

HOTON PARISH COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Introduction

Hoton Parish Council is committed to providing a quality service to residents of the Parish and to anyone who deals with the Parish Council. It is committed to conducting its business in a fair and equitable manner and the aim of this policy is to ensure that all complaints are investigated promptly and in an impartial manner, and to seek a solution which is satisfactory to both the complainant and the Council.

Parish Councils as corporate bodies are not subject to jurisdiction of the Local Government Ombudsman, and there are no provisions for another body to which complaints can be referred. The Council will therefore do its utmost to settle complaints and satisfy complainants in the interest of the good reputation of the Council.

This policy is for dealing with complaints about the Council's administration or its procedures. It does not cover the following:

- ✦ Complaints regarding the financial aspects of the Council, which will be dealt with through the external audit process.
- ✦ Complaints regarding individual Councillors, which will be dealt with through the standards committee of Charnwood Borough Council.
- ✦ Complaints regarding council staff, which will be dealt with through the Council's internal disciplinary procedure.
- ✦ Complaints regarding criminal activity, which will be dealt with by the Police.

A table explaining how to make complaints about the above can be found at the end of this document.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service provided by the Council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council.

The Council receives queries, problems and comments as part of its day to day running and it is not appropriate for every comment to be treated as a formal complaint. Every effort will be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining a decision.

All complaints will be deemed to be informal complaints unless a written complaint states that it is a formal complaint.

The complaints procedure will not be implemented for complaints made anonymously.

Informal Complaints

An informal complaint may be made by telephone, email, in person or in writing to the Clerk. If the complainant prefers not to put the complaint to the Clerk (because the matter relates to the Clerk, for example) he or she should be advised to write to the Chair of the Parish Council.

If a complaint is made to a Councillor, it is their duty to notify the Clerk or the Chair of the Parish Council immediately.

The Clerk or the Chair will communicate directly with the complainant and will attempt to resolve the complaint and ensure that the complainant feels satisfied that their grievance has been fully considered, taken seriously and acted upon accordingly.

All informal complaints, and any action taken, will be reported to the Council at the next appropriate meeting.

If the Clerk or the Chair cannot satisfy a complaint in an informal way, then the Formal Complaints Procedure will be instigated.

Formal Complaints

The complainant will be asked to put their complaint about the Council's procedures or administration in writing to the Clerk. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the Clerk, they should be advised to address it to the Chair of the Parish Council.

The letter should contain:

- Name, address and telephone number of the complainant
- Details of the complaint about the Council's procedures or administration
- How the issue has affected the complainant
- Copies of any relevant documents or other evidence
- Details of third parties and their involvement
- What action the complainant suggests will resolve their complaint

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within seven working days and will advise the complainant at which meeting the matter will be considered by the Council.

The complainant shall be invited to attend the meeting and to bring with them a representative if they wish.

Any documents not already supplied must be sent to the Clerk seven clear working days before the meeting. The Council shall provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to refer to at the meeting within the same timescale.

At the meeting

The Council shall consider whether the circumstances of the complaint warrants the exclusion of the public and press. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the Council meeting in public.

The Chair should introduce everyone and explain the procedure.

The complainant (or their representative) should outline the grounds for complaint and afterwards questions may be asked by the Clerk and Councillors.

The Clerk or a nominated Councillor will present the Council's position relating to the complaint (if necessary) and afterwards questions may be asked by other Councillors.

The Clerk or the nominated Councillor and the complainant will be offered the opportunity to summarise their position.

The Clerk or the nominated Councillor and the complainant will be asked to leave the room (unless the meeting is open to the public) while Councillors decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been met. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties will be invited to respond.

The Clerk or the nominated Councillor and the complainant will be given the opportunity to wait for the decision, but if the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day, they should be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it will be communicated to them.

In the event that neither the complainant nor their representative attend the meeting, the complaint will be considered by the Council in their absence. It will not normally be possible to arrange an alternative meeting without good cause.

After the meeting

The decision will be confirmed in writing within seven working days, together with details of any action to be taken.

Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to pursue a complaint when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other process, whether through the courts or some other recognised procedure, should, or has been taken. These matters will be referred to the Parish Council by the Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. The Parish Council may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.

What to do if you are still not satisfied

The decision of the Parish Council is final with no appeal process. The Local Government Ombudsman does not consider complaints in respect of parish councils.

How to complain about items not covered by this policy

Type of Conduct	Refer to
Financial irregularity	Complaints about financial irregularity should be referred to the Council's auditor, the name and address of whom may be obtained from the Clerk. <i>(Local electors' right to object Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 Sections 26 & 27 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)</i>
Councillor conduct	The Monitoring Officer at Charnwood Borough Council, Southfields Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire. The Monitoring Officer can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a Councillor and will not deal with complaints about matters that are not covered by the Councillors Code of Conduct. Complaints must be about a Councillors failure to follow the Code of Conduct. A copy of Hoton Parish Council's Code of Conduct can be found on the parish council website.
Employee conduct	Internal disciplinary procedure. Complaints concerning a member of staff should be made in writing to the Clerk. If the complaint concerns the Clerk, the complaint should be made in writing to the Chair of Hoton Parish Council.
Criminal Activity	The Police

This policy was adopted by Hoton Parish Council on 6 January 2020 and replaces that of 10 May 2010.