

1. This policy sets out the procedures for dealing with any complaints that anyone may have about Puddletown Area Parish Council's administration or its procedures. It applies to the employees of Puddletown Area Parish Council. Councillors are covered by the 'Code of Conduct' adopted by the Council. Complaints against policy decisions made by the Council should be referred back to Council (but note standing orders which says that a decision cannot be reversed within 6 months, except by a resolution).
2. The stages of the procedure are designed to provide the complainant with a thorough and fair means of redress and to provide a framework for officers to work within. However, there may be occasions when a complainant makes an approach in a different manner, and it is important that the procedure does not in itself become a barrier to effective communication.
3. During the course of daily business, minor complaints can be made to the Clerk about the services the Council provide. These are to be treated as informal complaints. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining a decision.
4. If someone is dissatisfied with the original service or response, they received and wishes to take the matter further then the issue should be recognised as a formal complaint and dealt with in the first instance by the appropriate departmental manager.
5. A person 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. The complainant should then be advised to send in their complaint in writing, addressed to the Clerk and marked private and confidential.
6. If a complaint about procedures or administration practised by the Council's employees is notified orally to a councillor or the Clerk, the complainant should be asked to put the complaint in writing to the Clerk and be assured that it will be dealt with promptly after receipt.
7. Anonymous complaints should be made to the Clerk, and may be acted on at their discretion, according to the seriousness of the allegation.
8. If the complainant prefers not to put the complaint to the Clerk, they should be advised to write to the Chairman.
9. On receipt of a written complaint, the Clerk or Chairman shall try to settle the complaint directly with the complainant. This shall not be done without first notifying the person complained against and giving them an opportunity to comment. Where the Clerk receives a complaint about their actions, they will refer the complaint to the Chairman. The Clerk shall be notified and given opportunity to comment.

Timescale:

Acknowledgement – by return of post.

Investigation completed – 14-days or

Progress Reports issued – 14-day intervals.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Clerk's response, or where the formal complaint is made about the actions of the Clerk, the matter shall be referred to a Chairman. If the complaint refers to the conduct of the Clerk they shall be notified and given an opportunity to comment.

Timescale:

Notification by the Clerk – 14 days

Acknowledgement – by return of post.

Review completed – 14 days thereafter

10. A decision on a complaint shall only be deferred if legal or other advice is sought and not yet received. The complaint shall be dealt with at the next meeting after the advice has been received.
11. If the working group so determines, the complaint may be referred to the next appropriate meeting of the Council.
12. As soon as a decision has been made, it and the nature of any action to be taken shall be communicated in writing to the complainant.
13. There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to pursue a complaint 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. In such circumstances the Clerk may decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant, and inform the complainant of this, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.
14. The aim in dealing with all complaints is to reach a resolution that satisfies the complainant, whether it is the remedy they were originally seeking or not. Where a complaint is found to be justified an explanation or an apology will always be needed. The Clerk will make the final decision regarding a remedy to the problem raised.
15. The Clerk shall report to the next meeting of the Council any formal written complaint disposed of by direct action with the complainant.
16. The Clerk or the Chairman, shall bring any complaint that has not been settled to the next meeting of the Council. The Clerk shall notify the complainant of the date on which the complaint shall be considered, and the complainant shall be offered an opportunity to explain the complaint orally. Confidential matters may be dealt with under exempt business where members of the public/press are excluded, but decisions on any complaint shall be announced in public.