

Corporate Complaints Procedure

Updated in line with the Local Government and Social Care
Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

Effective from 2 February 2026

1. Introduction

Our officers are committed to providing the best possible service we can. If we fail to do this, we want to know about your specific problem and take steps to avoid mistakes from happening again so that we can improve our services.

We welcome feedback, as people are at the heart of our service delivery and good complaint handling is central to this. This procedure explains how you can alert us formally through the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure (the Procedure) if you think the service you have received from the Council is unsatisfactory.

This Procedure operates in line with The Complaint Handling Code (the Code) published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman). This Procedure sets out the process for responding to complaints effectively and fairly, as we wish to learn from when things have gone wrong.

2. Complaint definition

As set out in the Code, a complaint is:

“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 complaint is different from a service request. A service request is:

"a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision."

This Procedure is not intended to be used for service requests. We first need to have the opportunity to deal with such matters under our business-as-usual processes.

Therefore, first reports of any defect, incident or fault are not regarded as complaints. Highways defects should be reported via the Lancashire County Council website (Love Clean Streets) or through the customer access centre. If such requests are received, your issue will be redirected and will be promptly responded to by the team responsible for the service delivery. For more information, please visit www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/contact/

First reports of any complaint are also dealt with under our business-as-usual processes as we cannot respond to a complaint unless we know about it first.



This Procedure deals with all complaints where there is not a separate specific or legal procedure to deal with the matter.

3. Is this the right procedure for my complaint?

By law, the Council must consider complaints about the following matters under separate procedures set by the Government:

- Complaints about social care issues relating to children:
www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/keeping-children-safe/childrens-social-care-complaints-and-representations/
- Complaints about social care issues relating to adults:
www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/adult-social-care/compliments-comments-complaints/
- Complaints against County Councillors:
www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/county-councillors-and-elections/complaints-about-a-county-councillor/

The Council also has specific procedures to deal with complaints about the following:

- Public rights of way obstructions, defects, and certain legal orders,
- Public transport services,
- Quality of goods you have purchased from a shop or trader (Trading Standards),
- Reporting a breach of planning control, and
- Insurance claims.

This Procedure cannot deal with:

- Complaints about issues covered by a separate appeals procedure, for example Penalty Charge Notices,
- A concern raised by a third party without explicit consent by the individual concerned,
- Complaints about recruitment and selection processes and voluntary roles and placements as these are dealt with by a management response,
- Complaints about procurement matters which are subject to legal processes,
- Complaints about schools – these should be referred directly to the school,
- Any matter on which you have commenced legal action against the Council which also includes abandoned matters,
- Complaints from County Council employees (or ex-employees) and their representatives in respect of matters relating to their employment or pension,
- Complaints by commissioned providers about matters relating to their legal contracts, for example payment issues,



- Complaints about data protection or other matters which fall within the remit of the Information Commissioner.

We will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If we decide not to accept your complaint, we tell you the reason and inform you of your right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. We will carefully consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

We operate a separate Whistleblowing Policy which enables whistleblowers to raise serious concerns. Please email WhistleblowingComplaints@lancashire.gov.uk or telephone to 01772 536442. For more information please visit www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/being-accountable/whistleblowing-and-counter-fraud-arrangements/whistleblowing/

Complaints received anonymously will be recorded and considered where the Complaints and Appeals Manager feels that this is appropriate, but action may be limited if there is insufficient information available to enable a full investigation to take place.

4. Delayed complaints

We will accept complaints within 12 months of the issue occurring or of you becoming aware of the matter. We will consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

5. Outcomes

The aims of the Corporate Complaints Procedure are:

- To prioritise a culture of learning from complaints to improve our services,
- To provide customer focussed services,
- To encourage constructive feedback,
- To deal with complaints fairly and consistently across services,
- To investigate complaints about service delivery promptly and, where we are at fault, to put things right,
- To encourage best practice by all staff, and
- To increase customer satisfaction across all our services.

6. Accessibility



We take our responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 seriously. We have therefore tried to make this procedure as accessible and straightforward as possible.

We will provide different channels through which people can make a complaint. We aim to anticipate the needs of individuals who may need extra support to access the complaints procedure. You may arrange a representative or advocate to support you with your complaint.

We aim to make reasonable adjustments if required. Please let us know if you need extra support to make a complaint. We will keep a record of the reasonable adjustments that we have agreed and keep them under active review.

We consider high volumes of complaints as indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints procedure. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that individuals are unable to complain.

7. How to make a complaint

You can contact us about your concerns:

- By completing the [online form](#) on our website. This is the quickest and easiest way to make us aware of your complaint.
- By letter to:
Complaints and Appeals Team
Lancashire County Council
County Hall
Preston
PR1 8XJ

Please ensure that any communication contains:

- Your full name,
- Your postal address,
- The date (where possible) and details of the complaint, and
- The service concerned where possible.

If you are contacting us by letter, we recommend you use the template complaint form available on our website.

Our investigations into your complaint will be thorough and unbiased, will be completed within strict timescales, and your confidentiality will be respected as far as possible.



8. Who is involved?

The appropriate manager, Head of Service or Director for the service to which the complaint relates acts as the Dedicated Complaints Officer (DCO) for that complaint. They are responsible for resolving and responding to a complaint promptly and fairly, identifying trends, and learning lessons from complaints to drive service improvement.

The Complaints and Appeals Manager is responsible for all complaint handling performance, identification of trends, and driving service improvement. They have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly. The Complaints and Appeals Manager reports to the Monitoring Officer who has overall responsibility for learning, good governance and oversight of complaint arrangements. The council ensures that every complaint is logged, and progress is monitored. The Complaints Team has access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints.

Elected members also play a key part in the overall accountability and governance of complaints data and trends. The 'Member Responsible for Complaints' is the Cabinet Member for Data, Technology, Customer and Efficiency.

9. Multiple complaints

The Complaints Team will consider all expressions of dissatisfaction to decide on the appropriate action to take in each case. If multiple related complaints are raised and the complaint response has not been issued, we aim to incorporate these additional elements into one single complaint response. This means that we may need to reset complaint timescales, to ensure that any additional aspects are investigated fairly. This action provides a coordinated and comprehensive response without having to go through multiple separate processes.

10. Third parties

Where our complaint response is managed by a third party, for example a contractor, this will form part of a two-stage procedure. You will not be expected to go through two complaints processes.

11. Stage 1 – Investigation by senior manager

When we receive a complaint:



- The complaint will be formally acknowledged by the Council within 5 working days.
- It will be recorded on the Council's electronic complaints management system.
- The appropriate manager for the service, or staff member to which the complaint relates, will investigate and respond to your complaint within 10 working days of your complaint being acknowledged.

This process should take no longer than 15 working days in total, from the receipt of the complaint to the response. We hope this means complaints are resolved promptly with an explanation, apology or resolution being provided.

A complaint response will be provided when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly, and appropriate updates will be provided.

In exceptional circumstances, where the issues raised are more complex and will take more than 10 days to investigate, we will let you know why we need more time. Any extension will be no more than 10 working days without good reason. If we breach this timescale or do not let you know the reasons for any delay, you will be provided with details of how to approach the Ombudsman.

We hope that the Stage 1 response will resolve your complaint to your complete satisfaction. However, if you remain dissatisfied with your response, you may ask for your complaint to be escalated to Stage 2 of this Procedure.

12. Stage 2 - Consideration by Head of Service or Director

The appropriate Head of Service or Director to which the complaint relates acts as the Designated Complaints Officer for your complaint. They will not have previously been involved with your complaint. They will examine the reasons for your continued dissatisfaction and conduct a full review and if necessary, further investigate your complaint.

When we receive a request to escalate a complaint to Stage 2:



- The complaint will be formally acknowledged by the Council within 5 working days.
- It will be recorded on the Council's electronic complaints management system.
- The appropriate Head of Service or Director to which the complaint relates, will investigate and respond to your complaint within 20 working days of your complaint being acknowledged.

If we need more time to investigate your complaint, we will let you know and provide the reason why. If we breach this timescale, you will be provided with the reason and details of how to approach the Ombudsman.

13. Putting things right

We will always aim to resolve complaints and use the feedback we receive to improve our services.

We consider that 3 months is the longest reasonable time within which a complaint should be managed in total through both stages of this Procedure before approaching the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman). This is in line with the maximum recommended times set out in the Code.

This Procedure is not intended to be used to obtain compensation payments. We may, however, offer a payment if you are out of pocket because of an upheld complaint. If a complaint is upheld, we will also consider making a "time and trouble" payment, in line with the Ombudsman's guidance on remedies. For more information please visit: www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/staff-guidance/guidance-on-remedies.

14. What if you are still unhappy with the response you receive?

We hope to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction. However, if you are still not happy after both stages of this Procedure have been completed, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate your complaint. Details of how to refer a complaint to the Ombudsman will be included in our Stage 2 response.

The Ombudsman's contact details are as follows:

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Website: www.lgo.org.uk



Online complaint form: <https://complaints.lgo.org.uk/>

The Ombudsman will expect you to have given us the opportunity to resolve your complaint through our own procedures before they will investigate.

15. Continuous learning and improvement

Lancashire County Council uses complaints and customer feedback to improve the quality of our services and ensure that lessons are learnt. Complaints are therefore monitored and reported on quarterly and annually, so that best practice is disseminated throughout the Council.

Themes and learning from complaints are reported to the Monitoring Officer and the Member Responsible for Complaints through the appropriate governance arrangements.

An annual report on performance, feedback and lessons learned under the Corporate Complaints Procedure is produced every financial year for consideration by Cabinet. The report with any associated actions and recommendations is shared on our website for public scrutiny and transparency. A self-assessment of our performance against the Code is also published alongside the annual report.

16. Management of unreasonable complaint behaviour

There are a small number of complainants who pursue their complaints in ways that are unreasonable and/or who take up an unwarranted amount of time and council resources.

In such circumstances, we may apply our policy on the management of unreasonable or unacceptable behaviour, which is in line with guidance issued by the Ombudsman.

Such action is very rare and not taken lightly and we will inform complainants before any restrictions are applied so that they might moderate their behaviour. Any such restrictions will be individual, proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. We will keep such restrictions under regular review.



17. Data Privacy Notice

The council publishes a data privacy notice to inform you of your rights in relation to the use of your personal data, e.g. access, rectification, erasure, restriction, objection, and data portability. The rights will differ depending on the lawful basis for processing.

To read our privacy notice, please visit:

www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/transparency/access-to-information/service-and-project-specific-privacy-notice/complaints-and-appeals/

18. Interpretation

The Complaints and Appeals Manager will determine any issue relating to the interpretation of any provision in this Procedure.

