

Corporate Complaints Policy

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1. Introduction

This Corporate Complaints Policy sets out how the Council receives, investigates and resolves complaints about its services. The policy reflects the principles of fairness, accessibility, transparency, and learning. The Council is committed to providing high-quality services and welcomes feedback to help us improve.

1.1 Scope of the Corporate Complaints Policy and Statutory Routes.

1.1.1 This Corporate Complaints Policy applies to all Council services except where a separate statutory complaints process applies, including Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

1.1.2 All third parties who deliver council services will be expected to adhere to this policy and use Slough Borough Council's 2-stage complaints process. The Council is responsible for ensuring that any third parties or external contractors delivering council services adhere to this policy and handle complaints in line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's and Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code where applicable.

1.1.3 This policy is kept under review to ensure it complies with the requirements of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's and Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Codes. The Housing Ombudsman reviewed the Council's policy in 2026 and the Code was amended in accordance with its recommendations.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a fair; accessible and consistent complaints process and to learn from complaints to improve services.

3. What Is a Complaint?

A complaint is defined as

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

This is different from a service request which is defined as:

"a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision". An individual does not need to use the word "complaint" for a matter to be treated as such. Wherever dissatisfaction is expressed, the Council will ensure the individual is given the opportunity and choice to have their concerns handled as a complaint under this policy. Complaints submitted by a third party or representative acting on behalf of an individual will be accepted and managed in accordance with the Council's Complaints Procedure. A complaint may be raised when an individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of

the service request remains ongoing. The Council will not stop its efforts to address the service request if an individual chooses to complain.

3.1 Support and Advocacy

The Council supports individuals to access the complaints process and encourages the use of advocates where needed.

3.2 Anonymous Complaints

The Council will not normally pursue anonymous complaints.

There are other avenues for residents and service users to raise concerns anonymously, including:

- Raising concerns about suspected fraud to the Council's fraud team
[Report fraud – Slough Borough Council](#)
- Raising concerns about safeguarding concerns
[Slough Safeguarding Partnership - Report Concerns](#)
- Raising concerns about illegality
monitoringofficer@slough.gov.uk
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3.3 Time limits

Complaints will be accepted up to 12 months after the issue occurred or an individual became aware of it. The Council will consider accepting complaints outside this timeframe where there are good reasons for the delay, in line with Ombudsman guidance.

4. Exclusions

The following set out exclusions from this policy. Each complaint will be considered on its own merit. Where the Council decides that an issue does not fall within the scope of this policy, the reasons for this decision will be clearly explained to the individual and the rationale for the decision set out in line with the Complaint Handling Code. The Council will also explain that the individual has the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman..

- **Matters with a statutory appeal or review process**

- Issues where there is a defined statutory right of appeal or review, including (but not limited to):
- Planning and licensing decisions

- Parking penalties (Penalty Charge Notices)
- Housing Benefit or Council Tax decisions
- School admissions or exclusions
- Decisions relating to an Education, Care and Health Plan within the remit of the First Tier Tribunal
- homelessness decisions where there is a statutory right of review and appeal

In these cases, individuals are normally expected to use the relevant statutory appeal or review process rather than the complaints procedure. These matters are not applied as blanket exclusions, and complaints may still be considered where they relate to service failure, delay, communication, or failure to follow procedure.

• **Complaints about Councillors**

- Complaints relating to the conduct of Councillors are dealt with under the Members' Code of Conduct.

• **Personnel and employment matters**

- Complaints relating to Council employment matters, including recruitment, disciplinary issues, grievances, pay, or terms and conditions, are managed through internal Human Resources procedures.

• **School-based complaints**

- Complaints about schools, academies or colleges are managed through their own governing bodies or complaints procedures.

• **Insurance claims and legal matters**

- The Council will not normally investigate matters that are subject to legal proceedings, including insurance claims.

This does not prevent the Council from considering complaints about service quality, delay, communication or the complaints procedure being utilised prior to the issue of proceedings.

• **Disagreement with policy decisions**

- The complaints process is to deal with service failure as opposed to challenging policy decisions made by the Council. However the

complaints process can be used if an individual considers that the Council has not properly applied their policy to their situation.

- **Matters outside the Council's remit**
- Issues where the Council has no legal power or duty to act, or where responsibility rests with another organisation.

5. Who Can Make a Complaint?

A complaint may be made by any member of the public who has been affected by a Council service, action, or failure to act. Complaints may also be made by someone acting on behalf of another person, provided the individual's consent has been given or the Council is satisfied the representative is acting in their best interests. Where several people are affected by the same Council decision or issue, one person may act as a representative and submit a complaint on behalf of the group.

5.1. Managing Unreasonable Behaviour

The Council will ensure all complaints are handled fairly and proportionately. In a small number of cases, the way a complaint is pursued may affect the Council's ability to progress it effectively. In these instances, the Council may treat the matter as an unreasonable behaviour. Behaviour may be considered unreasonable where there is:

- disproportionate or unclear demands;
- persistent contact about the same issue without new information;
- abusive or inappropriate language;
- excessive or repetitive contact;
- multiple issues raised in a way that prevents effective investigation.

Before taking action, the Council will normally explain its concerns and give the individual an opportunity to modify their approach. Any restrictions will be evidence based and comply with the Equality Act.

Where concerns continue, the Council may apply reasonable and proportionate measures, utilising the Council's Management Of Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy.

Any measures will be proportionate, clearly explained, and kept under review. They will not prevent access to Council services or the submission of new complaints on different matters.

6. How to Make a Complaint

Complaints may be made via any channel, including online, email, telephone, letter, in person or via social media, and will be accepted and handled consistently regardless of how they are received. Slough Borough Council operates a no-wrong-door approach to complaints and will ensure that expressions of dissatisfaction are appropriately recognised and managed. Residents can raise their complaints in any way with any member of staff. The Council is committed to providing an accessible complaints service and will make this policy available in alternative formats on request. The Council will ensure the complaints process is clearly published on its website and in resident communication including signposting to the Housing Ombudsman. Information on how to complain will be routinely provided at key service interactions (e.g. repairs, tenancy ASB cases). Reasonable adjustments will be made where required to enable individuals to access and progress a complaint, including support to make a complaint verbally, accepting complaints through a representative or advocate, providing information in alternative languages or formats, and making adjustments to communication methods or timescales where appropriate. **The Council will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed and a record of any disabilities disclosed by residents.**

Council officers may contact a complainant to clarify aspects of a complaint. This can include the following:

- **Clarify with the individual any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about;**
 - **Give the individual an opportunity to clearly set out their position;**
 - **Consider any concerns about actual or perceived conflicts of interest in relation to who investigates a complaint;**

The above can happen before the matter is referred to Stage 1 if this supports effective resolution.

7. Stages of the Complaint Process

The Council operates a **two-stage Corporate Complaints Procedure**, designed to be accessible, fair, proportionate and timely. The Council will prioritise early

and local resolution of complaints wherever possible to prevent escalation and minimise impact on residents.

The Council, when handling complaints, will deal with complaints on their own merit, act independently and have an open mind. Residents will be reminded of their right to escalate their complaint or approach the Housing Ombudsman at all relevant stages

7.1 Stage 1 – Initial Investigation

Stage 1 is the Council's first formal opportunity to investigate and resolve the complaint in a fair, proportionate and timely way.

Complaints will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt.

Acknowledgements at Stage 1 will confirm the Council's understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the complainant is seeking, and which aspects are and are not within the Council's responsibility.

A full written response will normally be provided within ten working days of acknowledgement. Responses will be issued when the Council has carefully considered all the information and evidence and reached a view on the complaint, even where not all identified actions have been completed. Where actions remain outstanding, the response will clearly set these out and provide appropriate updates on progress.

The Stage 1 response will address all points raised in the complaint and set out in clear, plain language:

- The complaint stage;
- The Council's understanding of the complaint
- The decision on the complaint
- The reason for any decision made
- The details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- Details of any outstanding actions; and
- Details of how to escalate the matter to the stage 2 of the complaints process if the individual is not satisfied with the response.

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Where all or part of the complaint remains unresolved at Stage 1, and dissatisfaction continues, the complaint will progress to Stage 2 upon request.

Where a complaint is complex or requires input from more than one service area, the Council may need additional time to provide a full response. In such cases, a holding response will be issued before the applicable ten-working-day deadline, explaining the reason for the delay and confirming a revised response date. The Council will agree suitable intervals at which to keep the complainant informed of progress and will normally issue a full Stage 1 response no later than a further ten working days. When the Council informs the resident of an extension to the Stage 1 response, the Council will provide the resident with the details of the Ombudsman.

Any Stage 1 extension will be applied only where there is good reason.

Where additional related issues are raised during the Stage 1 investigation, the Council will confirm whether these issues can be reasonably addressed as part of the existing complaint, or whether they need to be logged separately. This will be explained clearly to the complainant.

7.2 Stage 2 – Review

Stage 2 provides an independent review of the Stage 1 response and is intended to consider whether the complaint was handled appropriately and whether the outcome was reasonable and proportionate. Residents will not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration.

A Stage 2 review can be requested where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1.

The Council will not refuse an escalation of a complaint unless it has valid reasons to do so and the Council will make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.

Stage 2 complaints will normally be acknowledged within five working days of receipt. Acknowledgements at Stage 2 will confirm the Council's understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the complainant is seeking, and which aspects are and are not within the Council's responsibility.

A Stage 2 response will normally be issued within twenty working days of acknowledgement.

The Council will ensure that staff responsible for Stage 2 reviews are appropriately trained and empowered to act independently, make fair decisions, and resolve complaints in line with the Complaint Handling Code.

The person considering the complaint at Stage 2 will not be the same person who considered the complaint at Stage 1. Stage 2 will include all suitable staff members needed to issue a response.

Responses will be issued when the Council has carefully considered all the information and evidence and reached a view on the complaint, even where not all identified actions have been completed. Where actions remain outstanding, the response will clearly set these out and provide appropriate updates on progress.

The Stage 2 response will address all points raised and set out in clear, plain language:

- The complaint stage;
- The Council's understanding of the complaint;
- The decision on the complaint;
- The reasons for any decisions made;
- The details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- Details of any outstanding actions; and
- Details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if the individual remains dissatisfied.

Where it is not possible to meet the twenty-working-day response timescale, the Council will inform the complainant of the delay, clearly explain the reasons, and provide a revised response date. The Council will normally issue its Stage 2 response no later than a further twenty working days. When the Council informs the resident of an extension to the Stage 2 response, the Council will provide the resident with the details of the Ombudsman.

Any Stage 2 extension will be applied only where there is good reason.

7.3 Completing the Complaints Process

A Stage 2 response represents the Council's final response under the Corporate Complaints Procedure and once concluded, the complaint will be considered exhausted. The Council will not normally consider any further representations on the same issues unless new and relevant information is provided that could not reasonably have been submitted earlier, or where further action is recommended by the Ombudsman.

Final Stage 2 responses will clearly signpost complainants to the appropriate Ombudsman, including full contact details: the Housing Ombudsman for housing landlord related complaints, and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for all other eligible complaints.

8. Remedies

Where a complaint is upheld, the Council will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken or intends to take to put things right. Remedies are intended to acknowledge any fault, address the impact on the complainant, and prevent recurrence. Remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.

Remedies may include:

- a clear explanation and apology.
- an acknowledgement where things have gone wrong.
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons.
- taking action to resolve the outstanding issue.
- reconsidering or changing a decision.
- amending a record or adding a correction or addendum.
- providing a financial remedy.
- changing policies, procedures or practices.

Remedies will be fair, reasonable and proportionate, taking account of the individual circumstances and relevant Ombudsman guidance. Remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.

The remedy offer should clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the individual if appropriate. Any remedy proposed should be followed through to completion. If the proposed remedy cannot be delivered the individual should be informed of the reasons for this, provided with details of any alternative remedy and reminded of their right to complaint to the Ombudsman.

For housing landlord complaints, the Council's separate Remedies and Compensation Policy will apply. The Council will also take account of good practice guides and guidance on remedies issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

9. Learning and Improvement

Outcomes and learning points from complaints at all stages will be recorded and used to help improve services, policies and procedures. The Council seeks to have a positive complaints handling culture and sees complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.

The Council will publish annual complaints performance and service improvement report and will regularly review its policy and procedures following a self-assessment against both the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes. The Council will also publish this Corporate Complaints Policy and Information about the Housing Ombudsman and the Complaint Handling on this code to accompany the self-assessment. These will be reported and published to relevant member bodies and may be subject to resident review by representative groups.

In addition specific elected members have a role in ensuring a positive complaints handling culture. The lead member for housing is the Member Responsible for Housing Complaints and who will provide assurance to elected members on compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and oversee the complaint performance of the Housing Service. The Leader of the Council is the lead member for governance and has overall responsibility at a political level for complaints handling. Each cabinet member is responsible for ensuring that complaints about service delivery in their relevant portfolio are utilised to support service improvements.

Recording, Data and Oversight

The Council will maintain accurate records of all complaints, monitor performance against Complaint Handling Code timescales, and report complaint trends, themes and learning to senior management and elected members.

Complaint data will be actively used to identify service risks, drive organisational learning, and inform continuous service improvement.

Policy Review

The Council will review this policy annually to ensure it remains compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, relevant legislation, and best practice. The review will incorporate learning from complaints, performance data, and any changes to regulatory requirements. Any proposed amendments will be subject to appropriate governance approval, and the updated policy will be published to ensure transparency and continued accessibility to residents.