

# **Self-Advocacy Toolkit: Raising a concern**



### **Aim of this Toolkit:**

- Help individuals understand their options for raising concerns
- Provide guidance to help individuals ask questions, challenge decisions, or raise concerns
- Encourage self-empowerment so that individuals can raise concerns without needing support

### **This toolkit will also provide:**

- Template letters
- Helpful guides on making phone calls and preparing for meetings
- Timeline template
- How to find out information that you require
- How to get access to your records



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# Raising a concern

How to raise a concern will vary from organisation to organisation but they usually follow a similar process. Local procedures will have set time limits, including when the organisation must acknowledge the concern and the likely length of the investigation.

## Raising a concern

Where possible, and appropriate, issues and concerns should be resolved informally. There are many reasons for this which include:

- possible resolution at an early stage without the need to use a formal process
- formal methods can take a long time

### 1. Identify your concern(s)

It is important to try to list all your concerns from the start. Some examples could be:

- attitude or behaviour of care staff
- poor communication from services
- waiting times for services
- poor or failed adaptations or repairs in your home

### 2. Gather information about the issue

Note down everything you are concerned about. It can be helpful to write a timeline of events to keep you focused and ensure that you do not leave anything out.



### 3. Identify the desired outcome(s)

Try to think of what you want out of raising your concern. Some examples could be:

- a change to the service(s) you are currently receiving
- a change of care provider
- a reassessment of your needs
- an apology from the service

Once you have submitted your concerns the organisation should contact you to:

- acknowledge that they have received the concerns you have raised (if you do this over the phone, this may be done straight away) - reminder to take a note of the date and time of the interaction and who was spoken to about the concern
- tell you when you will be contacted about the concerns you have raised

## Meeting with Professionals – discussing your options

You may be invited to a meeting to discuss review or change to your care and treatment, or as part of the resolution for the concerns you have raised.

### Preparation

#### Identify what you would like to discuss during the meeting

It can be useful to write down what you would like to be discussed during the meeting. You can list these as bullet points. You may also want to use any previous correspondence as prompts for what you want to discuss. You may find it useful to list your points in order of how important they are for you. We have included a template to help you prepare for a meeting.

There will usually be a formal agenda for what will be discussed. You can request a copy of this in advance and ask that you are able to add in anything else that you would like to talk about.

You can usually bring someone else with you, for example a friend or family member, to support you in the meeting.



### **Identify your desired outcome(s)**

Think about what you would like to happen as a result of the meeting.

### **During the meeting**

You should be introduced to all the professionals that are involved in the meeting. There should also be someone to take notes or minutes to record what has been discussed. You can usually bring a family member or friend with you to the meeting as support.

Everyone at the meeting should have a copy of the agenda. Once the meeting is finished make sure any actions that were set are noted including what the action(s) are, who will be doing the action and when it be done by.

### **After the meeting**

You should be provided with a copy of the notes that were taken at the meeting. You may be offered the option to ask follow up questions.

## **What next?**

If you are satisfied that the concerns raised have been addressed and will not be a concern moving forward you can consider the matter resolved.

However, if you remain unsatisfied with the outcome you can move onto the Formal approach of raising a complaint. See Raising a Formal Complaint guidance.



# Raising a formal complaint

If it has not been possible to resolve your concerns informally, or you do not want to seek an informal resolution, then you can make a formal complaint.

Steps to raising a complaint are below. Organisations should be able to take a complaint in writing (via email or post) or over the phone. Some may have their own complaints forms.

You can always ask an organisation for a copy of their complaints policy, organisations are required to share their complaints policy and to help you. If you are raising a complaint over the phone, remember to take the note of the date and time and also the name and job title of the person you are raising the complaint with. You can also request written confirmation of your complaint, if you raise this over the phone.

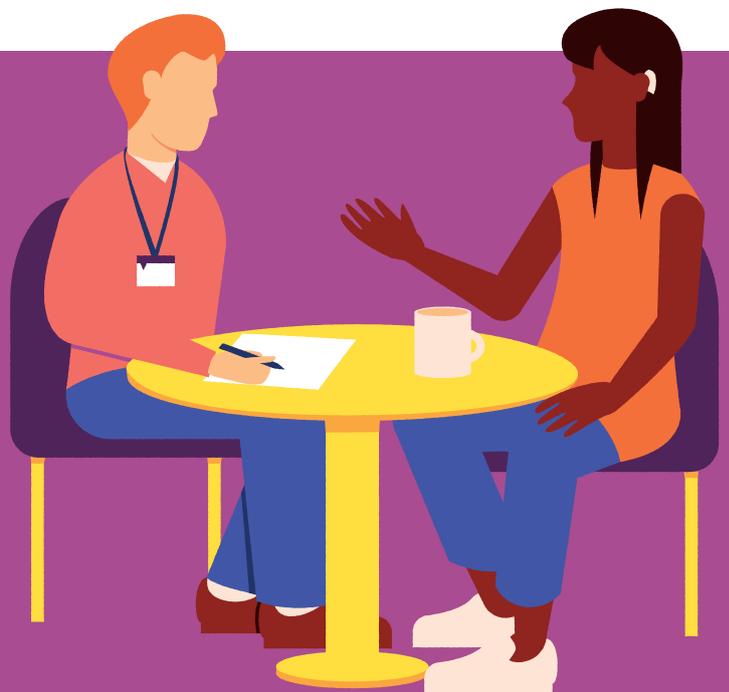
## Identify your concern(s)

It is important to try to list all your concerns from the start. Some examples could be:

- attitude or behaviour of care staff
- poor communication from services
- waiting times for services
- poor or failed adaptations or repairs in your home

## Gather information about the issue

Note down everything you are concerned about. It can be helpful to write a timeline of events to keep you focused and ensure that you do not leave anything out. Include all information on attempts to resolve informally, if you chose this approach. See Timeline template.



## Identify the desired outcome(s)

Try to think of what you want out of making your complaint. Some examples could be:

- a change to the service(s) you are currently receiving
- a change of care provider
- a reassessment of your needs
- an apology from the service

## Once you have submitted your formal complaint, the organisation should contact you to:

- acknowledge that they have received your complaint (if you do this over the phone, this may be done straight away)
- tell you when you will be contacted about your complaint

Each organisation will approach the investigation differently, they may want to speak with you further or may investigate internally and give you an outcome once the investigation has been completed.

Once you have been contacted about the outcome you will have some options depending on whether you consider the matter resolved.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome there is usually an appeal process, details of this are usually provided with the final response. Alternatively, you can raise this with an Ombudsman.



## The Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is usually the last stage of a formal complaint and can be contacted when you have gone through the full formal complaints process and are still unhappy with the outcome. You can also contact them if you feel that you have not been treated fairly by the organisation and there has been a negative impact on you – this can be psychological, financial, or practical.

Before going to an Ombudsman, you should have exhausted the formal complaints process with the organisation you are complaining about.

The Ombudsman will likely have a time limit for raising your complaint with them (this is usually 1 year). If you have questions about this, you can always contact them directly.

### What an Ombudsman can/cannot do

An Ombudsman does not have the power to force an organisation (for example, the NHS or Local Authority) to change its mind. They can make recommendations, and these are usually followed by the organisation. An Ombudsman can suggest specific remedy towards the complainant and/or changes to specific policies or processes for the future.

Each Ombudsman will usually have their own form for you to fill in and you should use it if possible.

They will also ask you for copies of all complaint letters from you to the organisation and response letters from the organisation to you. They will contact you if they feel you have left something out.



**Local Government Ombudsman (LGO):** Investigates complaints about councils and local authorities, including about social care

**Housing Services Ombudsman (HSO):** Investigates complaints about registered providers of social housing

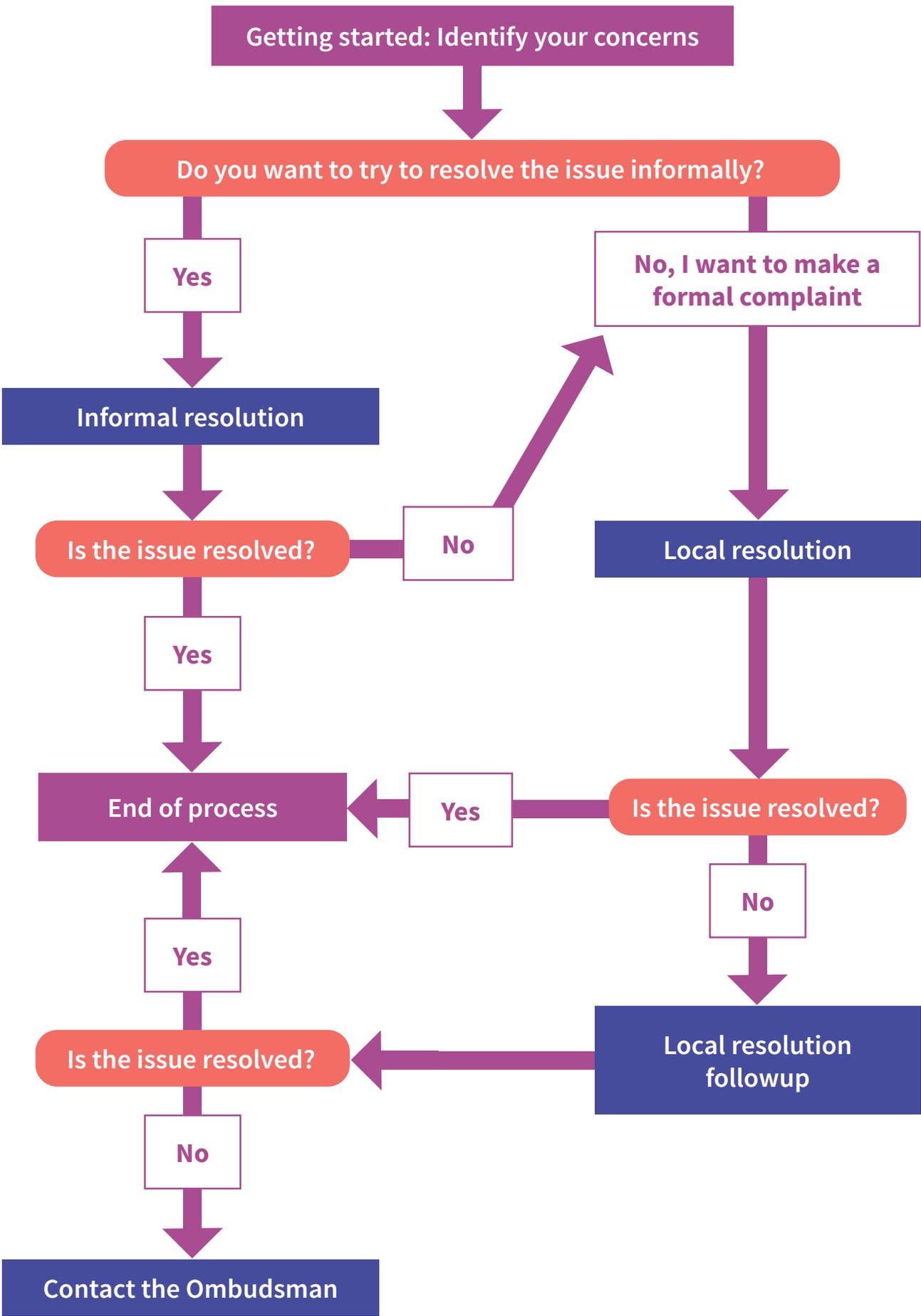
## Judicial Review

A Judicial review is a type of court proceeding where a judge reviews a decision or action by a public body (such as an NHS Trust or Local Authority) and determines if it was lawful or not.

If you would like to request a Judicial Review of a decision, you will need to seek legal advice. You can find a solicitor that specialises in the relevant area using The Law Society's "Find A Solicitor" service: [Find a Solicitor - The Law Society](#) or call 020 7320 5757.



# Raising a concern or making a complaint



# Preparation for making phone calls guidance

Use the section below to prepare **before** a phone call by answering some or all of the questions. You can have this with you to help you on the call.

What is the phone call about?

What do I want to say? What outcome do I want?

What information do I need from them?

What information will they need from me? Who could help me with this?

What questions do I want to ask?

What do I want to happen as a result of this phone call?

What happens next if I don't get the outcome I want?

Would I need to have someone with me during the call? Who would be the best person for this?



## Notes and actions

Use the section below to write down key words or information **during** the phone call. If there are actions at the end, you could write these down. It may be useful to make a note of who has said they are doing them and when, so that you can refer back to this later.

Notes
Name of the person you are speaking to:
Date and time of call:

Actions	Who	When

## Reflection after the phone call

**After** the call ends, reflect on the following questions. This could help you to make the next phone call go even better:

What went well?	
What do you think could have gone better?	
What could you do differently next time to help you to self advocate?	



# Preparation for meetings guidance

Use the section below to prepare **before** a meeting by answering some or all of the questions. You can take this with you to help you on the day.

What is the meeting about?

What time and date is the meeting? Where will it take place?

Who am I speaking to? How many people will be there?

**Top tips:** If you are unhappy about someone who is due to attend, you can raise this before the meeting. If there is someone you would like to be present to support you, you could ask for them to attend too. Additionally, you can request that the meeting is held in a place / location that is accessible to you. It is ok to ask for a better explanation if you do not understand what is being said, professionals can use abbreviations that people won't always understand, it's ok to ask as many times as you need.

What do I want to say? What outcome do I want?

What information do I need? How can I go about gathering this information?

What information will they need from me? Who could help me with this? Do I need to ask for advice?

What questions do I want to ask?

What do I want to happen as a result of this meeting?

Would I need to have someone with me during the meeting? Who would be the best person for this?

What happens next if I don't get the outcome I want?

## Notes and actions

Use the section below to write down key words or information during the meeting. If there are actions at the end, you could write these down. It may be useful to make a note of who has said they are doing them and when, so that you can refer back to this later.

**Top tip:** At the start of the meeting make sure everyone introduces themselves and their role so you know everyone in the room – don't forget to introduce yourself as you are the most important person in the room.

### Notes about the meeting

Actions	Who	When

## Reflection after the meeting

**After** the meeting, reflect on the following questions. This could help you to make the next meeting go even better:

What went well?	
What do you think could have gone better?	
What could you do differently next time to help you to self advocate?	

## Log sheet section 1: Record the event(s) you are complaining about

Date	What happened?	Who was involved?	What did you do next?

# Log sheet section 2: Record the stages of your complaint

Date	What did you contact?	What did they agree to do?	What did you agree to do?

# How to write a complaint letter guidance

Your letter should clearly explain your complaint and ask for an investigation under the organisations Complaints Procedure.

## Be brief

- summarise key points at the top of the letter, if it's longer than two pages
- if the complaint is long and complicated, complete and attach the log sheet on the previous page (or make your own version)

## Be clear and straightforward

- use short sentences
- don't be afraid to say what has upset you, but try to be calm and factual
- don't repeat yourself

## Be constructive

- remember your complaint is an opportunity to improve things
- explain your concerns politely, but firmly and clearly
- explain what you would like to achieve as a result of your complaint

Keep a copy of all letters or emails sent and received, in date order; and a note of all telephone calls made. Again, you can use the log sheet on the previous page.

Send photocopies of documents, not originals. Keep the original documents.

Make sure your letter is received. You may wish to send it by guaranteed or recorded delivery.

You should typically receive a letter of acknowledgement within five working days, but each organisation varies. The timeline for responses is usually well document on their complaint process.

# Complaint letter template

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Your name]

[Your address]

[Your phone number]

[The Chief Executive or Complaints Manager (name if known)]

[Name and address of above person's organisation]

[Date]

Dear [Name]

Re: (Reason for complaint) – [Complainant name and date of birth]

I am writing to complain about [name(s) of staff] at [place where incident happened] on [date of incident].

Describe what happened, when, and where.

If you were unable to recall events because you were undergoing surgery (for instance) include information provided by third parties and how they were made aware of this.

If you have completed a log sheet or written a list of events, you can attach it as a separate sheet and refer to it here. Explain what, if anything, you have already done to try to resolve matters.

As a result of this complaint I would now like [...]

Say what you want to achieve, for example:

- an explanation of what happened
- an apology
- action to remedy the problem you experienced, by a named person

I look forward to receiving your acknowledgement of this letter. I would like you to carry out a full investigation into my concerns, and provide a response in accordance with your complaint policy.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information.

Thank you for your attention to this complaint. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

[Your signature]

[Print your name]

[If you are sending copies of your letter to other people, show this here:]

cc. Other person

# View this toolkit online and in translation

This toolkit about raising a concern is also available online at [voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit](https://voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit). You can use the website's toolbar to read the text aloud, show simplified information, or translate the words into your language.

 Read aloud or translate

Visita [voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit](https://voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit) per tradurre questi documenti in Italiana

Ewch i [voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit](https://voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit) i gyfieithu'r dogfennau hyn yn cymraeg

এই নথিগুলিকে বাংলায় অনুবাদ করতে, [voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit](https://voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit) দেখুন

Visite [voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit](https://voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit) para traducir estos documentos al Español

આ દસ્તાવેજોનો ગુજરાતીમાં અનુવાદ કરવા માટે [voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit](https://voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit) ની મુલાકાત લો.

Tabhair cuairt ar [voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit](https://voiceability.org/self-advocacy-toolkit) chun na doiciméid seo a aistriú go anns a' Ghàidhlig



# VoiceAbility

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## About VoiceAbility

We make sure you're heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to have their say in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.