

GRIMSTON PARISH COUNCIL

COMPLAINT HANDLING POLICY

Informal Complaint

It is hoped that most complaints about Grimston Parish Council can be resolved quickly and amicably through this route. Informal complaints can be made by telephone, email or letter. Complaints should first be directed to the Clerk. A complainant may advise a Councillor of the details of a complaint, but it is the Clerk's role to attempt to resolve complaints. It is expected that most complaints can be resolved through this informal route. However, the Council appreciates that on occasions if an informal approach has not resolved the complaint, or that the initial complaint is so serious, then the formal complaints process should be followed.

Formal Complaint

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for managing the formal complaints process. If a formal complaint is being raised against the Clerk, then the process as detailed should be followed, but the Chairman of the Council should be informed instead of the Clerk.

A formal complaint can only be submitted in writing to the Council's Office, it should be addressed to the Clerk, marked "Confidential – Formal Complaint." The Council encourages contact by email and telephone, but as a formal complaint is a serious matter the Council will only accept these in writing.

The complaint should cover as much detail as possible and enclose any relevant supporting documentation. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within **five** working days.

The Clerk will carry out an initial investigation into the complaint and will within **ten** working days provide the complainant with an update on progress, or a suggested resolution. If the complainant is satisfied with the resolution the complaint is closed. The Clerk will report to the Council summary details of the complaint and a brief summary of its resolution. This summary report will exclude the names of the complainant. If the Clerk is unable to resolve the complaint, or the complainant is not satisfied with the proposed resolution then the matter will be referred to a meeting of the Council's complaints panel.

Complaints Panel

The Panel will be a properly formed committee of the Parish Council. The panel will consist of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council and one other member. This will ensure that the number of councillors present is not excessive. The panel is subject to all meeting notification, agenda and minute requirements, as laid down in the Parish Council's Standing Orders. It is expected that the panel will be able to meet within **seven** working days of being notified by the Clerk.

Prior to the meeting:

Seven clear working days before the Review Panel meeting the complainant will provide the Parish Council with copies of all documentation, or other evidence (such as photographs) that they intend to introduce to the Review Panel meeting. The Parish Council will provide the same to the complainant.

At the meeting:

1. The Panel shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and press*.
2. The Chairman of the Panel shall introduce everyone and explain the procedure to be used in order to consider the complaint made. The meeting should be as informal and friendly as possible, without prejudicing the need to consider properly the matter under discussion.
 - (a) The complainant (or representative) shall be invited to outline the grounds for complaint and panel members given the opportunity to ask any questions of the complainant.
 - (b) If relevant, the Clerk will explain the Council's position and panel members shall ask any questions of the Clerk.
 - (c) The complainant and Clerk to be offered the opportunity to sum up their respective positions.
3. The Clerk and complainant shall be asked to leave the room while the panel members decide if grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties should be invited back. In any case both parties return to hear the decision, or to be advised when the decision will be made.
4. The announcement of any decision will be made in public, at the next Full Council meeting.

** Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 and the Local Government Act 1972 s100 & 102*

Timings

The Parish Council will try to adhere to the timings outlined in this policy, but in the case of a complex complaint, or the availability of a member of staff who is involved in the complaint, may mean that the timings have to vary.

Impact on Council Staff

A formal complaint is a serious matter. A formal complaint against a member of the Council's staff could result in disciplinary action; or in the cases of gross misconduct dismissal from the Council's employment.

The Council will not under any circumstances enter into any correspondence, or discussion, with any complainant about any action taken, formally or informally against any member of its staff. This is expressly to protect the employment rights to which all employees of the Council are entitled.

Complaints Against Councillors

This policy does not cover formal complaints against an individual Councillor. A complaint about a Parish Councillor in relation to failure to follow the Councillors' Code of Conduct should be addressed to :

The Monitoring Officer

King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council

King's Court

Chapel Street

King's Lynn, Norfolk

Anonymity

The Council will not consider, under any circumstances, informal or formal complaints that are submitted anonymously.