

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.

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, Kings House, Kings Street, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2AP
- You could email the council using: mail@thetfordtowncouncil.gov.uk
- You could telephone the council on 01842 754247
- You could fax the council on 01842 762567
- You could visit the council offices at Kings House – the Town Council offices are located on the first floor and are open Monday – Friday from 9am – 4pm, closed from 1 – 2pm for lunch.
- You could contact your local councillor – full contact details are available on the website; www.thetfordtowncouncil.gov.uk Councillor contact details are also published periodically in the Town Council's quarterly newsletter contained within the 'About Thetford' magazine.

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. Complaints may be received regarding a variety of topics. The most likely types of complaints are the following;

- A complaint regarding a specific employee, volunteer, or contractor acting on behalf of Thetford Town Council

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- A complaint regarding the conduct of a specific Town Councillor
- A complaint regarding a service provided by the Town Council

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.

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 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.

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, at least - is so 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 (= the Mayor-of-the-Day) should take charge of the process instead of the Clerk.

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Council offices. Letters, duly signed by complainants, should be addressed to the Clerk and marked "Confidential – Formal Complaint". This will ensure the matter is handled by the Deputy-Clerk, should the Clerk be away. Whilst the Council encourages contact by telephone, a

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formal complaint is a serious matter and will only be officially regarded as such, if brought to the Council's attention by means of a signed letter.

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

The 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. 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, summary details of the complaint and its resolution.

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 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 timescale.

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 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, than that committee will take the lead on reviewing that complaint and agreeing the most appropriate action to take in consultation with relevant staff. The General Purposes Committee will review all complaints received on a twice yearly basis to ensure ongoing improvements are made.

A 'Complaints Log' will be produced and kept by the Town Clerk and regularly updated and made available to the General Purposes Committee when it reviews complaints. The log should record:

- The date the complaint was made;
- Details of the complainant/s and complaint/s being made;

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- 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. 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 Standards Committee, c/o Standards Officer, Breckland Council, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham Norfolk, NR19 1EE

E-mail:

standards@breckland.gov.uk

Website:

www.breckland.gov.uk

You may also wish to contact the United Kingdom Standards Board:

Standards for England
Fourth Floor
Griffin House
40 Lever Street
Manchester
M1 1BB
United Kingdom

Telephone: 0161 817 5300

E-mail: enquiries@standardsforengland.gov.uk

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 a councillor is behaving in a way that contravenes the Protocol, then that concern should be referred to the Chairman of the Council (The Mayor-of-the-Day), who will decide upon the best course of action.

All Thetford Town Councillors are required to sign up to the 'Code of Conduct'. If a member of the public or a member of staff feels a councillor has breached this Code, then they should report their concerns to the Town Clerk.

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.

PROCEDURE

Before the Meeting

- Complainants will be asked to put in writing to the Clerk the details of their complaint. They may direct it to the Chairman of the Council (The Mayor-of-the-Day), if unwilling to submit it to the Clerk.
- Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged by the 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 to 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 Clerk or Deputy-Clerk will set out the Council's position.
- Members can put questions to the Clerk or Deputy-Clerk.
- The Clerk/Deputy-Clerk and complainant (in that order) are offered a final opportunity to comment.
- The Clerk/Deputy-Clerk and complainant will be asked to leave the room, while the Committee considers whether or not the grounds for complaint shall

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be upheld. (If a point of clarification is required, both parties will be invited back).

- The Clerk/Deputy-Clerk 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.

Note:

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 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.

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