



IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Complaints Policy

April 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Ipswich Borough Council is committed to providing the highest levels of customer service putting our customers at the 'Heart of Everything We do.' We aim to provide efficient services for every customer, whether they are customers of the borough, businesses, or other service users, we ensure that our procedures are openly accessible and widely published.

Any individual, group, or organisation that receives or seeks services from the council is entitled to complain regarding acts or failures stemming from administrative or operational action. We are committed to making it easier for you to provide feedback to us and use your feedback to improve our services.

When dealing with complaints, it is our aim to work with you so that we understand what your issues are and what you would like to happen to resolve it.

If you require additional support in submitting a complaint, then you should be advised to contact the Customer Services Team on 01473 432000 where we will provide reasonable assistance or adjustments to enable you to make your complaint in a fair and equitable way.

This policy sets out how complaints can be made about our council services.

WHO CAN COMPLAIN

Any person, group or organisation receiving or seeking to receive a service from the council, or its contractors has the right to complain. A complaint made by anyone other than the aggrieved party will only be accepted when it is made by a third party on behalf of the complainant and with their permission. This may arise for example in the case of a minor, someone suffering from illness or incapacity. Customers can complain about any of our services, facilities, venues, and staff. Including, all departments and employees, agency staff, contractors and consultants who work for the council.

DEFINITIONS OF A COMPLAINT

A formal complaint is defined by the Housing Ombudsman as:

"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a customer or group of customers."

A formal complaint is defined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman as:

"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals."

The Council is keen to resolve disputes at the earliest possible opportunity providing the opportunity to put things right for the customer. With the acceptance of the complainant, and working with service partners across the Council, we aim to quickly resolve what went wrong. This will usually involve liaising with the relevant officers or service to arrange actions to be taken to the satisfaction of the person raising the issue.

However, if the customer remains dissatisfied or makes it clear that they wish to complain, then the matter will be logged as a complaint. Where a customer does not explicitly use the word complaint, this should not prevent the Council from identifying their concerns.

A complaint can relate to, but is not limited to:

- Failure by the Council to provide an agreed service
- Failure by the Council to respond to a request for a service
- The attitude or conduct of an employee or Councillor
- Failure to follow an agreed procedure

The following are not considered complaints and are not covered by this policy:

- Requests for a service, change or improvement
- Requests for information or an explanation of Council policy or practice
- Investigating a decision where there is a formal right of appeal (such as a planning decision, a parking penalty charge notice or benefit decision)

A complaint is different from a whistleblowing concern, where an individual raises information as a witness about danger, wrongdoing or illegality that affects others. Where this is the case, the matter should be raised under the council's Whistleblowing Policy.

OUR APPROACH TO HANDLING SERVICE REQUESTS

An Enquiry or Service Request – Whether raised by a customer, or via advocates, such as a Councillor or MPs, may not be classed or recorded as a complaint if the matter has not yet been raised with the service themselves as an initial service request or the service has not had a reasonable opportunity to respond or resolve. In addition, some of this demand may be 'business as usual' requests or queries that have been sent in via the 'complaints' route if the sender was uncertain where to direct it.

Most of this type of demand will either be 'diverted' by providing the customer with an alternative means of raising a service request (e.g., links on website, advice and guidance from Council Officers or Members, etc.), or distributed to frontline officers to progress as service requests or enquiries in the normal way. The customer will be advised accordingly and informed of the 'business as usual' service and transaction expectations. If the service request was made by an advocate, this will be captured as being reported by the advocate for future reference.

A service request may be defined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman as:

“A request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision”

A service request is defined by the Housing Ombudsman as:

“A request from a customer to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right.”

What we cannot deal with as a Service Request.

- Requests for information or an explanation of Council policy or practice
- Investigating a decision where there is a formal right of appeal (such as a planning decision, a parking penalty charge notice or benefit decision).

Examples of the type of concerns often raised as a 'complaint' that may be considered 'first-time service requests' could be:

- Fly-tipping
- Missed bin collections
- Housing repairs
- Road sweeping/cleansing

However, it will be noted that the customer has made the service request through the complaints route, and if appropriate expectations have not been delivered then this can be dealt with at Stage 1 of our complaints process.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

These can be made:

- Online: www.ipswich.gov.uk/contactus
- In writing: Customer Services, Ipswich Borough Council, Grafton House, 15-17 Russell Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 2DE
- In person: Talking to a member of staff at any of our council venues.
By phone: Telephone our Customer Services team on 01473 432000

Social media should not be used to make a complaint.

If a customer makes contact to complain in person, or by phone, they will be directed to complete the complaints online form or to send the complaint in writing. This is to ensure that there is a full audit trail of information captured to allow the Council to follow the complaints procedure, fully investigate and to provide a full response.

HOW COMPLAINTS WILL BE HANDLED

Complaints will be handled in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy and Complaints Procedure which are published on the Council's website.

The Council has nominated Complaint Champions in each service area who are responsible for complaint handling. Complaint Champions will:

- Act sensitively and fairly
- Be trained to receive complaints and deal with upset and distressed customers
- Have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints
- Have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly

Stage 1

Our Corporate complaints process involves a two-stage complaints process. You will receive an immediate automated acknowledgement to your Stage 1 response providing you with a unique reference for any future correspondence surrounding your Stage 1. We will provide you with a written response to your Stage 1 within 10 working days following a full investigation by our complaint champions employed in that service area.

If it is not possible to respond in this timeframe you will receive an explanation with the date that the Stage 1 response will be responded by, which will be no longer than an additional 10 working days.

The Stage 1 response is signed off by the relevant Head of Service and Assistant Director and in the majority of cases, matters are resolved at this point. However, the Stage 1 response will inform the complainant of their right to request a final review (Stage 2) of their complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

Stage 2

If you are not satisfied with the stage 1 response, you can follow up by requesting an escalation to stage 2. We would expect the relevant service area to have issued a formal Stage 1 response before the concern can be escalated.

Your complaint will be sent to the Director of the relevant service area who will carry out a review of your concerns. We will provide you with a response to your Stage 2 escalation within 20 working days where the final stage of our complaints process will be signed off by our Chief Executive.

If it is not possible to respond in this timeframe you will receive an explanation with the date that the Stage 2 response will be responded by, which will be no longer than an additional 20 working days.

Stage 2 complaints must be made within 12 months of issuing the Stage 1 response.

If you remain dissatisfied with our decision at Stage 2 you are entitled to proceed with your complaint to the relevant Ombudsman:

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman looks at complaints about Councils and some other authorities and organisations. It is a free service. Their job is to investigate complaints in a fair and independent way. Contact details for the Ombudsman that deals with Ipswich Borough Council are:

- By phone: 0300 061 0314
- In writing: PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH
- Online: www.lgo.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman looks at complaints involving the tenants and leaseholders of social housing landlords and other housing organisations registered with them. The service is free, independent, and impartial. Contact details are:

- By phone: 0300 111 3000
- In writing: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ
- Online: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

WHERE A COMPLAINT IS UPHELD

There will be a written apology and explanation. Where possible the error will be corrected, or the satisfactory service will be provided as a matter of urgency.

Where something has gone wrong the Council will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. Examples of where action to put things right may be required are:

- There was an unreasonable delay
- Inaccurate or inadequate advice, explanation or information was provided to the Customer
- The Council's policy or procedure was not followed correctly without good reason
- There was unprofessional behaviour by staff

Any remedy offered will reflect the extent of any and all service failures, and the level of detriment caused to the Customer as a result. These shall include:

- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- Providing an explanation, assistance, or reasons
- Apologising
- Taking action if there has been a delay
- Reconsidering or changing a decision
- Amending a record
- Providing a financial remedy
- Changing policies, procedures, or practices

Factors that will be considered in formulating a remedy can include, but are not limited to the:

- Length of time a situation has been ongoing
- Frequency with which something has occurred
- Severity of any service failure or omission
- Number of different failures
- Cumulative impact on the Customer
- A Customer's particular circumstances or vulnerabilities

LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

A key function of the complaint's procedure is to facilitate continuous improvement and ensure that the Council learns from complaints and uses them to improve services.

A summary of outcomes and recommendations from complaints, including progress on implementing them, will be reported quarterly to the Council's lead Member responsible for complaints (MRC) and to the Council's Senior Leadership Team and annually we will self-assess against the new Complaint handling codes in line with its requirements.

WHERE A COMPLAINT IS NOT UPHeld

Where a complaint is not upheld there will be a letter of explanation setting out the reasons for not upholding the complaint. The complainant will be advised that if they are unhappy they have the right to contact the relevant Ombudsman.

MANAGING UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

As part of the Council's commitment to engage with the community and our customers the Council does not normally limit the amount of contact any customer may have with the Council through its councillors or its employees. However, a small minority of customers' own conduct can cause problems in certain circumstances, which can impact upon the provision of service to others or upon employees and councillors. For example, some customers make complaints vexatiously or persist unreasonably with their complaints or issues or make unwarranted or unsubstantiated complaints or demands rather than genuinely seeking to resolve a grievance or other issues.

The Council recognises that it is important to distinguish between people who make a number of complaints because they genuinely believe things have gone wrong on more than one occasion, and people who are simply being vexatious. The Council acknowledges that complainants will often be frustrated and aggrieved if they have received a poor-quality service or where things have simply gone wrong, and therefore, it is important that the Council recognises that the merits of their case should be considered, rather than just their attitude or behaviour. Any restrictions placed on a customer's contact due to unacceptable behaviour will be appropriate to their needs and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Council values diversity and is committed to promoting equality of opportunity to ensure all residents are treated fairly.

The Council's Equality & Diversity Policy sets out our approach to promoting and upholding the principles of equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion.

The Council is committed to promoting equality by ensuring equal access to our complaint's procedure, including making reasonable adjustments to allow for flexibility in the procedure to accommodate an individual's need. For example:

- If a Customer requires assistance to take forward their complaint, they can appoint a representative to deal with their complaint on their behalf (verification will be sought before the complaint is investigated)
- Any individual representing or assisting a Customer with a complaint can accompany them at any meeting with the Council if a meeting is required to consider the complaint
- If a Customer requires assistance with their complaint but does not have anyone to help them, they can let the Council know by contacting our customer service team on 01473 432000, where our Quality Assurance and Complaints officer will assist them in formulating their complaint.

PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA

By submitting a complaint, the Customer is consenting to the Council processing and storing their data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations. The Council will retain their information for three years and may pass their details to other departments within the Council in order to investigate the complaint. We will not share a customer's data with any third parties unless permitted to do so by law such as the Ombudsman.

For further information about how we use personal data, including someone's rights as a data subject, please see our privacy statement on the Council website. Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at data.protection@ipswich.gov.uk.

COMMUNICATING THE POLICY

The complaints policy will be clearly communicated and published online on the Council's website.

HOUSING SERVICES – COMPENSATION POLICY

There is a separate Housing Services Compensation Policy that can be found [here](#).

POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

- This Complaints Policy will be reviewed annually along with the Complaints procedure in the event of any regulatory changes.
- This Policy is dated 1st April 2024. Our next Policy and Procedure review will take place on 1st April 2025.

Version number	Comments	Written / Amended by	Approved by	Date
1.0		Head of Customer Services & Channel Shift	CMT	01 April 2024



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