

# Our complaints charter

Guidance for staff



Find out about our complaints process, how it is managed internally, and what customers can expect from us.

[www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/complaints)

**It's only natural to think of complaints in a negative way. They can make us feel defensive, angry or upset. However, if we deal with complaints well, this can enhance the reputation of the council, and at the same time we can learn a lot about what matters to people, which can help us when planning for the future.**



All complaints need to be recorded so we can spot trends and emerging problems. We need everybody's help to do this.

This guidance is written so all employees are aware of our complaints process, how it is managed, and what our customers can expect from us.

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

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction received from a customer about the council's service provision.

A complaint may be about a lack of response, poor service, delays in a service being provided, one-off or ongoing problems and/or about the behaviour of council employees.

There is no difference between an informal and a formal complaint - both indicate an expression of dissatisfaction, so both require a response. Complaints are usually written or received by email, but sometimes, verbally in person if the complaint is made at the point of service delivery.

## **Service request or complaint?**

Sometimes it can be difficult to differentiate between a service request and a complaint. Generally if it is a request for a service, an appeal for assistance, or a request for a repair, these should be treated as service requests.

### **Examples of service requests**

These can be handled at first point of contact, an apology offered where appropriate, and corrective action taken:

- Can I have an extra recycling bin?
- I'd like to report a damaged street name sign.
- Can I arrange an inspection for ...?
- I'd like to complain about my noisy neighbour.
- There's litter on the grass verge outside my house.

### **Service requests can become complaints in the following circumstances:**

- Where no action is taken to deal with the service request.
- Where the quality of service has fallen below the council's published standards.
- Where insufficient information has been provided or where information has been misleading.
- Discourteous or rude treatment by staff.
- Decisions which do not follow council policy or there is inadequate explanation.
- Decisions which do not consider all the facts.
- If a person does not agree with the decision by the service officer or manager.

## What are not complaints?

Where possible we allow all complaints to be dealt with using the process set out in this charter, but there are exclusions. These include:

- A request for a service, except where this follows a service failure e.g. when an officer has failed to keep an appointment with a customer.
- Complaints against planning decisions which are dealt with under a separate appeals process.
- Insurance claims or contractual disputes - please refer to insurance officer.
- Complaints made about elected members for which a separate procedure exists. All such complaints should be referred to legal, property and development services.
- Reopening of a complaint after it has been to the Local Government Ombudsman and closed.
- Complaints made from members of staff relating to internal personnel or employment issues – these should be referred to the line manager or personnel services.
- A complaint that is subject to, or has already been through, court or tribunal proceedings, or there is a separate appeals process to a court or tribunal service.

## How to handle a complaint

Wherever possible, efforts should be made to talk to the complainant to fully understand their concerns and find out what changes or outcome they want to see. If the issue can be resolved at the first point of contact, no further action is needed.

However, if it is clear that the complainant remains unhappy (or perhaps is raising an issue for a second, or further time) this should be handled as a complaint.

In this case, please either give the complainant a copy of the **complaints, suggestions and compliments form** to complete, or offer to fill it in on their behalf. Alternatively, refer the complainant to [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/complaints) where they can fill the form in online and find out more about our complaints procedure.

Copies of the complaints, suggestions and compliments form are also available from all district council venues.

All completed complaints forms should be sent to the relevant service area for processing.

## How we process complaints

All complaints are sent to the relevant service area's complaints coordinator (see top right).

Each service area has a nominated complaints coordinator who on receipt of a complaint, records it on pentana (our performance management system), sends an acknowledgement to the complainant, and sends it to the relevant officer to investigate.

All complaints we receive by letter or email are recorded as **stage 1** complaints and dealt with in accordance with the procedure detailed overleaf.

## Complaints coordinators

**Corporate Services**  
Colin Cooke 308121  
Alison Bowen 308129

**Development Services**  
Laura Brentnall (308775)  
Debbie Green (308254)

**Economic Growth**  
Laura Brentnall (308775)  
Debbie Green (308254)

**Finance & Procurement**  
Michaela Plant (308026)

**Leisure, Operational & Parks Services**  
Nicky Haycock (687550)  
Gary Brownridge (687572)  
Stacey Coleman (308863)

**Legal Property & Democratic Services**  
Lesley Bennett (308072)

**Regulatory Services, Housing & Wellbeing**  
Laura Brentnall (308775)  
Debbie Green (308254)

**Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services**  
Laura Brentnall (308775)  
Debbie Green (308254)

**Joint Waste**  
Victoria Woodhouse  
(687541)



## Our complaints procedure & how to investigate a complaint

### Informal

If an issue can be resolved at first point of contact, no further action is required.

Our **complaints procedure** has two stages:

**Stage 1** Investigated by the service officer or manager.

**Stage 2** This will be passed to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive will then request that an Independent Director or Head of Service investigates the complaint.

### Complaints about the chief executive

Complaints made about the Chief Executive will be investigated by an independent director, who has no involvement in the subject of the complaint, and by the council's Monitoring Officer.

If you are asked to investigate a complaint, please download the 'complaints checklist', from the 'Dealing with a complaint' section on Brian.

For each stage the following takes place:

- An acknowledgement is sent within three working days (letter or email) by the relevant complaints coordinator. A standard letter is available online.
- A full response\* is sent within 20 working days by the investigating officer. The complainant must receive the response within this timescale (by letter or email).
- **The 20 working days start from the date the council receives the complaint, whether sent by letter, email, telephone call or in person.**
- A copy of the response should be forwarded by the investigating officer to the relevant complaints coordinator to record on Pentana.

**\*Where matters are likely to take more time to investigate/resolve, the investigating officer should keep the complainant informed of progress within the set timeframes above.**

### An independent view

If after both stages, the complainant is still unhappy they can refer their complaint to the **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**. This is an independent body that investigates complaints for free. Complaints received by the LGO are sent to the policy & performance team, who record them on pentana. An appropriate senior officer is then asked to investigate and respond to the LGO within 28 days. The responses are recorded by the LGO and sent to us in an annual audit letter.

### Premature complaints

On occasion customers may contact the **LGO** before we have had the opportunity to investigate their complaint. In such instances the LGO will send the complaint to the policy & performance team, who will pass it to the relevant complaints coordinator. If we decide to investigate, the complaints procedure is then applied. The LGO will inform the complainant that their complaint has been referred to us and that we will reply directly to the complainant.

### Anonymous complaints

If possible these complaints should be investigated and recorded as normal on pentana. Although it is recognised that if there is not enough detail this cannot be done.

### Persistent complainers

Persistent complainers are customers who frequently contact the council, particularly after their complaint has been closed. If you need advice or guidance please speak to the policy & performance team.

### MP enquiries

We receive enquiries from MPs every year. The majority of these are from the MPs who represent constituencies covered by the council. Constituents contact them and they ask us for our comments in relation the queries they receive. MP enquiries are not complaints, and are processed and recorded separately.

- MP enquiries are usually addressed to the Chief Executive and are forwarded to policy and performance team to record on pentana.
- **If you are asked to respond to an MP enquiry, please forward a copy of your response to the policy & performance team to record on pentana.**
- MP enquiries need to be responded to within 20 working days from date of receipt by the council.

### Help and advice

A copy of the council's complaints procedure and customer leaflet 'How to make a complaint, suggestion or compliment' is available at [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/complaints). The leaflet is also available from all council venues.

Information on the number of complaints we receive is analysed regularly and is published in the **complaints, compliments and standards** section of the Brian within the **document library and reports** section.

Any questions, please contact the policy and performance team - Alison Bowen (308129) or Colin Cooke (308121).