



Complaints Policy

Adopted: October 2026, minute reference 26/139 (d)

1. Purpose

Stoke sub Hamdon Parish Council is committed to providing high-quality, transparent, and accessible services to the community. From time to time, individuals may wish to express dissatisfaction with the Council's administration, procedures, decisions, or the conduct of its staff. This policy sets out how such complaints will be handled fairly, consistently, and in accordance with principles of natural justice.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to complaints relating to:

- The Council's procedures
- The administration of Council business
- The standard of service provided by the Council
- The conduct or performance of Council employees

This policy **does not** apply to:

- Complaints about Councillors, which must be referred to the Monitoring Officer of the principal authority (Code of Conduct matters)
- Complaints alleging financial irregularity, which must be referred to the Council's auditor or raised through statutory audit rights
- Complaints alleging criminal activity, which must be referred to the Police
- Complaints about planning decisions, which follow statutory processes
- Employment matters relating to staff, which will be handled under the Council's internal procedures

3. Principles

The Council will ensure that complaints are handled with:

- Impartiality
- Equality of access
- Confidentiality, subject to legal obligations
- Compliance with data protection legislation (GDPR)
- Timeliness, with clear communication throughout the process

4. Informal Resolution

Many concerns can be resolved quickly and informally.

- Complaints should first be raised with the Parish Clerk (unless the complaint concerns the Clerk).
- The Clerk will aim to provide an explanation or resolution within 7–10 working days .
- If further investigation is required, the Clerk will notify the complainant of the expected timescale.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the matter may proceed to the formal complaints process.

5. Formal Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Submission of Complaint

A formal complaint must be submitted in writing (email or letter) to the Parish Clerk and must include:

- The nature of the complaint
- Relevant dates, events, and supporting information
- The outcome sought

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days .

If the complaint concerns the Clerk, it will be referred to the Chairperson, who will oversee the process.

Stage 2 – Investigation

The Clerk (or Chairperson) will:

- Review all relevant evidence
- Seek clarification from the complainant where necessary
- Consult other parties as appropriate

A written response will normally be issued within 15–20 working days .

Stage 3 – Review by Council

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, they may request a review within 14 days.

The review will be conducted by:

- The Chairperson and at least two councillors, or
- A formally appointed Complaints Panel

The complainant may be invited to attend a meeting to present their case. They may bring a representative.

A final decision will be issued within 20 working days of the review meeting.

6. Complaints Meetings

Where a complaint is considered by councillors:

- The complainant will receive at least 7 days' notice of the meeting
- The meeting may be held in private if confidential matters are discussed
- The Clerk may present the Council's position but will not advise the Council if they are the subject of the complaint
- The decision will be formally recorded and announced at a Council meeting (in public session unless confidential)

7. Outcomes

Following investigation or review, the Council may:

- Uphold the complaint (in full or in part)
- Not uphold the complaint
- Provide an explanation or apology
- Take corrective action
- Implement procedural improvements

8. Vexatious or Unreasonable Complaints

Where a complaint is pursued in a persistent, abusive, or unreasonable manner, the Council may manage it under its Vexatious Complaints Policy (not yet adopted) .

9. Record Keeping

The Council will:

- Maintain a confidential record of all complaints and outcomes
- Report anonymised complaint data to Council where appropriate
- Retain records in accordance with data protection and retention policies
- Use complaint trends to improve services and governance

10. Communication of the Policy

This policy will be:

- Published on the Parish Council website
- Available on request from the Clerk
- Reviewed at least every two years or sooner if required by legislative or procedural changes