

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Operative date: 21st September 2010

OPENING STATEMENT

It remains the position that the Local Government Ombudsman has no jurisdiction over Parish, Town and Community Councils in England and Wales. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in Legal Topic Note 9 has issued guidance (November 2008) for local councils.

Crowborough Town Council adopted the NALC guidelines and model code on 21st September 2010.

GUIDELINES

It will not be appropriate to deal with all complaints from members of the public under a complaints procedure. Councils should consider engaging other procedures/bodies in respect of the following types of complaint:

Type of conduct	Refer to
Financial irregularity	Local elector's statutory right to object Council's audit of accounts pursuant to s.16 Audit Commission Act 1998. On other matters, councils may need to consult their auditor / Audit Commission
Criminal activity	The Police
Town Councillor conduct	In England a complaint relating to a member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct must be submitted to the standards committee of the relevant principal authority – Wealden District Council, Monitoring Officer (tel 01892 653311 or www.wealden.gov.uk) for further information.
Employee conduct	Dealt with by internal disciplinary procedure. The complainant can be assured that the matter will be dealt with under the Town Council's disciplinary procedures and appropriate action taken as required.

Important Notes

- (i) The Code of Practice that follows is therefore aimed at those situations where a complaint is made about the administration of the Town Council or about its procedures. It is not an appropriate forum for a complaint against individuals, as the provisions above cover these situations.
- (ii) The Code of Practice 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 officer or the Town Mayor.

CROWBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS (FROM THE PUBLIC) CODE OF PRACTICE

Aims:

1. To provide a standard and formal procedure for considering complaints either made by complainants directly or which have been referred back to the Town Council from other bodies.
2. To ensure that complainants feel satisfied that their grievance has been properly and fully considered.
3. To make the process reasonable, accessible and transparent.
4. At all times, the rules of natural justice will apply and all parties shall be treated fairly.
5. All complaints shall be heard by the Town Council's Complaints Panel, which shall report its findings to Council.

THE CODE OF PRACTICE

Before the Meeting (Hearing)

1. The complainant shall be asked to put the complaint about the Town Council's procedures in writing to the Town Clerk.
2. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the Town Clerk, they may be advised to put it to the Town Mayor in writing, sent to the Town Hall.
3. The Town Clerk shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the Complaints Panel.
4. The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting (hearing) and bring with them such representatives as they wish.
5. Seven (7) clear working days prior to the meeting (i.e. excluding weekends and public holidays), the complainant shall provide the Town Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence, which they refer to at the meeting. The Town Council shall similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which it wishes to rely at the meeting.

At the Meeting (Hearing)

6. The Complaints Panel shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the press and public. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the next full Council meeting in 'open session.'
7. The Panel Chairman to introduce everyone.
8. The Chairman to explain the procedure.
9. Complainant (or representative) to outline grounds for complaint.
10. Panel Members to ask questions of the complainant.
11. If relevant, the Town Clerk or other nominated officer, to explain the Council's position.
12. Panel Members to ask questions of the Town Clerk or other nominated officer.
13. The Town Clerk or other nominated officer and complainant to be offered the opportunity of the last word (in this order – i.e. Clerk/officer followed by complainant).
14. The Town Clerk or other nominated officer and complainant to be asked to leave the room while the Panel 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. The Town Clerk or other nominated officer and complainant return to hear the decision, or to be advised when the decision will be made.

After the Meeting (Hearing)

16. Decision confirmed in writing within seven (7) working days together with details of any action to be taken.