

COWBRIDGE WITH LLANBLETHIAN TOWN COUNCIL

LOCAL RESOLUTION POLICY & PROCEDURE

Background

The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales has agreed to the principle of referring some complaints against Members back to Community and Town Councils for a local resolution. However to date there has not been a common process for Community and Town Councils to follow in dealing with such matters. To assist the sector, One Voice Wales has drawn up a model protocol which any Community and Town Council can use in dealing with such complaints.

On this basis Cowbridge with Llanblethian Town Council has adopted the following Local Resolution Policy and Procedure.

Policy

It is the Town Council's policy to locally resolve low level complaints about Members including -

- Minor complaints from Members about Members
- Minor complaints from Officers about Members
- Members alleged to have not shown respect and consideration for others – either verbally or in writing

Complaints which will not be considered under this Policy and will be directed to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales are -

- Complaints instigated by a member of the public
- Serious complaints – breaches of the Code of Conduct/failure to disclose interests/bullying/abuse of position or trust/repeated breaches
- Complaints made by the Clerk/Proper Officer
- Vexatious, malicious or frivolous complaints
- Members' complaints about officers which should be dealt with using the Council's internal complaints process
- Repetitive low level complaints

Procedure

For the purpose of clarification, the Proper Officer (Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer) is accountable to the Council as a whole but on a day to day basis the Mayor of the Council will act as the Line Manager. Where the OVW Protocol refers to the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Council this Policy will refer to the Mayor or Deputy Mayor of the Town Council.

The Process

The Complaint

The complaint would need to be sent to the Town Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Town Council to undertake a first sift to ensure that the complaint is at a low level and should not be dealt with by way of a complaint to the Ombudsman. If appropriate, therefore, the Town Clerk/Proper Officer should firstly seek an early resolution of any such dispute by liaising informally with the individual Members concerned prior to the resolution process described below. It is vitally important that the 'accused' Member is given full details of the complaint against them so that in the interests of natural justice they are in a position to prepare their response to the accusation.

Resolution Process

The involvement of the Mayor/Deputy Mayor in the following process is not to adjudicate on the complaint, but to attempt to get the Members/officers involved to come to an agreement as to how the issue(s) could be resolved on an amicable basis.

The Town Clerk/Proper Officer will act as a facilitator for the resolution process below.

If the complaint is between Members other than the Mayor, the Clerk/Proper Officer and the Mayor will meet individually with the complainant and Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint is between Members, one of whom is the Mayor, but not the Deputy Mayor, the Town Clerk/Proper Officer and the Deputy Mayor will meet with the complainant and Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by an officer/employee, but not the Clerk/Proper Officer, against a Member other than the Mayor, the Clerk/Proper Officer and the Mayor will meet with the officer and the Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by an officer/employee, but not the Town Clerk/Proper Officer, against the Mayor, the Town Clerk/Proper Officer and the Deputy Mayor will meet with the officer and the Mayor to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by the Town Clerk/Proper Officer, then it is likely to be best practice that this complaint is forwarded by way of a complaint to the Ombudsman.

Possible Results of the Process

If an agreement is reached by Members and/or officers during this Stage then no further action is required.

If agreement cannot be reached the aggrieved Member/officer would always have the opportunity of referring the matter to the Ombudsman.

Examples of agreements might include issue of a letter of apology, a written undertaking or commitment not to breach the Code of Conduct in the future, a commitment to undertake training or an agreement that on the basis of the evidence that no further action should be taken and the matter be closed.

Time for the Process

It is the intention that all of the processes can be completed as quickly as possible to resolve the issue. However exact timing will depend on the availability of individuals to attend the meetings.

Recording of Meetings

Any meetings held with a view to discussing the issues of complaints and/or resolving matters will be minuted and recorded. This is to ensure that agreements are captured. This will also be useful in the event that matters break down or escalate and need to be referred to the Ombudsman. It may also be useful as evidence in the event of further similar breaches of the conduct and future conduct.

Breaches of Code of Conduct

The Town Council must be clear on its powers in respect of Code of Conduct matters. Investigations of possible breaches of the Code are matters for the Ombudsman. The Local Government Act 2000 gives him the authority to carry out such investigations. The Council has no legal authority to undertake such investigations or to make findings of a breach of the Code of Conduct, which are decisions that can only be reached by a Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales.