Suffolk County Council

Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

Owner : Steph Fowkes
Version : 7.0
Date : October 2026

We will on request produce this Policy, or particular parts of it, in other languages and formats, in order that everyone can use and comment upon its content.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Change History

Issue / Version No	Issue Date	Author	Summary of Changes
1.0	February 2017	Pauline Martin	Version 1.0
2.0	June 2018	Jane Swift	Version 2.0
3.0	October 2022	Jane Swift	Version 3.0
4.0	October 2023	Jamie Swinyard	Version 4.0
5.0	June 2025	Jamie Swinyard	Version 5.0
6.0	October 2025	Jamie Swinyard	Version 6.0
7.0	October 2026	Steph Fowkes	Version 7.0

Authorisation (Responsible Owner)

Role	Name	Approval Date
Customer Experience Operations Manager	Steph Fowkes	8/10/2026

Approval (Accountable Owner)

Role	Name	Approval Date
Head of Customer Access & Digital Inclusion	Jamie Swinyard	8/10/2026

Reviewers (Consulted)

Role and Review Responsibilities	Name	Approval Date
Monitoring Officer	Nigel Inniss	8/10/2026

Review Period

Date Document to be Reviewed	By whom
Annually	Customer Experience Operations Manager

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

1 Definition of a Complaint

1.1 Suffolk County Council's definition of a complaint is:

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.

2 Definition of a Compliment

2.1 A compliment is a positive comment intended to express praise or appreciation of an individual, team or service.

Compliments may include:

- Thanks for something done well or particularly well
- Praise for an individual worker
- Praise for a team or service
- Job or task completed above and beyond expected standard
- Exceptional levels of support received

3 Definition of a Comment

3.1 Examples of comments include:

- Suggestions for improving services
- Suggestions for new services
- Request to use or access a service
- Requests for clarification
- Approaches to the Council by groups of service recipients or residents who wish to give their opinions about a service
- Complaints (where the complainant wishes no action to be taken)

4 What can be complained about?

4.1 Anything that falls under the responsibility of the County Council can potentially be complained about. While this is not an exhaustive list, it could include the following:

- Delivery or non-delivery of services
- Quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service
- Council policy
- Staff behaviour and attitude
- Quality of communication
- Delays in making decisions or provision of services

4.2 Some complaints may be considered under the Council's Statutory Complaint procedures. This will often be the case if the complaint relates to a social care issue. The procedure the complaint is being considered under will be confirmed to the complainant when the complaint is acknowledged.

4.3 The Council should have an opportunity to resolve an issue before a complaint is made. We refer to this as a service request. We may decide not to accept a complaint if we have not had an opportunity to fix the problem first. A service request is defined as: a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision.

5 Alternative Routes

5.1 The Complaints Procedure does not apply in the following circumstances:

- Where a complaint is about matters of law or central government policy.
- Decisions that have been made by elected members. Concerns about the legality of decisions or conduct of elected members needs to be raised with the Council's Monitoring Officer. The Corporate Complaints procedure can however look at the decisions made by members when carrying out administrative functions of the council.
- Complaints from staff about personnel matters, including appointments, dismissals, pay, pensions and discipline.
- Complaints from those working with the Council in a professional capacity (unless appropriately advocating on someone's behalf).

These will be responded to outside of the complaints process.

- Complaints where the customer or the Council has started (not threatened) legal proceedings.
- Complaints about the merits of an insurance claim or matters that would be more appropriately considered by an insurer.
- Social care complaints where they qualify under statutory obligations. There are separate and specific statutory regulations which relate to both Children and Adults social care complaints.
- Requests for Council services. In such cases the Council should be given a reasonable opportunity to respond to the issue before recording it as a complaint.
- Complaints about matters that are subject to appeal rights in court, tribunal or with a government minister.
- Complaints that have already been decided by a court, independent tribunal or Ombudsman.

5.2 This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other situations where the complaints policy cannot be applied. In these instances, the complainant will be advised of the reason why.

5.3 The Council has discretion in deciding whether to consider complaints where doing so may prejudice the following concurrent investigations:

- Court proceedings
- Tribunals
- Appeals
- Disciplinary proceedings
- Criminal proceedings

5.4 If a decision is made not to consider, or further consider, such complaints, the Council will write to the complainant to confirm this, and to explain the reason why.

5.5 Once the other proceedings have been completed, the complainant may request the complaint be considered, provided this is within one year of the conclusion of other proceedings or longer if there are exceptional circumstances.

6 Complaints Using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

6.1 We encourage you to provide details of your complaint in your own words. While artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT or Copilot) may be used to assist

in preparing submissions, content generated in this way may be unnecessarily complex or include irrelevant legal references. This may increase the time required to review your complaint and, in some cases, we may request that it is resubmitted.

6.2 Content generated by artificial intelligence may include inaccurate, incomplete, or unsupported information. To ensure the integrity and reliability of communications, you are responsible for verifying any AI-generated material before submitting it. Failure to do so may result in delays or misinterpretation of the issues raised.

6.3 In order to ensure a proportionate assessment of your complaint, we reserve the right to summarise the issues presented. Where a complaint appears to be generated or supported by artificial intelligence, additional time may be required, and response timeframes may be extended accordingly and in proportion to the complaint correspondence provided.

6.4 If you would find it helpful to engage with advocacy support to help you with raising a complaint, you may refer yourself to POhWER – www.pohwer.net.

7 Who can complain?

7.1 Any member of the public (or someone advocating on their behalf, with appropriate consent), including a child, who claims to have been negatively impacted as a result of the actions of the authority, may make a complaint. The same applies if they are raising issues which relate to matters of significant public interest.

7.2 A member of the public includes people acting on behalf of a business, or a voluntary or charitable organisation. Members of the public do not have to be resident in the authority's area to raise a complaint.

8 Anonymous Complaints

8.1 Anonymous complaints will be recorded and shared with the relevant County Council service for awareness. These will however not be registered as a formal complaint and a response will not be provided.

9 Complaint Stages and Timescales

9.1 The Council tries to resolve corporate complaints and handle representations as soon as reasonably practical and within specific timescales.

9.2 The procedure consists of two stages:

Stage 1 - Local Resolution: The expectation is most complaints should be considered and resolved at Stage 1. It should be resolved as close to the point of contact with the person making the complaint as possible. This will usually require the relevant manager to respond in writing to the complaint. Complaints should be acknowledged within 5 working days and a response should be provided within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. On some occasions, such as with particularly complex complaints, the Council may seek to extend this deadline, but must have good reason to do so, and inform the complainant of the reason for doing so.

Where individuals raise additional complaints during stage 1, these should be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been provided. Where the stage 1 response has been provided, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being considered, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues should be logged as a new complaint.

9.3 If a complainant remains dissatisfied following receipt of their Stage 1 response, they should notify the Council within 20 working days confirming the reasons why they are dissatisfied.

9.4 **Stage 2:** If attempts to resolve the complaint at Stage 1 are not successful, the complainant can ask for the outstanding issues to be considered at Stage 2. A council officer, more senior to the Stage 1 responding officer, or on some occasions a person external to the Council, will then consider the complaint, the previous Stage 1 response, and any ongoing dissatisfaction.

9.5 The Council will issue a final response to the Stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. On some occasions, such as with particularly complex complaints, the Council may seek to extend this deadline, but must have good reason to do so, and inform the complainant of the reason for doing so.

9.6 Responses to Stage 2 complaints will be the Council's final response.

9.7 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman: If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the complaint or is dissatisfied with how the Council has dealt with their concerns, they can complain to the Local

Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council will make it clear in their response when the complaints process has been concluded.

10 Time limit for making a complaint

10.1 Complainants should normally complain to the Council within 12 months of knowing about the problem.

10.2 The Customer Experience Manager will decide on an individual case basis whether to consider complaints made outside the time limit. To assist this consideration, the Council expects a complainant to clarify any reason why the complaint was not raised within time.

10.3 If the Council decides not to consider a complaint outside of this time period, the Council will write to the complainant, to explain why this is so. The letter will also advise how to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

11 Information about the Complaints Procedure

11.1 Information about the Council's Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure is available online by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/feedback, and can be provided in hardcopy format, as well as accessible versions for people who require it.

11.2 Compliments and complaints may be logged by completing the Council's online form, by email, by phone, face to face or in writing.

11.3 Council Officers should be aware of the Council's complaints procedures and be able to direct customers appropriately.

11.4 Where appropriate the Council will make reasonable adjustments in accordance with the needs of the complainant.

11.5 Concerns about the legality of decisions or conduct of elected members needs to be raised with the Council's Monitoring Officer- Monitoring Officer - Suffolk County Council.

12 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

12.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman independently investigates complaints made by complainants or their representatives.

12.2 The Ombudsman investigates complaints in a fair and independent way - it does not take sides. It is a free service.

The Ombudsman expects you to have given us a chance to deal with your complaint, before you contact them.

About the Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services. It also investigates complaints about all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) for people who self-fund their care. There are some limits on what the Ombudsman can look at. For example, the Ombudsman may not consider your complaint if you have not been significantly personally affected by the issue you are raising, or if you have a right of appeal to a court or tribunal.

Contact

Website: www.lgo.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 061 0614

13 Learning from Complaints

13.1 The Council produces an annual report covering all comments, compliments and complaints handled under the corporate procedure. This is subject to oversight by the Council's Audit Committee. This report tables data around volumes, themes, and outcomes of complaints as well as learning that has been identified. This report should provide evidence that the Council follows the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaints Handling code, and the County Council's own complaints policies.

13.2 Learning from complaints and complaint intelligence is regularly shared with the organisation's Leadership Teams and used to inform service improvements and prevent repeated complaints.

13.3 Recommendations from Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions are captured in action plans and tracked to ensure compliance. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman publish details of decisions and the performance of Councils, including Suffolk County Council, on its website.

14 Comments and Compliments

14.1 The Council welcomes comments and compliments. The Council will acknowledge compliments or comments and make sure the person or service it relates to receives it. Compliments are also used to share and reinforce good practice.

14.2 Learning from comments and compliments is regularly shared with the organisation's Leadership Teams and used to inform service improvements.

14.3 This information is also reported to senior managers and Councillors to demonstrate where staff go the extra mile to help customers.

END