

SHADINGFIELD, SOTTERLEY WILLINGHAM AND ELLOUGH
Joint Parish Council

Complaints Policy

Introduction:

Shadingfield, Sotterley, Willingham and Ellough 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, in an impartial manner and to find a solution which is satisfactory to both the complainant and the Council.

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.

It will not be possible for the Council to deal with all complaints from members of the public under this procedure. Where such complaints are outside the remit of this procedure the following procedures/bodies should be engaged with to report/resolve the complaint:

Type of Conduct	Refer To
Financial irregularity	Complaints about financial irregularity should be referred to the Councils auditor, the name and address of whom may be obtained from the Clerk (Local electors' right to object Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 Sections 26 & 27 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234).
Criminal activity	The Police.
Councillor/Member conduct The Parish Council have adopted the NALC Mode Code of Conduct which can be viewed on the Parish Council's website	Members of Parish Council sign a declaration to abide by a Code of Conduct and if they breach that code, there are consequences. A complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct should be made in writing and addressed to The Monitoring Officer, East Suffolk Council.
Employee Conduct	The Council has an Internal disciplinary procedure to deal with complaints against an employee. If the complaint concerns the Clerk, the complaint should be made in writing to the Chair of the Council. All complaints relating to employees will first be received by the Personnel Committee.

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.

Anonymous Complaints:

Anonymous complaints will be disregarded.

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 to avoid any delay in dealing with the complaint.

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

If the Clerk or the Chair cannot satisfy a complaint in an informal way, the complainant will be invited to escalate the matter to a formal complaint.

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 believes will resolve their complaint

The Clerk/Chair will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days and will advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the appropriate Committee or 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 appropriate Committee / Council shall consider whether the circumstances of the complaint warrants the exclusion of the public and press.
- The Chair will introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
- The complainant (or their representative) will outline the grounds for complaint.

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- Councillors will ask questions of the complainant or their representative.
- If relevant, the Clerk will explain the Council's position.
- Councillors will be able to ask questions of the Clerk.
- The Chair will summarise the Council's position and then offer the opportunity to the Complainant or their representative to summarise their position.
- The complainant will be asked to leave the room (unless the meeting is open to the public) while Councillors decide whether the grounds for the complaint have been met. It may be appropriate in some circumstances for the Clerk to withdraw from the meeting whilst Councillors reach a decision.
- If any points of clarification are required, all parties will be invited to re-join the meeting whilst clarification is sought and then asked to withdraw again.
- All parties will re-join the meeting to be advised of the decision of the Council, together with reasons for the decision, or, if necessary, to be advised when a decision will be made. Dependant on the detail of the reasons for the decision, it might only be possible to give the decision at the meeting and then the detailed reasons for the decision will follow in the decision letter.

After the Meeting:

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

Complaints relating to the Clerk:

These will be dealt with by the Council as an employment matter. Such complaints could result in disciplinary action or, in cases of gross misconduct, dismissal from the Council's employment. The matter will be dealt with internally to protect the employment rights to which employees of the Council are entitled.

The complainant will be informed of action 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 and may inform the complainant that it will follow its Habitual and Vexatious Complainants Policy

What to do if you are still not satisfied?

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.

Date of adoption: March 2021	Chair
Date of next review: March 2023	Clerk