

# **Our Complaints Procedure**

## **Our Commitment**

We are an organisation committed to providing our customers with high quality standards of service. We welcome your comments on the quality of service you received and your suggestions on how we can improve our service.

## **Complaints**

Please tell us if you are unhappy with the quality of our service.

We will look at your complaint in a positive way, dealing with it as quickly as possible. We will fully and fairly investigate your complaint, keep you informed of progress, offer a full explanation of the circumstances and take appropriate action.

We also want to know how we can put things right. We therefore want to learn from our mistakes so that we can improve the quality of the service we provide to you.

Please note this complaints procedure does not include appeals about Departmental decisions nor does it include matters of policy or legislation which are the direct responsibility of the Minister.

## **How you make a complaint**

You can make a complaint in person, by letter, by fax, by e-mail, by telephone or by text-phone. It is important when contacting us, that you provide as much information as possible. This will assist us in investigating your complaint quickly and efficiently.

We will deal with complaints in the following way:

- **Step 1 – Initial complaint**

The first thing you should do is contact the officer with whom you were dealing with or the local manager and give them details of your complaint. They are best placed to deal with your complaint quickly.

You will find contact details on any correspondence issued, or in the Yellow Pages under 'Government Offices', 'Department of Agriculture & Rural Development'.

- **Step 2 – Your complaint has been investigated but you are still not satisfied**

If you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint, you can refer the matter to a senior manager who has not previously been involved in the matter and who will investigate your complaint. We will give you their name and address in our response to your initial complaint.

- **Step 3 – Still not satisfied, what can I do?**

If you feel that the senior manager has not responded to your complaint satisfactorily, you can write to the Permanent Secretary, (or the Chief Executive in the Agencies), who will oversee a further investigation of your complaint. He will be assisted in this by a panel including a person independent from the Department. The reply you receive from the senior manager will tell you whom to contact.

## **How quickly will we deal with your complaint?**

At each step of the process we will endeavour to:

- Acknowledge all written complaints within 3 working days of receipt; and
- Provide a full response to both verbal and written complaints within 15 working days of receipt.  
If it is not possible to provide a full response to you within 15 working days we will let you know why and tell you when you can expect a full response.

## **If we are responsible**

Although we do everything we can to get things right, occasionally we may get things wrong. If this happens, we will:

- Explain what has gone wrong;
- Apologise for our mistake;
- Take appropriate action to put things right.

## **What to do if you are still not satisfied**

If you have received a final reply from the Permanent Secretary or Chief Executive and you remain unhappy, you can ask a Member of the Assembly (MLA) to refer your complaint to The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

The Ombudsman provides a free service and is totally independent of the Government. He has wide legal powers that enable him to investigate complaints against Government Departments and their Agencies.

Usually the Ombudsman will expect you to have used our complaints procedure before he will consider your case.

You can contact the Ombudsman

In writing to:

The Ombudsman,  
Freepost BEL 1478,  
Belfast, BT1 6BR

By calling at:

The Ombudsman's Office,  
Progressive House,  
33 Wellington Place,  
Belfast, BT1 6HN

By telephone: 028 9023 3821 or

Free phone 0800 343424

By fax: 028 9023 4912

By e-mail: [ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk)

Or by visiting their website on

<http://www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk>

## **What to do if you have a complaint**

### **Please tell us about it**

Contact the officer with whom you were Dealing with or the local manager

If you are not happy with their response Write to the senior manager responsible

If you are still not happy write to the DARD Permanent Secretary or Agency Chief Executive

**If you have received a final reply  
And you remain unhappy, you can ask a  
Member of the Assembly (MLA) to  
Refer your complaint to The Assembly  
Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.**

## Contact Details

Department Of Agriculture  
& Rural Development (DARD)  
Headquarters  
Room 513  
Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Belfast BT4 3SB

Telephone No. 028 9052 0100

Help line No. 028 9052 4999

Text-phone No. 028 9052 4420  
(Can only be dialled from  
another text-phone)

Fax No. 028 9052 5546

Email: [dardhelpline@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:dardhelpline@dardni.gov.uk)

Or visit our website -  
<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/>

**This leaflet can be made available in  
other formats and languages on  
request (use contact details above).**

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