

Compliments, comments and complaints

Compliments and Feedback

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

The Council also welcomes suggestions for improving the way services are provided.

Complaints

The Council strives to provide high quality services to the best of our ability to all our residents and customers in line with the Customer Charter. We recognise however that we do not always meet the standards we set ourselves.

This is the Council's formal complaints 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.

Your complaints are important as they help us identify where things have not gone as well as we would want them to. We monitor and record all formal complaints received and a quarterly report is made to our Standards and Audit Committee about them so that we might learn from what you tell us and share best practice.

All complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially and in strict confidence in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations and we will not deal with you any less favourably because you have made a complaint. You can also have access to information we hold about you by making a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act 2018.

What is a complaint?

The Council has adopted the following definition of a complaint which has been suggested by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman: *'an expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service (whether the service is provided directly by us or by one of our partners/contractors) which requires a response.'*

What is not a complaint?

A complaint is not:

- A request for service (e.g. request for a repair or removal of flytipping)
- A request for information
- An explanation of Council policy (e.g. the level of Council Tax).

What is the point of having a formal complaints procedure?

Having a formal process in place enables us to discover whether anything has gone wrong and if so to say sorry if we have made a mistake and put it right and learn from it.

Who can complain?

Any resident, tenant or user of services provided by the Council. Alternatively, you may represent an organisation or be an advocate for a service user affected by the way our services have been provided.

Complaints about Councillors

This document concentrates on complaints about the service provided by the Council. If you have a complaint about one of your local Councillors, it will be dealt

with under a separate procedure by the Council's Monitoring Officer.

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.

An example might be a recall for a council house repair. Rather than using the formal complaints process, an approach to the appropriate team should be able to resolve the matter without delay.

If such an approach 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
- By telephoning us on 01932 838383, or
- By visiting us at the Civic Centre, Station Road, Addlestone, KT15 2AH when the office is open (currently closed to the general public owing to the Covid 19 pandemic)

If you need help with making a complaint we can provide a member of staff to assist you.

We will record any formal complaint received in our central register (Housing Contractor complaints are recorded separately).

Stage 1 complaints

Your complaint will be handled by a senior manager in the appropriate section or business centre. We will acknowledge your complaint and will either provide you with a full response within 10 working days or advise when you can expect a full response usually using the same method that you used to contact us.

Occasionally, a complaint might be more complex and might require further investigation which may make our 10 day response target difficult to meet. In such cases, we will let you know what is happening and will advise you when we hope to respond.

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 complaints

If you are not happy with our response you can make a stage 2 complaint which will be dealt with by a head of service – usually at Corporate Head level. The head of service will review your complaint and the stage 1 response and will respond to you within 10 working days. Once again, if your complaint requires further investigation, we shall advise you of any delays.

The conclusion of stage 2 is the end of our formal complaints procedure.

What to do if you are still not satisfied

You are free at any time during the complaints procedure to contact your local councillor. Whilst he or she will not deal directly with a complaint about the way the Council provides a service, your councillor can talk to you about your complaint and help you in making contact with officers.

You can get details of who your local councillor is and how to contact him/her from our website, from our staff at the Civic Centre or from local libraries.

If you remain dissatisfied, having completed our formal complaints procedure, you can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if you believe we have not handled matters properly. Full information can be found on their website at www.lgo.org.uk. Alternatively, you can contact their advice team on 0300 061 0614.

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

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 officer. Further details can be found on the Council's website.

Privacy Information

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. We will 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 (complaints) and 2 years (compliments).

Complaints and compliments are regularly reported to the Standards and Audit Committee, but any personal information is redacted. The Committee is interested in all the feedback we get, positive and negative so that trends can be identified, lessons learned, and good practice shared.

August 2020