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Runnymede Borough Council

Complaints Policy and Procedure

August 2026

Classification: Official



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Introduction

The Council strives to provide high quality services to the best of our ability to all our residents and those who work in and visit the borough. We welcome feedback including compliments and complaints and suggestions for making service improvements.

If you have been impressed by the way we have provided our services, or if our staff have excelled in their duties, we would like to hear from you. Compliments will be passed on to staff so they will know their efforts were appreciated.

This is the Council's formal complaints policy and procedure and it should help you tell us if you think something has gone wrong with any of the services or facilities we provide and look at how we can improve. Where we have made mistakes we will apologise and aim to put them right.

Our complaints policy and procedure has two stages and clear guidance is provided to all staff if they receive a complaint about how to follow the procedure correctly.

We have adopted the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint handling code which was launched in February 2024. This updated existing good practice guidance and is closely aligned with the Housing Ombudsman's statutory Complaints handling code which is followed by our Housing Department in their role as social landlords for our Housing tenants.

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Customer First Strategy which sets out our mission for serving residents and communities.

Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations 2004, Subject Access Requests and any Data complaints should be directed to the Council's Information Governance Officer. Complaints about how these requests have been handled have a separate internal review process which if you remain unsatisfied you can apply to the Information Commissioner for a review.

Definitions

We have adopted the following definitions of service requests, complaints and who can make a complaint from the Ombudsman's complaint handling code and guidance:

Service Request

'A request that an organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision'

Complaint

'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.'

A request for clarification of one of our policies is not generally regarded as a complaint and you are encouraged to use our report it function for issues such as missed bins. Missed bins are treated as service requests unless they are missed on more than three occasions in a six week period without a reasonable explanation, such as access issues, contamination etc.

Who can make a complaint?

'Any member of the public, including a child, who claims to have been negatively impacted as a result of the actions of the authority, may make a complaint. The same applies if they are raising issues which relate to matters of significant public interest. A member of the public includes people acting on behalf of a business, or a voluntary or charitable organisation. Members of the public do not have to be resident in the authority's area to raise a complaint,

How to make a complaint

We would like to think that in the majority of cases complaints can be resolved by speaking to the member of staff who dealt with you in the first place. We would encourage you to do this as it might put matters right quickly and with the minimum of fuss.

The Ombudsman's Code makes it clear that Councils should have the opportunity to deal with something as a service request before a complaint is made. However, you do not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as one.

If our initial action to a service request does not resolve your complaint, or if you are unhappy with our response, then you can complain formally using our two stage complaints procedure.

You can make a complaint by:

- completing our e-form and submitting this online
- emailing or writing to us
- telephoning us on 01932 838383, or
- visiting us at the Civic Centre during normal office hours
- use of other channels which could include social media if made directly to us

If you choose to make a complaint through a third party including councillors, MPs or another advocate of your choice, we will clarify if it is appropriate by checking if they have your consent to act on your behalf and are satisfied they are acting in your best interests. Details of your local councillors and how to contact them is on our website, noticeboards and from our staff. If someone makes a complaint on your behalf we will keep you as well as your advocate updated at the various stages.

If you need help with making a complaint we can assist you. Please tell us if you need us to make any reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 (as amended) in order to deal with your complaint.

Exceptions

We do not usually accept complaints if they fall into one of these categories:

- service requests
- duplicates
- external complaints (for example for issues where we refer customers to Surrey County Council)
- general responses – where customer services have been able to deal with an issue or without involving the service area
- no negative impact on person complaining or wider public interest issued raised
- not a person who can complain, (e.g. other public body or an anonymous complainant)
- about something that has happened more than 12 months ago
- if there is another internal appeals process you need to follow; for example disputing a penalty charge notice
- legal action (papers submitted to court) has already been commenced about the matter
- there is a statutory right of appeal in place to a tribunal, government minister or court
- there is an internal appeal process such as housing allocations - but there is no subsequent right of appeal to a court or tribunal
- the matter has already been appealed to a court or tribunal
- the matter has already been dealt with under our complaints policy and procedure and is not a new complaint

In certain cases, the Council reserves the right to consider complaints as unreasonably persistent and decline to respond to further approaches. The decision to classify a complainant as unreasonably persistent will be taken by a senior manager in accordance with our policy.

If your complaint is about a service provided by Surrey County Council please report it to them.

Stage 1

We will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days of receipt, setting out what we believe your complaint is and how we aim to resolve it. The person dealing with your complaint will either provide you with a full response within 10 working days, usually using the method you would like to be contacted by. This will be investigated by and signed off by one of the Council's Stage 1 Complaint Handlers. These are managers with the authority to resolve your complaint.

Sometimes a complaint might be more complex and requires further investigation which may make our 10 day response target difficult to meet. If this happens, we will seek your agreement to extend the deadline by up to a further 10 working days, keep you informed and signpost you to the relevant Ombudsman.

We will apologise if we have made a mistake and advise you when and what we will do to correct our mistake in the full response, followed by keeping you updated when the agreed actions have been completed.

Stage 2

If you are not happy with our response you can make a stage 2 complaint which will be dealt with by our Stage 2 Complaint Handlers. These are the Council's Corporate Heads who form the Senior Leadership Team. Where appropriate a Stage 2 complaint may be investigated by the Council's Chief Executive and/or an Assistant Chief Executive or their nominated deputies. They will review your complaint and the stage 1 response and will aim to respond to you within 20 working days. If you want to escalate your complaint to stage 2, please explain what aspects of your complaint are outstanding and the outcome sought. Once again, if your complaint requires further investigation, we will seek your agreement to extend the response date by up to a further 20 working days and sign post you to the relevant Ombudsman.

The conclusion of stage 2 is the end of our formal complaints procedure, unless we have given a sufficiently full and final decision at Stage 1.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

We will signpost you to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) or Housing Ombudsman at each stage of our complaints procedure and if we are unable to respond to your complaint within the normal timeframe or if we ask for an extension to the deadline. Signposting to the Ombudsman allows you to explore the services they offer and when it is appropriate to contact them about your complaint.

If you have been through all stages of our complaints process, you can ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to consider your complaint.
The Ombudsman has issued a Complaint Handling Code which sets out advice and guidance for councils on how to handle complaints. You can find more information about this on the Ombudsman's website (Complaint Handling Code - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman).
The Ombudsman investigates complaints in a fair and independent way - it does not take sides. It is a free service.
The Ombudsman expects you to have given us a chance to deal with your complaint, before you contact them.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services. It also investigates complaints about all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) for people who self-fund their care. There are some **limits on what the Ombudsman can look at**. For example, the Ombudsman may not consider your complaint if you have not been significantly personally affected by the issue you are raising, or if you have a right of appeal to a court or tribunal.
Website: **www.lgo.org.uk**
Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Opening hours:

- Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday - 10am till 1pm
- Wednesday - 1pm till 4pm

Timescales and Expectations

We will aim to acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days of receipt. Our acknowledgement will set out our understanding of your complaint and how it is being dealt with. The point of acknowledgement when the complaint is allocated to the stage 1 complaint handler triggers the 10 working days to respond.

We will aim to provide you with a full response at Stage 1 within 10 working days of your complaint being acknowledged. Please note there is an option to extend by a further 10 working days if justified and you are informed and given reasons given for the extension and provided with details of the relevant Ombudsman.

We aim to provide a complaint response when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed.

If a complaint is escalated to Stage 2, we will aim to provide an acknowledgement within 5 working days of the escalation request being received.

We will aim to provide a full response at Stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. Again, there is an option to extend by a further 20 working days if justified and clearly explained to you and you will be signposted to the relevant Ombudsman.

Equalities

The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010. Section 149 of the Act provides that we must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share protected characteristics. We should at all times act in a way that is non-discriminatory through our policies and procedures and interactions with people. We are required to comply with any aspects of the Ombudsman's Code which fall under our Public Sector Equality Duty. The Ombudsman completed an Equalities Impact Screening Assessment (EIA) prior to introducing the code and we have also completed one locally which was reviewed by the Equalities Group and reported to the Standards and Audit Committee when this policy and procedure was approved. An EIA is a way of assessing the impact or likely impact of our policies and procedures on people with protected characteristics.

Complaints about Housing

Complaints about Housing are dealt with under a separate but aligned policy and procedure.

Housing Ombudsman

The Council's landlord function comes under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman.

The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) will look at social housing related complaints. Full details about the process can be found on their website. Alternatively, you can contact the HOS on 0300 111 3000.

Complaints and compliments about Councillors

The Council encourages healthy debate and recognises the important role that Councillors play in our communities. The Council has adopted a robust, zero-tolerance approach to harassment, intimidation or abuse of Councillors and co-opted Members with clear reporting and monitoring mechanisms, and to ensure that the guiding principles of the Local Government Association's 'Debate Not Hate' Campaign are supported by the procedure for managing unreasonable actions by complainants.

If you have a complaint about one of your local Councillors, it will be dealt with under a separate policy and procedure by the Council's Monitoring Officer. If you would

like to compliment a Councillor please let us know, as both are reported annually to the Standards & Audit Committee.

Responsibilities and Performance Monitoring

The Council's Standards & Audit Committee has the role of overseeing the Council's Complaints Policy and associated procedures and monitoring relevant key performance indicators, including our annual self-assessment of compliance with the Ombudsman's complaint handling code and annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

- Number of complaints received at stage 1
- outcome of stage 1 complaints – upheld, not upheld, partially upheld
- % of complaints dealt with at stages 1 and 2 within expected timeframes
- number of complaints escalated to stage 2 – upheld, not upheld, partially upheld
- outcome of complaints at stage 2
- number of service improvements by service area or department

The Council's Monitoring Officer through Democratic Services monitors formal complaints received and regular reports are made to our Standards & Audit Committee so that we might learn from what you tell us and share best practice.

Where the data is held, we also report on the number and type of exceptions, where we have not accepted a complaint or have referred it to another organisation if it falls within their remit. Examples of these are listed earlier in this document.

The Council has appointed complaint handlers, assisted by trained colleagues. They are responsible for ensuring that this policy and procedure is followed and that all complaints are dealt with in a timely, transparent, fair and consistent manner.

Privacy Information

All complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially, in strict confidence and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations and we will not deal with you any less favourably because you have made a complaint.

We require your personal data in order to record and consider your complaints and compliments and to contact you. This is a public task which we have a duty to fulfil. Wewill only share your information if it is necessary, for resolving your complaint or we deemed the sharing compatible with the purpose your information was provided. We will not further share your information without your consent. Your information will be kept securely for 4 years and then deleted.

Review

This policy and procedure was approved by the Council's Standards & Audit Committee in July 2024 and is reviewed every six months and updated as and when necessary. The last review was August 2026.

For all information contained within this document contact:

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Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Tel 01932 838383

email: democratic.services@runnymede.gov.uk

www.runnymede.gov.uk

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