

# Complaints Handling Procedure

## Customer guide

Updated December 2023



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.

### **Alan Russell**

*Chief Executive*

*Renfrewshire Council*

## Our Principles

### **1. Transparency**

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

### **2. Accessibility**

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

### **3. Mutual respect**

We treat everyone presenting a complaint or feedback 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 response and twenty days for investigation.

### **8. Continuous improvement**

We actively use complaints for learning and continuous improvement.

## **Renfrewshire Council is committed to providing high-quality customer services.**

We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.

If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us.

This leaflet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.

## **What is a complaint?**

We regard a complaint as 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:

- failure or refusal to provide a service
- inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
- dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual
- failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
- failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (except where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves); or
- disagreement with a decision, (except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector).

Your complaint may involve more than one council service or be about someone working on our behalf.

## What can't I complain about?

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

- a routine first-time request for a service, such as reporting a missed bin
- a first-time report of a fault (for example, potholes or street lighting)
- a request for compensation only
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (if you decide to take legal action, you should let us know as the complaint cannot then be considered under this process)
- disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision (such as for freedom of information and subject access requests), or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector – such as council tax, planning, or a parking ticket appeal
- disagreement with decisions or conditions that are based upon social work recommendations, but determined by a court or other statutory body, for example decisions made by a children's panel, parole board or mental health tribunal
- a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts
- a grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment
- a concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as a whistleblowing concern)
- a concern about a child or an adult's safety
- an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
- abuse or unsubstantiated allegations about our organisation or staff where such actions would be covered by our Unacceptable Behaviour policy; or
- a concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (**except** where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf).

If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

## **Who can complain?**

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser).

If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will normally need their written consent. Please also read the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** on page 8.

## **How do I complain?**

You can complain in person at any of our offices, by phone, in writing, by email or via our website:

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

It is easier for us to address 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. Then they can try to resolve the issue.

When complaining, please tell us:

- your full name and address;
- as much as you can about the complaint;
- what has gone wrong; and
- what outcome you are seeking.

## **Our contact details**

You can complete the online form at:

[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

## **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 response

We aim to respond to complaints quickly (where possible, when you first tell us about the issue). This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, or immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will give you our decision at frontline response in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to investigation stage. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at investigation stage either:

- within six months of the event you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
- within two months of receiving your frontline response (if this is later).

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

#### Investigation

Investigation deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at frontline response and those that clearly require investigation, and so are handled directly at this stage. If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at frontline response, you can ask us to handle it at investigation instead.

During this stage:

- we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days;
- we will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for;
- we will try to resolve your complaint where we can (in some cases we may suggest using an alternative complaint resolution approach, such as mediation); and
- where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within 20 working days.

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



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

After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO is an independent organisation that investigates complaints. It is not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations which can help with advocacy or support).

You can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint if:

- you have gone all the way through the council's complaints handling procedure
- it is less than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about; and
- the matter has not been (and is not being) considered in court.

The SPSO will ask you to complete a complaint form and provide a copy of our final response to your complaint. You can do this online at [www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form](http://www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form) or or by telephone on Freephone 0800 377 7330.

You may wish to get an independent support or advocacy organisation to help progress your complaint.

See the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** on page 8.

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

SPSO  
Bridgeside House  
99 McDonald Road  
Edinburgh EH7 4NS

(if you would like to visit in person, you must make an appointment first)

### **By post:**

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

**Freephone:** 0800 377 7330

**Website:** [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)

**There are some complaints that have an alternative route for independent review. We will tell you how to seek independent review when we give you our final response on your complaint.**

## 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 them.

The Care Inspectorate has several offices around Scotland. Please refer to:

[www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/our-offices](http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/our-offices)

## 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 area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance:

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

Mansfield Traquair Centre

15 Mansfield Place

Edinburgh, EH3 6BB

**Telephone:** 0131 510 9410

**Website:** [www.siaa.org.uk](http://www.siaa.org.uk)

You can find out about advisers in your area through Citizens Advice Scotland:

Citizens Advice Scotland

**Website:** [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk) or check your phone book for your local citizens advice bureau.

We are committed to making our service 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 you access and use our services.

## Quick guide to our complaints procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing. We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress. If your complaint relates to a case service you can choose to complain to us or to the Care Inspectorate.



## **Our contact details**

You can complete the online form at:

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**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).