



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

A GUIDE FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Exmoor National Park Authority pledges to provide services of high quality and to listen to your views and clearly explain its decisions and the reasons for them. This leaflet explains how you can:

- **request an explanation** either for an action taken by or on behalf of the Authority or why the Authority has not taken action on a matter
- **complain** about such an action or lack of action

1.2 This procedure does not apply to explanations or complaints about actions for which the Authority is not responsible.

1.3 The Authority will:

- listen to your views
- clearly explain its policies, decisions and reasons for them
- write letters in clear English
- answer requests and complaints within ten working days of their receipt
- notify you within ten working days of an investigation into a complaint that is going to take longer than ten working days and give a date when a reply may be expected

2. HOW TO REQUEST AN EXPLANATION

2.1 It is recognised that sometimes members of the public may simply want to register a comment or obtain information and do not wish to pursue a formal complaint. The Authority will ensure that, if necessary, appropriate action is taken on comments received.

2.2 The simplest method to request an explanation is to telephone Exmoor House on (01398) 323 665, ascertain the appropriate officer and discuss the matter with him or her. Alternatively you can:

- write: Exmoor National Park Authority,
Exmoor House,
DULVERTON, Somerset TA22 9HL
- email: Info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
- fax: 01398 323 150
- website: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Your request will be forwarded to the appropriate officer and a response will be sent within 10 working days. If you are not satisfied with the explanation you may wish to make a formal complaint as outlined below.

3. HOW TO COMPLAIN

- 3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by any one or more members of the public about the Authority's action or lack of action or about the standard of service. This applies whether the action was taken or the service was provided by the Authority itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Authority.
- 3.2 Please check that you are complaining to the correct organisation. Many complaints to the Authority are about matters for which it is not responsible. A booklet outlining how the Authority works and what services it provides is available from Exmoor House and Visitor Centres.
- 3.3 Complaints about the conduct of Members of the Authority are not handled through this procedure. Such complaints must be reported (the attached complaints form can be used) to the Authority's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer at Exmoor House and the matter will be dealt with either by the Authority's Standards Committee or by the Standards Board.
- 3.4 To enable the Authority to consider a complaint information is required to provide a clear record of what it is felt went wrong and what the Authority should do to put this right. A complaint form is attached and this can be returned by post or completed and returned by email from the Authority's website. The complaint form requests information to monitor equal opportunities but completion is optional.
- 3.5 The identity of a person making a complaint will be made known only to those who need to consider the complaint and will not be revealed to any other person or made public by the Authority. However it may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in some circumstances for example where relevant legislation applies or allegations are made which involve the conduct of third parties.
- 3.6 The Authority operates a three stage complaints procedure to ensure complaints are dealt with impartially, objectively and professionally:
 - **Stage 1:** many complaints can be dealt with quickly and satisfactorily by the "front line" staff who provide the service. This is an opportunity for an informal and quick solution to a complaint. An answer will be given within 10 working days and at the end of this stage complainants will be told what they may do if they remain dissatisfied.
 - **Stage 2:** complex and serious complaints and those where the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, will be considered by the Authority's Complaints Officer, the Head of Corporate Services. An answer will be given within 10 working days and at the end of this stage complainants will be told what they may do if they remain dissatisfied.
 - **Stage 3:** if a complainant is still dissatisfied after Stages 1 and 2 the Chief Executive can be asked to consider the complaint. A response will be given by the Chief Executive within 10 working days.

Some complaints may be complex and take longer than 10 days to deal with properly. In such cases the complainant will be notified within 10 days and given a date when a reply may be expected.

4. THE OMBUDSMAN

- 4.1 If you are still dissatisfied after going through Authority's procedures outlined above, you may complain to the Local Government Ombudsman at the Commission for Local Administration in England. The Ombudsman will not question what the Authority has done simply because you do not agree with its decision. The complaint must be about maladministration, ie that something went wrong procedurally. You may also claim to have suffered injustice as a consequence.
- 4.2 The Ombudsman will expect claimants to have first raised their complaint with the Authority and given the Authority a chance to respond. The Ombudsman would normally allow about 12 weeks for a response but may get involved earlier if there are extenuating circumstances.
- 4.3 An explanatory booklet and a form to make a complaint to the Ombudsman is available from Exmoor House and information is available on our website.

5. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

- 5.1 The Authority wants to resolve problems as soon as possible and, ideally, prevent them from happening again. Your reporting of problems gives the Authority chance to put matters right. If your complaint is upheld:
- you will receive a written apology and an undertaking to prevent recurrence of the problem
 - efforts will be made to remedy the problem and compensation may be offered in appropriate cases

6. NOTES

1. The Chief Executive, and the Head of the Authority's paid staff is Dr Nigel Stone.
2. The Authority's Complaints Officer is Mr. Charles Burrows, Head of Corporate Services.
3. The Authority's Monitoring Officer is Mr John Whitcutt, who also acts as the Authority's Solicitor.

ANYONE WITH IMPAIRED VISION UNABLE TO READ THIS GUIDE SHOULD CONTACT THE HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES AT EXMOOR HOUSE, DULVERTON TA22 9HL OR TELEPHONE: 01398 323665
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