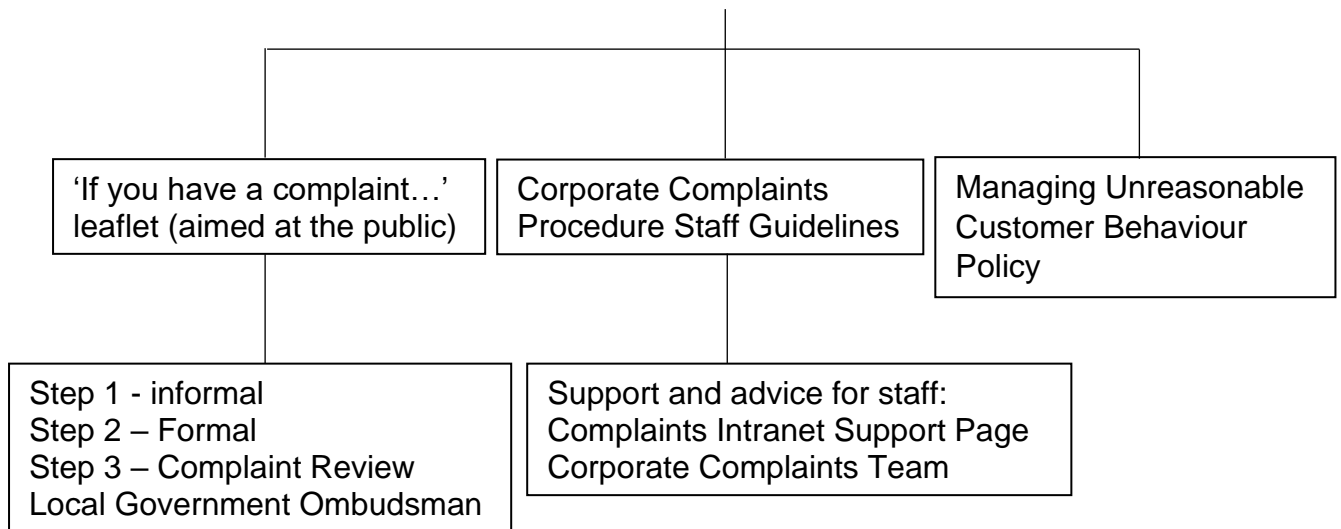


# **Newcastle City Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure**

Newcastle City Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure (overarching procedure and exclusions from Corporate Complaints Procedure)



There are some other complaints procedures which it may be more appropriate to follow:

- Complaints about [councillors](#)
- Complaints about [schools](#)
- Complaints about [Adult Social Care](#)
- Complaints about [Children's Social Care](#)

Complaints about other organisations:

- Complaints about [Your Homes Newcastle \(YHN\)](#)
- Complaints about [Byker Community Trust](#)

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This document sets out the scope of our Corporate Complaints Procedure, clarifying what a corporate complaint is, and is not included in scope of the procedure.

### **What is a complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by us, which affects someone using our services.

### **Who can complain?**

The complainant must be our customer – the person who directly engaged with the council. If they need help to make their complaint, they must give signed authority/written permission for another person to act on their behalf.

### **What can a complaint be about?**

The complaint must be about something which the council has responsibility for. The complaint can be about one or more of the following:

- Poor quality of service
- Refusal to provide a service
- Delay in providing a service
- A member of staff
- Someone feels that, ***compared to others***, they were unfairly treated under a council policy, or they do not have equal access to a council service
- An IT Systems failure

### **Is this the correct Complaints Procedure?**

There are a number of complaints procedures, and we need to ensure that each complaint is dealt with under the correct procedure.

- [Complaints about Councillors](#) have a separate procedure
- [Complaints about Schools](#) have a separate procedure
- Complaints about [Adult Social Care](#) or [Children's Social Care](#) have separate procedures
- Complaints about [Data Protection](#) have a separate procedure

All other complaints may be submitted using the Corporate Complaints Procedure and the Corporate Complaints Team will determine whether it can be treated as a Corporate Complaint or needs to be dealt with in another way.

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), our arms-length management organisation for council housing stock, has its own [YHN complaints procedure](#).

## Newcastle City Council's simple 3-Step Corporate Complaints Procedure

There are three steps to our Corporate Complaints Procedure.

**Step 1 Informal Complaint** is where we try to deal with your complaint informally. Often, we can resolve the matter on the spot and settle your complaint without you needing to do anything else.

**Step 2 Formal Complaint** of the procedure is where we acknowledge receipt of your complaint in three working days. A senior manager investigates, takes any necessary action and sends their reply out in 15 working days, or explains why it might take longer. We will try to make sure that the same or similar complaint does not happen again.

**Step 3**, also called a **Complaint Review**, takes place if you let us know that you are still unhappy with the handling of your complaint. You should write saying what you think was wrong about the handling of your complaint at Step 2, and what outcome you would like as a result of reviewing your complaint. The Corporate Complaints Officer will acknowledge receipt of your complaint in three working days. They will review the complaint and send out their reply in 25 working days, or explain why it might take longer.

If the customer remains dissatisfied after the Corporate Complaints Procedure is complete, they may take their concerns direct to Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman ([www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)). Customers may approach the LGSCO at any time, although the LGSCO often decides they want the customer to complete the council's Corporate Complaints Procedure first. Sometimes, LGSCO may decide to investigate before the council's own procedure is complete, for example, where the issues raised are time sensitive.

### What's not treated as a complaint?

If the customer raises a concern with the council for the first time, it will be treated as a first request for service (we might also call this a customer enquiry or an informal complaint). A first request for service will not be classed as a corporate complaint as the service area has not yet had the opportunity to deal with it.

Should we fail to deal with the first request for service, the customer may escalate their concerns to a manager or make the matter a corporate complaint at that point.

There are times when a customer states that they want to complain to the council, but for one reason or another, their concerns do not fall within the scope of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Firstly, we need to determine what's excluded from the procedure. If the concerns raised are excluded, it means that we don't record it formally as a corporate complaint. In most cases, we may still be able to respond to the customer, but we just won't treat it or record it as a corporate complaint.

See **Appendix 1** for examples of matters which fall outside of the Corporate Complaints Procedure and are therefore excluded; this is intended as guidance and is not an exhaustive list of exclusions.

## Summary

In summary, to determine if something falls within the scope of the Corporate Complaints Procedure, we should ask the following questions:

- **Is the complaint about an issue that is outside the council's responsibility?**  
If 'Yes', inform the customer it is not the council's responsibility. If we know, we can advise the customer whose responsibility it is, but do not forward the customer's details to them (as we may be in breach of the General Data Protection Regulation).
- **Is the complaint about a decision reached by councillors following proper procedures as set out in the Newcastle Charter?**  
Effectively, if it was agreed by councillors following proper procedures as set out in the Council's constitution, the Newcastle Charter, the customer cannot make a corporate complaint about it.
- **Is the issue more than 12 months old?**  
If 'Yes' it is normally deemed too old to be investigated as a corporate complaint, unless there is a good reason for the delay (for example, someone has been unable to lodge their complaint earlier due to incapacity, or where new information has come to light which could have affected the original investigation).
- **Is there another procedure which is more appropriate than the Corporate Complaints Procedure?**  
If 'Yes', refer to the other procedure.
- **Is this the first time it was brought to our attention** (and therefore can be treated as a first request for service, a customer enquiry, or an informal complaint)?

There are occasions when we will not treat the complaint as a corporate complaint, which need to be dealt with in a different way:

### Offensive complaints

A complaint is considered offensive if it includes comments (including swearing) which are of a derogatory, discriminatory or offensive in nature (if the recipient of the complaint deems it to be so). The complaint should be referred to the Corporate Complaints Team who will determine the appropriate response.

A distinction must be drawn between the above and a statement made in good faith. For example, a customer might allege a member of staff swore at them and when the customer repeats back what was said to them, or what they heard a member of staff say, they must give this detail as part of making their complaint.

## **Malicious complaints**

A malicious complaint is one that is investigated and found to be unsubstantiated, and where it has been established during the investigation that its submission was motivated exclusively by malice. This malice can be directed towards a member of staff or other people.

If the complaint is seen as malicious then a reply from a senior manager or specialist to the complainant may be more appropriate, outlining the way in which the matter was handled, that the matter was not proven and that no further action will be taken.

## **Persistent complainants**

There will be occasions where a complainant will persist in their cause, often following multiple routes (Corporate Complaint, Chief Executive or Director, Councillor or MP, Advocate, Freedom of Information, GDPR, Subject Access requests, and social media).

Whenever a complaint is received which has been investigated previously, and replied to, the matter needs to be referred to the Corporate Complaints Team. All potentially persistent complaints need to be considered, but if the substance of the complaint is the same as the previously determined one, and there are no new issues presented, then the Service Manager and/or Corporate Complaints Team will consider applying the Managing Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy.

## **Anonymous complaints**

In the case of anonymous complaints, a senior manager or specialist will need to decide whether an investigation is required. This will depend on the nature of the complaint and the information provided by the complainant. It may be necessary to seek HR advice depending upon the content of the anonymous complaint.

## **Collective complaints/petitions**

Collective complaints and petitions should generally be treated as one formal complaint. The response should be directed to the person acting as the co-ordinator. However, in some cases it may seem appropriate to send the reply to more than one person. The discretion to send out more than one reply lies with the Service Manager for the area being complained about.

## **Future considerations**

Complaints about partner organisations, contractors or providers of commissioned services may fall outside the council's own Corporate Complaints Procedure. It is important to bear this in mind. Our partners in these ventures should also have accessible and robust complaints procedures in place which customers may be directed to use in the first instance.

It is noted that the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is consulting on the proposed introduction of a new Statutory Complaints Code for corporate

complaints, to be implemented from 1 April 2024. This would be cause to revise this Corporate Complaints Procedure earlier than planned.

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### **What is not included in the Corporate Complaints Procedure...**

There are some alternative processes that are more appropriate than the Corporate Complaints Procedure. This includes some things a customer cannot complain about because there is a more appropriate body to deal with their complaint; or because we don't have a legal responsibility for the issue they wish to complain about. This is not a complete list, but a customer cannot make a corporate complaint about:

1. A matter where they have left it more than 12 months since knowing about the problem unless there is a good reason for the delay. (For example, someone has been unable to lodge their complaint earlier due to incapacity, or where new information has come to light which could have affected the original investigation).
2. Complaints that have already been properly examined by the council or the appropriate Ombudsman body.
3. Something they could appeal about to a tribunal (such as the Housing Benefit Appeals Service or a Penalty Charge Notice – or parking fine – appeal being taken to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal).
4. Something they could appeal about to a government minister (such as a planning appeal to the Planning Inspectorate).
5. Something they could go to court about (such as a Fixed Penalty Notice or Private hire vehicle operator licence), unless we think there are good reasons why they should not be expected to do so.
6. Something about which the customer has already appealed to a tribunal or a government minister or has taken court action against the council, and similarly, where the council has commenced court proceedings against them. The Corporate Complaints Procedure cannot be used as an alternative way to have such a decision reviewed.
7. Something that they wish to make a compensation claim for, under the council's insurance procedure.
8. Issues that fall under the Freedom of Information Act or General Data Protection Regulation (including the right of access to personal data) which fall under the Information Commissioner's Office remit.
9. Court proceedings, including: a. evidence given to the court, or b. actions and decisions by the council in those proceedings.
10. Personnel matters (about council employment, including pay, pensions or dismissal; or about applications for employment).
11. Formal action, legitimately taken, by employees/union members, such as strike action or work to rule, which the council has no control over.
12. Some external contractors or sub-contractors, for example, Bailiffs. Residents should complain to the contractor or sub-contractor in the first instance. If they are unhappy with the way in which their complaint was handled by the contractor or sub-contractor, they may approach the council afterwards.
13. Schemes run for staff such as Employee Home Improvements Scheme, Bike to Work Scheme or Staff Car Scheme.
14. Most internal management of schools (including Academies and Free Schools) and colleges (including conduct, discipline and teaching).

15. School admissions appeals, which go to an independent School Admissions Appeals Panel.
16. Exclusion appeals, which go to an independent Review Panel.
17. Complaints about taxi drivers and taxi licencing which are subject to a statutory framework (Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976).
18. Decisions reached by a properly convened body or committee; although we can look to ensure that the body or committee was properly convened when the decision was reached.
19. Decisions reached by Council, Cabinet or a Committee Decisions regarding council policy, expenditure or future plans and infrastructure schemes are taken by Full Council, the Cabinet or various formal committees made up of elected councillors.  
Customers cannot make a corporate complaint about a decision reached by elected councillors following proper procedures as set out in the Council's constitution, the Newcastle Charter. This includes the council's budget decisions. We can only investigate the way the decision was made.
20. Delegated Decisions 10 Officers can also make decisions where they have been given delegated power to do so under the Newcastle Charter. All Delegated Decisions are published on the council's website and circulated to all councillors for information. Where such decisions can be made by Delegated Decision, customers cannot make a corporate complaint, because there is a suitable alternative route to review.
21. Complaints about Council Policy In general, customers cannot complain if they disagree with a council policy as this will have been agreed via due process. Customers may only complain about council policy where they feel that, **compared to others**:
  - they do not have equal access to council services offered by Newcastle City Council, or
  - they have been unfairly treated under the policy.