

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" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background is a solid, bright yellow color.

**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.

If you'd like this policy in another format like large print, Braille, or another language. 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.

This policy is written in conjunction with the Equality Act 2010 which created the Public Sector Equality Duty.





What is a complaint?

A complaint may be defined as:

'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.'

- 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 a Service Request?

A service request may be defined as:

"a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision."

Service requests are not complaints but may contain expressions of dissatisfaction. You should give us the opportunity to deal with a service request before a complaint is made. A complaint may be raised if you remain unhappy with the response or outcome to your service request even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing.

If you would like to tell us about things that are not working like:

- Website link broken,
- a pothole,
- a missed waste collection, broken bin, full public bins,
- Or just ask a question or to change some details

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.

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 you're happy with this.

Organisations like Citizens Advice or Age UK should also be able to help if you need it. You can reach them at **citizensadvice.org.uk** or **ageuk.org.uk**.

What to do first

The early and local resolution of issues is key to effective complaint handling. So, if something's gone wrong or something has happened, you're not happy about, the first thing to do is to contact someone in the service or team concerned.

You can find service information by:

- going on our website:
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/>
- emailing
customerrelations@wokingham.gov.uk
- Calling us on 01189746000
- Or visiting our offices

Section 2: The complaints process

How to complain

If you're still unhappy, you can complain:

- online, at
wokingham.gov.uk/complaints
- by email or letter
- by phone
- in person

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

There are 2 stages to our complaints process. Here's what will happen and when.

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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 a dedicated complaints officer.
- They will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 working days, they'll let you know who's looking at your complaint, how you can contact them and how long it's going to take.
- They'll look into what's happened and give you a full reply within 10 working days of sending the acknowledgment.
- If it is a complex complaint the officer may ask for an extension of up to 10 working days. The reason for any extension of time will be explained and information about the relevant ombudsman will be provided.
- 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.
- If you remain unhappy with the stage one reply you can escalate to stage two. You'll need to do this within one calendar month of getting your stage one 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.

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. A member of our Customer Relations Team or a dedicated complaints officer will look into your complaint at this stage. Stage 2 is the council's final response.

- It would be helpful if you could include the reason(s) for escalation.
- We'll acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days. We'll let you know we've received your complaint, who's looking at it, how to contact them and how long it should take.
- They'll make reasonable efforts to understand why you remain unhappy, but we may need to clarify some points with you.
- They'll then look into what your original complaint was and how the stage 1 was answered. They'll issue a final response within 20 working days of sending out the acknowledgement. They'll tell you what we found and what we're going to do about it - there's more about this in 'Putting things right' below.
- If it's a complex complaint they may ask for an extension of up to 20 working days. The reason for any extension of time will be explained and information about the relevant ombudsman will be provided.



If you're still not happy

You can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Service or the Housing Ombudsman. They are entirely independent from the Council and will conduct their own investigation into the complaint, at no charge. You can contact them directly either online, by phone or letter outlining what's happened.

The Ombudsman details are:

LGSCO:

<https://complaints.lgo.org.uk/complaint-form/>

Address:

Local Government and Social Care
Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Phone:

0300 061 0614 (Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 10am-1pm and Wed 1pm-4pm)

Housing Ombudsman:

Complaint form: Fill in the **online complaint form**

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Write to:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ

Fax: 020 7831 1942

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:

- Apologise
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- Provide an explanation, assistance or reason
- Take action if there has been delay
- Reconsider or change a decision
- Amend a record or add a correction or addendum
- Providing a remedy where appropriate
- Changing policies, procedures, or practices

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

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

Whistleblowing

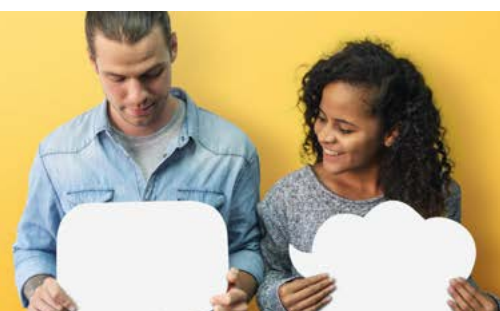
We work to high standards and always want to be open, honest, and accountable. If something has happened, like fraud or corruption, it's important to **report serious concerns**

Appeals/Tribunals/Housing Reviews

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.
- **Special Educational Needs (SEN), SEN 1st Tier tribunal**
- **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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Service requests and other complaints processes

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 request**
- Where your complaint is about **children's services** excluding SEN and school admissions
- 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 governance** this includes freedom of information and subject access requests
- 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.

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 what information we hold on to 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 six 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 or call 0118 9746000 and we'll be happy to help.

Section 6: Reporting

We will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report. It will include:

- an annual self-assessment report to ensure the complaint handling policy remains in line with requirements
- analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance. This will include a summary of all complaints including any that we have refused to accept
- any findings of non-compliance with the Ombudsman's code of practice
- What service improvements have been made as a result of the learning from complaints
- the Ombudsman's annual letter about the council's performance
- any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the council

This will be reported to the relevant scrutiny committee annually. It will be published on our website alongside our self-assessment.



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