



## **Sturminster Newton Town Council**

### **Vexatious, Persistent or Unreasonable Complaints Policy**

Sturminster Newton Town Council is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and consistently. However, a small number of complainants may pursue complaints in a way that is unreasonable, persistent, or vexatious, which can hinder the Council's ability to manage its business effectively. This policy sets out how such behaviour will be managed.

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

#### **Summary of How Behaviour is Managed**

| Stage                          | Action                                                                                        | Responsible Officer                   | Typical Timescale      |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Stage 1 – Concern Identified   | Behaviour appears unreasonable or persistent                                                  | Town Clerk or Mayor                   | Ongoing monitoring     |
| Stage 2 – Written Warning      | Written warning issued explaining why behaviour is unreasonable and expected changes          | Town Clerk / Mayor                    | Within 10 working days |
| Stage 3 – Restrictions Imposed | Restrictions applied if behaviour continues (e.g. single contact point, written contact only) | Town Clerk in consultation with Mayor | Up to 6 months         |
| Stage 4 – Review and Lifting   | Review of restrictions and decision on whether to lift, amend or continue                     | Town Clerk and Mayor                  | Every 6 months         |

#### **1. Introduction**

This policy ensures that the Council can deal effectively with complainants whose actions or behaviour are unreasonable, persistent, or vexatious, while ensuring that all complainants are treated fairly, consistently, and with respect.

## **2. Definition of Unreasonable Behaviour**

Unreasonable, persistent, or vexatious behaviour may include actions which are harassing, obsessive, or abusive, or where requests are unfounded, repetitive, or pursued in a way that is unreasonable or disproportionate.

## **3. Examples of Unreasonable Behaviour**

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Refusing to specify the complaint or desired outcome.
- Persistently raising the same issues after a response has been given.
- Making excessive or unreasonable demands on staff time.
- Submitting multiple overlapping complaints or correspondence.
- Using aggressive, abusive, or threatening language.
- Insisting on speaking to or meeting only certain officers or members.
- Recording conversations without consent.
- Repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or adding new demands.
- Unreasonably refusing to accept evidence or explanations.
- Harassing or contacting councillors or officers inappropriately.

## **4. Initial Response and Warnings**

Before restrictions are applied, the Town Clerk (or Mayor if the complaint concerns the Clerk) will issue a written warning explaining why the behaviour is considered unreasonable and what changes are expected.

If behaviour continues, the Council may impose proportionate restrictions.

## **5. Possible Restrictions**

Restrictions may include:

- Limiting contact to a single point of contact or email address.
- Requiring contact only in writing.
- Refusing to register further complaints on the same issue.
- Restricting or refusing meetings or phone calls.
- Setting time limits on correspondence.
- Declining to respond to abusive or offensive communication.

## **6. Communication of Restrictions**

The complainant will be informed in writing of the decision, the reasons, and the duration of any restrictions (normally up to six months).

The decision will be made by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor and reported to the Council for information.

## **7. Review and Lifting of Restrictions**

Restrictions will be reviewed at least every six months.

The Town Clerk and Mayor will consider whether behaviour has improved and may lift or amend the restrictions as appropriate.

## **8. Record-Keeping and Reporting**

A brief note will be kept of any restrictions imposed, including the reasons and duration, in accordance with the Council's Records Retention and Disposal Policy.

The Town Clerk will report annually to Council on the number and nature of restrictions imposed, if any.

## **9. New Complaints**

New complaints will always be considered on their merits, even where restrictions are in place, unless they are deemed to fall under the same issue previously addressed.

## **10. Adoption and Review**

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

Adopted: October 2025

Next Review Due: October 2027

The Council will always seek to resolve issues before applying this policy.