

ST ATHAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL COMPLAINTS POLICY



Adopted by St Athan Community Council at the Full General Council meeting held on Tuesday 7th July 2026 and replaces the previous Complaints Policy.

Review due:

Version: 2.0.

Adoption

This Complaints Policy was adopted by St Athan Community Council on:

Minute reference: 3504

Review date: May 2027

Signed:

Name:

Chair of St Athan Community Council

1. Purpose

St Athan Community Council welcomes feedback, including complaints, compliments, suggestions and representations. Feedback helps the Council understand what is working well, where something has gone wrong and how services, administration and communication can be improved.

The purpose of this policy is to set out a clear and fair process for dealing with complaints about the Council's services, administration, procedures and customer service.

2. Scope of this policy

This policy applies to complaints about St Athan Community Council as an organisation. This may include complaints about:

- a Council service, facility, activity or function;
- delay, failure to respond or failure to provide a service;
- the way a Council policy or procedure has been applied;
- the standard of administration or customer service;
- failure to follow Council procedures, Standing Orders or Financial Regulations; and
- the actions of a Council employee when acting on behalf of the Council, subject to the employment-related limits in this policy.

This policy does not override statutory procedures, employment procedures, data protection rights, freedom of information rights, safeguarding referrals, legal proceedings or the separate process for councillor conduct complaints.

3. Our principles

When handling complaints the Council will aim to:

- deal with complaints fairly, proportionately and without unnecessary delay;
- be polite, helpful and clear in its communication;
- seek informal resolutions where appropriate;
- investigate complaints properly and objectively;
- explain the outcome and the reasons for it;
- apologise and take reasonable corrective action where something has gone wrong;
- protect personal information and confidentiality; and
- learn from complaints and use them to improve Council services and procedures.

4. How to provide feedback or make a complaint

Feedback or complaints may be made by the person affected, or by a representative such as a family member, friend or advocate. If a complaint is made on behalf of someone else, the Council may need the affected person's consent before responding in detail.

Website	www.stathancommunitycouncil.gov.uk
Email	clerk@stathancommunitycouncil.gov.uk
Telephone	07867 218099
Post	St Athan Community Council, Old School Hall, Church Lane, St Athan, Barry, CF62 4PL
Councillor	You may raise feedback with a councillor, who should pass it to the Clerk unless the complaint is about the Clerk.

To help the Council deal with a complaint, please provide your name and contact details, a clear description of the issue, relevant dates, any supporting information and the outcome you are seeking.

5. Help to make a complaint

The Council will make reasonable efforts to help people access this procedure. Please contact the Clerk if you need assistance to submit feedback or a complaint, or if you need information in a different format.

The Council may accept complaints made in writing, by email, by telephone or in person by prior arrangement. Where a complaint is made verbally, the Council may prepare a written summary and ask the complainant to confirm that it is accurate.

6. Confidentiality and data protection

The Council will handle personal information in accordance with its data protection obligations. Information will only be shared with those who need it to consider, investigate or respond to the complaint, unless the Council is legally required to disclose it or there is a safeguarding, criminal, legal or public interest reason to do so.

Complaints will normally be handled confidentially. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where the complaint raises safeguarding concerns, alleged criminal conduct, legal proceedings,

serious risk, audit matters, standards matters or other issues that the Council is required or entitled to refer to another authority or body.

Anonymous complaints may be considered at the Council's discretion. However, it may be difficult to investigate or respond to an anonymous complaint where the Council cannot obtain further information.

7. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council that requires a response. A complaint may include:

- a service being delayed, not provided or provided to an unsatisfactory standard;
- failure to follow an agreed procedure, statutory duty or published service standard;
- poor communication or failure to respond within a reasonable timescale;
- unhelpful or inappropriate behaviour by someone acting for the Council;
- concern about how the Council has handled personal information; or
- dissatisfaction with the way a Council policy has been applied.

8. What this policy does not cover

This policy should not be used for matters that have their own legal, regulatory or internal procedure. Examples include:

- complaints that a councillor has breached the Code of Conduct;
- employee grievance, disciplinary, capability or employment matters;
- safeguarding concerns, which should be referred immediately to the appropriate safeguarding authority or emergency services;
- requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations or data protection legislation;
- appeals against Council decisions where an appeal or review process exists;
- attempts to reopen a Council decision simply because the complainant disagrees with it;
- legal claims, compensation claims, insurance claims or matters subject to court, tribunal or other legal proceedings;
- complaints about services provided by another authority or organisation; and
- complaints about a County Councillor, Senedd Member or Member of Parliament.

Where a complaint is outside this policy, the Council will try to signpost the complainant to the appropriate procedure or organisation, where it is able to do so.

9. Complaints about Councillors, the Code of Conduct and the Local Resolution Protocol

Complaints that a St Athan Community Councillor has breached the Members' Code of Conduct are not dealt with under the Council's service complaints procedure. They are standards matters and should normally be considered under the Code of Conduct process or referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, depending on the nature and seriousness of the allegation.

A complaint about councillor conduct may be referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Vale of Glamorgan Council's Monitoring Officer may also be involved in standards matters where appropriate. The Clerk can signpost complainants to the relevant process but cannot determine whether a councillor has breached the Code of Conduct.

Where the matter is a low-level councillor/officer conduct issue, misunderstanding or minor interpersonal dispute, and it does not amount to serious misconduct, a criminal allegation, a public service complaint or a formal employment grievance, the Council may consider whether it is appropriate to use St Athan Community Council's Local Resolution Protocol, adopted on 3 December 2025. The Local Resolution Protocol is intended to support early, proportionate and confidential resolution. It does not replace the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Code of Conduct process, the Council's Disciplinary and Grievance Policy, or this complaints procedure for public service complaints.

10. Complaints involving employees, the Clerk or the Chair

The Council may investigate complaints about the service received from an employee or someone acting on behalf of the Council. However, any employment, disciplinary or management action is confidential and will not be reported to the complainant in detail.

If the complaint is about the Clerk / Proper Officer, it should be marked confidential and sent to the Chair. If the complaint is about the Chair, it should be marked confidential and sent to the Vice-Chair or another councillor nominated by the Council. If there is a conflict of interest, the Council will appoint an appropriate councillor or panel to consider the complaint.

Councillors should not attempt to investigate complaints independently unless authorised to do so by the Council or under this policy. This protects fairness, confidentiality and the integrity of any investigation.

11. Time limits for making a complaint

A complaint should normally be made as soon as possible and within 12 months of the matter complained about, or within 12 months of the complainant becoming aware of the issue. The Council may consider older complaints where there is a good reason for the delay and where it is still possible to investigate fairly.

12. Stage 1 - initial resolution and investigation

The Council will aim to resolve complaints informally and directly where this is suitable. If informal resolution is not suitable or is unsuccessful, the complaint will be handled at Stage 1.

At Stage 1, the Council will normally:

- acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days, unless a full response can be provided quickly;
- clarify the complaint and the outcome being sought, where necessary;
- identify who will consider or investigate the complaint;
- review the relevant information and, where appropriate, speak to relevant people;
- aim to provide a written response within 10 working days of acknowledgement;
- explain any delay and provide a revised response date if the matter is complex; and
- explain whether the complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld, with reasons.

The Stage 1 response will usually be sent by the Clerk, unless the complaint concerns the Clerk or it would be inappropriate for the Clerk to respond.

13. Stage 2 - review by the Chair, Vice-Chair or nominated councillors

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, they may request a Stage 2 review. The request should explain why the Stage 1 response is considered unsatisfactory and what outcome is being sought.

A Stage 2 review will normally be considered by the Chair, Vice-Chair or one or more nominated councillors who have not been directly involved in the matter. Where appropriate, the Council may appoint a small panel of councillors.

At Stage 2, the reviewer or panel will consider whether the Stage 1 response was reasonable, whether relevant information was considered, whether the Council followed a fair process and whether any further remedy or action is appropriate.

The Council will aim to provide the Stage 2 response within 20 working days of receiving the request for review. If this is not possible, the Council will explain the reason for the delay and provide a revised response date.

14. Outcomes and remedies

Possible outcomes include:

- the complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld;
- an apology where the Council has got something wrong;
- an explanation of what happened and why;
- correction of an error where possible;
- review of a procedure, communication or service standard;
- staff, councillor or contractor learning, where appropriate; and
- referral to another organisation, regulator or statutory process where required.

The Council cannot always provide the outcome requested by a complainant. Where this is the case, the Council will explain why.

15. Learning from complaints

The Council will use complaints to identify learning and service improvements. The Clerk may report anonymised complaint themes, outcomes and recommended improvements to Council where appropriate. Personal, confidential, employment or standards information will not be reported publicly unless disclosure is lawful and necessary.

16. Unreasonable or persistent complainant behaviour

The Council recognises that people may be upset or frustrated when making a complaint. Complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. Council employees and councillors also have the right to be treated with courtesy and respect.

The Council may take proportionate steps where behaviour becomes abusive, discriminatory, threatening, unreasonably persistent, excessively demanding or where repeated complaints have already been fully considered. Any restriction on contact will be reasonable, recorded and kept under review.

17. Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after completing the Council's complaints procedure, they may complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Ombudsman is independent of public bodies and can consider complaints about public services in Wales, including certain complaints about community and town councils.

The Ombudsman generally expects complainants to give the Council an opportunity to respond before referring the matter, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Telephone	0300 790 0203
Post	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, 1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, CF35 5LJ
Website	www.ombudsman.wales
Welsh language	The Ombudsman states that correspondence may be submitted in Welsh and this will not lead to a delay.

Complaints about councillor conduct are also made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales using the Code of Conduct complaints route, not through this Council service complaints procedure.

18. Quick reference table

Stage / issue	Who usually deals with it	Target timescale
Acknowledgement	Clerk or appropriate councillor	Within 3 working days
Stage 1	Clerk, Chair or nominated person as appropriate	Aim: 10 working days
Stage 2	Chair, Vice-Chair or nominated councillors not directly involved	Aim: 20 working days
Councillor conduct complaint	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales / Monitoring Officer process	Outside this policy
Safeguarding concern	Appropriate safeguarding authority / emergency services	Immediate referral where risk is identified
Low-level councillor/officer conduct issue or misunderstanding	Local Resolution Protocol, where suitable	Informal/local resolution route; not for public service complaints, serious misconduct, criminal allegations or employment grievances

19. Complaint form

This form may be used to submit a complaint. A complainant may also provide the same information by email, letter, telephone or in person by arrangement.

Name	
Address	
Telephone / email	
Are you complaining on behalf of someone else? If yes, please provide details and consent where required.	
What happened? Please include dates, names and relevant details.	
What have you already done to try to resolve the issue?	
What outcome are you seeking?	
Supporting documents enclosed / attached	

Note for Council review: This draft should be checked against the Council's current Standing Orders, adopted Code of Conduct, local resolution protocol, staff/employment procedures, data protection arrangements and website publication format before adoption.