

Northumberland County Council – Complaints process flow chart

All complaints – Informal resolution

Our staff are here to help. On some occasions it is possible to resolve your concerns directly with the relevant service without the need to progress through to the relevant complaint process. Where possible, an informal resolution can be pursued. If the issue can be dealt with informally within 24 hours of receipt and you are satisfied with the outcome, an informal resolution will be recorded rather than progressing through one of the following formal complaint processes.

Corporate Complaints and Housing

(all services excluding Adults and Children's Social Care)

Stage 1

- Where informal resolution is not possible, a formal complaint will be logged and **acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt**.
- Services will be directly responsible for seeking resolution to any issue responding directly to customers and a response should be provided within **15 working days**.
- Each case is reviewed on an individual basis and complex or serious complaints may need an extended timeframe. This will be discussed with you at the time

Stage 2

- We would expect the relevant service area to have issued a formal stage 1 response before the concern can be escalated to stage 2.
- If you are not satisfied with the stage 1 response, you can request a review by making a stage 2 complaint. An appropriately appointed senior officer who has not been previously involved in your complaint will carry out the review.
- When making a stage 2 complaint, please explain why you are dissatisfied and what you expect from the review.
- We aim to respond within **20 working days**.

YES NO

Housing related?

Housing Ombudsman

Customers who remain dissatisfied following completion of our local processes can ask the Housing Ombudsman to review their complaint. The Housing Ombudsman will only investigate a complaint when a final decision has been. They will consider complaints brought to them within 12 months of this final decision. If you take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman after this time, they may not be able to consider your case. The Housing Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about housing association and local authority landlords. It will investigate matters fairly and impartially and is free to use. There are some matters the Housing Ombudsman cannot or will not investigate and they will clearly explain reasons for their decisions. Some complaints may fall outside of the Housing Ombudsman jurisdiction, and they will not be able to investigate if you are a private resident, these cases should be referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Children's Statutory Complaints

Stage 1

- If we cannot find an immediate resolution, a formal complaint will be recorded onto the relevant system and **acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt**. At this point, the Client Relations Team will raise the complaint with the most appropriate person (usually a social work team manager). We will provide a response to the customer within **10 working days**.
- However, this can be **extended to 20 working days** with the complainant's cooperation depending on the issues complexity.

Stage 2

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response provided at stage one, they may request an independent investigation of the issue.
- Investigators independent of the council will undertake a stage two investigation which could take up to **25 working days**. This can be **extended up to 65 working days** depending on the complexity of the issue.
- A report is produced at the conclusion of stage two investigations which is signed off by the Corporate Director of Children's Services. Recommendations made within this report form service improvement initiatives.

Stage 3

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the result of stage 2 investigation, they may request a review of the decision. Complainants are required to raise their request within **20 working days**, at which point an independent review panel is convened within **30 working days** of the request being received.
- Panel findings are to be reported back to the customer within 5 working days, with a final, formal response from the council within **15 working days**

Adults Statutory Complaint

Stage 1

- If we cannot find an immediate resolution, a formal complaint will be recorded in the relevant system and acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt.
- A resolution plan is agreed upon with the complainant, which may be updated during the investigation.
- The plan is appropriate and proportionate to the case's circumstances, considering the risk, seriousness, complexity, and sensitivity of events. A timetable is also agreed upon with the complainant.
- We would expect to respond to straightforward complaints within **10 working days** and usually expect other complaints within **20 working days**, although we make individual decisions based on circumstances.
- The regulations do not set out multiple stages for complaints handling, but some particularly complex or serious complaints may need 'formal investigation' to resolve, which can, in some cases, involve an independent investigator

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

Customers who remain dissatisfied following completion of our local processes can ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) to review their complaint. You usually have up to 12 months to do this, starting from the date you first knew about the matter you complained about. The Ombudsman will normally only consider complaints made within that time but can decide to look at older complaints if there is a good reason to do so. The Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about councils, all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) and some other organisations providing local public services. It investigates matters fairly and impartially and is free to use. There are some matters the Ombudsman cannot or will not investigate. In these cases, it will clearly explain the reason for its decision.