

Corporate Complaints Policy 2025-2026



Status: Not Published	Policy:	Corporate Complaints Policy		
Owner	Commissioning and Transformation	Contact for Help	Complaints Officer	
Intended Audience	This policy applies to all staff, councillors, Borough residents and users of services provided by Spelthorne Borough Council			
Reference	Version	Date	Date Approved	Next Review Due
	2	November 2024		

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Spelthorne Borough Council aims to provide high-quality services to all our residents and customers, but we recognise that we do not always meet the high standards we set ourselves.
- 1.2. 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
- 1.3. We will deal with all complaints fairly, consistently and professionally, in line with our [Customer Care Charter](#).
- 1.4. We want customers to be able to communicate with us and access our services easily. If you need help making a complaint or you need this document in an alternative format or language, please tell us and we will arrange for someone to help you.

What is a complaint?

- 1.5. The Council has adopted the following definition of a complaint as defined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code:

'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.'

- 1.6. A complaint can be about quality of service, delay in providing a service, the actions of staff or perceived failure to adhere to Council policy.

What is not a complaint?

- 1.7. A complaint is not:

- a request for service i.e. a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision,
- a request for information,

- an explanation of Council policy, for example, that Council tax is set at a certain rate or that dogs on leads are allowed in cemeteries.
 - an expression of dissatisfaction made through a survey.
- 1.8. If any of the above matters are raised through social media channels, we aim to provide a response or direct you to the relevant department within 24 working hours of your message being received.
- 1.9. A response from the relevant department to any of these matters will be sent within 7 working days.
- 1.10. We will not ordinarily consider your complaint if:
- there is a designated appeals process, or specific statutory review procedure available to you (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.
 - The matter has been considered at Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy within the past 12 months, although each case will be considered on its merits.
 - The issue giving rise to the complaint, or the customer becoming aware of it, occurred over 12 months ago. In any case, each complaint will be considered on its merits.
 - Legal proceedings have been started.
 - The issue has already been decided by a court or independent tribunal.
- 1.11. We will not ordinarily consider complaints about the management of properties we own as a registered social landlord. These properties (Harper House and The White House) are managed on the Council's behalf by Knowle Green Estates (a wholly owned Council company). Knowle Green Estates has its own Complaints Policy which customers can access via their [tenant portal](#). We will refer customers to this if it is the most appropriate route.
- 1.12. If we decide not to accept your complaint, we will explain the reasons why. Customers have the right to challenge our decision not to accept their complaint by going to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, who can instruct us to take on the complaint.

2. The Ombudsman

- 2.1. 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.

- 2.2. 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.
- 2.3. The Ombudsman has issued a Complaint Handling Code which sets out advice and guidance for councils on how to handle complaints. For more information, visit the Ombudsman's website: [Complaint Handling Code - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#).
- 2.4. The Ombudsman investigates complaints in a fair and independent way - it does not take sides. It is a free service.
- 2.5. We will provide you with details of how to raise your complaint with the Ombudsman at every stage of your contact with us. The Ombudsman expects you to have given us a chance to deal with your complaint, before you contact them.
- 2.6. You can **Contact the Ombudsman:**
Website: www.lgo.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 061 0614

3. Policy Details

- 3.1. This is the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy. It explains the procedures the Council will follow in considering complaints about services the Borough Council delivers.
- 3.2. We have designed this Complaints Policy to comply with the Ombudsman's [Complaint Handling Code](#) to ensure that complaints are properly identified and investigated.
- 3.3. We will promote the Code with our staff and undertake regular reviews to ensure it is being applied.
- 3.4. This Policy is published on the [Council's website](#).
- 3.5. Paper copies of this Policy will be made available at the Main Reception of the Council Offices at Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames.

4. How to make a complaint

- 4.1. Some issues can be resolved by talking to the member of staff, or team, dealing with your issue.

Stage 1 complaint procedure

- 4.2. If this does not resolve the matter, a customer will be given the opportunity to make a **Stage 1** complaint using our two-stage complaints procedure.
- 4.3. 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 impact this has had on you, what you would like us to do to put matters right and whether you have already spoken to anyone about it.

4.4. If your complaint is about an ongoing issue that the Council is aware of and trying to address, we will continue our efforts to resolve the issue whilst dealing with your complaint.

4.5. You can contact us about your complaint by:

- completing the [online complaints form](#)
- emailing customer.services@spelthorne.gov.uk
- phoning us on 01784 451499
- writing 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 8.45am - 5pm and Friday 8.45am - 4.45pm

4.6. If you need help with making a complaint let us know.

4.7. 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. This could be a friend, relative, legal representative, local councillors or the MP.

When can I expect to hear from you?

4.8. Your complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days. You should get a full response within a further 10 working days after the acknowledgment. If this is not possible, you will be kept informed and given a timescale for a full response.

4.9. If we have made a mistake we will apologise and advise what we will do to remedy it.

4.10. At the end of a Stage 1 response, we will advise you how to raise your complaint at Stage 2.

Stage 2 complaint procedure

4.11. If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can make a **Stage 2** complaint. Your Stage 2 complaint must be made within 28 days of receiving the Council's Stage 1 response, unless there are good reasons why this has not been possible.

4.12. If you made your Stage 1 complaint using the Council's online complaints form, you will be given the opportunity to raise a Stage 2 complaint by the same means.

4.13. In any other case, the **request for a Stage 2 complaint should be sent:**

- by email to complaints@spelthorne.gov.uk
- by letter to Group Head for Commissioning and Transformation, Spelthorne Borough Council, Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames, TW18 1XB

4.14. It would help us to review your complaint if you are able to explain why your complaint was not resolved to your satisfaction at Stage 1.

However, even if you do not provide this information, we will undertake a full review of your complaint.

- 4.15. Your complaint will be investigated in an impartial manner and responded to by a senior manager who does not work in the service area complained about.
- 4.16. Your complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days. You should get a full response within a further 20 working days after the acknowledgment. If this is not possible, you will be kept informed and given a timescale for a full response.
- 4.17. At the end of a Stage 2 response, we will advise you of your right to refer your complaint to the Ombudsman.

5. Putting things right

5.1. Where something has gone wrong the Council will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken or intends to take to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- Taking action if there has been a delay
- Reconsidering or changing a decision
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum
- Providing a financial remedy
- Changing policies, procedures or practices

5.2. Any remedy offered will reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified.

5.3. The remedy offer will clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the individual where appropriate. Any remedy proposed will be followed through to completion.

5.4. If a proposed remedy cannot be delivered, the individual will be informed of the reason for this and provided with details of any alternative remedy. They will also be reminded of their right to complain to the Ombudsman.

6. Not satisfied with our decision.

6.1. You can contact the Ombudsman at any stage of our formal complaints procedure for advice and assistance.

6.2. The Ombudsman will ordinarily only consider a complaint once it has been through both stages of the Council's complaints procedure. You usually have 12 months to raise your concerns with the Ombudsman after completing our complaints procedure.

- 6.3. For more information on the Ombudsman or to raise a complaint visit their website [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)
- 6.4. Or 'phone 0300 061 0614 (opening hours: Monday - Friday (ex. Wednesday) 10am to 1pm (except public holidays). Wednesdays 1pm to 4pm
- 6.5. You may also wish to contact a designated person such as your [local councillor](#) or [MP](#)

7. Training

- 7.1. All staff will receive training on this Complaints Policy and associated procedures and be able to pass details of your complaint to the appropriate person within the Council.
- 7.2. Staff will receive guidance on the value of learning from complaints in order to improve services.

8. Complaints handling code - self assessment

- 8.1. From April 2025 we will be completing the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment annually. The self-assessment will be reported to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for scrutiny and challenge and published on our website.
- 8.2. If you have any suggestions on how you feel we can improve our complaints process, email us at complaints@spelthorne.gov.uk

9. Monitoring and Performance Management

- 9.1. We aim to review this policy annually to ensure it reflects current guidance and best practice.
- 9.2. We log and monitor all complaints received and report annually on these to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. In addition, this Committee, (which holds the role of Member Responsible for Complaints) reviews the volume and outcome of complaints and complaint handling performance on an annual basis to drive service improvements. Individual Services also record, monitor and review service requests quarterly.

10. Complaints feedback

- 10.1. If you have experienced our complaints procedure, then we want to hear from you. Take our [short survey](#) (link to be inserted) to give feedback on your experience, which we can use to continue to make improvements in how we handle complaints from our customers.

11. Equalities Implications

- 11.1. In producing this document an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out.
- 11.2. An EIA is a way of assessing the impact, or likely impact, that a particular policy, procedure or decision will have on particular groups. This is used to assess whether in making the decision whether the Council has complied with its public sector equality duty under S149 of

the Equality Act 2010 (as amended) to; eliminate discrimination and any other conduct that is prohibited under this act and to advance equality between those who share a protected characteristic.

- 11.3. In accordance with the Equality Act we will make changes in our approach as necessary to ensure our services are accessible to everybody. The reasonable adjustments required may be physical, but we will also adjust this Policy and procedure, as well as staff training, to ensure that the objectives are delivered equally well for all our customers including people with, for example, learning disabilities and those who cannot read or write or speak English.
- 11.4. We will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities you disclose to us. Any adjustments agreed will be kept under active review. This information will be retained in accordance with our [Privacy Policy](#).

Version Control

Version Number	Date amended	Author	Comments	Date Approved	Approved by
V0.1	Sept 2024	Gill Scott	First draft completed	-	-
V0.2	Nov 2024	Gill Scott	Second draft for GH sign-off		