



LOSTOCK GRALAM
PARISH COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY AGAINST LOSTOCK GRALAM PARISH COUNCIL

1. Introduction

Complaints can be valuable because they may provide a chance to put things right if there has been an error, and to make sure that the same mistake is not repeated. It is essential that complaints be dealt with positively. The Parish Council will listen to people's comments and is committed to making full use of complaints information to contribute to continuous service improvement. Important information about areas for improvement can be obtained both from a single complaint and from patterns of complaints, highlighted by detailed monitoring.

2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Parish Council or its staff which affects the individual customer or group of customers.

What this complaints procedure will deal with:

The complaints procedure will deal with matters of maladministration, which is if the Parish Council does something the wrong way, fails to do something it should do or does something it should not do. Some examples include:

- neglect or unjustified delay
- malice, bias, or unfair discrimination
- failure to tell people their rights
- failure to provide advice or information when reasonably requested
- providing misleading or inaccurate advice
- inefficiency, ineffectiveness, bad and unprofessional practice or conduct

What the complaints procedure will not deal with:

- complaints for which there is a legal remedy or where legal proceedings exist already
- complaints about employment matters – the Parish Council operates alternative procedures to deal with grievances or disciplinary matters against staff
- complaints concerning an elected member should be directed to the Monitoring Officer at Cheshire West and Chester Council.

By post: Monitoring Officer, Cheshire West and Chester Council, 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BE.

Email: cwacmonitoringofficer@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

3. Equal Opportunities

The Parish Council is committed to equal opportunities. Complaint's feedback will be used to highlight discriminatory practices, and to promote equality of opportunity.

Complaints by members of the public of discrimination and/or harassment against the Parish Council will be dealt with through the complaints procedure unless it is a complaint that should be dealt with through a statutory procedure.

4. Complaints Officer

The Complaints Officer for the Council is the Clerk of the Council. Their main duties are:

- (i) The day-to-day operation and management of the procedure, including providing a reference point on informal complaints.
- (ii) To oversee, and undertake where necessary, the investigation of formal complaints at the first stage, within the relevant time scales.
- (iii) To maintain a record of all complaints received including details of the nature of the complaint, action taken, outcome, and time taken to resolve.
- (iv) To provide a quarterly analysis of the type, category and number of formal complaints received by the Council.
- (v) To identify improvement points arising from any complaints.

Relevant types of complaint (ideally in writing) should be referred directly to the Clerk, Lostock Gramam PC, PO BOX 768, Northwich, CW9 9TS.

Telephone 07739 926 025 E-mail: clerk@lostockgramparishcouncil.co.uk

5. Stages of the Procedure

The stages of this procedure are designed to provide the complainant with a thorough and fair means of redress and to provide a framework for officers to work within.

Everyday problems, queries and comments

The Council receives queries, problems and comments as part of its day-to-day running, and they should not all be regarded as complaints. These are routine and expected, and are generally resolved quickly to the persons satisfaction.

If someone is dissatisfied with the original service or response they received and wishes to take the matter further then the issue should be recognised as a complaint.

Informal Complaint

During the course of daily business, minor complaints are made to officers about the services provided. The Clerk will usually deal with these.

It is not appropriate for every comment to be treated as a formal complaint. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining a decision.

Formal Complaint (Stage 1)

All formal complaints against Lostock Gralam Parish Council must be communicated in writing. A person may wish to make a formal complaint directly, or may be unsatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint and may wish to take the matter further.

The complaint should include the following;

- whether the complaint should be treated as confidential
- the complainants name and address optional phone number and email address
- a description of the complaint
- details of any evidence / photos
- a time and date when the matter occurred

The Clerk will consult with the Chairman or Vice Chairman to determine appropriate action.

Response timescales:

Acknowledgement – within five working days

Investigation completed – 14 days thereafter

or Progress Reports issued – 14-day intervals

Review of Investigation and Complaint (Stage 2)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Chairman/Vice Chairman's response, they should be advised of their right to have the complaint referred to a Complaints Panel which will review the complaint.

Timescales: Advice given within five working days

If the complainant then advises that he/she wishes to go through stage three of the procedure, this should be acknowledged in five working days advising when the Complaints Panel will meet to discuss the issue.

Complaints Panel (Stage 3)

If the issue remains unresolved and the complainant has advised that he or she wishes to exercise their right to have the matter referred to the Complaints Panel, the matter should be referred to an appropriate meeting convened by the Chairman and Clerk of the Council. The outcome of all formal complaints dealt with by the Panel will be reported to the next full Council meeting.

The procedure at the Complaints meeting shall be as follows:

1. The Complaints Panel shall consist of the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Council and two Parish Councillors, at least 3 must be present at the meeting. In the event that at least two of these persons are not available a further appointment (as many times as necessary) shall be made at the sole discretion of the Chairman of the Council.
2. The complainant will be invited to bring a "friend" with them either to represent them or to give moral support.
3. A minimum of two weeks prior notice of such a panel will be given. At the time the complainant is notified in writing of the panel date they will also be requested to present any material/documentation that they wish to give in evidence to the meeting no later than 7 days prior to the meeting and the Council will confirm that it will present any material it intends to present to the complainant within the same time scale.
4. As general policy the public and press are not permitted attendance at meetings of the Panel although the Chairman will report on the outcome of the meeting at the following full Council meeting, if appropriate in part 2 of the agenda.

5. The order of business for the complaints meeting shall be in accordance with the National Association of Local Councils' guidance as follows:

- (i) Chairman to introduce everyone.
- (ii) Chairman to explain procedure.
- (iii) Complainant (or representative) to outline grounds for complaint.
- (iv) Members to ask any question of the complainant.
- (v) If relevant, the Clerk will be in attendance to explain the Council's position.
- (vi) Members to ask any question of the Clerk.
- (vii) The Clerk and the complainant to be offered the opportunity of a last word (in this order).
- (viii) Clerk and complainant to be asked to leave the room while Members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. (If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties to be invited back).
- (ix) The Clerk and complainant return to hear decision, or to be advised of when the decision will be made.

5. Following the conclusion of the meeting

The complainant will be advised that the decision of the Committee, which is final with no right of further appeal, will be confirmed in writing within 7 days together with details of any action to be taken.

6. Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to proceed when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other process, whether through the courts or some other recognised procedure, should or has been taken.

These matters should be referred to the Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. She may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant, and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.

7. Anonymous Complaints

Anybody communicating with the Parish Council is expected to provide their full name and a postal address. Anonymous complaints should be referred to the Clerk, and may be dismissed at her discretion, according to the type and seriousness of the allegation.

8. Resolution and Remedies

The aim in dealing with all complaints is to reach a resolution for the complainant, whether it is the remedy they were originally seeking or not. Where a complaint is found to be at all justified, consideration may need to be given to the question of an appropriate remedy (the Clerk to make any final decision regarding remedy unless such remedy involves the payment of a financial sum in which case a resolution of the Council will be required).