

Concerns and Complaints Policy

Mumbles Community Council is committed to dealing effectively with any concerns or complaints you may have about our service. We aim to clarify any issues about which you are not sure. If possible, we'll put right any mistakes we may have made. We will provide any service you're entitled to which we have failed to deliver. If we got something wrong, we'll apologise and offer redress if appropriate. We also aim to learn from our mistakes and use the information we gain to improve our services.

When to use this policy

When you express your concerns or complain to us, we will usually respond in the way we explain below. However, sometimes you may have a statutory right of appeal (local authorities may want to add e.g. against a refusal to grant you planning permission or the decision not to give your child a place in a particular school) so, rather than investigate your concern, we will explain to you how you can appeal. Sometimes, you might be concerned about matters that are not decided by us, for example a complaint about one of our councilors, and we will then advise you about how to make your concerns known.

Have you asked us yet?

If you are approaching us for a service for the first time, (e.g. reporting a faulty street light, requesting an appointment etc.) then this policy doesn't apply. You should first give us a chance to respond to your request. If you make a request for a service and then are not happy with our response, you will be able to make your concern known as we describe below.

Informal resolution

If possible, we believe it's best to deal with things straight away rather than try to sort them out later. If you have a concern, raise it with the person you're dealing with. He or she will try to resolve it for you there and then. If there are any lessons to learn from addressing your concern then the member of staff will draw them to our attention. If the member of staff can't help, they will explain why and you can then ask for a formal investigation.

How to express concern or complain formally

You can express your concern in any of the ways below:

- You can ask for a copy of our form from the person with whom you are already in contact. Tell them that you want us to deal with your concern formally
- You can get in touch with our central complaint contact point on 01792 363598
- You can use the form on our website at mumbles.gov.uk
- You can e-mail us at council@mumbles.gov.uk

Dealing with your concern

- We will formally acknowledge your concern within 5 working days and let you know how we intend to deal with it
- We will ask you to tell us how you would like us to communicate with you
- We will deal with all concerns in an open and honest way
- We will make sure that no one is disadvantaged because they have expressed a concern or made a complaint.
- Normally, we will only be able to look at your concerns if you tell us about them within six months. This is because it's better to look into your concerns while the issues are still fresh in everyone's mind.

We may exceptionally be able to look at concerns, which are brought to our attention later than this. However, you will have to give us strong reasons why you have not been able to bring it to our attention earlier and we will need to have sufficient information about the issue to allow us to consider it properly.

If you're expressing a concern on behalf of somebody else, we'll need their agreement to you acting on their behalf.

Investigation

We will tell you whom we have asked to look into your concern or complaint. If your concern is straightforward, the Clerk will usually look into it and get back to you. If it is more serious, or the complaint is about the Clerk, the Chairman of the Council will look into the matter for you.

We will set out to you our understanding of your concerns and ask you to confirm that we've got it right. We'll also ask you to tell us what outcome you're hoping for.

The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the files we hold relevant to your complaint. If you don't want this to happen, it's important that you tell us.

If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you're happy to accept this. For example, where you asked for a service and we see straight away that you should have had it, we will offer to provide the service rather than investigate and produce a report.

We will aim to resolve concerns as quickly as possible and expect to deal with the vast majority within 20 working days. (If appropriate, bodies may wish to insert a shorter timescale here.) If your complaint is more complex, we will:

- Let you know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate
- Tell you how long we expect it to take
- Let you know where we have reached with the investigation, and
- Give you regular updates, including telling you whether any developments might change our original estimate.

The person who is investigating your concerns will aim first to establish the facts. In some instances, we may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. Occasionally, we might suggest mediation to try to resolve disputes.

We'll look at relevant evidence. This could include files, notes of conversations, letters, e-mails or whatever may be relevant to your particular concern. If necessary, we'll talk to the staff or others involved and look at our policies and any legal entitlement and guidance.

Outcome

If we investigate your complaint, we will let you know what we have found in keeping with your preferred form of communication. This could be by letter or e-mail, for example. If necessary, we will produce a longer report. We'll explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

If we find that we got it wrong, we'll tell you what and why it happened. We'll show how the mistake affected you.

If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we'll tell you what it is and how we plan to change things to stop it happening again.

If we got it wrong, we will always apologise.

Redress

If we didn't do something well, we'll aim to put it right.

Ombudsman

If we do not succeed in resolving your complaint, you may complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Ombudsman can look into your complaint if you believe that you personally, or the person on whose behalf you are complaining:

- Have been treated unfairly or received a bad service through some failure on the part of the body providing it

- Have been disadvantaged personally by maladministration or service failure.

The Ombudsman expects you to bring your concerns to our attention first and to give us a chance to put things right. You can contact the Ombudsman by:

- Phone: 0845 601 0987
- E-mail: ask@ombudsman-wales.org.uk
- The website: www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk
- Writing to: Public Services Ombudsman for Wales 1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed CF35 5LJ

Learning lessons

We take your concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we've made. Our Council considers our response to complaints each time we receive one.

Where there is a need for change, we will develop an action plan setting out what we will do, who will do it and when we plan to do it by. We will let you know when changes we've promised have been made.

What we expect from you

In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a concern or a complaint. We do not view behavior as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined. We accept that being persistent can be an advantage.

We believe that all complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, we also consider that our staff have the same rights. We, therefore, expect you to be polite and courteous in your dealings with us. We will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence. We have a separate policy to manage situations where we find that someone's actions are unacceptable.