

RAISING CONCERNS POLICY

1 MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1.1 Purpose

All of us at one time or another have concerns about what is happening. Usually these concerns are easily resolved. However, when they are about wrongdoing, unlawful conduct, malpractice or risk / dangers to the public or environment, it can be difficult to know what to do.

You may be worried about raising such a concern and may think it is best to keep concerns to yourself, perhaps feeling it's none of your business or that it's only a suspicion.

We encourage members of the public to understand the value of an open and honest reporting culture, where their concerns can be raised and dealt with effectively as part of normal business, leading to strengthened governance.

1.2 What is raising a concern

Raising a concern (commonly known as Whistleblowing) is the action of telling someone in authority, either internally and / or externally about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice. The Council welcomes members of the public raising concerns as an important source of information.

The nature of the issue being raised needs to be considered to ensure that it is dealt with under the appropriate Policy.

There are two 'categories' of issue that members of the public can raise, which will dictate the appropriate Policy for dealing with it. These are:

Concern

When someone raises a concern, they are doing so about danger, illegality or wrongdoing that affects others.

The person raising the concern is usually not directly or personally affected and they are simply trying to alert others who can address the issue.

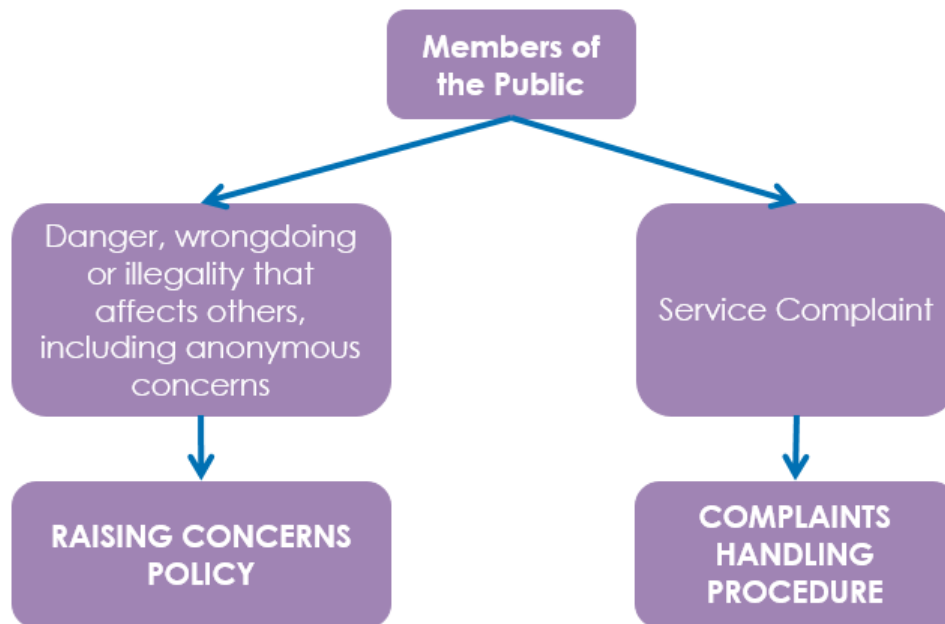
Such concerns will be treated in line with this Raising Concerns Policy.

Complaint

A complaint is when a customer or service user brings a problem to the attention of the Council and has been personally affected by the issue. The complainant is seeking some form of redress or compensation.

Complaints will be treated in line with the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure.

The following diagram provides a summary of the types of issues that may be raised and the relevant Policy which should be applied.



1.3 Should you raise a concern

If you have a concern about wrongdoing, unlawful conduct, malpractice or risk / dangers to the public or environment, we encourage you to raise that concern directly with the Council.

By doing so enables us to take immediate action and to ensure that the issue you raise is addressed as soon as possible.

1.4 How should you raise a concern

To assist you in raising your concern, we have set up the following dedicated contact methods.

Email: concerns@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk
Telephone: 028 9448 1337
Address: Head of Internal Audit
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
Antrim Civic Centre
50 Stiles Way
Antrim
BT41 2UB
(Please mark as 'Private & Confidential')

Alternatively, if your concern is in relation to the proper conduct of public business, value for money or fraud and corruption, and you do not want to raise directly with the Council, you can contact the Northern Ireland Audit Office and raise your concern with them.

Details where you can get further information and contact details for the Northern Ireland Audit Office are:

Website: <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/fraud-and-raising-concerns>
Email: raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk
Telephone: 028 9025 1000
Address: NI Audit Office
106 University Street
Belfast
BT7 1EU

1.5 How we will deal with your concern

The Council will take all concerns raised seriously. We will treat your concern no differently to concerns raised by our employees, contractors and agency staff.

However, it may not be necessary to carry out a formal investigation in each case and we will consider a range of possibilities depending on the nature of each case.

We will:

- Formally acknowledge receipt of your concerns (where possible).
- We will offer you the opportunity to meet with a representative of the Council to fully discuss the issue and provide any evidence you may have.
- We will provide you with an indication of how the matter raised might be progressed.
- We will respect your confidentiality where you have requested us to.
- We will provide an indication of when you might expect feedback, if you wish to receive it.
- We will provide appropriate feedback on resolution of the issues, if you wish to receive it.

1.5.1 On receipt of the concern

Once you have told us your concern, we will look into it and assess initially what action should be taken.

1.5.2 Initial investigation

Once we have received all the information relating to the matter, a report will be prepared for the consideration of the Chief Executive or nominated officer, including recommendations for further action.

Where the decision has been made to take further action, an investigating officer will be appointed.

The initial investigation is essentially a 'fact finding' exercise, to establish whether there is a case to answer. This investigation may need to be carried out under the strictest of confidentiality.

Once this initial investigation has been completed, the investigating officer will report their findings and recommendations to the Chief Executive or nominated officer for consideration.

1.5.3 Further Action

On the strength of the information provided by the investigation, the Chief Executive or nominated officer will decide whether further action is necessary. If the result of the initial investigation is that there is a case to be answered by any individual, the Council's Disciplinary Procedure will be used to take the matter forward. Where it is evident that statutory or legal requirements have been contravened which may result in civil or criminal action, the appropriate authorities will be informed.

1.6 Privacy Notice

We are collecting information from you for the purposes of dealing with your concern. This is in accordance with the lawful basis of Public Task.

Information collected will not be shared. Information will not be transferred to countries outside the EEA. All information collected and processed may be subject to audit.

All information will be held in accordance with the Council's retention and disposal schedule (see <http://www.antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/Council>) and will be disposed of securely when no longer required. You have a number of rights with regard to data we hold on you – for further information see the Information Commissioner's website <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/individual-rights/>

If at any point you believe the information we possess about you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and even have it corrected or deleted. If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter:

Data Protection Officer
Antrim Civic Centre, 50 Stiles Way, Antrim, BT41 2UB
T: 028 94 463113
E: DPO@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response, or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).