



South Tyneside Council

SOUTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL
**HOUSING
SERVICES**

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy 2026

**South Tyneside Council Housing Services
July 2026**

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Introduction

Our 20-year vision is:

Our South Tyneside – A place where people live healthy, happy and fulfilled lives

To make our vision a reality, it is important that people have the opportunity to let us know how they feel about the services we provide.

Complaints allow us to put things right where they have gone wrong and identify any faults which can then be addressed. We aim to reach a speedy resolution and will try wherever possible to put people back in the position they would have been in before having to make a complaint.

People can also tell us if you feel that we have done things right, as well as make comments on any services we provide, or make suggestions for improving our services.

This policy explains how we will deal with complaints, compliments and comments, in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the Code).

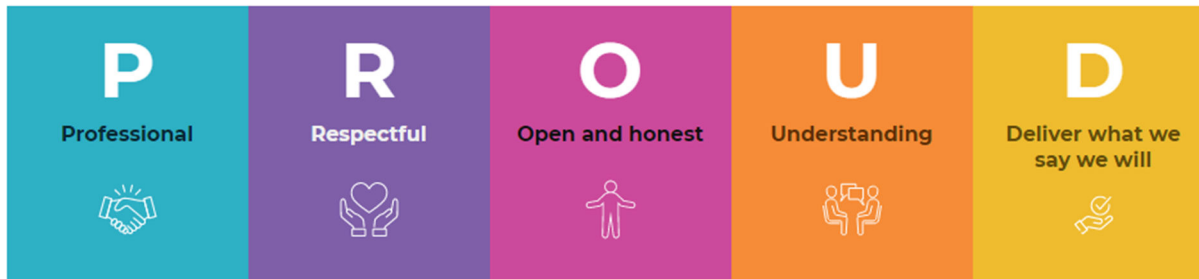
If a complaint is about a Council Service, Adult Social Care Service, Children Social Care Service, Public Health Service, or an elected official, it will be dealt with under a separate policy. This is a legal requirement.

The following are our principles when dealing with complaints:

- We will facilitate early resolutions to complaints wherever possible and aim to resolve most complaints promptly and provide an explanation, resolution or apology to residents.
- We will deal with complaints impartially, objectively and professionally. People who complain will receive no adverse treatment of themselves or their families because they have made a complaint.
- We will keep people informed about the progress of their complaint. Where complaints are complex or are likely to take time to investigate, people will be kept informed of progress, and if there is going to be a delay, will be told why.
- The identity of the person making a complaint will be managed in line with the Data Protection Act and only shared when it is necessary to do so to enable the investigation of the complaint. We will not make a complainant's identity public.

Values and behaviours

We have also agreed a set of 'Council Values' to define what we stand for as an organisation and the things that are most important in terms of how we work and act.



These **PROUD** values will be embedded into our Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments policy.

Behaviours

Under each Value sits a set of behaviours that we agree to in order to deliver on each specific Value. These include:

Professional – we uphold high standards

- Welcome people and offer help
- Be accountable
- Accept feedback and learn from mistakes
- Manage our time and resources well

Respectful – we value people

- Be polite, thoughtful and kind
- Listen to what others have to say
- Notice and thank others for their efforts
- Treat sensitive information appropriately with care

Open and Honest – we trust each other

- Share helpful information and ideas
- Work together to get great results
- Speak up against behaviours we do not want to see
- Use clear, jargon free information where possible

Understanding and Engaging – we care about people

- Accept and appreciate our similarities and differences
- Respect different needs and try to meet them
- Show we care and offer support
- Work together through any challenge to get the right outcome

Deliver what we say we will – we provide great services

- Always do what we say we will do
- Look to improve 'what we do' and 'how we do it'
- Reply in good time
- Keep you up to date with everything we do

Customer Feedback Team

Our Customer Feedback Team oversees the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy. The team are available to provide any advice and information relating to complaints, compliments, comments and suggestions.

The team can provide advice about the complaints procedure, as well as signpost people to any external advocacy or support services available. The team can also provide advice to Council officers who are investigating complaints.

The team will record and acknowledge all complaints made under our Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments policy, provide support to staff responding to housing complaints and monitor the progress of complaint investigations.

The team also acts as the central point of contact for any enquiries from the Housing Ombudsman.

It is recommended that a complaint is made by:

Website: [South Tyneside Council Housing Services - Make a complaint or give feedback](#)

Email: housing-complaints@southtyneside.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 6633

Letter: Information and Feedback Team, South Tyneside Council, Town Hall and Civic Offices, Westoe Road, South Shields, NE33 2RL

Defining a complaint

We adopt the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code's definition of a complaint:

'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'

An individual does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Any customer expressing dissatisfaction will be given the option to make a complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with the policy.

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 a request from a customer to the Council requiring action to be taken to put something right. The Council should not stop its efforts to address the service request if the individual complains. Service requests will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.

Unreasonable actions

In a small number of cases people interact with services in a way that is unreasonable. This may include being unreasonably persistent in relation to their contact, which can prevent the Council from providing services to the individual and others and have a significant impact on staff wellbeing. These actions can occur during delivery of a service, while a complaint is being investigated, or once an organisation has finished the complaint investigation.

The decision to restrict access to services should not be taken lightly. Careful consideration should be given to our duties under equality and human rights act legislation. The Council should not operate a blanket approach to managing challenging actions and should consider the circumstances of each individual case.

The Council has a Managing Unreasonable Actions Policy which defines unacceptable actions and sets out the measures we can take to deal with people who display this behaviour.

Who can use the policy?

The Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy is available to people who are or have been in a tenant/landlord relationship with South Tyneside Council. This includes people who have a lease, tenancy, licence to occupy, service agreement, or any other arrangement to occupy premises owned or managed by the Council.

If a complaint is made by a previous tenant, they must have been a tenant when the matter of their complaint arose.

Our Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy will be made publicly available through our website to ensure transparency and accessibility for all customers. In addition, customers may request a copy of the policy in an alternative language or format to meet their individual communication and accessibility needs. We are committed to providing information in a way that is inclusive and accessible, ensuring that all customers can readily understand and engage with the policy regardless of their preferred language or format.

What does this policy cover?

This policy covers complaints about the following:

- failure to deliver a service on time
- failure to provide a service at the level or standard expected by the Council
- failure to deliver agreed services
- failure to provide accurate information
- failure to follow the Council's agreed policies, rules and procedures
- failure to follow national legislation
- delays in providing services
- delays in decision making
- dissatisfaction with a decision
- cost of services
- lack of services
- lack of, or substandard communication
- unhelpful attitude or behaviour of staff
- services provided by contractors on behalf of the Council
- services delivered through partnership arrangements
- discrimination or harassment on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation

This list is not exhaustive and does not intend to cover every eventuality but is intended to provide a broad example of the areas.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints can play a significant part in revealing poor practice, particularly in relation to vulnerable people. Anonymous complaints will be considered under the housing complaints procedure where possible. If there are no means to provide a response in relation to allegations or issues raised, these this will be recorded as an initial report of concern and investigated as considered appropriate by the Lead Officer. The Council will be unable to provide a response to anonymous complaints.

Complaints involving more than one service

If a complaint involves more than one service, these will be combined into one complaint response. The service responsible for the main elements of the complaint will take the lead and work alongside other relevant services to provide a single response which will cover all elements of the complaint.

Services provided by contractors on behalf of the Council

Complaints about services provided by third-party contractors on behalf of the Council will be investigated under this policy. On some occasions it may be more appropriate for the contractor to conduct a complaint investigation and provide a response. It will be at the discretion of the Council whether the investigation is carried out by the Council or the contractor.

What does this policy not cover?

Some areas are not covered by this policy, as they are either covered by another policy or procedure or are outside the Council's control. These include:

- a first-time request for a service, such as reporting a repair or changing an appointment
- complaints made 12 months after the date you learned that something went wrong, unless there are any special circumstances that prevented this
- a request for information or an explanation
- a matter that has previously been fully investigated under this complaints policy and a written response given
- issues where there is a right of appeal/grievance or an alternative method of redress is available, for example appeals about the implementation of our Allocations Policy

- where legal proceedings are underway - this is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court
- a complaint in relation to high rise building safety concerns – these will be investigated in accordance with our Building Safety Strategy and High-Rise Buildings Complaints Procedure
- complaints about matters that fall under a separate complaints procedure
- insurance and / or housing condition claims (housing disrepair claims)
- matters dealt with under the Council's employment procedures
- complaints that have been investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service
- complaints outside the Council's jurisdiction (for example, complaints about utilities companies, private business or other government bodies)

The Council will consider each complaint on its individual merits and may exercise discretion when determining whether a complaint falls within the scope of this policy.

Where the Council determines that a complaint will not be accepted into the complaints process, the complainant will be provided with a clear written explanation outlining the reasons for this decision and why the matter is not considered suitable for investigation under the policy. The complainant will also be informed of their right to refer the decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service for further consideration.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaints

Reports of antisocial behaviour will be investigated in accordance with our antisocial behaviour policy.

A complaint can be made regarding the Council's handling of ASB, however the Council can only investigate complaints about the service provided by the Council and not the ASB itself.

Under the 2014 Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, people can request a review of their ASB complaint by the Council, Police and other agencies under the Community Trigger. A request can be made to South Tyneside Council or Northumbria Police, who will determine if they are able to review the complaint.

Premature Ombudsman complaints

The Housing Ombudsman may refer complaints to the Council that have not been through the Council's complaints process. When a Premature Ombudsman Complaint is received, we will investigate this as a Stage 1 complaint. For complaints that have been to stage 1, these will be investigated as a Stage 2 complaint.

Complaints about Councillors

The Localism Act 2011 requires Councils to have a separate process to consider allegations that an elected member has failed to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillor and co-opted members. More details of this can be found at [South Tyneside Council - Complaints against Councillors](#).

Complaints about the conduct of staff

Where a complaint involves the conduct or attitude of a member of staff, this will be investigated under the corporate complaints procedure to ensure that the customer receives a response to the concerns raised. The corporate complaints procedure is a separate process from any internal disciplinary procedures that may follow as a result of the investigation of a complaint.

The relationship between employer and employee is confidential. It is appropriate to advise the customer of any action taken in response to their complaint, however the application or outcome of any HR process must remain confidential.

Complaints about a housing policy

Disagreements with housing policies will not be investigated as a complaint unless we believe the policy is likely to give rise or contribute to a systemic service failure. If we decide not to investigate the matter as a complaint we will take your comments on board. If someone feels that a Council policy unfairly discriminates against a particular group of people with protected characteristics, as defined in the Equality Act 2010, we will investigate this as a complaint.

Complaints about financial impropriety

Allegations about financial impropriety will be considered under the corporate complaints procedure and will be shared with Internal Audit.

Assistance with complaints

In some cases, customers may need some help from an advocate to make a complaint. An advocate is someone who can speak on behalf of someone else.

Customers may prefer for a friend or relative to make a complaint on their behalf. If this is the case, the Council will need to establish that the person has consent from the customer to act on their behalf, and that the customer is happy for the Council to share any information with their chosen advocate. Consent must be given freely and can be removed at any time.

If someone is making a complaint on behalf of someone who is deemed not to have capacity as defined by the Mental Capacity Act, the complaint will only be considered if proof can be provided that the advocate has Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA), or are acting in that person's best interest. If this cannot be provided, the Council may undertake a Capacity Assessment/Best Interest Decision.

If the Council believes that an advocate is inappropriate, or is not acting in a customer's best interest, we will not consider the complaint but will inform the advocate and customer of the reasons for our decision. Customers have the right to appeal this decision with the Housing Ombudsman.

Assistance from Councillors or Members of Parliament (MPs) with complaints

In some cases, customers may seek assistance from their local Councillor or MP with enquiries or concerns. Councillors or MPs might include signposting customers to the correct route to submit an enquiry of concern, or submitting this directly on their behalf.

In cases where the Council investigates a complaint submitted by Councillor or MP on a customer's behalf, we will copy them into any complaint responses, unless the customer requests otherwise.

The Council cannot reinvestigate issues that have previously been investigated through the Council's complaints procedure and/or considered by the Housing Ombudsman. If the Council receives a request from a Councillor or MP to open a complaint about an issue that has previously been investigated, we will advise them of this and provide them with the previous response.

Housing Complaints Procedure

The Council has a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

All staff are aware of the complaints process and can raise a complaint on the customers behalf.

The Council will appoint a separate officer to investigate each stage of a complaint, who will do the following:

- clarify with the customer any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about
- deal with complaints on their merits
- act independently, and have an open mind
- provide the customer a fair chance to set out their position
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- consider all relevant information and evidence carefully

If a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales, the investigating officer will inform the customer of when the response will be provided, as well as the reasons for the delay.

The Council will make reasonable adjustments for customers where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. The Council will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed and keep these under active review.

The Council will not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless there are valid reasons to do so, and will clearly set out these reasons.

The Council will keep a full record of a complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This will include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the customer, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports. This will be retained in line with the Council's data retention policies.

The Council is responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Council's policy.

During the complaints process it may be necessary to share personal details with Council officers. We will only share details that are relevant to the complaint.

Complaint stages

Stage 1 complaint

Stage 1 is where the Council will try to resolve a complaint locally with the service the complaint relates to. The Council aims to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of our procedure, and intends to provide an explanation, apology or resolution promptly.

When a complaint is received at Stage 1 of our complaints procedure we will log and acknowledge the complaint **within 5 working days of the complaint being**

received.

The investigating officer will set out their understanding of the complaint, the outcomes sought by the complainant, and the aspects of the complaint for which the Council is responsible. Any matters outside the Council's remit will be clearly explained. Where necessary, the complainant will be contacted to clarify any unclear aspects of the complaint.

The investigating officer will provide a thorough response **within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged and logged**, unless there are reasons that this needs to be extended.

Any extension should be no longer than **10 working days** without good reason and the reasons will be clearly explained to the customer. The investigating officer will agree appropriate communication arrangements with the complainant, including suitable update intervals, to ensure they are kept informed of progress throughout the investigation. If a complaint is extended, the customer will be provided with the details of the Housing Ombudsman.

A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will still be tracked and actioned promptly, with appropriate updates provided to the customer.

The Council will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. The Council will be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.

If a customer raises 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. If 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 will be logged as a new complaint.

The Council will confirm the following in writing to the customer at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint
- the reason for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the customer is not satisfied

Stage 2 complaint

If all or part of a complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction at stage 1, it will be progressed to stage 2 of the Council's complaints procedure. Stage 2 is the Council's final response to a complaint.

Requests for stage 2 will be acknowledged and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure **within 5 working days of the escalation request being received**.

Individuals will not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration, but the Council will make reasonable efforts to understand why a customer remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.

The investigating officer will set out their understanding of the complaint escalation, the outcomes sought by the complainant, and the aspects of the complaint for which the Council is responsible. Any matters outside the Council's remit will be clearly explained. Where necessary, the complainant will be contacted to clarify any unclear aspects of the complaint escalation.

The officer considering the complaint at stage 2 will not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.

The investigating officer will issue a final response to the customer **within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**, unless there are reasons that this needs to be extended.

Any extension should be no longer than **20 working days** without good reason and the reasons will be clearly explained to the customer. The investigating officer will agree appropriate communication arrangements with the complainant, including suitable update intervals, to ensure they are kept informed of progress throughout the investigation. If a complaint is extended, the customer will be provided with the details of the Housing Ombudsman.

A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will still be tracked and actioned promptly, with appropriate updates provided to the customer.

The Council will confirm the following in writing to the customer at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decision made

- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman (or in some cases the Information Commissioner's Office) if the customer remains dissatisfied

If the Council's complaint response is handled by a third party (such as a contractor) or independent adjudicator at any stage, it should form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this policy. Customers should not be expected to go through two complaints processes.

The Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman is an independent service set up by the Government to investigate complaints about Council housing matters.

Customers can refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman at any time. However, the Ombudsman is unlikely to consider a complaint until it has been fully investigated under the Council's housing complaints procedure.

The Housing Ombudsman's contact details are:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

Website: [Housing Ombudsman Service](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Advice line: 0300 111 300

Putting things right

Where something has gone wrong, our objective is to put things right and reach agreement on a remedy which is satisfactory to the customer. As a general guide we would always attempt to put the customer back in the position they would have been in if a mistake had not occurred. The Council will acknowledge and errors and set out the actions we have already taken, or intend to take, to put things right. These can include:

- apologising
- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- taking action if there has been a delay
- reconsidering or changing a decision
- amending a record or adding a correction or addendum

- providing a financial remedy
- changing policies, procedures or practices

Any remedy offered will reflect the impact on the customer as a result of any fault identified. The remedy offer will clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the customer where appropriate. Any remedy proposed will be followed through to completion.

If a proposed remedy cannot be delivered, the customer will be informed of the reasons for this, provided with details of any alternative remedy and reminded of their right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman.

The Council will take account of the good practice guides issued by the Housing Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

Financial compensation

Financial compensation may be offered if appropriate such as:

- the Council has taken the appropriate action but has delayed in doing so and the delay has caused injustice;
- there is no practical action which would provide a full and appropriate remedy; or
- the complainant has sustained financial loss or has suffered stress and anxiety

Compliments

Compliments are a vital part of our feedback system and are a great way of telling us when we get things right. They help us to recognise and celebrate the good work being done by our staff and can help us to share good practice and improve the services we provide.

If someone compliments a service or staff member, we will record it and pass it on to the appropriate person. Positive feedback will also be shared with the relevant officers and teams to reinforce good practices and encourage continued excellence.

Exceptional compliments may also be highlighted within Council communications to showcase examples of outstanding service and performance.

Comments

Comments, whether positive or negative are also a great way of gaining valuable feedback about the services we provide. Comments sent to the Customer Feedback Team will be recorded and passed on to the appropriate service.

On some occasions people may express disappointment, disagreement or observations about services without necessarily wanting to complain. Feedback of this nature will be recorded and passed on to the relevant service area for consideration. People will not receive an acknowledgement or response of this unless they specifically ask for one.

Compliments and comments can be made in person, by telephone, social media, email, or in writing.

Performance reporting and self-assessment

The Council will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which will include:

- an annual self-assessment against the housing complaint handling code to ensure our complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Council's complaint handling performance. This will also include a summary of the types of complaints the Council has refused to accept
- any findings of non-compliance with the Code
- the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints
- the annual letter about the Council's performance from the Housing Ombudsman
- any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the Council.

The annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be reported through the Council's governance arrangements and published on the section of our website relating to complaints. The response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement will be published alongside this.

The Council will also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.