SHAFTESBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Delivering Excellence across the Shaftesbury Community

Comments, Compliments, Complaints Protocol

Date of Adoption: 11th April 2017
Last Reviewed: 17th December 2024
Review Date: December 2027

Managing People Policies

1. Overview

Shaftesbury Town Council (STC) values feedback to improve its services. Contact us to share comments, compliments, or complaints.

- **Address:** Town Hall, High St, Shaftesbury SP7 8LY
- **Phone:** 01747 852420
- **Email:** office@shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk
- **Website:** www.shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk

2. Compliments

To submit a compliment, contact the Town Clerk or Mayor by visiting the Town Hall, calling, or emailing. Please include your contact details so we can thank you.

3. Complaints

If something goes wrong, please let us know so we can address it. STC aims to resolve complaints promptly and professionally.

- **Timeframe:** Complaints should be made within three months of the incident.
- **Exclusions:** STC does not handle complaints about initial service requests, FOI requests, contract disputes, complaints about councillors, or issues under other jurisdictions.

4. Process for Complaints

STC follows a three-stage process to handle complaints.

Stage 1: Informal Complaint

Contact STC staff to discuss and resolve minor issues. If unresolved, you may proceed to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

Submit a formal complaint in writing (email or letter) to the Town Clerk or, if applicable, to the Chairman of the Council. Include:

- Your contact information
- Details of the complaint, how it has impacted you, relevant documents, and desired resolution.

Response time is 30 working days; if extended, you will be notified.

Stage 3: Complaints Panel

If dissatisfied with the response, you may request a review by a Complaints Panel. You will be invited to provide input prior to the meeting, and the final decision will be communicated in writing within 7 days.

5. Specific Complaint Types

- **Councillor Conduct:** Complaints must be submitted in writing to Dorset Council's Monitoring Officer using the Code of Conduct complaint form. The details of the complaint must include the identify the Councillor(s) or Co-Opted Member(s).
- **Employee Conduct:** Complaints involving staff will be managed as per the STC disciplinary procedures.

6. Confidentiality & Data Protection

Complaints are confidential, handled under Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts. Personal information will not be disclosed without consent.

7. Whistleblowing & Anonymous Complaints

STC will handle anonymous complaints at its discretion. Whistleblowing is protected by law if it concerns criminal activity, public safety, or unlawful acts, see STC's Whistleblowing policy. Personal grievances should be directed to STC's Grievance Policy.

8. Unreasonable, Persistent, or Vexatious Complainant

Shaftesbury Town Council is committed to addressing all complaints equitably and in a timely manner. However, in cases where behaviour obstructs the resolution of issues or consumes excessive resources, this policy may be applied to manage unreasonable, habitual, or vexatious complaints. This policy does not address vexatious requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA); refer to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for guidance.

8.1 Definition of Habitual or Vexatious Complainants

While complainants may act out of anxiety or distress, the Council differentiates between genuine concerns and disruptive behaviour. Legitimate concerns will be addressed fairly and transparently.

An unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainant exhibits repeated, unrealistic demands or unreasonable complaint methods, such as:

- Repeated complaints lacking merit
- Refusing to accept the complaint process or outcome
- Making excessive, hostile, or inappropriate contact
- Refusing to cooperate or comply with complaint resolution procedures

8.2 Handling Process

Before applying restrictions, the Council will notify the complainant of potential actions under this policy. If behaviour persists, a panel, including the Mayor and/ or Deputy Mayor and appointed Members, will decide on restrictions. The complainant will receive written notice detailing:

- Reasons for restriction
- Duration and nature of restrictions

- Any applicable review periods (typically every three months)

8.3 Imposing Restrictions
Restrictions may include:

- Limited contact channels (e.g., via a third party, written correspondence only)
- Designated staff for handling communications
- Defined contact times or formats

In cases of extreme behaviour threatening staff safety, the Council may involve law enforcement or pursue legal action.

8.4 New Complaints from Restricted Complainants
New complaints will be assessed individually. Restrictions may continue or be modified based on the panel's assessment.

8.5 Record Keeping and Review
The Clerk will maintain records of complainants under this policy, detailing restriction terms and review dates. The council will receive an annual report on cases managed under this policy.

8.6 Review and Transparency
Complainant status is reviewed quarterly. Should restrictions be lifted or adjusted, the complainant will be informed accordingly.