



VEXATIOUS BEHAVIOUR POLICY

(This revised version was adopted by the Parish Council at its meeting on 24/03/2026.)

1. Introduction

1.1 The Parish Council's aim is to deal with all complaints in ways which are fair and reasonable. Communications from members of the public are welcomed as an opportunity to identify areas in which the Council can make improvements. Complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy except where that is modified by this Vexatious Behaviour Policy.

1.2. This policy identifies situations where a complainant, either individually or as part of a group, or a group of complainants, make complaints which might be considered habitual or vexatious. The policy intends to assist in managing situations which, through pursuing an unreasonable course of conduct, are unreasonably disruptive to the Council.

1.3. Habitual or vexatious complaints can be a problem for Council staff and members. Handling such complaints can be time-consuming and wasteful of resources in terms of Officer and Member time. While the Council endeavours to respond with patience and sympathy to the needs of complainants, there are times when there is nothing further which can reasonably be done to assist or to rectify a real or perceived problem.

1.4. Raising of legitimate queries or criticisms should not in itself be regarded as a vexatious complaint.

2. Habitual or Vexatious Complaints

2.1. For the purpose of this policy, the definition of vexatious complaints is: The repeated and/or obsessive pursuit, by letter, email, phone or any other means, of (a) unreasonable complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes, and/or (b) reasonable complaints in an unreasonable manner.

2.2. Features of unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious complaints may include those which (the following list is not exhaustive):

- have insufficient or no grounds, and be made to annoy
- fail to specify the grounds of complaint
- originate from a complainant who refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- display a refusal to accept that issues are not within the remit of the Council's complaints policy and procedure, despite a copy of the latter having been provided
- persist in seeking an outcome which the Council has explained is unrealistic for legal, policy or other valid reasons
- fail to accept that issues are not within the power of the Council to investigate, change or influence
- insist on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Council's complaints procedure or with good practice
- are part of an unreasonable number of contacts with the Council
- make groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaints
- continue to make persistent and unreasonable demands of staff and/or the complaints process after that unreasonableness has been explained to the complainant
- harass, abuse or otherwise seek to intimidate staff dealing with their complaint, including by use of foul or inappropriate language
- are pursuing a personal grudge
- expect trivial or frivolous matters to be investigated
- change the substance or basis of the complaint without reasonable justification whilst the complaint is being addressed
- deny statements which the complainant made at an earlier stage in the complaint process
- fail to accept the outcome of the complaint process after its conclusion, repeatedly arguing the point and/or denying that an adequate response has been given
- make the same complaint repeatedly, perhaps with minor differences, after a response to the complaint has already been provided
- are persistently made to the Council through different routes about the same issue
- refuse to accept documented evidence as factual
- repeatedly complain about an issue which is now historic and/or an irreversible decision.

- display or suggest discrimination by race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other legally-protected characteristic.

3. Imposing Restrictions

3.1 Imposing restrictions on a complainant is a very serious step and must never be done without thorough consideration.

3.2. Where, after due consideration, complaints have been identified as potentially vexatious in accordance with Section 2 above, the Clerk will, in the first instance, consult with the Chair (or Vice-chair) of the Council and Chair (or Vice-chair) of the Finance & Governance Committee, prior to issuing a warning to the complainant. Subject to their views, the Clerk will then contact the complainant in writing to explain why the complaints are causing concern and to ask them to change their behaviour, outlining the actions which the Council may take if they do not, and supplying the complainant with a copy of this policy.

3.3. If the behaviour continues, the Clerk, after consulting the Chair (or Vice-chair) of the Council and Chair (or Vice-chair) of the Finance & Governance Committee, will write to the complainant advising them that the way in which they will be allowed to contact the Council in future will be restricted, and why, and explaining what procedures have been accordingly put in place and their duration.

3.4. Any restrictions imposed on the complainant's contact with the Council will be appropriate and proportionate and the complainant will be advised of the period of time over which they will be in place. In most cases, this period will be upto six months, but in exceptional cases may be longer. In such exceptional cases, the restrictions will be reviewed every 6 months at a Full Council Meeting.

3.5. Restrictions will be tailored to deal with the individual circumstances of the case and may include:

- banning the complainant from making contact by telephone except through a third party e.g. a solicitor
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and/or times and/or duration
- requiring any personal contact to take place in the presence of an appropriate witness
- informing the complainant that the Council will not reply to or acknowledge any further contact from them. (This will not be applied to genuine service requests unrelated to the vexatious complaints.)

3.6. Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme as to justify it, other options may be considered by the Council, e.g. the reporting of the matter to the police or the taking of legal action. The complainant may not be given prior warning of actions of this nature.

3.7. Any restrictions imposed on a complainant will be recorded and notified to those who need to know within the Council.

4. Review

4.1. The restrictions placed on a complainant as per Section 3 above will be reviewed by the Clerk, the Chair (or Vice-chair) of the Council and the Chair (or Vice-chair) of the Finance & Governance Committee, after three months, and at the end of every subsequent three months. The complainant will be informed of the result of this review if it reduces, extends or otherwise changes the restrictions placed upon them.

5. Record Keeping

5.1. The Clerk will retain adequate records of the details of the case, including a listing of the items of communication considered and the action that has been taken.

5.2. Whenever restrictions have been imposed on a complainant, or subsequently changed or withdrawn, this fact must be reported by the Clerk to all Members of the Council as soon as is reasonably possible.

(END)