



## Lewes District Council

### COMPLAINT FORM

#### 1. Your Details

Please provide us with your name and contact details.

<b>Title:</b>	Miss
<b>First Name:</b>	Claire
<b>Last Name:</b>	Lacey
<b>Address:</b>	Peacehaven Town Council Community House Meridian Centre Greenwich Way Peacehaven BN10 8BB
<b>Daytime Telephone:</b>	01273585493 x6
<b>Evening Telephone:</b>	-
<b>Mobile Telephone:</b>	07891518476
<b>Email Address:</b>	clairelacey@peacehavencouncil.co.uk

Your address and contact details will not usually be released unless necessary or to deal with your complaint.

However, we will tell the following people that you have made this complaint:

- the Councillor(s) you are complaining about;

- the Monitoring Officer of the authority; and
- the Parish or Town Clerk (if applicable).

We will tell them your name and give them a summary of your complaint. We will give them full details of your complaint where necessary or appropriate to be able to deal with it. If you have serious concerns about your name or details of your complaint being released to the Member about whom it relates, please complete Section 5 of this form.

Please tell us which complainant type best describes you:

- Member of the public
- An elected or co-opted member of an authority
- An independent person of Lewes District Council
- Member of Parliament
- Local Authority Monitoring Officer
- Other council officer or authority employee
- Other (please specify)

## 2. Making Your Complaint

Please provide us with the name of the Councillor(s) you believe have breached the Code of Conduct and the name of their authority:

Title	First Name	Last Name	Council or Authority Name
Mr	Robert	Robertson	Peacehaven Town Council

## 3. Date of Complaint

Please inform us of any relevant dates concerning your complaints (e.g. when the incident occurred, any relevant meetings dates etc).

**26/07/2016**

4. Please explain in this section (or on separate sheets) what the Councillor has done that you believe breaches the Code of Conduct. If you are complaining about more than one Councillor you should clearly explain what each individual person has done that you believe breaches the Code of Conduct.

It is important that you provide all the information you wish to have taken into account by the Monitoring Officer when it decides whether to take any action on your complaint. For example:-

- You should be specific, wherever possible, about exactly what you are alleging the Councillor said or did. For instance, instead of writing that the Councillor insulted you, you should state what it was they said.
- You should provide the dates of the alleged incidents wherever possible. If you cannot provide exact dates it is important to give a general timeframe.
- You should confirm whether there are any witnesses to the alleged conduct and provide their names and contact details if possible.
- You should provide any relevant background information.

Please provide us with the details of your complaint. Continue on a separate sheet if there is not enough space on this form.

Cllr Robert Robertson was the Mayor elect for Peacehaven Town Council from May 2014 until 17<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

In January 2016 it was discovered (via social media status updates) that Cllr Robertson was attending a visit to China with the then Mayor of Telscombe, our neighbouring town.

The visit appeared to have been arranged over the Christmas and New Year break, leaving England on the 8th January and returning on 16th January 2016.

The visit also included the wives of those Councillors.

The Councillors were both informed verbally and in writing that a Mayoral visit should be arranged via the Civic Officer at the Town Council and a written invitation would be required for the Mayor to take his chain of office.

A letter was subsequently received on the same day, 24 hours before the flight and although considered 'unusual' the Town Manager confirmed with SSALC that there was no suggestion that anything untoward had taken place at that stage. Their advice was to ensure a full declaration of any gift received were submitted on their return.

The only further intervention for Officers of the Council, was to ensure the Chain of Office was adequately insured and this was done at no additional cost to the Council.

On return from the visit abroad the Councillor was asked verbally and in writing for a submission of declaration – to detail all they may have received in the way of gifts (over the value of £25) and a form was received several weeks later, detailing £84

total gifts.

The air flights were paid by a fellow Councillor, Mayor of the neighbouring town, who attended in his capacity of Telscombe Town Council Mayor.

The Councillors were advised that a 'brief' to Full Council, whether in writing or delivered verbally, would be pertinent, due to the level of distress the trip had caused to other Councillors. This did not happen.

On Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July, an email was received by the Civic and Marketing Officer, with attachments including both an invitation to the Town and a reply stating acceptance for a visit to the Town.

Concerns have now been raised regarding a reciprocal visit from China, to Peacehaven, with a letter allegedly sent to the Chinese town of Nanning Political and Legal Committee, from Peacehaven Town Council. This has not been responded to.

The email was sent from a Chinese representative / [REDACTED], from Guangxi Province in China, with whom the Council has had no previous contact.

On close inspection, the attached letter from the Town Council is not on PTC headed paper and may or may not be signed by Councillor Robertson.

It is addressed to Councillor Robertson, as Mayor of Peacehaven and Vice Chair of Lewes District Council. He was not on 30<sup>th</sup> May, Mayor of Peacehaven.

It states his capacity as a District Councillor with his home telephone number at the bottom of the page.

The logo at the top of the page appears to have been pasted from another document and the font typeface is not the one we use on any of our literature.

It also looks like the signature has been scanned and pasted onto the document.

The document is therefore incorrect and fraudulent.

The letter appears to have been signed by Councillor Robert Robertson, our previous Mayor who handed in his chain on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2016 – the date on the letter states 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

On Thursday morning 21<sup>st</sup> July 2016, Councillor Robertson did come into the Town Council information office and organise a room booking at the Council Offices on behalf of visitors to the town, inviting the current Mayor and other Councillors verbally. He said that room booking for Councilors was of no cost.

The meeting is due to take place on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July at 11am.

The Town Council had no prior knowledge of this meeting, nor the visit, until the email was received that afternoon.

As Town Manager I emailed Councillor Robertson on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> requesting he contact the Office to discuss what had been arranged although he declined, stating he was in London for a few days.

Subsequently Officers discovered that Councillor Robertson had invited the current Mayor, her husband (also a Councillor) and other Council members verbally.

As Town Manager, I met with Cllr Robertson, our current Mayor Cllr Jean Farmiloe and my Deputy Town Clerk John Kocher on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July at 11am, to informally ask Cllr Robertson about the meeting on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July – what had been arranged, who would be attending, or what the reason for their visit was.

Councillor was not able to provide us with any information, stating 'I knew nothing about it. I don't know who they are or why they are coming'. He went on to state that he did know they were going to Birmingham on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July, although couldn't explain what the purpose of the visit was.

Councillor Robertson has now provided me with a telephone number –

[REDACTED]

We do not yet know if they are the same people who sent the original email (received 21<sup>st</sup> July 2016) although the current Mayor Councillor Jean Farmiloe has agreed the visit 26<sup>th</sup> July 2016 can go ahead.

Councillor Robertson was shown the letters attached, to which he stated he knows nothing about them and has not authorised, signed, sent, nor received either.

The concerns are that various aspects of the Code of Conduct for one or more Councillors has not been followed, as well as having the police investigate the fraudulent document sent impersonating the Chair of the Council, on behalf of the Council.

On advice from the Monitoring Officer at Lewes District, Officers have agreed that a complaint should be raised as it is not acceptable for a Councillors to

- speak on behalf of the Council as a whole
- to arrange a visit of this nature (discussing the UKs public security system, social welfare and the methods of government streamlining)
- without discussing it with Officers of the Council and with Council as a whole
- not give relevant information to the Council in a timely manner
- invite the Mayor of the Town without following correct protocol
- not provide adequate records to the Town Council

The letter is addressed to a previous Chair of the Council, which is not correct, nor was it sent via the correct channels via the Civic Officer.

The Officers at Peacehaven Town Council do appreciate Councillors ideas and always welcome innovation, but this is a consistent theme across the Council which after much discussion, Officers believe it is not a good representation of the residents, nor supportive of good working practice.

Officers also feel that their views have not been listened to, advice not been taken and resources including Officers time, room hire and financial cost to the Council has not been considered when making decisions.

The biggest concern with reference to this particular instance, is that security may have been breached, a document has been received which appears to have been forged and it alludes to one particular Councillor – Councillor Robertson is insistant he had not seen the letter of invitation, prior to Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July.

After discussion with the Monitoring Officer, I am forwarding this one instance as a specific circumstance, where the recommendation is that it is independently investigated, with a query as to whether it needs to be followed up with the police. I will forward other more general information on further Complaints reports.

**5. Only complete this next section if you are requesting that your identity is kept confidential.**

In the interests of fairness and natural justice, we believe Councillors who are complained about have a right to know who has made the complaint. We also believe they have a right to be provided with a summary of the complaint. We are unlikely to withhold your identity or the details of your complaint unless you have good reason to believe that:-

- You have reasonable grounds for believing that you will be at risk of physical harm if your identity is disclosed.
- You are an officer who works closely with the subject Councillor and you are afraid of the consequences to your employment or of losing your job if your identity is discovered.
- You suffer from a serious health condition and there are medical risks associated with your identity being disclosed. In these circumstances the Audit and Standards Committee may request medical evidence of your condition.

Please note that requests for confidentiality or requests for suppression of complaint details will not automatically be granted. The Monitoring Officer will consider the request alongside the substance of your complaint. We will then contact you with the decision. If your request for confidentiality is not granted, we will usually allow you the option of withdrawing your complaint.

However, it is important to understand that in certain exceptional circumstances where the matter complained about is very serious, we can proceed with an investigation or other action and disclose your name even if you have expressly asked us not to.

Please provide us with details of why you believe we should withhold your name and/or the details of your complaint:

None

**6. Additional Help**

Complaints must be submitted in writing. This includes electronic submissions. However, in line with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2000, we can make reasonable adjustments to assist you if you have a disability that prevents you from making your complaint in writing.

We can also help if English is not your first language.

If you need any support in completing this form, please let me know as soon as possible.

This information can be made available in **large print**, on audio tape or disk, or in another language upon request. Contact us on 01273 471600 or email [jennifer.norman@lewes.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.norman@lewes.gov.uk).

Please return your form to:

The Monitoring Officer  
Lewes District Council  
Southover House  
Southover Road  
Lewes  
BN7 1AB

Email complaints marked for the attention of "The Monitoring Officer" can be sent to [jennifer.norman@lewes.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.norman@lewes.gov.uk) .