

Guide to London Councils Complaints Procedure

London Councils has a simple three stage procedure that covers most of the services we provide. Please read the information below for details on the kinds of complaints we can investigate and how they will be handled.

What can we investigate?

We can investigate any of the following through our 3 stage complaints procedure:

- an unsatisfactory level or quality of service
- concerns about service delivery or non-delivery
- a failure to provide information or give the correct information
- a failure to follow the London Councils agreed policies and procedures
- a complaint about the behaviour of staff or contractors employed by London Councils.

What must be investigated by other procedures?

- Complaints about the Parking or Congestion Charging Adjudicators cannot be dealt with by London Councils. For details about when and how to complain about an adjudicator, please visit the London Tribunals website (<http://www.londontribunals.gov.uk>)
- Appeals against Grants decisions to reduce or cease an organisation's funding will be dealt with through the Grants Committee's Appeal Process.
- Complaints about how we have handled a request for information under the Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations or the Data Protection Act will be dealt with through our internal review procedure.
- Complaints about elected Members should be referred to their own authorities where they are bound by their local code of conduct.

What can't we investigate?

Sometimes we receive complaints about policy decisions taken by London Councils Member bodies, for example the level of parking fines or the reduction in the Grants scheme. If your complaint is about the substance of a policy, rather than the way a decision has been taken or a problem with delivery of a service, we will not consider it under our complaints procedure. Our response to you will explain that this is because your complaint is about a policy decision rather than a failure to do something.

Our standards for handling complaints

1. We treat all complaints seriously, whether they are made by telephone, by letter, by fax, or by email.
2. We will treat complainants with courtesy and fairness at all times.
3. We will aim to meet the timescales set down within our procedures and if, for any reason, we require further time we will tell the complainant the reason why and let them know when we will be able to reply in full.
4. We will not treat a complainant less favourably than anyone else because of their:
 - sex or marital status: this includes family status, responsibility for dependants, and gender
 - sexual orientation

- colour or race: this includes ethnic or national origin or nationality
 - disability
 - religious or political beliefs, or trade union affiliation
 - other unjustifiable factors, for example language difficulties or age.
5. If a complainant requires assistance in making their complaint, we will provide appropriate help, which may include putting people in touch with a suitable agency which can assist them in making their complaint.
- a. All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Persistent or vexatious complaints and managing unreasonable complainant behaviour

London Councils has adopted a policy on managing complaints which may be considered persistent or vexatious, and for dealing with a complainant who exhibits unreasonable behaviour. The policy is based on guidance from the Local Government Ombudsman and outlines what actions the organisation may take in response to either situation. The full policy is available on request.

Making a complaint

If you wish to make a complaint, or enquire about the progress of your complaint, please contact the Corporate Complaints Officer:

- by email at complaints@londoncouncils.gov.uk
- by telephone on 020 7934 9845
- by letter to Corporate Complaints Officer at: Corporate Governance, London Councils, 59½ Southwark Street, London, SE1 0AL

Please contact the Corporate Complaints Officer if you need any assistance in making your complaint.

When making your complaint please give us as many details as possible. This might include details about:

- What you think we have done wrong or not done?
- How you have been affected?
- What you would like us to do to put things right?
- Any relevant dates, the names of staff you have dealt with, information you have been given
- Copies of any letters or other documents to support your complaint.

Even if you cannot, or choose not to, provide all of these details we will still investigate your complaint as fully as possible but any information you can provide will be of assistance.

How will we investigate your complaint?

Stage 1 - Problem Solving

If you are unhappy about a particular service or wish to make a suggestion, please contact the relevant officer or manager in that directorate. If you do not know who this is you can contact the Corporate Complaints Officer. Please tell them if you require any assistance in making your complaint.

We will try to sort out mistakes and misunderstandings quickly at this stage and, at most, within 15 working days. If you are not happy with the response you get, then you can make a stage 2 complaint.

Please note: Occasionally, we receive a complaint that involves a senior member of staff or is sufficiently serious that it is appropriate to escalate it immediately to stage 3 of the complaints procedure. If this is the case, you will be informed immediately.

Stage 2 - Directorate Investigation

You can lodge a stage 2 complaint with the Corporate Complaints Officer. Your complaint will be referred to the relevant Corporate Director who will appoint someone to investigate. That person will usually be a senior manager or someone who has in-depth knowledge of the area you are complaining about. If the problem cannot be solved immediately, we will write to you within 5 working days to let you know that your complaint has been received and is being investigated. We will aim to provide you with a full response within 20 working days. Sometimes, when a complaint is complicated, further time may be needed to conduct the investigation. If extra time is needed, we will contact you to explain why and give a new date when you can expect a full reply.

Stage 3 - Chief Executive's Review

If you are still unhappy with our response after the Stage 2 investigation, you can lodge a stage 3 complaint with the Corporate Complaints Officer. They will ask the Chief Executive to initiate an independent review of our response to your complaint. This review will usually be conducted by a senior manager who is independent of the service area you are complaining about and who will work on behalf of the Chief Executive. We will write to you within five working days to let you know that your complaint has been received and that a full review will be carried out within 20 working days. If the issues raised are particularly complicated and extra time is required, we will contact you to explain why and give a new date when you can expect a full reply.

What can I do if my complaint is not resolved after completing all three stages?

In the unlikely event that after proceeding through the three stages of the complaints procedure you are still not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved, you can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman (www.lgo.org.uk).

You can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman at any point but they will, in most cases, only consider a complaint if the stages above have been fully exhausted. Within our stage 3 response, we will include full contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman.