

An Introduction to the Customer Relations Team: Service Level Agreements

Next review date: April 2024

Key Information

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| Department / Service  | *Quality Relationships – Quality Assurance and Performance Division* |
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Revision History

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Glossary

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| Abbreviation | Name |
| SCC | Surrey County Council |
| CR | Customer Relations |
| SLA | Service Level Agreement |
| CFLLC | Children’s, Family, Lifelong Learning and Culture |
| LGO | Local Government Ombudsman |
| YP | Young Person / People |
| PA | Personal Advisor |
| CRO /CRM | Customer Relations Officer / Customer Relations Manager |
| HR | Human Resources |

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Introduction

The key objective of this document is as follows:

* To provide an overview of the purpose of the Customer Relations (CR) Team.
* To introduce the newly defined Service Level Agreements (SLA’s), internally (for the teams and services of Surrey CC) and externally the councillor’s, MP’s, Residents and Young People (YP) of Surrey.
* To ensure a high-quality customer experience with early resolution as a key priority to ensure an excellent customer experience.
* To develop a greater working relationship between the CR team and the other services and teams across the directorate.
* To highlight the importance of learning from complaints and to encourage this practice across the directorate.

What is the role of the Customer Relations Team?

* To provide the teams, services, and Directors (including assistant directors) across CFLLC, with the support and guidance required to respond to complaints and enquiries in line with guidance from the LGO.
* To determine whether a concern shared meets the criteria for a formal response via the Complaint Process or should be responded to as an ‘Enquiry’.
* To Log, Manage and Escalate complaints and enquiries through the appropriate process.
* To assist the team or service involved in their response to the complainant, including sense checking the drafting of the response and providing any necessary feedback.
* To support Councillors and MPs in arranging responses to any enquiries that they receive from a resident of Surrey.
* To encourage a philosophy of ‘Learning from Complaints’ and ensure services are provided with customer feedback in order to enable practice improvement.
* To flag and escalate areas of concern/risk to senior leadership.

Key Contacts

If you need to speak to the team, please contact:

 Be.heard@surreycc.gov.uk).

The Team Manager for Customer Relations is:

* Jessica Brooke (jessica.brooke@surreycc.gov.uk)

The Service Manager for Customer Engagement is:

* Joanna Lang (joanna.lang@surreycc.gov.uk).

The Team Structure

An Overview of the SLA’s

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SLA Name | Key Details |
| 1. Concerns
 | Two Working days to triage the enquiry and to determine if it should be processed as a formal complaint or as an enquiry. |
| 1. MP & Councillors: Enquiry Process
 | Two Working days to triage the enquiry and to inform the lead member.Office will see an update from the CR15 Working days for the team to provide the draft response to the MP or Councillor’s Personal Assistant (PA).**Going down the complaints process*** A copy of the response will be shared within 11 working days.
* If the 11 working days deadline has passed, the lead Member office will contact CRT for an update.
 |
| 1. Request to Freeze
 | This request needs to be acted on immediately by the CR Team. |
| 1. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Enquiry
 | The CR Team has 28 Calendar days to provide a response to the Initial Enquiry. Unless otherwise specified by the Ombudsman investigator.* Day 2: The CR Team has to send the enquiry to the responsible service.
* Day 21: The response has to be completed by the service and returned to the CR Team.
* Day 25: The CR Team packages the response and addresses any outstanding points.
* Day 27: The CR Team finalise the response and sends it to the LGSCO.
 |
| 1. OFSTED Notifications
 | The Council has 10 working days to respond to the OFSTED Notification. |
| 1. Learning Arising from Complaints
 | A timeframe of 10 to 20 working days to implement any learning that can be gathered from the complaint. |
| 1. Stage 1 Complaints
 | 10 working days to respond to the complaint. For children’s complaints, the deadline can be extended to 20 working days in complex cases\*. |
| 1. Stage 2 – Statutory Children’s Act Complaints
 | The Council has 20 Working Days to review the complaint, which is 20 days from the date that the escalated complaint lands.This can be extended to a maximum of 65 working days. If the complaint is complex, for example the involvement of multiple teams or services. |
| 1. Stage 2 – Non-Statutory Complaints (Education)
 | **Stage One*** The Council has 20 Working Days to review the resident’s complaint, which is 20 Workdays from the date that the escalated complaint lands.
* The deadline for the formal response following an investigation is agreed with the complainant, this is usually 25 Workdays.
* The deadline for the further response at stage 1 is 10 workdays
* The Senior Customer Relations Officer (SCRO) will write and share the outcome report by day 20, along with a formal response with the appropriate AD.
* The AD will personalise the draft response, sign and return it to the SCRO by day 25.
* SCRO is to send the formal response plus a copy of the outcome report to the family no later than day 25.

**Investigations at Stage Two*** The SCRO will share the ‘questions’ that require answers with the identified officer no later than 2 working days prior to the date of interview, enabling the identified officer to prepare for the meeting.
 |
| 10. Stage 2 – Non-Statutory Complaints (Children’s Services) | The Council has 20 Working Days to review the resident’s complaint, which is 20 days from the date that the escalated complaint lands.The outcome of the review can be: No Further Action, Peer Review, Mediation Independent Investigation.The deadline for the formal response after the review is agreed with the complainant, this is usually 25 Workdays. This deadline can be extended to 65 Workdays.* The CRO will liaise with the service and appoint an investigator.
* The CRO will share the outcome report by day 55, along with a draft formal response to the AD.
* By day 65 the AD will personalise, finalise, and sign the draft response.
* By day 65 the CRO will send the response and outcome report to the family.
 |
| 11.Stage 3 Complaints | All parties involved in the stage 3 complaint to adhere to the statutory guidelines.The Panel Chair must write to the Director, via the CR Team, within 5 working days from the date of the panel.* The CR Officer is to turn around a draft response and share it with the Director within 48 hours of receiving the Panel letter.

The Director has 15 working days from the date of the Panel letter to respond to the complainant. |

\*e.g. where the complaint cuts across multiple teams or services and where the young person is supported by an advocate.

SLA 1: Concerns

The first SLA addresses ‘Enquiries’ and determines whether they should be processed as an enquiry or as a ‘formal complaint’.

This SLA manages the concerns shared by families, the young person or any other eligible representative.

Examples of an enquiry include matters before the Court, matters covered by Employment Legislation, Human Resources enquiries, requests for service and appeals against decisions.

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The Customer Relations (CR) Team.
* The Responsible Service.

**The Key Time Frame(s)**

The CR Team have two working days to ‘triage’ the concern and determine if it is eligible to be responded to via the formal complaint process or as an enquiry.

**The associated benefits of incorporating this SLA**

* It provides a clear process to managing enquiries and complaints.
* It offers families with a clear level of expectation when their enquiry or complaint will be processed by.
* The CR Team and the Service involved have clear deadlines to work towards.
* The benefit of a decreased risk of a response being delayed, along with any subsequent escalations.

The SLA Process



SLA 2: MP and Councillors - Enquiry Process

The second SLA ensures that enquiries submitted by an MP or Councillor (on behalf of the resident) are managed in a timely manner; Either as a complaint or as an enquiry.

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The CR Team.
* Senior Leaders.
* The MP or Councillor’s Personal Assistant (P.A).
* Senior Leadership Support Team.
* Lead Member for Education and Children’s.

**The Key Time Frames**

* The SLA ensures that the enquiry is triaged by the Customer Relations Officer (CRO), with the designated time frame of Two Working days.
* The CRO then needs to then inform the lead member of the route in which the enquiry is being managed, whether that is as an enquiry or a formal stage one complaint.
* This is achieved by the CRO copying the lead member into the Children’s services and ELLC Enquiries for weekly updates, that covers all complaints and enquiries.
* The CRO will inform the office whether they will be provided with an update or not, and if they will receive an update the date when.

**What happens if the enquiry need to be escalated?**

* The CRO will copy the councillor or MP involved into the weekly reminders sent to the service.
* If a draft request response is requested then the Operational Team involved will share this with the MP or Councillor’s P.A, within 15 working days.
* This is achieved by highlighting any outstanding items on the weekly RAG report.
* The CR Team request that they be CC’d into the update to the MP / Councillor or the response to the family. As this will enable the CR Team to close the enquiry.

**Going down the Complaints Process**

* A copy of the response will be shared within 11 working days.
* The services responding and the Lead Member Office are copied into the Weekly RAG Report.
* If the 11 working days deadline has passed, the lead Member office will contact CRT for an update.

**The associated benefits of incorporating this Service Level Agreement**

* Provides a clear process for everyone to follow: The CR Team, Services involved and the MP’s & Councillors raising the enquiry.
* Ensures that clear expectations can be given to families, from when they can expect to receive a response.
* Enforces clear deadlines for the CR Team and other services to work to.
* Decreases risk of delayed responses and therefore any subsequent escalations.

The SLA Process



What happens if the enquiry needs to be escalated?



SLA 3: Request to Freeze

The third SLA outlines the process to be followed when a request comes through to ‘freeze’ all decisions to move the young person (YP). If the CRM is not available then the Customer Engagement Service Manager (Jo Lang) can cover in their absence.

Until the case has been thoroughly investigated to ensure that the decision is in the best interest of the YP. If the CRM is not available then the Senior CRO can cover in their absence, with guidance provided by the Service Manager (SM) OR Assistant Director (AD).

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The Customer Relations Manager (CRM).
* Customer Relations Officer (CRO).
* Relevant Director or Assistant Director (AD).
* The relevant social care team.
* The young person’s Independent Reviewing Officer & advocate if appointed.

On receipt of the ‘Request to Freeze’ the CRO must immediately inform the CRM to ‘triage’ the request and determine if the decision to move the YP should be frozen. The CRM must then inform the relevant AD and service manager.

The CRM will then freeze all decisions to move, pending further investigation where the following questions are considered:

* Why is the Young Person being moved?
* How long they have known about the move?
* Is it a planned move? Or an emergency move?
* To check in with the Young Person or advocate
* How soon the move is supposedly happening?
* The Impact on education as appropriate
* To determine what other options are available

The CRM then decides if the move can still go ahead or not and then update the relevant AD as appropriate, as well as respond to the YP.

**The Key Timeframes**

The request needs to be acted on immediately by the CRO and the CRM.

**Additional Details**

Please note that if the move is not a decision made by Surrey Children’s Services, for example the carers have given notice, the CR Team cannot freeze or stop this decision from happening.

The SLA Process



SLA 4: Responding to a Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Enquiry

The fourth SLA ‘LGSCO Enquiry’ outlines in detail the process and key timescales which that need to be adhered to when providing a response to an enquiry to the LGSCO.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is a service that investigates complaints from the public, about councils and other bodies providing public services in England.

The Local Government Ombudsman investigates allegations of maladministration that have caused injustice to the complainant. Most council services can be investigated including some areas of housing, planning, education, social services, council tax, housing benefit and highways.

It is the last stage of the complaints process for those who have given the council or provider the opportunity to resolve the issue themselves first.

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The CR Team and the Responsible Service(s).

**The Key Timescales**

* The Council are given 28 **Calendar** days by the LGO to provide a response to the initial enquiry.
* By day 2: LGSCO Enquiry to be sent to responsible service by the customer relations (CR) Team.
* By day 21: A response is to be completed by the responsible team and sent to the CR Team.
* Work takes place in the CR Team, with the CRO Liaising with the Service to gather evidence as necessary.
* By day 25: The CR Team is to package the response and address any outstanding points.
* By day 27: The CR Team is to finalise response and send to LGSCO. The CR Team will actively chase the AD for sign-off if needed.
* The LGO investigator may make additional enquiries and will specify of appropriate response deadlines on a case by case basis.
* The CRO will share the additional queries with the accountable manager within 2 workdays to allow for weekends and bank holidays hours.
* The accountable manager will adhere to the LGO directed timeframe as shared by the CRO when providing additional information to assist in a further response.

**Why this SLA is important**

* It provides a clear process, that allows for clear expectations to be given to families.
* It gives the Customer Relations Team and the Service involved clear deadlines that they can work to.
* The SLA decreases the risk of a delayed response and subsequent escalation.
* By introducing this SLA, the appropriate Service will no longer be able to request an extension\* to the LGSCO deadline.

\* Surrey County Council were criticised by the LGSCO in their most recent Annual Report, as it was highlighted there was a number of late responses from the services involved due to the extension of deadlines.

The SLA Process





SLA 5: OFSTED Notifications

The purpose of the fifth SLA is firstly to ‘Record Receipt of Notifications’ from OFSTED and secondly to ‘Monitor Notifications’ to ensure that OFSTED receive responses where appropriate.

There are three levels of enquiry: All of the three levels are recorded and monitored to ensure that no drift\* takes place, as well as to assist colleagues in ensuring that appropriate action is taken where necessary.

\*Delay or interruption

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The CR Officer.
* The CR Senior Business Administrator
* The relevant Service – usually the Assistant Section Officer (ASO) or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

**The Key Timescales**

* 10 Working days for the Council to respond.
* The CR Team will chase the relevant service to ensure that the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) has sufficient information and time to respond to Ofsted.
* This may need to be extended if the notification is received during school holidays.

**Why this SLA is important**

* It provides a clear process to be followed by the CR Team and the service involved.
* The CR Team and the Service have clear deadlines to work to.
* It decreases the risk of a delayed response and subsequent escalation.

**Additional Details**

* Depending on the level of the notification (1, 2 or 3) will determine the response required.

The SLA Process



SLA 6: Learning Arising from Complaints

The purpose of the 6th SLA ‘Learning Arising from Complaints’ is to manage the learning that is identified through the outcome of a complaint together with any directed actions arising from the complaint, such as a letter of apology or financial remedy.

This includes learning and actions identified by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO).

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The Customer Relations Team.
* The Responsible Service.

**The Key Timescales**

* To action any learning or identified follow up actions within 10-20 working days.
* Changes to processes or procedural amendments need to be provided with a relevant timescale on an individual case by case basis.

**Why this SLA is important**

* This SLA is important as it provides clear instruction to the CR Team and the services involved of what is expected and the clear timescales to be adhered to.
* It assists the CR Team, by giving clear expectations to families.
* The SLA ensures that the CR Team will monitor progress and record outcomes. Therefore, decreasing the risk of delayed outcomes and subsequent escalations.

**Additional Details**

* All Learning and Outcomes are to be recorded on the Complaints Tracker
* Procedural change requests to be escalated to the Senior Manager and the Quality Assurance Team.

The SLA Process



SLA 7: S1 Complaints

The 7th SLA provides an overview of stage 1 of the complaints process. This SLA manages the concerns shared by families, the young person (YP), or the other representative eligible to be responded to via the stage 1 complaints process (i.e. foster carers and special guardians).

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The Customer Relations Team.
* The Responsible Service.

**The Key Timescales**

* A deadline of 10 Working Days that can be extended to 20 Working Days for complex cases, for example where the complaint cuts across multiple teams or services and where the young person is supported by an advocate.
* For Non-Statutory Complaints such as SEN the timescale sits at 10 Working Days, with no capacity for extension.

**Why this SLA is important**

* It provides clear process for managing a Stage 1 Complaint.
* It gives clear expectations and deadlines to families as for when they can expect their complaint to be processed by.
* It provides the CR Team and the Service involved with clear deadlines to adhere to.
* It decreases the risk of a delayed response and subsequent escalation.

**Additional Details**

* All Learning and Outcomes to be recorded on the Complaints Tracker
* Procedural change requests to be escalated to Senior Manager and the Quality Assurance Team

The SLA Process



SLA 8: S2 Statutory Children’s Act Complaints

The 8th SLA provides an overview of stage 2 of the complaints process. This SLA manages the concerns shared by families, young person (YP). Or other representative eligible to be responded to via the stage 2 complaints process (i.e. Foster carers and special guardians).

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The Customer Relations Team
* The Responsible Service
* The involvement of the family /YP or eligible representative
* The involvement of the independent investigators

**The Key Timescales**

* The Council has 25 Working Days from the **date that the Statement of Complaint is agreed** to respond to the complaint.
* The 25 workdays can be extended by the investigator up to up to 65 workdays in exceptional circumstances
* The CRO will liaise with the investigator to determine if an extension is required.
* The investigator will inform the complainant if the deadline for the response is to be extended, the CRO is then copied in.
* On receipt of the report of the investigation, the CRO will Quality Assure (QA) the report and prepare a draft adjudication response to the AD (Assistant Director).
* The AD will then finalise the response and send it to the complainant together with a copy of the investigation report. The maximum response deadline is 65 days.
* The CRO will monitor the formal response and chase the AD as needed to ensure that the deadline is met.

**Why this SLA is important**

* It provides clear process for managing a S2 Complaint
* It gives clear expectations and deadlines to families as for when they can expect their S2 complaint to be processed.
* It provides the CR Team and the Service involved with clear deadlines to adhere to.
* It decreases the risk of a delayed response and subsequent escalation.

The SLA Process

***Please see the page below***



SLA 9 Stage 2: Non-Statutory Complaints: Education

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The Customer Relations Team
* The Responsible Service
* The involvement of the family /YP or eligible representative
* The involvement of the investigators

**The Key Timescales**

* The Council has 20 Working Days to review the resident’s complaint, which is 20 Workdays from the date that the escalated complaint lands.
* The outcome of the review can be: No Further Action, Refer back to the service for a further response at Stage 1, Peer Review, Mediation and Investigation.
* The deadline for the formal response following an investigation is agreed with the complainant, this is usually 25 Workdays.
* The deadline for the further response at stage 1 is 10 workdays.

The SLA Process



**Investigations at stage 2**

* The SCRO will liaise with the service.
* For straightforward complaints the SCRO will access the data held on One and other SEN records and gather available intelligence to inform the investigation.
* For more complex complaints or where data is not readily available the SCRO will convene an interview with the officer identified as most appropriate to assist with the investigation, to ascertain the missing data.
* The SCRO will share the ‘questions’ that require answers with the identified officer no later than 2 working days prior to the date of interview, enabling the identified officer to prepare for the meeting.
* If the requisite information is not available at the meeting, the identified officer will have the next working day to gather the data needed to inform the investigation.
* If the identified officer does not attend the interview or a mutually convenient date cannot be arranged in timely manner, the SCRO will share the ‘questions’ by email and Teams chat and confirm the deadline for the response.
* the SCRO will share the draft report with the Service for fact checking, setting the deadline for the response.
* the SCRO will share the final report with the AD Vulnerable learners to inform the formal response, setting out the deadline for the response.
* The SCRO will update the family on progress.
* Overdue responses will be escalated to the appropriate Director by the CRO/SCRO.

The SLA Process



SLA 10 Stage 2: Non-Statutory Complaints: Children’s

Services

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The Customer Relations Team
* The Responsible Service
* The involvement of the family /YP or eligible representative
* The involvement of the independent investigators

**The Key Timescales**

* The Council has 20 Working Days to review the resident’s complaint, which is 20 Workdays from the date that the escalated complaint lands.
* The outcome of the review can be: No Further Action, Peer Review, Mediation and in exceptional circumstances: Independent Investigation.
* The deadline for the formal response after the review is agreed with the complainant, this is usually 25 Workdays.
* The SCRO will liaise with the service and agree timescales to explore and finalise a formal response, including any learning actions arising and financial remedies.
* The SCRO will update the family on progress

The SLA Process

Please See Next Page



SLA 11: S3 Complaints

The 10th (and final SLA) provides an overview of stage 3 of the complaints process. This SLA Manages the concerns of families, the young person (YP). Or other representative eligible to be responded to via the stage 3 complaints process (i.e. Foster carers and special guardians).

**Those involved in the SLA**

* The CR Team and the responsible service(s)
* The involvement of the family associated with the complaint
* The involvement of Independent Investigators
* The Independent Panel
* The Adjudicator

**The Key Timescales**

* To adhere to the Statutory Guidelines for Stage 3
* The CRO to turn around a draft response to the directors, within 48 hours of receiving a Panel letter
* Directors have 15 working days from the date of the Panel letter to respond to the complainant.

**Why this SLA is important**

* It provides a clear process for the CR Team, other Services and Directors to follow.
* It allows clear expectations can be given to families.
* It gives the CR Team and service involved with ‘clear deadlines’ to work towards.
* It decreases the risk of a delayed response and subsequent escalation.

The SLA Process

Please see next page.

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Top Tips for Working with the Customer Relations Team

* Remember at all times to be transparent when discussing your complaint or enquiry with the Customer Relations Team.
* If you realise that you have made a mistake, you are not in trouble and you do not need to be afraid of the Customer Relations Team. The team are here to support you and provide you with the tools to manage the complaint, they are not here to judge you.
* Take ownership of your complaint and **own it** do not bury your head in the sand and hope it will go away, because it may not.

Don’t get defensive –although it’s easier said than done, please try to remember and live by this mantra.

* Be prepared to say sorry, especially if you are at fault, also try to have ‘empathy’ with the complainant and see the situation from their point of view.
* It is important to continue to look for areas of growth and improvement which you can build upon. For example, improving on the way you communicate and build trust with the complainant.
* Refer to the CR team’s [SharePoint](https://orbispartnerships.sharepoint.com/sites/children_schools_families/SitePages/Customer%20Relations%20Team.aspx) Site for useful content around the complaints and enquiries process.
* In everything that you do and every decision that you mark “Always Remember the child in the room.
* In order to achieve this The Customer Relations Team therefore recommends that you read the blog’s titled [Teflon Shoulders](https://surreycc.jiveon.com/people/jessica.brooke%40surreycc.gov.uk/blog/2020/08/17/teflon-shoulders) and [Teflon Shoulders Revisited](https://surreycc.jiveon.com/people/jessica.brooke%40surreycc.gov.uk/blog/2020/11/20/teflon-shoulders-revisited).
* Stick to the Timescales that are in place – remember that Early Resolution is key, if you can address and solve the problem there and then, make sure that you do.
* If you ever find yourself in a situation where you are unsure on what to do next, The CR Team are always on hand to help and support you.

The Importance of Learning from Complaints

The role of the CR Team is to help the service or team that receives the complaint, learn from it and take onboard any learning which can be implemented. To ensure that the service or team can improve as a whole and provide an improved level of service to the residents of Surrey.

The CR Team can provide assistance by:

* Making Recommendations
* Help implement any necessary changes
* Ensure that any actions or changes that have been made are clearly demonstrated and taken onboard.

To achieve this the Customer Relations Team, embrace the philosophy of Bill Gates:

***“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning”.***

Although the situation may start off as being difficult an unhappy one, by listening to your customers and taking on board their feedback there is the perfect opportunity to learn, grow and make improvements.

Whether that is an improvement to a policy, procedure or the actual type of behaviour employed when managing the correspondence with the complainant.

Although the Customer Relations Team owns the complaints process, key learning and ownership has to be taken by the service involved in the complaint and then driven forwards.