

How to complain to Dartford Borough Council

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Our standards of service

We strive to provide excellent and improving services, recognising that we can always do better. We also want to be open and responsive, listening to your needs and addressing them as quickly as possible.

The nature and level of services depends on the resources available to the Council. The quality of services depends on how well we do our job.

Equality and diversity

We are committed to giving an equal service to all. This means we will not treat you any differently because of your sex, colour, race, nationality, ethnic group, regional or national origin, age, marital status, disability, political or religious belief, sexuality or class.

What can you complain to us about?

Your complaint must be about something specific. You must tell us what you believe we have done wrong, how this has affected you and what you think we should do to put things right.

What can't we investigate?

There are some matters we cannot investigate and/or which may be more appropriate for other organisations to deal with. If you are in doubt, send us your complaint and we will tell you whether we can deal with it. Or you can contact us on 01322 343434 for help and advice. Refer to the end of this leaflet for information on the most commonly raised complaints that are not within the remit of our complaints procedure.

Do you need special help?

We have arrangements to help you if you have difficulty, for example if you have a disability or if English is not your first language. If you need an interpreter, we can arrange this and we can also produce letters and reports in large print (16pt plain text), in Braille or on tape. Please call our Customer Services on 01322 343434. We welcome calls via Typetalk.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymity makes it more difficult for us to properly investigate and understand your complaint, and to provide appropriate responses or redress. We may record and investigate anonymous complaints, but we do encourage names and addresses so we can report back.

When to make a complaint

You should complain to us within 3 months of when you first knew about the matter you are complaining about. If you leave it later, we may not be able to help.

Can your complaint be resolved informally?

We encourage you to first raise your complaint directly and informally with the staff member you have been dealing with. If you have not been dealing with anyone or do not know who to contact about your complaint, you should call our Customer Services on 01322 343434.

We describe this as an informal stage because it is carried out with minimal record keeping, which means that your concerns can be addressed quickly. The aim is to achieve resolution at the earliest stage possible.

If, following this informal approach, you are not satisfied that the problem has been resolved or handled to your satisfaction, you may if you wish, formally invoke the Stages of our complaints procedure.

Notes to help you fill in the complaint form

How to make your formal complaint

We encourage you to make use of the complaint form (attached to this leaflet) but do welcome your contact by telephone, Typetalk, email, letter, in person or online at www.dartford.gov.uk. You can call our Customer Services on 01322 343434 and ask for a complaint form to be sent to you.

Your complaint will normally be dealt with in a simple three stage process. Some complaints or appeals are dealt with differently for legal reasons e.g. fraud, homelessness and benefits. We will let you know when this applies.

What can you expect from us?

Complaints differ widely in nature and complexity and in dealing with your complaint, we will aim to apply a number of basic principles:

- Acknowledgement of your complaint within 7 working days of its receipt by us;
- A reply to your complaint within 15 or 21 working days of its receipt by us and to be kept informed if an investigation takes longer;
- If the matter is not resolved, a full and fair investigation by a named person within an agreed timescale;
- An Ombudsman review if you remain dissatisfied;
- Courtesy and helpfulness at all times;
- Confidentiality – any request for your identity to remain confidential will be respected as far as possible;
- Impartiality – your complaint will be dealt with on its own merits and impartially.

What happens if we agree with your complaint about us?

If we find that we are at fault, we will apologise and consider whether there is anything else we should do.

The three stages of our complaints procedure

Stage One – express your dissatisfaction

Describe your complaint as fully and clearly as you can by telling us which members of staff, contractors or service you have dealt with. You can ask someone to help you with your complaint at any of the Stages of our complaints procedure: this can be the Citizen's Advice Bureau or other organisations (see the list at the end of this leaflet), your local Councillor, or a friend or relative as long as they have your permission to represent you. We will help you to complete the complaint form if you ask us.

It will also be helpful if you send us copies of any letters or documents about your complaint. Please tell us what you'd like us to do to put things right.

Send your complaint to the Corporate Complaints Officer (contact details are at the end of this leaflet). You will receive an acknowledgment within 7 working days of receipt of your complaint – the acknowledgement will name the Service Manager responsible for investigating your complaint, and the likely timescale for response. Our target for replying to complaints at this Stage of our complaints procedure is 15 working days from the date of receipt of your complaint by us. If it is not possible to give you a full reply within this time, we will tell you when you can expect a reply.

When the investigation is complete, the Service Manager will write to you and explain how and why they have come to their conclusions.

If your complaint is upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review finds in your favour), you will receive an apology and where appropriate, be given details of any action that we will take to remedy the situation or at least put things right for the future.

Notes to help you fill in the complaint form

If your complaint is partially upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review finds in your favour, in part), you will receive an apology and explanation and where appropriate, be given details of any action that we will take to remedy the situation or at least put things right for the future.

If your complaint is not upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review does not find in your favour), you will be given an explanation.

You will be given the name and contact details of the Corporate Complaints Officer, and advised what to do next if you are still not satisfied and wish to pursue your complaint under Stage Two.

Stage Two – formal investigation

If you are not satisfied with the response you receive under Stage One, you should write to the Corporate Complaints Officer (contact details are at the end of this leaflet) setting out clearly and in detail why you remain dissatisfied. You may do this by filling in the complaint form (attached to this leaflet), or by letter, fax, email, Typetalk, telephone, or online, at www.dartford.gov.uk

You should make it clear that you want to invoke Stage Two of our complaints procedure. Stage Two may only be invoked if you have exhausted the Stage One process.

You will receive an acknowledgment within 7 working days of receipt of your complaint – the acknowledgement will name the person (an individual independent of the Stage One decision) responsible for considering and reviewing your complaint afresh and the likely timescale. Our target for replying at this stage is 21 working days from the date of receipt by us of your request to invoke Stage Two of the procedure. If it is not possible to give you a full reply within this time, we will tell you when you can expect a reply.

Because we are obliged to keep records of all formal complaints, we will need to agree a detailed, written statement of your complaint with you before embarking on a formal investigation. The person who considers and reviews your complaint under this stage of our complaints procedure will:

- make sure that your complaint is clear;
- check that the Stage One procedure has been completed;
- review, with the person who dealt with your initial approach, the reasons for their response;
- consider the issues afresh for themselves;
- consult the Council's lawyers if there are any doubts about our statutory powers relevant to the issues;
- decide upon their own findings in the light of these considerations; and
- write to you setting out their findings.

The review will produce a detailed response, which will contain sufficient information to show that your complaint has been fully investigated. This will be our final response to you under our complaints procedure.

If your complaint is upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review finds in your favour), you will receive an apology and, where appropriate, be given details of any action that we will take to remedy the situation or at least put things right for the future.

If your complaint is partially upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review finds in your favour, in part), you will receive an apology and explanation and where appropriate, be given details of any action that we will take to remedy the situation or at least put things right for the future.

If your complaint is not upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review does not find in your favour) you will be given an explanation.

Notes to help you fill in the complaint form

You will be given details of your right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman, if you remain dissatisfied.

If your complaint concerns perceived harassment or unfair treatment by us because of your sex, colour, race, nationality, ethnic group, regional or national origin, age, marital status, disability, political or religious belief, sexuality or class, the following bodies are the ultimate authorities to which to complain, following the Stage Two process:

Disability Discrimination

Equality and Human Rights Commission,
FREEPOST MID02164,
Stratford upon Avon CV37 9BR
Tel: 08457 622633
Textphone: 08457 622644
Fax: 08457 778878

Race, Age, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Religion and Belief and Human Rights

Equality and Human Rights Commission
FREEPOST RRLL-GHUX-CTRX,
Arndale House,
Arndale Centre,
Manchester M4 3EQ
Tel: 0845 604 6610
Textphone: 0845 604 6620
Fax: 0845 604 6630

Stage Three – an Ombudsman investigation

We hope to resolve most complaints internally, but if you are not satisfied with the Stage Two response, or if we do not give you an answer within a reasonable time, you can ask the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate your complaint.

Although you can approach the Ombudsman at any time, you must first give us a chance to answer the complaint. The Ombudsman may ask you about what efforts, if any, you have made to resolve your concerns personally and locally with

us and may encourage and assist you to make this effort.

An information leaflet about the Ombudsman's service is available from the Council Offices Civic Centre Home Gardens Dartford Kent DA1 1DR, or from Dartford Library, or call our Customer Services on 01322 343434 or visit www.lgo.org.uk

Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Re-use of Public Sector Information

If you are dissatisfied with our response on your initial application, you can ask for a Stage Two review of our decision. The following bodies are the ultimate authorities to which to complain following the Stage Two process:

Data Protection and Freedom of Information

The Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Tel: 01625 524510
Web: www.ico.gov.uk

Re-use of Information

OPSI Standards Team
Room 1.35 Admiralty Arch, North Side,
The Mall, London SW1A 2WH
Tel: 01603 7230111
Web: www.opsi.gov.uk

Who can help?

We encourage you to raise your complaint directly and informally with the staff member you have been dealing with. If you have not been dealing with anyone or do not know who to contact about your complaint, you should call or visit our Customer Services. For advice on our complaints procedure, contact the Corporate Complaints Officer.

Notes to help you fill in the complaint form

Customer Services

Tel: 01322 343434 (calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes) and Typetalk
Post: Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR

Corporate Complaints Officer

Tel: 01322 343634
Email: complaints.officer@dartford.gov.uk
Post: Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR

The following organisations may assist you in making a complaint

Dartford Citizens' Advice Bureau

Tel: 01322 224686
Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Disability Information Advice Line (DIAL)

Advice tel: 01474 537666
Textphone: 01474 537666
Web: www.dialuk.info/

Local Councillor or MP

Tel: 01322 343434 for information about your local ward Councillor
Web: www.dartford.gov.uk

North West Kent Council for Voluntary Services who will tell you of organisations that offer support

Tel: 01322 291060
Email: enquiries@northwestkentcvs.org.uk

North West Kent Racial Equality Council (Dartford)

if you feel you have been discriminated against because of your race
Tel: 01322 287251
Web: www.nwkrec.com

Examples of complaints that are not within the remit of our complaints procedure

Councillors and Co-opted Members

Complaints about conduct i.e. complaints which allege that Councillors (Borough and Parish/Town Councillors) and Co-opted Members have breached the relevant Code of Conduct (Borough or Parish/Town Council Codes), must be addressed to the Chairman of the Assessment Sub-committee, Member Services Section, Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR.
Tel: 01322 343251 www.dartford.gov.uk

Highways

Complaints about highways (e.g. potholes, broken paving etc) and trees, hedges and verges on highways and street lamps are dealt with by Kent Highways Services, Kent County Council, Invicta House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1XX
Tel: 08458 247800
Email: kent.highwayservices@kent.gov.uk

Homelessness Decisions

There is a two stage process for dealing with disputes about homelessness decisions under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 or the Homelessness Act 2002. The first stage is a review by the Council's Housing Department: the second stage is by applying to the Dartford County Court.

Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit Decisions

There is a two stage process for dealing with complaints about entitlement to Housing or Council Tax Benefits. The first stage is an internal review by the Council's Benefits Department: the second stage is an appeal to the independent Tribunal Appeals Service.

Notes to help you fill in the complaint form

Liability for Council Tax or Business Rates

There is a two stage process for disputing liability for Council Tax or Business Rates. The first stage is by representation to the Council's Council Tax/Business Rates Department: the second stage is by appeal to the Valuation Tribunal.

Notices served under the Housing Acts, Environmental Protection Act, Street Trading and Trading Standards legislation, Building Control and Planning Enforcement

Complaints about Housing Acts Notices are dealt with by applying to the Residential Property Tribunal Service. Complaints against all other Notices are dealt with by applying to the Dartford County Court.

Parking Penalty Charge Notices

Complaints by motorists who believe that they are not liable for a parking ticket (penalty charge notice) are dealt with by the Parking Appeals Service, following representations to the Council's Parking Services Department.

Licensing Decisions

Appeals against licensing decisions are dealt with by Medway Magistrates' Court.

Refusal to grant Planning Permission

Appeals against refusal of planning permission are dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Privacy policy – your personal information

Dartford Borough Council supports the objectives of the Data Protection Act 1998 and is registered as a data processor. If you use our complaints procedure, you are agreeing that we can use any personal information you send us for purposes connected with your complaint. We may also give your personal information to other people and organisations if we have to do so by law or if you have given us permission.

Notes to help you fill in the complaint form

If you or anybody you know requires this or any other Council information in another language, please contact us and we will provide this for you. Braille, audio tape and large print versions of this document are available upon request.

Tel: 01322 343434

Fax: 01322 343422

Email: customer.services@dartford.gov.uk

Calls are welcome via Typetalk

ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੇ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਲਈ ਜਾਂ ਹੋਰ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲਈ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਨੰਬਰ 01322 343610 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ

இந்த ஆவணத்தின் மொழிபெயர்ப்பிற்கு அல்லது மேலதிக தகவல்களுக்கு 01322 343611 க்கு அழையுங்கள்

தமிழ்

W celu uzyskania tłumaczenia tego dokumentu lub dalszych informacji, prosimy o kontakt pod numerem 01322 343612

Polski

Pokud si přejete obdržet překlad tohoto dokumentu nebo další informace, volejte číslo 01322 343613

česky

如欲索取这份文件的中文翻译或有意查询，请致电 01322 343614 联系。

简体中文

Pour une traduction de ce document ou pour plus d'information appeler 01322 343615

Français

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Corporate Complaints Officer, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR
Tel: 01322 343434 Fax: 01322 343422

Email: complaints.officer@dartford.gov.uk Website: www.dartford.gov.uk

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