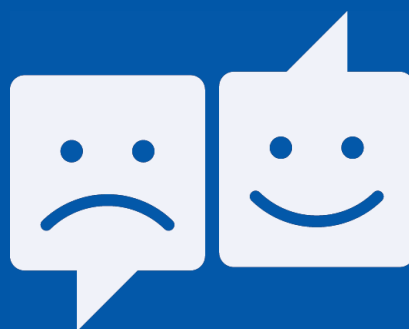




Feedback & Complaints

Crown Prosecution Service Policy Statement



April 2010

Feedback and Complaints Policy - “Responding to you”

The fundamental role and purpose of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is to bring offenders to justice, help reduce both crime and the fear of crime, promote public confidence in the rule of law, and support victims and witnesses. In doing so, we are committed to delivering the highest possible standards of service to the communities we serve.

The purpose of this policy

We are committed to giving individuals directly affected by our service the opportunity to tell us whether or not we have met the standards we have set and to responding to their comments quickly and effectively. We recognise that the public must have confidence that they will be listened to. We will acknowledge and examine any concerns they may have and we will try to put things right as far as possible. This policy aims to ensure that complaints are dealt with sensitively, fairly, and thoroughly, and that all feedback (positive and negative) is properly considered and acted upon.

The scope of the policy

This policy applies to complaints and other feedback. We will treat any expression of dissatisfaction by a member of the public who has been directly involved in the service we have provided as a complaint*. We will deal with complaints in accordance with the procedure set out below.

*A complaint may be made by the individual concerned or on their behalf by a nominated representative, such as a family member, support group or a solicitor. Written permission must be provided for the nominated person to act on behalf of the complainant and to represent their interests.

Any feedback on how we can improve our service will be recorded and used to improve future service.

Simple requests for information will not normally be treated as a complaint or feedback and falls outside of this policy.

Equality of access and treatment

We recognise that if a member of the public wishes to make a complaint, or provide other feedback about the service that they have received from us, they should find it easy to do so. We aim to achieve this through the publication of information about our policy and procedures on our website, in booklets and leaflets, and through the availability of electronic and paper forms to record complaints and feedback. We are committed to ensuring that all users of our service have equal access to this information and the opportunity, where possible, to communicate in the way that suits them best.

Complaints will be treated impartially and in confidence (within our legal obligations). They will also be treated sensitively, recognising individual needs. We may decline, however, to deal with: complaints that are abusive; persistent correspondence; or complaints where our formal complaints procedure has been exhausted.

Dealing with others

We are independent of the police although we work closely with them at all times. Where the complaint appears to relate exclusively to the police or another criminal justice agency we shall provide details of where to address any such complaint. If the complaint relates to the CPS and another agency, we will provide the most comprehensive reply that we can and shall always consider whether it is possible to supply a co-ordinated reply.

Learning and improving

Complaints and feedback provide us with an opportunity to learn more about the service that we are delivering. We will capture and analyse information from the complaints and feedback we receive at both a local and a national level to inform our policies, change our procedures and improve our performance. We will monitor and audit the way this policy operates. We will publish details of our performance annually.

CPS Complaints Handling Procedure

Informal resolution

We recognise that most members of the public who are dissatisfied with the service that we have provided will want someone to look at the problem as quickly as possible. The first step for a complainant is therefore to contact the local office or, if known, the staff member who dealt with the matter. The cause of dissatisfaction may be capable of being resolved immediately and we will aim to do so by providing an explanation and, where appropriate, an apology or some other desired and achievable outcome.

If we are unable to resolve a complaint immediately, we will deal with it in the following way. However, it might be necessary to ask for further information to ensure that the complaint is correctly understood, thoroughly investigated, and that a comprehensive response is provided at each stage of the procedure.

Stage 1

The complaint will be formally recorded and reviewed by a local manager in the office where the complaint originated. If the complaint is about a legal decision this will be the appropriate lawyer manager.

Stage 2

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, any outstanding issues will be reviewed by a more senior manager. For legal decisions, this will usually be the Chief Crown Prosecutor for the Area concerned or the relevant Headquarters Director. For non-legal decisions, this will usually be the Area Business Manager or the relevant Headquarters Director. They will provide a further response within the stated timescale.

Stage 3

Finally, a complaint that remains unresolved may be referred, via the Correspondence Unit at CPS Headquarters, for consideration by the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Chief Executive, or a senior manager nominated on their behalf. It will be for the complainant to set out any outstanding issues and to explain why the complaint should be the subject of a further review. A reply at this stage marks the end of the formal CPS complaints procedure.

The Attorney General's Office

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the way the complaint has been handled by the CPS, the complaint may be referred to the Attorney General's Office. The purpose of such a referral is not to review any legal decisions, but is aimed at ascertaining whether the CPS has correctly followed its complaints procedure.

Please note that the Attorney General's Office will not become involved until the complaints procedure has concluded.

Timescales

We will record and acknowledge complaints at each stage of the formal process as quickly as possible and, in any event, within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint. We aim to deliver a full response as quickly as possible and in any event within 20 working days. Where a complaint is at the third stage of the complaints procedure we aim to respond within 40 working days. We will tell the complainant if we are unable to respond within these timescales.

Complaints should be made as soon as possible and, in any event, within 6 months of the matter complained of. If complainants remain unhappy and wish to escalate their complaint to the next stage of the procedure they should do so within one month of the reply. We will usually decline to deal with complaints that are made outside these timescales.