

Complaints Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Warfield Parish Council aims to deliver high quality services where the customer is at the heart of everything it does. The council welcomes all customer feedback and aim to deal with customers' concerns in a fair and consistent way. We learn from best practice, your experiences, and our mistakes to improve in the future.

2.0 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all parties that have a relationship with the parish council, including members of the public, hirers of facilities, suppliers of goods and services and contractors. For the purposes of this document these parties are referred to as customers.

3.0 The Policy

3.1 A customer has a right to:

- Complain
- Be listened to
- Have their complaint investigated and resolved as quickly as possible
- Have their concerns taken seriously

3.2 We aim to:

- Be accessible and uncomplicated
- Promote customer satisfaction
- Identify areas where services can be improved
- Learn from good practice
- Learn from mistakes
- Implement improvements in processes and procedures

3.3 Warfield Parish Council promotes the right of its customers to raise a concern or make a complaint if they think something has been done incorrectly or if they feel it has been addressed poorly. Similarly, customers may complain if they feel something that ought to have been done has not been done.

3.4 Complaints will be investigated objectively, fairly, and thoroughly. The aim will be to resolve the complaint. Mechanisms will be in place to ensure that lessons are learnt, and improvements implemented.

3.5 The council also promotes the right of customers to comment on a policy or council decision which may affect them and express a compliment if things have gone well for them. These should be forwarded to the Parish Clerk.

4.0 Definitions

4.1 Complaint:

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet with the quality of a service or with a failure to provide a previously agreed service, or with the attitude or behaviour of a member of staff or councillor

4.2 Comment:

A comment is a general statement about policies, practices, or a service, which have an impact on everyone and not just one individual. A comment can be positive or negative in nature. Comments may question policies and practices, make suggestions for new services or for improving existing services.

4.3 Compliment:

An expression of praise. It is a positive statement about a service provided by or on behalf of the Council, or about the helpfulness, attitude, or approach of a member of staff.

5.0 When the Complaints Procedure is Not Appropriate

5.1 The council's complaints procedure will not be used in respect of the following types of complaint:

5.2 Financial irregularity

5.2.1 The Parish Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) will provide an explanation of the item.

5.2.2 If the complainant is not satisfied, the Parish Clerk will advise the complainant of their statutory right to object to the Council's audit of accounts pursuant to Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. On any matter, it may be necessary for the Parish Clerk to consult the auditor.

5.3 Criminal activity

5.3.1 The Parish Clerk should refer the complainant to the police.

5.4 Member conduct

5.4.1 In the event of a complaint relating to a Member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the complainant will be advised to make their complaint to the Monitoring Officer at Bracknell Forest Council.

5.5 Employee conduct

5.5.1 A complaint relating to the conduct of an employee will be dealt with via the council's Disciplinary Policy by the Parish Clerk, or, if the Parish Clerk is implicated, through the Chairman of the council.

5.5.2 Complaints that an employee may have about a colleague will be dealt with in accordance with the council's Grievance Policy. Complaints that an employee may have about a Member will be referred to the Parish Clerk or, if the Parish Clerk is implicated, through the Chairman of the council.

6.0 Time limit for making a complaint

6.1 The council's aim is to put things right if they go wrong as quickly as possible, so it is important to recognise there is a six-month time limit (from the date of the incident giving cause for the complaint) for making a complaint. However, the time limit may be extended if it is still possible to consider the complaint effectively and efficiently or if there are other circumstances which may enable resolution of the complaint.

7.0 Confidentiality

7.1 The council will take care to maintain confidentiality where circumstances demand, e.g. where matters concern sensitive information or where third parties are concerned.

7.2 The name, address and other details of any complainant will remain confidential and only shared with those investigating any complaint. The council will not disclose your details to any party outside of the council without the consent of the complainant.

8.0 Unreasonable or vexatious complaints

8.1 There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to proceed when the complaint clearly has no reasonable basis, or where the council has already taken reasonable action in response, or some other action has been taken.

8.2 The Parish Clerk may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant and will inform the complainant to this effect, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response. If such a step is taken, it will be reported to the Chairman of the council.

9.0 Anonymous complaints

9.1 Anonymous complaints will be reviewed by the Parish Clerk but cannot be progressed through the Complaints Policy.

10.0 How to make contact

10.1 A customer can make a complaint, compliment, or comment either in person or by:

- By post to the Parish Clerk at the Parish Council office
- By e-mail to clerk@warfieldparishcouncil.gov.uk
- By telephone - 01344 457777
- In person at the Parish Office, 7 County Lane, Warfield, RG42 3JP

The preferred method of receiving complaints is in writing by post or e-mail.

11.0 The Complaints Procedure

11.1 Unfortunately things do not always go as planned or people feel upset or aggrieved by an action taken. It is for these reasons that the Parish Council operates a complaints procedure, to ensure that we always serve our customers fairly, courteously, professionally and in a non-discriminatory way. The council's aim is to put things right if they go wrong as quickly as possible. All staff are trained to deal with routine difficulties as they arise.

11.2 The process consists of three stages, which will follow these steps:

- **Recording your complaint:** the person receiving your complaint will record it. This enables us to monitor the number and type of complaints.

- **Acknowledging your complaint:** whenever possible your complaint will be dealt with at the first point of contact. If this is not possible your complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days and you will be given the details of the person looking into the matter.
- **Responding to your complaint:** the person responsible for responding to your complaint will contact you to agree the best way to deal with your complaint. The council's aim is to give you a full response within 14 working days. If for any reason we cannot do this, we will let you know when you can expect to receive a response. In any event we would endeavour to respond within 21 working days.
- **Room for error:** if we have made a mistake we will apologise and try to put things right. We will explain what actions we intend to take as a result of your complaint.
- **Your right to respond:** on receipt of a response, you will have up to 21 working days in which to decide whether to accept or reject the actions/ recommendations we have stated to resolve your complaint.

11.3 Stage 1

11.3.1 Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and satisfactorily at stage 1. In the first instance, please contact the Parish Clerk, tell them your complaint and in most cases the complaint can be dealt with to the satisfaction of all parties.

11.4 Stage 2

11.4.1 If you are not happy with the outcome or response at stage 1, you can request a review by the Parish Clerk and the appropriate chair of the relevant supervisory committee or (depending on the nature of the complaint) the Chairman of the council. There will be a thorough review and where necessary further investigation of your case following the deadlines in the guidance and timescale outlined above.

11.5 Stage 3

11.5.1 If you are still not satisfied with the response from the outcome at stage 2, you should contact The Parish Clerk who will arrange for the complaint to be dealt with by a panel of three members drawn from the council. Any member involved at stage 2 may not participate as a panel member.

11.5.2 The Complainant will be invited to attend a meeting and to submit copies (at least 7 clear working days in advance) of any correspondence or details that they wish the panel to be informed of. The Council will provide the Complainant with copies of any documentation which it wishes to rely on at the meeting (at least 7 clear working days in advance of the meeting).

11.5.3 The Complainant may be accompanied by or represented by one other person at the meeting if they wish.

11.5.4 The panel may not be able to reach a decision at this meeting as more information may be required to make a fully informed decision. The Complainant will be advised of this, along with details of how the matter will be further considered.

11.5.5 The decision of the Committee will be confirmed in writing to the complainant within seven working days of the decision being reached.

11.6 Stage 3 completes the parish council's complaints procedure.

12.0 How will we put things right?

12.1 If we have made a mistake we will apologise and tell you what action we will take to ensure the same situation does not arise again for you or other customers.

15.0 Freedom of information requests

15.1 If your complaint makes any requests for provision of documents or information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, then this act will be followed and the appropriate rules, regulations and schedule for the act will be followed (either instead of or as well as the complaints policy).

16.0 Evaluation and monitoring

16.1 The council will ensure that full records are kept of the nature and treatment of every complaint considered under this procedure. Particular attention will be paid to the lessons learnt, nature of complaints and trends, the timeliness of responses and resolutions.

Complaints Process

STAGE 1



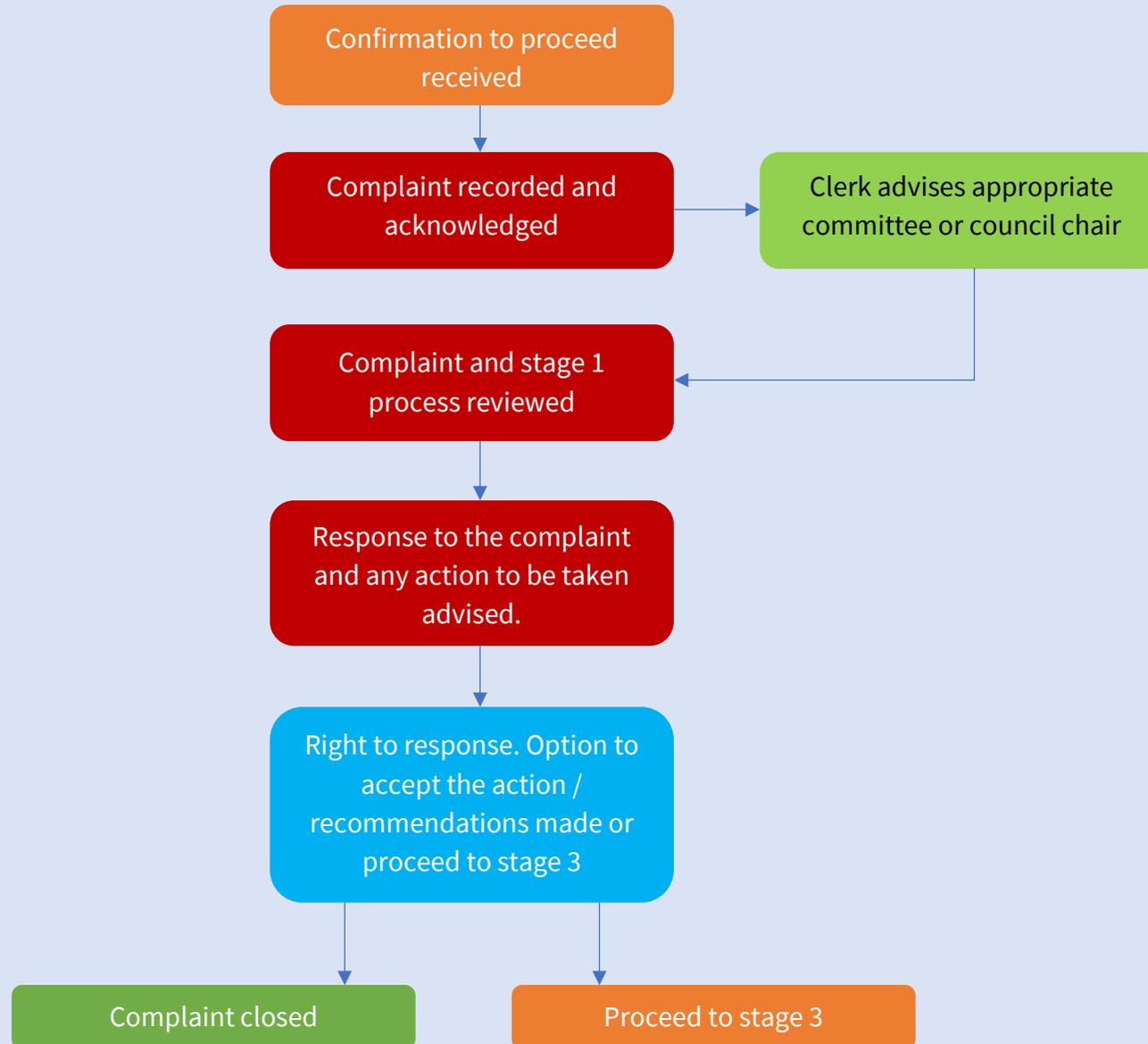
Within 5 working days

Usually within working days 14 working days

Within 21 working days of issue of response. If

Complaints Process

STAGE 2



Within 5 working days of receipt

Usually within working days 14 working days

Within 21 working days of issue of response.

Complaints Process

STAGE 3

