

## **Somerset Association of Local Councils Ltd Procedure for handling complaints**

### **Introduction**

The Somerset Association of Local Councils recognises that from time to time there may be concerns over the activities of the association, one of the staff, or one of the directors. It is also important to recognise that an enquiry for information or an explanation of an action taken is not necessarily a complaint.

To address issues, the association has adopted a procedure for handling complaints. This procedure allows individuals receiving a service from the association, member councils, or an outside body to have a form of address to the association if they feel they have a complaint or have been unfairly treated in their dealings with the association.

Complaints or matters short of a complaint should be sent by email to [ceo@somerset-alc.org.uk](mailto:ceo@somerset-alc.org.uk)

### **Informal resolution**

Prior to registering a complaint, the person or body concerned is encouraged, where appropriate, to contact the chief executive to seek information or an explanation. The chief executive will normally respond within 5 working days.

The association can only deal with complaints about staff or directors that are related to the responsibilities that they undertake on behalf of the association. Any complaints that relate to activities of individuals acting in a capacity not relating to the work of the association should be referred to the relevant body.

### **Formal Complaints**

Formal complaints should be submitted in writing to the chief executive. However, in very exceptional circumstances a complainant can seek to submit the complaint directly to the chair.

The association will endeavour to respond to any complaint in a timely efficient and effective manner but depending upon the nature of the complaint any investigation that might be required may take more than five working days. If that is the case the complainant will be informed.

If the complaint is from an individual receiving a service from the association or about some other body/person contracted by the association to deliver a service for the association the chief executive officer will investigate the circumstances and respond directly in writing to the complainant. This will normally be within five working days; however, it may take longer if the complaint involves someone outside of the association.

If the complaint is from a member council the person contacting the association should ensure that they have the authorisation, by resolution of that council, to make a formal complaint.

If the complaint is from an outside body, it will in the first instance be dealt with by the chief executive and reported to the chair of the association.

If the complaint is about a member of staff, it will be considered in the first instance by the chief executive as an employment issue and will also report the matter to the chair of the association.

If the complaint is about the chief executive or the company secretary, they will endeavour to respond and also inform the chair of the association of both the complaint and the response. Depending upon the nature of the complaint, the matter may be referred to a staffing committee of the association.

If the complaint is about a director, the chief executive will inform the director and seek a response. The complaint will also be referred to the chair and vice chair of the association, and the chief executive will inform the complainant of the outcome of their consideration of the complaint and response, if any, from the director.

If the complaint is about the chair or vice chair of the association the chief executive will inform the person concerned, however, the complaint will be considered by a committee.

### **Dissatisfaction with the response**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the initial response the following procedure will be adopted.

If the complainant is an individual receiving a service from the association, that person should refer their concern to their member council with all of the relevant information including the response from the association.

If the member council supports the individual, or the outside body wishes to pursue an issue that it has raised itself, the member council/outside body should write to the chief executive with details of their reasons for pursuing the issue. The association will then arrange for the issue to be considered by a committee not previously involved in the matter.

The complainant or a representative of the organisation originating the complaint may be invited to attend part of the meeting to explain the nature of their complaint. Persons mentioned in the complaint will have the opportunity to explain the nature of their actions to the meeting.

The complainant will be notified in writing of outcome of their complaint and the nature of any action taken by the association to address the issue.

The decision of the committee is final.