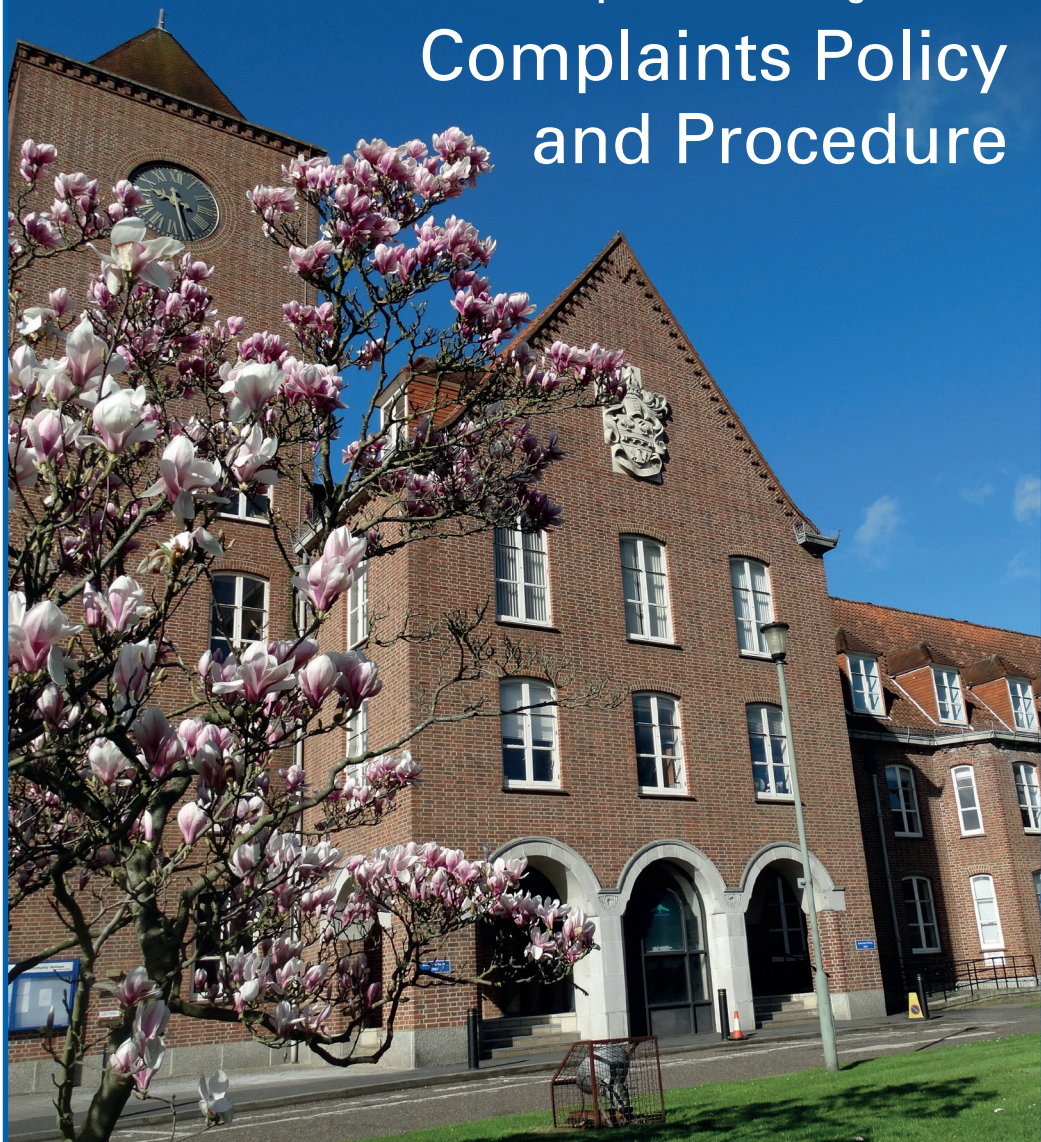


Spelthorne Borough Council

Complaints Policy and Procedure



www.spelthorne.gov.uk/complaints

customer.services@spelthorne.gov.uk

01784 451499

Customer Service Centre, Spelthorne Borough Council,
Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames, TW18 1XB



Introduction

We aim to provide high-quality and value-for-money services to all our customers. If we do get something wrong, we want to try to put it right quickly and learn from our mistakes to help improve services in the future. Feedback from our customers is an important part of helping us to do this.

We will deal with all complaints fairly, consistently and professionally, in line with our Customer Care Charter.

Please contact us to request this document in an alternative format or language.

What is a complaint?

In simple terms, a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about anything we have done, or perhaps not done. It might be about:

- failure to deliver a service
- delay in providing a service
- unsatisfactory quality of a service
- the behaviours of a member of our staff
- failure of our staff in following Council policy

What is not a complaint?

There are certain subject areas that we would not consider as a complaint, these include:

- first time request for service (such as reporting a missed refuse collection, removal of "fly-tipping", noise nuisance or housing repair).
- request for information or an explanation of council policy (such as why the Council Tax is set at a certain level)
- disagreement with a Council decision

There are some occasions when a complaint is not dealt with under this policy: for example, when there is a separate appeal or review procedure (this may be an internal council procedure or external legal process through the courts). If this is the case, we will explain this when you first contact us and tell you what to do next.

How to make a complaint

You can make your complaint either in writing or verbally. Putting your complaint in writing helps us to ensure that the complaint is recorded properly, and can be a more effective way of making sure that we understand all the relevant details. We need to know what you believe went wrong, what you would like us to do to put matters right and whether you have already spoken to anyone about it.

If you already have the contact details for the service responsible for the matter you wish to complain about, please contact them direct and they will try to resolve the issue to your satisfaction.

Alternatively, there are a number of other ways you can contact us.

- complete the suggestions and complaints form on our website **www.spelthorne.gov.uk/complaints**
- email **customer.services@spelthorne.gov.uk**
- phone us on 01784 451499
- write to us at: Customer Service Centre, Spelthorne Borough Council, Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames, TW18 1XB
- or visit us at the above address. Our opening hours are Monday to Thursday 9am - 5pm and Friday 9am - 12noon

We want customers to be able to communicate with us and access our services easily. It is important that you let us know if you prefer to communicate with us and access our information in a particular way. For example, if you need help making a complaint and English is not your first or preferred language or you have a disability that makes communicating with us more difficult, please tell us and we will arrange for someone to help you. If you require information in an alternative format please let us know and, where feasible, we will provide it. We are happy for someone else to contact us who will act on your behalf as long as you have given authorisation for them to do so.

Our Complaints Procedure

Informal stage

We aim to resolve the vast majority of complaints about Council services at the first point of contact. Please let us know of any problem to give us the opportunity to put it right as soon as we can.

In many instances the first point of contact with the Council will be with our Customer Service Centre. We train our Customer Service staff to try to resolve any complaints about Council services but if this is not possible, they will put you directly in touch with someone in the relevant service that can help.

If after you have contacted us you are still not satisfied, or the issue has not been resolved, then you should use Stage 1 of the formal complaints procedure.

Formal Complaints – Stage 1: Consideration and response

You can register a complaint by using any of the methods above, although we would prefer if you would put your complaint in writing. We will appoint someone senior within the service involved to consider your complaint. They will be your point of contact (unless advised otherwise) until the investigation is complete. They will keep you informed of the progress of your complaint or make you aware of the reasons for any delay.

We will acknowledge your complaint within five working days of receipt and that acknowledgement will provide an answer if possible. If we have not had the opportunity to resolve your complaint within this time then we will come back to you within 10 working days to provide a full answer or say when we will be able to give you a full reply, as well as giving you an update on the investigation.

If your complaint is about something of a personal nature and we need to refer it to a third party, we will seek your consent first before doing so.

Formal Complaints – Stage 2: Request for a Review

We hope that our consideration of your complaint will provide you with a fair and satisfactory response. If you have good reasons to believe that we did not investigate your complaint properly, you can request a review. For example, you may believe that an important piece of information was missed out, or misunderstood and feel this would change the outcome.

Your review request must be made within 28 days of receiving our response to your complaint. It should be sent to our Group Head for Commissioning and Transformation at the above address and include reasons in support of your request for a review. This Group Head, who is independent from all the other services in the Council, will pull together all the relevant facts and decide whether there are grounds for a review.

We will acknowledge your request for a review within five working days of receipt, and let you know which of the following actions we intend to take:

- if your request for review is upheld, we will arrange for a further investigation or better response if required, by the relevant Group Head for the service concerned; or
- if your request is not upheld we may:
 - refer the complaint back to the manager for the service you are complaining about, with a request to reconsider all or specific parts of your complaint; or
 - decide not to carry out a further investigation if any of the following apply:
 - your complaint was properly dealt with at first consideration stage;
 - there is no evidence that we are at fault in delivering our service; this includes failure to follow law, government guidance or our own policies, procedures and best practice;
 - further investigation would not result in the outcome you are seeking; or
 - there is a more appropriate route for resolution

If your review request is unsuccessful, we will write to you to explain why. If we decide that a further investigation is appropriate we will pass the matter to the relevant Group Head who has not previously been involved with your case to carry it out.

The relevant Group Head will aim to provide a full response within 20 working days. Complex complaints may take longer and if this is the case we will keep you informed. The decision made by the Group Head will be final.

You can contact our Group Head for Commissioning and Transformation at customer.services@spelthorne.gov.uk

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman

There will be occasions where we will not be able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction. If this is the case, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) or the Housing Ombudsman (HO) who will consider your complaint and investigate, if appropriate.

The LGO and HO will not normally consider any appeal until a complaint has been through the complaints procedure outlined in this document. It will be in your interest to follow this procedure before taking your complaint to them.

To contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman please call: 0300 061 0614.

Alternatively, you can write to: The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH. Please visit www.lgo.org.uk to complete the complaint form.

To contact the Housing Ombudsman Service please call: 0300 111 3000
Alternatively, you can write to: 81 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4HN. Please visit www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk to complete the complaint form.

How you can help us

We understand that it is frustrating when we do not meet your expectations. You can be sure that we will do everything we can to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction. In return, we ask that you:

- treat our staff with respect
- do not use abusive language or behaviour when dealing with us
- comply with all reasonable requests made in an effort to resolve your concerns

How we manage unreasonable complaint behaviour

On the rare occasion when a customer makes a complaint in an unreasonable way: repeatedly, obsessively or aggressively, for example, we will write to them explaining what action we are taking to bring the matter to an end. This could include, but not be limited to, restricting the form of

communication that a complainant can use, limiting contact to a named officer or managing the contact with the help of a named intermediary.

The decision to class a complainant as unreasonable will be made by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Corporate Management Team. They will write to the complainant to explain the reason for the decision. The Monitoring Officer will record the details in a register and review the decision after six months. The Monitoring Officer will write to the complainant to tell them if they have been removed from the register or if they will remain on it for a further six months, when a further review will be carried out.

Privacy Statement

All correspondence received by the Council is subject to the Freedom of Information and Environmental Information laws and, in certain circumstances, may need to be made public. We will, however, respect legitimate expectations for confidentiality and we will keep to the relevant privacy laws.

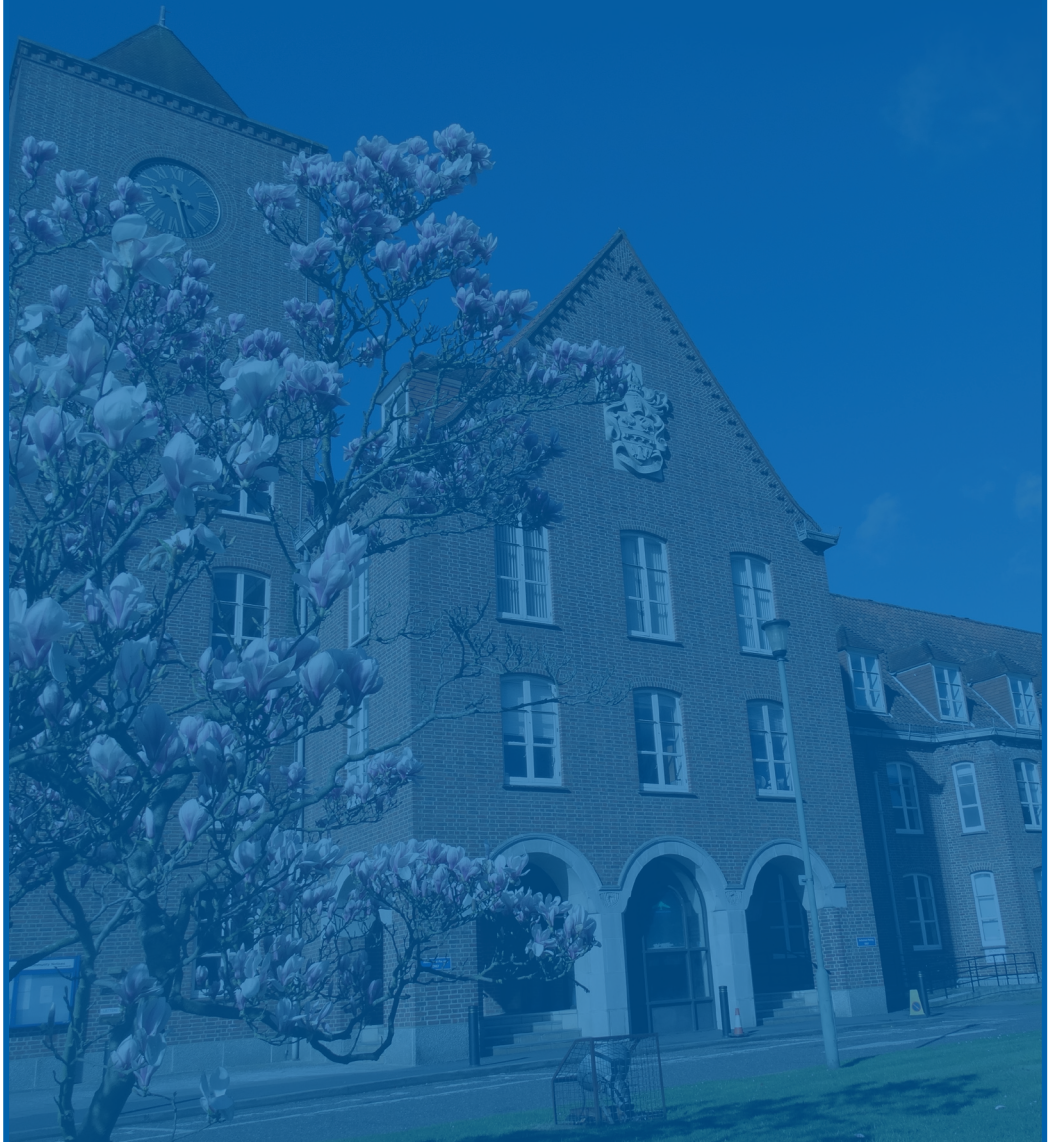
We will use the personal information you give us only to deal with your feedback and, where necessary, to put things right. In the case of complaints, we will give details to the people who need them in order to investigate and resolve the matter.

We will not give your personal details to any third party unless they have a need to know (for example, if a complaint relates to the actions of one of our contractors, or if the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is investigating).

When dealing with complaints, we also protect the identity of other people who may be involved. So there may be times when we will not be able to give you personal information about other people (for example, witnesses to incidents or other people complaining).

Follow up process

From time to time, we may contact a sample of customers who have used our complaints procedure to ask for their feedback on the response they received. We will appreciate your co-operation with this process, as it will help us to improve the service we offer to you.



www.spelthorne.gov.uk/complaints
customer.services@spelthorne.gov.uk
01784 451499

Customer Service Centre, Spelthorne Borough Council,
Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames, TW18 1XB

