How to complain about Council Services

Corporate Complaints Policy

December 2019*

Bolton Council - Our Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

Bolton Council aims to provide the best possible service to the people and organisations that make up the community of Bolton.

To help us deliver this aim we would like you to tell us what you think of our services.

We are committed to providing high-quality affordable services to all our customers, but there are times when things go wrong, and you are left unhappy or dissatisfied.

This policy describes our procedure for handling complaints.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is a way of letting the Council know that you are not happy with a service.

A complaint may be about delay, lack of response, discourtesy or about the standard of service you have received.

3. How we will deal with your complaint

If you are not happy with a service, then you have the right to complain and be listened to.

We will do all we can to resolve your complaint promptly and effectively.

If you make a complaint, we will:

- Listen to what you have to say.
- Respond to you promptly, ensuring you receive a response to the issues

you raise.

- Provide advice and information about how you can pursue your complaint further should you feel you need to do so.
- Learn from the experience to prevent a reoccurrence of the issue.

Any personal data provided to the council will be managed in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.

4. The Complaint Stages

It is important to us to try and resolve complaints at the point of service delivery and as quickly as possible.

Before making a formal complaint, try to talk the problem over with the person you are dealing with or ask to speak to the manager of the service.

Stage 1

If your complaint cannot be resolved informally you may wish to make a formal complaint. You can do this online, by telephone, in person or in writing. We will contact you within 5 working days to acknowledge receipt and within 10 working days with a full response from the date of acknowledgment. If the complaint is complex and takes longer to investigate we will keep you informed. We will also tell you who to contact if your issue is not resolved.

You should complain to us within 12 months of the issue happening. We will not normally act on any complaint made after a period of 12 months. However, we will consider any exceptional reasons you may give us for not meeting this time limit.

If you submit a Data Protection (Subject Access Requests/ Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Regulations request) at the same time as a complaint relating to the same issue, we will pause the investigation of the complaint and resolve these requests as a priority (there are statutory timescales for these requests).

If you do not wish to complain yourself, with your written permission, someone else can do so on your behalf.

Stage 2

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint response at stage one, you may ask for your complaint to be reconsidered.

To request a stage two review of your complaint you must be able to show:

- There has been a factual error on which the decision was made.
- There has been an oversight on a significant piece of evidence, or the response does not accurately address all the issues that have been
- raised.

This request must be made within 20 working days of the date of the stage one response. A more senior officer will then investigate your complaint, review your stage one response and provide a new response within 20 working days.
If the complaint is complex and takes longer to investigate we will keep you informed. We will also tell you who to contact if your issue is not resolved
This response will be considered the final stage of the procedure and will be endorsed by a senior officer.

Exclusions

There are separate complaints processes for some specific services. These are:

- The Management of Social Care Complaints
- Schools

- Data Protection (Subject Access Requests)/Freedom of Information/ Environmental Information Regulations
- Challenging a Parking Ticket (Penalty Charge Notice)
- Councillors

In addition, the Corporate Complaints Policy does not apply under certain instances including:

- Employee (or, former employees) complaints relating to employment
- issues or disciplinary and grievance process
- Council decisions where there is an existing appeals process
- Matters already subject to legal proceedings
- Insurance claims against the council
- Issues through the council's 'Whistle-blowing' policy

5. How can you complain?

- By using the form on Bolton.gov.uk website (https://www.bolton.gov.uk/complaints)
- By contacting the dedicated Customer Relations line on (01204) 338021
- In writing to Corporate Customer Complaints, Bolton Council, Town Hall,
- Victoria Square, Bolton, BL1 1RU
- In person at a Council building or office

All complaints will be handled in accordance with our Valuing Diversity policy

6. How we will manage your complaint

The Councils Complaints Team are responsible for ensuring that all complaints received by the Council are managed in accordance with this policy.

They will monitor and analyse the department's complaints and recommend changes in processes or service provision where the number of complaints indicates that this is appropriate.

Complaints are recorded in our complaints management system, This data is regularly reviewed to monitor our performance and customer service.

We review:

- target response times
- information is collected accurately
- any 'learning' to improve services

7. Unreasonable persistent complaints

Occasionally customers may pursue a complaint in an unreasonable way which impacts on the council resources and capacity to respond to the complaint effectively.

The council has a Duty of Care responsibility to staff and other service users.

Examples of unreasonable, persistent behaviour include:

- repeatedly refusing to clearly specify the grounds of a complaint
- refusing to accept investigation decisions
- repeatedly making the same/similar complaints
- requesting a response in an unreasonable timescale
- unreasonable, persistent contact with council officers/ contacts and
- requests to various departments at the same time
- abusive behaviour / threats towards staff including shouting at staff
- members
- cyber-bullying staff members
- excessively targeting individual staff members and inappropriately naming
- them in correspondence

Initially, behaviour that matches any of the above, will receive a formal request to stop it with immediate effect. It is expected that the complaint will continue to be addressed in a reasonable manner.

If a complainant is considered to have become unreasonable, and the behaviour continues after the request to stop, they will be referred to the departmental monitoring officer who will convene a panel of officers to determine the action to be taken on any further involvement with the council on this matter. The panel will be composed of senior officers appropriate to the case under review. The monitoring officer will act as the chair of this panel and will oversee the outcome of the case under review.

Depending on the severity of the case, possible outcomes may include:

- an individual advocate to coordinate the response to the complainant
- support for the complainant to help them to complain more effectively
- a referral, single-point of contact for the duration of the complaint
- police referral
- civil action

9. What else you can do

If you are unhappy with the outcome or way in which the Council has investigated your complaint and your complaint was regarding the Council's response to a request for information, you can, under the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations or General Data Protection Regulation (2018), refer your complaint to the Information Commissioner, who will investigate the matter on your behalf.

The Information Commissioner is an independent body, whose purpose is to provide an impartial investigation and resolution of complaints against public bodies, including Bolton Council, regarding requests for information.
The address of the Information Commissioner is:
The Office of the Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF
Tel: 0303 123 1113
www.ico.org.uk

If your complaint is regarding any other matter you may ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to investigate the matter on your behalf.
The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is an independent body, whose purpose is to provide impartial and prompt investigation and resolution of complaints of injustice through maladministration by Local Authorities.
Contact details for the Ombudsman are:
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

www.lgo.org.uk

Or you can contact their advice line on: 0300 061 0614

10. More information on exclusions

We intend, where possible, that all complaints will be dealt with under the procedures outlined above.

There are exclusions due to statutory and legal limitations such as:

- a Town and Country Planning appeal
- a complaint where the customer or the Council has commenced legal
- proceedings or has taken court action, but not cases where a customer has
- simply threatened to start legal proceedings against the Council
- a complaint that has already been heard by a court or tribunal, including the
- Revenue Services Review Board appeal mechanism
- a complaint about social care provision (children and adults) covered by
- statutory procedures (i.e. Section 7, Local Authority Social Services Act 1970)
- including services provided under the Children Act 1989 and the Health and
- Social Care (Community Health Standards) Act 2003.
- Complaints about a school should be addressed to the Headteacher/ Chair of
- Board of Governors
- a school admission or exclusion appeal
- a staff complaint about a personnel matter, including appointments,
- dismissals, pay, pensions and discipline (but not from staff as service users)
- a complaint about the issue of a penalty charge notice by the parking
- enforcement team (except administrative issues) and the recovery process
- thereafter
- a complaint about the refusal of disabled badges for parking exemption
- These exceptions have specific procedures governing complaints and appeals.
- We will let you know what the correct process is if your complaint falls into one of
- the above categories.

A list of the exceptions which fall outside of this policy, is available from/maintained on the “making a complaint” page on the council website. This list also includes contact details for each procedure.

https://www.bolton.gov.uk/complaints/making-complaint

11. Complaints by Councillors and Members of Parliament

This Complaints Procedure is intended for individual citizens to seek redress. Councillors and MPs may bring a formal complaint by acting as their constituent's advocate.

12. Reporting allegation of Fraud or 'whistle-blowing'

If you suspect that either a member of staff or a service user/member of the public is committing any kind of fraud against the Council please call our free and confidential Fraud Hotline on 0800 9178179.

Version Control	Date	Owner
Days to investigate at Stage 1 changed from 20 working days to 10 working days.	17/11/2026	Gemma Quin Complaints Manager
Removed external useful contacts	17/11/2026	Gemma Quin Complaints Manager
Being one requirement should the complainant want to escalate Stage 2 of the complaint process.	17/11/2026	Gemma Quin Complaints Manager