

Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Whittingham, Callaly and Alnham (WCA) Parish Council will handle complaints from members of the public. It aims to ensure complaints are dealt with in a fair, transparent, and timely manner.

2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints about the council's procedures, administration, decisions, or conduct of staff. It does not cover:

- Complaints against individual Councillors (refer to the Code of Conduct and the Monitoring Officer at Northumberland County Council)
- Employment matters (covered by internal HR procedures)
- Matters that are subject to legal proceedings or other formal investigation

3. Whistleblowing

The Council encourages anyone with serious concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice by the Council, its members or staff, to raise them in good faith. Whistleblowing concerns will be treated seriously and, where appropriate, in confidence. Such concerns may be raised through the Council's Chair, the Clerk, or directly to the Monitoring Officer at Northumberland County Council (monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk).

4. Making a Complaint

Complaints must be submitted in writing to the Clerk:

- By email to whittinghampc29@gmail.com, or
- By post to the address published on the council website

Complainants should provide their name, contact details, and a clear description of the issue.



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4. Informal Resolution

Where appropriate, the Clerk or Chair may attempt to resolve the matter informally. If informal resolution is not possible or unsuccessful, the formal procedure below will apply.

5. Formal Complaint Procedure

1. The Clerk (or Chair, if the complaint concerns the Clerk) will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days.
2. The complaint will be investigated, and a written response will be provided within 20 working days.
3. If further time is needed, the complainant will be notified.
4. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request that the matter is reviewed by the full council or an appointed panel.

6. Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled sensitively and in line with data protection legislation. Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered.

7. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

The council is committed to respectful and constructive communication. It recognises that occasionally individuals may pursue complaints in a way that can hinder their effective resolution.

A complaint (or series of complaints) may be considered unreasonable or vexatious if it:

- Involves abusive, threatening, or offensive language or behaviour
- Is persistent, harassing, or repetitive without new evidence
- Imposes a significant burden on staff time without proportionate justification
- Seeks to re-open issues that have already been addressed

If such behaviour is identified, the council may:

- Limit or restrict contact (e.g. require communication in writing only)
- Decline to respond to repeated or abusive correspondence



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- Refer the matter to external bodies if appropriate

Any decision to treat a complaint as unreasonable will be made by the Clerk in consultation with the Chair (or a nominated Councillor if the Chair is involved).

8. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if required by changes in guidance or legislation.

Adoption

Adopted by WCA Parish Council on: **DATE AND MINUTE REFERENCE**