

Policy

Compliments, Comments and Complaints



Compliments and Comments

Thetford Town Council aims to provide high quality services which meet the needs of our residents. We believe that we achieve this most of the time: if we are getting it right - please let us know!

We will acknowledge any compliments and comments made and pass these on to all staff and let you know the outcome. Any suggestions will be discussed and if these are relevant and can be adopted, we will do so.

We seek compliments and comments so that we can continually improve the services that we provide and therefore all feedback is very gratefully received.

This policy sets out how to raise a complaint with Thetford Town Council and the process that must be followed once a complaint has been raised.

How to contact Thetford Town Council

There are many ways in which you can contact Thetford Town Council to pass on compliments and comments;

- You could write to the council; Thetford Town Council, The Carnegie, Cage Lane Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2DS
- You could email the council using: mail@thetfordtowncouncil.gov.uk
- You could telephone the council on 01842 754247
- You could visit the council offices at The Carnegie – the Town Council offices are located on the first floor and are open Monday – Friday from 10am – 4pm.
- You could contact your local councillor – full contact details are available on the website; www.thetfordtowncouncil.gov.uk
- In addition, the Town Council website (as above) has a 'Report It' function that can be utilised to inform relevant agencies of issues that you may have identified.

Complaints

Introduction

Thetford Town Council provides many services to community groups, companies and individuals. We try to get our service delivery right every time, but there are occasions when users of our services may be dissatisfied with our performance, for any number of reasons. Thetford Town Council seeks to create a positive approach to complaints as they are a valued means of continuously reviewing and improving our services. We also welcome positive feedback to let us know when we have got things right.

For the purpose of this policy a complaint is defined as:

An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standards of service, actions, or lack of action by Thetford Town Council and all staff, councillors or contractors.

Objectives

- To provide an effective means for customers/service users and their representatives to complain if they are dissatisfied with the service they receive.
- To ensure complaints are dealt with in a courteous and efficient manner and are resolved without avoidable delay.
- To provide customers/service users with a formal method of challenging decisions we have made.
- To obtain information about the public's perceptions about our services, to inform future policy and service planning
- To maintain records of complaints made so that regular reviews can be produced for internal monitoring and public accountability.

Reasons for complaint

- We have not achieved the standard we say we will provide.
- We have not provided a service to the standard which the customer/service user thinks is reasonable.
- We are doing something the customer/service user did not want us to.
- We are carrying out our duties in an unsatisfactory way.
- Our staff, councillors or contractors are behaving in an unacceptable way.
- We fail to do something we have been reasonably asked to do.
- We fail to do something the customer/service user thinks we should have done, even when we were not actually asked to do it.

Rights

Customers/Service Users have the right

- To confidentiality (if an investigation cannot proceed without the complainant being identified the complainant will be given the option whether to proceed or not)
- To be kept informed of the progress of their complaints
- To receive an apology if a complaint is upheld
- To be informed of any changes to policy or procedures arising from a complaint

This complaints procedure does not affect the rights of an individual or organisation to approach a councillor for advice or assistance. If this results in a complaint being made on behalf of an individual it will be dealt with using this procedure.

All council representatives have the right to be treated with respect and courtesy at all times by customers/service users, managers and councillors.

Complaints Against Council Representatives

If a complaint regarding a council representative's action or behaviour is found to be valid it will be referred to the Mayor or Town Clerk as appropriate and the disciplinary procedure followed. This will be regarded as an outcome for the complaints procedure.

Informal Complaints

It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved quickly and amicably through this route. Informal complaints can be made by telephone, email or a visit to the Council offices. The complaint will be handled by the most appropriate member of staff, depending on the nature of the complaint. The Town Clerk must be kept informed by that member of staff of the handling of the complaint and its resolution and will be required to report the complaint, and the resulting action, to the next scheduled meeting of the Town Council's most relevant committee. For example, if the complaint is regarding a Cemetery issue, it should be forwarded to the Cemetery Committee. The Personnel Committee will however be made aware of all complaints through a standard agenda item detailing all complaints received since the last meeting of the committee.

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Complaints should always be directed through the Council offices, not through individual Councillors. A complainant may advise a Councillor of the details of a complaint, but individual Councillors are not in a position to resolve complaints. Complainants can, if they so wish, copy their relevant Ward Councillor and/or the Chairman of the relevant Council Committee into an e-mail or letter, if they consider that necessary.

It is expected that most complaints can be resolved through this informal route. However, the Council appreciates that, on occasion, when either an informal approach has not resolved the complaint or the complaint (as initially presented) is more serious, the formal complaints process, as set out below, should be followed.

Formal Complaints

The Clerk to the Council, as the Council's Proper Officer, is responsible for managing the formal complaints process. If a formal complaint is being raised against the Clerk, then the process detailed below should be followed, but the Chairman of the Council (Mayor) should take charge of the process instead of the Clerk.

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1

Every endeavour will be made to resolve complaints at this initial stage and where possible it should be dealt with within a few days.

The complaint should cover as much detail as possible and any relevant supporting documentation should be enclosed. The Town Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 3 working days.

The Town Clerk will carry out an initial investigation into the complaint and will, within ten working days, provide the complainant with an update on progress or a suggested resolution. The final paragraph of the response letter should read as follows

If you remain dissatisfied with the response you have received, you may wish to take your complaint to Phase 2 of the council's complaint procedure (formal investigation). You must respond within 28 days, sending your complaint (including the reasons why you feel your complaint has not been resolved to (name job title & address).

If the complainant is satisfied with the resolution, the complaint is taken no further. The Clerk will report to the Personnel Committee, through the relevant agenda item,

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summary details of the complaint and its resolution. The record of the complaint will be closed and retained for the monitoring process.

Stage 2

If the Clerk is unable to resolve the complaint, or the complainant is not satisfied with the proposed resolution, the matter will be referred to the Personnel Committee, which may in turn refer the matter to Full Council or the relevant Council Committee.

The complainant will be sent a letter within 3 working days to inform them of this action and advised a full response or progress timescale not to exceed 20 working days.

If a resolution is found a final letter will be sent to the complainant offering an explanation/list of reasons/facts of all issues and concerns, concluding with the following paragraph:

If you still remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, or you may feel the result is unfair you may progress your complaint to Phase 3 of the complaints procedure. You must respond within 28 days, sending your complaint (including the reasons why you feel your complaint has not been resolved to (name job title & address).

Stage 3

On receipt of a request to proceed to Phase 3 the Town Clerk will send a holding reply within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint. Subsequently all previous responses will be reviewed to ensure councils relevant policies and procedures were followed. A final letter will be sent out within 20 working days with the findings of the review and an explanation/list of reasons/facts of all issues and concerns concluding with the following paragraph.

Thetford Town Council feels it has made every effort to conclude your complaint. If you still feel your complaint has not been resolved you may refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman at the address below.

*Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
COVENTRY
CV4 0EH*

Phone: 0300 061 0614

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Fax: 024 7682 0001

Text “call back” to 07624 811595

Website: www.lgo.org.uk (online complaint form available)

The Town Council will make every effort to adhere to the timings outlined in this policy. However, when a complaint is complex or a cited member of staff is absent; these timings may have to vary. Should this occur, complainants will be informed of any revised timescales.

A formal complaint is a serious matter. A complaint against a member of the Council’s staff could result in disciplinary action or, in cases of gross misconduct, dismissal. The Council will not, under any circumstances, enter into any correspondence or discussion with complainants about any action taken, formally or informally, against any member of staff. This is expressly to protect the employment rights of all Council employees.

Complaints Monitoring

A standard Agenda item for each Thetford Town Council Personnel Committee meeting will be ‘To receive information regarding any complaints received since the last meeting of the Committee’, so that the Committee has an overview of all complaints received. If a complaint relates to the remit of a specific committee, then that committee will take the lead on reviewing that complaint. The committee will then agree the most appropriate action to take in consultation with relevant officer.

A ‘Complaints Log’ will be produced and kept by the Town Clerk. The log should record:

- The date the complaint was made;
- Details of the complainant/s and complaint/s being made;
- How the complaint was made, e.g. in person, letter, email;
- When the complaint/s were responded to;
- What action was taken;
- What further actions may need to be taken.

All written complaints, whether via e-mail or letter, should be stored securely in the main Town Council offices in a designated Complaints Folder that is kept in a locked filing cabinet. This log will be reviewed as felt necessary by the Personnel Committee. Any follow-up correspondence should be filed with the original complaint.

Complaints against Councillors

This policy does not cover complaints against an individual Councillor.

Complaints regarding councillors must be directed to;

By Post:

The Monitoring Officer, c/o Democratic Services, Breckland Council, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham Norfolk, NR19 1EE

E-mail:

standards@breckland.gov.uk

Website:

www.breckland.gov.uk

Online Complaints Form Available:

<http://www.breckland.gov.uk/content/how-make-complaint-about-councillor>

Member Officer Protocol

Thetford Town Council has adopted a separate Member/Officer Protocol that can be viewed in addition to this Complaints Policy. If a member of staff feels that a Councillor is behaving in a way that contravenes the Protocol, then that concern should be referred to the Town Clerk, or the Mayor if the person affected is the Town Clerk.

All Thetford Town Councillors are required to sign up to the 'Code of Conduct' cited in The Localism Act 2011. If a member of the public or a member of staff feels that a Councillor has breached this Code, then members of staff should report this to the Town Clerk and members of the public should report this to the Monitoring Officer at Breckland Council (See 'Complaints Against Councillors' above).

Investigation of a Complaint by a Committee

In some circumstances, it will be necessary for the Personnel Committee, or a more relevant Town Council Committee, to investigate a complaint further and, if required, invite the complainant to attend a meeting of the Committee. The section below outlines the process to be followed, should that indeed occur.

Before the Meeting

- Complainants will be asked to put in writing to the Town Clerk the details of their complaint. They may direct it to the Chairman of the Council (Mayor), if unwilling to submit it to the Town Clerk.
- Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged by the Town Clerk or Chairman and the complainant will be advised of the date when the Personnel Committee will hear the complaint.
- Complainants will be invited to attend the meeting, accompanied by their representatives (should that be their wish).
- Seven working days prior to the meeting, complainants and Council shall exchange any relevant documentation on which they may wish to rely at the meeting.

At the Meeting

- The Committee shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and press. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the next scheduled meeting of the Full Council in open session.
- The Chair of the Committee will introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
- Complainants (or their representatives) will outline the grounds for complaint.
- Members can put questions to complainants or their representatives.
- If relevant, the Town Clerk or Deputy will set out the Council's position.
- Members can put questions to the Town Clerk or Deputy.
- The Town Clerk/Deputy and complainant (in that order) are offered a final opportunity to comment.
- The Town Clerk/Deputy and complainant may be asked to leave the room, while the Committee considers whether or not the grounds for complaint shall be upheld. (If a point of clarification is required, both parties will be invited back).
- The Town Clerk/Deputy and complainant will return to either hear the decision or be advised when a decision will be made.

After the Meeting

The decision, once made, will be confirmed in writing within seven working days, together with details of any action to be taken.

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Note:

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The Committee will, when following this procedure adhere at all times to the above paragraph.