



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Introduction

Hannington Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to providing a high standard of service to the community. The Council recognises that sometimes things may go wrong and welcomes feedback and complaints as an opportunity to improve our services.

This Policy sets out how you may raise a complaint to the Council and how we shall try to resolve your complaint, should you be dissatisfied with the standard of service you have received from this Council or are unhappy with about an action or lack of action by this Council.

The Council will take into account the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 when dealing with complaints.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council’s actions, decisions, or the conduct of a councillor or council staff. Complaints may relate to:

- Dissatisfaction about the failure to provide or meet the expected standard of service.
- Neglect or delay in responding to a contact with the Parish Council.
- Failure to observe the Parish Council’s policies or procedures.
- Discourteous or dishonest conduct by a member of staff.
- Harassment, bias or discrimination.
- Mishandling of personal data.

This policy does **not** cover complaints shown in the table below.

Type of Alleged Conduct	Required Action
Financial Irregularity	Complaints about financial irregularity should be referred to the Council’s auditor, whose name and address can be obtained from the Parish Clerk. (Local elector’s statutory right to object council’s audit of accounts pursuant to Sections 25, 26 & 27 of the Local Audit & Accountability Act 2014) and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)
Criminal activity	Contact the Police
Member conduct	Contact the Monitoring Officer at Swindon Borough Council.

Employee conduct	Dealt with under internal disciplinary procedure. (If the complaint is about the Parish Clerk, the complaint should be referred to the Chairman of the Council).
Decisions of the Council	Where an individual or group wishes to disagree with a Parish Council decision or policy.
Planning decisions	Contact the Planning Department at Swindon Borough Council.
Freedom of Information Act	Where an individual wishes to make a request under the FOI Act or GDPR whereby there are alternative processes in place.
Matters that are subject to legal proceedings.	

Informal Complaint Process

Many concerns can be resolved quickly and efficiently through an informal discussion. The Council encourages complainants to raise issues informally before pursuing a formal complaint.

Raising an Informal Complaint

- Complainants should contact the Parish Clerk in writing via email, post or telephone.
- If a complaint is submitted to a member (councillor), it is their duty to notify the Parish Clerk.
- If the complaint concerns the Parish Clerk, it should be directed to the Chairman of the Council.
- All complaints will be deemed to be Informal Complaints unless a written complaint states that it is a Formal Complaint.

Informal Complaint Resolution

- The Parish Clerk or designated person will attempt to resolve the issue through discussion, clarification, or minor remedial action.
- If a resolution is reached, no further action will be required.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may proceed to the formal complaints process.

Formal Complaint Process

Submitting a Formal Complaint

If an informal resolution is not possible, a formal complaint should be submitted in writing via email or post. As a minimum the complaint should provide the following information.

The complaint should include:

- The complainant's name and contact details.
- A clear description of the issue.
- Any relevant dates, locations, or supporting evidence.
- The outcome the complainant is seeking.

Acknowledgement of a Formal Complaint

Acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint will be made within five working days and provide an overview of the next steps.

Formal Complaints Committee

A Complaints Committee will be formed to ensure a fair and impartial investigation.

Formation of the Complaints Committee

- The committee will consist of at least two councillors, appointed by the Parish Council, who have had no prior involvement in the complaint.
- Where there are more than three members, the Chairman of the Complaints Committee will be elected by the members of the temporary committee.
- The Parish Clerk will provide administrative support but will not participate in decision making.

Complaints Committee Responsibilities

The committee will conduct an impartial investigation, which may include:

- Reviewing council records and policies.
- Speaking with staff or councillors involved.
- Seeking additional information from the complainant.

The complainant will be kept informed of the progress.

The Committee may choose to process the complaint exclusively through written communications or may offer the complainant the opportunity to make a verbal representation, although this will lengthen the period of dealing with the complaint.

Complaints Committee Meeting & Decision

- A formal meeting of the Complaints Committee will be arranged within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.
- An agenda for the Complaints Committee will be issued no less than three working days prior to the date set.
- The complainant will be invited to attend (if appropriate) and may present their case. The complainant may bring a representative to support them or speak on their behalf.
- Any documentation not already supplied must be sent to the Parish Clerk seven clear days prior to the meeting.
- The meeting will be heard in public unless the Complaints Committee expressly resolves to exclude the press and public in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 due to the confidential nature of the complaint.
- The Complaints Committee will discuss findings and agree on a resolution.
- The Chairman of the Complaints Committee may adjourn the meeting to a later date in order that specialist or other advice may be sought.

- The formal recommendation of the Complaints Committee will be provided to Full Council for ratification at the next available meeting.

Formal Complaint Response & Resolution

Within five working days of the Council approving the recommendation of the Complaints Committee, a formal written response will be provided to the complainant outlining:

- The findings of the investigation.
- Any corrective actions taken (if applicable).

If additional time is needed, the complainant will be informed of the revised timeframe.

Escalation & Review Process

If a complaint cannot be settled by the Council, it cannot refer the complaint to any other body for settlement. The decision of the Parish Council is final with no appeal process, as the Local Government Ombudsman does not consider complaints in respect of parish councils.

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

The Parish Council reserves the right to limit communication with complainants who make persistent, abusive, or vexatious complaints. Any such decision will be made fairly and in accordance with the Council's Vexatious Complaints and Correspondence Policy.

Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled with appropriate confidentiality. Personal data will be processed in accordance with data protection laws and the Councils existing policies.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every five years or earlier if required by changes in legislation.

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