



Vale of Glamorgan Council

Corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy

1 July 2013

Introduction

This Policy applies to members of the public receiving or seeking a service from the Vale of Glamorgan Council, excluding Social Services.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council is committed to dealing effectively with any concerns or complaints you may have about the services we provide. We aim to clarify any issues about which you are not sure. If possible, we'll put right any mistakes we may have made. We will provide any service you're entitled to which we have failed to deliver and if we got something wrong, we will apologise where appropriate. We also aim to learn from our mistakes and use the information we gain 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 decided by us e.g. policy set by the Welsh Government and we will then advise you about how to make your concerns known.

Also, this Policy does not apply if the matter relates to a Freedom of Information or Data Protection issue (apart from time periods in responding). In this circumstance you should contact The Council's Information Manager via our central contact point - C1V - at contactonevale@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk.

Have you asked us yet?

If you are approaching us for a service for the first time, (e.g. reporting a faulty street light, requesting an appointment etc) then this policy doesn't apply. You should first give us a chance to respond to your request. 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.

Is there anything which is excluded from being dealt with as a Corporate Concern or Complaint?

Sometimes your concern or complaint will not be dealt with via the Corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy, examples include:

- an initial request for a service, such as reporting a faulty street light or refuse has not been picked up
- an appeal against a 'properly made' decision made by the Council

- a means to seek change to legislation or 'properly made' policy decision
- decisions in respect of which there is a separate right of appeal or review, eg planning appeals, council tax reviews and via Magistrates court
- an insurance claim against the Council (however a complaint could be made about the process the Council followed in administering the claim)
- comments about the standards of a particular service when the standard provided is at, or above, the published standard
- a means for lobbying groups/organisations to promote a cause
- allegations of financial impropriety, fraud and/or corruption
- items which are a police matter
- complaints about things which are not the responsibility of the Council

Complaints about Social Services; Councillors and Schools are not dealt with via this Policy – please see the Summary document for details.

Stage 1 - Informal resolution

If possible, we believe it's best to deal with things straight away rather than try to sort them out later. If you have a concern, raise it with the person you're dealing with. He or she will try to resolve it for you there and then. If there are any lessons to learn from addressing your concern then the member of staff will draw them to our attention. If the member of staff can't help, they will explain why and you can then ask for a formal investigation.

How to express concern or complain formally – Stage 2

You can express your concern in any of the ways below.

- You can use the form on our website at: www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk.
- You can get in touch with our central contact point on: 01446 70011 if you want to make your complaint over the phone.
- You can e-mail us at: contactonevale@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk.
- You can ask for a copy of our concern and complaint form from the person with whom you are already in contact. Tell them that you want us to deal with your concern formally.
- You can speak to a receptionist at our main receptions and libraries.

- You can write a letter to us at the following address: Customer Complaints Officer, Customer Relations, Civic Offices, Holton Road, Barry, CF63 4RU

We aim to have concern and complaint forms available at all of our reception areas and libraries.

Copies of this policy and the complaint form are also available in Welsh and upon request in other languages as well as audio, large print and Braille.

Dealing with your concern

- 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 have a disability.
- 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 12 months. This is because it's 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 give us strong reasons 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, regardless of the circumstances, we will not consider any concerns about matters that took place more than three years ago.)

If you're expressing a concern on behalf of somebody else, we'll 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 organisation e.g. this Council and South Wales Police we will usually work with them to decide who should take a 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 (eg repair contractors), we will look into your complaint ourselves and respond to you. 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.

Stage 2 - Investigation

We will tell you who we have asked to look into your concern or complaint. If your concern is straightforward, we'll usually ask somebody from the specific service to look into it and get back to you. If it is more serious, we may use someone from elsewhere in the authority or in certain cases we may appoint an independent investigator.

We will set out to you our understanding of your concerns and ask you to confirm that we've got it right. We'll also ask you to tell us what outcome you're hoping for.

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

If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you're 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.

We will aim to resolve concerns as quickly as possible and expect to deal with the vast majority 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.

The person who is investigating your concerns will aim first to establish the facts. The extent of this investigation will depend on how complex and how serious the issues you have raised are.

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

We'll look at relevant evidence. This could include files, notes of conversations, letters, e-mails or whatever may be relevant to your particular concern. If necessary, we'll talk to the staff or others involved and look at our policies and any legal entitlement and guidance.

Outcome

If we formally investigate your complaint, we will let you know what we have found in keeping with your preferred form of communication. This could be by letter or e-mail, for example. If necessary, we will produce a longer report. We'll explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

If we find that we got it wrong, we'll tell you what and why it happened. We'll show how the mistake affected you.

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

If we got it wrong, we will always apologise.

Putting Things Right

If we didn't provide a service you should have had, we'll aim to provide it now if that's possible. If we didn't do something well, we'll aim to put it right. If you have lost out as a result of a mistake on our part we'll try to put you back in the position you would have been in if we'd got it right.

If you had to pay for a service yourself, when you should have had one from us, or if you were entitled to funding you did not receive we will usually aim to make good what you have lost.

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 body providing it
- have been disadvantaged personally by a service failure or have been treated unfairly.

The Ombudsman 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
- e-mail: ask@ombudsman-wales.org.uk
- the website: www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk
- writing to: Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed CF35 5LJ

There are also other organisations that consider complaints. We can advise you about such organisations. For example, the Welsh Language Commissioner about services in Welsh. You can contact the Commissioner by:

- phone: 0845 6033 221
- e-mail: post@welshlanguagecommissioner.org
- writing to: The Welsh Language Commissioner, Market Chambers, 5-7 St Mary Street, Cardiff CF10 1AT

Learning lessons

We take your concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we've made. Our corporate management team considers a summary of all complaints six monthly, as well as details of any serious complaints. Our Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees also consider our response to complaints annually.

Where there is a need for change, we will set out what we will do; who will do it and when we plan to do it by and this will be included in our response to you.

What if I 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 eg CHC advocacy services, Age Concern, Shelter etc who may be able to assist you.

If you are someone under the age of 18, you can also use this concerns and complaints policy. If you need help to do so, you can speak to someone on the Meic Helpline (phone 080880 23456, www.meiccymru.org) or contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Contact details are:

01792 765600 (South Wales)

01492 523333 (North Wales)

post@childcomwales.org.uk

www.childcomwales.org.uk

South Wales Office:

Oystermouth House
Phoenix Way
Swansea
SA7 9FS

North Wales Office:

Penrhos Manor
Oak Drive
Colwyn Bay
Conwy
LL29 7YW

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 where we find that someone's actions are unacceptable.

Concern/Complaint form

A: Your details

Surname	Forename(s):	Title: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/if other please state:
Address and postcode:		
Your e-mail address:		
Daytime contact phone number		
Mobile number:		

Please state by which of the above methods 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.

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. Please note that before taking forward the complaint we will need to satisfy ourselves that you have the authority to act on behalf of the person concerned.

B: Making a complaint on behalf of someone else: Their details

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

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 6 months since you became first aware of the problem, please give the reason 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:

Customer Complaints Officer, Customer Relations, Civic Offices, Holton Road, Barry, CF63 4RU