

BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

The Local Government Ombudsman has no jurisdiction over parish and town councils. Therefore for the benefit of good local administration, Blandford Forum Town Council has adopted the procedure overleaf for considering complaints either made by complainants direct or which have been referred back to the council from other bodies which deal with the administration or procedures of the Council.

Complaints about an employee of the council (i.e. the Town Clerk) will be dealt with as an employment matter. The complainant should be assured that the matter will be dealt with internally as such and appropriate action taken as required.

Complaints about a councillor are now subject to the jurisdiction of the Standards Board. A leaflet is published by the Standards Board on how to make a complaint and the complainant will be advised that a copy can be obtained from the Standards Board or the Monitoring Officer at the District Council.

The council will establish a panel of three Councillors made up from the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council and Chairmen of Committees to deal with complaints. The panel will report its conclusions to the next council meeting.

The procedure is designed for those complaints that cannot be satisfied by less formal measures or explanations provided to the complainant by the Town Clerk or other proper officer or Chairman of Council.

If the Town Clerk or other proper officer is putting forward the justification for the action or procedure complained of, he or she should not represent the position of the council.

At all times, the rules of natural justice will apply. In other words, all parties will be treated fairly and the process will be reasonable, accessible and transparent.

CODE OF PRACTICE

Before the Meeting

1. The complainant should be asked to put the complaint about the council's procedures or administration in writing to the clerk or other nominated proper officer.
2. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the clerk or other proper officer, they may be advised to put it to the chairman of the council.
3. The clerk shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the panel established for the purpose of hearing complaints.
4. The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting and bring with them such representative as they wish.
5. 7 clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the council with copies of any documentation or other evidence, which they wish to refer to at the meeting. The council shall similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting.

At the Meeting

6. The 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 council meeting in public.
7. Chairman to introduce everyone.
8. Chairman to explain procedure.
9. Complainant (or representative) to outline grounds for complaint.
10. Members to ask any question of the complainant.
11. If relevant, clerk or other proper officer to explain the council's position.
12. Members to ask any question of the clerk or other proper officer.
13. Clerk or other proper officer and complainant to be offered opportunity of last word (in this order).
14. Clerk or other proper officer and complainant to be asked to leave 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).
15. Clerk or other proper officer and complainant return to hear decision, or to be advised when decision will be made.

After the Meeting

16. Decision confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.
17. A report to be made in public at the next Council meeting.