



ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

1. This Code of Practice does not specifically focus upon complaints about an employee of the Council that are appropriate to be dealt with as an employment matter and in accordance with the approved disciplinary procedure. Similarly, complaints that an employee may have about a colleague, a Senior Officer or an elected Member must be conducted in accordance with the official grievance procedure.
2. Complaints concerning the conduct of an elected Member of the Town Council are dealt with by the Vale of White Horse District Council. For further details please follow this website link:
<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/about-us/how-we-work/contact-us/complaints/complaints-about-councillors>
3. As policy every effort should be made to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of the complainant prior to the involvement of elected Councillors in the formal complaints procedure process. Should this not be possible, then it will be necessary for Councillors to become involved. In such circumstances the usual practice is for a panel comprising the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Finance & General Purposes Committee together with the Town Clerk (or the Head of Services if the Town Clerk is actively involved in the original complaint) to meet with the complainant in an attempt to resolve the matter to mutual satisfaction.

4. Prior to any complaints panel meeting the complainant is required to put his detailed complaints and concerns about the Council's procedures and/or administration in writing to the Council (see address below). Receipt of this will be formally acknowledged in writing and the complainant advised of when the Panel will meet and who will be sitting on it. The complainant will be invited to bring a "friend" with them either to represent or to give moral support. A minimum two weeks prior notice of such a panel will be given. At the time the complainant is notified in writing of the panel date they will also be requested to present any material/documentation that they wish to give in evidence to the meeting no later than seven days prior to the meeting and the Council will confirm that it will present any material it intends to present to the complainant within the same time scale.

5. As general policy the public and press are not permitted attendance at such complaints panel meetings although the Chairman of Finance & General Purposes Committee will report on the outcome of the panel meeting at the following full Council meeting. The order of business for the complaints panel meeting is in accordance with the National Association of Local Council's guidance as set out in Legal Topic Note 56 as follows:
 - (i) Chairman to introduce everyone.
 - (ii) Chairman to explain procedure.
 - (iii) Complainant (or representative) to outline grounds for complaint.
 - (iv) Members to ask any question of the complainant.
 - (v) If relevant, the Town Clerk or other officer in attendance to explain the Council's position.
 - (vi) Members to ask any question of the Town Clerk or other officer.
 - (vii) The Town Clerk or other officer and the complainant to be offered opportunity of last word (in this order).
 - (viii) Town Clerk or other officer and complainant to 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 to be invited back).
 - (ix) Town Clerk or other officer and complainant return to hear decision, or to be advised when decision will be made.

6. Following conclusion of the meeting the complainant will be advised that the decision of the panel, which is final with no right of further appeal, will be confirmed in writing within seven days together with details of any action to be taken.

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