

Audley Rural Parish Council

COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS PROCEDURE

(adopted 17 May 2018)

1. This complaints procedure is intended to ensure that complaints by members of the public about the Council's actions, or lack of action, or standard of service are dealt with promptly and effectively. The object of the procedure is to put things right when they have gone wrong and ensure that mistakes do not recur in the future.

2. This procedure does not apply to:

- complaints about the substance of policy decisions made by the Council (although members of the public may make comments or ask questions during the public participation session during every Council and committee meeting);
- complaints about the conduct of an individual councillor, which should be made to the Monitoring Officer at Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council
- complaints by an employee of the Council about the Council's actions as an employer, which should be dealt with under the Council's grievance procedure.

3. Complaints about the Council's administration and procedures should be made initially to the Clerk to the Council, and will be dealt with initially by the Clerk. If the complainant is unwilling to approach the Clerk a complaint may be made to the Chairman of the Council, who will refer the complaint either to the Clerk or to the Council. Complaints may be made in writing, by email, by phone or in person.

4. Complaints which cannot be dealt with immediately to the satisfaction of the complainant will be acknowledged in writing within 5 working days.

5. Complaints should be dealt with promptly. In general complaints will be dealt with within 20 working days of receipt, although this time limit may be extended with the agreement of the complainant, or where the Clerk feels it necessary to take legal or other advice.

6. Where it appears that the complaint includes an allegation that a criminal offence has been committed the Clerk may deal with the complaint by referring it to the police.

7. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the Clerk's decision on a complaint, or if the complaint is not dealt with to the satisfaction of the complainant within the time limit set out in the previous paragraph, the complainant may ask for the matter to be referred to Full Council.

8. Where a complaint is referred to Full Council the complainant will be informed of the date, time and place of the meeting. At least ten working days' notice will be given. The complainant will be invited to attend the meeting and also to submit any documents which s/he wishes to refer to. Any such documents must be received by the Clerk seven working days before the meeting to enable them to be circulated to members. The Clerk will provide the complainant with any documents that s/he wishes to refer to to the same timescale. The Clerk will also inform the complainant whether it is likely that the meeting will be open to the press and public or whether the press and public are likely to be excluded (for example because the personal affairs of an individual may be discussed).

9. At the meeting the Chairman should introduce everyone and explain the procedure. The complainant may outline the grounds of complaint and may then be questioned, first by the Clerk and then by Council Members. The Clerk may outline the Council's position and may be questioned, first by the complainant and then by Council Members. The Clerk and then the complainant may give a final summary of their position.

10. The complainant and the Clerk will then leave the room to allow the Council to reach a decision on the complaint. They will be called back when the Council has reached a decision.

11. If the Council considers that a complaint alleges misconduct by an employee the decision on the complaint may be deferred until the allegation has been dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure.

12. Council decisions on a complaint should normally be announced in public. The complainant should be notified of the decision in writing within seven working days, and notified also of what action will be taken.

13. Where a complaint is upheld the Clerk should report to a subsequent meeting of full Council what action has been taken to ensure that any mistake does not recur.

Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaints

All complaints will be processed in accordance with this policy and procedure. However, during the investigation of a complaint, or once the Parish Council has concluded an investigation into a complaint, staff or Councillors may have contact with unreasonably persistent complainants or unreasonable complainant behaviour. If the Parish Council is satisfied that the original complaint has been, or is being, properly dealt with and that there is nothing further that can reasonably be done; and if the frequency and nature of the contact is unreasonably hindering the carrying out of the Council's business, the Parish

Clerk or Chair may take appropriate steps to limit contact with a particular individual. Such a decision will only be taken after careful consideration, and taking into account all the circumstances. Before applying any restrictions the complainant will be given a warning of the steps that will be taken if his or her actions continue and an explanation of the reasons why.

Compliments and Suggestions

Compliments, suggestions and comments should be recorded on the complaints database to assist with the evaluation of services. An acknowledgement thanking the customer for their compliment, suggestion or complaint should be sent within 3 working days. Where appropriate, the customer should be informed of the outcome of any further deliberations on their suggestion or comment.