

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

The City of Durham Parish Council wants to provide excellent quality services for the residents of our area. However, things can sometimes go wrong. If they do, we need to know so we can put them right and learn from them.

The Parish Council sees all customer comments and feedback as a good way of evaluating its services. Complaints and comments are an important part of this process and help us to learn and develop. The Parish Council aims to use this information to help drive improvements forward.

The Parish Council aims to ensure that all written communication is clear, concise, simple to understand, jargon-free and available in larger print if required.

Our Promises to you

- You will receive a prompt, courteous and efficient service;
- You can expect a full and fair investigation of your comment or complaint;
- We will be happy to explain procedures to you if you are unsure about anything;
- Your confidentiality will be respected at all times;
- Your personal information will be kept in line with Data Protection;
- You will be kept informed of progress and the outcome of your complaint, as outlined below;
- We will make it easy for customers or those acting on their behalf to make a complaint or pass on comments about a service;
- We will try to resolve complaints, put things right where appropriate and take any action necessary to prevent recurrence as soon as practicable;
- We will monitor comments and complaints and provide feedback to council so that trends are highlighted and can be taken into account when decisions are made.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a response, a lack of response, the standard of service you have received or disrespect from a council employee that cannot be resolved through the normal day to day operational processes of the service involved.

A complaint can only relate to a service that the council already provides. It can't relate to requests for new services or services provided by other local authorities. However, information provided may highlight gaps in service provision that may be relevant to future consideration and should be recorded and actioned as a comment.

The following list is a guide to the range of complaints which are covered by this Complaints Policy:

- Failure to provide a service or to achieve an acceptable standard.
- Issues regarding the attitude of staff and or their actions, or lack of actions.
- Dissatisfaction with the manner in which council policy and procedure has been carried out.
- Discrimination.

What is not a complaint?

The following are excluded from this Complaints Policy:

- A request for service
- A request for information or an explanation
- An insurance claim against the council
- Criticism of council policy
- A matter which is, or may be, the subject of court or tribunal proceedings

Complaints about Councillors

Any complaint about councillors' conduct can only be dealt with by reporting details to Durham County Council's Monitoring Officer. The Parish Council cannot legally deal with these issues.

Compliments and Comments

Compliments - thanking the Council for something done, or done particularly well.

Comments - We recognise that sometimes members of the public simply want to register a comment about a council service, and do not wish to pursue a complaint. In this case we will ensure a record of the comment is maintained and appropriate action is taken on the comment. Where compliments/comments are received by the Council an acknowledgement will be communicated by the clerk within 3 working days.

What do I do if I am unhappy with the council?

You can write to us with details of your complaint. We will send you an acknowledgement and inform you who is dealing with your complaint within three working days of receiving your complaint.

There are two stages to the Council's complaints procedure:

Stage One

Your complaint will be acknowledged within three working days of contacting us. Your complaint will be investigated by the clerk and a reply provided to you within ten working days.

If you are unhappy with your reply you can appeal to the Council, which leads to Stage Two.

You may choose to appeal because:

- you think a finding or penalty is unfair
- additional new evidence comes to light – hearsay or unsubstantiated evidence cannot be accepted
- you think the stage one procedure was not used correctly

Stage Two

You may appeal to the Council's Complaints Committee whose Members are drawn from the Council. We will let you know that we have received your appeal within three working days of you contacting us.

The Parish Council's Complaints Committee will consider the evidence, based on the criteria set out above, and provide a final response. If it is considered necessary you will be invited to attend and discuss your complaint with Committee Members. These members will not have been involved in the original complaint and they will determine if there is a valid reason for appeal.

The Parish Council's Complaints Committee decision will be communicated to you through the Clerk within fifteen working days.

If the Council's Complaints Committee determines there is no valid reason for the appeal there is no further right of appeal at this stage.

This will be the final decision and the case will be closed. There is no further right of appeal.

How do we make sure everyone is treated fairly?

We recognise and value all of the people in the City of Durham Parish area and want to make sure that everyone can use the complaints system. We want to make sure we treat you fairly when making any complaint about us.

The information you give is confidential. We only use it to check that we treat all groups of people fairly and we do not discriminate against you.

If part of your complaint is about equal opportunities or discrimination, please tell us. We will make sure we look into that for you.

Vexatious/Repetitive Complaints

The Parish Council may choose to give a decision on a complaint, without a formal investigation, where it considers the complaint to be deliberately vexatious or repetitive.

How can I complain?

You can write to the Parish Clerk providing full details of the service you are complaining about.

Please send all written complaints to: -

City of Durham Parish Council
Office 3
Clayport Library Building
8 Millennium Place
Durham
DH1 1WA

or e mail to parishclerk@cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk

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