



COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

This policy was adopted by Barrow Parish Council at its meeting on 15th May 2017 and last reviewed in December 2020.

Barrow Parish Council is committed to providing a quality service for the benefit of residents and visitors to the parish. This policy sets out how Barrow Parish Council deals with complaints about the parish council's administration, procedures or actions of its employees and may include complaints about how the parish council has dealt with concerns.

This policy does not apply to complaints against councillors; these are covered by the Code of Conduct and should be addressed to the Monitoring Officer at Ribble Valley Borough Council. Concerns regarding policy decisions can be raised with the parish council, but Standing Orders prevent the re-opening of 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.

All formal complaints regarding the parish council should be made in writing to the Clerk of the parish council. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the Clerk, he should address it to the Chair of the parish council. Contact details for the Clerk, Chair and other Councillors are listed on the website. A refusal to put the complaint in writing does not mean that the complaint will not be investigated, but it will be easier to deal with if it is in writing.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Clerk / Chair will endeavour to settle the complaint immediately. If it is not possible to do this, the Clerk / Chair will normally acknowledge correspondence within five working days and explain how the complaint will be dealt with. The complainant will be asked if he wishes the complaint to be dealt with confidentially. A procedure will be put in place to investigate the facts of the complaint and collate evidence for the parish council. Any person complained about will be given an opportunity to comment.

If the complaint includes an allegation that a criminal offence has been committed the Clerk / Chair may refer the matter to the police.

If the complaint alleges misconduct by an employee, a decision on the complaint may be deferred until the allegation has been dealt with under the parish council's grievance and disciplinary procedures. If this is the case, the parish council will not enter into correspondence or discussion with the complainant about the action taken against any member of staff in order to protect employment rights to which all employees of the parish council are entitled.

The Clerk / Chair of the parish council will notify the complainant within 20 working days of the outcome of the complaint and of what action (if any) the parish council proposes to take as a result. In exceptional cases, the twenty working days timescale may be extended but if it is, the claimant will be informed.

The Clerk / Chair shall report to the next meeting of the full parish council any written complaint received and the action taken.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response to their complaint, he can ask for the complaint to be heard at the next meeting of the full parish council. The complainant will be invited to attend the meeting and to bring with them a representative if they wish and they will be offered the opportunity to explain the nature of the complaint to the meeting. The Clerk / Chair will consider whether the complaint requires a discussion in the absence of the press and public.

Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the parish council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on. The Clerk shall provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which the parish council wishes to rely and shall do so promptly, allowing the complainant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting. The parish council may defer dealing with any complaint if it considers that further advice is necessary. The advice will be considered and the complaint dealt with at the next meeting after the advice has been received.

The Clerk / Chair will write to the complainant within ten working days of the full parish council meeting and state what action (if any) it proposes to take as a result of the complaint. In exceptional cases the timescale may be extended but if it is, the claimant will be informed. Where the complaint is upheld, the Clerk / Chair will report to a full parish council meeting what action has been taken to ensure that any mistake does not recur.