



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY 2026

VERSION: 3.0

1. Purpose

This complaints policy sets out how Stotfold Town Council will handle formal complaints about its operations and services. The Council is committed to providing high-quality services and welcomes feedback to help improve performance.

2. What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of a service. This may include:

- Allegations of administrative fault (e.g., not following procedures or standing orders)
- Inadequate service or no service
- Delay or mistakes
- Service quality issues

Complaints against the Council should be treated as complaints against the body corporate, not against individual employees or members.

3. Who Can Use This Procedure?

The complaints procedure is available to:

- Residents living in or near the Council's area
- Individuals affected by the Council's decisions
- Organisations (businesses, charities)
- Unincorporated bodies (residents' associations, allotment tenants' associations)

4. When This Procedure is NOT Appropriate

This complaints procedure should not be used for:

- Alleged financial irregularity – Local electors should use their statutory right to object under s.27(1) Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014
- Alleged criminal activity – Report to the police
- Member conduct breaches – Report to the unitary council's Monitoring Officer [Customer feedback | Central Bedfordshire Council](#)
- Employee grievances – Staff should use the internal grievance procedure
- Requests for information – Use Freedom of Information or Data Protection procedures
- Contractual disputes – Follow contractual terms and legal remedies
- Matters where legal action has been threatened or commenced – Seek professional legal advice

5. Key Principles

The Council's complaints procedure follows Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) guidance. A good complaints system is:

- ✓ Well-publicised, easily accessible and easy to use
- ✓ Helpful and receptive
- ✓ Not adversarial
- ✓ Fair and objective
- ✓ Based on clear procedures and defined responsibilities
- ✓ Thorough, rigorous and consistent
- ✓ Decisive and capable of putting things right
- ✓ Sensitive to special needs and circumstances
- ✓ Adequately resourced
- ✓ Supported by councillors and officers
- ✓ Proportionate
- ✓ Timely
- ✓ Regularly analysed to identify patterns and lessons for improvement

6. Informal Resolution

Where possible, complaints should be resolved informally through usual channels of communication. Complainants are encouraged to:

- Raise concerns directly with the Town Clerk
- Discuss the matter with relevant councillors
- Seek an informal resolution before proceeding to the formal procedure

7. Formal Complaints Procedure

Step 1: Before Processing a Complaint

- Complaints should be received no later than 3 months after any actions leading to the complaint occurring.
- All formal complaints must be submitted in writing (letter or email) to:
Stotfold Town Council, Greenacre Centre, Valerian Way, Stotfold SG5 4HG
enquiries@stotfoldtowncouncil.gov.uk
- Complainants must be asked whether they wish the complaint to be treated confidentially
- Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days.

Step 2: Investigation

- The Council (Clerk/Chair or nominated officer or Councillor) will investigate the facts and collate relevant evidence
- Investigation will normally be completed within 4 weeks of receipt
- For complex complaints, this timeframe may be extended with explanation to the complainant

Step 3: Meeting (if applicable)

If the complaints procedure includes an opportunity for verbal representations:

- The complainant will be invited to attend a meeting with the Clerk or a Complaints Committee
- The complainant may bring a friend or representative
- Both parties will exchange any new information/evidence before the meeting
- The complainant will outline their complaint
- The Council will explain its position
- Both parties may ask questions
- Both parties will have opportunity to summarise their positions
- The complainant will be advised when a decision will be made

Step 4: Decision

- The Council will write to the complainant within 5 working days of the meeting/completion of investigation
- The letter will confirm whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld
- Reasons for the decision will be provided
- Details of any action to be taken (if appropriate) will be outlined
- Information about the right to appeal (if applicable) will be included

8. Two-Stage Process

Stage 1: Initial investigation and decision by Clerk/nominated officer

Stage 2: Appeal to Complaints Committee/Sub-Committee

Appeals must be submitted in writing within 5 working days of receiving the Stage 1 decision, specifying grounds for appeal. Staff or members involved in Stage 1 should not participate in the appeal.

9. Timescales for Resolutions

All complaints within 4 weeks from the point a complaint has been received or an appeal is requested.

10. Data Protection and Confidentiality

- Complaints are personal to the complainant and treated as confidential unless they waive this right
- The identity of the complainant will only be disclosed to those who need to consider the complaint
- Agendas and minutes will not disclose personal data about the complainant or third parties
- The Council will comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- Meetings considering complaints will exclude the public

11. Remedies if Complaint is Upheld

If a complaint is upheld, the Council may:

- Provide an explanation of what happened
- Apologise to the complainant
- Explain steps to prevent recurrence
- Offer a remedy that puts the complainant back in the position they would have been in

- Offer financial compensation (full and final settlement, without admission of legal liability)
- Make a goodwill gesture (e.g., free/reduced use of Council facilities)

The Council should avoid admissions of wrongdoing that could expose it to legal liability.

11. Insurance and Legal Claims

The Council must immediately notify its insurers if a complaint:

- Seeks redress for personal injury, property damage or financial loss
- Threatens legal action
- Could result in the Council being held liable to pay damages

The Council must follow insurer instructions. Failure to notify insurers promptly may invalidate the insurance policy.

12. Delegation and Responsibility

The Council may:

- Delegate complaint handling to the Clerk/nominated officer
- Appoint a Complaints Committee or Sub-Committee to consider and determine complaints
- Engage external investigators where appropriate

13. Publicity

This complaints procedure will be:

- Published on the Council's website
- Made available via the Council's publication scheme
- Provided to any complainant on request

14. Review

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years or sooner if legislation or best practice guidance changes.

Version History:

Version No	Date Approved/Reviewed	Summary Of Changes
	Adopted July 2009	
1.	Reviewed 2019	Not known
2.	April 2024	Reviewed in line with SLCC policy
3.	January 2026	Reviewed in line with NALC policy