



Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy reflects the Council's commitment to valuing compliments, comments and complaints. It seeks to resolve resident's dissatisfaction thorough, impartial and fair investigation of resident's complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of the case.

1.2 This policy is intended to represent a practical means by which the Council can demonstrate its determination to manage the compliments, comments and complaints process effectively for the benefit of the resident.

1.3 This policy is to enable Councillors to be able to do so within one set of standards and criteria, which will ensure a consistent approach for residents of the Parish.

1.4 It is important that the policy is 'owned' by Elected Councillors as their role as leaders in the Parish brings them into frequent contact with residents who make compliments, comments and complaints to the Council.

1.5 The policy determines a standardised and centralised approach to handling complaints which aims to help us 'get it right first time'. It demonstrates a clear escalation process and ensures that complaints are investigated by Councillors other than those involved in the original complaint, avoiding any conflicts of interest. We want quicker, simpler and more streamlined compliments, comments and complaints handling process with local, early resolution by capable and well-trained councillors.

1.6 This policy sets out the framework for handling compliments, comments and complaints that:

- Sets out a definition for compliments, comments and complaints that can be clearly communicated to Councillors and residents.
- Establishes clear minimum service standards that are capable of being monitored and reported.
- Is responsive to the needs of our residents.
- Is transparent and easy to understand for both Councillors and residents.
- Reflects best practice.
- Helps the Council to learn from resident feedback.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all Parish Councillors.

Contractors who provide any services for or on behalf of the Council will be required to comply with this policy. This includes recording and responding to complaints, providing Parish Councillors with information as requested and providing assistance in connection with further investigations as appropriate.

3. Principles of the Policy

Definitions

3.1 For the purpose of this policy the following definitions will be used:

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction concerning a function or service provided by the Parish Council.
A comment is a suggestion or idea about how a function or service provided by the Parish Council could be improved.
A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, by one or more residents about the Parish Councils action or lack of action or decision that needs a response.

3.2 Anyone resident of Kingston Parish can make a compliment, comment or complaint. If a resident is unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own, we will accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the resident has given their express personal consent.

3.3 The Councils' approach to receiving compliments, comments and complaints is designed to be as inclusive as possible. Although the policy has been developed to meet statutory requirements, an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the procedure, to ensure there are no barriers for anyone making a compliment, comment or complaint because of race, colour, ethnicity or national origins, religion and belief, gender, sexual orientation or marital status and disability or age. Residents may have specific needs that we will seek to address to ensure easy access to the procedure.

3.4 Complaints give us valuable information we can use to improve resident satisfaction. Our complaints handling procedure will enable us to address a resident's dissatisfaction and may also prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again.

3.5 The procedure supporting this policy will ensure that the Council are able to gain meaningful information from the analysis of issues raised through compliments, comments and complaints.

4. Statement

FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

COMPLIMENTS

4.1 Whilst pleasing to receive, compliments will not always receive an acknowledgement in writing. These should be sent to the Clerk or the Chairperson (their name and contact details can be found at the end of this policy).

COMMENTS

4.2 Residents may make their comment in writing, by letter or by e-mail.

4.3 All written comments will receive a written acknowledgement within three working days thanking the resident and advising that their suggestion is being dealt with. Either Clerk or the Chairperson may choose to contact the resident further with feedback, if appropriate.

COMPLAINTS

4.4 Residents may make their complaint in writing, by letter or email.

A complaint may relate to, but not limited to:

- Inadequate standard of service
- Disagreement with the way a decision has been administered, though not the decision itself, where the resident cannot use another procedure (for example an appeal) to resolve the matter
- The Council's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- Behaviour of a Parish Councillor

4.5 The Council will adopt a three stage complaint process as follows:

Informal – Frontline Resolution within 3 working days
Formal – Investigation within 15 working days
Internal Review – Investigation within 20 working days

4.6 Complaints about responses to Freedom of Information requests will be reviewed in line with the Internal Review (Stage three of the complaint process) - **20 working days**.

The complaints handling process

The process aims to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process for resolving complaints early and locally.

Remedies for a complaint

4.7 There are two important reasons for having an effective complaints system – to provide a remedy and to improve effectiveness.

4.8 It is important to ascertain early on in the complaints process what outcome the resident is looking for i.e. what would be a suitable remedy. Whilst the proposed remedy may not always be reasonable and/or achievable it ensures that the Council knows early on what would be a satisfactory outcome for the resident.

4.9 Remedies can include, but are not limited to:

- An apology which would normally be appropriate and adequate, but not in all circumstances. Other remedies will be considered where appropriate in addition to an apology.
- An explanation as to why a situation arose and to help the resident understand.
- An assurance that the same thing will not happen again (and monitored to make sure that it does not).
- Action that can be taken to put things right and where appropriate a change of procedure will be implemented to prevent further difficulties of a similar kind either for the individual resident or for resident's generally.

4.10 The guiding principle must be that as far as possible the resident is put in the position that he/she would have been in had things not gone wrong.

4.11 Resident's need to know what remedies to a complaint are available.

4.12 Where a complaint is found to be justified after investigation, at any stage, the process which has caused the complaint needs to be reviewed by the Parish Council.

4.13 For Frontline Resolution complaints (stage one) the above remedies could be used singularly or in combination depending on the complaint. It is important that the person handling informal complaints is aware of which remedies to offer and when.

4.14 For Formal Investigation complaints (stage two) a consideration of appropriate remedies will be requested from Chairperson as part of the complaint investigation process.

4.15 For Internal Review complaints (stage three) a consideration of appropriate remedies will be undertaken by the appropriate Parish Councillors as determined by the Chairperson.

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