

Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council

Complaints Policy

Purpose

Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council endeavours to get its service delivery right every time, but there are occasions when parishioners may be dissatisfied with our performance. This policy sets out how to raise a complaint with the Parish Council and the procedure followed by the Council when one is received.

The procedure is based on the framework suggested by the National Association of Local Councils.

Scope

This policy covers complaints that are expressions of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the Council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council.

There are some specific types of complaints the Parish Council cannot handle. These are:

- Complaints submitted anonymously
- Complaints regarding the conduct of an individual Councillor. Complaints regarding the conduct of an individual Councillor should be directed to the West Suffolk District Council Monitoring Officer.
- Any accusation or report of criminal activity. These should be reported directly to the Police

Employee Conduct is dealt with solely through the internal disciplinary procedure. The Council will not, under any circumstances, enter into any correspondence or discussion with any complaint about any action taken, formally or informally, against any member of staff. This is expressly to protect the employment rights to which all employees of the Council are entitled.

Complaints must always be directed through the Proper Officer to the Council, hereafter referred to as the Clerk. They must not be submitted to or via individual Councillors. A complainant may advise a Councillor of the details of the complaint, but individual Councillors are not authorised to resolve complaints.

Informal Complaints

If complaints are made to the Council either in person, by telephone, letter or email to Clerk or the Chairman of the Council. The Clerk will try to resolve the complaint informally in a timely manner. It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved quickly and amicably through this route. In the event that the informal process does not satisfy a member of the public, Ixworth and Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council has a formal complaints procedure that should be followed.

Formal Complaints Process

If the Complainant is not satisfied by the informal actions taken, or may wish to make a formal complaint directly, he or she will be asked to submit a formal complaint in writing to the Council, addressed to the Clerk or Chairman of the Parish Council as appropriate.

The complaint should cover as much detail as possible and enclose any relevant supporting documentation.

Process for Dealing with a Formal Complaint

1. The Clerk or Chairman of the Parish Council will acknowledge receipt of the complaint, in writing, within 5 working days.
2. The Clerk or Chairman of the Parish Council will convene the Policies & Resources Sub-Committee within 10 working days of the acknowledgement of a formal complaint.
3. The complaint, with all relevant documentation, will be distributed to the members appointed to the Policies & Resources Sub-Committee dealing with the complaint prior to the meeting.

Policies & Resources Sub-Committee

1. The Chairman of the Policies & Resources Sub-Committee should outline the grounds for complaint.
2. The complaint and all relevant documentation will be discussed fully.
3. The Policies & Resources Sub-Committee reserves the right to seek external specialist advice.
4. The Policies & Resources Sub-committee reserves the right to refer to full Council if it feels unable to arrive at an outcome.
5. If the above two clauses (3 & 4) are implemented the complainant will be informed of the status of the complaint and any possible delay.

After the meeting

The outcome will be confirmed in writing to the complainant within seven working days.

The Clerk or Chairman of the Parish Council will report to the Council, summary details of the complaint and a brief summary of its outcome. This summary report will exclude the names of the complainants and any Council staff involved.

Appeal

The Policies & Resources Sub-Committees' outcome is final with no appeals process as the Local Government Ombudsman does not consider complaints in respect of Parish Councils.

Any complaint in relation to this procedure not being followed correctly will need to be submitted as a new complaint.

Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to pursue a complaint when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other process, whether through the courts or some other recognised procedure, should, or has been taken. These matters will be referred to the Parish Council by the Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. The Parish Council may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.