



Corporate Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At Three Rivers District Council, we aim to provide high quality services to our customers. On occasions, however, things can go wrong. We want to know when our services have gone wrong, so that we can put things right and learn from our mistakes.
- 1.2 The council considers comments and complaints as opportunities for customers to provide valuable feedback, and for the council to improve its services.
- 1.3 This procedure outlines the aims of the Council in dealing with complaints and sets out what the customer can expect when making a complaint regarding a Council service.

2. What is a complaint?

- 2.1 The council defines a complaint as when
 - We fail to provide a service
 - We provide a service but it is below a defined standard
 - We take too long to do something
 - We treat you unfairly
 - Our staff or contractors are unhelpful or discourteous
- 2.2 A complaint should not be confused with a request for service. For example - a Council tenant asks the Council to repair a hole in their roof - that is a request for service and not a complaint. If the Council did not carry out the repair, turned up late, did the job poorly, or the contractors were rude, then any of these would be a complaint.
- 2.3 Where issues have a separate mechanism for a right of appeal, then this avenue should be pursued rather than using the complaints procedure. Examples of this are
 - Disputes over the issue of parking tickets are dealt with initially by the Council's parking contractor, Hertsmere Borough Council, and a right of appeal then exists to the National Parking Adjudication Service.
 - Disputes over Housing Benefit claims can be dealt with by the Benefits Appeals Service.
 - Disputes about Council Tax liability can be dealt with by the Hertfordshire Valuation Tribunal.

3. Aims of the procedure

3.1 The aims of our complaints procedure are

- To provide our customers and residents with a well publicised and easily accessible method of expressing concerns about the way in which the council provides its services.
- To offer prompt action and a speedy resolution to problems.
- To provide consistency of approach to all complaints throughout the council's services.
- To record, monitor and analyse complaints in order to systematically improve service performance.
- To enable all Three Rivers employees to understand the importance of a speedy and effective response to complaints from customers.

4. Making a complaint

4.1 A complaint can be made

- in writing (by letter, fax, email or by the website)
- in person
- by telephone

4.2 A complaint can be made by anyone who lives, works or travels in the Three Rivers area, and those that receive or are looking for a service from the Council.

4.3 We have also published a booklet "Your Views Can Help Us Improve", which explains briefly about our procedure, and has a pullout form, which you can also use to register your complaint.

5. Principles of the Complaints Procedure

5.1 There are two stages to our complaints procedure. At both stages of the procedure we will aim to acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days, and investigate and respond to your complaint within 10 working days. (n.b. if you provide us with an email address responses should be received by you within these timescales)

5.2 Occasionally, we may not be able to give you a full response within 10 working days, i.e. for a very complex complaint, in which case we will let you know when you can expect a full reply.

5.3 When we acknowledge your complaint we will give you the contact details for the officer who is dealing with it.

6. Stage 1 - Departmental Level

- 6.1 The Head of Service of the department that you are dealing with will arrange for your complaint to be investigated and for a reply to be sent to you. We would expect to be able to resolve most of our complaints at this stage.

7. Stage 2 – Director & Chief Executive Level

- 7.1 If you are unhappy with the response that you have been provided with under Stage 1 of the procedure, you should contact the Corporate Complaints Officer. The Director who is responsible for the service or the Chief Executive will investigate your complaint further and one of them will reply to you. The Council's Directors, Chief Executive & Corporate Complaints Officer are:

Director of Community and Environment Services	Geof Muggeridge
Director of Finance	Alison Scott
Chief Executive	Joanne Wagstaffe
Corporate Complaints Officer	Billy Hall

- 7.2 If you are still unhappy with the decision after the Stage 2 Review, then you may wish to refer your complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

8. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO)

- 8.1 The LGO is an independent person appointed by the Government to look into complaints against certain authorities.

- 8.2 The best way to make a complaint is via the LGO website - <https://www.lgo.org.uk/> - which has an online form.

For telephone help, you can call an LGO adviser, who will listen to you and say whether the LGO can consider your complaint.

You can call 0300 061 0614 between the hours of 10.00am and 4.00pm, Monday to Friday (except public holidays).

9. Complaints about Councillors

- 9.1 A complaint about an elected Three Rivers District Councillor should be directed to the Council's Monitoring Officer.

The Council's Monitoring Officer is:

James Baldwin
Solicitor to the Council
Three Rivers House
Northway
Rickmansworth
Herts WD3 1RL

10. Vexatious and Anonymous Complaints

- 10.1 Where we consider a complaint to be deliberately repetitious or vexatious, we may, at any stage of the complaints procedure, review a complaint and give a decision to this effect in writing. If this is the case, then no further correspondence will be entered into about the matter.
- 10.2 We understand that complaining can be difficult, but if you do not provide us with a contact name or address, then we will be unable to investigate your complaint.

11. Managing the procedure

- 11.1 The Council's Corporate Complaints Officer has overall responsibility for the procedure on behalf of the Chief Executive. The Corporate Complaints Officer will monitor the level of complaints across the authority and report them to senior management on a quarterly basis so that we can identify any trends, learn from our mistakes and improve our performance.
- 11.2 Every member of staff is responsible for being aware of what constitutes a complaint, and for taking ownership of the complaint in the first instance. This is to ensure that all complaints are registered with the appropriate Head of Service, and responses are monitored.

12. Remedies

- 12.1 The Local Government Ombudsman states that

"The remedy needs to be appropriate to the injustice, and should as far as possible put the complainant in the position he or she would have been in but for the maladministration."
- 12.2 Whilst we are looking into your complaint, we will always consider any practical solutions that could provide a suitable remedy. It would be helpful, therefore, if you would let us know at the outset, what you think the Council should do to put things right.

13. Follow Up

- 13.1 After we have completed our investigation into your complaint, we may write to you and ask that you complete a satisfaction form to comment on how we handled your complaint. These satisfaction forms will help us to monitor how we are performing.

14. General

- 14.1 We understand that making a complaint can sometimes be a frustrating matter, however we would ask that you treat our staff with courtesy and respect when we are processing your complaint. We will not tolerate any verbal or physical harassment of our staff, and anyone using threatening or abusive behaviour during the process, will have their complaint terminated immediately.

15. Other Help

- 15.1 You can contact your local Councillor at any stage of the complaints procedure. Contact details of Councillors are available on our [website](#).
- 15.2 You can also get free and impartial advice from the [Citizen's Advice Bureau](#).

16. Our Contact Details

Address: Three Rivers District Council, Three Rivers House,
Northway, Rickmansworth, Herts WD3 1RL

Telephone: 01923 776611

Email: enquiries@threerivers.gov.uk

Website: www.threerivers.gov.uk