

Escalation Procedure

Guidance on expediting delayed responses to complaints

Version 1.0

1. Introduction

1.1 This Procedure is intended to be applied alongside the Council's **Complaints Policy** and sets out the process to be followed by the Complaints Team, when delays to complaints investigations become unacceptable or unreasonable.

1.2 However, this Procedure is not intended to be used in respect of every complaint where a delay in obtaining a response from the relevant Council service occurs.

1.3 The Complaints team must use discretion in relation to each case and whilst this procedure provides broad guidance, it is expected that a case-by-case approach will be followed.

1.4 The process set out in this document is also presented as simple flow diagrams in **Appendix 1**.

2. The responses required by the Complaints Team

2.1 In general, there are three types of response required from Council services:

- a) Confirmation of an appropriate manager from the service concerned, to respond to a Stage 1 complaint;
- b) A completed response to a Stage 1 complaint, which is provided direct to the complainant and copied to the Complaints Team;
- c) Confirmation of an Investigating Officer (IO) for Stage 2 complaints; and
- d) Completion of an investigation and formal response at Stage 2, either in the form of a report or a detailed letter/email.

2.2. The normal timescales allowed for services to provide the different types of responses set out above are:

- **Type a)** – to be provided within 2 working days of receiving the complaint
- **Type b)** – to be provided within 10 working days of receiving the complaint

- **Type c)** – to be provided within 5 working days of receiving the complaint
- **Type d)** – to be provided within 15 working days of receiving the complaint

3. Delays – agreeing an extension

3.1 The following arrangements can apply whether a service has requested an extension or simply not responded. In doing so, the Team should be comfortable with agreeing to the request and deem the reasons appropriate (complexity of the investigation, workload/capacity or absence from work might sometimes mean a that delays occurs).

Type a) – confirming an appropriate manager

3.2 The Complaints Team can agree an extension request, or disregard a delay, of up to a further 3 working days.

Type b) – completing a stage 1 response

3.3 The Complaints Team can agree an extension request, or disregard a delay, of up to a further 5 working days.

3.4 It is imperative that any extension must be agreed between the manager responding to the complaint and the complainant.

Type c) – confirming an IO for Stage 2 complaints

3.5 The Complaints Team is able to agree to an extension of a further 5 working days to identify and appoint an IO.

3.6 Therefore, it should be noted that when such an extension is permitted, whilst a total of 10 working days would then be allowed to complete this part process, the time to conduct an investigation would consequently be reduced.

Type d) - completing and investigation and formal response

3.7 Where the investigation cannot be completed within 15 working days and it is clear that the final deadline of 20 working days cannot be met, an IO can agree an extension with the complainant, but only where there is a justifiable basis for doing so. The IO must also ensure that the Complaints Team is notified of any agreed extension.

4. Escalation

4.1 This section applies solely and specifically to response types c) and d), in relation to Stage 2 complaints.

4.2 Where the Complaints Team encounters any delay beyond the extensions agreed, as set out above, the following escalation can be applied:

Referral of the case to the relevant Head of Service (HoS)

4.3 The method of escalation pursued by the HoS might vary, but could include re-allocating resources where this possible and deemed appropriate.

Referral to Director

4.4 Where a HoS is unable to progress matters, or is actually involved in the complaint in some way, the Complaints Team can escalate the case to the relevant Director.

4.5 The Director (as a member of the Corporate Management Team) will be expected, as the most senior service manager, to make every effort to remove any impediments wherever possible, and ensure the matter is given the attention it deserves.

5. Cross departmental complaints

5.1 Where a complaint relates to matters falling within the responsibilities of more than one Council service/department, the same escalation process will be applied.

5.2 For instance, where two services in different departments are involved, the case may be referred to both relevant HoS and then to the two Directors, as set out above.

6. Reporting

6.1 Cases where undue or unacceptable delays have occurred will be reported to the Corporate Management Team in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy.

7. Equalities statement

7.1 All employees are required to adopt a positive, open and fair approach and ensure the Authority's **Equality and Diversity Policy** is adhered to and applied consistently to all irrespective of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, disability, religion and belief or non-belief, age, sex, gender reassignment, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, marital or civil partnership status.

7.2 In addition, the Welsh Language Standards ask us to 'ensure that the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language' and this principle should be adopted in the application of this procedure.

If you require this document in an alternative format please email complaints@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Escalation Procedure flow diagrams

