



# South Cambridgeshire District Council Complaints Policy

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## 1. Introduction

1.1. This policy provides the framework for ensuring that complaints received across the Council relating to its services are handled consistently, fairly and effectively. It covers both our corporate services and the landlord services for our tenants and leaseholders. The Policy aligns with the Housing Ombudsman (HO) Complaint Handling Code and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Code.

## 2. Principles

2.1. We will

- Resolve issues early, using a simple two-stage process.
- Log, acknowledge and define every complaint, agreeing the issues and desired outcomes with the complainant.
- Investigate fairly and independently, addressing all points and explaining our decisions with reference to policy, law and good practice.
- Keep residents informed and provide clear written outcomes at each stage.
- Make reasonable adjustments so the process is accessible to all.
- Learn from complaints and publish performance and improvements annually.

## 3. Service Requests

3.1. A service request is a request to improve a service, fix a problem or reconsider a decision; service requests are not complaints (but may become a complaint if dissatisfaction remains).

3.2. Service requests are handled outside of our complaints process and are governed by our general resident service standards which can be found on the [Contact us section](#) of our website, or our service specific targets for completion.

3.3. Where a complaint is made, this will not stop our efforts to address the service request alongside investigating the complaint.

3.4. A service request is defined as:

***“a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision”. (LGSCO)***

3.5. Residents can submit a service request either by logging into the [My South Cambs](#)

online portal, where a range of e-forms are available, or by completing an e-form on our website as a guest (no log-in required). Upon completion and submission of an e-form, this will be allocated to the appropriate team to act upon. Where residents require support to submit a service request online, this can be provided by calling our Customer Contact Service.

## 4. Complaints

4.1. In line with the HO and LGSCO Complaint Handling Codes, a complaint is defined as:

***‘An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation/landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual/resident or group of individuals/residents.’***

4.2. Individuals/Residents do not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such.

## 5. Third Party or Representative

5.1. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will be handled in line with this complaints policy.

5.2. A third party or representative can be anyone who the complainant wishes to act on their behalf. In line with GDPR requirements we would require written permission from the complainant to discuss this on their behalf.

## 6. How to make a complaint

6.1. Complaints can be made through any of the following channels:

- Via our [My South Cambs](#) resident portal
- Email: [Feedback@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:Feedback@scambs.gov.uk) or [Housing.Complaints@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:Housing.Complaints@scambs.gov.uk) for housing related functions
- Telephone (via our contact centre on 01954 713 000) or during a call with a member of staff.
- In writing (postal letters or hand delivered at our council office at South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne Business Park, Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6EA.
- In person (during office hours at our council offices or during a visit to your property via one of our officers).
- Through a representative or advocate (including MPs, councillors, or support

workers).

- Complaints received via any of our contractors.
- Complaints received via social media or digital platforms (e.g. twitter and Facebook).
- Our policy is published on our website and can be found via the following link:  
<https://www.scamb.gov.uk/about-your-council/feedback-and-complaints/complaints>
- Dissatisfaction from a survey is not classed as a complaint but, we will provide information on how the resident can complain if a resident wishes to do so.

## 7. Complaint stages and timescales

- 7.1. All complaints will be acknowledged, defined, and logged within **five working days** of receipt. While this is the minimum requirement, our policy continues to set a more ambitious standard by aiming to acknowledge complaints within **three working days** wherever possible. This approach ensures compliance with the Code while maintaining our commitment to delivering a higher level of service.
- 7.2. If any aspect of the complaint provided by the resident is unclear, we will ask for clarification.
- 7.3. We operate a two-stage process. When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, we will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. This is referenced in the HO Code as *'the complaint definition'*.

### Stage 1

- 7.4. At Stage 1 the Responding Officer will review, investigate and respond to the complaint. The Responding Officer will be a manager or nominated team leader from the relevant service area.
- 7.5. The Responding Officer is responsible for communicating with the resident throughout the complaint investigation process, including to request further information or provide information on the progress of the complaint.
- 7.6. Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation these will be incorporated into the Stage 1 response, if it has not already been issued.
- 7.7. Any issues that are unrelated or raised after a response has been issued will be logged and investigated as a new complaint.
- 7.8. A full written response will be sent within **10 working days** of acknowledgement.

- 7.9. Stage 1 complaints that duplicate a previously closed Stage 1 complaint from the same resident will not be reopened and the resident will be advised to escalate to Stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied with the original Stage 1 outcome.

## Stage 2

- 7.10. A complaint is submitted at this stage when the resident is dissatisfied with the result of a Stage 1 complaint. The resident does not have to explain their reasons for requesting a Stage 2.
- 7.11. At Stage 2 of the complaints process, a Responding Officer will be appointed who is either more senior than, or at the same level as, the officer who handled the Stage 1 response. The Responding Officer will undertake a further review and investigation of the complaint to understand the reasons the resident remains unhappy and will address these concerns as part of the Stage 2 response.
- 7.12. The Responding Officer will generally be the Head of Service or Service Manager from the relevant area or a nominated alternative (this person will be independent from the review undertaken at Stage 1).
- 7.13. The Responding Officer is responsible for communicating with the resident throughout the complaint investigation process, including to request further information or provide information on the progress of the complaint.
- 7.14. A full written response will be sent within **20 working days** of acknowledgement. The response will advise residents of their right to approach the HO (for landlord matters) or LGSCO (for corporate matters) and provide contact details.
- 7.15. Where a further complaint is received that duplicates a previously closed Stage 2 complaint from the same resident, a new Stage 2 case will not be opened. Instead, the resident will be issued a response confirming that the matter has already been considered and advising them of their right to refer the complaint to the relevant Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome.

## 8. Tracking and Communication During Stage 1 and 2 Complaints

- 8.1. Residents can monitor the progress of their complaint through their [My South Cambs](#) portal account. The portal also provides a secure channel for two-way communication with the Responding Officer, including the ability to upload supporting documents and exchange messages via the 'notes' feature. Responding Officers may use this feature to request further information or provide updates

during the investigation. Whenever a new note or document is added, the resident will receive an email notification. Alternative communication methods, such as email or telephone, may be agreed where more appropriate, and all interactions will be recorded in the case file.

## 9. Complaint Responses

- 9.1. Our final complaint response at both stages will be provided in writing when answers are known and not when actions have been fully completed. Outstanding issues will still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident. This may be by letter, email or 'note' on the [My South Cambs](#) resident portal. Whichever of these options is used, the final complaint response will always be made available on the My South Cambs resident portal account.
- 9.2. Our responses will cover our understanding of the complaint, the outcome the resident is seeking, and which aspects of the complaint is and is not the responsibility of the Council.
- 9.3. On occasions, because of the complexity of the complaint, responses to Stages 1 and 2 may fall outside the required timescales. The anticipated response timeframes will be communicated to the resident. Any extension shall not exceed an additional **10 working days** without good reason, and the resident will be fully informed of these reasons for the extension, along with agreeing appropriate intervals for receiving updates on their complaint.
- 9.4. We will also include Ombudsman contact details whenever we notify an extension to a timescale.

## 10. Remedies

- 10.1. Where we find fault, we will put things right – apology, explanation, action (including review/change of decision where appropriate), record amendment, financial remedy, and/or policy or practice changes – with clear timescales and monitoring of completion. We will have regard to Ombudsman guidance on remedies.

## 11. Time Limit for Making a Complaint

- 11.1. We encourage residents to raise complaints as soon as possible after the issue occurs. However, we will normally only consider complaints made within 12 months of the matter arising or of the resident becoming aware of it.

11.2. In some circumstances we may accept complaints outside this timeframe where there are reasonable grounds for the delay, such as:

- The resident was unable to complain earlier due to health, vulnerability, or other exceptional circumstances.
- The issue relates to ongoing problems that have continued within the last 12 months.

11.3. Each case will be assessed individually, and we will act reasonably and fairly when deciding whether to investigate a late complaint.

11.4. If a complaint is not accepted because it is outside the 12-month period and no exceptional circumstances apply or any of the other exceptions listed, we will provide a clear explanation in writing and signpost the resident to the relevant Ombudsman Service for further advice.

## **12. Exclusions and acceptance**

12.1. We will accept complaints unless there is a clear and valid reason not to do so. Where a complaint is not accepted, we will provide a written explanation and signpost the complainant to the relevant Ombudsman should they wish to challenge that decision.

12.2. The following matters fall outside the scope of this policy:

- Cases where legal proceedings have commenced, defined as the filing of a Claim Form and Particulars of Claim at court.
- Complaints relating to events that occurred more than 12 months ago, unless circumstances apply (see section on time limits)
- Allegations concerning the conduct of Councillors, which are managed under the Council's Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure.
- Complaints from suppliers, partners, and other public authorities regarding our business relationships.
- Internal complaints from staff or Councillors regarding staff conduct, which are handled under HR policies.
- Complaints about organisations not part of the Council, including Ermine Street Housing, which operates its own complaints policy.
- Reports of unacceptable behaviour or everyday incidents in or around the home which are addressed under our Anti-Social Behaviour procedures:  
<https://www.scamb.gov.uk/housing/neighbourhood-issues>.
- Anonymous complaints - while we cannot provide a direct response, we will record and review anonymous complaints for learning purposes. Residents wishing to report issues anonymously may use the feedback form detailed in the



“How to make a Complaint” section.

### 13. The Ombudsman

- 13.1. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint, they may wish to contact the LGSCO, or the HO (whichever is applicable). The LGSCO and HO aim to remedy injustices through impartial, rigorous, and proportionate investigations into complaints about local government and social housing providers respectively.
- 13.2. The Ombudsman will not usually investigate complaints unless we have had an opportunity to investigate at Stages 1 and 2 first.
- 13.3. When notified by the Ombudsman that they have received a complaint, it will be passed to the appropriate Head of Service, who will review the complaint and respond directly to the relevant Ombudsman within **28 days** (calendar rather than working days).
- 13.4. Following investigation, the Ombudsman will write to the resident notifying them of their decision. The Council will also receive a copy of their findings, with relevant action points, if applicable.

#### Submitting a Complaint to the LGSCO

- 13.5. The LGSCO will consider complaints relating to all corporate council services, other than its social landlord functions. This includes complaints relating to homelessness and allocations.
- 13.6. Contact details for the LGSCO Service are:

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman  
PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH  
Telephone: 0300 061 0614  
Web: <https://www.lgo.org.uk/>

#### Submitting a Complaint to the HO

- 13.7. The HO covers complaints from social housing residents about their landlord's actions and housing management. Contact details for the HO Service are:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO Box 1484  
Unit D  
Preston  
PR2 0ET  
Telephone: 0300 111 3000  
E-mail: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
Web: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

## 14. Multi-service and Shared Service Complaints

- 14.1. Some complaints that we receive relate to more than one service area. In these cases, a lead service will be identified to coordinate a review of the complaint and arrange a joint response detailing their findings.
- 14.2. In cases that relate to a service that we share with another local authority (for example, the Shared Waste Service or the Greater Cambridge Planning Service), the complaint will be dealt with by the lead authority for that shared service.

## 15. Reasonable Adjustments

- 15.1. We make it easy to complain by offering multiple channels: in person, telephone, email, online, letter or via a representative.
- 15.2. We are committed to ensuring that our services, including our complaints process, are accessible to all residents. In line with the Equality Act 2010, the HO's Complaint Handling Code, and the LGSCO Code, we will make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce barriers for individuals with disabilities or other needs. [Equality Scheme - South Cambs District Council](#).
- 15.3. Adjustments may include, but are not limited to:
- Using a communication method that best suits the resident's needs.
  - Providing information in alternative formats (e.g. large print, Braille, coloured paper).
  - Offering translation or interpreting services, including British Sign Language.
- 15.4. In most cases, adjustments can be agreed and implemented promptly. Where more complex changes are required, we may seek specialist advice. In all cases, we will discuss requirements with the resident and confirm agreed adjustments in writing.

15.5. When deciding what is reasonable, we will consider:

- The effectiveness of the adjustment in reducing disadvantage.
- Practicality of implementation.
- Availability of resources, including external support and funding.
- Any disruption to service delivery caused by the adjustment.

## 16. Managing unacceptable behaviour

16.1. We are committed to treating all residents and service users fairly, respectfully, and consistently when handling complaints. Most complaints are made in good faith and will be managed through our standard complaints process. However, in a small number of cases, a complainant's behaviour may become unreasonable or unreasonably persistent, which can affect our ability to provide services effectively and fairly to all.

16.2. Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent behaviour may include, but is not limited to:

- Repeated pursuit of a closed complaint after the process has been fully exhausted.
- Refusal to accept decisions, including attempts to reopen matters already investigated and determined.
- Excessive or disproportionate contact, such as frequent, lengthy, or overlapping communications that hinder resolution.
- Aggressive, abusive, or threatening behaviour, including language or actions that cause distress or risk to staff or contractors.
- Unreasonable demands, such as insisting on outcomes or processes incompatible with our complaint's procedure or good practice.

16.3. This aligns with the HO Code and the LGSCO Code, which distinguish between persistent (often justified) and unreasonably persistent behaviour.

16.4. We will manage unacceptable behaviour in a way that is:

- **Fair and Inclusive:** Considering individual circumstances and making reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, particularly where

health, disability or vulnerability may influence behaviour.

- **Proportionate and Evidence-Based:** Any action taken will be proportionate, based on evidence and subject to regular reviews.
- **Transparent:** Before applying restrictions, we will:
  - Explain why the behaviour is considered unreasonable.
  - Outline the changes we expect.
  - Warn of possible restrictions if behaviour continues.

16.5. Where unacceptable behaviour persists, actions may include:

- Limiting the frequency or method of contact (e.g., written communication only).
- Appointing a single point of contact. (see Council's Single Point of Contact [SPOC Protocol](#)).
- Setting timeframes for responses.
- In extreme cases, refusing to consider further complaints on the same issue.

16.6. Safeguards will be put in place, including:

- Residents will be informed in writing of any decision to apply restrictions and the reasons for it.
- They will be signposted to the HO Service or LGSCO for independent advice.
- Restrictions will be reviewed periodically and lifted if behaviour improves.

16.7. **Equality and Vulnerability** - We will consider any health conditions, disabilities, or vulnerabilities before applying restrictions and agree alternative arrangements where necessary.

## 17. Roles and responsibilities

- **Complaints Officer** – each service area has an appointed Complaints Champion responsible for overseeing complaints within their service area.
- **Responding Officer** – responsible for reviewing, investigating and responding to the complaint. Appointed officers will generally be either a team leader or manager.
- **Senior Responding Officer (Stage 2)** – independent of Stage 1; ensuring complete, fair and final responses.

- **Senior Leadership** – the Head of Transformation, People & Corporate Services is the lead officer for complaints relating to the Council's corporate services, with the Head of Housing leading on its housing landlord functions.
- **Member responsible for complaints (MRC)** – the Deputy Leader is the appointed MRC for all complaints relating to the Council's corporate services, with the Lead Member for Housing responsible for the housing landlord functions.
- **Governance** – Cabinet is responsible for scrutinising complaint handling performance and learning and ensuring a positive complaints culture.

## 18. Performance and monitoring

- 18.1. We actively encourage resident feedback and view it as a valuable opportunity for learning and improvement, rather than as a negative measure. A high volume of feedback or complaints helps us identify areas where we can enhance our services.
- 18.2. Our performance in handling complaints is tracked through key performance indicators, which are reported quarterly to senior management and Councillor committees. Regular reviews of complaint data and resident feedback enable us to manage processes effectively on a day-to-day basis and share learning across all services. In addition, we review any Ombudsman decision notices and annual review letters to ensure continuous improvement.
- 18.3. We will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report covering self-assessment, qualitative and quantitative analysis, any Ombudsman findings, and improvements made.
- 18.4. For landlord functions, we will complete and publish the HO annual self-assessment and comply with the HO's monitoring requirements.
- 18.5. The LGSCO expects regular oversight and continuous learning. The Code includes performance reporting and self-assessment to embed a positive complaint handling culture.

## 19. Data protection and confidentiality

- 19.1. We will handle complaint information in line with data protection law, retain records in accordance with retention schedules and share information only where lawful and necessary for investigation and learning.

## 20. Monitoring and Review

- 20.1. This policy will be reviewed every 5 years (or sooner if Codes or legislation change) to ensure continued alignment with the HO/LGSCO Codes and statutory schemes.

## 21. Our values

### **Ambitious**

- We are proactive and take a forward-thinking approach to addressing challenges.
- We create smart solutions and reach our goals with determination and a clear vision.

### **Collaborative**

- We foster a culture of teamwork and open communication.
- We work with and involve stakeholders, to improve how the organisation works and serves the public.

### **Compassionate**

- We prioritise empathy and understanding in decision-making and service delivery.
- We consider the wellbeing of people and communities in everything we do, and we replicate this when we talk to our colleagues because we know that when we support each other, we all do better.

### **Accountable**

- We take responsibility for our actions and decisions.
- We own up to mistakes and make sure we fulfil our commitments.