

Complaints Procedure & Policy

1. Purpose and Principles

Winterbourne Parish Council values complaints as an opportunity to learn, improve services, and correct mistakes. All complaints will be handled **fairly, transparently, and without delay**, in line with NALC's recommended model complaints procedure.

The Council is committed to:

- treating all complainants with respect
 - resolving issues promptly and proportionately
 - identifying service improvements
 - ensuring accountability and good governance
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2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is **any expression of dissatisfaction**, whether verbal or written, about:

- the standard of service provided by the Parish Council
- actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff
- decisions or processes that affect an individual or group

This procedure covers complaints of **maladministration**, including:

- avoidable delay or neglect
 - unfairness, bias, or discrimination
 - failure to follow proper procedures
 - failure to provide information or giving misleading information
 - poor-quality service, inefficiency, or unprofessional conduct
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3. What This Procedure Does Not Cover

Certain matters fall outside this complaints process:

- **Complaints with a legal remedy**, or where legal proceedings are underway
- **Employment-related issues**, which are handled through staff grievance and disciplinary procedures
- **Complaints about individual councillors**, which must be referred to the **Monitoring Officer** at South Gloucestershire Council under the Code of Conduct framework



- **Freedom of Information or Data Protection matters**, which follow statutory processes
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4. Equal Opportunities

Winterbourne Parish Council is committed to equality, fairness, and inclusion. Complaints relating to discrimination or harassment will be investigated under this procedure unless a statutory process applies.

Feedback from complaints will be used to identify and address discriminatory practices and promote equal access to services.

5. Complaints Officer

The **Clerk** is the Council's designated Complaints Officer. Their responsibilities include:

- managing the complaints process on a day-to-day basis
- providing guidance to staff and councillors on informal complaints
- investigating formal complaints at Stage 1
- maintaining a complaints register (nature, actions, outcomes, timescales)
- identifying service improvements and training needs

Where a complaint concerns the Clerk, the **Chairman** will act as Complaints Officer.

Where a complaint concerns both the Clerk and the Chairman, the matter will be referred directly to the **Council**.

6. Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

If a complaint is made verbally to a councillor or the Clerk and cannot be resolved immediately, the complainant will be invited to submit the complaint **in writing** to the Clerk. If the complaint concerns the Clerk, it should be submitted to the **Chairman**.

The Clerk or Chairman will attempt to resolve the matter directly, except where the complaint concerns their own conduct.

Where the complaint concerns the Clerk or a councillor, the subject of the complaint will be notified and given an opportunity to comment before any resolution is attempted.

Any complaint resolved informally will be reported to the next Council meeting for transparency.



Stage 2 – Formal Consideration by the Council

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, or the complainant requests formal consideration:

1. The complaint will be referred to the **next available Council meeting**.
 2. The complainant will be notified of the meeting date and invited to attend and speak.
 3. The Council will decide whether the matter should be heard in **public or private session**, in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.
 4. The Council will consider the complaint, review evidence, and reach a decision.
 5. The decision and any actions to be taken will be confirmed **in writing** as soon as reasonably possible.
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Stage 3 – Deferral

The Council may defer consideration if:

- legal or specialist advice is required (e.g., NALC, SLCC, legal counsel)
- the matter is under investigation by a statutory body (e.g., Monitoring Officer, Police, ICO)

The complaint will be reconsidered at the next meeting following receipt of the necessary advice or outcome of investigations.

7. Outcomes and Learning

The Council will:

- record all complaints and outcomes
 - identify recurring themes or service issues
 - implement improvements where appropriate
 - provide training to staff or councillors where needed
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8. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All complaints will be handled in accordance with:

- the Data Protection Act 2018
- the UK GDPR
- the Council's Privacy Notice



Winterbourne

PARISH COUNCIL

Information will only be shared where necessary for the investigation or where legally required.

9. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed **every two years**, or sooner if NALC guidance or legislation changes.

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