

Belfast Harbour Commissioners Complaints Policy and Procedure

Belfast Harbour is Northern Ireland's primary gateway for trade, services and tourism, handling more than two thirds of the imports and exports that come into and out of Northern Ireland by sea.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) is open and responsive to ways in which we can improve how we conduct our business.

The purpose of this procedure is therefore to address complaints and to provide persons and entities who have dealings with BHC with a remedy for administrative failures by BHC. For a complaint to be upheld, it must be shown that there has been such a failure on the part of BHC.

Any complaint as to any action or inaction on the part of BHC or its employees, servants and agents should be submitted within 6 months. It will be treated courteously, promptly and effectively and in accordance with this procedure.

Complaints may be submitted by telephone, post, or e-mail, addressed to:

The Chief Executive
Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Harbour Office
Corporation Square
Belfast BT1 3AL

Telephone: 028 9055 4422
Fax: 028 9055 4411
E-mail: complaintsofficer@belfast-harbour.co.uk

Whilst a complaint may initially be made by telephone, BHC may require confirmation of the complaint in writing.

If the complaint is made on behalf of another person, it should be accompanied by a letter of authorisation.

BHC is committed to ensuring its process for dealing with complaints is accessible and user friendly particularly for those with special needs or those whose first language is not English. In line with its statutory equality duties, reasonable adjustments will be made to assist a complainant so it is important that any special requirements are outlined to BHC when a complaint is made.

All complaints received will be investigated thoroughly and responded to by BHC.

The complaint process

All complaints received will be dealt with by an appropriately trained complaints officer (“**Complaints Officer**”) who is independent from the subject matter of the complaint and will be nominated by the Chief Executive. It should be noted that a complaint will not normally be investigated by the Chief Executive.

It is the role of the Chief Executive to decide whether or not any complaint received is sufficiently serious to merit notification to the BHC Board or relevant Board Committee.

Timescales

A complaint will be investigated by the duly designated Complaints Officer and a response will be issued in writing usually within 40 working days. If the complaint is more complex, we will:

- let the complainant know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate;
- tell the complainant how long we expect the investigation to take;
- let the complainant know where we have reached with the investigation; and
- give the complainant regular updates, including whether any developments might change our original time estimate for the investigation.

The following timescales will apply:

1. Complaint acknowledged within 5 days.
2. Response to be issued within 40 working days.

3. A request for a Review by the Complainant to be received 2 weeks after the Response.
4. Review to be concluded by the Reviewing Officer within a further 2 months.

The nature of the complaint may require BHC to engage external expertise, in which case the timescales may by necessity be longer. BHC may ask the external expert to liaise directly with the complainant.

Occasionally BHC may suggest mediation or another method to resolve the complaint.

If the complaint is upheld an appropriate and proportionate remedy will be provided which may include one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- a correction of an error;
- undertaking service improvement; or
- a change in policy or procedure.

Records of complaints received by BHC will be retained by BHC for a minimum of 6 years after this procedure has been exhausted.

When this procedure does not apply

Where the complaint arises in respect of a commercial agreement or commercial relationship between BHC and any third party, both in respect of services between BHC and another party, or any party engaged in port services more widely, particularly where there is any form of dispute resolution procedure documented between the parties. Such issues should be dealt via such dispute resolution procedures, or alternatively by seeking commercial resolution within the context of such commercial agreement or relationship. Attention is drawn to the Complaints handling procedure in the Marine Safety Management System, which should be used for port and port service activities.

This procedure will not apply to employment disputes, for which purpose a separate process of redress is available, in accordance with employment law.

This procedure will not apply to any other matter excluded by the Public Services Ombudsman Act (NI) 2016.

This procedure does not affect the right of the complainant to pursue his/her complaint with the Equality Commission in accordance with paragraph 10 of Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Any complainant who is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint handled in accordance with this procedure may ask for an internal review by BHC by contacting:

The Chief Executive
Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Corporation Square
Belfast
BT1 3AL

The Chief Executive will normally appoint another appropriately trained officer to review the complaint (the Reviewing Officer) who will respond to the complaint within the timescales noted above. Where practicable the Reviewing Officer will be senior to the Complaints Officer.

The Reviewing Officer will advise the complainant that if they remain unhappy with the outcome of a complaint handled in accordance with this procedure, they may contact the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman at:

The effective delivery of this procedure is the responsibility of the CEO.

NI Public Service Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

Telephone: 0800 34 34 24
Email: Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Any changes to this procedure will be posted on the BHC website.

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