



FRAMLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

All members of the public have the right to lodge a complaint regarding an issue that is within the Town Council's scope of control and responsibility. This policy is set to ensure that the Town Council takes complaints seriously, will work with complainants to resolve the issues in a fair, timely and confidential manner and considers complaints an important form of feedback to ultimately drive the continuous improvement of services.

You can make a complaint by mail, telephone, email or in person at the Town Council office.

The Town Council will not acknowledge or consider anonymous complaints unless it is apparent from the nature of the complaint that anonymity is justified.

MAKING A COMPLAINT

There are three categories of complaints: -

Complaints relating to an employee (i.e. the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk or Administrative staff) are processed as an internal matter and are referred to the Finance & Strategic Planning Committee where appropriate action will be taken as required.

Complaints relating to a Town Councillor who may have breached the Suffolk Local Code of Conduct are under the jurisdiction of the East Suffolk Council and must be submitted in writing to the Monitoring Officer, East Suffolk Council, East Suffolk House, Station Road, Melton IP12 1RT or customerservices@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

Complaints regarding procedures or administration will be considered by Full Council or by the Finance Committee, which will include the Chair and/or Vice Chair and one or two Town Councillors, to a total of three members.

Before the Meeting

1. The complainant should direct the complaint about the Town Council's procedures or administration in writing to the Town Clerk at the following address: -
2. Framlingham Town Council, 10c Church Street, Framlingham, Suffolk, IP13 9BH, or by email: townclerk@framlingham.com
3. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the Town Clerk or other proper officer, they may put it to the Chair of the Town Council.
4. The Town Clerk or Chair of the Town Council shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the Full Council or by the Finance Committee.

5. The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting and bring with them such representation as they wish.
6. Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the Town Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence, which they wish to refer to at the meeting. The Town Council shall similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting.

At the Meeting

7. The Town Council shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and the press. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the Town Council meeting in public.
8. The Committee Chair shall introduce everyone and explain the complaints procedure.
9. The complainant (or representative) shall outline the grounds for complaint.
10. Committee members may question the complainant.
11. If relevant, the Town Clerk or other Proper Officer should explain the Town Council's position.
12. Committee members may question the Town Clerk or other Proper Officer.
13. The Town Clerk or other Proper Officer (in this order) and complainant are to be offered the opportunity of the last word.
14. The Town Clerk or other Proper Officer and complainant shall be requested to leave the room while Committee members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. Both parties may be invited back for points of clarification.
15. The Town Clerk or other Proper Officer and complainant may return to hear the decision, or can be advised when the decision will be made.

After the Meeting

16. The decision of the Town Council shall be confirmed in writing within seven working days of the meeting, together with the details of any action to be taken.

HABITUAL OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

Most complainants act reasonably, responsibly and respectfully in their interactions with the Town Council, but in a very small minority of cases complainants act in ways that are inappropriate and unacceptable despite every effort by the Town Council to assist with their complaint. This can take up a disproportionate amount of resource and can affect the Town Council's ability to do its work and provide a service to others and can result in unacceptable stress for the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk.

Habitual are those complaints of unreasonable persistence, unreasonable demands, unreasonable lack of cooperation, unreasonable arguments and unreasonable behaviours by complainants.

Vexatious are those complaints made by complainants without sufficient grounds, but made especially to cause annoyance or disruption.

Where complainants have been identified as habitual or vexatious the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Town Council will as appropriate take one or more of the following courses of action: -

1. The complainant will be notified in writing why their complaint has been classified as habitual or vexatious. The complainant will be advised of the Town Council's normal complaints procedure and what steps to follow if that is appropriate.
2. The complainant will be notified in writing that the Town Council has responded fully to the points raised and has tried to resolve the complaint but that there is nothing more to add and that continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose. The complainant will also be notified that the correspondence is at an end, advising the complainant that they are being treated as an habitual or vexatious complainant and as such the Town Council does not intend to engage in further correspondence dealing with the complaint.
3. The Town Council will decline further contact with the complainant (on that matter only), either in person, by telephone, by letter or by email or by any other means.
4. The complainant will be informed that the Town Council may seek legal advice on habitual or vexatious complaints.
5. The Town Council will suspend all contact with the complainant in connection with the issues relating to the complaint being considered habitual and/or vexatious, while seeking advice or guidance from a solicitor or other relevant agency, such as its advisory body, Information Commissioners Office or External Auditor.
6. The Town Clerk and the Chair of the Town Council will invite the complainant to meet with them to discuss the matter.
7. If a complainant or their representative/s have threatened or used physical violence towards the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Administrative Assistant or Town Councillors at any time all personal contact will cease, it will be documented and the police notified where applicable. Thereafter complaints will only be continued through written communication with the complainant or their representative/s

New complaints received from complainants who have been deemed habitual or vexatious will be treated on their own merits. The Town Council will regularly review whether any restrictions applied to a complainant before are still appropriate and necessary and whether normal channels of communication can be resumed. Complainants will be notified in writing or by email that such restrictions have been withdrawn.