

Westmorland and Furness Council Corporate Compliments and Complaints Policy

About this policy

We care about our customers and listen to them. We will put customers at the heart of everything we do and ensure they are able to make a compliment or complaint easily using a channel of their choice. We will use feedback received and lessons learned from compliments and complaints to help design and improve our services.

We aim to provide the best possible service, so we will celebrate when things go well and act when things go wrong. We want to invite feedback so that we can work with our customers to put it right and learn from it so we can prevent it happening again in future.

This policy explains the Council's approach to receiving and resolving complaints. It applies to all Council services except those which have their own statutory process (e.g., Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Data Protection Complaints).

The Council recognises that individuals may be reluctant to raise complaints out of fear it may impact services they receive in future, but we aim to reassure our residents with a caring and considerate approach and to ensure their feedback is valued.

We also want to know when we are getting it right as your compliments help us build on what is working well. In section 7 of the policy, we set out how you can share this valued feedback with us.

Definitions

If something has gone wrong, we can usually work with you to resolve it quickly and locally without the need for you to make a complaint. You can approach the team delivering the service directly, or you can make a 'request for service' via our website. Depending on the issue, you may be directed towards a specific team. For example, if you are reporting a pothole, we will direct you to the Highways Hotline online form on our website. If you are a council tenant and need to report a repair, we will redirect you to the Housing Landlord Service to log this repair.

In contrast, we understand a 'complaint' to be an expression of dissatisfaction.

You don't have to use the word 'complaint' to make a complaint. If you contact us and we consider that you are expressing dissatisfaction with a service, and it has affected you or someone you are representing, we will begin the complaints process after confirming with you, or the person representing you, that you wish to make a complaint.

If we are not sure if you are making a complaint, we will ask. We will also consider information requests under the:

- Section 103 - Data Use and Access (DUA) Act 2025/Section 164A - Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)
- [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#); and
- [Environmental Information Regulations 2004](#)

Are subject to statutory procedures and are not covered in this policy.

You can find out more here - [Make a Freedom of Information request | Westmorland and Furness Council](#).

Any concerns about a risk of harm relating to the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult should be raised directly with the appropriate Safeguarding Team for urgent consideration. You can find more information here - [Health and social care | Westmorland and Furness Council](#)

If you have a concern about how your personal data has been handled by the council you can contact the Data Protection Officer (DPO), see [Your rights and contacting the Data Protection Officer | Westmorland and Furness Council](#).

Here is a summary of the differences between requests for service, complaints, and information requests:

Request for service

A request that the Council provides or improves a service, fixes a problem, or reconsiders a decision.

For example:

- There is a large pothole on the street in front of my house
- The library closes early on Wednesday.
- You are a Council tenant, and your boiler is not working and this is the first time you have reported this

Complaint

An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Council, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.

For example:

- I reported the pothole via the Highways Hotline, but it took 6 months to be fixed.
- The person who answered the phone was very rude to me.
- I reported a faulty boiler to the Landlord Service, and it took 2 weeks to have heating and hot water restored

Information request

There are three main types of information request:

- For information about yourself (Personal Data) under the UK General Data Protection Regulations/~~Data Protection Act 2018~~
- For general information held by the Council under the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- For general information about the environment under the Environment Information Regulations 2004.

For example:

- I would like to see my records from when I was in care.
- How many children were in the care of the local authority between 2021-2022?
- Could I have copies of documents that outline the council's carbon strategy, including any strategy for using carbon offsets to meet carbon targets.

Eligibility and Accessibility: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Who can complain under this policy?

Anyone who is a customer of Westmorland and Furness Council can submit a compliment or make a complaint. This is usually residents but can also include visitors or others who have interacted with the local authority.

Anyone who has been asked to represent an individual to make a complaint and has been provided with consent for them to do so, whether formally (e.g., an advocate) or informally (e.g., a friend or family member).

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) states that:

“The Council should provide individuals with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.”

What can be complained about under this policy?

- If we do not provide a service at the level or to the standard laid down by law or Council policy/guidance.
- If we delay unreasonably in answering a query or responding to a request for service (we will continue to respond to the request for service even after a complaint is made). Response times to service requests may vary depending on the service. However, we would always expect that service requests are acknowledged within five working days with clear timescales given.
- If we fail to handle your personal data properly.
- If we do not take account of relevant matters in coming to a decision.
- If we do not communicate appropriately.
- If the conduct of a member of staff falls below the standards our customers expect.
- If we discriminate against anyone or act unfairly.

Complaints against contractors employed by the Council to deliver services on our behalf will be treated as complaints against the service area employing the contractors. The Council may ask the contractor to respond to the complaint but will oversee the response.

For Housing complaints in relation to our functions as a landlord, the service will handle the complaint and liaise with the contractor as part of the investigation and will respond to the complaint using the information gathered as part of the investigation. This will not delay the response times required by the Complaint Handling Code.

What can't be complained about under this policy?

The Complaints policy may not always be the most appropriate route to follow and will not apply to the following:

- The complaint is 'out of time'. A complaint should be submitted within 12 months of the issue arising or the resident becoming aware of the issue unless they are excluded on other grounds set out in the Codes. The Council may apply discretion to accept complaints outside of this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

- A member of staff employed by Westmorland and Furness Council should not use this complaints procedure to raise matters relating to their own employment. Instead, they should consider raising a grievance. The grievance guidance and information page can be found on the staff intranet.
- Elected Members of Westmorland and Furness Council who wish to complain about Council services, in their capacity as an Elected Member, should contact the portfolio holder and/or director of the relevant service area. If Elected Members wish to raise a complaint as a resident of Westmorland and Furness, they can use the policy in the same way as any other resident.
- Anyone complaining on behalf of someone else without their consent to do so.
- A member of staff raising a concern with someone in the Council, internally and/or externally about wrong doing, risk or malpractice that affects others should consult the Council's policy on Confidential Reporting - [Confidential Reporting Whistleblowing Policy \(westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk\)](#)
- Any matters relating to Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care or Data Protection which are governed by separate statutory complaints procedures. For more info follow – [Make a complaint about social care](#) and [Your rights and contacting the Data Protection Officer | Westmorland and Furness Council](#).
- Any matter for which there is a more appropriate legal remedy e.g., a matter which is (or could reasonably be expected to be) the subject of court or tribunal proceedings or review by a minister. However, any matter that has not yet proceeded to formal court or tribunal action, including at a pre-action protocol stage, can still be raised as a complaint.
- A matter which responding to would provide personal info about another person.
- The processing of statutory requests for information received under Freedom of Information Act 2000/Environmental information Regulations 2005, see: [Make a freedom of information request](#)
- A request which is covered by legislation e.g., Freedom of Information or Data Protection.
- Subsequent complaints about the handling of requests under the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations or Data Protection Act. These are considered 'Internal Reviews' and follow a separate process. More info can be found here – [Make a freedom of information request](#).
- A claim for compensation. In most cases, claims for compensation against the authority will be referred to the Council's insurer.
- Any matter where there is an alternative appeal or redress route e.g., appealing a parking ticket, or an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Any complaint that does not fall within the Council's remit for example crime and police matters, issues relating to healthcare or those outside of the geographical boundaries of Westmorland and Furness.
- Matters that have previously been considered, and resolved, under the complaints policy.
- Complaints about the conduct of Councillors/ Elected Members. These should be referred to the Council's Monitoring Officer. More info here – [Complain about a councillor](#).
- Complaints about a School: If you have a complaint about a school, your first step must be to contact the school directly to see if it can be resolved informally. If you are still dissatisfied, then requesting a copy of the school's Complaints Procedure will help you to submit a formal complaint with the school. Further information can be found here – [Make a complaint about a school](#).
- Complaints about the way a parish or town council manages its own services, staff or decision-making. These are for the relevant parish or town council to consider under its own complaints procedure. We will signpost you to the appropriate council.
- A report of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in relation to a council tenancy is not a complaint under this policy as the Council has a separate [policy](#) for dealing with reports of ASB. A resident may complain about the way an ASB report has been handled by the service once the process for this has been exhausted within the policy itself.

- Complaints about the Council's landlord functions that are excluded under Section 2.2 of the Housing Complaint Handling Code.

If the Council decide not to accept a complaint in relation to its functions (including as a landlord), an explanation will be provided setting out the reasons why it is not suitable for the complaints process, and will provide the details of the right to take that decision to the relevant Ombudsman Service, providing their contact details.

Data Use and Access Act (DUA) 2025

Section 103 DUAA 2025 inserts Section 164A into Data Protection Act 2018, creating a legal duty for the council as a data controller to operate a Data Protection complaints process.

From 19 June 2026, the council must:

- provide a way for individuals to complain
- investigate/respond without undue delay

Requests are overseen by the council's Data Protection Officer and handled by the Data Assurance Team (Legal and Democratic Services). Further information can be found at: [Your rights and contacting the Data Protection Officer | Westmorland and Furness Council](#).

Parish and Town Council complaints

Parish and town councils within the Westmorland and Furness area are separate legal authorities. They are responsible for their own services, staff and decision-making and must operate their own complaints procedures.

This corporate Compliments and Complaints Policy applies only where:

- the complaint is about a service delivered by Westmorland and Furness Council, even if a parish or town council was involved in referring, signposting or consulting; or
- Westmorland and Furness Council acted in another formal capacity (e.g., planning authority, highway authority).

The following are not handled under this corporate policy:

- complaints about decisions or general administration of a parish or town council;
- complaints about parish/town council staff.

Customers will be signposted to the relevant parish or town council and its complaints procedure.

Complaints Submitted by Parish and Town Councils on Behalf of Residents

Parish and town councils are independent legal bodies and are responsible for managing their own services and decision-making. They may, however, raise concerns with Westmorland and Furness Council where the matter relates to a service delivered by this Council or where we are acting in a statutory capacity (for example as the planning or highway authority)

Our advice is that parish councillors should submit complaints in a personal capacity—either as an individual resident or as an individual complainant representing their own concerns.

In these cases, the complaint is handled in the same way as for any other resident, and the individual retains the full right to escalate the matter through both stages of the Council's complaints procedure and subsequently to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

(LGSCO) if dissatisfied with the final decision

A parish or town council may occasionally request to raise a complaint collectively on behalf of one or more residents. The Council may agree to manage such complaints through the corporate complaints process subject to Director discretion.

Where a parish or town council acts as the complainant:

- The complaint will be considered and responded to in line with the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.
- However, the individual residents whose concerns prompted the parish council's involvement will not be regarded as the complainants for the purpose of escalation rights.
- As a result, the residents will not be able to escalate the matter independently to the LGSCO, because Ombudsman jurisdiction applies only to individuals who are themselves complainants or those with properly authorised personal representatives

If residents wish to retain their statutory right to escalate to the LGSCO, they should submit the complaint individually or with explicit consent via a representative acting on their behalf. Clarity of representation and consent.

Where a parish councillor or parish council states they are acting on behalf of named residents, the Council must be satisfied that:

- Valid consent has been obtained from each resident, and
- The parish councillor/council is acting as their representative rather than as a corporate body raising a general issue.

Where proper consent exists, the residents retain full rights under the complaints procedure and may escalate to the LGSCO if necessary. Without consent, the matter will be treated as a parish council complaint and not a complaint by an individual resident.

Complaints about how a parish or town council manages its own services, staff or decision-making cannot be considered under this policy and must be directed to the parish or town council's own complaints procedure

Complaints about the conduct of Councillors

Complaints about the behaviour or conduct of:

- a Westmorland and Furness councillor; or
- a parish or town councillor within the Westmorland and Furness area

are handled under the Members' Code of Conduct, led by the Monitoring Officer and overseen by the Standards and Governance Committee.

Such complaints must be submitted through the Code of Conduct complaints process. We will signpost complainants appropriately where issues relate to alleged misconduct rather than service delivery. More information can be found here - [Councillor code of conduct and standards | Westmorland and Furness Council](#)

Unreasonable Customers

The unreasonable customer aspect of the policy is not intended to prevent customers from raising legitimate and important concerns, enquiries, or requests, or from pursuing them. The council is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and learning from them.

However, Westmorland and Furness Council has a duty to ensure that it provides value for

money services for all its residents and local communities. An unreasonable or unreasonably persistent customer can take up a disproportionate amount of time that can hinder the other work of staff. The Council will therefore ensure that it uses its resources wisely and reserves the right to limit the amount of time spent on queries that it considers unreasonable, vexatious or unreasonably persistent.

Westmorland and Furness Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and diversity, and to challenging discrimination. Staff working for the Council and Elected Members have a right to undertake their work free from all types of discrimination, abuse, and harassment. The council has a duty to protect the safety and welfare of its staff and Elected Members. We therefore shall not tolerate what we consider to be unacceptable behaviour by unreasonable or unreasonably persistent customers.

We would not normally limit the contact that our customers may have with the Council. However, in accordance with this policy, we may decide to do so if customers behave unreasonably, are vexatious, or are unreasonably persistent, or if staff experience unacceptable behaviour.

For the purposes of this policy unreasonable, vexatious or unreasonably persistent customers are defined as being those which, because of the frequency or nature of their contact, hinder the authority's consideration of complaints, enquiries, or requests. Officers may recognise one or more of the following indicators as characteristic of unreasonable or unreasonably persistent customers.

They make complaints, requests, concerns, or enquiries that:

- clearly do not have any serious purpose or value; or are designed solely to cause disruption or annoyance.
- are vexatious in nature.
- have the effect of harassing the Council or its staff or can otherwise fairly be characterised as obsessive or unreasonable.
- take up an unreasonable amount of officer time and hinder the other work of the Council.

Unacceptable behaviour can include:

- abusive, offensive, or threatening behaviour
- behaviour which amounts to bullying or harassment.

The following customer actions or behaviours could cause the unreasonable customer element of the policy to be invoked:

- unwillingness to comply with council procedures.
- insisting on issues or requests being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with Council procedures or with good practice.
- making unreasonable demands of officers and / or members or setting unreasonable timescales for responses.
- making unreasonable requests in relation to who should deal with their complaint, enquiry, or request, or how it should be dealt with.
- repeatedly being unwilling to accept documented evidence.
- insisting that no response has been received or that the response is unacceptable.
- sending a high volume of letters, emails and/or phone calls (sometimes to multiple recipients) or repeatedly adopting a 'scattergun' approach; pursuing complaints or requests with the authority and, at the same time, with a Member of Parliament, a Councillor, legal services, local police, solicitors or the Ombudsman.
- continuing to add new, or making trivial, complaints, requests, or enquiries.
- repeatedly complaining or making repeat requests about similar issues after they have already been dealt with or making many complaints, requests, or enquiries about different issues in succession

- refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance with this from the Council's staff.
- making groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaint or request and seeking to have the staff replaced.
- refusing to accept that issues or requests are not within the remit of a procedure despite having been provided with information about the procedures scope; for instance, if the customer has been advised that a complaint or request is within the remit of another authority yet refusing to accept this.
- changing the basis of a complaint or request as it proceeds and/or denying statements made at an earlier stage.
- introducing trivial or irrelevant new information which the customer expects to be considered, or raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are all fully answered; or submitting repeat complaints or requests, with minor variations, after the processes have been completed refusing to accept a decision.
- electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other persons involved.

The process of invoking the Unreasonable Customer Policy can be considered if a member of staff experiences one, or several of, the examples given above.

There is internal guidance available for colleagues who wish to have support on invoking the policy.

Behaviour considered to be harassment, aggressive or a threat to staff safety and welfare may lead to police involvement or legal action. In such cases, where there is a need or justification for protecting staff, the Council may not need to give the customer prior warning of this action.

Our Process

How to make a complaint under this policy

We always aim to resolve any issues informally where possible. If however a complaint is required, we want to make it as easy as possible for you to do so, offering a variety of channels for you to tell us what the problem is. You do not need to write down the problem to have it considered as a complaint. How we receive your complaint does not change how we handle it.

Here are some ways you can make a complaint:

- By email to complaints@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk
- By telephoning the Customer Service Team on 0300 373 3300
- Directly with a member of frontline staff: face-to-face
- By writing to the following postal address. You do not need to write in letter format, we just need as much information as possible:
Customer Service,
Westmorland and Furness Council
South Lakeland House
Highgate
Kendal
LA9 4DL
- On audiotape, in braille, or by videocall with a BSL interpreter.

Council staff have been trained to receive complaints and know what to do next.

Contacting the council complaints team will ensure your concern is managed effectively. Please do not contact the Chief Executive, Directors, Assistant Directors, or Senior Managers directly regarding complaints, as they are less likely to be able to help resolve the matter because they

may not have the detailed information about the issues. For your assurance, there are routes of escalation within the complaints procedure for review by a more senior officer if necessary.

How to make a Data Protection complaint

To make a Data Protection complaint under the Data Use and Access Act (DUAA) 2025 (which updates the UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018 framework), complainants should:

Contact the Data Protection Officer (DPO) at dataprotection@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

You should include

- What happened (e.g. misuse, breach, failure to respond to a DSAR)
- Dates and evidence relevant to the complaint
- Required outcome (e.g. correction, deletion, explanation)

The Council is required to respond without undue delay (typically within 30 days). If a complaint is complex, timescales can be extended but the Council must provide an explanation to the complainant and their options for escalation.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the Council's response they can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO will investigate and either order the council to comply or issue a warning reprimand or fine.

The ICO do not award compensation. If a complainant has suffered damage or distress, they can bring a claim in the civil courts or seek independent legal advice.

Accessibility and Awareness

Complaints can be submitted in any language, and we can arrange an interpreter to facilitate ongoing communication with you.

The Council will make this policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. If you require any reasonable adjustments to facilitate your access to the complaints procedure, please tell us and we will be happy to arrange this.

The Council will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments will be kept under active review.

You can have a suitable representative deal with the complaint on your behalf if they have your consent. They can represent you or accompany you to any meetings, either online, via telephone or face-to-face.

This policy will be promoted via:

- Our website
- Our customer service points
- Our Housing newsletter
- Our Housing annual report
- Letters we send to our tenants and residents

Complaint Stages

This section refers to complaints considered and investigated under the Corporate Complaint process.

The Council will not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless there are valid reasons to do so. The Council will clearly set out these reasons, and they will align with the approach to exclusions set out in section 2 of the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code and Section 2.2 of the Housing Complaint Handling Code.

A full record will be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This will include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the individual, 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.

When a resident raises a complaint, the complaint will not prevent/stall or impact upon any actions needed to resolve any immediate issues.

Stage 1

The Council has processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further consideration. The Council will consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the individual is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the individual.

Complaints will be acknowledged and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received.

When responding to complaints around the Council's Landlord functions, the acknowledgement will also define the Council's understanding of the complaint, outcomes sought and confirm any aspects it is or is not responsible for.

A full response to stage 1 complaints will be issued within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. An extension of this timescale can be applied depending on the complexity of the complaint which will be advised to the complainant.

An extension will usually be no more than 10 working days without good reason and these reasons will be clearly explained. In exceptional circumstances, our response may need to fall outside of the extended timescales set by the Codes. If this happens, the Council will always tell you why and agree suitable intervals to update you on the progress of your complaint.

The person responding to the complaint will:

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

Complaint responses will be provided to the individual 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 individual.

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.

At the conclusion of Stage 1, the Council will provide details of how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.

Where individuals raise additional complaints during Stage 1, these will 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 will be logged as a new complaint.

The Council will have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Individuals will not have to escalate a complaint to get an appropriate remedy.

Stage 2 Review

If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at Stage 1, it will be progressed to Stage 2 of the procedure and reviewed. New issues unrelated to the original complaint must be submitted as a new complaint.

Stage 2 requests will be logged and acknowledged within 5 working days of the escalation request being received. The acknowledgement will set out the Council's understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspects of the complaint are unclear, the resident will be asked for clarification.

The resident does not have to provide reasons or expected outcomes for the escalation of the complaint to Stage 2, but the Council may take reasonable steps to understand why the resident is unhappy.

Stage 2 consideration will be a review of the adequacy of the Stage 1 response, as well as any new and relevant information not previously considered. Stage 2 will not necessarily be a more thorough, detailed investigation of the complaint as it is expected this will have taken place at Stage 1.

A final response to the stage 2 review will be issued within 20 working days of the escalation being acknowledged. When considering the complexity of the review, an extension of usually no more than 20 working days may be applied but will be clearly explained to the complainant. In exceptional circumstances, our response may need to fall outside of the extended timescales set by the Codes. If this happens, the Council will always tell you why and agree suitable intervals to update you on the progress of your complaint.

Complaint responses will be provided to the individual 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 individual.

Stage 2 is the Council's final response and will involve all suitable staff members needed to issue the response. The person considering the Stage 2 review will not be the same person that considered the Stage 1 complaint.

Complaints about Housing Services

Westmorland and Furness Council is committed to putting tenants first. Housing complaints and those relating to the services we provide as a landlord are overseen by the Housing Ombudsman rather than the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

If you are a council tenant or leaseholder and you are unhappy with the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the housing landlord service, your complaint will be managed through our Corporate Complaints process and assigned specifically to a council officer from the housing service. This ensures your concerns are handled in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and receive the specialist consideration required.

Any other complaints will follow the corporate complaints policy and process and will be allocated to the relevant services for consideration.

Escalation of Housing Complaints

If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint review at Stage 2, or you feel we have not answered within a reasonable timescale, you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service:

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

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

An online Form can found here - [Online complaint form | Housing Ombudsman Service](#)

Complaints involving joint authorities and multiple organisations

This section draws on the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code, the LGSCO guidance on complaints involving multiple organisations, and the joint working/manual guidance, and aligns with best practice promoted through the North West Complaints Managers Group.

We recognise that many services are delivered in partnership with other organisations. This can include:

- other local authorities (including combined authorities and joint committees);
- NHS organisations and integrated care systems;
- housing providers and the Housing Ombudsman's jurisdiction;
- commissioned or contracted providers; and
- parish and town councils where they are working with us on joint initiatives.

Where a complaint involves more than one organisation, we will follow the principles in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Handling Code and related guidance on complaints involving multiple organisations.

We will also take account of good practice developed with the North West Complaints Managers Group, which emphasises joint working, a person-centred approach and learning from complaints.

At first contact we will consider whether:

- more than one organisation may be responsible for the issues raised;
- any part of the complaint lies with another local authority, combined authority, NHS body, or other partner; and
- there are separate complaints procedures or statutory frameworks that also apply (for example, the Local Authority Social Services and NHS Complaints Regulations 2009 for joint health and social care complaints).

Where this is the case we will discuss the options with the complainant and, where possible, agree a joint or coordinated approach.

Wherever practicable, we will aim to ensure that:

- the complainant has one clear point of contact;
- the organisations involved agree which will act as the lead organisation for the complaint;
- all organisations are clear about which issues they are responsible for investigating; and
- there is a single, coordinated complaint plan, including timescales, methods of contact and any consent needed to share information.

We will not ask complainants to navigate complex organisational structures or pursue multiple separate complaints where a joint approach can reasonably be taken. Our starting point is that the complaint should be handled in the way that is clearest and most straightforward for the person raising it.

To handle joint complaints properly we may need to share information with partner organisations. We will:

- explain clearly what information needs to be shared, with whom and why;
- seek the complainant's informed consent before sharing personal information, unless we are legally required to share it without consent;
- record consent and any limitations the complainant sets; and
- respect data protection, confidentiality and information-sharing agreements at all times.

If consent is not given, we will either:

- investigate only the part of the complaint that relates to Westmorland and Furness Council, or
- explain that we cannot progress some or all aspects of the complaint and signpost to other options, such as raising a complaint directly with the partner organisation or approaching the relevant Ombudsman.

When we are the lead organisation, we will:

- agree realistic timescales with partner organisations and the complainant;
- monitor progress and keep the complainant updated;
- coordinate the contributions from all organisations; and
- issue a single, coordinated response wherever possible, clearly setting out:
 - which organisations were involved;
 - the findings for each part of the complaint;
 - any apologies and remedies; and
 - any service improvements or learning identified by each organisation.

When another organisation is the lead, we will:

- cooperate fully with their investigation;
- share relevant information promptly, in line with data protection requirements; and
- contribute to a coordinated response where asked to do so.

In all cases, we will make sure that joint working arrangements do not disadvantage the complainant or cause unnecessary delay. If timescales need to be extended because several organisations are involved, we will explain this and agree revised timeframes wherever possible.

Where a complaint concerns both Westmorland and Furness Council and a combined or joint authority (for example, in relation to transport or other strategic services), we will:

- identify which issues fall within each organisation's jurisdiction, having regard to LGSCO guidance on jurisdiction and combined authorities.
- agree with partners which organisation is best placed to lead the complaint; and
- make sure the complainant understands how to access the relevant complaints processes and, if necessary, the right Ombudsman or regulator for each element.

Escalation beyond the Council:

Stage 2 is the Council's final response and will involve all suitable staff members needed to issue a response.

If you are still not happy with the decision about your complaint, or you feel we have not answered within a reasonable timescale, you can complain to the relevant Ombudsman Service:

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV04 0EH

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

An online Form can be found here - [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaint form](#).

OR

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ETTelephone: 0300 111 3000

An online Form can found here - [Online complaint form | Housing Ombudsman Service](#)

Remedy Payments

Where something has gone wrong, the Council will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. Any remedy offered will reflect the impact on the individual because of any fault identified. Each case will be considered on its own merits and any application of remedies will:

- Be appropriate and proportionate to the injustice.
- Return the complainant in the position they would have been in except for the fault.
- Consider financial compensation, where the above is not possible.
- Consider the complainant's views and desired outcomes; and
- Consider the effect of the complainant's own actions (such as delay on their part)

There are different reasons why financial redress may arise. These could include:

- Compensation
- Quantifiable loss
- Loss of a non-monetary benefit
- Loss of value
- Lost opportunity
- Distress
- Time and trouble

When considering financial redress, consideration should also be given to the following issues: whether it is appropriate to offset compensation in instances where the complainant owes money to the authority. This would apply for any costs owed to the authority, rather than to a single service.

Where the complainant has incurred expenses or suffered financial loss, the Council should also consider whether it is appropriate to pay for loss of interest as well. The Local Government Ombudsman recommends the standard rate set by the County Court; and it may also be appropriate to calculate a financial remedy as a formula which considers all known factors.

Governance

Performance Reporting and Annual Reports

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

- a) the annual self-assessment against the LGSCO and Housing Complaint Handling Codes to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- b) 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.
- c) any findings of non-compliance with the LGSCO or Housing Complaint Handling Codes.
- d) the service improvements made because of the learning from complaints.
- e) any annual report about the Council's performance from the relevant Ombudsman
- f) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the relevant Ombudsman in relation to the work of the Council.
- g) reporting data protection trends and performance to the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)

Commitment to Continuous Learning and Improvement

The Council will always aim to look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made because of any learning from the complaint.

The Council will appoint a suitable Responsible Senior Executive, the Director of Customer and Digital, to oversee its complaint handling performance. This senior officer will assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision. Directorates will receive regular reports on volumes and trends to inform their practice and make improvements.

In addition, a member of the Council will be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints.

As a minimum, the Member and the Responsible Senior Executive will receive:

- regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance.
- regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; and
- the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

Compliments

If you think we are providing a good service, then please let us know that we have got things right as this will help us continue good practice.

We appreciate being advised when we are doing things well, and your positive feedback is crucial to ensure we provide consistently high levels of positive interactions across all of the services we deliver.

Compliments mean a lot to our colleagues and teams and a compliment can be given in any environment, whether that is a passing comment during a telephone call or face-to-face interaction, a letter delivered to any of our offices, or an online submission.

Compliments we receive will be recording on our central case management system by members of our Customer Services team. Once a compliment is logged on our system, it will be passed to the relevant team for their attention to be discussed during their team meetings and form part of their service improvement strategies.

Data on compliments received will also be collated and reported to our senior leadership team to form part of our quarterly and annual performance reports, and to reflect on our customer interactions, ensuring that we continue to put customers at the heart of everything we do and implement all the positive feedback our customers provide.

Compliments can be submitted by visiting our [“Give us a compliment” page](#) on our website.

Background Documents

[LGSCO Complaints Handling Code - Complaint Handling Code - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

[The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code - The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#)

Change History

Version	Date reviewed	Reviewed by	Description of revision
2	16/02/2026	DMT, Leona Noble, Cllr Helen Chaffey	Several sections added as follows, to clarify our processes for the customer and ensure correct signposting where needed – - Complaints involving Joint Authorities and multiple organisations - Parish and Town Council Complaints - Complaints about the conduct of Councillors - Complaints Submitted by Parish and Town Councils on Behalf of Residents - Complaints about Housing Services
3	16/04/2026	Rebecca Halton	Following the Housing Landlord Service submitting their annual submission, a review of the complaint policy was carried out by the Housing Ombudsman as part of their duty to monitor compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. A number of recommendations were made as a result of this review and the policy has been updated to incorporate these recommendations to strengthen compliance.
4	02/06/2026	Claire Owen	Following the introduction of the the Data Use and Access Act (DUAA) 2025 and the requirement to allow customers to complain about the use of personal data.