

The Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board

Complaints and Feedback Policy

The Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board (UMIDB) is committed to the highest standards of accountability, transparency, and service quality. We recognise the value of stakeholder feedback and view complaints as an important opportunity for learning, improvement, and strengthening trust in our operations.

Purpose and Scope

This policy outlines the Board's commitment to handling complaints in a timely, fair, and consistent manner. It applies to:

- Members of the public, partner organisations, landowners, and other stakeholders who have dealings with UMIDB.
- All formal and informal complaints about the conduct of the Board, its services, its staff, or its members.

Policy Commitments

UMIDB will:

- Treat all complaints seriously and with respect.
- Ensure that complaints are handled objectively, without bias or retaliation.
- Provide clear and accessible channels for submitting complaints, including by phone, email, or in writing.
- Respond to complaints promptly and in accordance with published response times.
- Keep complainants informed of progress throughout the process.
- Maintain confidentiality as far as possible, while ensuring appropriate investigation and resolution.
- Use feedback and complaints to inform reviews of policy, procedures, and service delivery, promoting a culture of continuous improvement.

Complaints Procedure

UMIDB's complaints procedure will be:

- Simple and accessible: Clear guidance will be provided on how to make a complaint and what to expect.
- Tiered and proportionate: Complaints will be resolved at the earliest stage possible, escalating to more formal stages if needed.
- Evidence-based and transparent: Investigations will be fair and well-documented, with outcomes explained clearly to the complainant.
- Time-bound: Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days and resolved within 20 working days, unless a longer investigation is justified.

Governance and Accountability

- The Clerk has overall responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy and the complaints procedure. They will act as the designated Complaints Officer (or equivalent) and will manage the handling of complaints and ensure lessons are captured and acted upon.
- Complaints involving Board members will be referred to the appropriate standards process or external review mechanism in line with public body governance requirements.
- Complaints involving the Clerk, will instead pass the initial handling onto the Responsible Finance Officer, who will in turn make the complaint known to the Board Chairman. The Board Chairman will then take on the responsibility of oversight and management of the complaint.

Monitoring and Review

UMIDB will keep a central record of complaints, monitor trends, and report periodically to the Board on:

- The number and types of complaints received.
- Response times and resolution outcomes.
- Actions taken to improve services as a result of feedback.

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required due to changes in legislation or procedure.

Vexatious, Unsolicited, or Excessive Complaints and Complainants

The Board aims to resolve all complaints fairly and proportionately. In some cases, a complainant's behaviour may be considered vexatious or unreasonably persistent where it places a disproportionate burden on staff resources or prevents the effective delivery of the Board's statutory functions.

Such behaviour may include repeated complaints about the same issue after a full response has been provided, refusal to accept a decision without new or otherwise compelling evidence, excessive or repetitive correspondence, or aggressive or abusive conduct. **A complainant will not be considered vexatious solely because they are dissatisfied or pursue a complaint robustly but reasonably.**

Any decision to treat a complainant as vexatious will be made by the Clerk (where a Board decision has already been taken), or the Board (via the Chairman if necessary, due to timing), will be evidence-based and proportionate, and will be recorded in writing. The complainant will normally be warned before any restrictions are applied and given the opportunity to modify their behaviour.

Where necessary, the Board may limit how it communicates with the complainant, require correspondence to be in writing, nominate a single point of contact, or decline to respond to repeated correspondence that raises no new issues. Any restrictions will be proportionate, time-limited, and kept under review.

The complainant will be informed in writing of the decision, the reasons for it, and how the decision may be reviewed (unless the decision is not to respond). Legitimate new complaints raising different issues will continue to be considered on their merits.

All complaints will be read, recorded, and reported, but no action may be taken.

Delivery Procedures

Complaint Handling

A named officer (usually the Clerk) will log, track, and manage all complaints using a central complaints register. This register will record the nature of the complaint, actions taken, and outcomes. Where a complaint is regarding the Clerk, the RFO will pass on the complaint to the Board Chairman for handling.

If a complainant is considered vexatious (see vexatious complainants above), the complaint will be viewed and filed but may not be responded to. The complaint will be reported to the Board, but no further action may be taken.

Communication

The complaints process, contact details, and forms will be clearly published on the UMIDB website and public notices. Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days and fully responded to within 20 working days. Complaints will be submitted to DEFRA using the IDB1 form or per request.

Escalation

If a complaint is unresolved, it will be escalated to the Chair of the Board or an appointed sub-committee for further review. The complainant will be informed of the escalation process in writing. Should this still not be a suitable outcome for the complaining party, they are able to request a full Board review at the next meeting to ensure the actions of the handling officer were appropriate, and their decision making reasoned. A final resort will be for the complaint to be moved to the local authority ombudsman.

Learning and Improvement

Following a complaint there will be a review of the process and outcome. Where necessary, changes to policy or procedure will be proposed to the Board.

January 2026 Amendments

- Created policy entry for vexatious and excessive requests