



**Surrey Heath Borough Council**

# **Complaints and Compliments Policy**



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## Document history

| Date       | Version | Author     | Changes made                    |
|------------|---------|------------|---------------------------------|
| 28/04/2017 | 4.0     | Lynn Smith | Initial revision of 2011 policy |
|            |         |            |                                 |
|            |         |            |                                 |

## Approvals

| Name          | Role/Title                  | Date     |
|---------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Richard Payne | Executive Head of Corporate | 04/05/17 |
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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of the Complaints and Compliments Policy is to provide an authority wide framework which helps us capture and learn from what we do well and resolve dissatisfaction about a service, officer, contractor, policy or procedure.

## **2. Scope**

This policy applies to all members of staff, (including fixed term, agency staff and volunteers or work experience students), partners and contractors.

## **3. Policy Statement**

Surrey Heath Borough Council is committed to consistent, fair and confidential complaint handling and to resolving complaints as quickly as possible. We aim to make it easy for people to make a complaint if they are dissatisfied and we will treat all customers making a complaint equally.

## **4. Principle and Aims**

The aim of the complaints and compliments system is to provide a framework which helps resolve dissatisfaction about a service or lack of service. In addition, to provide an opportunity to recognise what we do well.

## **5. Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction (whether justified or not) by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service. This applies whether the action was taken or the service was provided by the Council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council.

## **6. Stages**

The complaints system is split into stages; Stage 1 informal, Stage 2 formal, Stage 3 Appeal. It excludes requests for a service or for an explanation of a decision.

A complaint can be made in the following ways:

- In person
- By phone
- In writing
- By email
- By social media
- By using our complaints form

## **7. Stage 1 - Informal Complaints**

An informal complaint is an initial approach to the Council outlining dissatisfaction with some aspect of the Council's service or actions that can be resolved informally and quickly during the normal course of business, normally within 2 working days. It is expected that the majority of complaints will be dealt with satisfactorily at this informal stage but complainants will be told how to pursue matters further if they remain dissatisfied.

## **8. Stage 2 - Formal Complaints**

The formal complaints procedure applies:

- where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint, or
- where the complainant alleges improper conduct or maladministration, or
- where the matter is complex or serious enough to be handled by a senior member of staff.

Formal complaints must be made by:

- the complainant, or
- someone acting on the complainant's behalf, or
- a member of staff, where the person with a complaint needs help.

Complaints will:

- be acknowledged within two working days, and
- receive a full or substantive reply within ten working days, or
- if lengthy enquiries are necessary, receive an indication (with explanation) as to when a full reply may be expected.

All formal complaints will be investigated by a senior member of staff (normally the appropriate Executive Head of Service) who has had no previous involvement in the actions or decisions complained of. Where a complaint relates to more than one division, a lead officer shall be designated in consultation with the Executive Head of Corporate.

A complaint record will be kept of all formal complaints, clearly summarising:

- what the complainant feels went wrong
- what, in the complainant's view, should be done to put things right
- the action taken, and
- the complainants response (if any).

## **9. Stage 3 - Appeals**

Complainants dissatisfied with the response to their Stage 2 complaint may appeal to the Chief Executive.

Appeals should be in writing and specify the reason/grounds of appeal.

Complaints will:

- be acknowledged within two working days, and
- receive a full or substantive reply within ten working days, or
- if lengthy enquiries are necessary, receive an indication (with explanation) as to when a full reply may be expected.

Appeals will be dealt with by the Chief Executive who will investigate the matter and also seek the formal views of the appropriate Executive Head of Service.

The complainant will be kept informed of progress in dealing with the appeal.

The Chief Executive will provide a written decision, together with the reasons for the decision and any follow-up action required.

## **10. Local Government Ombudsman**

Complainants, who are still dissatisfied with the way the Council has dealt with their complaint after going through the all internal stages, can take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman who is independent of the Council. Their address is:

Local Government Ombudsman  
PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH  
Phone: 03000 610614  
Web: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

## **11. Confidentiality**

The identity of the person making a complaint shall be made known only to those who need to consider/administer the complaint (including third parties where allegations involving them are made by the complainant) and shall not be made public.

## **12. Rights of Appeal**

At the conclusion of each stage of a complaint, complainants shall be told how they can pursue the complaint in any other way (eg appeal to the Chief Executive or to the Ombudsman).

## **13. Putting Things Right**

The purpose of the complaints system is to put things right if they have gone wrong. Where the investigating officer feels that they do not have the authority to agree a particular remedy, the matter should be referred to the Executive Head of Service.

## **14. Complaints Not Upheld**

The Council recognise that most complaints come from people who have a genuine sense of grievance and any communication setting out the reasons for not upholding a complaint shall give a clear, full and sympathetic explanation.

## **15. Responsibility for the System**

The Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee will receive an annual report that analyses all complaints received by number, subject, outcome and also identify any lessons learned. The Committee also receive and consider the annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman. The Committee will make recommendations as necessary to the Executive.

## **16. Compliments**

Compliments enable us to:-

- recognise that our service is being provided to the customers' satisfaction
- provide positive feedback to our staff
- influence our organisational and service development

## **17. Recording compliments**

Any verbal or written compliments will be recorded at the time the compliment is given, or as soon as possible afterwards. If appropriate the member of staff, line manager and Executive Head will be made aware that a compliment has been received.

The customer will be notified of any action(s) taken/recommendations made in response to the compliment.