



Complaints Policy

Introduction

As a Council, we recognise that on occasions, we may get things wrong or not do something that a customer thinks we should have done.

We want to give our customers a fair, consistent and structured process to get a remedy for failures in the delivery of our services.

We recognise the importance of customer feedback from complaints, compliments and comments. Using this feedback can help us to improve services for our customers and ultimately reduce the number of complaints we receive.

We define a complaint as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents'

This policy should be reviewed in conjunction with the Council's Whistleblowing policy –

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/fraud>

Our Complaints Process

You can contact the Council by email, telephone, letter or in person* to make a complaint. The Council also has social media channels for contact about complaints

*In person visits are, at the present time not available, due to Covid-19 restrictions, as the Council offices remain closed

Details of our complaints process is set out below and can be found at the following website link:-

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments>

- On receipt of your complaint, our Complaints Team will assess to see if it can be resolved informally. This will give you a quicker resolution
- If this is not possible, we will log your complaint at stage 1 of our process

The Council has a two stage process:

Stage 1

1. You will be sent an acknowledgement of your complaint within 3 working days
2. You will be able to contact our Complaints Team for assistance, throughout the process
3. Your complaint will be dealt with by a manager who has direct responsibility for the department you are complaining about
4. Wherever possible, we will respond to you within 15 working days but if we are unable to do so, we will explain why and tell you when a full response will be sent
5. If you are not satisfied that we have dealt with your complaint in full, you can ask us to review it further:-

Stage 2

1. An acknowledgement will be sent to you within 3 working days
2. You will be able to contact our Complaints Team for assistance, throughout the process
3. Your complaint will be reviewed by the relevant head of service or senior manager of the department. A full response will be sent to you within 20 working days
4. If we cannot respond fully within that time, we will explain why and tell you when a full response will be sent

We seek to resolve any complaints as quickly and easily as possible, working from informal, to stage 1 and then 2 We are unable to skip any stages when seeking to rectify your complaint and ask for your full cooperation in this process.

Next Steps

If after receiving the outcome of a stage 2 complaint you are still unsatisfied with the result, you can refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman for review. You can contact the Council's Complaints Team for advice about this. The Ombudsman services usually ask that you have exhausted the Council's complaints process before you contact them for assistance.

Contact details are given below:-

www.lgo.org.uk

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

customerservices@stalbans.gov.uk

Tel: 01727 819209

Complaint reports are produced for the Council's Chief Executive Board on a quarterly basis. In addition, meetings are held within teams to discuss outcomes of complaints, service improvements and lessons learnt. A report is provided to the Council's Standards Committee on complaints and compliments annually in October.

Exceptions to the Policy

The Council will deal with complaints under its formal process, however, there are exceptions, which will not be dealt with under this policy:-

- A complaint by an applicant or agent in relation to the refusal of planning permission or non-determination of a planning application for which there is a statutory appeals process
www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/appeals/planningappeals
- A complaint where the customer or the Council has started legal proceedings or has taken court action but not cases where a customer has simply threatened to start legal proceedings against the Council
- A complaint in relation to housing benefit for which there is a statutory appeals process
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/appealing-benefit-decision>
- A complaint about a Right to Buy valuation for which there is a statutory process for review (ss128A & 128B Housing Act 1985)
- A complaint about the Council's Housing Allocation policy
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments>
- Council Tax Liability, Discounts and Exemptions – if you disagree with some aspect of your council tax bill because you do not think you are liable for council tax for that dwelling, or you think an exemption or discount should be applied, you need to appeal in the first instance to the Revenues team –
counciltax@stalbands.gov.uk
- If your appeal is turned down or not answered you have the right of appeal to the Valuation Tribunal –
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/appeals>
- Council Tax Bandings – if you disagree with the band of your property, further information can be obtained from –
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/appeals>
- A complaint about the issue of a penalty charge notice by our parking services and the recovery process thereof, which are subject to a separate appeal process
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/parking-fines>
- A complaint from a third party about a planning application under consideration by the Council. This will be forwarded to the case officer and treated as a comment on the application –
planningcomments@stalbands.gov.uk

or by email: planning@stalbans.gov.uk

- A complaint by an employee about a personnel matter, including appointments, dismissals, pay, pensions and discipline. These are dealt with under the Council's personnel procedures
- A complaint about the Council's recruitment process
- A complaint about an issue that was known about for more than 12 months before the complaint was made to the Council, unless there is a good reason for the delay

A complaint about a Freedom of Information Act request, Environmental Information Regulations request, or a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998

<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

- Any other instance where an alternative appeal mechanism exists
- Anonymous complaints will not be considered under our procedure.

If for any reason we cannot review a complaint under our procedure, we will provide you with the reasons why.

Making a complaint about a councillor

If you wish to complain about the conduct of a Member of St Albans City & District Council or a Member of a parish or town council please contact:

membercomplaints@stalbans.gov.uk

Serial, Persistent and Vexatious Complainants

We have a duty to make sure that public money is spent wisely and achieves value for complainants and the wider public. We also have a duty to protect the safety and wellbeing of our staff.

Our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy sets out how we will manage serial, persistent and vexatious complainants. This document can be found at the following link:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments>

Further Advice

For further information or advice about the Council's complaints procedure, please contact our Complaints Team:-

customerservices@stalbans.gov.uk

Tel: 01727 819209

Author	
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