

## **Glanton Parish Council** **Complaints Policy**

### **1. Purpose**

This policy sets out how Glanton Parish Council will handle complaints from members of the public. It aims to ensure complaints are dealt with in a fair, transparent, proportionate and timely manner.

### **2. Scope**

This policy applies to complaints about the Council's administration, procedures, services, or the administrative handling of Council decisions.

It is intended to provide a straightforward process for raising concerns and seeking resolution.

### **3. Matters Not Covered by this Policy**

This policy does not apply to:

- complaints against individual councillors, which are dealt with under the Members' Code of Conduct via Northumberland County Council;
- Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations requests;
- Subject Access Requests or other rights under data protection legislation;
- employment matters relating to council staff;
- contractual or commercial disputes;
- criminal allegations;
- matters subject to legal proceedings or insurance claims.

The complaints procedure is not a means of challenging lawful decisions properly made by the Council simply because an individual disagrees with them.

Where a complaint relates to a matter outside the Council's powers or responsibilities, the complainant will be advised of the appropriate body to contact where possible.

### **4. Making a Complaint**

Complaints should normally be submitted in writing to the Clerk by email or post using the contact details published by the Council.

Complainants should provide:

- their name and contact details;
- a clear description of the issue;
- relevant dates, correspondence or evidence where appropriate;
- the outcome they are seeking.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered unless there is a clear public interest reason to do so.

Complaints should normally be submitted within three months of the matter arising.

Reasonable assistance will be provided where required to enable a complaint to be made.

## **5. Informal Resolution**

Where appropriate, the Clerk or Chair may attempt to resolve the matter informally.

Many concerns can be resolved through clarification, explanation or correction without requiring a formal complaint process.

## **6. Formal Complaint Procedure**

6.1. The Clerk (or Chair, if the complaint concerns the Clerk) will normally acknowledge receipt within 5 working days.

6.2. The complaint will normally be investigated and a written response provided within 20 working days where practicable.

6.3. If additional time is required, the complainant will be notified.

6.4. Where appropriate, the Council may offer the complainant the opportunity to present their complaint in person or remotely.

6.5. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a review within 14 days of the response.

6.6. Any review will be carried out by the full Council or an appointed panel of councillors who were not directly involved in the original consideration where possible, having regard to the size of the Council.

6.7. The review will consider whether the complaint was handled properly and whether the outcome was reasonable.

6.8. The complainant will normally be notified of the outcome within 20 working days where practicable.

6.9. The Council's decision following review will normally be final.

## **7. Confidentiality**

Complaints will be handled sensitively and in accordance with the Council's Data Protection and Privacy Policy.

Information relating to complaints will only be shared where necessary and lawful.

Where appropriate, complaints may be considered in confidential session under the Local Government Act 1972.

Complainants should be aware that certain information may be subject to disclosure where required by law.

### **8. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints and Correspondence**

The Council is committed to respectful and constructive communication. It recognises that occasionally individuals may pursue complaints or correspondence in a manner which hinders their effective resolution or places an unreasonable burden on council resources.

A complaint or pattern of correspondence may be considered unreasonable or vexatious where a person:

- repeatedly raises substantially the same issue after it has already been considered;
- refuses to accept a reasonable explanation or response;
- sends excessive, repetitive or harassing correspondence;
- uses abusive, offensive or threatening language;
- makes unfounded allegations;
- seeks to disrupt council business or meetings;
- publishes confidential, misleading or incomplete information relating to complaints.

Where such behaviour is identified, the Council may:

- limit methods or frequency of communication;
- require communications to be directed through a single point of contact;
- decline to respond to repeated correspondence regarding matters already concluded;
- take proportionate steps to protect councillors and staff from harassment or abuse.

Councillors should not normally engage in separate correspondence regarding active complaints outside the Council's agreed process.

Publication of complaint material online or through social media may affect confidentiality obligations and the Council's ability to investigate matters fairly.

Any restrictions imposed will be proportionate and reviewed periodically.

### **9. Standards of Behaviour**

The Council expects all parties involved in the complaints process to behave respectfully and appropriately.

Aggressive, abusive, discriminatory or threatening behaviour towards councillors, employees or other individuals will not be tolerated.

#### **10. Record Keeping**

The Council will maintain appropriate records of complaints and outcomes in accordance with its retention arrangements and data protection obligations.

#### **11. Review**

This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required by changes in legislation, guidance or operational requirements.