

BURTON LATIMER TOWN COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

APRIL 2010

Definition of a 'Complaint'

"A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the council." **(Local Government Ombudsman)**

Confidentiality

"The identity of a complainant should only be made known to those who need to consider a complaint. In local councils it may not be feasible to deal with complaints outside some sort of committee structure but, nevertheless, councils should take care to maintain confidentiality where circumstances demand (e.g. where matters concern financial or sensitive information or where third parties are concerned)". **(Local Government Ombudsman)**

Scope of the Complaints Procedure

It is not appropriate for the Town Council to deal with all complaints from members of the public under a complaints procedure. The complaints procedure set out below is not appropriate for use where a complaint is made against an individual. Serious complaints relating to the conduct of an individual will be dealt with in the ways specified in the following table and the the Town Council will engage other appropriate procedures/bodies, as specified:

Type of conduct	Refer to
Financial irregularity	Local elector's statutory right to object Council's audit of accounts pursuant to s.16 Audit Commission Act 1998. On other matters, councils may need to consult their auditor / Audit Commission
Criminal activity	The Police
Member conduct	A complaint relating to a member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct must be submitted to the standards committee of the relevant principal authority.
Employee conduct	Internal disciplinary procedure

The procedure set out below is designed for those complaints which cannot be satisfied by less formal measures or explanations provided to the complainant by the clerk (or other nominated officer) or chairman of the Town Council.

Procedure for Dealing with Complaints from Members of the Public

1. The complainant shall be asked to put the complaint about the council's procedures or administration in writing to the clerk, or other nominated officer.
2. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the clerk or other nominated officer, he or she shall be advised to address it to the chairman of the council.
3. The clerk or other nominated officer shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the council or by the committee established for the purposes of hearing complaints. The complainant should also be advised whether the complaint will be treated as confidential or whether, for example, notice of it will be given in the usual way (if, for example, the complaint is to be heard by a committee).
4. The complainant shall be invited to attend a meeting and to bring with them a representative if they wish.
5. Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on. The council shall provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting and shall do so promptly, allowing the claimant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting.

At the Meeting

6. The council shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and the press. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the council meeting in public.
7. The chairman should introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
8. The complainant (or representative) should outline the grounds for complaint and, thereafter, questions may be asked by (i) the clerk or other nominated officer and then (ii), members.
9. The clerk or other nominated officer will have an opportunity to explain the council's position and questions may be asked by (i) the complainant and (ii), members.
10. The clerk or other nominated officer and then the complainant should be offered the opportunity to summarise their position.
11. The clerk or other nominated officer and the complainant should be asked to leave the room while members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, *both* parties shall be invited back.
12. The clerk or other nominated officer and the complainant should be given the opportunity to wait for the decision but if the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day they should be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated to them.

After the Meeting

13. The decision should be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.