



**STROUD
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**
www.stroud.gov.uk

Complaints & Feedback Policy

April 2023

Corporate Policy &
Governance

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Contents

Contents	1
Introduction	2
Tips for making a complaint and giving feedback	2
How can you make a complaint and give feedback?	2
What can we deal with under this policy?	3
There are some exceptions.....	3
What is a complaint?.....	4
Compliments and comments.....	5
How we will learn from your complaints and feedback	5
Using support to make a complaint or give feedback	5
Time limitations on making a complaint and giving feedback	5
Equality monitoring	6
How we manage your data.....	6
Unacceptable behaviour	6
Our complaints procedure	7
Stage 1 Process.....	8
Stage 2 Process.....	8
Ombudsman Services.....	9
Future updates to this policy	9

Introduction

Stroud District Council is committed to delivering high-quality local services to support our communities, protect our environment and support the local economy. To help us achieve these goals we welcome your feedback and want to know when we get things right and when things go wrong.

This policy and procedure sets out how you can provide feedback and what we do with it. We have also adopted a [set of service standards](#) so you know what to expect whenever you contact us.

We follow the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's [best practice for complaints handling](#) and the Housing Ombudsman's [complaint handling code](#).

When you give feedback we will:

- Listen to you, understand your point of view and treat you with respect
- Keep you updated if we can't resolve something straight away
- Be honest and explain our decisions
- Put things right if something has gone wrong
- Learn from your feedback and continually improve our services

Just as we will treat you with respect and listen to your feedback, we expect you to respect and listen to us and understand what we can and can't deal with. We may not always be able to deliver what you want us to, but we will make sure we explain why if this is the case.

Tips for making a complaint and giving feedback

- Try to keep your feedback brief and to the point with the key events and what happened
- Tell us the dates and times in the order they happened
- Let us know if anyone else was involved including names, job titles or identifying characteristics
- Let us know what your desired outcome is and if you would like a response

How can you make a complaint and give feedback?

You can send feedback through any of our contact channels. When you get in touch, please let us know your preferences for how we should contact you.

- Online: [stroud.gov.uk/contactus](https://www.stroud.gov.uk/contactus)
- Email: customer.services@stroud.gov.uk
- Phone: 01453 766 321¹
- Post: Stroud District Council, Ebley Mill, Stroud, GL5 4UB
- Text: 07851 729 229 (start your message with the word: COUNCIL²)
- Face to Face with our community colleagues or by arranging an appointment to visit us at our main offices at [Ebley Mill](#)

¹ Call charges may apply

² Messaging charges may apply

- Social Media:
 - Facebook: @strouddistrictcouncil
 - Twitter: @strouddc

What can we deal with under this policy?

There is a difference between the services that Town & Parish, District and County Councils provide. This policy covers feedback about the following Stroud District Council services:

- Animal Welfare
- Anti-Social Behaviour:
 - Fly Tipping
 - Dog Fouling
 - Littering
 - Noise
 - Graffiti
 - Abandoned Vehicles
- Building Control
- Business Rates
- Council Carparks
- Council owned Social Housing
- Council Tax
- District Council Staff
- District, Town and Parish Councillors
- Environmental Health
- Elections and Voting
- Food Safety
- Homelessness and Housing Advice
- Housing Benefit
- Licensing
- Pest Control
- Planning Applications & Policy
- Public Parks and Open Spaces
- Public Toilets
- Street Cleaning
- Waste & Recycling Collection

There are some exceptions

As public services are very varied, you might find that what you want to discuss with us has a separate regulation or may be the responsibility of another organisation. If you contact us about something that has its own procedure or is the responsibility of someone else, we'll let you know.

Common District Council issues that may have their own procedures are:

- **Planning appeals** go through the [Planning Inspectorate](#)
- Complaints made about **Council Staff** may be managed under internal disciplinary policies depending on the issues raised
- Complaints about **District or Town & Parish Councillors** will be investigated under the Nolan Principles and the [Council Code of Conduct](#) and are managed by the Monitoring Officer of the Council
- **Council Tax and Business Rates** may need to be escalated to the [Valuation Tribunal](#) rather than the Local Government Ombudsman depending on your complaint
- **Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection** have an internal review process managed by the Data Protection Officer of the Council and regulated by the [Information Commissioner's Office](#)

Gloucestershire County Council has their own [complaints page](#) and they can help with:

- Adult Social Care
- Children and Young people's Services including Social Care
- Highways (Roads, Roadworks, Potholes etc.)
- Parked Vehicles breaking parking rules (e.g. double yellows)
- Household Recycling Centres
- Libraries
- County Councillors
- Education

If you have an issue with any **benefits** other than Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit, you'll need to contact the [Department of Work and Pensions](#).

For any feedback for **Town & Parish Councils** that isn't related to a Councillor, please [contact the Council directly](#).

Feedback about **schools, hospitals and private businesses** should be made directly to the organisation.

Vehicles on a road that are a hazard should be directed to the police by calling 101.

A matter related to the interpretation of the law or other **legal action** can only be resolved through the legal system and therefore won't be treated as a complaint.

Insurance claims are dealt with on their own merits and not as a complaint.

What is a complaint?

We view complaints as an opportunity to improve and we want to make giving feedback easy. We will treat a complaint generally as "*an expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service that requires a response.*"³

Wherever possible we will try to resolve a valid complaint straight away. When we can't do that, we will agree with you further actions and timescales. We explain the complaints process in the [Our Complaints Procedure](#) section of this document. For all complaints we will record what went wrong and how we put things right to learn and improve.

We can decide to escalate an issue to a complaint if there are signs of dissatisfaction. Likewise we can decide to not treat something as a complaint if it is not valid. If we decide to not accept a complaint, we will give you a detailed explanation why and what your options are in a response.

Where we have followed our policies and regulations correctly but there is a difference of opinion, including policy disagreements, it is unlikely to be treated as a complaint.

³ For housing complaints the exact definition used 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 resident or group of residents.'

Compliments and comments

We want to know when we've delivered a good service and you can make a comment or compliment through any of our contact channels. Just like a complaint, we will listen to your feedback and learn from it to keep delivering the services you value.

When you send us a compliment or comment we will direct it to the service area it best relates to. There, a manager will assess the feedback and investigate any further actions needed.

If you have asked us for a response to your compliment or comment, we will make sure we reply to you within **10 working days**.

How we will learn from your complaints and feedback

When we receive your feedback, as well as resolving your enquiry we will use the information you've given us to:

- Find the root cause of events and make improvements
- Monitor performance to ensure we're improving
- Identify patterns in the feedback we receive and investigate trends
- Publicly report our complaint and compliment performance annually
- Learn from our successes and failures

Using support to make a complaint or give feedback

We understand that everyone is different, and you may want or need support to give feedback. We will support accessibility requirements where we can such as large print, braille, minicom facilities, physical access to buildings and interpretation services.

You may also ask a third party or representative to help you such as a friend, family member, Citizens Advice, legal adviser or your local Councillor or MP.

In these circumstances you must give explicit consent for them to support you with your enquiry. You can provide consent over the phone after answering security questions or you can give it in writing. Your consent is only applicable for the specific issue you have raised. Any further matters will need a new consent. We will record the consent on our system until your enquiry is resolved. If consent is written, the third party representative must be able to provide a copy to enable us to communicate with them.

Time limitations on making a complaint and giving feedback

In general, making a complaint or giving feedback should be done as quickly as possible.

It is unlikely we will accept feedback that is over 12 months old as it can be impractical or impossible to effectively investigate and form a fair conclusion. In exceptional cases individual circumstances will be considered and we will inform you if we believe we can investigate the matter you raise.

Both the Housing and Local Government Ombudsman are also unlikely to take on a complaint which is over 12 months old.

Equality monitoring

We want to ensure that we are providing an equitable service to all our customers. As part of our feedback process we may ask you if your enquiry is related to any of the [protected equality characteristics](#). Providing this information is voluntary, and your choice will not affect how your complaint is investigated. We would encourage you to provide this data as it helps us assess if we're reaching all the District's residents, that our services are appropriate for everyone's needs and that any shortfalls are investigated and resolved.

How we manage your data

All feedback received will be processed under UK Data Protection legislation⁴. When feedback is received it may need to be discussed with relevant Council service areas and external third parties to resolve any issues and implement corrective actions. Please do not supply any information you are not comfortable being shared in this way. We may contact you for more information if it is needed to resolve your feedback.

After the closure of your feedback your details including your name and contact details will be kept for up to two years, or longer if there is a statutory requirement, to allow us to put in place corrective actions and in case you contact us again about a related issue.

We ask that any feedback is given using a real name and contact information. While you can make a complaint anonymously, it is unlikely that we can investigate it thoroughly and put in place corrective actions without having contact with an individual. Anonymous complaints will be assessed to decide if there is adequate evidence to investigate.

Unacceptable behaviour

We understand that when things go wrong it can often be personal and emotional. We will respect and listen to your feedback to resolve your concerns; however we will not accept any threatening, abusive or persistently vexatious behaviour made towards anyone involved with the Council. We likewise expect anyone working for the Council and Councillors to treat you with respect.

We have a [dedicated policy](#) which explains how we will manage unacceptable behaviour across our services.

⁴ The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR 2021

Our complaints procedure

When a complaint is made, depending on the situation we'll deal with it in one of two ways.

- If you contact us to say something has gone wrong and we are confident we can fix the issue as part of our routine services, we will let you know right away what will happen and when the matter will be resolved. Much of the contact with the Council is dealt with this way as we appreciate that most of us want to quickly fix a problem and make sure it doesn't happen again.

For these types of complaints we may need time to fix the problem and we'll agree with you when we'll get back in touch to let you know when it's sorted.

- If you contact us and we can't confidently fix the issue as part of our routine services, or you have asked for a formal response, we will begin an investigation into your complaint by following our [Stage 1 process](#).

However your complaint is managed we will make sure we explain our understanding of your complaint, what you expect as an outcome and agree between us the actions that will be taken. At all stages we will ensure any parties related to the complaint have adequate opportunity to comment before a final decision is made.

We will also ensure each complaint is dealt with on its own merits and reviewed in an impartial manner. We will consider all the information and evidence carefully and only disclose your complaint as necessary to investigate the matter.

If after the stage 1 process you are dissatisfied with our decision, you can escalate your complaint to stage 2 within one month of our stage 1 decision. If you request escalation after this time the Council may require you to start the complaints process again.

At stage 2 we will review the stage 1 response and assess whether we have robustly investigated the complaint and responded appropriately. If after stage 2 you are still dissatisfied, you may have the right to escalate your complaint to a relevant [Ombudsman](#).

If a valid complaint has no prospect of resolution, such as where it is demanding actions that the Council cannot take, we may refer the complainant to an Ombudsman service without completing all stages of this complaint process.

Sometimes we will reach a decision which agrees with part of your complaint but not all of it. If this is the case, we will say that your complaint is 'partially upheld'. If this happens, we will give clear reasons for our decisions supported by relevant policy, law and good practice. You may still have the right to escalate the part we haven't upheld to the next stage. If your complaint goes to an Ombudsman, they may also only partially uphold your complaint.

As a public body we are dedicated to using public funds responsibly and will only issue financial compensation if required to as statutory payments or in exceptional circumstances. The Council's Social Housing function has a [compensation policy](#), this policy is only applicable to relevant housing complaints.

Stage 1 Process

When a complaint is received, we will record the complaint in our complaints system. The complaint will be allocated to the relevant service (Council Tax, Housing, Planning etc.) or where a complaint involves multiple services our contact centre will make it clear which service will lead your complaint and co-ordinate the response.

We will acknowledge all stage 1 complaints within **3 working days** of receiving them. We will contact you to explain what we understand your complaint to be, what you expect as the outcome, and we'll ask for more information if needed.

We will contact you throughout the complaint process if any other clarification or discussion is needed to investigate the matter.

We will provide a written decision to the complaint within **10 working days** or where this is not possible, we will be clear about the reasons why and arrange further contact at intervals agreed by you and us until the complaint is resolved. If you are still dissatisfied at the end of the stage 1 investigations, you can escalate your complaint to stage 2.

Our written decision will include:

- The original complaint (as agreed with you during the first acknowledgement)
- The steps we have taken to investigate the complaint
- What we've considered (applicable laws, policies, best practice)
- Our decision and the reasons for it
- What will happen next (any actions to be taken) and the timescales to do it
- Any lessons learned and changes we will make following your complaint
- How you can escalate your complaint if you still are dissatisfied
- Confirmation that your complaint was stage 1

Stage 2 Process

Stage 2 is the last stage of our internal complaint process. We will acknowledge your complaint within **3 working days**, and we will set out our understanding of the outstanding issues and the outcomes you have told us you are seeking. We may ask for further clarification if any points are unclear.

A further investigation will be conducted and the decision, unchanged or amended, will be peer reviewed and considered by a manager from a different service area to the service that dealt with your stage 1 complaint. The peer review ensures an impartial assessment is made by someone unrelated to the service area for fairness and scrutiny.

Stage 2 investigations may take more time to complete as they can involve more in-depth investigation, interviews, visits or consultation with specialists.

Stage 2 reviews will generally receive a final decision within **20 working days** of escalation. In exceptional circumstances, where more time is needed for consultation or investigation, we will be clear about the reasons why and arrange further contact at intervals agreed by you and us until the complaint is resolved. If you are still dissatisfied at the end of our stage 2 investigation you will be told how to escalate your complaint to the relevant Ombudsman.

At the completion of stage 2 our written response will include:

- The original complaint (as agreed with you during the first acknowledgement)
- The steps we have taken to investigate the complaint
- What we've considered (applicable laws, policies, best practice)
- Our decision and the reasons for it
- What will happen next (any actions to be taken) and the timescales to do it
- Any lessons learned and changes we will make following your complaint
- Confirmation that your complaint was stage 2
- How to escalate your matter to the Ombudsman if you are still dissatisfied

Ombudsman Services

You will be given details of how to contact the relevant ombudsman as part of your complaint if it reaches stage 2.

- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
For most Council services you will be directed to the Local Government Ombudsman. For more information you can visit lgo.org.uk or phone 0300 061 0614
- Housing Ombudsman
Council owned social housing complaints are escalated to the Housing Ombudsman. For more information you can visit housing-ombudsman.org.uk or phone 0300 111 3000

Future updates to this policy

The Council is committed to ensuring that we manage complaints and feedback using best practice and accurate, relevant reporting. To achieve this we may periodically review and update how we report complaints by using new technologies or amending operational processes.

The Strategic Director of Resources may authorise operational changes and any major policy amendments will be authorised by the District Council. If there are changes to the processing of personal data, this will be reflected in our Privacy Notices.

In parallel with improvements to our customer management systems we aim to improve reporting of the informal complaints that we resolve promptly but know have an impact on our customers. Changes to this reporting will be reflected in future transparency reports when the supporting systems are available.

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Owen Chandler	Complaints & Feedback Policy	Corporate Policy & Governance

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