

your guide to our complaints procedure

About the Scottish Consumer Council

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) was set up by government in 1975. Our purpose is to promote the interests of consumers in Scotland, with particular regard to those people who experience disadvantage in society. While producers of goods and services are usually well-organised and articulate when protecting their own interests, individual consumers very often are not. The people whose interests we represent are consumers of all kinds: they may be patients, tenants, parents, solicitors' clients, public transport users, or simply shoppers in a supermarket.

Consumers benefit from efficient and effective services in the public and private sectors. Service-providers benefit from discriminating consumers. A balanced partnership between the two is essential and the SCC seeks to develop this partnership by:

- carrying out research into consumer issues and concerns;
- informing key policy and decision-makers about consumer concerns and issues;
- influencing key policy and decision-making processes;
- informing and raising awareness among consumers.

The SCC is part of the National Consumer Council (NCC) and is sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry. The SCC's Chairman and Council members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in consultation with the First Minister. Martyn Evans, the SCC's Director, leads the staff team.

Please check our web site at www.scotconsumer.org.uk for news about our publications.

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Telephone 0141 226 5261
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The SCC assesses the consumer perspective in any situation by analysing the position of consumers against a set of consumer principles.

These are:

ACCESS

Can consumers actually get the goods or services they need or want?

CHOICE

Can consumers affect the way the goods and services are provided through their own choice?

INFORMATION

Do consumers have the information they need, presented in the way they want, to make informed choices?

REDRESS

If something goes wrong, can it be put right?

SAFETY

Are standards as high as they can reasonably be?

FAIRNESS

Are consumers subject to arbitrary discrimination for reasons unconnected with their characteristics as consumers?

REPRESENTATION

If consumers cannot affect what is provided through their own choices, are there other effective means for their views to be represented?

Published by the Scottish Consumer Council
July 2005

We can often make our publications available in braille or large print, on audio tape or computer disk. Please contact us for details.

1. This guide explains what to do if you want to make a comment, suggestion or complaint about the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC).
2. If something goes wrong in your dealings with us — for instance, when you contact us or buy one of our publications or attend a meeting here — we want to hear about it.
3. We will try to put it right as quickly as possible — preferably on the spot. If you remain dissatisfied, we have a complaints procedure that sets out the steps that will help to resolve the problem.

About our work

4. The SCC is the independent voice of consumers in Scotland. It is our job to promote the interests of the consumers of goods and services of all kinds. We do this by carrying out research and framing consumer policies, supporting other consumer representatives and campaigning for change. We make sure consumers' views are heard by government, business, regulators and professionals — and we make sure these views are taken into account.
5. So the SCC is mainly a research and campaigning body. Although we have contact with consumers in the course of our work, we do not provide frontline services directly to consumers — for instance, we do not answer individual queries or take up individual cases, although we do try to suggest other sources of help or information.

About our complaints procedure

6. Complaints do arise. We all make mistakes. When this happens, we want people to let us know immediately what has gone wrong so we have the opportunity to apologise and put things right as quickly as possible — preferably on the spot.
7. We will treat any expression of dissatisfaction as a complaint and use our complaints procedure to try to put it right. If there is any doubt about whether a complaint has been made, we will treat it as one.

The standards you can expect from the Scottish Consumer Council

8. When you contact the SCC.
 - ❖ A courteous, prompt and helpful response from all members of staff.
9. When you order an SCC publication.
 - ❖ An explanation of how to order and pay for the publication.
 - ❖ Despatch of the publication within five working days OR an explanation about any delays in meeting this timescale.

- ❖ If a publication is supplied in poor condition, prompt replacement or a full refund of the cost.

10. When you buy any goods, including SCC publications, you have various legal rights. The standards we have set ourselves for supplying publications do not limit your legal rights in any way.

11. When you visit the building or attend a meeting at the SCC's invitation.

- ❖ Details in advance of the arrangements for the meeting.
- ❖ Information about the facilities to be provided, access to the building, meeting rooms and other available services.

Other aspects of the SCC's work

12. The SCC both commissions its own research and carries out research for other people. We also work in partnership with other organisations and we receive funding from various sources for project work. Our complaints procedure applies to all these functions and we have internal guidelines for ensuring that they are carried out to a high standard. The procedure also covers complaints about our recruitment practice which adheres to our equal opportunities policy.

Reporting and monitoring complaints about the SCC

13. Our complaints procedure is designed to be fair, accessible, simple and quick. Please let our Complaints Officer, Trisha McAuley, know if you have any suggestions for improving it.

14. The subject matter of complaints about the SCC will be routinely discussed, if appropriate, at staff meetings and training sessions.

15. The Scottish Consumer Council is a Committee of the National Consumer Council (NCC) and reports annually to the Board of the NCC on formal complaints received, the conclusions reached, and any action taken as a result.

16. Please remember — we welcome your complaints, views and comments.

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How to Make a Complaint

17. If you think we have failed to meet appropriate standards, or you are dissatisfied with some other aspect of our work, we want to hear about it. Please let us know, using any method that's convenient for you — in person, by phone, fax, email, in writing or on audio-tape. Please don't hesitate to ask us for help if you need it or are unsure about anything to do with making a complaint.
18. However, you choose to make your complaint, we will treat it seriously. If we consider that it is well-founded, we will act immediately to resolve the problem and — to the best of our ability — to prevent it happening again.
19. All complaints are handled in line with the following procedure. If, after our **initial** response, you are still dissatisfied or feel the procedure has not been followed at any stage, please let our Complaints Officer, Trisha McAuley, know.

Informal Resolution

20. Complaints can often be resolved immediately and informally — and we will aim to do this wherever possible. If you have already been dealing with someone at the SCC, start by contacting that person and putting the problem to them.

Formal Procedure — Stage One

21. If the matter cannot be resolved immediately, and you would like to make a formal complaint, please contact our Complaints Officer, Trisha McAuley. She will acknowledge your complaint within three working days and carry out a full and fair investigation, reporting this to our Director, Martyn Evans. Martyn will let you know the result of the investigation within 15 working days of you putting your complaint. He will tell you what has been investigated, and how we will try to put things right.

Formal Procedure — Stage Two

22. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of stage one, please contact our Chairman, Graeme Millar, who will look into your complaint again. Your request will be acknowledged within three working days of receiving it. Graeme will respond in full within 15 working days, giving details of what he has done and the results of his enquiries.

Review Stage

23. If you are still not satisfied that we have done all we can to resolve your complaint after it has gone through all of our internal stages, you can refer the matter to the Parliamentary Ombudsman (also called the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration). The Ombudsman is completely

independent of the SCC and will investigate how we have handled your complaint.

24. If you want to complain to the Ombudsman, you must tell an MP about your complaint and ask him/her to refer it to the Ombudsman. It is usual to approach your own constituency MP in the first instance — your local library or citizens advice bureau can give you your MP's details.
25. You can get more information about how to complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman by contacting the following helpline – 0845 015 4033 – or by writing to:

The Parliamentary Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London SW1P 4QP

The Parliamentary Ombudsman's website also contains information about how to complain – <http://ombudsman.org.uk>

26. Because the SCC is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry in London, you need to contact your Westminster MP and not your MSP (member for the Scottish Parliament). However where our actions relate to **devolved** matters, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman direct.

You can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman by writing to:

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
23 Walker Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7HX

Or by phoning: 0870 011 5378

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's website also contains information about how to complain - <http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk>