

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

GWYNEDD 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 are entitled to which we have failed to deliver. If we got something wrong, we will apologise and where possible we will try to put things right. 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, (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 and we will then advise you about how to make your concerns known.

Also, this policy does not apply if the matter relates to a Freedom of Information or Data Protection issue. In this circumstance, you should contact the

Information Manager,
Council Offices,
Caernarfon LL55 1SH
Or e-mail - foi@gwynedd.gov.uk

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 does not 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 are 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. Tel them that you want us to deal with your concern formally.
- You can get in touch with our central complaint contact point on 01766 771000 if you want to make your complaint over the phone.
- You can use the form on our website at www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru
- You can e-mail us at complaints@gwynedd.gov.uk
- You can write a letter to us at the following address:

Service Improvement Officer
Corporate Support
Cyngor Gwynedd
Shirehall Street
Caernarfon
Gwynedd LL55 1SH
(01286 679103)
cwynion@gwynedd.gov.uk

We aim to have concern and complaint forms available at all of our service outlets and public areas and also at appropriate locations in the community (e.g. libraries, leisure centres).

Copies of this policy and the complaint form are available in Welsh and English. For large print versions please contact Galw Gwynedd at the above address.

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 and establish whether you have any particular requirements – for example, if you have a disability.
- We will deal with your concern in an open and honest way.
- We will make sure that your dealings with us in the future do not suffer just because you have expressed a concern or make a complaint.

Normally, we will only be able to look at your concerns if you tell us about them within 6 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.

(In any event, regardless of the circumstances, we will not consider any concerns about matters that took place more than three years ago).

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

What if there is more than one body involved?

If your complaint covers more than one body, e.g. a Housing Association and Council re: noise nuisance, we will usually work with them to decide who should take a lead in dealing with your concerns. You will then be given the name of the person responsible for communicating with you while we consider your complaint.

If the complaint is about a body working on our behalf, e.g. repair contractors, you may wish to raise the matter informally with them first. However, if you want to express your concern or complaint formally, we will look into this ourselves and respond to you.

Investigation.

We will tell you who we have asked to look into your concern or complaint. If your concern is straightforward, we will usually ask somebody from the service to look into it and get back to you. If it is more serious, we may use someone from elsewhere in the Council or in certain cases, including those concerning social services where a statutory procedure applies, we may appoint an independent investigator.

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 are hoping for. The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the files we hold relevant to your complaint. If you do not want this to happen, it is important that you tell us.

If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you are 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 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. The extent of this investigation will depend on how complex and how serious the issues you raised are. In complex cases, we will draw up an investigation plan.

In some instances, we may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. Occasionally, we might suggest mediation or another method to try to resolve disputes.

We will 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 formally 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 will explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

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

If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we will 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.

Putting Things Right.

If we didn't provide a service you should have had, we'll aim to provide it now if that is possible. If we didn't do something well, we will aim to put it right. If you have lost out as a result of a mistake on our part we will try to put you back in the position you would have been if we'd got it right.

If you had to pay for a service yourself, when you should have had one from us or if you were entitled to funding you did not receive, we will usually aim to make good what you have lost.

The Ombudsman

If we do not succeed in resolving your complaint, you may complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Ombudsman is independent of all government bodies and 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 a service failure or have been treated unfairly.

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 6010987
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.

There are also other organisations that consider complaints. For example, the Welsh Language Commissioner about services in Welsh. We can advise you about such organisations.

Learning Lessons.

We take your concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we've made. Our senior management team considers a summary of all complaints quarterly as well as details of any serious complaints. Our Cabinet Member also considers our response to complaints regularly and reports as necessary to full Cabinet.

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 is I need help

Our staff will aim to help you make your concerns known to us. If you need extra assistance, we will try to put you in touch with someone who can help.

You can also use this concerns and complaints policy if you are someone under the age of 18. If you need help, you can speak to someone on the Meic Helpline (tel. no. 080880 23456, www.meiccymru.org) or contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Contact details are

Telephone No. 01492 523333

post@childcomwales.org.uk

www.childcom.org.uk

North Wales Office,
Penrhos Manor,
Oak Drive,
COLWYN BAY, LL29 7YW, Conwy.

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 behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined.

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.



CONCERN/COMPLAINT FORM.

A. Your details:

Surname:	Forename(s):	Title: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/ if other, please state.
Address and postcode:		
Your e-mail address		
Daytime contact telephone number		
Mobile number:		

Please state by which of the above methods you would prefer us to contact you:

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Your requirements: if our usual way of dealing with complaints makes it difficult for you to use our service, for example if English or Welsh is not your first language or you need to contact us in a particular way, please tell us so that we can discuss how we might help you.

The person who experienced the problem should normally fill in this form. If you are filling this on behalf of someone else, please fill in Section B. Please note that before taking on the complaint we will need to satisfy ourselves that you have the authority to act on behalf of the person concerned.

B. Making a complaint on behalf of someone else. Their details:

Their name in full:	
Address and postcode:	
What is your relationship to them?	
Why are you making a complaint on their behalf?	

C. About your concern/complaint (Please continue your answers to the following questions on a separate sheet(s) if necessary)

C1	Name of the department/section/service you are complaining about:
C2	What do you think they did wrong, or failed to do?
C3	Describe how you personally have suffered or have been affected.
C4	What do you think should be done to put things right?

C5	When did you first become aware of the problem?
C6	Have you already put your concern to the frontline staff responsible for delivering the service? If so, please give brief details of how and when you did so.
C7	If it is more than 6 months since you became first aware of the problem, please give the reason why you have not complained before now.

If you have any documents to support your concern/complaint, please attach them to this form.

Signature: Date:

When you have completed this form, please send it to :-

Service Improvement Officer
Customer Contact Section
Cyngor Gwynedd
Shirehall Street
Caernarfon
Gwynedd LL55 1SH
(01286 679103)
cwynion@gwynedd.gov.uk