



Middlewich Town Council

Complaints Policy

1. The Importance of Complaints

Complaints are valuable because they provide a chance to put things right if there has been an error, and to make sure that the same mistake is not repeated.

It is essential that complaints be dealt with positively. The Town Council is anxious to hear people's comments and committed to making full use of complaints information to contribute to continuous service improvement. Important information about areas for improvement can be obtained both from a single complaint and from patterns of complaints, highlighted by detailed monitoring.

2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Town Council or its staff which affects the individual customer or group of customers.

What the complaints procedure will deal with:

The complaints procedure will deal with matters of maladministration, which is if the Town Council does something the wrong way, fails to do something it should do or does something it should not do. Some examples include:

- neglect or unjustified delay
- malice, bias, or unfair discrimination
- failure to tell people their rights
- failure to provide advice or information when reasonably requested
- providing misleading or inaccurate advice
- inefficiency, ineffectiveness, bad and unprofessional practice or conduct

What the complaints procedure will not deal with:

- complaints for which there is a legal remedy or where legal proceedings already exist
- complaints about employment matters – the Town Council operates alternative procedures to deal with grievances or disciplinary matters against staff.

Alternatively, complainants can be made to Cheshire East Borough Council, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, CW11 1HZ, telephone 0300 123 5500.

3. Equal Opportunities

The Town Council is committed to equal opportunities. Complaints feedback will be used to highlight discriminatory practices, and to promote equality of opportunity.

Complaints by members of the public of discrimination and/or harassment against the Town Council will be dealt with through the complaints procedure unless it is a complaint that should be dealt with through a statutory procedure.

4. Complaints Officer

The Complaints Officer for the Town Council is the Town Clerk. His main duties are:

- (i) The day-to-day operation and management of the procedure, including providing a reference point for staff queries on informal complaints.
- (ii) To oversee, and undertake where necessary, the investigation of formal complaints at the first stage, within the relevant time scales.
- (iii) To maintain a record of all complaints received including details of the nature of the complaint, action taken, outcome, and time taken to resolve.
- (iv) To provide a quarterly analysis of the type, category and number of formal complaints received by the Town Council.
- (v) To identify improvement points arising from any complaints.



Relevant types of complaint should be referred directly to the Town Clerk, Middlewich Town Council, Victoria Buildings, Lewin Street, Middlewich, CW10 9AS, telephone 01606 833434.

5. Stages of the Procedure

The stages of the procedure are designed to provide the complainant with a thorough and fair means of redress and to provide a framework for officers to work within.

Everyday problems, queries and comments

The Council receives queries, problems and comments as part of its day-to-day running, and they should not all be regarded as complaints. These are routine and expected and are generally resolved quickly to the customer's satisfaction.

If someone is dissatisfied with the original service or response they received and wishes to take the matter further then the issue should be recognised as a complaint.

Informal Complaint

During the course of daily business, minor complaints are made to officers about the services we provide. The Town Clerk or a member of his staff will usually deal with these.

It is not appropriate for every comment to be treated as a formal complaint. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining a decision.

Formal Complaint (Stage 1)

A customer may wish to make a formal complaint directly, or may be unsatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint and may wish to take the matter further. This will be recorded as a complaint and passed to the appropriate officer to investigate.

Timescales: Acknowledgement – within three working days
 Investigation completed – 14 days thereafter
 or Progress Reports issued – 14 day intervals



Review of Investigation and Complaint (Stage 2)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Investigating Officer's response, they should be advised of their right to have the complaint referred to the Personnel Committee which will review the complaint.

Timescales: Advice given within three working days

If the complainant then advises that he/she wishes to go through stage three of the procedure, this should be acknowledged in three working days advising when the Personnel Committee will meet to discuss the issue

Personnel Committee, Meeting as a Complaints Panel (Stage 3)

If the issue remains unresolved and the complainant has advised that he or she wishes to exercise their right to have the matter referred to the Personnel Committee, the matter should be reported to the next appropriate meeting. The outcome of all formal complaints dealt with by the Committee will be reported to the next full Town Council meeting.

The procedure at the Personnel meeting shall be as follows:

1. The complainant will be invited to bring a "friend" with them either to represent them or to give moral support. A minimum of two weeks prior notice of such a panel will be given. If less than two weeks is available before the next Committee meeting, the matter should be referred to the next available meeting. 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 7 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.
2. As general policy the public and press are not permitted attendance at meetings although the Chairman of Personnel Committee will report on the outcome of the meeting at the following full Council meeting, if appropriate in part 2 of the agenda.
3. The order of business for the complaints meeting shall be in accordance with the National Association of Local Councils' guidance 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 will be in attendance to explain the Council's position.
 - (vi) Members to ask any question of the Town Clerk.
 - (vii) The Town Clerk and the complainant to be offered the opportunity of a last word (in this order).
 - (viii) Town Clerk 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 proper officer and complainant return to hear decision, or to be advised of when the decision will be made.
4. Following the conclusion of the meeting, the complainant will be advised that the decision of the Committee, which is final with no right of further appeal, will be confirmed in writing within 7 days together with details of any action to be taken.
5. Unreasonable and Vexations Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to proceed when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other process, whether through the courts or some other recognised procedure, should or has been taken.

These matters should be referred to the Town Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. He may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant, and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.

6. Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints should be referred to the Town Clerk, and may be dismissed at his discretion, according to the type and seriousness of the allegation.

7. Resolution and Remedies

The aim in dealing with all complaints is to reach a resolution for the complainant, whether it is the remedy they were originally seeking or not. Where a complaint is found to be at all justified, consideration may need to be given to the question of an appropriate remedy (the Town Clerk to

make any final decision regarding remedy). An explanation or an apology will always be needed.