

To: **Governance and audit committee**
22 January 2025

Minor revisions to complaint policies

Executive director of communities – democratic and registration services

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To outline minor revisions to the council's policies for statutory adults' social care complaints and statutory children's social care complaints to support effective use of the new complaint handling system.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee approves the minor revisions to the complaint policies for statutory complaints to make the council's online complaint form the only electronic channel to submit a complaint.
- 2.2 That the executive director: communities is authorised to make minor revisions to the policies for statutory adults' social care complaints and statutory children's social care complaints in consultation with the committee chair and the executive director: people.

3. Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 The council is introducing a new complaint management system with a standard approach to support consistency and efficiency. By removing the option to submit a complaint by email, the revised policies make more efficient use of the system as no intervention is required to log a complaint. Once logged, the system provides automated tracking to help achieve complaint timescales and greater use of data to support learning and improvement.
- 3.2 The online form asks structured questions so the complainant can provide all the relevant details. It ensures we have the information required for a full investigation which focusses on the impact on the complainant and the outcome they are looking for, which supports a more satisfactory response. This is not necessarily the case with emails.
- 3.3 Emails are not always sent to the correct team and delays can be introduced whilst they are passed between services. A variety of officers and councillors can be included on emails, creating inefficiencies and rework if the issue is considered by several parties at the same time. The online form has a clear, single route to the dedicated complaint coordinator for the area.
- 3.4 The revisions reflect our customer experience strategy aim to simplify our email contact. Within the people directorate, there are three separate email addresses for complaints. This change provides a single front door for submitting complaints electronically, and supports our aim to be digital by design, build the digital skills of our customers and aligns with our digital and ICT strategy.
- 3.5 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman accepts complaints using its online form, by telephone and by letter. The Ombudsman does not provide an email address to submit complaints by email.

4. Alternative options considered

- 4.1 None considered.

5. Supporting information

Impact on complainants

- 5.1 Most of the council's complaints are submitted electronically (97% in Q1 – Q3 of 2024), with a slight preference for the online form (52% online form, 45% by email over the period). The revised approach standardises the council's online complaint form as the only electronic method. If someone can interact with us electronically, we will signpost to the online form rather than accept an email.
- 5.2 Telephone support is available for anyone who needs help to complete the form.
- 5.3 Complaints by telephone and letter remain available for people who cannot interact with us digitally.
- 5.4 Supporting documents can be submitted with the online complaint form, meaning complainants can still provide a free form summary of the concern if they wish.
- 5.5 We will communicate the change on the council's complaints webpages and in complaint correspondence (acknowledgements and complaint responses) to prepare individuals.
- 5.6 Existing complaint email accounts will use autoreplies to direct complainants to the online form and to the support available to submit a complaint.

Statutory and good practice guidance

- 5.7 The statutory guidance for children's social care complaints (Getting the best from complaints) states "*Local authorities are required to put in place systems for complaints to be made verbally to a member of staff or in writing (including electronically)*". The proposed approach allows complaints to be made verbally, in writing and electronically via the online form and associated documents.
- 5.8 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)'s complaint handling code states "*Organisations should make it easy for individuals to complain by providing different channels*" and "*Individuals should be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff*". The proposed approach allows complaints to be submitted in three ways – verbally, by letter and electronically – and all members of staff will be advised how they can support people to complain.
- 5.9 The corporate complaints policy will be updated in a similar way to ensure consistency and a standard experience for complainants regardless of service area.
- 5.10 The following appendices outline the proposed new policies and associated web guidance

Appendix A – adults' social care complaints
Appendix B – children's social care complaints

6. Consultation and other considerations

- 6.1 Legal advice
There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 6.2 Financial Advice
The executive director: resources is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise from this report.
- 6.3 Other consultation responses
The assistant directors of adult social care operations and children's social care both support this change.
- 6.4 Equalities impact assessment
Positive impact identified. Initial equalities screening attached as appendix C.
- 6.5 Strategic risk management issues
Good complaints handling improves outcomes for service users and enhances the council's reputation. The recommendations remove inefficiencies caused by manual intervention and potential delays or duplication of work. Standardising within a digital process helps the council meet the timescales for statutory complaints, and provides better data analysis to support further improvement.
- 6.6 Climate change and ecological impact
The recommendations in section 2 have no impact on emissions of CO₂.
- 6.7 Health & wellbeing considerations
There are no specific health and wellbeing implications relevant to this report.

Background Papers

None

Contacts for further information

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Appendix A

1. Revised section of the statutory complaints procedure: feedback, compliments and complaints regarding adult social care

A complaint may be received anywhere and by any officer within the council. If your concerns cannot be immediately resolved, we may register them within the complaint procedure with your agreement. Our online complaint form is the most effective way to register a complaint in our procedure. We will encourage and support you to use it if we cannot resolve your concern.

2. Further information – the supporting webpage will say:

To submit your complaint please fill in our complaint form.

[Make a complaint](#)

If you

- need help filling in the form
- cannot go online to complete the complaint form

call 01344 351736 for assistance.

It will take a little longer to reach us, but you can make a complaint by post to:

Complaints manager, Adults' social care, Bracknell Forest Council, Time Square, Market Street, Bracknell, RG12 1JD.

Appendix B

1. Revised section of children's social care complaints policy

How to make a complaint

Complaints can be accepted in the following ways:

- verbally/telephone
- in writing
- website online complaint form

Support is provided to make sure the complainant can easily use one of these ways.

2. Further information – the supporting webpage will say:

To submit your complaint please fill in our complaint form.

[Make a complaint](#)

If you

- need help filling in the form
- cannot go online to complete the complaint form

call 01344 351737 for assistance.

It will take a little longer to reach us, but you can make a complaint by post to:

Complaints manager, Children's social care, Bracknell Forest Council, Time Square, Market Street, Bracknell, RG12 1JD.