



Barnham & Eastergate Parish Council Complaints Procedure

1. Purpose

Barnham & Eastergate Parish Council aims to provide high-quality services to the community. We recognise that from time-to-time things may go wrong, and when they do, we welcome complaints as an opportunity to improve.

This procedure explains how complaints will be handled fairly, consistently, and transparently.

2. What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about:

- The Council's procedures
- The administration of Council business
- The conduct of Council staff

3. What This Procedure Does Not Cover

This procedure does **not** apply to:

- Complaints about Councillors (handled under the Code of Conduct via the District Council Monitoring Officer)
- Financial irregularities (subject to external audit processes)
- Planning decisions (these are statutory processes)

4. Informal Resolution

Where possible, complaints should first be raised informally with the Clerk.

- Many issues can be resolved quickly at this stage
- The Clerk will aim to respond within 7 working days



5. Formal Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Submission of Complaint

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, a formal complaint should be made:

- In writing (email or letter)
- Addressed to the Clerk
- Clearly stating:
 - The nature of the complaint
 - Relevant dates and details
 - Desired outcome

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days.

Stage 2 – Investigation

- The complaint will be investigated by the Clerk (or the Chair if the complaint concerns the Clerk)
- Relevant evidence will be gathered
- The complainant may be contacted for further information

A written response will normally be provided within 15 - 20 working days.

Stage 3 – Review by Council

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response, they may request a review.

- The request must be made in writing within 14 days
- The complaint will be considered by:
 - The Chair and at least two councillors, or
 - A complaints panel

The complainant may be invited to attend a meeting to present their case.

A final decision will be issued in writing within 20 working days of the review.

6. Complaints Meetings

Where a complaint is considered by councillors:

- The complainant will be given at least 7 days' notice
- They may bring a representative
- The meeting will follow a fair and structured format
- The Council may exclude the public and press if confidential matters are discussed



7. Outcomes

Following investigation, the Council may:

- Uphold the complaint (in full or in part)
- Not uphold the complaint
- Take action to improve procedures
- Offer an apology or explanation

8. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

If a complaint is pursued in a way that is unreasonable or persistent, it may be managed under the Council's Vexatious Complaints Policy.

9. Record Keeping

The Council will:

- Keep a record of all complaints and outcomes
- Handle information in line with data protection requirements
- Use anonymised data to improve services

10. Escalation Outside the Council

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the Council's procedure is complete, they may contact:

- The Local Government Ombudsman (where applicable)
- Or seek independent advice

11. Freedom of Information Complaints (Internal Review)

If a requester is dissatisfied with the Council's response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, they may request an internal review.

How to Request a Review

- Requests must be made in writing
- Submitted within 40 working days of the response
- Should state the reasons for dissatisfaction

Review Process

- The review will be carried out by someone not involved in the original decision (where possible)
- The Council will reconsider:



- The handling of the request
- Any exemptions applied
- The completeness of the response

Timescales

- The Council will aim to respond within 20 working days
- Complex reviews may take up to 40 working days

Outcome

The Council will write to the requester with:

- The outcome of the review
- Reasons for the decision
- Details of the next step

Further Escalation

If the requester remains dissatisfied, they may complain to the Information Commissioner's Office.

12. Data Protection Complaints

This section applies to concerns about how the Council handles personal data under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

Raising a Concern

Individuals who are concerned about how their personal data has been handled should contact the Council:

- In writing (email or letter)
- Providing details of the concern
- Including any relevant dates or correspondence

Requests should be directed to the Clerk or Data Protection Officer for the Council.

Investigation

The Council will:

- Acknowledge the concern within 5 working days
- Investigate how the data has been processed
- Review compliance with relevant legislation
- Respond within 1 calendar month (in line with statutory requirements)



Outcome

The Council will provide a written response outlining:

- Findings of the investigation
- Any corrective action taken
- Steps to prevent recurrence

Further Escalation

If the individual is dissatisfied with the Council's response, they may complain to the:

Information Commissioner's Office at <https://ico.org.uk/>

13. Policy Review

This procedure will be reviewed every **2–3 years** or sooner if required.

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