



Haslemere Town Council

Complaints Procedure (Revised 2026)

1. Purpose

This procedure sets out how Haslemere Town Council receives, investigates and resolves complaints from residents, users of council services, and others. It aims to be accessible, fair, timely and to support learning and service improvement.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Council, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, which affects an individual resident or group.

3. Matters not dealt with under this procedure

- Allegations of criminal activity: report to the police.
- Financial irregularity: matters relating to external audit procedures and elector audit rights.
- Councillor Code of Conduct complaints: these are usually handled under the principal authority arrangements. If you believe a councillor has breached the Code of Conduct the Council will advise on the correct route.
- Staff disciplinary or grievance matters: handled under the Council's internal staffing procedures.

4. How to make a complaint

Complaints can be made by: email, post, telephone, in person, or via the Council's online complaint form. Help to make a complaint (for example large print, translation or to record by phone) is available on request.

Required information: the complainant's name and contact details; a description of the complaint; dates and times where known; what outcome the complainant wants. The Council may ask for further information.

5. Informal resolution

Complainants should normally seek an informal resolution first by contacting the Clerk (or, if the complaint relates to the Clerk, the Mayor). Many concerns can be resolved quickly at this stage.

6. Formal complaints procedure

6.1 Submission: A complaint should be clearly marked as a formal complaint and submitted by one of the routes in section 4.

6.2 Acknowledgement: The Clerk (or the Mayor if the complaint concerns the Clerk) will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days.

6.3 Timescales: The Council will aim to provide a full response within 20 working days of receipt. If the matter is complex, the Council may extend the timescale to 40 working days but will inform the complainant and provide interim updates.

6.4 Investigation: The Clerk (or their delegate) will consider the complaint, obtain relevant information, and consult any relevant officers or councillors. Where appropriate the Chair of the committee most closely concerned will be involved.

6.5 Outcome: The complainant will be notified of the decision, reasons, and any action to be taken. Outcomes may include an apology, an explanation, corrective action, or a recommendation for policy or procedural change.

7. Appeals

7.1 If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision they may request an appeal in writing within 7 days of the decision.

7.2 Appeals will be considered by a Complaints Panel of three councillors who were not involved in the earlier decision. The Clerk may attend as adviser but not vote. If the complaint involves a named councillor or the Clerk, that person will be excluded from panel membership. The panel will seek written representations and may invite the complainant and relevant officer(s) to meet the panel.

7.3 The panel will normally provide its decision within 20 working days of the appeal being accepted. The panel's decision is final under this procedure (subject to statutory rights).

8. Unreasonable, persistent or vexatious complainants

The Council will not normally subject staff or councillors to abusive or unreasonably persistent behaviour. Where a complaint is abusive, malicious, or persistently repeated without new evidence, the Clerk (with the Chair of the Council or committee) may apply proportionate restrictions on contact and correspondence. Any such decision will be recorded and reviewed.

9. Data protection and confidentiality

Complaints will be processed in line with the Council's privacy notice and data protection policies. Personal data will be used only for the purpose of handling the complaint and retained in accordance with the Council's retention schedule. Complainants may request

copies of personal data held about them in line with data protection legislation. Data protection complaints will follow ICO guidance on handling such complaints.

10. Remedies and limitations

Possible remedies: apology; explanation; corrective action; service change; staff training. The Council cannot award damages like a court; legal redress or insurance claims are separate routes.

11. Monitoring and reporting

The Clerk will maintain a complaints log recording anonymised details, outcomes and lessons learned. An anonymised annual summary will be presented to the Finance & Governance Committee and published on the website.

12. Record retention

Complaints records are personal data and will be retained and disposed of in line with the Council's records retention policy.

13. Contact details

Town Clerk: Lisa O'Sullivan
Town Hall, High St, Haslemere GU27 2HG
Tel: 01428 654305
Email: town.clerk@haslemere-tc.gov.uk

Town Mayor: office@haslemere-tc.gov.uk

For complaints about councillor conduct: refer to the principal authority's arrangements for handling Code of Conduct complaints. Monitoring Officer contact details will be confirmed in the published procedure.

14. Review

This procedure was adopted by Haslemere Town Council on [date to be completed]. It will be reviewed at least every 3 years or earlier if required.

Front sheet for Council (one page)

Title: Revised Complaints Procedure (2026)

Purpose: To update the Council's complaints procedure to reflect sector good practice, improve accessibility, clarify data protection and strengthen impartial appeals arrangements.

Key impacts / considerations:

- Legal/data protection: aligns procedure with ICO guidance and good practice.
- Staffing: Clerk time to administer (estimated 2–4 hours per formal complaint plus panel time).
- Cost: negligible — website update and minor administration. Training if required.

Recommendation: Adopt the revised procedure and delegate the Clerk to finalise contact details and publish.

Publication table

Document	Where to publish	Frequency / notes
Complaints procedure (full)	Website + Town Hall reception	Review every 3 years or after a serious case
Complaints form & guidance	Website (form + PDF); paper on request	Keep live; accessible formats on request
Annual complaints summary	Website + committee papers	Anonymised; annual report to Finance & Governance
Privacy notice / data handling	Website	Ensure procedure links to this

Guidance for the Clerk — quick admin note

1. Acknowledgement template (5 working days):

"We acknowledge receipt of your complaint dated [date]. We will investigate and aim to reply within 20 working days. If we need more time we will inform you."

2. Logging: Use the complaints log spreadsheet with unique ID, complainant (or anonymised), date received, route, subject, assigned officer, outcome, date closed.

3. Records: Keep case files secure. Keep only necessary personal data and follow retention schedule.

4. Annual summary: collate anonymised themes, numbers, outcomes and any recommended policy changes for Finance & Governance.

5. Vexatious cases: discuss with Chair before applying contact restrictions; record decision and review after 6 months.