

Longhorsley Parish Council

Complaints Procedure

1. Councillors

- 1.1 This procedure does not cover any complaints made regarding the conduct of a Longhorsley Parish Councillor. This issue will be handled by the Standards Committee of Northumberland County Council via the Monitoring Officer.

2. Complaints

- 2.1 Complaints to Councillors concerning Longhorsley Parish Council business must be taken seriously and, if given verbally to the Councillor, should be requested to be put in writing by the complainant and addressed to the Clerk.
- 2.2 Any complaint received by the Parish Council must be clearly marked as a complaint otherwise it will be dealt with as a standard communication and will not come under the scope of a complaint. However, the unreasonable complainant behaviour section will still apply.
- 2.3 Any written complaint received from a Parishioner by a Parish Councillor or the Clerk, should be promptly copied to all councillors and the Clerk for consideration and receipt of the complaint acknowledged, by the Clerk, within 7 days.
- 2.4 The complaint will be investigated by the Clerk within 21 days taking into account considered input from councillors and a response prepared for the next council meeting.
- 2.5 Any complaint regarding a third party will be passed to the third party and they will be given the opportunity to make any comments.
- 2.6 The Clerk or the Chairman, where the complaint is in respect to the Clerk, will report the outcome of any complaints resolved by direct action with the complainant to the next available meeting of the Council explaining the reason for the need to take direct action.
- 2.7 As with any monthly Parish Council meeting the public, including any complainant, will have the right to talk to the complaint during the public session to the time limit enforced at such meetings.
- 2.8 The Parish Councillors will consider the content of the complaint and agree appropriate action and response.
- 2.9 The Parish Council may consider that the circumstances of a complaint warrants the matter being discussed without the presence of the press and the public. In such a case, the result will be communicated to the complainant directly and to the general public through the minutes of the meeting.
- 2.10 The complainant will be informed of any actions and response within 14 days of the meeting.

2.11 The Parish Council may defer dealing with any complaint if it is of the opinion that any of the issues arising from the complaint require further advice being obtained. Any advice received will be referred to the next available meeting of the Parish Council.

3. Management of unreasonable complainant behaviour

3.1 Introduction

Longhorsley Parish Council is committed to dealing with all complaints and other correspondence fairly and impartially, and to making its services as accessible as possible. Because of the nature or frequency of their contact with the Parish Council a small number of complainants or other correspondents hinder the normal workings of the Council. This may be because of unacceptable behaviour in their dealings with the Parish Council, or because of unreasonably persistent contacts that distract staff from carrying out the day-to-day work of the Council.

3.2 Unacceptable Behaviour

The Parish Council will not tolerate deceitful, abusive, offensive, threatening or other forms of unacceptable behaviour from complainants or correspondents. When it occurs, we will take proportionate action to protect the wellbeing of our staff and the integrity of our processes. Any unacceptable behaviour at a council meeting is covered by the relevant Standing Orders for Longhorsley Parish Council.

3.3 Unreasonably Persistent Behaviour

We manage a wide range of work on behalf of the Longhorsley Parish Council at any one time, using our time and resources to best effect. We cannot do so if an individual or group attempts to dominate attention with frequent, lengthy contacts and repetitive information. This hinders the consideration of other aspects of the day-to-day work of the Parish Council.

3.4 Warnings

In most instances when we consider behaviour is unreasonable we will explain why and ask the individual or group to change it. This may take the form of offering a face-to-face meeting with the Chairman or other members of the Parish Council

3.5 Restricting access to Longhorsley Parish Council

The Parish Council will decide whether the circumstances justify any restriction of access. They will record the reason for their decision and explain it to the person or group concerned. They will state for how long any restriction will apply before it is reconsidered, and state how the decision can be challenged.

The sort of restrictions imposed could include:

- a) restricting e-mails / telephone calls to specified days and limited times
- b) limiting contacts to one form only (for example, a maximum of one letter in advance of each Parish Council meeting)

- c) requiring contact to take place with one named Councillor

Other suitable options will be considered in the light of the complainant or correspondent's circumstances. If a complainant or correspondent attends the public meetings of the Parish Council and is deemed by those Councillors present to be affecting the normal running of the meeting then the Chairman will have the right to request the individual concerned to leave the meeting.

3.6 Terminating access to the Parish Council

If a complainant or correspondent continues to behave unreasonably, and overrides the restrictions placed on access to the Parish Council, the Parish Council may decide to terminate all contact with them.