

GLENIFFER HIGH SCHOOL

Complaints

Procedures

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

A complaints handling procedure has a dual purpose. Firstly, it should re-assure the public that their views are taken seriously and that their comments and complaints will be dealt with efficiently and in a fair manner. Secondly, it should ensure that certain standards are maintained across education services. The view of the public should be encouraged – complaints handling procedures should not exist in isolation. They must be one of a part of an overall communication strategy aimed at encouraging two way dialogue with the public. The standards of the Council are set out in its Value Statement. In particular, treating our customers with fairness and respect, aiming to be the best and listening and communicating are relevant.

Principles of a Complaints System

The Citizen's Charter Complaints Taskforce outlined principles and a checklist that they felt could be used to assess the effectiveness of a customer complaints procedure. The principles that they suggest can usefully be adopted when considering how the Council's complaints system should operate

These principles are to

- Be easily accessible and well publicised
- Be simple to understand and use
- Allow speedy handling, with established time limits for action
- Keep people informed of progress
- Ensure a full and fair investigation
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Address all points at issue
- Provide an effective response and appropriate redress
- Provide information to management so that services can be improved

Definition of a Complaint

The definition of what constitutes a complaint is very important of the procedure is to work properly and should be agreed corporately. The definition of a complaint offered by the Local Government Ombudsman clearly states that a complaint must allege failure on the Council's part to adhere to its own policies and practices and is one that could be usefully applied.

"A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however mad, which alleges failure on the part of the Council to perform a function and provide a service in line with stated Council Practices and Policies".

This would also include unreasonable delay and incompetence

Council Values

Complaints like any other form of Council business should be dealt with in accordance with the values of the Council as will be outlined in the Corporate Plans.

Specifically, this means that all times complaints should be treated with fairness and respect and complaints should be dealt with objectively.

Procedures

In the initial stages complaints should be made to the establishment against which the complaint is made. Approach should only be made to education services when the customer isn't satisfied with the response of the educational establishment. This is in terms of the spirit of decentralisation of service delivery whereby complaints should be dealt with as close as possible to the original point of contact.

Each school should develop a written policy on handling complaints. This policy should be in accordance with the procedures of the Council regarding complaints.

Schools should keep a log of complaints. This should include a cumulative reference number, the name of the person making the complaint, details of the incident, the date the complaint is made, the outcome and any subsequent referral to education services. A senior member of staff should monitor complaints and analyse them at the end of each term.

Complaints to Education Services

Complaints to education services should only be handled by education services after the complaint had been made to the appropriate head of establishment. The only exception to this rule should be when the complaint is against the head teacher.

Education services has a system of duty officers always on duty to respond to incidents and complaints. A pro-forma is used to record internal incidents reported to education services and the duty officer will inform the appropriate principal officer, within whose remit the issue falls, to allow a follow-up to the initial response by the duty officer.

Categories

It is important that complaints are categorised properly in accordance with the council's procedures.

1. Stage one – informal complaints by telephone

The principal officer should try to resolve the complaint as quickly as possible by making contact with the head of establishment to obtain appropriate information. If the person is not satisfied they should be asked if they wish to make a formal complaint (written).

Where a formal complaint is received over the telephone a complaints' form should be completed and a copy sent to the caller within 3 working days.

2. Stage two – formal complaints (written)

A written complaint should be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days (sample letter attached). Personal callers should be asked to complete a complaints' form (attached) if they have not already done so. Complainants should be given a copy of the complaints form. A target response time is normally within 10 days of the acknowledgement being sent out. If the deadline cannot be met a letter should go out advising when a fully reply will be provided. This form demonstrates how clear and accurate information will be maintained on each complaint together with a record of who has been involved, decisions/actions taken and why.

3. Stage three – appeal

If the complainant remains dissatisfied he/she should be invited to write to the director of education. If the director has been handling the complaint, they should go to the chief executive.

If the complaint involves more than one department the customer service officer of the most appropriate department should monitor the complaint.

Departmental Responsibilities

Establishment of simple and accessible departmental procedures which

- Are easy to understand
- Allow handling within the established time limits
- Keep people informed
- Ensure a full and fair investigation
- Respect confidentiality
- Address all points at issue
- Provide information to management
- Provide an effective response and appropriate redress
- Comply with corporate procedures, goals
- Identify and train a departmental customer services officer

Production and publication of:

- Service standards and pledges
- Department literature outlining departmental procedures which is consistent with and reflects the style of the corporate literature.

Training of all relevant employees to help them:

- Understand the Council's and the department's values and policies
- Deal with the public
- Recognise and deal with complaints

Maintain records which:

- Allow complaints to be tracked fully and accurately
- Allow trends to be identified
- Demonstrate the importance of the complaints' procedure plus its use as a gauge of customer satisfaction and an indicator of performance.

Monitoring

All educational establishments should keep records, total these and analyse the end of each term (4 times per year). This analysis should include the number of complaints received, the response times and the number of stage two or three complaints. Each educational establishment should return the analysis to education services at the end of each term. These returns will be collated with complaints handled by education services and will be analysed by the management team. An annual return will be made to the policy and performance sub-committee.

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL : EDUCATION SERVICES

COMPLAINT FORM

Name & address of Complainant:		Telephone No:			
Date:		Time:			
Complaint taken by:					
Method of Complaint:		Letter	Phone	Personal Call	Form
Established Concerned:					
Young Person:					
Address:					
Date of Birth:					
Detail of complaint (when?, where?, who?)					
Signature of person making complaint				Date: _____	

EDUCATION SERVICES USE ONLY					
Refer to:		Principle Officer			
Action taken by: Principal Officer					
Copy sent to complainant on:		Target date for response:	Further correspondence sent on		
If you do not agree with the findings, you can appeal to the Director of Education					

This should be returned to Education Services, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1LE and marked 'Complaint'.

I am still unhappy

If you are still unhappy with the service or with our response then you can put your complaint in writing by:

- Filling in the complaints form overleaf

Or

- Asking a member of staff to record your complaint for you. You will get a copy of your complaint.

Please send completed form to: Education Services, South Building, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1LE. Telephone 0141 842 5663

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 3 working days.

Following investigation a response will be sent to you within a further 10 working days.

Still unhappy

If you are unhappy with the outcome or our response you can write to the Director of Education and Leisure at Education Services, South Building, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1LE

Once again, an acknowledgement will be sent to you within 3 working days of receipt of the form and a detailed reply will be sent to you within a further 10 working days.

You can also contact your local councillor or the local government Ombudsman. However, the Ombudsman will not normally accept your complaint until you have followed the complaints procedure. The address of the Ombudsman is: The Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland, Freepost, Edinburgh, EH2 0DB. Telephone 0131 225 5300.

Please do not try to raise your complaint through the school board as they cannot deal with your complaint.

Education Services is responsible for:

- 18 Pre-5 Establishments
- 52 Primary Schools
- 14 Secondary Schools
- 5 Special Educational Needs Schools
- Community Education Centres

We aim to provide good quality services. Users of the service are generally very pleased with what is provided by teachers, nursery nurses, psychologists, community education workers and clerical and auxiliary staff. We want to hear from you if you feel that we do things well or we need to do better.

We hope that you will not need to complain but sometimes things go wrong and we would like to hear from you as soon as possible so that we can put things right.

If you wish to complain about cleaning, catering and grounds your complaint should be directed to Environmental Services. Complaints regarding buildings should be to the Housing and Property Department. Locations of the customer services officers for these services are detailed in the council complaints leaflet.

Tell Someone

Some people find it difficult to raise a concern when it involves their own children.

In the first instance you can

- Telephone or write to the head of establishment to make an appointment for an informal chat.

Many difficulties can be solved quickly and easily. The head may suggest a solution which will need time to work. If after an agreed period of time you are unhappy, you can use the formal complaints procedure to record your complaint.