

Concerns and Complaints Policy

Concerns and Complaints Policy

Flintshire County Council is committed to dealing effectively with any concerns or complaints you may have about our services. We believe in treating people fairly and with respect, and listening to our conscience and acting with integrity.

We aim to clarify any issues you may be unsure about. If possible, we will put right any mistakes we may have made. We will provide any service you are entitled to which we have failed to deliver. If we did something wrong, we will apologise and, where possible, try to put things right for you. We aim to learn from our mistakes and use the information we gain from complaints to improve our services.

When to use this policy

When you express your concerns or complain to us, we will usually respond in the way we explain below. However, sometimes you may have a statutory right of appeal e.g. against a refusal to grant you planning permission or the decision not to give your child a place in a particular school, so rather than investigate your concern, we will explain to you how you can appeal. Sometimes, you might be concerned about matters that are not covered by this policy e.g. when a legal framework applies and we will then advise you about how to make your concerns known.

This policy does not apply to Freedom of Information or data access issues. The Information Governance Team can help by emailing foi@flintshire.gov.uk

This policy does not apply to complaints made about schools. In matters of complaints against schools, our statutory role as the Council is to offer advice and check that fair processes have been worked through by the school when they are considering complaints. The Council does not have the regulatory power to undertake an investigation on your behalf, nor substitute our view for that of the governing body. Should you wish to raise a complaint about a school, contact the school direct who can provide you with a copy of their complaints policy.

Asking us to provide a service?

If you are approaching us to request a service, e.g. reporting a missed bin collection, or requesting an appointment this policy does not apply. If you make a request for a service and then are not happy with our response, you will be able to make your concern known as we describe below.

Informal resolution

If possible, we believe it is best to deal with things straight away. If you have a concern, please raise it with the person you are dealing with. They will try to resolve it for you there and then. If there are any lessons to learn from addressing your concern, the member of staff will draw them to our attention. If the member of staff cannot help, they will explain why and you can then ask for a formal investigation.

How to express concern or complain formally

You can express your concern in any of the following ways:

- Ask for a copy of our form from the person with whom you are already in contact. Tell them that you want us to deal with your concern formally.
- Use the form on our website at www.flintshire.gov.uk/complain
- Email us at customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk
- Get in touch with Customer Services on 01352 703020 if you want to make your complaint over the phone.
- Write to us at: Flintshire County Council, Customer Services, County Hall, Mold. CH7 6NR.

We aim to have concern and complaint forms available at all of our public areas e.g. Flintshire Connects Centres. Copies of this policy and the complaint form are available in alternative languages, audio and braille on request.

Dealing with your concern

STEP 1

- We will formally acknowledge your concern within 5 working days and let you know how we intend to deal with it.
- We will ask you to tell us how you would like us to communicate with you and establish whether you have any particular requirements – for example, if you need documents in large type.
- We will deal with your concern in an open and honest way.
- We will make sure that your dealings with us in the future do not suffer just because you have expressed a concern or made a complaint.

Normally, we will only be able to look at your concerns if you tell us about them within six months. This is because it is better to look into your concerns while the issues are still fresh in everyone's mind.

We may exceptionally be able to look at concerns which are brought to our attention later than this. However, you will have to explain why you have not been able to bring it to our attention earlier and we will need to have sufficient information about the issue to allow us to consider it properly. In any event, we will not consider any concerns about matters that took place more than three years ago.

If you are expressing a concern on behalf of somebody else, we will need their agreement to you acting on their behalf.

What if there is more than one body involved?

If your complaint covers more than one body e.g. a housing association we will usually work with them to decide who should take the lead in dealing with your concerns. You will then be given the name of the person responsible for communicating with you while we consider your complaint.

If the complaint is about a body working on our behalf e.g. repair contractors, you may wish to raise the matter informally with them first. However, if you want to express your concern or complaint formally, we will look into this ourselves and respond to you.

Investigation

We will tell you who we have asked to look into your concern or complaint. If your concern is straightforward, we will usually ask somebody from the relevant service area to look into it and respond to you. If it is more serious, we may use someone from elsewhere e.g. another area of the Council or where a statutory procedure applies, we may appoint an independent investigator.

We will set out our understanding of your concerns and ask you to confirm that we are right. We will also ask you to tell us what outcome you are hoping for.

The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the files we hold relevant to your complaint. If you do not want this to happen, it is important that you tell us.

If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you are happy to accept this. For example, where you asked for a service and we see straight away that you should have had it, we will offer to provide the service rather than investigate and produce a report.

Continued...

Investigation

We will aim to resolve concerns as quickly as possible and expect to deal with the vast majority within 10 working days. If your complaint is more complex, we will:

- Let you know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate.
- Tell you how long we expect it to take.
- Let you know where we have reached with the investigation, and
- Give you regular updates, including telling you whether any developments might change our original estimate.

The person who is investigating your concerns will firstly aim to establish the facts. The extent of the investigation will depend upon how complex and how serious the issues you have raised are. In complex cases, we will draw up an investigation plan.

In some instances, we may ask to meet with you to discuss your concerns. Occasionally, we might suggest mediation or another method to try to resolve disputes.

We will look at relevant evidence. This could include information you have provided, our case files, notes of conversations, letters, emails or whatever may be relevant to your particular concern. If necessary, we will talk to the staff or others involved and look at our policies, any legal entitlement and guidance.

Outcome

If we formally investigate your complaint, we will let you know what we find. If necessary, we will produce a report. We will explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

If we find that we made a mistake, we will tell you what happened and why.

If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we will tell you what it is and how we plan to change things to stop it happening again.

If we make a mistake, we will always apologise for it.

Putting Things Right

If we did not provide you with a service you should have had, we will aim to provide it now, if that is possible. If we did not do something well, we will aim to put it right. If you have lost out as a result of a mistake on our part, we will try to put you back in the position you would have been in if we had done things properly.

If you were entitled to funding and we did not provide it, we will try to refund the cost.

STEP 2

If we do not succeed in resolving your complaint, you may ask us to escalate your complaint to Step 2. You can ask the person who has dealt with your complaint or contact Customer Services. We will ask you to tell us why you are dissatisfied with the response you have received and what outcome you are hoping for.

We will tell you who we have asked to look into your concern or complaint and we will aim to respond within 20 working days. If your complaint is more complex, we will:

- Let you know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate.
- Tell you how long we expect it to take.
- Let you know where we have reached with the investigation, and
- Give you regular updates, including telling you whether any developments might change our original estimate.

If we escalate your complaint, we will let you know what we find. If necessary, we will produce a report. We will explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

The Ombudsman

If we do not succeed in resolving your complaint, you may complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Ombudsman is independent of all government bodies and can look into your complaint if you believe that you personally, or the person on whose behalf you are complaining:

- Have been treated unfairly or received a bad service through some failure on the part of the service provider.
- Have been disadvantaged personally by a service failure or have been treated unfairly.

The Ombudsman normally expects you to bring your concerns to our attention first and to give us a chance to put things right. You can contact the Ombudsman by:

- **Phone:** 0300 790 0203
- **Email:** ask@ombudsman.wales
- **The website:** www.ombudsman.wales
- **Writing to:** Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, 1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed CF35 5LJ

There are also other organisations that consider complaints. For example, the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office deals with complaints about services in Welsh. We can advise you about such organisations.

Learning lessons

We take your concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we have made. We are committed to using information from complaints to identify areas where we need to improve processes and procedures now and in the future. We use complaints information to drive improvements for the benefit of everyone who may need to access our services.

Our Chief Officer Team considers a summary of all complaints quarterly and is made aware of all serious complaints. Our Cabinet also considers our response to complaints at least twice a year. We share summary (anonymised) information on complaints received and complaint outcomes with the Ombudsman as part of our commitment to accountability and learning from complaints.

Where there is a need for significant change, we will develop an action plan setting out what we will do, who will do it and when we plan to do it. We will let you know when changes we have promised have been made.

What if you need help?

Our staff will aim to help you make your concerns known to us. If you need extra assistance, we will try to put you in touch with someone who can help. You may wish to contact advocacy services who may be able to assist you:

Advocacy Services North East Wales

- **Website:** <https://asnew.org.uk>
- **Email:** Advocacy@ASNEW.org.uk
- **Phone:** 01352 759332
- **Write to:** 1st Floor Offices, 42 High Street, Mold, Flintshire CH7 1BH

You can also use this concerns and complaints policy if you are under the age of 18. If you need help, you can speak to someone on the Meic Helpline:

- **Website:** www.meiccymru.org
- **Phone:** 0808 802 3456

Or contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Contact details are:

- **Website:** www.childcom.org.uk
- **Phone:** 0808 801 1000
- **Email:** post@childcomwales.org.uk

What we expect from you

In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a concern or a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined.

We believe that all complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, we also consider that our staff have the same rights. We therefore expect you to be polite and courteous in your dealings with us. We will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence. We have a separate policy to manage situations when we find that someone's actions are unacceptable.

APPENDIX A

CONCERN/COMPLAINT FORM

Please Note: The person who experienced the problem should normally fill in this form. If you are filling this in on behalf of someone else, please fill in Section B.

A: YOUR DETAILS

Surname:	Forename(s):	Title:
Address and Postcode:		
Email Address:		
Daytime Phone Number:		
Please state how you would prefer us to contact you:		

Your requirements: if our usual way of dealing with complaints makes it difficult for you to use our service, for example if English or Welsh is not your first language or you need to engage with us in a particular way, please tell us so that we can discuss how we might help you.

B: MAKING A COMPLAINT ON BEHALF OF SOMEONE ELSE

THEIR DETAILS:

Please note: We have to be satisfied that you have the authority to act on behalf of the person who has experienced the problem.

Their full name:	
Address and Postcode:	
What is your relationship to them?	
Why are you making a complaint on their behalf?	

APPENDIX A

CONCERN/COMPLAINT FORM

C: ABOUT YOUR CONCERN/COMPLAINT *(please continue your answers to the following questions on a separate sheet(s) if necessary)*

C.1 Name of the department/section/service you are complaining about:

C.2 What do you think they did wrong, or failed to do?

C.3 Describe how you personally have suffered or have been affected:

C.4 What do you think should be done to put things right?

C.5 When did you first become aware of the problem?

C.6 Have you already put your concern to the frontline staff responsible for delivering the service? If so, please give brief details of how and when you did so:

C.7 If it is more than six months since you first became aware of the problem, please say why you have not complained before now:

If you have any documents to support your concern/complaint, please attach them with this form.

Signature: **Date:**

When you have completed this form, please send it to:

Flintshire County Council
Customer Services
County Hall
Mold
CH7 6NR

HOW TO CONTACT US

Email: customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk

Phone: 01352 703020

Website: www.flintshire.gov.uk/complain

Write to us: Flintshire County Council, Customer Services, County Hall, Mold. CH7 6NR

You can also follow us on **Twitter:** @FlintshireCC