

Swanage Town Council

Complaints Procedure

1. This Policy sets out procedures for dealing with any complaints that anyone may have about the Swanage Town Council's **administration and procedures**. It applies to the Town Council's employees. Councillors are covered by the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council on 24th September 2007. Complaints against **policy decisions** made by the Council shall be referred to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor [Note paragraph 77 of the Council's Standing Orders].
2. 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.
3. During the course of daily business, minor complaints are made to officers about the services the Council provide. These are to be treated as informal complaints. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining a decision.
4. 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 formal complaint, and dealt with in the first instance by the appropriate departmental manager.
5. A person 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. The complainant should then be advised to send in their complaint in writing, addressed to the Town Clerk and marked private and confidential.
6. If a complaint about procedures or administration as practised by the Council's employees is made directly to a Councillor they should notify the Town Clerk. Alternatively, the complainant should be asked to put the complaint in writing to the Town Clerk, and be assured that it will be dealt with promptly after receipt.
7. On receipt of a formal written complaint the Town Clerk (*except where the complaint is about his or her own actions*), shall try to settle the complaint directly with the complainant. This shall not be done without first notifying the person complained against and giving him or her an opportunity to comment. Efforts should be made to attempt to settle the complaint at this stage.

Timescale:

Acknowledgement – by return of post
Investigation completed – 14 days
or Progress Reports issued – 14 day intervals

8. If the complainant is not satisfied with the Town Clerk's response, or where the formal complaint is made about the actions of the Town Clerk, the matter shall be referred to a Panel consisting of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. If the complaint refers to the conduct of the Town Clerk he or she shall be notified and given an opportunity to comment.

Timescale:

Notification by the Town Clerk – 14 days
Panel – Convened within 14 days
Review completed – 14 days thereafter

9. If the panel so determines, the complaint may be referred to the next appropriate meeting of the Council.
10. As soon as a decision has been made, it and the nature of any action to be taken shall be communicated in writing to the complainant.
11. 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. In such circumstances the Town Clerk may decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant, and inform the complainant of this, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.
12. Anonymous complaints should be referred to the Town Clerk, and may be acted on at his discretion, according to the seriousness of the allegation.
13. The aim in dealing with all complaints is to reach a resolution that satisfies the complainant, whether it is the remedy they were originally seeking or not. Where a complaint is found to be justified an explanation or an apology will always be needed. The Town Clerk will make the final decision regarding a remedy to the problem raised.

Approved
13th December 2004