

Complaints Policy



1. SUMMARY OF POLICY

Biggleswade Town Council is committed to providing a quality service for those who live or work in the area or who visit the town. If you are dissatisfied with the standard of service you have received from the Council or are unhappy about an action or lack of action from the Council, this document sets out how you may complain to the Council and how we will resolve your complaint.

2. FURTHER POLICY INFORMATION

This Policy applies to complaints about Council administration and procedures. This Policy does not apply to:

- Complaints by one Council employee against another Council employee, or between a Council employee and the Council as employer. These matters are dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures.
- Complaints about the conduct of Biggleswade Town Councillors. Complaints against Biggleswade Town Councillors are covered by the Code of Conduct for Members adopted by the Council.
- Alleged financial irregularity. Local electors have a statutory right to object to a Council's audit of accounts (s.16 Audit Commission Act) by contacting the Council's auditors.
- Alleged criminal activity. This should be reported to the police.
- Complaints about Council decisions. The appropriate time for influencing Council decision-making is by raising your concerns within the Public Open Session before the Council debates and votes on a matter.
- Anonymous complaints. These complaints will be recorded but not responded to.

3. PROCEDURE

If you wish to make a complaint, you must do so in writing, either by letter and delivered to the Town Council Offices (4 Saffron Road, The Old Court House, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, SG18 8DL), or by email to enquiries@biggleswadetowncouncil.gov.uk.

Depending on the source, and content, each complaint is passed to an appropriate Officer within the Town Council. Where a complaint is dispatched to multiple recipients, those recipients must swiftly decide amongst themselves who will be take responsibility for handling the complaint. It is that Officer's responsibility to acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days, including providing the complainant with an indication of when they can likely expect to receive a response to the complaint.

Stage 1

The Responsible Officer will then establish further detail as required from all relevant sources, by all relevant means and report back findings as swiftly as possible to the complainant and seek the complainant's assurance that their complaint has been dealt with. If necessary, interim reports of progress and estimates of future timescales will be provided. The decision on how to resolve the complaint will be confirmed in writing to the complainant within ten working days. This will include details of any action to be taken and when, and the reasoning behind all decisions.

Stage 2

If the complainant feels that the response from the Responsible Officer is unsatisfactory, they can inform the Town Clerk of this in writing. If the Responsible Officer is the Town Clerk, then the complainant should inform the Mayor. The Town Clerk/Mayor will have 10 days from the date the complainant has

escalated the complaint for them to respond with how to resolve the complaint and any further action that needs to be taken.

Stage 3

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, they may request a final review of their complaint. This review will be conducted by a Final Review Panel, which will aim to provide a fair and proportionate resolution.

Panel Composition

The panel will consist of:

- The Town Clerk (unless previously involved, in which case a senior officer will be appointed)
- One Councillor (not previously involved in the complaint)
- The Mayor (or Deputy Mayor if the Mayor was involved at Stage 2)

Complainant Involvement

The complainant will not be a member of the panel but will be invited to submit a written statement outlining why they remain dissatisfied.

If appropriate, the complainant may be invited to attend a brief meeting (in person or virtually) to clarify their concerns. This will be at the discretion of the panel and based on the nature of the complaint.

Timing

The complainant must request a Stage 3 review within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 response.

The panel will convene and issue a final written response within 15 working days of receiving the Stage 3 request.

The response will include:

- A summary of the complaint and previous responses
- The panel's findings
- Any further action to be taken (if applicable)
- Confirmation that this represents the final stage of the Council's internal complaints process
- Information on if the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 3 that they may seek independent advice or escalate the matter to an external body.

4. RECORD KEEPING

The complaint will be recorded in a Complaints Register, maintained by the Administration & HR Manager. These records will support the Town Council in improving its performance and procedures. Complaints will be retained for seven years from the date of resolution.

5. MANAGEMENT OF VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

Biggleswade Town Council is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. However, the Council recognises that sometimes complaints can become unreasonable because of their nature or frequency. The Council will be guided by the "Managing unreasonable actions by complainants:

A guide for organisations” issued by the Local Government Ombudsman in determining whether complaints are unreasonable and what action to take.

Deceitful, abusive, offensive, threatening or other forms of unacceptable behaviour from complainants will not be tolerated. When it occurs, the Council will take proportionate action to protect the wellbeing of staff.