



SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Surrey County Council Complaints and Feedback Policy



Version Control Table

Version	Date	Purpose/Change	Reviewer / Authoriser
1.0	March 2026 25	New Complaints Policy	Surrey County Council Cabinet

1. Introduction

Surrey County Council is committed to providing high-quality services for residents, people who use services and their families. We recognise that sometimes things may not go as planned and when this happens, people have the right to raise concerns and make a complaint.

Complaints are an important way for us to:

- Put things right when something has gone wrong
- Apologise where appropriate
- Learn from feedback and improve our services.

This policy explains how to make a complaint, what you can expect from us, and how we handle and learn from complaints across all Council services. This includes both corporate complaints and complaints that are subject to statutory procedures.

2. Purpose

This policy sets out Surrey County Council's approach to handling all complaints, including:

- Corporate (non-statutory) complaints
- Statutory Adult Social Care complaints
- Statutory Children's Social Care complaints

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Provide clarity about what a complaint is and what people can expect when they raise one
- Ensure complaints are handled fairly, consistently, and lawfully across all services
- Set clear standards for communication, timescales, and outcomes
- Promote accountability, openness, and transparency
- Support learning and continuous service improvement
- Explain the different complaints routes, including statutory processes
- Meet legal and regulatory requirements, including those set out by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Handling Code and relevant social care legislation

3. Our Customer Promise

When you raise a complaint, you can expect us to:

- Listen carefully to your concerns
- Treat you with respect and courtesy

- Act fairly, proportionately and without bias
- Be open and honest about what happened
- Keep you informed throughout the complaints process
- Use your feedback to improve our services

4. Scope

This policy applies to all complaints about services provided or commissioned by Surrey County Council.

It covers:

- Corporate complaints (non-statutory) complaints
- Statutory Adult Social Care complaints
- Statutory Children's Social Care complaints

This includes complaints about the actions, decisions, or lack of action by the Council or its staff.

Some complaints are subject to specific statutory procedures, particularly within Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care. These statutory processes form part of this policy and are explained in later sections. You do not need to know which process applies — we will ensure your complaint is handled through the correct route.

This policy applies to a wide range of Council services, including highways, transport, environmental services, education services (where not covered by separate statutory appeals), council buildings and facilities, and social care services.

5. What is a Complaint?

A complaint is:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff, affecting an individual or group.”
— Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

This definition applies to all complaints, including corporate complaints and statutory Adult or Children's Social Care complaints. Different processes, timescales, and legal requirements may apply depending on the type of service involved. You do not need to know which process applies — we will ensure your complaint is handled through the correct route.

Examples of corporate complaints may include:

- Dissatisfaction with how a pothole, street lighting, or roadworks issue was handled
- Disappointing customer service

- Delays or errors in council communications or administration
- Issues with environmental services, council buildings, or general facilities

Examples of statutory social care complaints may relate to:

Adult Social Care:

- Assessment of care and support needs
- Care planning and review arrangements
- Quality or appropriateness of care or support provided
- Delays, errors, or failures in Adult Social Care processes
- Communication, conduct, or behaviour of staff
- Decisions affecting care or support provision

Children's Social Care:

- Assessments of need, care planning, and reviews
- Placement decisions, including foster or residential placements
- Quality or delivery of services
- Delays or failures in decision-making
- Conduct or behaviour of staff
- Complaints about the application of policy or procedure

Some matters, for example court decisions or safeguarding, are outside the statutory complaints process. If this applies, we will explain why and advise you on what you can do next.

If you are unsure whether your concern is a complaint, or which process applies, our Corporate Complaints Team can advise you and help you raise it appropriately. For full detail about statutory complaints processes and eligibility, see *Section 13*.

6. What this policy does not cover

Some concerns are dealt with under separate legal or procedural routes and are not covered by this policy. These include:

- **School complaints**, which are managed under individual school complaints procedures
- **Employment matters** relating to Council staff
- **Legal appeals or statutory review processes**, for example Special Educational Needs (SEN) appeals, Blue Badge appeals, parking fines, school admissions, and exclusions
- Freedom of Information (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations (EIR), and data protection requests
- **Complaints about Councillors**, which are handled under the Members' Code of Conduct
- **Fraud or corruption concerns**, which are managed under the Council's Anti-Fraud procedures
- **Insurance claim decisions** (although we may review communication during the process)

- **Service requests**, for example reporting a pothole, blocked drain, or missed street clean. These are requests for service, not complaints. If you are unhappy with how a service request was handled, you can raise it as a complaint under this policy

This policy does include all corporate complaints and statutory Adult and Children's Social Care complaints. If your concern falls outside this policy, we will explain why and advise you on the appropriate route.

7. Access and Inclusion - Need help making a complaint?

We want everyone to be able to raise a complaint. If you need support, we can provide the following:

Interpretation and formats

- Interpretation and translation services, including British Sign Language
- Accessible formats, such as large print or Braille
- Reasonable adjustments in line with equality legislation

Advocacy and independent advice

- Eligible children have a statutory right to independent advocacy to help them understand and engage with the complaints process.
- General advice is available from organisations such as Citizens Advice and Healthwatch Surrey.
- For complaints about social care providers, first make a complaint directly to the care provider or agency; you can also raise your concerns with the local authority that arranges or pays for the care; you can also share your experience with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) so they are aware of potential issues, even if they can't resolve it directly.

Staff support

- Our staff can help explain the complaints process and guide you through it if needed.

No negative impact

- Making a complaint will not affect the level of help or support you receive in the future.

Please let us know what support you need — we will do our best to make the process as easy and accessible as possible.

8. Before Making a Complaint

We encourage you to try to resolve your concerns directly with the service first, where possible. Many issues can be addressed quickly and informally, without the need to submit a formal complaint.

To help with this, you can:

- Contact the relevant service team directly
- Explain clearly what happened, when, and who was involved
- Keep a record of emails, letters, or other evidence that may help

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, or you are not satisfied with the response, you can make a formal complaint under this policy. This applies to both corporate complaints and statutory Adult or Children's Social Care complaints.

Trying to resolve the issue early can often save time and help us put things right more quickly.

9. Early Resolution

Where possible, we aim to resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity. Early resolution may include:

- Providing explanations or apologies
- Taking immediate action to put things right where appropriate
- Signposting you to the correct service or complaints route

Early resolution can help resolve issues quickly, reduce frustration, and prevent the need for a formal complaint.

If your concern cannot be resolved informally, or you are not satisfied with the response, your complaint will move into the formal complaints process under this policy. This applies to both corporate complaints and statutory Adult or Children's Social Care complaints.

10. Who Can Complain

We welcome complaints from anyone who uses, or is affected by, a service provided or commissioned by Surrey County Council, either directly or through one of our partner organisations.

Complaints can be made by:

General (applies to all services)

- People receiving Council services

- Residents, visitors, or members of the public affected by Council services or decisions
- Someone acting on behalf of another person, with their consent

Adult Social Care

- Adults receiving care or support
- People who have requested, or been assessed for, care or support
- Carers or former carers
- Representatives acting on behalf of an adult, including where the adult lacks capacity, in line with the Mental Capacity Act 2005

Children's Social Care

- Children and young people receiving Children's Social Care services
- Children who are looked after by the local authority
- Care leavers
- Children in need
- Parents or those with parental responsibility
- Foster carers, special guardians, and others with a sufficient interest in the child's welfare

Also included are:

- Persons wishing to adopt a child
- Adopted persons, their parents, natural parents, and former guardians

Complaints made on behalf of someone else

- We will usually ask for written consent from the person affected
- We may proceed without formal consent if:
 - The complaint does not involve personal information, or
 - The individual is clearly aware of and involved in the complaint

Anonymous complaints

- These may be accepted, but please note that anonymity can limit our ability to investigate fully.

11. How to Make a Complaint

Online

- Use the Council's Complaints form on our website. You can indicate which service your complaint relates to, and we will ensure it is directed to the correct team.

By Email

- **Corporate Complaints:** county.complaints@surreycc.gov.uk
- **Adult Social Care Complaints:** asc.customerrelations@surreycc.gov.uk

- **Children’s Social Care Complaints:** be.heard@surreycc.gov.uk
- **Education (including SEND) Complaints:** be.heard@surreycc.gov.uk

By Phone

- **Corporate Complaints:** 03456 009 009
- **Adult Social Care Complaints:** 01483 518 300
- **Children’s Social Care Complaints:** 01483 519095
- **Education (including SEND) Complaints:** be.heard@surreycc.gov.uk

By Post

- **Corporate Complaints Team:** Dakota, 11 De Havilland Drive, Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0YP
- **Childrens Social Care and Education Complaints Team:** Victoria Gate, Chobham Road, Woking, GU21 6JD

In Person

- By appointment at a Council office. Please contact the relevant team to arrange a visit.

Via Social Media Direct Messages

Complaints may be sent via our corporate social media accounts. Any complaints received in this way will be taken offline and handled through our normal complaints process. To protect your privacy, we do not accept complaints submitted via public comments. Further information about our approach to social media use can be found on the [Social media and podcasts – Surrey County Council](#) webpages.

Triage

- All complaints are reviewed on receipt to ensure they follow the correct process — corporate or statutory.
- If you are unsure which team to contact, you can use any channel above, and we will direct your complaint appropriately.

Acknowledgement

- We aim to acknowledge all complaints within **3 working days** of receipt.

12. Time Limits for Complaints

Complaints should ideally be made within 12 months of the issue coming to your attention. However, we recognise that sometimes this may not be possible, and we will consider complaints outside this timeframe where there are good reasons for the delay.

Flexibility

- We will consider individual circumstances and may still investigate complaints outside the 12-month period if it is reasonable to do so.
- Decisions to accept complaints outside this timeframe will be made by the relevant Complaints Manager, in consultation with service leads where appropriate. Factors considered may include:
 - The seriousness or severity of the issue
 - The impact on the complainant
 - Whether there is sufficient information to investigate effectively.
 - Reasons why the issue could not reasonably be raised sooner

Support

- If you are unsure whether your complaint can be accepted due to the time elapsed, please contact the relevant complaints team. We will provide advice and guidance.

13. Complaints Procedures

This section explains how complaints are handled across Surrey County Council, including corporate complaints and statutory Adult and Children's Social Care complaints. Timescales, stages, and advocacy arrangements differ depending on the type of complaint.

Corporate Complaints

Stage 1 – Service Investigation

- A manager from the relevant service investigates your complaint.
- Acknowledgement within 3 working days.
- Response within 15 working days.

Stage 2 – Review

- If you remain dissatisfied, a senior officer, independent of the original investigation, will review your complaint.
- Acknowledgement within 3 working days.
- Response within 25 working days.

Escalation to the Ombudsman

- If you are still dissatisfied, you may contact the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
- Independent timescales apply.

For more information please refer to [Our corporate complaints procedure - Surrey County Council](#)

Adult Social Care Statutory Complaints

Adult Social Care complaints are managed in accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and NHS Complaints (England) Regulations 2009. This provides a formal way for adults, or those acting on their behalf, to raise concerns about the delivery, quality, or administration of adult social care services. Complaints should normally be made within 12 months of the event or of becoming aware of it.

Process

- Single-stage investigation, with timescales agreed at the outset.
- We will:
 - Acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days
 - Agree the scope and timescale (the regulations allow a period of 6 months)
 - Carry out a proportionate investigation
 - Provide a written response explaining our findings, the outcomes, and any remedies
 - If you remain dissatisfied, we can review our response in line with the LGSCO good practice guide 2025

Escalation

- If you remain dissatisfied after the statutory process, you may refer your complaint to the LGSCO.

Contact Adult Social Care Complaints Team

- Phone: 01483 518 300
- Email: asc.customerrelations@surreycc.gov.uk

For more information, please refer to our [Adult social care complaints - Surrey County Council](#)

Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints

Complaints about Children's Social Care are handled under the Children Act 1989 statutory complaints procedure. This provides a formal way for children, young people, their parents, carers, or others with sufficient interest to raise concerns about the delivery, quality, or administration of children's social care services.

The procedure has three stages:

- **Stage 1 – Local Resolution:** 10 working days (extendable to 20 working days)

- **Stage 2 – Independent Investigation:** 25 working days (extendable to 65 working days). This stage involves an independent investigator and an Independent Person.
- **Stage 3 – Review Panel:** Panel held within 30 working days from request (which must be within 20 working days from completion of Stage 2). Council response: 20 working days from date of Review Panel

Advocacy and Support

Children and young people have a statutory right to independent advocacy at all stages of the Children's Social Care complaints process.

Advocacy support can:

- Help children and young people understand the complaints process
- Support them to express their views and wishes
- Assist them during meetings and review panels

Advocates are independent of the Council and act in the best interests of the child or young person.

To request an advocate, contact the Children's Social Care Complaints Team:

- Phone: 01483 519095
- Email: be.heard@surreycc.gov.uk

Escalation

- Once the statutory procedure is complete, complaints may be referred to the LGSCO.

For information on how to complain, please refer to our [Children's social care complaints - Surrey County Council](#)

14. Extensions

Some complaints may be more complex or require extra information, meaning the investigation could take longer than the usual timescales.

If an extension is needed, we will:

- Let you know promptly that we need more time to undertake our investigation
- Explain the reason why we need more time to investigate
- Provide a new expected date for our response
- Keep you regularly updated throughout the process

If you feel the extension is taking too long you can contact the relevant complaints team. We are here to help ensure your concerns are addressed fairly and as quickly as possible.

15. Complaint Outcomes

How will you hear back

Once we have completed our investigation, you will receive a clear, written response by letter or email—whichever you prefer. This response will include:

- What we found during the investigation
- Our decision regarding your complaint
- Any actions we plan to take to address the issue
- Guidance on what you can do next if you are not fully satisfied

Types of decisions

- **Upheld** – We agree that there was a service failure. For example, policies or procedures may not have been followed correctly.
- **Partially Upheld** – Some parts of your complaint were justified, while others were not.
- **Not Upheld** – We believe the service was delivered properly and in line with our policies and procedures.

Next steps

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, what you can do next will depend on the type of complaint and the stage reached.

- For corporate complaints, you may be able to request a further internal review.
- Statutory Adult and Children's Social Care complaints follow legally prescribed procedures with defined stages.
- After completing the Council's complaints process, you may contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

Further information about escalation routes and timescales is set out in Section 13 (Complaints Procedures) and Section 17 (Contacting the Ombudsman).

16. Putting Things Right - Remedies

When things go wrong, we aim to resolve complaints fairly, promptly, and effectively. The actions we take will depend on the nature of the complaint and the outcome of the investigation. Possible remedies may include:

- **Apologies** – acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- **Fixing the problem** – providing the service or support you were expecting
- **Corrections or reconsideration** – reviewing decisions or amending errors
- **Improvements** – updating policies, procedures, or staff training to prevent recurrence
- **Financial remedies** – where appropriate and in line with Ombudsman guidance

Our approach

- Where fault is found, we aim to put you back in the position you would have been in if the issue had not occurred, wherever possible.
- Remedies are applied consistently across all complaints, including corporate and statutory Adult and Children’s Social Care complaints, in line with Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) guidance.
- Every complaint is also an opportunity for learning and service improvement.

17. Contacting the Ombudsman

If you are still dissatisfied after completing the Council’s complaints process—whether corporate or statutory—you may contact the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

The Ombudsman is an independent and impartial service that investigates complaints about councils. Their service is free of charge.

What the Ombudsman may do:

- Review information from both you and the Council
- Request further details if needed
- Recommend actions such as apologies, service improvements, or financial remedies
- Explain their reasons if they do not uphold your complaint

Contact details:

- **Address:** Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH
- **Phone:** 0300 061 0614
- **Website:** www.lgo.org.uk

Contacting the Ombudsman is the final stage after completing the Council’s complaints process.

18. Managing Unreasonable or Unacceptable Behaviour

Most people use our complaints process reasonably and respectfully. However, in rare cases, someone may behave in a threatening, abusive, or persistently disruptive manner.

The Council manages such behaviour under its Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy, ensuring that:

- Staff and service users are protected
- Complaints can continue to be handled fairly
- Behaviour is addressed in a consistent and transparent way

This applies to complaints of all types, whether corporate or statutory.

For further information, read our [Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy](#).

19. Learning from Complaints

We use complaints as an important tool to **improve services and prevent issues from recurring**. This applies to **corporate complaints as well as statutory Adult and Children's Social Care complaints**.

By reviewing complaints, we can:

- Identify **trends and common issues** across services
- Update **policies and procedures** to prevent future problems
- Provide **training and guidance for staff**
- Share **lessons learned across the Council** to improve outcomes for all service users

Every complaint helps us **learn and improve our services**, ensuring feedback benefits both individuals and the wider community.

20. Monitoring and Reporting

We carefully monitor all complaints to ensure they are handled fairly, promptly, and thoroughly. Monitoring complaints helps us understand where we are performing well and where improvements are needed.

Each year, we publish an Annual Complaints Performance Report which includes:

- The volume and types of complaints received across all services, including statutory complaints
- Response times and performance against agreed targets
- Actions taken and improvements made to services as a result of complaints

Transparency and accountability

- We share this report publicly to demonstrate our commitment to **openness, accountability, and continuous improvement**.
- Your feedback plays a vital role in helping us **enhance services** for everyone.

21. Confidentiality and Data Protection

We take your privacy and the security of your information very seriously. When you make a complaint—whether corporate or statutory—we handle your details carefully and in accordance with data protection laws.

- We will only share your information with staff involved in resolving your complaint, or when legally required to do so.
- Your personal information will never be shared without your consent, unless required by law.
- You can be confident that your complaint will be handled with the utmost confidentiality, respect, and professionalism.

Confidentiality applies to all complaints, ensuring your information is protected throughout the investigation and resolution process.

22. Complaint Records Retention

We keep complaint records securely in line with the Council's data retention policies and legal requirements.

- All complaint records (corporate and statutory) are retained for a minimum of three years.
- Statutory Adult and Children's Social Care complaint records are retained for longer periods where required by legislation, safeguarding obligations, or statutory guidance.
- Children's Social Care records, and records relating to serious safeguarding concerns, may be retained for up to 75 years or permanently in accordance with statutory retention requirements.
- After the applicable retention period has expired, records are securely disposed of unless there is an ongoing investigation, legal proceeding, audit requirement, or statutory reason to retain them.

Further details about how long different types of complaint records are kept are set out in the Council's data retention schedules, which comply with data protection and safeguarding legislation.

23. Comments and Compliments

We value all feedback—whether it's ideas for improvement or recognition of a job well done or general comments about our services. Your feedback helps us celebrate successes and improve services across the Council.

You can share your feedback using the same channels as complaints:

- **Online:** [Compliments and Comments Page](#)
- **Email:** county.complaints@surreycc.gov.uk
- **Phone:** 03456 009 009

- **Post:** Dakota, 11 De Havilland Drive, Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0YP

24. Policy Review and Governance

Oversight of the Council's complaints processes — including corporate and statutory Adult and Children's Social Care complaints — is provided by the Corporate Leadership Team.

- **Reporting:** Performance data, trends, and lessons learned from complaints are reported regularly to senior leadership and relevant scrutiny committees.
- **Policy review:** This policy is reviewed every two years, or sooner if changes in legislation, statutory guidance, or service structures require it. Responsibility for updates lies with the Director of Customer Experience, in consultation with the Directors of Adult and Children's Social Care. Updates will be made promptly if there are changes to statutory guidance, social care legislation, or the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code.
- **Continuous improvement:** Monitoring and governance ensure complaints are handled consistently, fairly, and in line with statutory and corporate requirements, while supporting learning and service improvement.

This oversight covers all complaints, ensuring transparency, accountability, and continuous service improvement across the Council.