

Acklington Parish Council

Complaints Policy (England)

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Acklington Parish Council will deal with complaints about its administration, procedures, or actions.

The Council aims to:

- Provide a fair, transparent, and consistent process
 - Resolve complaints promptly
 - Learn from complaints to improve services
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2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints about:

- Council administration
- Services provided by the Council
- Actions of Council employees

This policy does **not** apply to:

- Complaints about councillor conduct (handled under the Code of Conduct via the principal authority, e.g. Northumberland County Council)
 - Employee grievances (handled under the Grievance Policy)
 - Matters subject to legal proceedings
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3. Principles

The Council will:

- Treat complaints seriously
 - Handle them courteously and fairly
 - Respond within reasonable timescales
 - Maintain confidentiality where appropriate
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4. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about:

- The standard of service
 - The actions or lack of action by the Council
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5. Informal Resolution

5.1 Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved informally in the first instance.

5.2 The complainant should contact the Clerk to discuss the issue.

5.3 Many concerns can be resolved quickly without the need for formal procedures.

6. Formal Complaints Procedure

6.1 Submission of Complaint

A formal complaint must:

- Be submitted in writing (email or letter)
- Include the complainant's name and contact details
- Clearly state the nature of the complaint
- Provide relevant dates and supporting information

Anonymous complaints will only be considered at the Council's discretion.

6.2 Acknowledgement

- The Council will acknowledge receipt within **5 working days**
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6.3 Investigation

- The Clerk will investigate the complaint or arrange for an appropriate person/panel to do so
 - This may include reviewing documents and speaking to relevant parties
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6.4 Complaint Hearing

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally:

- The complainant may be invited to attend a meeting
 - A panel of councillors (who are not involved in the matter) will consider the complaint
 - The complainant may be accompanied by a representative
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7. Outcome

7.1 The Council will provide a written response within **10–20 working days** where possible.

7.2 The response will include:

- Findings of the investigation
 - Any actions taken
 - Reasons for the decision
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8. Appeals

8.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied, they may request a review.

8.2 The request must:

- Be submitted in writing within **10 working days**
- State the reasons for dissatisfaction

8.3 The appeal will be considered by a different panel of councillors where possible.

8.4 The decision following the review is final.

9. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

9.1 The Council may refuse to consider complaints that are:

- Repetitive
- Abusive or vexatious

9.2 Any such decision will be made carefully and recorded.

10. Confidentiality and Data Protection

10.1 Complaints will be handled in accordance with:

- Data Protection Act 2018

10.2 Personal data will be processed lawfully and securely.

11. Record Keeping

11.1 The Council will:

- Keep records of complaints and outcomes
 - Use information to improve services
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12. Learning and Improvement

12.1 The Council will review complaints periodically to:

- Identify recurring issues
 - Improve procedures and services
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13. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be:

- Reviewed annually
 - Updated in line with guidance from NALC, SLCC, and Government
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14. Publication

This policy will be:

- Available to the public
 - Published on the Council's website where possible
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Adoption

This Complaints Policy was adopted by Acklington Parish Council:

Date: 5th May 2026

Minute Reference: N/A

Signed: S Ingleby (Chair)

Signed: B Watson (Clerk)