

## **Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy**

We are committed to providing high quality services and support for all our customers. We value all feedback as it allows us to make valuable improvements to our services.

This policy covers all services that are provided by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council, either by us directly or through sub-contractors, contractual partners, and providers of services on our behalf.

### **What is a complaint?**

When raising your concerns with the Councils you do not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such and a complaint submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with our policy as long as you have provided consent for a third party to handle the feedback on your behalf. The Councils will assess the information received and decide the appropriate course of action through conversations with you if the issue cannot be resolved at that moment in time. We review cases on a case-by-case basis, and we will work with you regarding the appropriate stage to register your complaint. At this point the Councils will decide whether it needs to be logged as a stage one or stage two complaint or whether it has been considered a service request.

We will make sure that efforts to resolve your complaint do not obstruct any access to the complaints procedure and will not result in any unreasonable delay. We will not create any extra stages such as a pre-complaint stage. We will acknowledge your complaint and log it within 5 working days of receipt.

The definition of a complaint is:

*'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of actions by the organisation, its own staff or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents'*

What is not considered to be a complaint under this policy?

The following list is not meant to be exhaustive. If the Council is unable to investigate your complaint, then the reasons why will be detailed to you and the relevant appeals process detailed to you.

- Cases where other rights of appeal exist (e.g. against refusal of planning permission, or housing benefit assessment). [Appeals » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#)
- Routine requests for service (e.g. raising a repair request, grass cutting, a missed bin, complaints about neighbours), unless such a request has been dealt with improperly or with undue delay. These should be logged via the online forms or through customer services [Contact us » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#).
- Allegations of fraud (which are dealt with via our fraud reporting service).
- Services we do not deliver (e.g. services completed by Suffolk County Council or Town or Parish Councils, such as Highways [Roads and transport | Suffolk County Council](#), Blue badges [Blue Badge scheme | Suffolk County Council](#)).
- Complaints about Councillors. If your complaint is about a Councillor, please go to: [Making a complaint about a councillor » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#).
- Complaints that are over a year old unless you can provide a statement to detail why the matter could not be raised sooner. In which case we will review this on a case-by-case basis.
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.

- Anonymous complaints, as we are not able to investigate this fully for you.
- Lastly, complaints where they have been or are subject to formal court proceedings. Unless there is evidence of a stamped letter of claim or particulars, the Councils can use the complaints process alongside the pre-action protocol stage. Please refer to the following for further guidance: Guidance on Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims and service complaints - [Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](http://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

The Councils will not unreasonably refuse to escalate your complaint through our complaints procedure however, there are some instances outlined above in which we may not be able to investigate your complaint. The Councils' will demonstrate our reasonings for not escalating your complaint and the reasons for not accepting a complaint align with the section above, "What is not considered to be a complaint?".

If the Councils do not accept your complaint, you will be provided with the following information:

- A closure letter detailing the reasons as to why the Councils' have not accepted your complaint. If your complaint is submitted anonymously, we will not be able to provide you with a response.
- The contact details for the relevant ombudsman, which we will refer you to. These contact details can also be found in this policy below.

### **How to make a complaint or compliment**

In the first instance, it's always best to try to raise the problem by contacting the area your concern relates to via [Contact us » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#). This is for cases of raising a service request with the Councils. If you are unhappy with the service that is provided to you and your attempts to get the problem sorted, you can then raise a complaint using the processes below:

The easiest way to register a complaint is online, by completing our online portal form Contact Us - Babergh and Mid Suffolk Self Service ([achieveservice.com](http://achieveservice.com))

You will receive an instant acknowledgement and case reference number.

Please note if you do not sign up to the system, your complaint will not receive a response as we cannot accept anonymous complaints.

Via our social media sites:

Twitter: @BaberghDistrict @MidSuffolk

Facebook: @BaberghDistrict @midsuffolkdistrictcouncil

If you wish to submit a complaint through via social media, please let us know it's for the attention of compliments, comments and complaints.

### **If you are not online, you can also submit your complaint:**

By letter addressed to: Compliments/Comments and Complaints,  
Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils,  
8 Russell Road,  
Ipswich,  
Suffolk,  
IP1 2BX

If you send a complaint via post, please include your contact information, and allow up to 10 working days to receive an acknowledgement.

By calling 0300 1234 000 and selecting option 7.

Face to face via our customer access points (for more information, please visit: Contact us » Babergh Mid Suffolk).

### **What can you expect once you have submitted a complaint?**

#### **Our promise:**

We will deal with your complaint in a professional, confidential, and fair manner.

On submission of your complaint, you will receive an acknowledgement that your complaint has been received and uploaded to our complaints system.

We will let you know who is investigating your complaint in writing within five working days and we will use this opportunity to set out our understanding of your complaint and the outcomes that you are seeking. We may also follow this up with a phone call to help understand your complaint further and if any feature of your complaint is unclear, we will ask for clarification prior to proceeding with the complaint.

We will respond to your complaint in the timescale described below and keep you as updated as possible throughout the process.

If we make a mistake, we will apologise and put things right where we can.

We will send you your complaint response when the answer to your complaint is known and not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are known and completed. If there are remedial actions that need to take place outside of the complaints process, these will be clearly detailed to you in your final response and the method in which we will update you, will be included in the final response. We will track and action the outstanding actions from your complaint and regular updates will be provided to you.

We will provide you with information during your complaint on how to access the Housing Ombudsman service so you are able to contact them for advice, not only at the end of the complaint. Information on how to contact the Housing Ombudsman can also be found in this policy below, under the heading 'Next Steps'.

We will learn from your feedback and use it to improve services and publish public annual reports to show the lessons learnt and improvements made.

### **Equal Opportunities, Human Rights & Reasonable Adjustments**

The Councils are fully committed to supporting Equal Opportunities and Human Rights. To commit to this:

- We will deal with complaints in an impartial manner, in an objective and professional manner.
- We guarantee that no one will receive adverse or discriminatory treatment as a result of making a complaint.
- We will maintain confidentiality wherever possible. Normally, the identity of complainants will be known only to those who need to consider the complaint and will not be revealed to any other person or made public by the Councils. When this isn't possible because of allegations involving third parties or relevant legislation, we will let the complainant know.
- The information gained from customer complaints will be used to help highlight and eliminate any discriminatory practices and promote equality of opportunity for all of our residents.

We will commit to making reasonable adjustments whilst investigating your complaint. We do not have a predetermined list of reasonable adjustments that we offer, rather that the adjustment will depend on your needs. We will discuss the requirements with you, and we will seek to come to an agreement on what may be reasonable in the circumstances. We will not make any assumptions regarding reasonable adjustments.

We commit to giving everyone equal access to the rights contained in the Human Rights Act, under article 14 (Prohibition of Discrimination). This is regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, political views, or any other personal characteristics. We will treat all of our customers equally when a complaint is made against us.

More information on article 14 can be found here:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights/what-are-human-rights>

### **Our Complaints Process**

Being able to resolve a matter at the point of contact is important and the Councils' aim is to resolve issues for our residents as quickly and simply as possible and to the resident's satisfaction, where possible. This is done by discussing with the resident their issue and whether it can be resolved as a service request. Where an issue that has been raised has not been dealt with to the resident's satisfaction at the point of contact then the formal procedure is started, and the issue is logged as a complaint. This is done within 5 days of the issue being first raised.

Contact from residents pursuing an issue with one of our services will be handled quickly and effectively to obtain the best outcome for our customers. These are not considered complaints and will be handled in accordance with our policies in place that request. Issues resolved in this way will still be logged on our systems for learning purposes. Where substantial further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or it is requested, then the issue then becomes a complaint and will be dealt with in accordance with the our complaints policy.

#### **Stage 1**

The manager or deputy manager of the service the complaint relates to will respond as they will be able to best review the concerns you have raised.

The person dealing with your complaint will contact you within five working days to acknowledge your complaint and let you know who they are and then provide a full response within 10 working days.

The deadline can be extended by a further 10 working days if necessary and If the Councils require longer than 20 working days to respond to your complaint fully, this will be agreed with you in writing. If we cannot agree an extension with you, we will provide the contact details of the necessary ombudsman.

Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these should be incorporated into the stage one response if they are relevant, and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.

If you need any support in raising a complaint or someone raising this on your behalf, please let us know, using the contact methods above.

From the receipt of your stage one complaint response, you will need to raise your stage two complaint within 30 days for matters that have occurred in the last 12 months. The Councils will consider complaints that have not been raised in a timely manner and outside the 30 days in exceptional circumstances.

#### **Stage 2**

If all or part of your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction at stage one, it will be progressed to stage two of our complaints procedure unless an exclusion ground now applies. In instances

where we decline to escalate a complaint we will clearly communicate in writing our reasons for not escalating the complaint as well as the your rights to approach the Ombudsman about its decision.

On receipt of your escalation request, we will set out our understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes that you are seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask you for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.

We will only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the customer.

Our Customer Liaison Officer investigates our stage two complaints, they will not have had any previous involvement of your complaint at stage one.

We will respond to the stage two complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. Exceptionally, we may provide an explanation to you containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This will not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.

Once we have received your stage two complaint, we must confirm the following in writing to you at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stages.
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made.
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right.
- details of any outstanding actions

If you remain dissatisfied with our complaint investigation, you may escalate this to the Housing Ombudsman to investigate further, their contact details are below.

If you are a tenant and you have logged a complaint regarding our responsibilities as a landlord, with the Councils' upholding your complaint and considering that you are due financial recompense, any decisions surrounding this will be made in line with our Housing Compensation Policy.

#### Next Steps:

#### **Escalating your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman**

If you are still unhappy and have been through the first 2 stages, you can ask the ombudsman to review your complaint. The ombudsman is a free, independent service and you can submit your complaint to the relevant ombudsman using the below information:

#### The Local Government Ombudsman:

The Local Government Ombudsman may be contacted at <http://www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/>

Alternatively, you can call on 0300 061 0614

#### The Housing Ombudsman:

From the 1st October 2022, tenants are no longer required to contact a designated person regarding their complaint prior to escalating to the Housing Ombudsman.

If you remain dissatisfied with the complaint response you have been provided, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman directly and they may be able to investigate the review of your complaint. The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

- Online complaint form: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/)
- Phone: 0300 111 3000

- Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- Postal address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

## **Unreasonable Behaviour**

The Councils have an Unreasonable and Persistent Complainer Policy. This policy sets out the process for designating an unreasonably persistent complainant and the processes of appeal. The Councils define an unreasonably persistent complainer in line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's definition, which is :

*“Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are those complainants who, because of the nature of frequency of their contacts with the organisation, hinder the organisation's consideration of their, or other people's, complaints.”*

The Unreasonable and Persistent Policy can be found on our website here: [BMSDC Unreasonable and Persistent Policy](#)

## **Make a Compliment or Comment**

### **Make a compliment:**

All compliments will be submitted to a panel for an annual customer service award to recognise the following:

- Outstanding contribution to customer services from an individual
- Outstanding contribution to customer services from a team

The panel will include the corporate manager for customer operations, volunteer officers from across the Councils and volunteer residents.

If you would like to be part of this process in the future, please fill out this form here and we will be in touch within 5 working days.

### **Make a comment:**

If you wish to leave a comment, please use the methods on page five.

If you would like us to respond to your comment, please let us know in the body of your comment with your contact details and we will get back to you within 10 working days.

## **Continuous improvement from feedback**

Compliments, comments and complaints are really important in helping us to make improvements to our services and we are committed to learning lessons based on our customer feedback.

Some of the ways we use your compliments, comments and complaints are:

- Presenting quarterly reports to our senior leadership team and councillors. These can be found here [Performance Reporting » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#)
- Publishing annual ombudsman reports and annual lessons learnt reports on our compliments, comments, and complaints pages.
- Using trends to identify opportunities for process improvement.

We always want to hear from you regarding your experience of our compliments, comments and complaints process and work with you to co-design improvements to our services.

If you wish to be involved in customer feedback panels, to help shape our improvement work please fill in our expression of interest form here.

## **How we use your information and retention guidelines:**

All feedback is dealt with in the strictest of confidence and any personal information is stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

This means that your information will only be shared with the relevant professionals to effectively investigate and respond to your complaint.

To find out more about GDPR and our privacy policy please visit [Data Protection Act » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#) and [Privacy Policy » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#).

As part of our public sector equality duty and our desire to ensure we provide fair and consistent services for all we would be grateful if you could take the time to tell us a bit more about you. This will help us to consider how we improve services moving forwards. You will receive a link to the customer satisfaction survey when we provide a response to your complaint. The survey should not take any longer than 5 minutes to complete and we will be grateful for any feedback received.

**Retention guidelines:**

We will review and destroy all information after the closure of a complaint after two years.