



Sturminster Newton Town Council Complaints Policy and Procedure

Sturminster Newton Town Council is committed to providing high quality services to the local community. The Council recognises that from time to time members of the public may have complaints or concerns about the Council's administration, decisions, or standard of service. This policy sets out how the Council will handle complaints in a fair, consistent, and timely manner.

Summary of Complaint Stages

Stage	Handled By	Expected Timescale
Stage 1 – Informal	Relevant officer or councillor	Within 14 working days
Stage 2 – Formal	Town Clerk investigates and responds in writing	Within 14 working days
Stage 3 – Councillor Panel Review	Panel of councillors not previously involved	Within 14 working days of review request

1. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council's administration, decisions, or the standard of service provided, whether the action was taken or not taken by the Council, its staff, or councillors acting in an official capacity.

Complaints about data protection or access to information will be handled under the Council's Data Protection or Freedom of Information policies.

2. Equal Opportunities

The Council is committed to equality of opportunity. Complaints will be handled fairly and without discrimination. Feedback will be used to identify and address any barriers to equality.

3. Confidentiality and Accessibility

All complaints will be handled sensitively and in confidence, in accordance with data protection law.

The Council will make reasonable adjustments to assist complainants who need help to make or pursue a complaint.

4. Complaints Officer

The Town Clerk is the Council's Complaints Officer and is responsible for managing the process, recording complaints, and identifying areas for improvement.

5. Stage 1 – Informal Complaints

Many complaints can be resolved quickly and informally. Complainants are encouraged to contact the Town Clerk or relevant councillor to discuss their concerns in the first instance.

The Council aims to resolve informal complaints within 14 working days. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may submit a formal complaint in writing.

6. Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

Formal complaints must be made in writing to the Town Clerk. The complaint should include the complainant's name, contact details, and details of the issue.

The Town Clerk will acknowledge the complaint within five working days and investigate. A written response will normally be provided within 14 working days.

If the complaint concerns the Town Clerk, it will be considered by the Mayor or Deputy Mayor.

7. Stage 3 – Councillor Panel Review

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a review by a panel of councillors who were not involved in the earlier stages.

The panel will normally comprise the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor if appropriate) and two other councillors. The panel will meet within 14 working days and confirm its decision in writing.

The decision of the Council following the panel review is final.

8. Vexatious or Anonymous Complaints

Where a complaint is considered unreasonable, persistent, or vexatious, the Town Clerk may decide that no further correspondence will be entered into unless new and substantive issues are raised.

Anonymous complaints will be considered at the Council's discretion, depending on the seriousness of the issue and the information provided.

9. Remedies and Resolution

The Council will seek to resolve complaints in a fair and proportionate way. Where appropriate, remedies may include an apology, explanation, corrective action, or policy review.

10. Oversight and Further Concerns

The decision of the Council is final. If a complainant believes the Council has acted unlawfully, they may contact the relevant oversight body such as:

- the Information Commissioner's Office – for data protection or freedom of information matters;
- Dorset Council's Monitoring Officer – for complaints about councillor conduct; or
- the Council's External Auditor – for financial or governance irregularities.

11. Learning from Complaints

The Town Clerk will maintain a simple record of formal complaints and report annually to the Council on the number and outcome of complaints and any actions taken to improve services.

12. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required by legislation or guidance changes.

This policy should be read alongside the Council's Freedom of Information Policy, Records Retention and Disposal Policy, and Privacy and Data Protection Policies.

Adopted: October 2025

Next Review Due: October 2027