



PADDOCK WOOD TOWN COUNCIL

*ADOPTED BY COUNCIL
21st February 2022
Reviewed May 2024*

Complaints Procedure

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1. The Importance of Complaints

- 1.1 Complaints are valuable because they provide a chance to put things right if there has been an error and reduce the risk of the same mistake being made again.
- 1.2 It is essential that complaints are dealt with positively. The Town Council welcomes people's comments and is committed to making full use of complaints information to contribute to continuous service improvement. Important information about areas for improvement can be obtained both from a single complaint and from patterns of complaints, highlighted by detailed monitoring.

2. Definition of A Complaint

- 2.1 A complaint is *any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Town Council or its staff which affects an individual customer or group of residents.*

2.2 What the complaints procedure will deal with: -

The complaints procedure will deal with matters of administration, which is if the Town Council does something the wrong way, fails to do something it should do or does something it should not do. Some examples include:

- neglect or unjustified delay
- malice, bias, or unfair discrimination
- failure to tell people their rights
- failure to provide advice or information when reasonably requested
- providing misleading or inaccurate advice
- inefficiency, ineffectiveness, bad and unprofessional practice, or conduct.

2.3 What the complaints procedure will not deal with: -

- complaints for which there is a legal remedy or where legal proceedings already exist.
- complaints about employment matters - the Town Council operates alternative procedures to deal with grievances or disciplinary matters against staff.
- Complaints about Councillor's behaviour. These must be dealt with by the Monitoring Officer at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council – details below.

3. Equal Opportunities

- 3.1 The Town Council is committed to equal opportunities. Complaint's feedback will be used to highlight discriminatory practices, and to promote equality of opportunity. Complaints by members of the public of discrimination and/or harassment against the Town Council will be dealt with through the complaints procedure unless it is a complaint that should be dealt with through a statutory procedure.

4. Complaints Officer

4.1 The Complaints Officer for the Town Council is the Town Clerk. Their main duties are:

- (i) The day-to-day operation and management of the procedure, including providing a reference point for staff queries on informal complaints.
- (ii) To oversee, and undertake where necessary, the investigation of formal complaints at the first stage, within the relevant time scales.
- (iii) To maintain a record of all complaints received including details of the nature of the complaint, action taken, outcome, and time taken to resolve.
- (iv) To identify improvement points arising from any complaints.
- (v) To identify staff training issues.

5. Stages of The Procedure

5.1 The stages of the procedure are designed to provide the complainant with a thorough and fair means of redress and to provide a framework for officers to work within. However, there may be occasions when a complainant makes an approach in a different manner, and it is important that the procedure does not in itself become a barrier to effective communication.

5.2 Everyday problems, queries, and comments

The Council receives queries, problems, and comments as part of its day to day running, and they should not all be regarded as complaints. These are routine and expected and are generally resolved quickly to the customer's satisfaction.

If someone is dissatisfied with the original service or response they received and wishes to take the matter further, then the issue should be recognised as a complaint.

5.3 Informal Complaint

During the course of daily business, minor complaints are made to officers about the services we provide. These will usually be dealt with by the relevant officer as appropriate. It is not appropriate for every comment to be treated as a formal complaint. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action, or explaining a decision.

5.4 Formal Complaint (First Stage)

A resident may wish to make a formal complaint directly or may be unsatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint and may wish to take the matter further. This will be recorded as a complaint and passed to the Town Clerk to investigate. Complaints should be made using the form provided.

The complainant should provide the Council with copies of any documentation or

evidence in support of their complaint.

If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the response, they should be informed of their right to take the matter further.

Timescales

- i) Your complaint will be acknowledged within 2 days
- ii) The Clerk or the Chairman of the Council will notify you within 20 working days of the outcome of your complaint and of what action (if any) the Council proposes to take as a result of your complaint. (In exceptional cases the twenty working days timescale may have to be extended. If it is, you will be kept informed.)

Investigating Officer: Town Clerk

55 Review of Investigation and Complaint (Second Stage)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Town Clerk's response, they should be advised of their right to have the complaint referred to the Councillors' Panel who will review the complaint.

Timescales

The panel, if thought necessary, will convene within 15 working days. (in exceptional cases this will be extended, in which case you will be informed)
The review will be completed within 15 working days. (in exceptional cases this will be extended, in which case you will be informed)

56 Councillors' Panel

If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant should be notified of his or her right to have the matter referred to a panel consisting of the Chairman of the Council and two other Councillors appointed by the Council who have not had previous involvement with the complaint or are referred to in the complaint. There will also be a note-taker, nominated by the panel, who will also not have had previous involvement in the complaint. A chairman of the panel will be elected.

The complaint will be heard as follows

- 1) The complainant will be invited to attend the panel meeting. They be accompanied by one other person if they so wish.
- 2) At the meeting, the Chairman will introduce each party and outline the procedures.
- 3) The complainant (or their chosen representative) will be allowed to outline their complaint to the panel and answer any questions from the panel.
- 4) The Chairman will explain the Council's position and answer any resulting questions from the complainant
- 5) The complainant will be asked to leave the room whilst the panel makes its decision.

6) The complainant may return to hear the outcome of panel's deliberations. Initial feedback will be given on whether the complaint has been upheld/partially upheld/dismissed.

7) A written response with any actions the council intends to take will be sent to the complainant within 15 days, working days.

8) The outcome of all formal complaints dealt with by the panel will be advised to the Council.

57 Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

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

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

58 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints should be referred to the Town Clerk, and may be acted on at their discretion, according to the type and seriousness of the allegation.

6 Resolution and Remedies

The aim in dealing with all complaints is to reach a resolution or remedy that satisfies the complainant, whether it is the remedy they were originally seeking or not. Where a complaint is found to be at all justified, consideration may need to be given to the question of an appropriate remedy. An explanation or an apology will always be needed.

7 Contact

Town Clerk Paddock Wood Town Council The Podmore Building St Andrews Field St Andrews Road Paddock Wood TN12 6HT clerk@paddockwoodtc.co.uk	The Monitoring Officer Tunbridge Wells BC Town Hall Royal Tunbridge Wells TN1 1RS monitoring.officer@tunbridgewells.gov.uk
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