

Parish Council DRAFT Complaints Procedure

Why Have a Complaints Policy and Procedure?

1. The Charity Commission report '*Cause for Complaint*' states: '*an effective complaints management system is a proven way of maintaining and building relationships with the people on whom the organisation depends.*' This is particularly relevant for Hannington Parish Council as it exists primarily to help and support the residents, and its success depends on having the support and confidence of those residents.
2. Handling complaints well:
 - Demonstrates your commitment to your clients and other stakeholders
 - Demonstrates your commitment to providing the best possible service
 - Helps you to find out about things that have gone wrong so
 - Helps you to prevent things going wrong again in future

Who Is This Model For?

3. This policy and procedure is based on a model that was aimed at small organisations that have no staff, or only one or two non-managerial staff, such as Hannington PC.

Adapting the Model to Suit Your Organisation

4. The policy assumes that complaints are likely to be handled by the Parish Council itself. The alternative is that it is led by a member of staff. But, in a small organisation, like ours, any 'complaint' is more than likely to be against that employee!
5. The organisation also needs to consider not only to whom any complaint should be sent but how (in person or in writing) and to where ?.
6. Flexibility in handling complaints is essential so I have tried not to make the procedure too rigid.

Complaints Policy of Hannington Parish Council

7. Hannington Parish Council [HPC] views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person [or organisation] that has made the complaint.
8. Our policy is:
 - To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
 - To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
 - To make sure everyone at [Organisation name] knows what to do if a complaint is received
 - To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
 - To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired

- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

Definition of a Complaint

9. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of Hannington Parish Council, its employees or its Members.

Where Complaints Come From

10. Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in Hannington Parish Council.
11. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

Confidentiality

12. All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibility

13. Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Chairman of the Parish Council.

Review

14. As part of the Parish Council's 'governance' documents, this policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Complaints Procedure of Hannington Parish Council

15. Written complaints may be sent to Cllr Simon Taylor, Chairman, Hannington Parish Council at [land address] or by e-mail at [e-mail address]. Verbal complaints may be made by phone to [phone number].
16. If the complaint is against the Chairman, the complainant may send the complaint to the Clerk.

Receiving Complaints

17. Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.
18. Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:
 - Write down the facts of the complaint
 - Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
 - Note down the relationship of the complainant to [Organisation name] (for example: client, member)
 - Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
 - Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
 - Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

Resolving Complaints

Stage One

19. In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.
20. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Chairman of the Parish Council within one week.
21. On receiving the complaint, the Chairman records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.
22. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.
23. Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.
24. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.
25. Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

26. If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Council level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Clerk if it has been dealt with by the Chairman, or by the Chairman, if it has been dealt with by the Clerk
27. The request for Council level review should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.
28. The person who receives Stage Two complaints will investigate the facts of the case. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.
29. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.
30. The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.
31. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not

possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, or there is not a suitable Council meeting within that time span, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

32. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

33. The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Council decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

Reporting of the Complaint

34. In addition to the Complaint being formally logged, the nature of the complaint, the outcome and any 'lessons learned' will be formally minuted at the next appropriate meeting of the Council, taking into account the need for confidentiality etc.

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

35. The Council may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review (see suggestion above re Clerk).

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

36. Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

On a related matter, the Parish Council is reminded that Standing Order 25 deals with "Allegations of Breaches of the Code of Conduct". This Standing Order applies to Councillors.

Chris Pottinger,
Clerk, Hannington Parish Council

24th August 2016