;
- Recognise the importance of complaints in providing feedback about Council services and performance;
- Set out how the Council will monitor complaints and use that information to improve services and identify training needs.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is committed to delivering the highest quality public services and will, as far as possible, fully and effectively respond to any complaints received from the public relating to failures in its services or the actions of its workforce. The procedures contained in this policy and procedure document will assist the Council in recording, assessing and responding to complaints as diligently as possible.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Mayor
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Chief Executive,
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

3. DEFINITIONS

Please find below an explanation of what certain terms mean in the context of the policy:

“A Complaint”

For the purpose of this policy and procedure “a complaint” is defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction with the standard of service provided by the Council, or with something the Council or a member of its workforce may or may not have done.”

Complaints under this policy may include issues relating to:

- Delays in delivering services
- Failure to follow agreed policies and procedures
- Inadequate or unsatisfactory services
- Rudeness or inappropriate or offensive behaviour
- Unfair discrimination or unequal treatment.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The implementation and effectiveness of the policy will be overseen by the Chief Executive of the Council or officers so designated by him.

5. PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

5.1 Purpose of the Procedure

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that:

- As many complaints as possible are resolved at the initial point of contact without the need for the customer to pursue the matter further;
- Any faults on Council’s behalf are acknowledged and an apology is offered;
- The customer is given a clear and relevant explanation where this is requested;
- Acknowledged deficiencies in the Council’s services are identified and remedied as quickly as possible;
- Effective action is taken to avoid similar complaints in future;
- Best practice in dealing with complaints is shared across the Council.

5.2 Who Can Make a Complaint?

Complaints about the Council can be received from any person or organisation receiving, or seeking to receive, a service from the Council.

5.3 How Can Complaints Be Received?

Complaints can be made in person, by phone, by e-mail, in writing or in languages other than English. If a complainant has any difficulties in making a complaint at any stage of the procedure, they can request assistance or submit their complaint in an alternative form.

5.4 Standards Expected of Staff

The minimum standards expected of staff in dealing with complaints are as follows:

- Complaints made verbally (in person or by phone) must be formally recorded with all relevant details included in this record of the complaint, ie nature of the complaint, dates, times, contact details for complainant, who dealt with the complaint, etc.
- Complaints received in writing from the complainant either in the form of a letter, e-mail or on the official complaints form must be date stamped on receipt and acknowledged.
- It is not absolutely necessary for the complainant to have completed the Council's official complaint form although they should be made aware of this method of making a complaint.
- Each Service section will have a nominated officer who will be responsible for ensuring complaints are logged and tracked and outcomes recorded.

5.5 Handling Complaints – The Three Stage Process

In most cases service delivery problems reported by the public can be resolved satisfactorily by the member of staff they first contact without any need for further action. If the customer is not satisfied, however, with the response given at this informal stage, they are entitled to ask for their complaint to be dealt with formally under the Council's Complaints Procedure which has three formal escalating stages.

Details of the three formal stages are included in **Appendix 1**.

5.6 Monitoring Complaints

Periodic statistical reports on the number, type and resolution of complaints and any associated trends will be provided to the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team.

An annual report on complaints will be produced for consideration by the Council. As well as reporting on the number, type and resolution of complaints, the report may also:

- identify improvements to service delivery introduced in response to complaints;
- recommend action to minimise or avoid similar complaints in future;
- recommend procedural improvements for handling and resolving complaints;
- identify training and information needs.

6. EVALUATION AND REVIEW OF THE POLICY

This Complaints Policy and Procedure will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team and, as part of this review, an evaluation will be conducted on the effectiveness of the policy and procedures in relation to receiving, handling, assessing and resolving complaints received by the Council.

7. SECTION 75 EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is fully committed to meeting its obligations in relation to Equality and Good Relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. In this regard this policy will be screened using Section 75 guidelines and will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment if found necessary as a result of the screening process.

8. CONTACT DETAILS

Any issues or queries relating to this policy should be addressed to:

Elizabeth Beattie
Head of Policy
Causeway Coast and Glens District Council
c/o Coleraine Borough Council
66 Portstewart Road
Coleraine
BT52 1EY

Tel: 028 7034 7163
E-Mail: elizabeth.beattie@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk

HANDLING COMPLAINTS – THE THREE STAGE PROCESS

Stage One

- The complainant contacts the Council and is referred to the section dealing with the subject of the complaint.
- The name and nature of the complaint are recorded by the section and the complaint is dealt with by the relevant officer in the section.
- Complaints about a member of staff must go directly to the appropriate Service Manager or Director and not to the person about whom the complaint has been made. Complaints about a Director must be made directly to the Chief Executive.
- If the complaint is not settled immediately, the complainant will receive a reply within **three working days**.

Stage Two

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they have received they can refer the matter to the relevant Director for investigation (if appropriate).
- They should be asked to put their complaint in writing, including as much detail as possible or they can complete the official complaint form.
- If the complaint cannot be dealt with immediately, an acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint should be sent to the complainant within **three working days** in an appropriate medium and language.
- Where the complaint relates to a specific Director, the Chief Executive will allocate another Director to investigate the complaint.
- Where a complaint relates to a number of different Departments or Directorates, it should be responded to by the Director where the bulk of the complaint rests. This Director must also take responsibility for co-ordinating a response within the specified time period.
- A reply to the complainant in relation to their complaint should be furnished within **ten working days**.

- In the response the complainant must be told how they may pursue their complaint further, ie to the next stage.
- In exceptional circumstances the time period for the investigation and furnishing of a reply can be extended but the complainant must be kept informed of when a likely response can be expected.
- All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that information about complaints remains confidential.

Stage Three

- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response they have received in Stage Two then the complainant has the right to ask the Chief Executive to review the matter.
- The Chief Executive will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within **three working days**.
- In his absence the Chief Executive may authorise another senior officer to undertake his role.
- The Chief Executive (or nominated Director) will carry out a review of the matter and will reply to the complainant within **twenty one working days**.
- The aim of the review is to ensure that all matters raised in the original complaint have been comprehensively and accurately addressed and, if not, to ensure that this now happens.
- In the response the complainant must be told how they may pursue their complaint further, ie to the next stage.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the Council's response, they must be advised that they have the right to refer their complaint to:

The Northern Ireland Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints
 Freepost BEL 1478
 Belfast
 BT1 6BY

Tel: (028) 90233821
 Text Phone: 028 90897789
 E-Mail: ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk

OR

By calling between the hours 9.30 am and 4.30 pm at the address below:

The Ombudsman
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN