

Epping Forest District Council

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

January 2017

Introduction

At Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) we always want our residents to be our top priority, and so we want to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible.

Sometimes things can go wrong, so if there is a problem with how we deliver your service, we have ways of investigating to make sure that all complaints are dealt with fairly, appropriately and in a good time. We are also committed to using our resources effectively and, where possible, try to communicate electronically or online rather than by letter. It is also important to us that we manage your expectations so we will tell you what we are responsible for, what we can and cannot do, and signpost to you other organisations where necessary. Most importantly, we want to identify our mistakes so that we can learn from them, and provide an even better service in the future.

We would also like you to tell us when you are pleased with what we have done, or have suggestions about services. Comments and compliments highlight good practices to introduce to other service areas, and are excellent feedback and motivation for our staff.

What are comments?

A suggestion or observation about a service delivered by us, a supplier or partner.

What are compliments?

Praise for an individual or a service delivered by us, a supplier or partner.

What is a complaint?

At EFDC, we define a complaint as;

An expression of dissatisfaction, where you feel any of the following has happened;

- Failure to provide a service, or experience of dissatisfaction with the way we have provided a service;
- Unreasonable delays with the provision of a service;
- Dissatisfaction with the way a policy has been applied or a decision made;
- Failure to fulfil our statutory responsibilities;
- Provision of inaccurate or false information and advice to you;
- The conduct of staff, partners or contractors has been inappropriate.

We do not include initial requests for a service as part of our complaints process. Such requests will be directed to the right team so they can manage this as part of their normal processes. Examples of service requests include;

- Reporting an abandoned vehicle;
- Reporting fly tipping;
- A missed bin collection.

If you have already reported it and we failed to do something, then a complaint can be raised.

When we can't deal with your concern

There are certain situations where we cannot deal with your concern through our complaints process.

- We cannot investigate a complaint where you have a formal or legal right of appeal or review, or the matter is currently part of court proceedings. For example, if you disagree with our decision to refuse an application for planning permission or housing benefit;
- If your concern relates to the conduct of a councillor; this will be considered as part of a Standards conduct investigation;
- If 12 months pass before you tell us about your concerns, or follow up on a complaint, then we will not investigate;
- If you contact us about a service provided by another organisation such as the NHS, North Essex Parking Partnership or Essex County Council e.g. potholes, with your permission, we will forward it to their Customer Services team to investigate;
- If you contact us about a national policy that we cannot change, we will inform you of the appropriate body to contact regarding your concern.

How can I raise a concern?

By using our online form at www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk

By e-mailing contactus@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

By telephone 01992 564000

What happens when I raise a concern?

EFDC has a two stage complaints process, forming the initial complaint at Stage 1 and a review at Stage 2.

Stage 1

Your complaint at Stage 1 will be investigated and dealt with by the appropriate service where the complaint originates. Where necessary, we will co-ordinate with suppliers or partners to provide a response.

You will receive a full response within 10 working days of receipt into the organisation. If it is not possible to respond within this time we will notify you of this, along with the reasons why we are unable to reply and tell you when we will be responding.

If you are unhappy with the decision made then you must let us know within 15 working days that you wish to submit a request for a Stage 2 review. Otherwise, we will close down your case.

Stage 2

At Stage 2, you will need to give clear reasons and evidence why you disagree with the decision made at Stage 1 before a review can be undertaken. If a review cannot be undertaken on this basis, you will still have the right to contact the relevant Ombudsman.

The Stage 2 review will be undertaken by the relevant Assistant Director and a response will be provided within 15 working days from receiving the request.

If a Stage 1 investigation and a Stage 2 review have been undertaken, then EFDC's formal complaints process has been exhausted. You then have the right to contact the relevant Ombudsman.

Comments and Compliments will be shared directly with the right manager, so they can act on the suggestion, or praise the member of staff who gave you great service.

What can I do if I disagree with your decision?

If at the conclusion of our complaints process, you believe that your concerns have not been dealt with appropriately, you have the right to take your case to an Ombudsman. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO) are independent bodies that will impartially review your complaint. EFDC will notify you which Ombudsman you will need to contact if you are unhappy with the decision we have made. An Ombudsman will not usually investigate if;

- We have not completed our own investigation of your complaint;
- There is a significant delay in you making your complaint to them;
- There is an alternative way of addressing the problem through the courts or a formal right of appeal.

The Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Post: Local Government Ombudsman, PO Box 4471, Coventry, CV4 0EH

The Housing Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

What happens if I contact a councillor or MP first?

If you contact your councillor or MP we will seek your permission that we can divulge information about your concerns to them. Your complaint will follow the process described previously, and we will usually send the response to the councillor or MP so they can contact you directly.

Vexatious and persistent behaviour

We will always treat you with respect and we expect our staff have the right to be treated the same. Rude, violent or abusive behaviour towards our staff will never be tolerated.

If we consider behaviour to be unreasonable or vexatious, we will explain why and request the complainant modifies their behaviour and warn them that contact will be restricted if it continues.

This includes behaviour such as refusal to follow the appropriate process, an aggressive style of communication, repeatedly contacting numerous officers and councillors unnecessarily and refusing to accept a decision without providing any necessary or new evidence.