

Epping Forest District Council – Customer Complaints Policy

We always want to provide you with the best possible service, however we appreciate that sometimes things can go wrong. If there is a problem, we need you to tell us so that we can investigate, put things right and learn from it. This will help us to continuously improve our service to you.

The Ombudsmen defines a complaint as any 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 resident or group of residents.

We understand you will be unhappy if you believe we have:

- Not carried out an action in a timely manner
- Done something we should not have done
- Not done something that you feel we should have done
- Behaved inappropriately (staff or contractors)

This policy explains how you can make a complaint, how we will investigate and respond to your concerns and how you can progress the matter if you remain dissatisfied. It also covers what types of issues the complaints process can address and what it cannot.

1. Issues which the Complaints process cannot address

Initial reports of a problem

Examples include reporting a missed bin collection, fly tipping or an abandoned vehicle; reporting a problem with your property that requires repair; reporting antisocial behaviour or noise nuisance; and other initial reports of problems. You should always raise this either via our website or by calling our Customer Contact Centre. If you have previously reported a problem but feel that the appropriate action has not been taken, then you can raise this as a complaint.

Matters where you have a formal or legal right of Appeal

If you disagree with the Council's refusal of planning permission, or an application for housing benefit; or other matters which are the subject of legal proceedings, such as eviction proceedings. You must follow the appropriate legal path in such cases and the relevant Officer will advise you as to what this is. The complaints process cannot address such matters.

Challenging a decision made by Council Officers concerning your property

If you believe that works are required to your Council property, but an Officer has advised you these are not necessary and will not be carried out. You should advise the relevant officer that you wish to appeal against the decision. This will then be reviewed by a Senior Officer. Decisions cannot be changed through the complaints process.

Matters over which the Council has no jurisdiction

Potholes and repairs to roads are the responsibility of Essex County Council. Parking is the responsibility of North Essex Parking Partnership. Other matters which

are the subject of national policy (which the Council cannot change) and any other issues which fall under the jurisdiction of another body. Our complaints process cannot address such matters and you should contact the appropriate body to pursue your concerns.

Matters involving insurance claims

The complaints process cannot address matters which must be investigated for the purposes of an insurance claim. You should discuss this with your own insurer and if you need to contact our insurance department, they can be contacted by emailing Insurance@eppingforestdc.gov.uk or calling 01992 564000.

2. Issues which the Complaints process can address

- Failure to provide a service which we should have provided
- Unreasonable delays in providing a service
- Dissatisfaction with the way a policy has been applied
- Failure to fulfil our statutory responsibilities
- Provision of inaccurate or false information
- Inappropriate conduct of staff or contractors

3. Reasonable Adjustments during the complaints process

The Council is committed to taking action to ensure that the way we work does not place disabled people at a disadvantage and to meet our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

The Equality Act 2010 requires us to provide reasonable adjustments for you if you are “disabled”. Under the Act this means you have a “physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities”. Our duty is to make “reasonable adjustments” if the way that we carry out our complaints process places you as a disabled person at a “substantial disadvantage” compared to someone who is not disabled.

Requesting reasonable adjustments

Specific reasonable adjustments are not defined by the Act. If you feel there is reasonable adjustment to be made during the complaints process then please contact us at complaints@eppingforestdc.gov.uk with your request.

Some examples of adjustments that we can make during the complaints process is;

- Providing documentation in larger print
- Giving you more time than usually allowed to provide further information or respond accordingly.
- Calling you in addition to corresponding in writing.
- Corresponding via post instead of email or using online tools.
- Communicating with you via your representative or advocate

4. How to make a complaint

You can make a complaint in writing (*addressed to the Complaints Officer, Contact Centre, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ*), via the Council's website (www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk), or by telephoning the Contact Centre on 01992 564000.

You should make your complaint yourself, unless there is a good reason why you need to ask someone else to do this for you. If you do want someone else to complain on your behalf, please contact us to give permission for us to discuss your complaint with the third party.

As part of your complaint, you will need to provide your contact details and a clear explanation of what you think we did wrong, and what you believe should have happened under the circumstances. If there is any documentary evidence that we should see, you should also provide this.

You must make your complaint as soon as possible, and within 12 months of the events occurring, otherwise we will not be able to investigate the matter.

The complaints process

When you make a complaint, the initial Stage 1 investigation will be carried out by the relevant Officer. You will receive a full response within ten working days (or if the matter is complex and requires more time to complete our investigations, we will let you know the expected timescale).

Our response will tell you if we have identified any fault, and if so, what actions we will take to put matters right. If you are dissatisfied with our response, you must tell us within three weeks and you must explain why you are dissatisfied. If you can show that there is good reason we may have missed something important, then we will carry out a further stage 2 review.

A Senior Officer will review the original investigation and write to you within 15 working days to advise of the outcome and whether any new fault has been identified. However, if the matter is complex and requires more time to complete our investigations, we will let you know the expected timescale. If you are dissatisfied with our response at stage 1, but do not provide any good reason, then we will not carry out a stage 2 review.

If you disagree with the outcome of our investigations

If on conclusion of our complaints process you believe your concerns have not been addressed appropriately, you have the right to take your case to an Ombudsman. The Local Government Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman are independent bodies that will impartially review your complaint.

The Local Government Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman each deal with different types of complaint and we will advise you of which Ombudsman to contact at the conclusion of our investigations. The Ombudsmen will not usually accept a complaint until it has fully completed the Council's processes.

Further information can be obtained directly from the Ombudsmen themselves:

- Local Government Ombudsman: www.lgo.org.uk or telephone 0300 061 0614
- Housing Ombudsman: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk or telephone 0300 111 3000