

# **WHADDON PARISH COUNCIL**

## **Complaints Policy and Procedure**

**May 2024**

**Review Date: May 2025**

## **1. Commitment to Providing a Quality Service**

Whaddon Parish Council (WPC) is committed to providing a quality service for the benefit of the people who live and work in the Parish or who are visitors to the area. If you are dissatisfied with the standard of service you have received from this Council or are unhappy about an action or lack of action by this Council, this Complaints Procedure sets out how you may complain to the Council and seek a remedy, and how WPC will handle your complaint.

WPC makes all the policies (including this one) referred to in this procedure available under its Publication Scheme.

## **2. Scope.**

This Complaints Procedure applies to complaints about council administration and procedures and may include complaints about how council employee(s) have dealt with your concerns.

It does not apply to:

- 2.1. Complaints by one council employee against another, or between a council employee and the council as the employer. These matters are dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary and Grievance procedures.
- 2.2. Complaints against Councillors are covered by the Code of Conduct for Members as adopted by the Council. If a complaint against a Councillor is received by the Council, it will be referred to Buckinghamshire Council's Monitoring Officer.

Where WPC considers a complaint or complainant abusive, persistent, habitual or vexatious this will be dealt under WPC's Vexatious Complaints Policy.

## **3. Raising a Concern.**

Ahead of making a complaint a concern or service request should be raised with WPC, and WPC will make every effort to put things right through normal processes. Raising a concern provides WPC with the opportunity to resolve matters quickly and efficiently.

To raise a concern the appropriate route to having your say in a decision the Council is making is ahead of the Council's debate and vote on the matter, usually at a scheduled meeting. You may do this in writing to the Council in advance of the meeting at which the topic will be discussed (contact information is below) and there will also be an opportunity to raise your concerns in person in the public participation section of council meetings. Details of meetings are available via the website and via public notices.

If you are unhappy with a Council decision that's already been made, you may raise your concerns in writing with the Council and/or at the public session of a Council meeting. But please note that where a decision was made at a previous meeting Standing Orders prevent the Council from re-opening the topic for six months from the date of the decision, unless there are exceptional grounds to consider this necessary. The special process for this is set out in the Standing Orders.

## **4. Making a Complaint.**

If, after having raised a concern or service request in Sec.3 there is still dissatisfaction with the response or lack of resolution of the problem, you may submit a formal complaint. WPC may continue to address the concern or service request after a complaint has been submitted.

WPC will always accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to, and in that event, will provide its evidence and reasoning. Each complaint will be considered individually and on its own merits. The event must have occurred within the last 12 months or 12 months of the individual becoming aware of it.

A complaint against either an individual or the council as a whole will be treated as a complaint against the body corporate of the Council not the individual. A complaint should be submitted to the Clerk in writing (LTN 9E para. 14) along with all supporting information and documentation. Under the Equality Act 2010,

WPC will make reasonable adjustments for individuals to ensure they have full access the complaints process. The contact information for making your complaint is set out below.

The Council will not accept anonymous complaints.

If you do not wish to report your complaint to the Clerk, you may make your complaint directly to the Chair of the Council who will report it to the Full Council and Clerk. Contact information is available on the Council's website.

Once submitted the complaint may be processed by the council exclusively through written communications. Verbal representations by the complainant may be offered at the council's discretion. The council may at its discretion appoint an external body to assist with the investigations and/or complaint handling.

## **5. Handling of a Complaint.**

The Clerk or the Council, as appropriate, will investigate each complaint by obtaining further information as necessary from you, council staff and members of the Council and other appropriate sources.

WPC will keep a complete record of the complaint, the steps taken and all outcomes, which will be retained in accordance with WPC's Document Retention and Disposal Policy.

### Complaint Stages

#### Stage 1

- 5.1. WPC will aim to provide acknowledgement of the complaint within five working days of receipt.
- 5.2. WPC will aim to provide a response to the complaint within 10 working days of the acknowledgement.
- 5.3. Should the complexity of the complaint justify an extension, an expected timescale for a full response and the reasoning will be provided.
- 5.4. The response may include clarifying which aspects of the complaint WPC is not responsible for and any areas where responsibility is not clear.

#### Stage 2

- 5.5. If a complaint is not resolved under Stage 1 it may be escalated to Stage 2 and WPC will aim to provide acknowledgement within 5 days of receipt.
- 5.6. WPC will provide a summary and review of any issues deemed outstanding from Stage 1 and the outcomes the complainant is seeking, and will request any clarification(s) needed to progress the complaint.
- 5.7. WPC will endeavour to allocate a different person to handle the complaint from the person who handled Stage 1.
- 5.8. WPC will endeavour to issue a final response to a Stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- 5.9. Should the complexity of the complaint justify an extension, an expected timescale for a full response and the reasoning will be provided.

### Finalising the Complaint

On completion of its investigations WPC will provide a summary of the complaint and the decision reached along with the reasons, plus the details of any remedy, details of any outstanding actions and if appropriate details about how to escalate the complaint outside WPC, e.g., to the Monitoring Officer, an Ombudsman or other appropriate organisation.

## **6. Putting Things Right**

Where WPC is found to have done something wrong this will be fully acknowledged, and an apology made. Where needed, corrective action will be taken; e.g., provision of an explanation/assistance/reasons, action to reconsider or change a decision, the amendment or correction or addendum to a record, a change in policies or procedures or practices.

WPC will periodically review all complaints received and complaint handling performance and to identify any improvements needed to its policies and procedures. WPC is committed to continuous service improvement to bring best service and value at all times.