

Compliments, Comments & Complaints Procedure

Introduction

Bishop Auckland Town Council aims to provide excellent quality services for the benefit of people who live, work or visit the town. The Town Council sees all customer comments, compliments and complaints as feedback and feel that it is a good way of evaluating its services. Sometimes things can go wrong, and if they do, we need to know so we can put them right and take steps to improve our services. The valuable feedback will be used to help us to learn and develop and drive improvements.

Compliments

Compliments, can be given to the Town Council for something that has been achieved or something we have done particularly well.

We are always happy to know we are doing things well and meeting the needs of our residents. If you wish to send a compliment you can send it directly to the Town Clerk of the Council by:

Email: council@bishopauckland-tc.gov.uk

Post: Town Clerk, Bishop Auckland, Town Council, Kingsway Court, 54 Kingsway, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL14 7JF

Where compliments are received by the Council, an acknowledgement will be communicated within 3 working days to you. They will be forwarded to the appropriate Service Manager or Officer for record and action.

Comments

We recognise that sometimes members of the public simply want to register a comment, maybe about a council service or event or generally about the council, however they do not always wish to pursue a complaint. In this case we will ensure a record of the comment is maintained and the feedback it provides used to address any issues or concerns, by taking appropriate action. If you, wish to send a comment you, can do so directly to the Town Clerk of the Council at:

Email: council@bishopauckland-tc.gov.uk

Post: Bishop Auckland, Town Council, Kingsway Court, 54 Kingsway, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL14 7JF

Where comments are received by the Council, an acknowledgement will be communicated within 3 working days to you. They will be forwarded to the appropriate Service Manager or Officer for record and action.

Complaints

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a response, a lack of response, or if the standard of service you have received is in your view not satisfactory and it cannot resolve through the normal day to day operational processes of the Council.

A complaint can only relate to a service that the Council already provides. It cannot relate to requests for new services or services provided by other local authorities. However, information provided may highlight gaps in service provision that may be relevant to future consideration and should be recorded and actioned as a comment.

The following list is a guide to the range of complaints which are covered by this policy:

- Failure to provide a service or to achieve an acceptable standard.
- Dissatisfaction with the manner in which council policy and procedure has been carried out.
- Discrimination.

What is not a complaint?

The following are excluded from this policy:

- A request for service.
- A request for information or an explanation.
- An insurance claim against the Council.
- Criticism of Council policy.
- A matter which is, or may be, the subject of court or tribunal proceedings.
- It is not appropriate for complaints regarding the conduct of individual employees of the Council or for complaints regarding the conduct of individual elected Members.

What do I do if I am unhappy with one of your services?

This procedure is to be followed for all complaints regarding the administration of the Council's services or its procedures.

Complaints need to be made in writing:

Email: council@bishopauckland-tc.gov.uk

Post: Bishop Auckland, Town Council, Kingsway Court, 54 Kingsway, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL14 7JF

Upon receipt we will send you an acknowledgement to confirm that your complaint has been received, and in the first instance the Deputy Town Clerk will deal with the complaint, in their absence this may be delegated to another officer of the Council.

- Your complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days of contacting us.
- The Deputy Town Clerk¹ will investigate your complaint and reply to you within 10 working days.
- However, if the complaint is particularly serious or complicated, an interim response will be provided within 7 working days indicating when a full response is likely to be received.
- If you are unhappy with the Deputy Town Clerk's reply you can appeal to the General Appeals Panel.

How do I appeal?

If you are unhappy with the Deputy Town Clerk's reply you can appeal to the General Appeals Panel. You must do this within 7 days of receiving the decision on your complaint.

You may choose to appeal because:

1. you think a finding or penalty is unfair.
2. additional new evidence comes to light – hearsay or unsubstantiated cannot be accepted.
3. you think a procedure was not used correctly.

The Council's General Appeals Panel² will consider the evidence, based on the criteria set out above, and provide a final response. The decision of the General Appeals Panel will be final. There is no further right of appeal.

As the complainant you will be invited to attend the appeal hearing, and you may bring with you a representative as you wish.

As the complainant you shall provide the Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence which you wish to refer to at the meeting at least 10 working days prior to the meeting.

¹ The Deputy Clerk deals with complaints in the first instance, as the Town Clerk will deal with any appeals.

² The General Appeals Panel will be made up as per the Terms of Reference set out in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution

Similarly, the Council will provide you, the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they intend to rely. This will be issued to you and Panel members by the Town Clerk, as an appeal pack. This will be issued within 7 days of the panel meeting.

The panel shall consider whether the circumstances of complaint warrant the exclusion of the press and public at the hearing. However, any decision on an appeal shall be announced at a Council meeting in public. The Town Clerk along with another officer of the Council will provide the secretariat for the hearing.

At the hearing:

- The Chair will outline why the hearing has been called.
- You as the complainant may be asked to outline the grounds for the appeal. This must be one or more of the 1-3 reasons listed above. Factual evidence to the matter at hand, must be used, hearsay, anonymous statements and non-direct related issues cannot be used.
- Panel Members will ask any question(s) to you as the complainant as they deem necessary.
- The Deputy Town Clerk will explain the Council's position, and the processes and any actions taken.
- Panel Members will ask any question(s) of the Deputy Town Clerk they deem necessary.
- The Deputy Town Clerk and you will be offered any opportunity of any further comment.
- The complainant and the Deputy Town Clerk will be asked to leave while the Panel decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been justified.
- The complainant and the Deputy Town Clerk return to hear the decision or to be advised when a decision will be made.

The decision will be confirmed in writing within 7 working days together with details of any action to be taken.

The decision of the General Appeals Panel will be final. There is no further right of appeal.

How do we make sure everyone is treated fairly?

We recognise and value all of the people in Bishop Auckland and want to make sure that everyone can use the complaints system. We want to make sure we treat you fairly when making any complaint about us.

To help us treat you fairly we may ask you to tell us your sex, age, ethnic origin and if you are disabled.

The information you give is confidential. We only use it to check that we treat all groups of people fairly and we do not discriminate against you.

If part of your complaint is about equal opportunities or discrimination, please tell us. We will make sure we look into that for you.

Vexatious/Repetitive Complaints

The Council may choose to give a decision on a complaint, without a formal investigation, where it considers the complaint to be deliberately vexatious or repetitive. The Vexatious Complaints and Unacceptable Behaviour Policy outlines this in more detail.