

Complaints Policy and Procedure



INDEX OF LYDBROOK PARISH COUNCIL COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1	Introduction	3
2	Scope	3
3	Principles.....	3
4	Informal Resolution (Stage 1)	3
5	Formal Complaint (Stage 2).....	4
6	Independent Review (Stage 3)	4
7	Outcomes and Remedies.....	5
8	Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour	5
9	Recording and Learning	5
10	Data Protection	5

1 Introduction

Lydbrook Parish Council is committed to providing high quality services to the community. We welcome feedback and recognise that occasionally things go wrong. This policy sets out how members of the public can raise complaints, and how we will handle them fairly, consistently, and promptly.

2 Scope

This policy covers complaints about the Council's:

- Administration and procedures
- Services provided to the public
- Decisions made by the Council
- Conduct of officers acting on behalf of the Council

This policy does **not** cover:

- **Employee complaints** – managed through the Council's Grievance and Disciplinary Policies
- **Councillor conduct** – referred to the Monitoring Officer under the Local Government Code of Conduct
- **Financial irregularity** – referred to the external auditor in line with audit legislation
- **Alleged criminal activity** – referred to the police
- **Matters already decided by Council** – these cannot be reopened except as allowed by Standing Orders
- **Freedom of Information requests** – handled under FOI legislation

Anonymous complaints may be recorded, but the Council is not obliged to respond to them.

3 Principles

- **Fairness:** complaints will be handled without prejudice
- **Accessibility:** we will consider reasonable adjustments to support those who need them
- **Confidentiality:** complaint records will be held securely in line with GDPR
- **Learning:** complaints will be logged and reviewed to improve services

4 Informal Resolution (Stage 1)

Many complaints can be resolved quickly and informally.

- Please contact the **Clerk** (or the **Chair** if the complaint concerns the Clerk).
- We will acknowledge your concern within **5 working days** and aim to resolve it within **20 working days**.
- If further time is required, we will provide an interim update and revised timescale.

5 Formal Complaint (Stage 2)

If the matter is not resolved informally, you may submit a formal complaint in writing (letter or email). Please include:

- What happened and when
- Who was involved
- What outcome you are seeking

The Clerk (or Chair if the complaint concerns the Clerk) will:

- Acknowledge the complaint within **5 working days**
- Investigate, which may include seeking further information from you or officers
- Provide a written response within **28 calendar days** (or explain any delay with a revised target date)

6 Independent Review (Stage 3)

If you remain dissatisfied after Stage 2, you may request an independent review. The Council will seek to provide a fair and impartial process appropriate to its size and resources. Options include:

- **Complaints Committee:** Where numbers allow, a committee of three councillors with no prior involvement will hear the complaint.
- **Full Council (with exclusions):** In smaller councils, the full Council may hear the complaint, provided that councillors previously involved in Stages 1 or 2 do not take part.
- **Independent Person/Body:** Where independence cannot otherwise be achieved, the Council may ask a neighbouring parish/town council, or the Monitoring Officer of the District/Unitary Council, or another independent person appointed by the Council, to review the matter.

Before the meeting/review

- You will be invited to attend the hearing or review (you may bring a representative).
- Both sides will exchange documents at least 7 working days beforehand.

At the meeting/review

- The Chair or Independent Reviewer will outline the process.
- You present your complaint, followed by questions.
- The Council or Clerk responds, followed by questions.
- Both sides may make final comments before a decision is made.

After the meeting/review

- A written decision will be issued within 7 working days, setting out findings and any actions.
- The decision at Stage 3 is final.

7 Outcomes and Remedies

Where a complaint is upheld, the Council will:

- Offer an apology where appropriate
- Explain what went wrong
- Confirm what action will be taken to prevent recurrence (e.g. correcting records, changing procedures, training staff)

8 Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

The Council is committed to ensuring fair access for all residents and to handling complaints properly, consistently, and fairly. However, the Council reserves the right to take proportionate action if a complainant's behaviour becomes unreasonable.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour include:

- Persistent or repetitive complaints with no new evidence being provided.
- Refusal to accept decisions properly made by the Council.
- Abusive, offensive, defamatory, or threatening communication directed at councillors, staff, or volunteers.
- Abusive, defamatory, or persistent misuse of social media, online forums, or other digital platforms, including behaviour covered by the Council's Media & Communications Policy.
- Unreasonable demands on staff or councillor time, or contact at unreasonable hours.

Possible actions the Council may take include:

- Requiring all contact to be directed through a single point of contact (usually the Clerk).
- Restricting communication to written correspondence only.
- Limiting the frequency of contact.
- In rare cases, declining to respond further while continuing to log the complaint for audit purposes.

Any restrictions will be proportionate, time-limited, and subject to review. The Council will follow the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's guidance on unreasonable complainant behaviour in applying these measures.

9 Recording and Learning

- All complaints will be logged by the Clerk.
- The log will record dates, subject, outcome, and any follow-up actions.
- The Council will receive periodic anonymised reports to identify themes and improvements.

10 Data Protection

All complaints will be managed in accordance with the Council's Data Protection and Records Management policies. Information will be kept confidential and only shared with those directly involved in the process.

Adopted: [Date]

Reviewed: [Month, Year]

Next Review Due: [Month, Year]

Signed: _____ (Chair)

Signed: _____ (Clerk)

Disclaimer

In the absence of NALC model policies for all areas of core and recommended council governance, GAPTC has prepared this policy by studying a cross-section of parish and town council policies available online, identifying their strengths, common pitfalls, and where scope might need to be broadened to be fully effective. Drafting has been assisted by AI tools, and the content has not been assessed by a legal expert. Councils are strongly encouraged to tailor and customise this policy to suit their individual circumstances, activities, and risk profile, and to seek independent legal or professional advice where necessary.