



Comhairle an Iúir agus Mhúrn
Newry And Mourne District Council
Equality Unit

working for equality

Complaint Procedure



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Mission Statement (Our Purpose)

“To enable the Council to make decisions and deliver its services having recognised the impact of its actions in terms of promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, performance management, good communications and member services”

Our Complaint Procedure is available in alternative formats upon request.

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Introduction

The Equality Unit is committed to the provision of quality public services in accordance with the needs and expectations of its many and diverse customers.

The Equality Unit recognises the value of people's opinion and its contribution to the processes of policy formulation and service delivery.

The Equality Unit believes it is important that people can raise issues of dissatisfaction through a formal complaint system and this procedure will be made available to them.

There are a number of principles underpinning the complaints procedures:

- Openness and accessibility – flexible options for pursuing a complaint and effective support for those wishing to do so;
- Fairness and independence – emphasising early resolution in order to minimise distress for all;
- Responsiveness – providing an appropriate and proportionate response; and
- Learning and development – ensuring complaints are viewed as a positive opportunity to learn and improve services.

Objectives And Scope Of Complaint Procedure

The Equality Unit's complaint procedure is available to all customers and anyone acting on their behalf. It will:

- be well publicised, accessible and subject to independent monitoring;
- provide an opportunity, in a supportive environment, for investigation and resolution of a complaint with the minimum of delay;
- contribute to achieving a person-focused service where complaints are welcomed as a learning opportunity;
- ensure everyone has equal access and support in raising a complaint through the provision of readily available advice and support services, including advocacy (including, where necessary, interpreting and translation) and the provision of information in other formats;
- be fair, with a full and unbiased enquiry;
- be confidential, in order to ensure fairness to the complainant and staff;
- have clear lines of accountability for complaints management;
- provide a response that fully addresses the matters raised in the complaint within a reasonable time frame;
- contribute to organisational learning;
- be continuously reviewed to monitor its effectiveness and feedback into service delivery;
- communicate effectively with complainant throughout the complaints procedure.

Complaints are seen as a significant source of learning within the Equality Unit and provide opportunities to improve:

- outcomes for services users;
- service quality; and
- service user/staff experiences.

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Complaint Definition

A complaint is simply defined as follows:

“An expression of dissatisfaction with a service which requires a response.”

Customers may also offer a comment or suggestion that can be extremely helpful. It is important to recognise those comments, which are really complaints and need to be handled as such.

How to Make a Complaint

Complaints may be made orally or in writing and can also be accepted via the telephone or electronically to the Administrative Officer within the Equality Unit who will then pass it onto the appropriate officer within the Unit.

Responding to Complaints

The Equality Unit will acknowledge the receipt of complaints within 5 working days and respond to the complaint in full within 15 working days. Where it is not possible to respond in full within this period, due to the need to undertake further investigation, the complainant will be informed of that situation within 15 days, and every 5 days thereafter. This will be monitored on a regular basis.

In addition, the Equality Unit aims to resolve 90% of complaints received within 15 working days.

If it is not possible to resolve a complaint at the point of contact the matter will be referred directly to the attention of the Unit's Assistant Director of Administration and then Director of Administration to review the situation.

If a complainant continues to be dissatisfied, the Clerk and Chief Executive will consider the complaint, within a further 15 days period.

In cases where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint

procedure they will be informed of their right to refer the complaint to the attention of the NI Commissioner for Complaints – the Ombudsman.

Letters of response will:

- address the concerns expressed by the complainant and show that each element has been fully and fairly investigated;
- include an apology where things have gone wrong;
- report the action taken or proposed to prevent recurrence;
- indicate that a named member of staff is available to clarify any aspect of the letter;
- indicate that, if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints process, they may take their case to the Ombudsman with details of how to contact the Ombudsman's Office included.

Once the final response has been signed and issued, the officer dealing with the complaint, will provide guidance to the relevant manager/ member of staff/ service provider to ensure they undertake all follow-up action. Arrangements should be made for any outcomes to be monitored to ensure that they have been actioned by the appropriate department/ officer.

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Training and Publication of Information

All Equality Unit staff will receive training on how to deal with complaints.

The Assistant Director will deal with complaints to the Equality Unit where complaints cannot be resolved immediately. The Equality Unit will provide a leaflet which is accessible and easily understood to summarise the provisions of the complaint procedure. It will outline how they can make a complaint and what to do if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

From time to time information regarding the Complaint Procedure will be published in the local press to provide citizens with details regarding the Complaint Procedure. The Council's Household Panel will also be kept informed. In addition the Council, in its Annual Report to the Equality Commission, will report on complaints it received relating to equality issues.

Monitoring and Reviewing

The Equality complaint register will be reviewed on a regular basis. These reviews will be available to both customers and other relevant bodies.

In addition, the Assistant Director, having dealt with a complaint, will be responsible for asking the complainant for their opinion on how we dealt with their complaint.

The system will be monitored and a six monthly report provided to Council assessing performance.

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Guidelines on Redress

As part of Newry and Mourne Council's commitment to providing a quality service, we wish to provide guidance on the issue of redress – what the Council does to respond to users who feel they have received a poor service.

Redress is about putting things right when they go wrong. It is important for the Council to recognise that users have a right to certain standards.

It should be:

- appropriate to the failure in service, i.e. the response needs to be tailored to the circumstances; and,
- take into account what people are looking for when they complain, provided the complaint is justified.

Any form of Redress may:

- Reinforce - users entitlement to a quality service
- Reassure - users that the same thing will not reoccur.
- Restore - users to the position they would have been in had the problem not arisen
- Compensate - users for the fact that things have gone wrong

Redress can involve a variety of responses such as:

- an explanation and an apology
- customers will be informed of the Equality Unit's complaints procedure
- action to ensure the problems do not happen again
- priority provision of a service
- financial compensation (in exceptional circumstances)

A range of possible responses to a variety of complaints will be drawn up which staff can use as guidelines on dealing with complaints but which offer some flexibility to step outside where the circumstances warrant it.

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Equality Unit Complaint Form

Title Mr Mrs Ms Miss

First Name _____

Surname _____

Your Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone Day time _____ Evening _____

E-mail Address _____

What do you think the Equality Unit service did wrong or did not do?
Please detail your complaint.

How has this affected you

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What do you think the Council should do to put things right?

Have you raised this matter with staff concerned? Yes No

If there is anything that makes it difficult for you to pursue your complaint.

We will send you an acknowledgement within 5 working days of receiving your communication and tell you who will be dealing with it and how long it will take to send you a full reply. We try to respond quickly and reply within 15 working days.

Signed _____

Date _____

Written Correspondence to: -

Brenda Byrne
Equality Unit
Newry & Mourne District Council
Council Offices
Monaghan Row
Newry
BT35 8DJ

Tele: 028 3031 3095
Fax: 028 3031 3076

Email: brenda.byrne@newryandmourne.gov.uk

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Which Equality Unit service
is the complaint about?

Please tick

Corporate Communications

Equality

Good Relations

Member Services

Performance Management

Other Services - specify department