

Corporate Complaints Handling Procedure

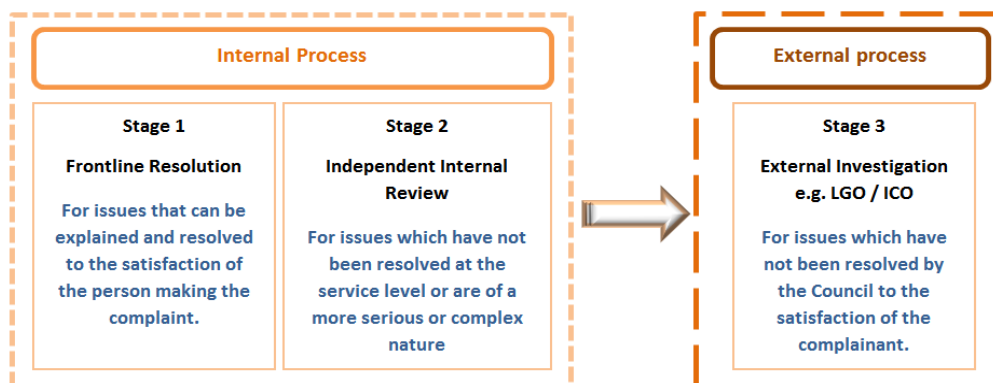
The Council strives to provide value for money services that meet the needs of the local community and to ensure that satisfaction with our services remains high.

However we recognise that there may be occasions when individuals wish to express their dissatisfaction about the services they have received, or feel that they ought to have received, in order that any failings can be remedied.

In light of this the Council has established a formal procedure through which complaints can be made and the notes below explain what you can do should you feel that there are matters on which you wish the Council to take action.

It should be noted that routine requests for a service or information will be dealt with at a service level and outside of this procedure.

The Corporate Complaints Procedure consists of a two stage internal process as illustrated below. Should you remain dissatisfied with the Council's final response to your complaint you also have the opportunity to pursue matters independently of the Council through the Local Government Ombudsman. In the majority of cases the Ombudsman will not investigate a complaint until the Council's own procedure has been exhausted.



How do I make a complaint and who do I complain to?

Stage 1 – Service Response

In most circumstances it is advisable to first contact staff within the relevant service area directly as those people closest to the situation may be able to address matters quickly. This will give the service area concerned the opportunity to provide an explanation of its actions and an appropriate and acceptable remedy to your complaint.

You can contact the relevant service through a number of channels i.e.

- Use the [enquiries form](#) to contact a Customer Service Representative with your enquiry about any service in the Council
- Call the Contact Centre on 0303 333 4300 and ask to be put through to the relevant department
- Visit one of the Halton Direct Link one-stop shops situated in either Widnes or Runcorn, details of which can be found at: <http://www.halton.gov.uk/contact> or
- You may wish to raise your complaint with one of your local Councillors who will submit a complaint on your behalf.

Alternatively you may wish to:-

- Download and complete the Corporate Complaints Form, which is available [here](#), and return it electronically to corporatecomplaints@halton.gov.uk or in hard copy to the postal address below.
- Contact the Corporate Complaints Team by letter which should be addressed to:-
Performance and Improvement Team (Corporate Complaints),
Halton Council, Municipal Buildings, Kingsway, Widnes WA8 7QF
- Contact the Corporate Complaints Team via e-mail at corporatecomplaints@halton.gov.uk to explain the nature of your complaint and what action you would like the Council to take to remedy the situation.

The Council will try to respond to all stage 1 complaints as soon as is possible and within 10 working days of receipt.

It should be noted that the following types of complaints cannot progress beyond Stage 1 of the Procedure.

- Complaints about a Council policy or decision rather than the way that the policy or decision has been carried out.
- Complaints against the conduct of individual employees. Should such matters need to be progressed, after a Stage 1 response has been provided to the complainant, this will be done through the Council's internal management procedures.
- A decision where regulatory powers are being exercised (such as licencing and planning) unless the complaint relates to the way the matter has been administrated.
- Matters for which there is a right of appeal, a legal remedy, or where legal proceedings are ongoing.
- Matters that are of a general nature and do not relate to the provision, or lack of provision, of a service at an individual level.

Stage 2 – Independent internal Review

The Council will seek to ensure that all complaints are dealt with effectively at the first stage of the procedure but we understand that there may be times when individuals may remain dissatisfied with the initial response that has been given and wish to take matters further. Should this be the case please contact the Corporate Complaints Team via e-mail at corporatecomplaints@halton.gov.uk (or by letter at the postal address referred to on page 2) and explain why you are unhappy with the response that has been provided at Stage 1 and what action you would like the Council to take. Should you have new information or evidence in support of your complaint this should also be provided.

The Independent Investigating Officer will determine if your complaint can be progressed to Stage 2 and will advise you accordingly and provide an explanation of their decision.

Where a Stage 2 review is undertaken the Independent Investigating Officer will try to provide a response to your complaint as soon as possible and within 28 working days of receipt of your request.

Alternative actions

If you remain unhappy with the way that the Council has responded to your complaint you may wish to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSC0) as detailed below.

The Ombudsman investigates complaints in a fair and independent way - it does not take sides. It is a free service.

The Ombudsman expects you to have given the Council a chance to deal with your complaint, before you contact them. If you have not heard from the Council within a reasonable time, it may decide to look into your complaint anyway. This is usually up to 12 weeks but can be longer for social care complaints that follow a statutory process.

About the Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services. It also investigates complaints about all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) for people who self-fund their care.

Contact Details

Website: www.lgo.org.uk **Complaint webpage** <https://www.lgo.org.uk/make-a-complaint>

Telephone: 0300 061 0614 **Opening hours** Monday to Friday: 10am to 4pm (except public holidays)

Anonymous Complaints.

The Council will pursue anonymous complaints where sufficient information is provided that allows further enquiries to be made. Where insufficient information has been provided, and no contact details of the complainant are available, the Council will not be in a position to take further action.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

If you have requested information under FOIA legislation and the Council is unable or unwilling to meet your request you will be provided with an explanation of the reasons for this. If you remain unhappy with the Council's decision you can request a Stage 2 review of how your request has been handled (please refer to above section).

If you remain unhappy with the Council's Stage 2 response you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner who is an independent person who can investigate FOIA related matters. Further information can be accessed via [http://ico.org.uk/for the public](http://ico.org.uk/for_the_public)

Limitations of the Corporate Complaints Handling Procedure

By necessity the Council has in place separate procedures for dealing with complaints about Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Schools.

For further information concerning these procedures please visit the Council's website at <http://www3.halton.gov.uk/Pages/councildemocracy/Contact-Us.aspx>, or telephone the Council's Contact Centre on **0303 333 4300**.