

Camden Leaseholders' Forum

Guide: Complaining Effectively

(last updated 23rd June 2015)

This document explains Camden Council's official complaint process; its pros and cons; the best way to get a positive and relatively painless outcome and, in appendices at the end, a step by step guide to submitting a complaint online or an initial fault by telephone. Although written with the perspective of being a Leaseholder, the same process applies for *all* Camden Council's services.

Why would you want to complain to Camden Council?

Example: You've been discussing your issue with your Leaseholder Service Officer from Camden Council for many weeks (if not months) and you don't feel you're getting anywhere. You've told them you're unhappy with the service and you want the matter escalated. Still it seems to make no difference. What can you do?

Answer: Complain! It often works and anything else (using your Councillor or going to the ombudsman) can only start after you have made a formal written complaint.

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About the Complaints Process

Even though you may have used the word “complaint” in your conversations with Camden Council, your query will not get regarded as an official complaint unless you use the official complaints process.

- The complaints process ties up a number of extra resources (people!) and is expensive – all these costs get, eventually, passed back to leaseholders, so it is sensible to see if you can get the issue dealt with without wasting the time of unnecessary layers of management and other staff.
- If you complain too often and the complaints are rejected as unjustified, then you could be labelled as “vexatious” and all your future complaints will simply be ignored!!
- The complaints process is reasonably thorough; this means that the official complaints can take longer to answer than the usual response time.

TIP 1: Before making a complaint you are first advised to approach Contact Camden or Leaseholder Services (as appropriate). These are the areas within Camden Council that are specifically set up to be able to answer your query – if you don’t use these areas, then you are not likely to get a satisfactory response! On a good day these areas can get you answers very quickly; unfortunately we would agree that, for Camden Council, not every day is a good day. Camden Leaseholders’ Forum usually only hears about the issues of bad service, but it would be fair to say that Camden Council deal with 100s of requests every day without incident.

TIP 2: If you are complaining about a housing repair, sometimes it is far quicker and easier to phone up Camden Repairs and give them the original repair number (which they can look up for you, if you don’t already have it) and let them know that the repair hasn’t been carried out effectively. They can immediately re-open the job and get investigating. Under Camden’s “Right First Time” repairs procedure, the amount of re-opened repairs do get logged and noticed (although this wouldn’t count as an official complaint). If there is no repair number, then it means the job was not logged on the system properly in the first place, which is probably why it has not been done!

Complaining effectively

Regardless of how frustrated you are, having come to this point in time where you feel you have been banging your head against a brick wall, the important thing to do is to take a step back and try and view your issue without emotion(!)

The Complaints Officer that deals with your complaint will have no idea what you are talking about, so you will have to explain everything – the better you write in to explain your situation, the better the officer will understand the issue and where you are coming from. You will need to explain:

- What you asked
- What happened
- What you are trying to achieve

1. Writing a history of the issue can be helpful. Sometimes, at this point, you may realise that what you asked and what you are trying to achieve are slightly different things (or have changed over time) – in that case go back and log a new enquiry! This time you will have more information, be on more solid ground and you might get the information or action you need.
2. When looking at the “What happened” question, you may realise that you don’t have any documentary evidence (photos, times and dates of calls, letters and/or emails, reference numbers that you were given). Again, here what you need to do is go back to the beginning and, if necessary, write or email in from scratch again.

TIP 3: If a council officer calls you to discuss your issue, do have the conversation but ask them to put the pertinent points in writing. Alternatively you can then email the Council Officer concerned and say “Thank you for our conversation. This is what I understand from it: XXX. If you feel that I have misunderstood please do write back to me within the next 10 working days.”

If there is no evidence, then Camden Complaints will dismiss your request. The Complaints department won’t regard the request as a complaint unless you have tried to go through the correct department/route/channel first.

3. If you do have documentary evidence, then you need to summarise it. If your evidence is too lengthy then your complaint may not be understood or a vital sentence may be missed!

Usually a page or two is enough for all of this; if you have an entire email trail, do feel free to refer to it, or include it as an appendix, but if you want to increase your chance of success, overloading a Complaints Officer with too much paper won’t help them get to the root cause of the problem and may just take up more time as they fail to understand the matter at hand. You can always include a line such as “More documentary evidence is available should you want it.”

4. Be reasonable and practical about what you want to achieve! Camden Council have set legal responsibilities (which they are obliged to meet) but other activities can be at their discretion.

5. If you do not think that Camden Council has resolved your issue then other options include: raising the issue with your local [councillor](#), the [First Tier Tribunal \(Property Chamber - Residential Property\)](#) or the [Local Government Ombudsman](#). We do not investigate individual complaints – please see the “[About Us](#)” section on our website for more details about our work.

Lastly

10 working days is generally agreed to be a reasonable time period for expecting a response from Camden Council on most topics. If you write in to Camden Council, do specify that you expect to hear from them within 10 working days (or otherwise ask them when they will be able to get back to you with an update) – this ensures that there are no misunderstands and expectations have been set on both sides. If a party (e.g. the Council) takes more than the agreed time, then going down the official Complaints route (after that) does tend to elicit a much better response!

Appendix 1 – About Camden Leaseholders’ Forum

We are a volunteer group representing all the leaseholders in Camden Council properties and freeholders paying service charges to Camden Council. We scrutinise Camden Council proposals, examine working practices and lobby on behalf of leaseholders to Camden Council.

More information is available at <http://www.leaseholdersforum.org.uk>

If you know of anyone who would like to receive regular updates from us, please direct them to <http://www.leaseholdersforum.org.uk/mailling-list> where they can sign up. Subscribers can also adjust preferences by clicking on the link at the bottom of any email we send.

Appendix 2 – How to use the online complaints form

TIP: Read this entire page before submitting your complaint online. It will make your life easier!

1. Read the first two pages of this document.
2. Prepare all your summary in advance and save it as a Word file (or similar). If you wish to also send in a timeline, or more detailed evidence or both, prepare these as a Word document, PDF file or scanned image (but only in a popular format such as JPG) in advance and have them available on your computer.
3. Go to <http://www.camden.gov.uk/complaint> and then click “Make a complaint” further down the page
4. Page 1 is mainly about contact details.
 - The complaint number is at the top where it says “Form reference” – this should come in useful should you ever want to speak to Camden Council and chase the progress of your complaint
 - Put in your contact details as this will enable the Complaints Officer to contact you quickly and easily, potentially speeding up the handling of the complaint.
 - Most Leaseholder enquiries belong to “Directorate: Housing and Community Care”
 - In the “Your complaint is” box at the bottom, just put the summary of the issue – copy and paste it from your pre-prepared Word document. If you have used formatting and feel that this would make things easier for the Complaint Officer to understand, instead include a one or two sentence summary and write “Please see attached file which is the full summary of this complaint”.

Complaints
Form reference: 8500077

Timing out
Although the form allows 30 minutes for completion, we understand that you may need more time, so you may want to click the back button on your browser and prepare the text of your complaint in a Word or other text document, then return to this form afresh. This will prevent the form timing out and you losing your data. You can cut and paste directly into the form.

Items marked with an asterisk (*) must be completed.

Title

Forename 1

Forename 2

Forename 3

Surname*

Any other name you may be known by

Address lookup

Address*

Town

County

Postcode

Email address

Phone number Ext.

Which directorate are you complaining about:

Your complaint is:*

5. Page 2 is just for attaching documents (such as the summary, if in word format, or any other scanned documentary evidence).

- Each file must be attached one at a time.
- Press browse and file the file on your PC, then click “open”/”ok” (or something similar)
- Once you have found your file click “upload”
- Each file must be attached one at a time
- Click “Proceed”



Complaints

Form reference: 8500077 | Test 25 to 44

Supporting documents

Please attach any documents relating to your complaint here. If you are submitting photographic evidence please do so in JPEG format.

You can use commercial software such as Photoshop to convert or reduce the size of your images, or you can use this [free web based service](#)
The maximum filesize we accept is 4000 kb.

Files currently attached

test [Open](#) [Remove](#)

Upload document

Browse to find the file on your computer, then give a brief description of the document. Click on the 'Upload' button to upload your document.

Filename

Description

Page 2 of 2

6. Page 3 is just for confirming that you are ready to file the complaint

- Put in your email address (again), as this ensures that you will receive a copy of the complaint form
- Read through the entire screen, as this shows the details of the complaint that will be submitted (including attached documents)
- When ready scroll to the top and click “Submit Form”



Complaints

Form reference: 8500077 | A 25 to 44

Form about to be sent
Please check the details of your request. Then send it using the button below.

To receive a confirmation email, please enter your address below.

Email address

[<< Back](#) [Submit form](#)

Timing out
[Edit this page](#)

Title	Rt. Hon.
Forename 1	A
Surname	Person
Any other name you may be known by	
Address	Camden
Town	
County	
Postcode	
Email address	
Phone number	
Directorate complaint	Housing and Community Care
Your complaint is	Summary
Parking	
Car registration	
What happens next	Yes
Diversity monitoring	

Please answer the following questions to help us meet the changing needs of our customers. Any information you give us will be used in the strictest confidence. Your information will only be used for statistical purposes.

7. That’s it! You will then get an automated acknowledgement and a fuller response from the person that should have originally dealt with your query or the Complaint Officer within a calendar month.

Appendix 3 – How to log an initial repair/fault by telephone

You may want to log an issue by telephone, well before getting to the “complaints” stage. Here’s how to achieve the best possible result:

1. Call Contact Camden (020 7974 4444) and select the appropriate option from the menu.
2. Describe the problem and the person you are speaking to will give you a reference number.
3. On a notepad (not a bit of scrap paper, that may get lost!), write down:
 - Time
 - Date
 - **Reference number** (this is very important!)
 - Name of the person you are speaking to
 - Brief summary of the issue (so you don’t confuse it with any other issues that may occur!)
 - Ask what will happen – e.g. how long the repair may take. If Contact Camden do not wish to suggest a time period, narrow the range down. e.g. “So, will it take a year”, and then narrow it down: “so will it take less than 6 months?”. This way you will eventually get an approximate idea of how long the issue will take to resolve.

N.B. You can also log an initial enquiry online and then, if nothing appears to be happening, phone Contact Camden with that reference number that you have seen at the end of the online submission process (and hopefully received by email too). When speaking to Contact Camden, quote the reference number and they should be able to look up your issue for you and tell you what the status is.