



# **HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR TOWN COUNCIL**

**(Including Complaints/Vexatious Complaints  
Procedures)**

**Adopted 20 July 2021**

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Meetings .....	3
How to contact Camelford Town Council .....	3
Information about you.....	4
Where to find information about CTC .....	4
Noticeboards.....	4
The Local Press.....	4
Website .....	4
Social Media .....	5
Facebook.....	5
Twitter .....	5
Procedures .....	5
Procedures for Communicating with the Council.....	5
Telephone calls .....	5
Website Communication .....	6
Social media .....	6
Do you want an item put on the agenda? .....	6
Do you want to speak at a meeting? .....	6
How to Complain to your Council .....	6
Verbal Complaints.....	7
Written Complaints.....	7
Complaints Against Council Members or Officers .....	7
Inappropriate Behaviour .....	7
Abusive, Persistent and Vexatious Complaints.....	8
Community Engagement Strategy .....	13

## Introduction

CTC is committed to ensuring that decision-making is transparent and accountable. It will enable the local community to influence decisions that impact on their lives and on the wellbeing of the local community as a whole through clear communication channels.

Efficient, clear communication between the community and Camelford Town Council (CTC) is really important to us. This document sets out policy, procedure and standards that CTC have in place in order to communicate with our community. Better service and communication between town councils and their communities is based on two central themes; transparent decision-making and customer service.

This document includes basic service goals such as; turnaround times for correspondence, returning telephone calls, as well as notification and complaint handling.

## Meetings

Our meetings are run in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12, which set out how we should notify you of our full Council Meetings and Annual Meeting of the Council, and also includes provision on public participation. Based on these principles, we are committed to ensuring that there is:

- Community access to two council meetings each month (excluding August and January where there is only one meeting) - 15 minutes participation at the start of each council meeting.
- Public access to council records (see Freedom of Information Policy in Appendix 3)
- Agendas published on the Town Council website, social media and local noticeboards 3 clear working days ahead of any meeting.
- Approved minutes of the previous meeting on the Town Council website, social media and the main local noticeboard.
- Provision for conducting community surveys
- Provision for public meetings on topical local issues
- Provision of service and information to the local community through the Town Hall offices, by telephone, email, Facebook message, website contact form and letter.
- Provision to assist members of the local community who wish to contact councillors

## How to contact Camelford Town Council

You are able to contact The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk at Camelford Town Council via a number of options:

### **By person at:**

the Town Hall, Market Place, Camelford PL32 9PD

Monday & Tuesday	10.00am – 4.30pm
Wednesday & Thursday	10.00am – 1.00pm
Friday	9am to 1pm (by appointment only)
Saturday	10.00am – 1.00pm (only library staff who will be able to take messages)

**Telephone: 01840 212880**

**Email:** [clerk@camelford-tc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@camelford-tc.gov.uk) or [admin@camelford-tc.gov.uk](mailto:admin@camelford-tc.gov.uk)

**Website contact form:** <http://www.camelford-tc.gov.uk/general-enquiries/>

**Facebook page/private message -** <https://www.facebook.com/camelfordtc/>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/CamelfordTC>

You are able to contact Councillors directly, and their details are listed on the website:

<http://www.camelford-tc.gov.uk/your-councillors/>

Messages can be left with CTC staff who will pass on the message, either by calling the Councillor or emailing the Councillor (whichever is deemed more appropriate).

## Information about you

We receive phone calls and emails from the general public, whether it is to get in touch with a Councillor, rent an allotment, enquire about an event. When we receive communication from you, we will keep your details in order to process your enquiry. When we are satisfied that your enquiry has been dealt with appropriately, we will destroy your details either by confidential waste or deletion from our electronic database.

We will inform you, at the time of enquiry, who we will pass your information to, and for which purposes. For example, if you want something raised at a Council meeting, we will forward your enquiry to all Councillors. For more details see heading "Want to put an item on the agenda?" A copy of all correspondence is available to the general public who attend meetings. Our Privacy Notice and Data Protection and Information Policy which can be found on the website.

## Where to find information about CTC

### Noticeboards

We have 4 CTC noticeboards in the Parish:

- By the crossing on the A39 by the Masons Arms Public House (agendas, minutes, audit information, other information regarding events and allotments).
- Outside the Town Hall (limited to agendas, minutes and a calendar of meetings)
- Tregoodwell (limited to agendas)
- Helstone (outside the Village Hall) (limited to agendas)

We also have a noticeboard within the Library, where we will put up information about any planning applications and events.

### The Local Press

We work closely with the Camelford & Delabole Post, who post news articles. They are invited to each Town Council meeting and will often produce an article following that meeting on any significant news.

### Website

The website is updated regularly and includes, amongst other things, the following information:

- Agendas (which includes details of income and expenditure)
- Minutes

- Annual Calendar of Meetings
- Councillor contact details
- Copies of statutory documents (i.e. the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts)
- Policy and Procedure (including monthly and annual Transparency Code information)
- Planning Log (listing all planning applications)
- Events (including library events)
- Surveys/consultations
- Neighbourhood Development Plan information

## Social Media

### Facebook

We publish the following information on Facebook:

- Agendas
- Minutes
- Events
- Road closure information (from Cornwall Council)
- Surveys/consultations
- Neighbourhood Development Plan information
- Allotment information
- General CTC news

### Twitter

We publish the following information on Twitter:

- Agendas
- Minutes
- Neighbourhood Development plan information
- Events
- General CTC news

## Procedures

### Procedures for Communicating with the Council

#### Telephone calls

Telephone contact between council staff and members of the public gives CTC an opportunity to respond quickly and effectively to enquiries, comments and complaints from members of the public.

Where possible, we try to ensure that:

- All telephone calls are answered either in person or by an automated telephone answering system.
- All staff are responsible for answering the telephone (including library staff).
- All staff will respond to the call and promptly transfer the caller onto the member of staff who can best respond or; if the call cannot be responded to, take a message including brief details of the caller's name, contact details and the nature of the enquiry. We will pass this information onto the person we feel can answer your question.
- Staff aim to deal with enquiries as soon as possible, usually responding the same day. If it is not possible to deal with the enquiry the same day (due to staff absence/training etc), the caller will be informed of an estimated time when the enquiry can be dealt with and who will be calling back.

- Any complaints will be logged in our Feedback computerised file. We do not hold caller information, but just the nature of the call. We review this every 2 months to see whether there is an issue that needs escalating at Council.

### Website Communication

CTC staff are notified via email when an enquiry comes through the website contact form. CTC staff aim to reply the same day and will inform you if your enquiry needs to be passed to someone else in order to be dealt with, and if this is the case, give an estimated time when you can expect a reply and by whom.

### Social media

CTC have their own Facebook page and only comments and private messages through that specific page will be answered. CTC do post events on other sites (What's on in Camelford & Surrounding Area, Events Cornwall & Devon), but will only respond to questions from the CTC Facebook page.

Any private FB messages will be responded to by CTC staff. CTC staff aim to reply the same day and will inform you if your enquiry needs to be passed to someone else in order to be dealt with, and if this is the case, give an estimated time when you can expect a reply and by whom.

### Do you want an item put on the agenda?

If you would like an issue to be discussed at a Council meeting, this needs to go on the agenda and must be received, in writing, by the Clerk at least 3 working days before the next meeting. If the correspondence is received later than that, it will be put on the following agenda. The Clerk will inform you of the date of the meeting your correspondence will be discussed. Email correspondence, Facebook message, Twitter message will also be accepted forms of correspondence.

Correspondence is distributed to all Councillors and is available for the public to view at the Council meeting (apart from Part 2 paperwork which is confidential).

It is important that you are also aware that members of the public are entitled to record meetings (e.g filming, audio recording). For further information, see Appendix 1 - Policy for Broadcasting or using Social Media at Council Meetings.”

### Do you want to speak at a meeting?

At the start of each meeting, we allow members of the public to speak on any issue for a 3-minute period during the 15-minute public participation agenda item. You must inform the Clerk at least 3 clear working days before the meeting that you would like to speak. A brief summary of what you would like to speak about would be helpful. You can request this by any of the communication methods listed above.

### How to Complain to your Council

Camelford Town Council recognises that from time to time there will be concerns expressed by members of the public over the activities of the Council, one of its members or employees. To address these issues the Council has adopted a procedure for the handling of complaints. This procedure allows people to have a form of address to the Council if they feel they have a complaint, or have been unfairly treated in their dealings with the Council staff, Councillors, the Council or its Committees.

If a member of the public feels that his/her complaint has not been dealt with satisfactorily he /she may submit a complaint against a member/members of the Council to the Monitoring Officer at Cornwall Council:

The Monitoring Officer, Cornwall Council, Treyew Road, Truro, TR1 3AY.

## Verbal Complaints

1. On receipt of a complaint by telephone or in person the Clerk will try to satisfy the complainant immediately or as soon as is practicable.
2. Any anonymous complaint will not be dealt with.
3. If the Clerk is unable to answer the complaint immediately, then full details of the complaint together with the complainant's telephone number, name and contact details will be recorded so that a further verbal response can be made as soon as possible.
4. If a verbal response is unable to satisfy, then the Clerk/member will ask that the complaint be put in writing in order that it can be investigated more fully.

## Written Complaints

1. On receiving a written complaint, the Clerk shall try to settle the complaint directly.
2. If the complaint is about the behaviour of a member or employee of the Council or a Contractor used by the Parish Council, the Clerk must also notify the person and offer the opportunity for comment on the manner in which it is intended to try and settle the complaint.
3. If necessary, the Clerk will send a holding letter to the complainant to allow further time to address the issues raised.
4. The Clerk or Chairman shall bring any written complaint which has not been settled to the next meeting of the Council and the Clerk shall notify the complainant of the date of the meeting. The Complainant will be offered the opportunity to explain the nature of the complaint to the meeting.
5. The Clerk shall consult with the Chairman/Vice Chairman to consider whether the written complaint warrants discussion at a Council meeting in the absence of the press and public, with the decision on the complaint being announced at the Council meeting in public.
6. The Clerk will communicate in writing the decision that has been made by the Council and the nature of any action taken by the Council.

## Complaints Against Council Members or Officers

1. Any complaint against a member or officer must be submitted in writing.
2. If the complaint is against the actions of the Clerk, it should be submitted in writing to the Chairman.
3. If the complaint is made against the actions of a member or employee, the Clerk will present the complaint to the Council for consideration at a meeting held in the absence of the press or public.
4. If the complaint is made against the actions of the Clerk, the Chairman will present the complaint to the Council for consideration at a meeting held in the absence of the press or public.
5. The Complainant may be invited to attend part of the meeting to explain the nature of their complaint, in the absence of the public and press.
6. Persons mentioned in the complaint will have the opportunity to explain the nature of their actions to the meeting, in the absence of the public and press.
7. The result of any Council consideration of a complaint will be announced at a Council meeting in public.

## Inappropriate Behaviour

We understand that sometimes the general public may not be happy with a decision made by the Council. However, our staff and Councillors have the right to carry out their work without threat or abuse, and it will ensure that behaviour must stay within certain acceptable limits. The council is entitled to consider placing and enforcing limits on contacts between CTC and the person displaying the inappropriate behaviour.

## Abusive, Persistent and Vexatious Complaints

- 1.1 This section identifies situations where a complainant, either individually or as part of a group, or a group of complainants, might be considered to be habitual or vexatious and ways of responding to these situations.
- 1.2 In this policy the term habitual means 'done repeatedly or as a habit'. The term vexatious is recognised in law and means 'denoting an action or the bringer of an action that is brought without sufficient grounds for winning, purely to cause annoyance to the defendant'. This policy intends to assist in identifying and managing persons who seek to be disruptive to CTC through pursuing an unreasonable course of conduct.

The term complaint in this policy includes requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the [General Data Protection Rules 2018 \(GDPR\)](#) and reference to the Complaints Procedure is, where relevant, to be interpreted as meaning a request under those Acts.

- 1.4 Habitual or vexatious complainants can be a problem for CTC staff and members. The difficulty in handling such complainants is that they are time consuming and wasteful of resources in terms of staff and member time. While CTC endeavours to respond with patience and sympathy to the needs of all complainants there are times when there is nothing further which can reasonably be done to assist or to rectify a real or perceived problem.
- 1.5 Raising of legitimate queries or criticisms of a complaints procedure as it progresses, for example if agreed timescales are not met, should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as a vexatious or an unreasonably persistent complainant. Similarly, the fact that a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and seeks to challenge it once, or more than once, should not necessarily cause him or her to be labelled vexatious or unreasonably persistent.
- 1.6 The aim of this policy is to contribute to the overall aim of dealing with all complainants in ways which are demonstrably consistent, fair and reasonable.

## 2. Habitual or Vexatious Complainants

For the purpose of this policy the following definition of habitual or vexatious complainants will be used:

*The repeated and/or obsessive pursuit of:-*

- (1) *unreasonable complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes; and or*
- (2) *reasonable complaints in an unreasonable manner*

Prior to considering its implementation CTC will send a *summary* of this policy to the complainant to give them prior notification of its possible implementation.

Where complaints continue and have been identified as habitual or vexatious in accordance with the criteria set out in Section 3, the Clerk will convene a panel of three members to including the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor and one other member to seek agreement to treat the complainant as a habitual or vexatious complainant and for the appropriate course of action to be taken. Section 4 details the options available for dealing with habitual or vexatious complaint



The Clerk on behalf of CTC will notify complainants, in writing, of the reasons why their complaint has been treated as habitual or vexatious and the action that will be taken. *The Cornwall Councillor for that area will also be informed that a constituent has been designated as an habitual or vexatious complainant.*

The status of the complainant will be kept under review. If a complainant subsequently demonstrates a more reasonable approach, then their status will be reviewed.

### **Definitions**

CTC defines unreasonably persistent and vexatious complainants as those complainants who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with CTC, hinder CTC's consideration of their or other people's complaints. The description 'unreasonably persistent' and 'vexatious' may apply separately or jointly to a particular complainant.

Examples include the way in which, or frequency with which, complainants raise their complaint with staff or how complainants respond when informed of CTC's decision about the complaint.

Features of an unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious complainant include the following (the list is not exhaustive, nor does one single feature on its own necessarily imply that the person will be considered as being in this category):

#### **An unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious complainant may:**

- Have insufficient or no grounds for their complaint and be making the complaint only to annoy (or for reasons that he or she does not admit or make obvious)
- Refuse to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of assistance
- Refuse to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- Refuse to accept that issues are not within the remit of the complaints policy and procedure despite having been provided with information about the scope of the policy and procedure
- Refuse to accept that issues are not within the power of CTC to investigate, change or influence.
- Insist on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice (e.g. insisting that there must not be any written record of the complaint)
- Make what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaints, and seek to have them dismissed or replaced
- Make an unreasonable number of contacts with CTC, by any means in relation to a specific complaint or complaints
- Make persistent and unreasonable demands or expectations of staff and/or the complaints process after the unreasonableness has been explained to the complainant (an example of this could be a complainant who insists on immediate responses to questions, frequent and/or complex letters, faxes, telephone calls or emails)
- Harass or verbally abuse or otherwise seek to intimidate staff dealing with their complaint, in relation to their complaint by use of foul or inappropriate language or by the use of offensive and racist language

- Raise subsidiary or new issues whilst a complaint is being addressed that were not part of the complaint at the start of the complaint process
- Introduce trivial or irrelevant new information whilst the complaint is being investigated and expect this to be taken into account and commented on
- Change the substance or basis of the complaint without reasonable justification whilst the complaint is being addressed
- Deny statements he or she made at an earlier stage in the complaint process
- Electronically record meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other person(s) involved
- Adopts an excessively 'scattergun' approach, for instance, pursuing a complaint or complaints not only with CTC, but at the same time with, for example, a Member of Parliament, other Councils, elected Councillors of this and other Councils, CTC's Independent Auditor, the Standards Board, the Police or solicitors.
- Refuse to accept the outcome of the complaint process after its conclusion, repeatedly arguing the point, complaining about the outcome, and/or denying that an adequate response has been given
- Make the same complaint repeatedly, perhaps with minor differences, after the complaints procedure has been concluded and insist that the minor differences make these 'new' complaints which should be put through the full complaints procedure
- Persistently approach CTC through different routes about the same issue
- Persist in seeking an outcome which CTC has explained is unrealistic for legal or policy (or other valid) reasons
- Refuse to accept documented evidence as factual
- Complain about or challenge an issue based on an historic and/or an irreversible decision or incident

Combine some or all of these features

### **Imposing Restrictions**

CTC will ensure that the complaint is being, or has been, investigated properly according to the adopted complaints procedure.

In the first instance the Clerk will consult with the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) of CTC prior to issuing a warning to the complainant. The Clerk will contact the complainant in writing, or by email, to explain why their behaviour is causing concern and ask them to change their behaviour and outline the actions that CTC may take if they do not comply.

If the disruptive behaviour continues, the Clerk will issue a reminder letter to the complainant advising them that the way in which they will be allowed to CTC in future will be restricted. This decision will be made following the Clerk consulting with a panel of three members to usually include the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) of CTC. This letter will inform the complainant in writing of what procedures have been put in place and for what period.

Any restriction that is imposed on the complainant's contact with CTC will be appropriate and proportionate and the complainant will be advised of the period of time that the restriction will be in place for. In most cases restrictions will apply for between 3-6 months, but in exceptional cases this may be extended. In such cases the restrictions would be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

Restrictions will be tailored to deal with the individual circumstances of the complainant and may include:

- Banning the complainant from making contact by telephone except through a third party eg a solicitor, a Councillor or a friend acting on their behalf
- Banning the complainant from sending emails to individual and/or all CTC members and insisting they only correspond by letter
- Requiring contact to take place with one named member of staff only
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and/or times and/or duration
- Requiring any personal contact to take place in the presence of an appropriate witness

Letting the complainant know that CTC will not reply to or acknowledge any further contact from them on the specific topic of that complaint (in this case, a designated member of staff will be identified who will read future correspondence)

When the decision has been taken to apply this policy to a complainant, the Clerk will contact the complainant in writing to explain:-

- Why the decision has been taken
- What action is being taken
- The duration of that action

The Clerk will enclose a copy of this policy in the letter to the complainant.

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way that is unacceptable, the Clerk, in consultation with a panel of three Members to include the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) of CTC may decide to refuse all contact with the complainant and stop any investigation into his or her complaint.

Where the behaviour is so extreme or it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, other options will be considered, e.g. the reporting of the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, the complainant may not be given prior warning of that action.

## 5. **New complaints from complainants who are treated as abusive, vexatious or persistent**

- 5.1 New complaints from people who have come under this policy will be treated on their merits. The Clerk, in consultation with a panel of three members to include the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) of CTC will decide whether any restrictions that have been applied before are still appropriate and necessary in relation to the new complaint. A blanket policy is not supported, nor ignoring genuine service requests or complaints where they are founded.
- 5.2 The fact that a complainant is judged to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious and any restrictions imposed on CTC's contact with him or her, will be recorded and notified to those who need to know within CTC.

## 6. **Review**

- 6.1 The status of a complainant judged to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious will be reviewed by a panel of three members to include the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) of CTC, after three months, and at the end of every subsequent three months within the period during which the policy is to apply.
- 6.2 The complainant will be informed of the result of this review if the decision to apply this policy has been changed or extended.

## 7. **Record Keeping**

- 7.1 The Clerk will retain adequate records of the details of the case and the action that has been taken. Records will be kept of:-
- The name and address of each member of the public who is treated as abusive, vexatious or persistent
  - When the restriction came into force and ends
  - What the restrictions are
  - When the person and CTC were advised
- 7.2 CTC will be provided with an annual report giving information about members of the public who have been treated as vexatious/persistent as per this policy.

## Community Engagement Strategy

The Community Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) seeks to support Camelford Town Council's (CTC) Aims and Vision for the future by involving the local community in order:

- To promote and represent the community's views and aspirations at local, county and regional level.
- To serve those who live in Camelford Parish, working the town and visit the town.
- To promote growth of CTC's activities where new services can be taken on effectively and efficiently.
- To strive to improve the quality of life for all residents of the town.
- To work in partnership with local, county and regional level to promote and provide for the well-being of the town.

### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

CTC's community engagement strategy is a responsive document which addresses:

- The role of community engagement and its importance;
- How CTC engages the community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community;
- How CTC can improve community engagement.

The Strategy will be continually monitored to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement through the development of a network of relationships;
- Ensure that there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with the community about decisions which would/could affect them;
- Ensure that there is clear and open communication and accessibility to all;
- Enable and ensure that all types of feedback obtained from the community have an input on the decision-making process and delivery of services;
- Identify how CTC can enhance its profile through engagement with the community.

CTC is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Monitoring the above activities and services, in order to further improve relationships with the community.
- Ensuring that any information published is clear, concise and widely available both in hard copy and electronic versions.
- Identifying opportunities to work with all ages of our community, in particular, our youth, the elderly and those vulnerable in our community. CTC will work with existing and other local community groups (including local schools) as and when the need arises.
- Publicising the achievements from working relationships between CTC and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and raise civic pride.
- Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons are learned and carried forward and an assessment of how effective/useful the consultation was. We take part in the Camelford Show each year.