

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Need to Complain?

The Boards in the Downham Group have a procedure for dealing with complaints from members of the public and others. Despite our best endeavours, we recognise that things might not always meet your expectations. We follow a standard procedure to ensure that we investigate your complaint fully and fairly, and which enables complaints to be dealt with in a consistent way.

We want to hear from you if you are unhappy with our services and want to make a complaint.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action made by the Board or its staff, contractors etc, affecting an individual member of the public or other group or organisation.

The Steps to Follow

- I. Some complaints can be dealt with immediately, and we would like to put things right straight away if possible, rather than involve you in filling out a form and waiting for a response. So your first step if you are not happy with the way we have dealt with you is to go back to the person in the board who handled the matter in the first place.
- II. If you are still not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with, we will then adopt a formal procedure in order to investigate it further. Please fill in the attached form setting out what went wrong and what you think the Board should do to put things right. Please provide as much information about your complaint as possible and include reference numbers, dates of correspondence etc.
- III. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing or by phone to confirm that we have understood your concerns correctly. We will tell you who is dealing with the complaint and how they can be contacted. The person investigating your complaint will always be a senior officer of the Board.
- IV. We will investigate your complaint, and where possible, send a written reply to you within 15 working days of our acknowledgement (which we will send you within **three** working days). If the matter requires further investigation, we will tell you the reason for the delay and when a full reply will be sent.
- V. If you are not satisfied with our reply, please let us know why. If possible, we will investigate further and, where necessary, a committee of Board members will review your concerns. Some issues will take longer to review than others, however we will keep you informed of progress and provide a further reply within 15 working

days of receiving your written request for your complaint to be reviewed. The review by Board members is the final stage of the Board's internal complaints procedure.

The Local Government Ombudsman

If you remain unsatisfied with the way we have dealt with your complaint you may refer it to the Local Government Ombudsman, who works independently to the Board, investigating allegations of maladministration causing injustice to the person who has complained. However, the Ombudsman will usually expect you to have tried to get your complaint settled by the Board first. Any complaint to the Ombudsman must involve more than a disagreement with the Board and needs to show that something went wrong and an injustice was caused.

For example it might be maladministration if the Board:

- made a mistake
- took too long to do something
- did not follow its own rules or the law
- gave you wrong information; or
- did not make a decision in the right way – that is, if it:
 - did not follow the right procedures when making the decision;
 - did not consider all the relevant information; or
 - wrongly considered irrelevant information

You might have been caused an injustice by the Board's maladministration if, for example, you:

- did not get the service or benefit you were entitled to or there was a delay before you got it;
- suffered financial loss; or
- were put to a lot of avoidable expense, trouble or inconvenience, or suffered avoidable uncertainty or stress

The Local Government Ombudsman might not investigate your complaint if they consider that the injustice is only slight, or if the Board has already taken, or is willing to take, satisfactory action to resolve it.

The Local Government Ombudsman has a leaflet called "Complaint to the Council? How to Complain to the Local Government Ombudsman". While the leaflet refers to councils, the same principles apply equally to IDBs. There is also a leaflet on the LGO website entitled "How the Ombudsman will deal with your complaint". You can get a copy of these leaflets by telephoning their Adviceline on 0845 602 1983, or downloading them from their website at www.lgo.org.uk.

