

Our complaints policy for customers

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A man with a beard, wearing a light blue denim shirt over a white t-shirt, is smiling and looking upwards. He is holding a large, white, circular speech bubble with both hands. The speech bubble contains the text 'Customer voice'. The background is a solid bright yellow.

***Customer
voice***

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Section 1: Our complaints policy

What's in this policy

We always want to give you the very best service we can. But we know that occasionally we get things wrong or there are problems you need us to put right. So this policy sets out what to do if you're not happy with something. It explains what to do if you want to complain, what will happen next and how long it will take.

There are certain complaints that aren't covered under this policy - you can read about those in section 3.

If you'd like this policy in another format like large print, please email **customerrelations@wokingham.gov.uk** or call 0118 9746000 and we'd be happy to help.

Our promise to you

If you're not happy with something, we want you to let us know. This helps us improve things for you, fix problems quickly and stop them happening again.

When you complain, we promise to:

- treat you with respect and fairness
- respond positively, and never treat you differently because you've had to complain
- resolve things as quickly as we can
- work hard to make things right when we've got them wrong
- learn from our mistakes.

What is a complaint?

We consider it a complaint if you're not happy with:

- something that we've done
- a decision that we've made
- the service that you've had from us.

This can be about our team or a contractor or partner who is acting for us.

What's not a complaint?

If you're telling us about a missed waste collection or a pothole, we won't count it as a complaint if it's just happened once. But we will keep an eye on things to make sure that the problem doesn't keep happening. You can tell us about this type of thing here:

wokingham.gov.uk/report-problems

If you'd like to share ideas for improvements, we won't count that as a complaint either. But we'd love to hear your ideas - you can let us know here:

customerrelations@wokingham.gov.uk.

And if you're giving us some good feedback about something or someone, we'd be delighted to hear that, too.

Who can complain?

You can complain if you or your company have received a service from us.

You can also ask someone to complain on your behalf. This can be another person, business, organisation, or your councillor or MP. We just need you to let us know in writing that you're happy with this.

Section 2: The complaints process

How to complain

You can complain:

- online, at **wokingham.gov.uk/complaints**.

You can also complain to the service or team directly. You can do this:

- in person
- by email or letter
- by phone.

If you don't know their details, just email **customerrelations@wokingham.gov.uk** and they can let you know.

For most complaints, you need to complain within 12 months of the problem happening. If there's a good reason you haven't been able to, you can still get in touch, and we'll see if it's possible to look into it.

What you can expect from us

Our first step is to try to resolve your complaint informally, we call this early resolution. We aim to reply to your contact within 5 working days. This could be by phone or in writing. If you are not happy with the reply or the service have not resolved your complaint, you can escalate to our formal complaints process.

Stage 1

At stage 1, the service area you're complaining about will look into your complaint.

- We'll send your complaint to the service area to reply.
- They'll allocate your complaint to an experienced team member.
- They will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 working days.
- They'll look into what's happened and get back to you within 15 working days.
- They'll let you know what they found and what they're going to do about it - there's more about this in 'Putting things right' below.



Stage 2

If you're not satisfied with what's happened at stage 1, you can ask for your complaint to be escalated to stage 2. You can do this by contacting

customerrelations@wokingham.gov.uk

- You'll need to do this within one calendar month of getting your stage 1 response. If there's a good reason you haven't been able to, you can still get in touch, and we'll see if it's possible to look into it.
- Make sure you include the reasons **why** you want to escalate your complaint. Without any details we may not be able to take the complaint to stage 2.
- The Customer Relations team will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days and explain the next steps.
- They'll then review everything and will get back to you within 20 working days. They'll tell you what they found and what will happen next - there's more about this in 'Putting things right' below.

Please note a stage 2 complaint will not be investigated if:.

- there is an appeal or tribunal process. Go to Section 3 for further information.
- you are making an insurance claim against the council. Go to Section 3 for further information.
- all questions have been fully answered at stage 1 and a stage 2 investigation is unlikely to change the original outcome.

If you're still not happy

The next, and final, step is to escalate your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Service. We'll give you their details when we get back to you about your stage 2 complaint.

You can normally only complain to the Ombudsman once you've gone through stages 1 and 2 of our complaints process first.

Putting things right

It's really important to us that we put things right when we've got something wrong or made a mistake. So, when we have, we'll always:

- take responsibility and say sorry
- sort out the mistake or problem within the time we agree
- make any decisions that we should have made earlier
- look at any of our practices, policies or procedures and make changes where necessary to make sure it won't happen again.

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What we expect from you

We promise to be fair and open when looking into complaints, and we expect the same in return. Very occasionally, people are unreasonable when they complain. For example, if someone is unreasonably persistent in how often they contact us, or if they use abusive, offensive, or threatening language. If someone behaves like this, we'll:

- look at the case and make sure we've done everything correctly
- decide if we're going to restrict how often or how they can contact us, and for how long
- let them know how they can ask for these restrictions to be reviewed.

Read more about our Unreasonable Behaviour Policy at wokingham.gov.uk/complaints.

Need some help?

You can ask someone to complain on your behalf. This can be another person, business, organisation, or your councillor or MP. We just need you to let us know in writing that you're happy with this. Organisations like **Citizens Advice** or **Age UK** should also be able to help if you need it.

Section 3: Complaints that don't fall under this policy

Other types of complaint

Some issues and complaints aren't covered under this policy, usually because they have their own process. They include:

- Asking for a service or reporting a **service failure**, like if we've missed a waste collection.
- If there's another process for appealing (e.g. parking fines, planning decisions, council tax, benefit claims). There's more on how to do this in the 'Appeals' section below.
- Where your complaint is about **Housing**.
- Where your complaint is about **children's services**.
- If your complaint is about fraud or corruption. The 'Whistleblowing' section below tells you what to do in this case.
- Where your complaint is about a **councillor**.
- If you're complaining as a council employee about an internal or Human Resources issue. Our intranet has the details you need for this.
- Complaints from an MP or councillor (that aren't on behalf of one of their constituents). Please get in touch with Democratic Services for the correct process.

- Where your complaint is about a government policy that we've implemented. Your local councillor will be able to help you with this.
- Insurance claims, like if you hit a pothole and burst a tyre. Go to the relevant service area at the council, or email **customerrelations@wokingham.gov.uk** and they can point you in the right direction.
- Where your complaint is about **antisocial behaviour**.
- Where your complaint is about a school or college or one of their staff members. Schools have their own complaints process, so you can complain to the school's head teacher and then the Chair of the school's governing body.
- If you're looking for **information**.
- Where we've already investigated and closed the complaint.
- Where there's legal action taking place, or a complaint outcome has already been decided by a court or tribunal.

Whistleblowing

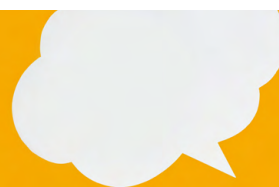
We work to high standards and always want to be open, honest and accountable. If something has happened, like fraud or corruption, it's important to report serious concerns.

Appeals

This section explains where to go to appeal if you're not happy with a decision or act that's happened, and it doesn't fall under the complaints process set out in this policy. Discover more and appeal at

- School admissions, exclusions and school transport. You can appeal directly to the school's head teacher and then the Chair of the school's governing body.
- **Housing benefit appeals**
- **Council tax appeals**
- **Planning decisions appeals**
- **Parking fines appeals**
- **Blue badge appeals**
- Housing allocation reviews. If you'd like us to review your housing allocation, please do this within 21 days at **housing.needs@wokingham.gov.uk**
- Homelessness reviews. If you'd like us to review our decision, please do this within 21 days at **housing.needs@wokingham.gov.uk**

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Section 4: Confidentiality and data protection

We handle complaints in line with Data Protection Legislation. To deal with your complaint, we do need to collect, store and use your personal information. But we'll only use this to work on your complaint.

You can make a subject access request under the Data Protection Act to see information that we hold on you about your complaint.

We won't share your information with anyone without your consent, except where we're required to.

We'll keep information about complaints for 6 years after the complaint has closed. After this, we'll destroy everything confidentially.

For more information, please refer to our website.

Section 5: Get in touch

Need a bit of help or some more information about anything in this policy?

Please email us at
customerrelations@wokingham.gov.uk
and we'll be happy to help.



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