SOMERFORD
PARISH COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Adopted – January 2026

1. Introduction

Complaints can be valuable as they may provide a chance to correct mistakes if there has been an error, and to make sure that the same mistake is not repeated.

It is essential that complaints be dealt with positively. The Parish Council is keen to hear the public's comments and is committed to making full use of complaints information to contribute to continuous service improvement. Important information about areas for improvement can be obtained both from a single complaint and from patterns of complaints, highlighted by detailed monitoring.

2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by, the Parish Council, Councilor's or staff, which affects the individual parishioner or group of parishioners.

What the complaints procedure will deal with:

The complaints procedure will deal with matters of maladministration. Some examples include:

- neglect or unjustified delay,
- malice, bias, or unfair discrimination,
- failure to provide information when reasonably requested,
- providing misleading or inaccurate information,
- inefficiency, ineffectiveness, bad and unprofessional practice or conduct.

What the complaints procedure will not deal with:

- Complaints for which there is a legal remedy, or which are already the subject of legal proceedings,
- Complaints about employment matters – the Parish Council operates alternative procedures to deal with grievances or disciplinary matters against staff,
- Complaints concerning an elected Member as these are subject to the Monitoring Officer at Cheshire East Council. Any complainants should be advised to contact the MO direct. Their e-mail address and web site are as follows:

To the Monitoring Officer at Cheshire East Council, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, Cheshire, CW11 1HZ, telephone 01270 686013.

3. Equal Opportunities

The Parish Council is committed to equal opportunities. Complaints feedback will be used to highlight discriminatory practices, and to promote equality of opportunity.

Complaints from members of the public relating to discrimination and/or harassment by the Parish Council will be dealt with through the complaints procedure unless it is a complaint that should be dealt with through a statutory procedure.

4. Complaints Officer

The Complaints Officer for the Council is the Clerk of the Council. Their main duties are:

(i) The day-to-day operation and management of the procedure, including providing a reference point for staff queries on informal complaints.

(ii) To oversee, and undertake where necessary, the investigation of formal complaints at the first stage, within the relevant time scales.

(iii) To maintain a record of all complaints received including details of the nature of the complaint, action taken, outcome, and time taken to resolve them.

(iv) to provide a quarterly analysis of the type, category and number of formal complaints received by the Council.

(v) To identify improvement points arising from any complaints.

Relevant types of complaint should be referred directly to the Clerk:

clerk@somerfordparishcouncil.gov.uk

5. Stages of the Procedure

The stages of the procedure are designed to provide the complainant with a thorough and fair means of redress where appropriate and to provide a framework within which officers should work.

Everyday problems, queries and comments

The Parish Council receives queries and comments as part of its day-to-day running, and they should not all be regarded as complaints. These are routine and are generally resolved quickly to the customer's satisfaction.

Informal Complaint

During the course of daily business, minor complaints may be made to officers about the services provided. The Clerk or a member of his staff will usually deal with these.

It is not appropriate for every comment to be treated as a formal complaint. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining a decision.

Formal Complaint (Stage 1)

A parishioner may wish to make a formal complaint directly or may be unsatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint and may wish to take the matter further. This will be recorded as a complaint if submitted in writing to the Clerk and passed to the appropriate officer to investigate.

Timescales: Acknowledgement – within 5 working days

Investigation completed – 10 working days

or Progress Reports issued – 10 working days

Review of Investigation and Complaint (Stage 2)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Investigating Officer's response, they should be advised of their right to have the complaint referred to a Complaints Panel which will review the complaint.

Timescales: Advice given within 5 working days

If the complainant then advises that it wishes to go through Stage 3 of the procedure, this should be acknowledged within 5 working days advising when the Complaints Panel will meet to discuss the issue.

Complaints Panel (Stage 3)

If the issue remains unresolved and the complainant has advised that it wishes to exercise its right to have the matter referred to the Complaints Panel, the matter should be referred to an appropriate meeting convened by the Chairman and Clerk of the Parish Council. The outcome of all formal complaints dealt with by the Panel will be reported to the next full Council meeting.

The procedure at the Complaints Panel meeting shall be as follows:

1 The Complaints Panel shall consist of the 3 members of the Parish Council.

2 A minimum of 10 working days' notice of such a panel will be given. At the time the complainant is notified in writing of the panel date, it will also be requested to present any material / documentation that they wish to give in evidence to the meeting no later than 5 working days prior to the meeting

3 The public and press are not permitted attendance at meetings of the Complaints Panel, although the Chairman will report on the outcome of the meeting at the following full Council meeting, if appropriate in part 2 of the agenda.

4 The order of business for the complaints meeting shall be in accordance with the National Association of Local Councils' guidance as follows:

(i) Chairman to introduce everyone.

(ii) Chairman to explain procedure.

(iii) Complainant (or representative) to outline grounds for complaint.

(iv) Members to ask any question of the complainant.

(v) The Clerk will be in attendance to explain the Council's position.

(vi) Members to ask any question of the Clerk.

(vii) Clerk and complainant to be asked to leave the room while the panel decides whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made (if a point of clarification is necessary, both parties to be invited back).

(viii) Clerk or other proper officer and complainant return to hear decision, or to be advised of when the decision will be made.

5 Following the conclusion of the meeting, the complainant will be advised of the outcome and that it is final with no right of further appeal, will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days together with details of any action to be taken.

6. Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to proceed when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other process, whether through the courts or some other recognised procedure, should or has been taken.

These matters should be referred to the Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. She may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant, and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.

7. Anonymous Complaints

Anybody communicating with the Parish Council is expected to provide their full name and address, telephone and email address if any. Anonymous complaints should be referred to the Clerk, but it will not be investigated.

8. Resolution and Remedies

The aim in dealing with complaints is to reach a fair decision. Where a complaint is found to be justified, consideration may need to be given to the question of an appropriate remedy, as well as an apology (the Clerk and Chairman to make any final decision regarding remedy unless such remedy involves the payment of a financial sum in which case a resolution of the full Council will be required). An explanation of the decision will be given where appropriate.