

Ealing Council

**Corporate Complaints Policy 2025
Documental Control**

Version number	Date	Purpose/change
Version 1.0	January 2025	Review and amend current policy in Line with Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
Version 1.1	March 2025	Broaden the policy to include housing and landlord services, ensuring compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code.

Contents

Ealing Council	1
Corporate Complaints Policy 2025	1
Documental Control	1
1. Introduction	4
2. Policy Statement	4
3. Scope.....	5
4. How to make a complaint?	9
5. The complaint process.....	11
6. The Ombudsman	14
7. Complaints about Contractors.....	14
8. Putting things right	15
9. Customer rights	16
10. Unreasonable or unacceptable customer behaviour	16
11. Privacy.....	17
12. Publication	17
13. Self-assessment, reporting, and compliance.....	18
14. Scrutiny and oversight: continuous learning and improvement	19
15. Review	21
Appendix 1 - Complaints outside the scope of this policy	21
Appendix 2 - Timescales	23

1. Introduction

This policy covers Ealing Council's corporate complaints process. It sets out the stages of the complaints process, required timescales and who should be involved in handling the complaint. The policy has been aligned with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code to ensure that the council is fully compliant with the codes and that the Ombudsman guidance on complaints handling is followed at every stage of the process.

2. Policy Statement

The council is dedicated to delivering high-quality services to all our customers. We value feedback from our service users and view complaints as an opportunity to improve our services. This policy outlines our approach to handling complaints and ensures that all complaints are handled in a fair, transparent and efficient manner.

When we have done something wrong and it has had an adverse impact on a customer, we shall endeavour to put things right.

- We will record complaints on our case management system to help us monitor our performance across the whole of the council.
- We will act fairly and proportionately.
- We will be open and accountable for any failures.
- We will acknowledge and respond to all complaints in a timely manner and within relevant timescales.

We will seek to resolve complaints at the earliest possible opportunity and have processes to ensure complaints can be remedied at any stage of this complaints process without the need for escalation.

- When investigating and responding to complaints, we will consider the individual circumstances of complaints and the residents making them, such as the complexity of the complaint or whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk.

We will learn from complaints and implement corrective actions to improve service delivery.

We will process all personal information relating to complaints in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

We will maintain transparency throughout the complaint process, ensuring clear communication and providing regular updates to the complainant.

3. Scope

3.1 What is a complaint?

The council defines as a complaint:

‘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.’

A resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction we will give them the choice to make a complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will be handled in line with our complaints policy. The complaint process will look at how we have delivered our services or reached decisions and could be about:

- Dissatisfaction with the standard of the service we have provided.
A failure or repeated failure to provide a service.
- Failure to follow the law or the council's own policies.
- Delay in taking action without good reason.
- Mistakes in the way a decision is made.
- Giving incorrect or misleading information.
- Bias or discrimination.
- Staff conduct when delivering the service.
- Poor communication.

3.2 Exclusions

There are some issues that are not covered by this complaint policy because there are other processes more suitable for dealing with them, or because they are outside the council's control.

Details of issues not covered under the complaint's policy can be found in Appendix 1

3.3 Service requests

Certain issues fall outside the scope of the corporate complaints policy and are better addressed as service requests. While they may involve expressions of dissatisfaction, these instances are not recorded as formal complaints.

A service request is where there is an initial request for the council to provide or improve a service or fix a problem or reconsider a decision this can include:

- Reporting a faulty streetlight
- Reporting a missed bin collection

- A request to carry out a repair
Reports of anti-social behaviour
- Reporting a fly-tip

To log a service request, residents can go to [Report or request it | Ealing Council](#) on the council's website

Service requests are recorded, monitored and resolved in line with the target response times for service delivery. A complaint will be raised if the service request remains unresolved or if you wish to express dissatisfaction with the response to the service request. We will continue to try and address your service request even after the initiation of a formal complaint.

An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey will be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where we ask for wider feedback about our services, we will provide details of how residents can complain. We will also seek to use the results of surveys to improve our services.

3.4 Appeals

Where there is an appeals procedure within the council or where there is a right of appeal to an independent tribunal these also fall out of scope of this policy. This includes a decision on:

- Housing benefit appeals
- Council tax reduction (CTR)
- Penalty Charge Notice (PCN)
- Environmental Enforcement Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN)
- Planning appeals
- Special Education Needs Tribunals

- School admission and exclusion appeals

Wherever we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide a valid reason for not doing so and we will ensure we are able to evidence our reasoning. We will consider all complaints on their own merits. When we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide the complainant with details of the relevant Ombudsman in case they wish to appeal.

For further information on issues excluded under this policy, please refer to Appendix 1 of this document.

3.5 Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who uses and/or is individually affected by our services can make a complaint. This includes:

- Service users (people who use services)
- Residents
- Tenants and leaseholders
- People who live, work, study or visit the borough
- Local businesses
- Community groups

We cannot investigate complaints where there has been no personal injustice (in other words, where the complainant has not been directly affected by the matter raised).

If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, we need their written consent before we can undertake an investigation or report our findings to them.

Concerns raised by partner organisations about our services and concerns raised by staff or job applicants about employment are outside the scope of this policy. A dissatisfaction against democratic council decisions is also not

covered under the scope of this policy. See Appendix 1 for a list of matters not covered under this complaint's policy.

3.6 Anonymous complaints

We will deal with anonymous complaints on an individual basis and determine whether further action is appropriate. Any action taken will be dependent on the information that has been provided.

However, the council is unlikely to be able to deal with an anonymous complaint effectively, as the council would normally need to correspond with the complainant to address their concerns.

4. How to make a complaint?

If you have already reported the problem to the correct service and you are unsatisfied with the outcome, you have the option to make a complaint using the online portal My Account, in writing, via email, by telephone or in person, or to any member of staff, who will be able to raise a complaint on your behalf.

4.1 When can a complaint be made?

Complaints to the council should be made within 12 months of the complainant becoming aware of the issue they want to make a complaint about. This is because it is easier to find out what happened and to put things right when complaints are received promptly. As time passes it becomes more difficult to investigate the matter, officers who were involved may have left the council and the data may no longer be readily available.

We will consider the individual circumstances that led to the delay in submitting a complaint and not apply a blanket approach. If the council

decides not to investigate you will be informed of the reasons for this decision and provided with the escalation rights to the Ombudsman.

We will not investigate complaints that have already been addressed through the council's complaints procedure. If a complainant has exhausted the complaints process and remains dissatisfied with the complaint decision, they have the right to escalate their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman.

4.2 How will your complaint be dealt with?

The council maintains a corporate system for recording customer complaints. All complaints must be documented within this system, along with any accompanying notes and relevant documentation. This procedure ensures that a comprehensive investigation can be conducted and serves as a record should the customer request further review by the relevant Ombudsman. Records will be retained in accordance with the council's data retention policies.

We might need more information from you during any stage of the complaints process. If this happens, we will contact you to ask for this. It's important that you respond to us as soon as possible so that your complaint is not delayed.

If we do not hear back from you, this may limit our ability to fully investigate your complaint, but we will proceed to investigate it as much as is possible with the information that we have.

4.3 Complaints about more than one service

Sometimes a complaint involves more than one service and in these cases the council will usually provide one co-ordinated response. If the matters are not closely linked the council may decide to record each complaint

separately, and we will inform you how your complaint will be handled at the earliest possible opportunity.

If you raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be included in the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not yet been issued. If the stage 1 response has already been issued, or the new issues are unrelated to the ones being investigated, or including them would unreasonably delay the response, then the new issues will be logged as a separate complaint.

5. The complaint process

The council's corporate complaints process has two stages. At both stages, we will provide complainants with a response when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the complaint are complete. We will then ensure that outstanding actions are completed and provide appropriate updates.

We have teams assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). These roles are called 'complaints officer' and these roles are sometimes carried out in addition to other duties.

The complaints officers have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.

We prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff are suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. Complaints are seen as a core service and we are resourced to handle complaints effectively.

5.1 Stage 1 – Investigation

Stage 1 complaints are acknowledged within 5 working days. We aim to provide a full response within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. There may be instances where a complaint is complex, and the council may require additional time to gather all the relevant information for the investigation and so may extend the complaint response time up to a further 10 working days. If we need to extend the response time, we will provide you with the Ombudsman details. This stage is investigated and responded to by the service the complaint relates to. The stage 1 response is approved by the Head of Service or a designated officer to sign on their behalf.

5.2 Stage 2 – Review

If you remain dissatisfied following receipt of the Stage 1 response, you can request that your complaint is progressed to Stage 2 of the corporate complaints process. This is the final stage of our complaints process and will involve all suitable staff members needed to issue a thorough response. We will not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless we have valid reasons to do so. We will clearly set out these reasons and inform complainants of the right to escalate to the Ombudsman.

To progress a complaint to stage 2, you will be asked to outline the reasons for your dissatisfaction with the response and explain your desired outcome to resolve your complaint.

Your stage 2 complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of the complaint being received and we aim to provide the response within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. There may be instances where a complaint is complex, and the council may require additional time to gather all the necessary information and so may extend

the complaint response time up to a further 20 working days. If we need to extend, we will inform you of the expected timescale for response and the reasons why an extension is required and provide you with the Ombudsman details. This stage will be investigated by an Assistant Director/Director who will review how your complaint was dealt with originally to decide if it was investigated thoroughly and objectively and whether the conclusions reached were appropriate and proportionate. If following receipt of the Stage 2 outcome you remain dissatisfied with the council's response, you have the right to refer your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman Service, details of which will be included in the response.

Responses to complaints will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

We will inform you, in plain written English, at the completion of both stage 1 and stage 2:

- a. the complaint stage;
- b. the complaint summary;
- c. the decision on the complaint;
- d. the reasons for any decisions made;
- e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f. details of any outstanding actions; and
- g. at stage 1, details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if you are not satisfied with the response.

6. The Ombudsman

If you are still dissatisfied after completing the council's 2 stage complaints process, you have the right to refer your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) deals with enquiries and complaints about council services including housing allocations.

- Further information can be found at:

[Home - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

The Housing Ombudsman (HOS) deals with enquiries and complaints related to council housing stock, repairs, tenant, and leaseholder matters or landlord functions.

You can raise your concerns with the Housing Ombudsman at any time.

- Further information can be found at: [Housing Ombudsman Service](#)

7. Complaints about Contractors

The council recognises complaints regarding the council's contractors and any organisation contracted to work for the council. Complaints about the council's contractors are handled under the council's complaints procedure and can be made directly to the council. All third-party suppliers/contractors will be required to follow the council's complaints policy and the relevant Ombudsman's complaint handling code.

8. Putting things right

The objective of redress is to rectify any mistakes or problems at the earliest opportunity. The council will acknowledge faults when they occur and take responsibility for putting things right and avoiding a recurrence.

Following an investigation into a complaint, if it is recognised that the service did not meet the required standards, the council will:

- Apologise where appropriate
- Acknowledge where things have gone wrong
- Provide an explanation, assistance, or reasons
- Take action if there has been a delay
- Rectify the mistake or problem, make a decision that should have been made earlier, or change a decision that was made earlier
- Amend a record or add a correction or addendum
- Review practice, policy or procedure as appropriate
- Improve processes to prevent similar problems from happening again
- Provide a financial remedy, where this is appropriate and in line with our compensation policy

Where a remedy is required to put things right (which may include remedial actions and/or compensation), the remedy will reflect the impact on the complainant of any fault identified.

The remedy offer will clearly set out what will happen and when and where appropriate will be in agreement with the complainant. Any remedy proposed will be followed through to completion.

We will take account of the guidance issued by the appropriate Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

9. Customer rights

As our customer, you have the right:

- To be treated with courtesy and respect at all times
- To have a friend or other representative help you with their complaint (a letter of authority may be required)
- To confidentiality (if an investigation cannot proceed without you being identified, the complainant will be given the option whether or not to continue)
- To be kept informed of the progress of your complaint
- To receive an apology if a complaint is upheld
- To be informed of any changes to council policy or procedures arising from a complaint

10. Unreasonable or unacceptable customer behaviour

We are committed to dealing with all customers fairly, ensuring we provide:

- high-quality services
- a clear and timely response

In a minority of cases, some customers' behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonable this:

- impacts on resources
- affects the wellbeing of our staff

- can hinder our service provision to others

On rare occasions, we may need to take proportionate action to limit our contact with these customers.

The council has a separate policy for dealing with unreasonably persistent complainant and unreasonable customer behaviour.

Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour will be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

[Policy on dealing with unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour | Ealing Council](#)

11. Privacy

Information collected from complainants will only be used for the purposes of investigating a complaint. All personal data will be held securely and in line with the relevant legislation. Customer information may be shared with other council services, contractors, or the relevant Ombudsman to thoroughly investigate complaints.

All personal data is held securely and managed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR.

12. Publication

This policy and information about the Ombudsman and their codes of practice is published on the council's website. We will also publicise details of this policy through a variety of channels of communication, including residents' and tenants' newsletters, via social media channels, to residents'

and tenants' groups, and via other internal and external communication channels.

Our self-assessment will be published on the council's website to demonstrate compliance with the Ombudsman codes of practice.

13. Self-assessment, reporting, and compliance

We will produce an Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which will include:

- a. the annual self-assessment against the relevant Complaint Handling Code to ensure complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements
- b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance - this will also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept
- c. any findings of non-compliance with the Complaints Handling Code by the relevant Ombudsman
- d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints
- e. any annual report about our performance from the relevant Ombudsman
- f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the relevant Ombudsman

The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report will be reported to Strategic Leadership Team and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and reported to Cabinet (governing body) as part of the annual performance report and published on the section of our website relating to

complaints. The governing body's response to the report will be published alongside this.

We will update our self-assessment following any significant change, including significant restructures or change in procedures, or on request following an Ombudsman investigation.

If, for any reason, we are unable to comply with the Complaints Handling Code due to an exceptional event, we will inform the relevant Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on our website as well as providing a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.

14. Scrutiny and oversight: continuous learning and improvement

We will look beyond the circumstances of an individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.

A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which we can resolve disputes. We will use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.

Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. We will report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.

We will appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for our complaint handling. This person will be able to assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and

procedures that require revision. In addition to this, a member of the governing body will be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC). For example, for Housing complaints about our role as a landlord, the MRC is the Lead Member alongside the Independent Housing Board.

The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person will have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.

As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body will receive:

- a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance
- b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling
- c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration finding
- d. Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report.

We have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:

- a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments
- b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others
- c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body

15. Review

This policy will be reviewed and updated when the council deems it appropriate or at least every three years.

Appendix 1 - Complaints outside the scope of this policy

The items listed below are not covered by the Corporate Complaints Policy:

- Initial request for a service
- Requests for information
- Complaints relating to Children's Social Care
- Complaints relating to Adult Social Care
- Complaints against schools
- An explanation of a council policy or procedure
- Complaints against councillors
- Complaints made on behalf of individuals without their explicit consent
- Employment issues
- Criminal matters
- Most complaints where the customer or the council has started legal proceedings or court action (but not where a customer has only threatened to do so)
- Complaints that have been appealed to a Tribunal or Minister or have already gone to Court about the same dispute

- Claims for compensation – in most cases claims for compensation against the council will be referred to the council's insurance team
- Complaints regarding matters that are more than 12 months old
- Complaints that have already been investigated through the council's complaint procedure.
- Requests covered by legislation such as Data Protection and Freedom of Information or Subject Access requests.

Where there is an appeals procedure within the council or where there is a right of appeal to an independent tribunal, including:

- Housing benefit appeals
- Council tax reduction (CTR)
- Penalty Charge Notice (PCN)
- Environmental Enforcement Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN)
- Planning appeals
- Special Education Needs Tribunals
- School admission and exclusion appeal

There are also some complaints that are managed under a separate complaints policy:

- **Adults Social Care**

https://www.ealing.gov.uk/downloads/download/666/adults_services_complaints_policy_and_procedure (pdf)

- **Children's Social Care**

https://www.ealing.gov.uk/downloads/download/654/representations_and_complaints_policy_children_and_families (pdf)

- **Complaints about councillors:**

Complaints about councillors are managed through the council's Standards Procedure. Further information about this can be found at [How to complain about your councillor | Councillor complaints](#)

Appendix 2 - Timescales

Corporate complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days.

Following the acknowledgment, a response will then be sent as follows:

- At Stage 1 - we aim to provide a full response within 10 working days from the day the complaint is acknowledged.
- At Stage 2 - we aim to provide a response within 20 working days from the day the complaint is acknowledged.

Certain complaints may require additional time for a thorough investigation. In such cases, a holding response will be provided, outlining the reason for the delay and indicating when a comprehensive response can be expected. Any extension will not exceed 10 days at stage 1 and 20 days at stage 2, unless there are extenuating circumstances, which will be clearly communicated to the complainant.