

Bletsoe Parish Council

Complaints Policy

Bletsoe Parish Council aims to operate in a way that is open, transparent and fair and to provide efficient and appropriate services to the community of Bletsoe. The Council welcomes feedback from the public at all times.

In the event that the Council does not satisfy a member of the public Bletsoe Parish Council has a two stage complaints procedure. If complaints are made to the council either in person, by telephone, letter or email the clerk or nominated officer will try to resolve the complaint informally in a timely manner. However, if the complainant is not satisfied he or she will be asked to submit a formal complaint. On receipt of a complaint the clerk, in consultation with the chairman, will ascertain the category of the complaint and take the relevant action with reference to the following:

	Complaint Category	Action
A	Financial irregularity	The Clerk/RFO should endeavour to provide an explanation of the item. The clerk /RFO may need to consult the auditor/Smaller Authorities Audit Association Ltd. If the complainant is not satisfied, the clerk should advise the complainant of the Local Elector's statutory right to object Council's audit of accounts pursuant to s.16 Audit Commission Act 1998.
B	Criminal activity	The clerk should refer the complainant to the Police.
C	Member conduct	If the complaint relates to a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct the complainant should be advised to submit the complaint to the Bedford Borough Council Standards Committee.
D	Employee conduct	As an internal disciplinary matter, this should be dealt with under the council's disciplinary procedure.
E	Other*	Should be dealt with under the following complaints procedure.
F	Member conduct (in house)	If the complaint is "in house" between individual parish councillors then this should initially be raised with the Clerk and the Chairman who will endeavour to deal with on an informal basis. However, if a solution/compromise cannot be agreed then the complainant would have no further right of complaint to the PC. They would of course be able to refer the matter to the Monitoring Officer if the complaint relates to a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

*Category E complaints are "expressions of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was

taken or the service provided by the council itself or a person or body action on behalf of the council". These will be heard by the Complaints Committee established by the Council which has delegated authority to deal with complaints on its behalf. The Complaints Committee must comprise three Parish Councillors who should be appointed on an ad hoc basis from Parish Councillors who, as far as practicable, have taken no part in the action which forms the basis of the complaint.

Complaints Procedure

Before the Meeting of the Complaints Committee

1. The complainant should be asked to put the complaint about the council's procedures or administration in writing to the clerk or other nominated officer.
2. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the clerk or other nominated officer he or she should be advised to address it to the chairman of the committee.
3. The clerk or other nominated officer shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the committee established for the purposes of hearing complaints. The complainant should also be advised whether the complaint will be treated as confidential or whether, for example, notice of it will be given in the usual way on the committee agenda.
4. The complainant shall be invited to attend a meeting of the committee and to bring with them a representative if they wish.
5. Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on. The council shall provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting and shall do so promptly, allowing the complainant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting.

At the Meeting

6. The committee shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and press. Any decision on the complaint shall be announced at the committee meeting in public.
7. The chairman of the committee should introduce everyone and explain the procedure
8. The complainant (or representative) should outline the grounds for complaint and, thereafter, questions may be asked by (i) the clerk or other nominated officer and then (ii) members.
9. The clerk or other nominated officer will have an opportunity to explain the council's position and questions may be asked by (i) the complainant and (ii) members.

10. The clerk or other nominated officer and then the complainant should be offered the opportunity to summarise their position.

11. The clerk or other nominated officer and the complainant should be asked to leave the room while members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties shall be invited back.

12. The clerk or other nominated officer and the complainant should be given the opportunity to wait for the decision but if the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day they should be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated to them.

After the Meeting

13. The decision should be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.

(Adopted by Bletsoe Parish Council - 9 May 2016)