

# Complaints Handling Procedure

## Customer guide



Renfrewshire  
Council

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## **Introduction**

At Renfrewshire Council, we are committed to providing you with high-quality council services. But sometimes, things go wrong. And when they do, you might need to complain.

It is important that we hear from you first-hand. You can highlight problems that we might have missed.

We can then try to resolve your complaint quickly—and prevent the same problems from happening again.

This is our complaints handling procedure. It explains how we try to deal with your complaint at the earliest possible point.

It also lets us conduct thorough, objective and fair investigations of complaints—so that, where we can, we can try and make things better, or provide a better explanation for a decision that we made.

We value your complaint. We want to make sure we get it right for everyone living in Renfrewshire and, by letting us know when you have a complaint, you can help us achieve this.

### **Sandra Black**

*Chief Executive*

*Renfrewshire Council*

## Our Principles

### **1. Transparency**

Inform all stakeholders about the complaints and appeals processes, including the estimated response times, and signpost customers to online information.

### **2. Accessibility**

Make the mechanisms for registering complaints clear and easily accessible to all parties.

### **3. Mutual respect**

Everyone presenting a complaint or feedback is treated with respect, regardless of the motivation behind the claim. In return, we expect those people making a complaint to show respect for the organisation and its staff, as well as for the complaints handling procedure.

### **4. Good faith**

We assume that people making a complaint are acting in good faith, making an authentic claim, and do not have any malicious intent.

### **5. Confidentiality**

We safeguard confidentiality in the complaints process and protect the personal information of those involved. Personal information is dealt with according to the General Data Protection Regulations.

### **6. Impartiality**

We handle all complaints in an objective way.

### **7. Timely response**

We aim to meet the timescales set within our Complaints Handling Procedure—five days for frontline resolution and 20 days for investigation.

### **8. Continuous improvement**

We actively use complaints for learning and continuous improvement.

## **What is a complaint?**

Our definition of a complaint is:

*‘Any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us, or on our behalf.’*

## **What can I complain about?**

You can complain about things like:

- delays in responding to your enquiries and requests.
- failure to provide a service.
- our standard of service.
- council policy
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff
- our failure to follow proper procedure.

## What is not covered by the complaints policy?

There are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure:

- A routine first-time request for a service, for example a first-time request for a housing repair or action on anti-social behaviour.
- Requests for compensation from the council.
- **Reports of alleged bullying made by pupils/parents/others. These will be treated as bullying incidents under the Council's bullying policy 'Respect Me'. Further information on this policy is available online at [www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/bullying](http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/bullying)**
- Things that are covered by a right of appeal. For example:
  - If you are dissatisfied with the level of priority you have been given when applying for a house, you have the right to appeal against the decision.
  - If your planning application is refused, you will have a right to request either an appeal to Scottish Ministers or a review by the planning authority's Local Review Body. Which one depends on the circumstances of the application and the timescale for appeal or review will normally be explained in correspondence and the decision notice from the planning authority.
  - If you believe your house is incorrectly valued for council tax, you can appeal to the Assessor.

If we think that other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will let you know.

## **Who can complain?**

Anyone can make a complaint, including the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service. Please also read the section, 'Getting help to make your complaint', on page 8 of this guide.

## **How do I complain?**

You can complain in person at any of our offices, by telephone, in writing, by email, on social media or via our website:

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

It is usually easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff at the service you are complaining about. They can try to resolve any problems there and then.

If your complaint is about a school or one of our early years' centres, you should complain directly to the head teacher or head of centre before contacting the Council.

When complaining, please tell us:

- your full name and address;
- as much as you can about the complaint;
- what has gone wrong; and
- how you want us to resolve the matter.

## **How long do I have to make a complaint?**

It is easier for us to try and fix your complaint if you make it early.

Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the event you want to complain about, or;
- finding out that you have a reason to complain, but no longer than 12 months after the event itself.

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

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

## What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint.

### **Our procedure has two stages:**

#### Frontline resolution

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, taking immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will try to resolve or give you our decision in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If it is a Social Work complaint, this can be extended by 10 working days.

If we can't resolve your complaint at this stage, we will explain why and tell you what you can do next. We might suggest that it would be better to consider your complaint in the investigation stage. You may choose to do this immediately or sometime after you get our initial decision.

#### Investigation stage

The investigation stage deals with two types of complaint: those that have not have been resolved at the frontline, and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.

When using the investigation stage, we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days;
- where appropriate, discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for; and
- provide you with a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and within 20 working days.

If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will agree revised time limits with you and keep you updated on progress.



## **What if I am still dissatisfied?**

After we have fully investigated (through the frontline resolution and investigation stages), and you are still dissatisfied with our decision of the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO cannot normally look at:

- a complaint that has not gone through our complaints procedure (so please make sure it has done so before contacting the SPSO);
- events that happened, or that you became aware of, more than a year ago; and
- a matter that has been or is being considered in court.

### **You can contact the SPSO:**

#### **In person:**

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman,  
Bridgeside House  
99 McDonald Road  
Edinburgh EH7 4NS

#### **By post:**

**Freepost SPSO** (This is all you need to write on the envelope, and you don't need to use a stamp).

**By telephone:** (Freephone) 0800 377 7330

**Online:** [www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us)

## **Care complaints**

If your complaint relates to a care service we provide, you can choose whether to complain to us or the Care Inspectorate.

You can find out more about their complaints procedure, or make a complaint, by contacting:

**Telephone:** 0345 600 9527

#### **Filling in our complaints form online:**

[www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/online-complaint-form](http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/online-complaint-form)

#### **In writing:**

Care Inspectorate Headquarters,  
Compass House,  
11 Riverside Drive,  
Dundee DD1 4NY

## **Getting help to make your complaint**

We understand that you may be unable, or reluctant, to make a complaint yourself.

We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

You can find out about advocates in your areas by contacting the **Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance**, by phone 131 260 5380 or online [www.siaa.org.uk](http://www.siaa.org.uk).

We want our service to be easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help customers access and use our services.

If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille you can contact the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance for assistance.

### **Their office is:**

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance,  
Mansfield Traquair Centre,  
15 Mansfield Place,  
Edinburgh EH3 6BB

**Telephone:** 0131 524 1975

**Email:** [enquiry@siaa.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@siaa.org.uk)

## **Our complaints contact details**

You can complete the online form:

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

**Telephone:** 0300 300 0300

**Email:** [complaints@renfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@renfrewshire.gov.uk)

### **Write to:**

Renfrewshire Council,  
Renfrewshire House,  
Cotton Street,  
Paisley PA1 1WB

**We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as large print, audio and Braille)**

## Quick guide to our complaints procedure



