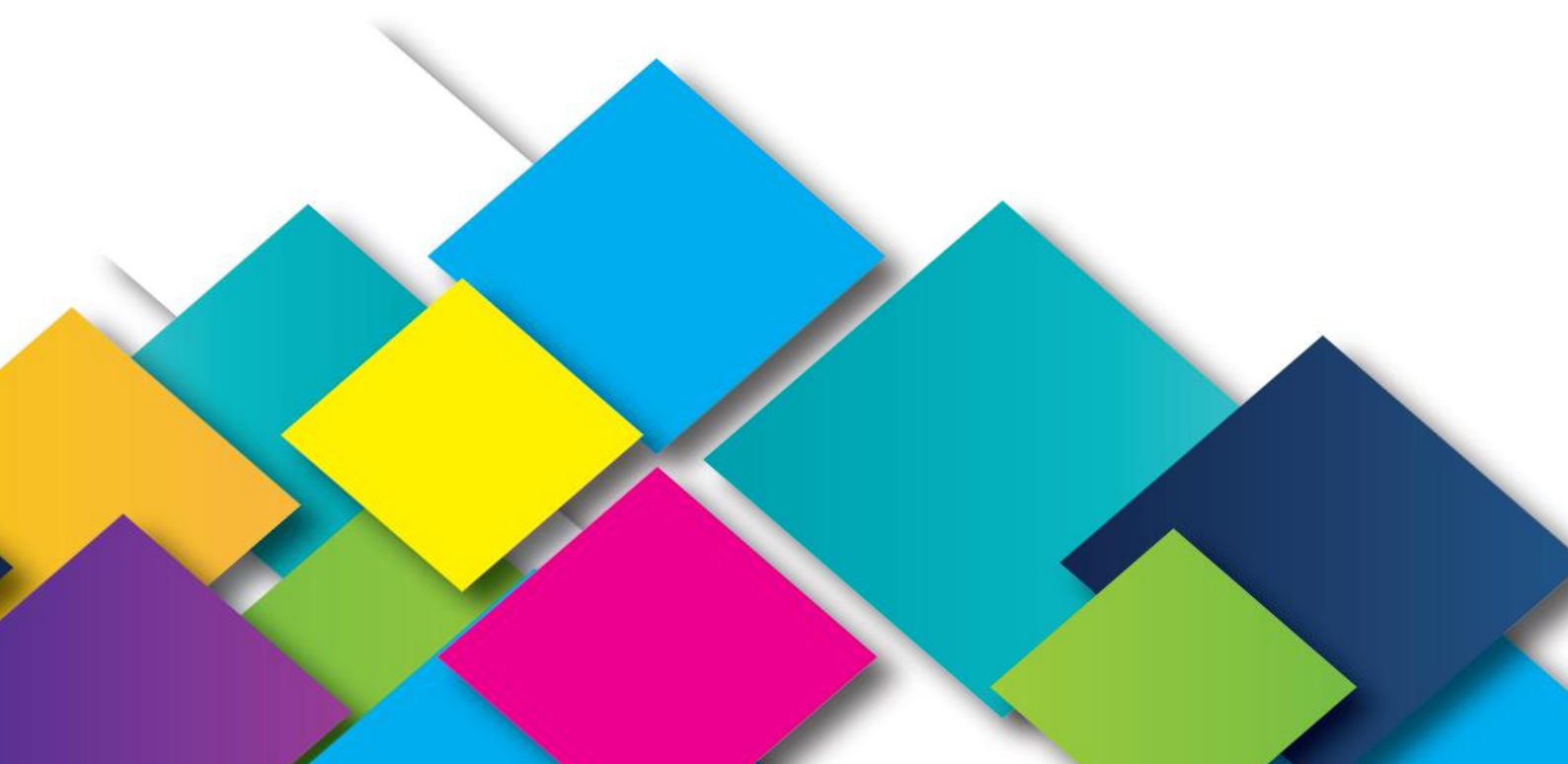




North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



North Ayrshire 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 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 procedures or guidance when delivering services
- failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- conduct, treatment by or attitude of an employee or contractor (**except** where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves)
- disagreement with a decision (**except** where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed by local authorities).

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 cannot handle through our complaint handling procedure. These include:

- a routine first-time request for a service (for example a housing repair)
- 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 Managing Unacceptable Contact 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** below.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person at any of our public facing offices, by phone, in writing, by email or via our online complaint form.

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 staff at the service you are complaining about. They can then try to resolve the issue.

When making your complaint please tell us:

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

How long do I have to make a complaint?

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.

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.

What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint. Our complaints procedure has two stages.

Stage One: 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 Stage One 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 Stage Two. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at Stage Two 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 Stage One response (if this is later).

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

Stage Two: Investigation

Stage Two deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage One and those that clearly require investigation from the outset and are therefore handled directly at this stage. If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at Stage One you can ask us to handle it at Stage Two instead.

When using Stage Two:

- 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
- 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 also tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

What if I'm 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 are an independent organisation that investigates complaints. They are not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you 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 complaint handling procedure and received a Stage Two final response letter
- 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 Stage Two final response letter to your complaint. You can do this online at www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form or call them on Freephone 0800 377 7330.

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO

Bridgeside House

99 McDonald Road

Edinburgh

EH7 4NS

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

Their freepost address is:

FREEPOST SPSO

Freephone: 0800 377 7330
Online contact www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us
Website: 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.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint. See the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** below.

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 how to make a complaint, by contacting them. The Care Inspectorate has several offices around Scotland. Please refer to: <http://www.scswis.com/>

If you have a Social Work complaint please contact:

North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership
5th Floor, West Wing, Cunninghame House, Irvine KA12 8EE

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

Tel: 0131 510 9410 Website: <http://www.siaa.org.uk>

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

Citizens Advice Scotland

Website: <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. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, tell us in person or contact us by using the details below.

Telephone: [01294 310000](tel:01294310000)

Online: www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/complaints

Write: Complaint Team, Information Governance,
Cunninghame House, Irvine, KA12 8EE

Visit: One of our Customer Service Centres in Irvine,
Saltcoats, Largs or Arran

Quick guide to our complaints procedure

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 care service you can choose to complain to us or to the Care Inspectorate.*



Stage One: Frontline response

We will always try to respond to your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage Two.



Stage Two: Investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage One. We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage if it is clear that they need investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days** and confirm the points of complaint to be investigated and what you want to achieve.

We will investigate the complaint and give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days** *unless* there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.



Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint you remain dissatisfied with the decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it. We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final decision letter.

There are some complaints that have an alternative route for independent review so we will tell you what these are when we give you our final decision.