



Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure

Adopted 15th June 2015
Reviewed 10th December 2018
Next review December 2020

You have a right to expect good quality services from the Parish Council and the Council welcomes contact from its residents and customers. If something has gone right the Council will be delighted to hear from you and positive feedback will be passed on to the staff. If something has gone wrong and you are not satisfied with the service you have received, please let us know.

The Council views the use of the procedure as an efficient way of dealing with contact from the public about the Council's procedures or administration and as a means of preserving the good reputation of the Council through a transparent process.

Complaints Policy

- The Complaints system will be easily accessible
- It will be simple to understand and use, and its operation will be regularly reviewed
- Complaints received will be acknowledged and logged on a computerised database.
- All complaints will receive a full and fair investigation
- A response will normally be sent within 15 working days of receipt, subsequent to outcomes of the investigation
- Subject to the need for a thorough investigation, the procedures will respect people's desire for confidentiality
- The Council response will address all the points at issue and will attempt to provide effective and appropriate redress where fault on the part of the Council has been acknowledged
- Where relevant the Council will want to learn from complaints and provide appropriate information to line managers within the Council so that services can be improved and systems altered where needed

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1

1. The complainant should address the complaint about the Council's procedures or administration, in writing to the Clerk of the Council. This can be by letter or by e.mail. Verbal complaints can only be dealt with if the subject matter is very straightforward.
2. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the Clerk of the Council, then it should be sent to the Chairman of the Council. This would be relevant if the matter is one with which the Clerk has been closely involved.
3. The Clerk of the Council will send an acknowledgement letter or e.mail within 3 working days of receipt.
4. The Clerk of the Council (or the Chairman of the Council if paragraph 2 applies) will let the complainant have a response in writing within 15 working days. If the complaint is very serious or complex, it may take longer, in which case, the complainant will be advised accordingly.

Stage 2

1. Complaints initially handled by the Clerk of the Council – If the complaint is not resolved in Stage 1, the complainant may ask for a review of the case by the Chairman of the Council, who should respond to the complainant, in writing, in 7 working days.
2. Complaints initially handled by the Chairman of the Council – If the complaint is not resolved in Stage 1, the complainant may ask for a review of the case by the Vice Chairman, who will respond to the complainant, in writing, in 7 working days.

Stage 3

1. If the complaint is still unhappy, their case can be presented either in person or in writing to the Organisation, Methods and Personnel committee, which will consider the matter in the absence of any members who have been previously involved.
2. The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting and bring with them such representation as they wish.
3. Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence, which they wish to refer to at the meeting. The Council shall similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting.

At the Meeting

1. The committee shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and the press.
2. If the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Council have previously been involved (see paragraph 4), they will have to withdraw from the committee and a chairman will need to be elected to conduct the business of the complaint.
3. The Chairman of the committee or the member presiding will introduce everyone and will explain the procedure.
4. The complainant or representative will outline the grounds for the complaint.
5. Members may ask any question/s of the complainant.
6. If relevant, the Clerk of the Council or deputy proper officer will explain the Council's position.
7. Members may ask any question/s of the Clerk of the Council or the deputy proper officer.
8. The Clerk of the Council or deputy proper officer and complainant will be offered the opportunity of last word (in this order).
9. The Clerk of the Council or deputy proper officer, complainant and representative/s will be asked to leave the room while members decided whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been justified. If a point of clarification is required, both parties will be invited back.
10. The Clerk of the Council or deputy proper officer, complainant, their representative/s and councillors who are not members of the Organisation, Methods and Personnel committee will return, along with any members of the public or press (see paragraph 1), to hear the decision or to be advised when the decision will be made.
11. If a member presiding had been elected under paragraph 2, the Chairman of the Organisation, Methods and Personnel committee will resume chairmanship.

After the Meeting

1. The decision will be confirmed in writing to all involved parties within 7 working days together with details of any action to be taken.

The Investigation and Report should contain:

- Full details of the outcome of the investigation
- A recommendation whether they believe the complaint is: Upheld/partially upheld/not upheld
- Any actions proposed to deal with issues raised and necessary to avoid this happening in the future
- On receipt of the report of the Investigation, the Clerk or the Chairman will prepare a response including determining if a refund of fees is appropriate.
- Recommendations of how to avoid this type of complaint in future will be sent to the relevant manager.
- **Information on Redress**

The following range of responses will enable the Council to ensure that responses are fair and impartial, and demonstrates to users that it welcomes comments on the quality of its service:

- Expression of regret whenever possible and appropriate
- Apology when a fault on the part of the Council is identified
- Correction of organisational deficiency where appropriate, which will be recognised in the response, where appropriate
- Maximum liability is normally limited to the refund of fees or charges already paid if the Council is found liable for not providing an adequate service.

Monitoring Arrangements

The Organisation, Methods and Personnel committee will receive quarterly reports from the Clerk reporting all complaints and compliments received and any actions taken.

What this Policy and Procedure do not cover

Please note that this procedure is designed for dealing with complaints about the Council's administration or its procedures. If your complaint is about anything that is not the Parish Council's responsibility, it will be passed on to the appropriate authority.

If your complaint is about any of the following, there are separate procedures in place:

A Complaints by one council employee against another council employee, or between a council employee and the council as employer. These matters should be dealt with under the council's disciplinary and grievance procedures.

B Complaints against councillors. *These are covered by the Code of Conduct for Members adopted by the Parish Council on 4 July 2012 and complainants should contact the Monitoring Officer of Chelmsford City Council who will decide if further action is necessary.*

C Allegations of financial irregularity. *Local electors may object to the Council's Annual Accounts under Section 16, Audit Commission Act 1998. On other matters, the Council may need to consult its internal auditor or the Audit Commission.*

D Criminal Activity. *The complainant should be advised to contact the police.*

E Safeguarding. *The complainant should be advised to contact the Essex Safeguarding Children Board www.escb.co.uk (Telephone **0333 013 8936**) or the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board www.essexsab.org.uk (Telephone 0845 603 7630)*