



Complaints Handling Procedure for the Customer

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5	Governance	23 August 2023	General review and update to the Happy to Translate information in 'Our Contact Details' Section.

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Introduction

Lothian Valuation Joint Board (LVJB) is committed to providing high-quality customer services.

The Assessor and ERO (Electoral Registration Officer) is an independent statutory official who carries out their duties in relation to Rating Valuation, Council Tax and Electoral Registration in line with the appropriate statutory legislation and guidelines.

Separate and distinct appeal systems exist for disagreements regarding entries in the Valuation Roll, Council Tax List or Electoral Register. Appeals against entries in the Roll, List or Register **will not therefore be dealt with as complaints** as these must follow the legislative framework set out in the Acts, as undernoted below in section number 6 on **‘What can’t I complain about’**.

We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services

1. If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us. This policy describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.
2. Senior management will review the information reported on complaints regularly to ensure that any trends or wider issues which may not be obvious from individual complaints are quickly identified and addressed. Where we identify the need for service improvement, we will take appropriate action.

What is a complaint?

3. We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

What can I complain about?

4. You can complain about things like:
 - failure or refusal to provide a service
 - inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
 - dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual
 - failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
 - failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
 - conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff; or
 - disagreement with a decision, (**except** where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process).
5. Your complaint may involve more than one **LVJB** service.

What can’t I complain about?

6. There are some things we can’t deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include:
 - disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision
 - such as freedom of information and subject access requests or;
 - an established appeals process, such as a disagreement against information on council tax, non-domestic rating and the electoral register.
 - a disagreement where a statutory right of appeal, complaint or challenge exists – such as a disagreement, challenge or objection concerning an information notice or its related civil penalty, the valuation roll, the valuation list or the electoral register and its associated absent voter and overseas elector lists.

- a routine first-time request for a service
- a request for compensation only
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal
- a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts.
- a grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment.
- a concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as a whistleblowing concern).
- an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision.
- a concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (except where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf).
- abuse or unsubstantiated allegations about our organisation or staff where such actions would be covered by our [Unacceptable Actions Policy](#)

7. If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

Who can complain?

8. Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you may need their consent. Please also read, section numbers 26 to 29 below on '**Getting help to make your complaint**'.

How do I complain?

9. You can complain in person at our office, by telephone, in writing, by email or via our complaints form on our website.
10. It is easier for us to address complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff at the service you are complaining about. Then they can try to resolve the issue.
11. When complaining, please tell us:
 - your full name and contact details
 - as much as you can about the complaint
 - what has gone wrong; and
 - what outcome you are seeking.

Our contact details

Written complaints should be addressed to:

The Governance Team
Lothian Valuation Joint Board
17A South Gyle Crescent
Edinburgh
EH12 9FL

Email: Complaints@lothian-vjb.gov.uk

Telephone: 0131 344 2500

Online Complaints Contact form: www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk/complaints/

Website: www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk

How long do I have to make a complaint?

12. Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:
- the event you want to complain about; or
 - finding out that you have a reason to complain.
13. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

What happens when I have complained?

14. Our complaints procedure has 2 stages and each stage has timelines. 'Day one' is always the date of receipt of the complaint (or next working day if the complaint is received on a weekend, public holiday or too near to our standard close of business to effectively initiate the handling process).
15. We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint.

Stage 1: Frontline response

16. We aim to respond to complaints quickly (where possible, when you first tell us about the issue). This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, or immediate action to resolve the problem.
17. We will give you our decision at stage 1 in **five working days** or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
18. If there are exceptional circumstances the timescale could be extended to **ten working days**. If your complaint is not answered within ten working days, it will escalate to stage 2.
19. If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to stage 2. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at stage 2 either:
- within six months of the event you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
 - within two months of receiving your stage 1 response (if this is later).
20. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

Stage 2: Investigation

21. Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at stage 1 and those that clearly require investigation, and so are handled directly at this stage. If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at stage 1, you can ask us to handle it at stage 2 instead.
22. When using stage 2:
- we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within **three working days**
 - we will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for
 - we will try to resolve your complaint where we can (in some cases we may suggest using an alternative complaint resolution approach, such as mediation); and
 - where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within **20 working days**.
23. If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

24. After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO are an independent organisation that investigates complaints. They are not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

You can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint if:

- you have gone all the way through the **LVJB's** complaints handling procedure
- it is less than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about; and
- the matter has not been (and is not being) considered in court.

The SPSO will ask you to complete a complaint form and provide a copy of our final response to your complaint. You can do this online at www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form or call them on Freephone 0800 377 7330.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint. See the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** below.

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO
Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh
EH7 4NS
(if you would like to visit in person, you must make an appointment first)

Their freepost address is:

FREEPOST SPSO
Freephone: 0800 377 7330
Online contact www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us
Website: www.spsso.org.uk

25. There are some complaints that have an alternative route for independent review. We will tell you how to seek independent review when we give you our final response on your complaint.

Getting help to make your complaint

26. We understand that you may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.
27. You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance:

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

Telephone: 0131 510 9410 **Website:** <http://www.siaa.org.uk>

28. You can find out about advisers in your area through Citizens Advice Scotland:

Citizens Advice Scotland

Website: <http://www.cas.org.uk> or check your phone book for your local citizens advice bureau.

29. We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille please see section 30 below for 'Our contact details'.

Our contact details

30. Please contact us by the following means:

In writing to:

The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Lothian Valuation Joint Board
17A South Gyle Crescent
Edinburgh
EH12 9FL

Email: enquiries@lothian-vjb.gov.uk

Telephone our Customer Services Team: 0131 344 2500

Online Contact form: www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk/contact/

Website: www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk



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QUICK GUIDE TO OUR COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Complaints procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by telephone, in writing or by email.

We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.



Stage 1: Frontline response

We will always try to respond to your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can.

If there are exceptional circumstances the timescale could be extended to **ten working days**. If your complaint is not answered within ten working days, it will escalate to stage 2.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at stage 2.



Stage 2: Investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at stage 1.

We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they need investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**.

We will confirm the points of complaint to be investigated and what you want to achieve.

We will investigate the complaint and give you our decision as soon as possible.

This will be after no more than **20 working days** *unless* there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.



Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it.

There are some complaints that have an alternative route for independent review. We will tell you how to seek independent review when we give you our final response on your complaint.

We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final decision.