

1. The Importance Of Complaints

Complaints are valuable because they provide a chance to put things right if there is an error, and to make sure that the same mistake is not repeated.

It is essential that complaints are dealt with positively. The Parish Council is anxious to hear people's comments, and is committed to make full use of complaints information to contribute to continuous service improvement.

Improvements can be obtained both from a single complaint and from a pattern of complaints highlighted by detailed monitoring.

2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Parish Council or its staff which affects an individual customer or a group of customers.

3. What The Complaints Procedure Will Deal With.

The complaints procedure will deal with matters of maladministration, which is where if the Council does something the wrong, fails to do something it should do or does something it should not do.

Some examples include:

- a) Neglect or unjustified delay
- b) Malice, bias or unfair discrimination
- c) Failure to tell people their rights
- d) Failure to provide advice of information when reasonable requested
- e) Providing misleading or inaccurate advice
- f) Inefficiency, ineffectiveness, bad or unprofessional practice or conduct.

The complaints Procedure will not deal with:

- a) Complaints for which there is a legal remedy or where proceedings already exist.
- b) Complaints about employment matters – the Parish Council operates alternative procedures to deal with grievances or disciplinary matters against staff.

4. Equal Opportunities

The Parish Council is committed to equal opportunities. Complaints feedback will be used to highlight discriminatory practices, and to promote equality of opportunity.

Complaints by members of the public of discrimination and/or harassment against the Parish Council will be dealt with through the complaints procedure unless it is a complaint that should be dealt with through a statutory procedure

5. Complaints Officer

The complaints officer for the Parish Council is the Proper Officer (Parish Council Clerk). Their main duties are:

- a) The day-to-day operation and management of the procedure, including providing a reference point for staff queries on informal complaints.

- b) To oversee, and where necessary undertake, the investigation of the formal complaints at the first stage, within the relevant guidelines.
- c) To maintain a record of all complaints received including details of the nature of the complaint, action taken, outcome, and time taken to resolve.
- d) To identify improvement points arising from any complaints.
- e) To identify staff training issues.

6. Stages of the procedure

The stages of the procedure are designed to provide the complainant with a thorough and means of redress and to provide a framework for officers to work within. However, there may be occasions when a complainant approaches the Council in a different manner and it is important that the procedure does not itself become a barrier to effective communication.

7. Everyday problems and queries

The Council receives queries, problems and comments as part of its day-to-day routine and they should not all be regarded as complaints. These are routine and expected and generally resolved quickly to the customer's satisfaction.

If someone is dissatisfied with the original service or response they receive and wishes to take the matter further, then the issue should be recognised and taken as a complaint.

8. Informal Complaint

During the course of daily business, minor complaints may be made to officers about the service provided. These will usually be dealt with by the relevant officer as appropriate, it is not appropriate for every comment to be treated as a formal complaint. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining the decision.

9. First Stage Formal Complaint

Whether this is a formal complaint or the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint, it should be recorded and passed to the Proper Officer.

Time scales

Acknowledgement	should be within 48 hours of receipt
Length of investigation	should be completed within 14 days, or a progress report provided at regular intervals as agreed with the complainant.
Who will investigate	Investigating officer the Proper Officer.

10. Second Stage Review Of Investigation And Complaint

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they should be advised of their rights to have the complaint referred to the Councillors Panel who will review the complaint and the outcome.

Time scales

Acknowledgement	Should be within 48 hours of receipt
Length of time taken	Should be completed within 14 days, or a progress report provided at regular intervals as agreed with the complainant.
Investigating officer	Councillor's Panel

11. The Councillors Panel

- a) If the issue remains unsolved, the complainant should be notified of their rights to have the matter referred to a panel consisting of the Chairman (Unless the complaint refers to the Chairman) in which case the Vice-Chairman would act and two other councillors who have had no previous involvement with or are referred to in the complaint.
- b) The outcome of all formal complaints dealt with by the panel will be reported to the Council, after completion.

12. Unreasonable and vexatious Complaints

- a) Where a complainant persists in pursuing a complaint when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or where the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where the matter is being pursued through the courts or some other recognised procedure, this may be treated as unreasonable.
- b) Such matters should be referred to the Proper Officer with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. The Proper officer may decide that no further action can be usefully taken and inform the complainant accordingly, making it clear that only new and substantive issue will merit a response.

13. Anonymous complaints

No complaint reported anonymously will not normally be considered.

14. Resolution and Remedies

The aim in dealing with all complaints is to reach a resolution or remedy that satisfies the complainant, whether or not it is the remedy originally sought. Where a complaint is found to be justified, consideration may need to be given to an appropriate remedy. An explanation or an apology will normally be provided where appropriate.

Contact

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