



SAFFRON WALDEN
TOWN COUNCIL

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy

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1	June 2015	FC 183	June 2016
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6	March 2020	F & E 039-20	March 2021
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Introduction

Saffron Walden Town Council aims to deliver high quality services where the customer is at the heart of everything it does. We welcome all customer feedback and aim to deal with customers' concerns in a fair and consistent way and this is encouraged in our community engagement policy.

Saffron Walden Town Council wants to listen to its customers' views and values their contributions. We learn from good practice as well as any mistakes and build upon past experiences to improve the future. This Policy applies to all of the services Saffron Walden Town Council provides.

Our Policy

A customer has a right to:

- Complain
- Be listened to
- Have their complaint investigated and resolved as quickly as possible
- Have their concerns taken seriously

We aim to:-

- Be accessible and uncomplicated
- Promote customer satisfaction
- Identify areas where services can be improved
- Learn from good practice
- Learn from mistakes
- Implement improvements in processes and procedures

Saffron Walden Town Council promotes the right of its customers to raise a concern or make a complaint if they think something has been done incorrectly or if they feel it has been addressed poorly. Similarly, customers may complain if they feel something that ought to have been done has not been done. The Council also promotes the right of customers to comment on a Policy or Council decision which may affect them and express a compliment if things have gone well for them. Complaints will be investigated objectively, fairly and thoroughly in a positive manner and we will endeavour to resolve the complaint. We will have mechanisms in place to ensure that any required lessons and improvements have been achieved following customer feedback.

What is a complaint, comment or compliment?

Complaint:

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet with the quality of a service or with a failure to provide a previously agreed service, or with the attitude or behaviour of a member of staff or councillor

Example:

- a customer complains that the Council has failed to follow its own procedures

Comment:

A comment is a general statement about policies, practices or a service as a whole, which have an impact on everyone and not just one individual. A comment can be positive or negative in nature. Comments may question policies and practices, make suggestions for new services or for improving existing services.

Examples:

Positive Comment:

- It's great to see Saffron Walden Town Council promoting the town

Negative Comments

- I am not happy that you have not supplied further dog bins

Compliment:

An expression of praise. It is a positive statement about a service provided by or on behalf of the Council, or about the helpfulness, attitude or approach of a member of staff.

Example:

- I would like to thank the Receptionist for the prompt and efficient way in which they dealt with my query. They were most helpful and friendly.

When the Complaints Procedure is Not Appropriate

The Town Council's Complaints Procedure will not be used in respect of the following types of complaint:

1. Financial Irregularity

The Town Clerk or Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) should endeavour to provide an explanation of the item.

If the complainant is not satisfied, the Town Clerk or RFO will advise the complainant of their statutory right to object to the Council's audit of accounts pursuant to the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, ss 25-28. On other matters, it may be necessary for the Town Clerk or RFO to consult the auditor.

2. Criminal Activity

The Town Clerk should refer the complainant to the Police.

3. Member Conduct

In the event of a complaint relating to a Member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the complainant will be advised to make their complaint to Uttlesford District Council's Standards Committee – see page 8 for further details

4. Employee Conduct

A complaint relating to the conduct of an employee will be dealt with via the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and through the Town Clerk.

Complaints that an employee may have about a colleague will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Grievance Procedure. Complaints that an employee may have about a Member will be referred to the Town Clerk or, if the Town Clerk is implicated, through the Mayor.

Time Limit for making a Complaint

Our aim is to put things right if they go wrong as quickly as possible, so it is important to recognise there is a one-year time limit (from the date of the incident giving cause for the complaint) for making a complaint. However, the time limit may be extended if it is still possible to consider the complaint effectively and efficiently or if there are other circumstances which may enable resolution of the complaint.

Confidentiality

The Council will take care to maintain confidentiality where circumstances demand, e.g. where matters concern sensitive information or where third parties are concerned.

Should the complaint progress to the Town Council's Stage 3 complaints procedure, it will be to the discretion of the Committee whether this meeting will be held in confidence with the exclusion of the public and press and this decision will be final.

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to proceed when the complaint clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other procedure should or has been taken.

These matters will be referred to the Town Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. The Town Clerk may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant and will inform the complainant to this effect, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.

Where appropriate, the Town Council will refer to and follow the procedures as outlined in the current version of the Town Council's Vexatious Behaviour Policy.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be referred to the Town Clerk, and may be dismissed at their discretion, according to the type and seriousness of the allegation

How to give your feedback

A customer can make a complaint, compliment or comment either in person or by:

- Telephone 01799 516501
- Email : townclerk@saffronwalden.gov.uk
- In person at either of our offices:
Saffron Walden Town Council, The Town Hall, Market Street
Saffron Walden, CB10 1HZ
- In writing to The Town Clerk at the Town Council offices (address as above)
- Via our Contact Us page on the Web-site
<http://www.saffronwalden.gov.uk>
- By contacting your local Councillor (details on our web-site)

Where possible, complaints should be made in writing to the Town Clerk or other nominated officer

Complaints

Unfortunately, things do not always go as planned or people feel upset or aggrieved by an action taken. It is for these reasons that the Town Council operates a complaints procedure, to ensure that we serve our residents fairly, courteously, professionally and in a non-discriminatory way at all times. Our aim is to put things right if they go wrong as quickly as possible. All staff are trained to deal with routine difficulties as they arise.

What Happens Next?

The complaints process can be explained using the following steps:

- **Recording your complaint:** the person receiving your complaint will record it. This enables us to monitor the number and type of complaints which assists us in improving our services.
- **Acknowledging your complaint:** whenever possible your complaint will be dealt with at the first point of contact. If this is not possible your complaint will be acknowledged within **5** working days and you will be given the details of the person looking in to the matter.
- **Responding to your complaint:** the person responsible for responding to your complaint will contact you to agree the best way to deal with your particular complaint. Our aim is to give you a full response within **14** working days. If for any reason we can not do this we will let you know when you can expect to receive a response. In any event we would endeavour to respond within **21** working days.
- **Room for error:** if we have made a mistake we will apologise and try to put things right. We will explain what actions we intend to take as a result of your complaint.
- **Your right to respond:** on receipt of a response you have up to **21** working days in which to decide whether to accept or reject the actions/ recommendations we have stated to resolve your complaint.

Stage 1

Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and satisfactorily at stage 1. In the first instance, please contact the appropriate member of staff, tell them your complaint and in most cases the complaint can be dealt with to the satisfaction of all parties.

Stage 2

If you are not happy with the outcome or response at stage 1, you can appeal to a more senior officer and the Mayor at Saffron Walden Town Council under the guidelines and timescale listed above. This officer will thoroughly review and where necessary carry out a further investigation of your case following the deadlines in the guidance and timescale outlined above.

Stage 3

If you are still not satisfied with the response from the outcome at stage 2, you should contact The Town Clerk who will arrange for the complaint to be dealt with at the next appropriate meeting of the Committee which manages that area of complaint. The Committee will consider the complaint within the guidelines and timescales listed above, who will carry out a further investigation on your behalf.

The Complainant will be invited to attend this meeting and to submit copies (at least 7 clear working days in advance) of any correspondence or details that they wish the Committee to be informed of. The Council will provide the Complainant with copies of any documentation which it wishes to rely on at the meeting (at least 7 clear working days in advance of the meeting).

The Complainant may be accompanied or represented at the meeting if they wish.

It is possible that the Committee is unable to make a decision at the meeting as more information may be required for the Committee to make a fully informed decision. The Complainant will be advised of this along with details of how the matter will be further considered.

The decision of the Committee will be confirmed in writing to the complainant within seven working days of the decision being reached.

These 3 stages conclude Saffron Walden Town Council's complaints procedure.

Complaint against a Councillor

The above procedure should not be followed if your complaint specifically concerns the conduct or behaviour of a Town Councillor. Complaints of this nature are dealt with under the Town Councils Code of Conduct for members. Saffron Walden Town Council has an adopted Code of Conduct and this sets out rules governing the behaviour of its members.

If your complaint concerns the conduct or behaviour of a Town Councillor, please contact the Town Clerk who will provide you with a copy of the Town Council's Code of Conduct and details of the procedure to be followed. These complaints are dealt with in the first instance by the Standards Committee at Uttlesford District Council which is responsible for considering complaints of a breach of Code of Conduct by Town Councillors. Further details can be provided on request.

Complaint against a member of staff

The stages 1-3 as outlined above may be followed by the Town Council in progression of complaints about a staff member. Alternatively, complaints of this nature may be dealt with through the internal disciplinary process; the Town Council follows the rules, regulations and procedures of ACAS for this process. If a complaint is about a decision which an officer has made, then it is likely that the complaint will follow the stages 1-3 as above. If the complaint is about the specific behaviour or attitude of a staff member then it is likely that this complaint would follow the internal disciplinary process. Upon receipt of any complaints of this nature, a decision will initially be reached which will determine the process to be followed.

How Will We Put Things Right?

If we have made a mistake we will apologise and tell you what action we will take to ensure the same situation does not arise again for you or future customers.

Comments

If you wish to make a comment, either positive or negative in relation to a policy decision, practice or service, this will be recorded and your comment may be acknowledged within **3** working days. When we review our policies we take into consideration any comments made about a Policy.

Compliments

If you wish to express a compliment this will be recorded and shared with the Councillor or member of staff it relates to. We may acknowledge your compliments within **3** working days. All compliment statistics will be reported as part of our Annual Report and the information gathered from them will assist in improving our service to all our customers.

Freedom of Information Requests / Environmental Information Regulations

If your complaint makes any requests for provision of documents or information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations, then these Acts will be followed and the appropriate rules, regulations and schedule for these Acts will be progressed (either instead of or as well as the Town Council's complaints policy).

Record Management and Data Protection

All aspects of the Customer Feedback Procedure meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 Chapter 12 and Freedom of Information. Any personal information obtained in relation to a complaint is only to be used for that purpose.

Evaluation and Monitoring

We will ensure that full records are kept of the nature and treatment of every complaint, comment and compliment considered under this procedure. Information will be held in accordance with the Town Council's Data Protection Policy.

Particular attention will be paid to the lessons learnt, nature of complaints and trends, the timeliness of responses and resolutions. This procedure will be reviewed annually at the Town Council's Annual General Meeting and may also be reviewed periodically to ensure continued good practice.