



Complaints Policy

Introduction

We recognise that on occasions, we may get things wrong or not do something that a customer thinks we should have done.

We want to give our customers a fair, consistent, and structured process to get a remedy for failures in the delivery of our services.

We recognise the importance of customer feedback to learn from as this can help us improve services for our customers.

We define a complaint as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents'

We define a service request as:

A service request is *'a request from a resident to the Council (or organisation working on their behalf) requiring action to be taken to put something right.'* This will usually be the first time you have made us aware of your dissatisfaction with our service.

Service requests are not considered to be complaints but are recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly. If you tell us you are dissatisfied with our response to your service request, we will raise this as a complaint while continuing to address the issues.

Our Complaints Process

You can choose to make either a complaint or service request via our on-line portal:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments>

You can also contact the Council by telephone, by letter or in person:

Telephone: 01727 866100

St Albans City & District Council
Civic Centre
St Peter's Street

Details of our complaints process is set out below. This includes information about the Complaint Handling Code for both the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

- You are given the option to log a complaint or a service request. You will receive an acknowledgement which summarises the issue and the outcome you are seeking. If your complaint falls outside of our remit, we will advise you once your complaint has been reviewed
- We are happy to deal with complaints that are made via a third party, but we would expect written authority to do so

The Council has a two-stage formal process:

Stage 1

1. All complaints will be defined, logged and acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. Those received via our on-line portal will receive an immediate automatic acknowledgement
2. Your complaint will be dealt with by a service manager who has direct responsibility for the department you are complaining about
3. We will respond to you within 10 working days from when your complaint was logged. In exceptional circumstances, we may extend this by a further 10 working days. If we do this, we will explain why and let you know when a full response will be sent and keep you informed of progress at regular intervals. You may receive your response before any agreed remedial actions are completed. Any outstanding actions will be tracked until completion, and you will be kept updated
4. If you raise an additional related complaint before we have completed our investigation, we will include it as part of your stage 1 response
5. If your additional complaint is unrelated, would delay our response to your original complaint or if we have already sent your stage 1 response, you must log it as a separate complaint
6. If you have a MyStAlbans account, you can track the progress of your complaint via your account
7. If you are not satisfied that we have dealt with your complaint in full, you can ask us to review it further. You should do this within 35 days of receipt of our response. You do not need to explain the reasons for your escalation request

Stage 2

1. All complaints will be defined, logged and acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. Those received via our on-line portal will receive an immediate automatic acknowledgement
2. Your complaint will be reviewed by the senior manager of the department.

3. We will respond to you within 20 working days from when your complaint was logged. In exceptional circumstances, we may extend this by a further 20 working days. If we do this, we will explain why and let you know when a full response will be sent and keep you informed of progress at regular intervals. You may receive your response before any agreed remedial actions are completed. Any outstanding actions will be tracked until completion, and you will be kept updated
4. If you have a MyStAlbans account, you can track the progress of your complaint via your account

We seek to resolve any complaints as quickly and easily as possible, working with you, through our process. We will keep you informed of any actions required through to completion.

Next Steps

If after receiving the response to a stage 2 complaint you are still dis-satisfied you can refer your complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman for review.

The Ombudsman services usually ask that you have exhausted the Council's complaints process before you contact them for assistance, but you can get in touch with them about your complaint at any stage:

www.lgo.org.uk

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Complaint reports are produced weekly for service areas and for the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a quarterly basis. In addition, meetings are held within teams to discuss outcomes of complaints, service improvements and lessons learnt, which includes Ombudsman determinations. The Council's Audit & Governance Committee scrutinise reports on complaints and compliments, service requests and feedback.

Exceptions to the Policy

The Council will deal with complaints received as set out in this policy, however, there are a number of exceptions, detailed here:

- Planning Enforcement or Building Control are now provided jointly by St Albans City and District Council and Watford Borough Council. For complaints about these services, please visit [Watford's webpage](#)
- Some complaints may be about decisions that cannot be changed or can only be changed with democratic approval. If a complaint relates to a Council or Government policy, we will still record it, but it will not be progressed through our formal complaints process. This includes complaints that are simply criticisms or disagreement with Council policy or decisions made

- A complaint by an applicant or agent in relation to the refusal of planning permission or non-determination of a planning application for which there is a statutory appeals process
www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/appeals/planningappeals
- A complaint where the customer or the Council has started legal proceedings or has taken court action but not cases where a customer has simply threatened to start legal proceedings against the Council
Legal proceedings - this is defined as details of the case having been filed at court
- A complaint in relation to housing benefit for which there is a statutory appeals process
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/appealing-benefit-decision>
- A complaint about a Right to Buy valuation for which there is a statutory process for review (ss128A & 128B Housing Act 1985)
- A complaint about the Council's Housing Allocation policy and decisions made in line with this policy.
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/finding-home>
- A complaint relating to the suitability of our accommodation where this is being addressed through the legal process
- Council Tax Liability, Discounts and Exemptions – if you disagree with some aspect of your council tax bill because you do not think you are liable for council tax for that dwelling, or you think an exemption or discount should be applied, you need to appeal in the first instance to the Revenues team
counciltax@stalbands.gov.uk
- If your appeal is turned down or not answered you have the right of appeal to the Valuation Tribunal –
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/appeals>
- Council Tax Bandings – if you disagree with the band of your property, further information can be obtained from –
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/appeals>
- A complaint about the issue of a penalty charge notice by our parking services and the recovery process thereof, which are subject to a separate appeal process
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/parking-fines>
- A complaint from a third party about a planning application under consideration by the Council. This will be forwarded to the case officer and treated as a comment on the application
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/how-comment-planning-application>
- A complaint by an employee about a personnel matter, including appointments, dismissals, pay, pensions and discipline. These are dealt with under the Council's personnel procedures

- A complaint about the Council's recruitment process
- A complaint about an issue that was known about for more than 12 months before the complaint was made to the Council, unless there is a good reason for the delay
- A complaint about a Freedom of Information Act request, Environmental Information Regulations request, or a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 2018
<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>
- Any other instance where an alternative appeal mechanism exists
- Anonymous complaints will not be considered under our procedure, as it is not possible to provide a response

If for any reason we cannot review a complaint under our procedure, we will provide you with the reasons why.

Making a complaint about a councillor

If you wish to complain about the conduct of a Member of St Albans City & District Council or a Member of a parish or town council, please visit this page:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/councillors-mayoralty-and-town-twinning>

Vexatious Complainants

We have a duty to make sure that public money is spent wisely and achieves value for complainants and the wider public. We also have a duty to protect the safety and wellbeing of our staff.

Our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy sets out how we will manage serial, persistent and vexatious complainants. This document can be found at the following link:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments>

Further Advice

For further information or advice about the Council's complaints procedure, please contact our Customer Delivery Team on 01727 866100.

If you need help to make your complaint, please tell us. This could include larger print documents or documents in an alternative language. All requests will be considered and where possible, acted upon in line with the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Whistleblowing policy - <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/performance-vision-policies-strategies-and-plans>

Author	
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