

BRACEBRIDGE HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

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Complaints policy

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 Bracebridge Heath Parish Council is committed to providing its services efficiently and to as high a standard as possible. The Council takes all complaints seriously.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Council has a clear process for dealing with complaints in order to:
- have the opportunity to respond to and resolve any issues that arise;
 - learn from mistakes and prevent them from happening again in the future;
 - review policies and procedures where necessary.
- 1.3 The aim of this policy is to outline how members of the public can complain to the Council and how a complaint will be dealt with.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This complaints policy applies to complaints about council administration and procedures and may include complaints about how council employees have dealt with concerns.
- 2.2 This policy does not apply to:
- Complaints by one council employee about another council employee; or complaints by a council employee about Bracebridge Heath Parish Council as an employer. Complaints of this nature should be referred to the Council's grievance policy.
 - Complaints about individual Members of Council. Complaints of this nature are covered by the Code of Conduct for Members. Such complaints should be made in writing to the Monitoring Officer at North Kesteven District Council. Further information on the process of dealing with complaints about councillors can be obtained directly from North Kesteven District Council and is available on their website.
- 2.3 The appropriate time for influencing Council decision-making is by raising your concerns before the Council debates and votes on a matter. You may do this by writing to the Council in advance of the meeting at which the item is to be discussed. There may also be the opportunity to raise your concerns in the public participation section of Council meetings. If you are unhappy with a Council decision, you may raise your concerns with the Council, but Standing Orders prevent the Council from re-opening issues for six months from the date of the decision, unless there are exceptional grounds to consider this necessary and the special process set out in the Standing Orders is followed.

3 The complaints process

3.1 Informing the Council of a complaint

- 3.1.1 Complaints about procedures of administration should be discussed with the clerk. Mistakes and misunderstandings are often resolved informally at this stage. If the clerk cannot resolve the complaint informally the following steps should be followed:
- Complaints should be made in writing (or email) addressed to the clerk, providing the name, address and contact details for the complainant together with the details of the complaint. The complaint may also be addressed to the chairman of the council.

- The complaint shall be acknowledged in writing within ten working days and the complainant advised of when the matter will be considered by the Council. Complaints will usually be discussed at a meeting of Full Council.
- The clerk or Council (as appropriate) will investigate each complaint, obtaining further information as necessary from the complainant and anyone else related to the complaint.

3.2 All personal information and data will be held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

3.3 **At the meeting**

3.3.1 The Council will consider whether the nature of the complaint warrants the exclusion of the public and press from the meeting.

3.4 **Following the meeting**

3.4.1 The decision made by the Council regarding the complaint will be confirmed in writing within ten working days of being made. Included with this will be details of any action to be taken. Complainants will be kept informed should additional time be required to respond.

3.5 **Appeal process**

3.5.1 The complainant must inform the Council in writing if they wish to appeal the decision made.

- The request for an appeal shall be acknowledged in writing and the complainant advised of when the matter will be re-considered by the Council.
- Following the appeal, the Council will confirm its final decision in writing within ten working days together with any action to be taken.
- If following the appeal process, the complainant is still not satisfied with the action taken, or if the complainant feels they have been unfairly treated they can pursue their complaint through the Local Government Ombudsman. Further information can be found at www.lgo.org.uk or by calling 0300 061 0614. The circumstances in which the Local Government Ombudsman considers complaints about parish councils are very limited. Advice and information should be sought directly from the LGO website.

3.6 **Handling vexatious or abusive complaints**

3.6.1 A very small minority of complainants may persist unreasonably with their complaints rather than genuinely to resolve a grievance. The Council recognises the need to distinguish between those who make a number of complaints because they genuinely believe things have gone wrong, and those who are looking to subvert the legitimate business of the Council.

3.6.2 It is not necessary to meet a complainant's unreasonable demands, and judgement is required to separate the legitimate from the unreasonable queries, often within the same complaint.

3.6.3 If the complainant's persistence adversely affects the Council's ability to do its work, it must address such behaviour. The clerk will implement action agreed by the Council and will notify the complainant that their complaint is considered vexatious and what action will be taken.

4 Responsibilities & review

- 4.1 The Full Council is responsible for the review of this policy on a biennial basis or in response to changes in relevant legislation.

5 Version control and amendment history

| Date approved | Version Number | Revision / amendments made | Review date |
|----------------|----------------|---|----------------|
| May 2015 | 1.1 | New policy | April 2016 |
| May 2016 | 1.1 | Reviewed – no changes | |
| January 2017 | 1.2 | Reviewed – vexatious complaints added | January 2018 |
| September 2018 | 2.0 | Reviewed – new format | September 2020 |
| August 2020 | 2.1 | References to Finance and General Purposes committee updated. | August 2022 |
| June 2022 | 2.2 | Update to council header | June 2024 |
| June 2024 | 2.3 | Update to council header. Removal of references to Finance and Policy committee | June 2026 |