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Complaints policy

Definitions

Complaint: A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet with the quality of a service or with a failure to provide a previously agreed service, or with the attitude or behaviour of a member of staff or councillor

Comment: A comment is a general statement about policies, practices, or a service, which have an impact on everyone and not just one individual. A comment can be positive or negative in nature.

Comments may question policies and practices, make suggestions for new services or for improving existing services.

Compliment: An expression of praise. It is a positive statement about a service provided by or on behalf of the Council, or about the helpfulness, attitude, or approach of a member of staff.

Customer: A customer is any party who has a relationship with the Council, including members of the public, users of facilities provided or maintained by the Council, suppliers of goods and services and contractors.

Introduction

- 1 Beaulieu Parish Council (“the Council”) aims to deliver high-quality services where the customer (as defined below) is at the heart of everything it does. The Council welcomes all customer feedback and aims to address customers’ concerns fairly and consistently. We learn from best practice, your experiences, and our mistakes to improve in the future.

The Policy

- 2 A customer has a right to:
 - a Complain
 - b Be listened to
 - c Have their complaint investigated and resolved as quickly as possible
 - d Have their concerns taken seriously
- 3 We aim to:
 - a Be accessible and uncomplicated
 - b Promote customer satisfaction

Beaulieu Parish Council

Complaints policy (cont'd)

- c Identify areas where services can be improved
 - d Learn from good practice
 - e Learn from mistakes
 - f Implement improvements in processes and procedures
- 4 The Council promotes the right of its customers to raise a concern or make a complaint if they think something has been done incorrectly or if they feel it has been addressed poorly. Similarly, customers may complain if they feel something that ought to have been done has not been done.
- 5 Complaints will be investigated objectively, fairly, and thoroughly. The aim will be to resolve the complaint, learn lessons and implement improvements.
- 6 The Council promotes the right of customers to comment on a policy or council decision which may affect them and express a compliment if things have gone well for them. These should be forwarded to the Clerk.
- 7 The complaints procedure cannot be used to challenge a lawful decision of the Council or a decision properly made by a committee or officer under delegated authority. Complaints relating to council decisions should be distinguished from disagreements with council policy or decisions. Complainants may express their views through correspondence, public participation at meetings, or the electoral process.

When the Complaints Procedure is Not Appropriate

- 8 The council's complaints procedure will not be used in respect of the following types of complaint:
- a Financial irregularity
 - i) The Parish Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) will provide an explanation of the item.
 - ii) If the complainant is not satisfied, the Parish Clerk will advise the complainant of their statutory right to object to the Council's audit of accounts pursuant to Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. On any matter, it may be necessary for the Parish Clerk to consult the auditor.
 - b Criminal activity

The Parish Clerk should refer the complainant to the police.
 - c Member conduct

In the event of a complaint relating to a Member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the complainant will be advised to make their complaint to the Monitoring Officer at New Forest District Council.
 - d Employee conduct

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Complaints policy (cont'd)

A complaint relating to the conduct of an employee will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's employment procedures.

Time limit for making a complaint

- 9 The Council's aim is to put things right if they go wrong as quickly as possible, so it is important to recognise there is a six-month time limit (from the date of the incident giving cause for the complaint) for making a complaint. However, the time limit may be extended if it is still possible to consider the complaint effectively and efficiently or if there are other circumstances which may enable resolution of the complaint.

Confidentiality

- 10 The Council will take care to maintain confidentiality where circumstances demand, e.g. where matters concern sensitive information or where third parties are concerned.
- 11 The name, address and other details of any complainant will remain confidential and only shared with those investigating any complaint. The Council will not disclose the complainant's details to any party outside of the Council without his/her consent.
- 12 Personal data will be processed in accordance with the Council's Data Protection and Privacy policies.

Unreasonable or vexatious complaints

- 13 There may be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to proceed when the complaint clearly has no reasonable basis, or where the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or some other action has been taken.
- 14 In such circumstances the Clerk shall consult with the Council to agree whether any further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant. The complainant will be notified if the Clerk's (or Council's) decision is that no further action is to be taken and informed of this decision, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a further response.

Anonymous complaints

- 15 Anonymous complaints will be reviewed by the Clerk and referred to Council as he/she considers appropriate.

How to make contact

- 16 A complaint, compliment, or comment can be made in person or by:
- a post to the Clerk at the above address
 - b e-mail to clerk@beaulieu-pc.org.uk
 - c telephone - 07825 309333
- 17 The preferred method of receiving complaints is in writing by post or e-mail.