

Blofield Parish Council - Complaints Procedure

Introduction

Blofield Parish Council strives to provide a high standard of service to the public. In the interests of openness and the desire to seek continuous improvement, the Council encourages anyone who feels dissatisfied with the service provided to bring this to the attention of the Council.

In some instances, it will be appropriate for an explanation to be given and/or remedial action taken.

Where a formal complaint is submitted in writing, a proportionate investigation will be conducted and the outcome communicated back to the complainant in writing.

How to make a complaint about the Council

Enquiries or observations about the Council services can be made to the Parish Clerk, by telephone, by e-mail or by mail. The contact details are below.

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Clerk / Deputy Clerk at:
The Lodge, 48 Panxworth Road, South Walsham, Norwich, Norfolk, NR13 6DX, or
by e-mail to:

Finance@blofield-pc.gov.uk

Clerk@blofield-pc.gov.uk

If the matter relates directly to the Clerk / Deputy Clerk, the complaint should be addressed to the Chairman of the Council and sent, marked personal & confidential, via the Clerk or by email to: chair@blofield-pc.gov.uk or vicechair@blofield-pc.gov.uk

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Confidentiality

All complaints will be treated as confidential. Even where the complainant specifically waives their right to confidentiality, the Council will comply with its obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 to safeguard against the unlawful disclosure of personal data.

Any meeting of the Council, or a group, considering a complaint or inviting the complainant to make representations, will exclude the public. Agendas and minutes will not disclose personal data or financial, sensitive or confidential information relating to an individual complainant or a third party.

Receipt of the complaint

Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged within 21 days, specifying:

- Who is dealing with the complaint
- Whether the complainant will have an opportunity to make verbal representations, accompanied by a friend if desired
- Timeframe for receipt by complainant of a formal response
- Confirm the next steps in the complaints procedure

Investigating the complaint

The Clerk will inform the Chair and Vice-Chair of any complaint.

It will usually be appropriate for the circumstances leading to the complaint to be investigated by the Clerk on behalf of the Council.

Complaints that relate directly to the Clerks will be dealt with by an ad hoc group of three councillors with either the chair or vice-chair being one.

Where appropriate, the complainant will be invited to make verbal representations to the person (or group) investigating. Before the meeting and within a specified period, the complainant shall provide the Clerk with any new information or other evidence relevant to the complaint, and the Clerk shall provide the complainant with new information or evidence relevant to the complaint.

Meetings with the complainant (if applicable)

1. If the complainant is invited to a meeting, the Clerk or chairman of the meeting should explain how the meeting will proceed.
2. The complainant should outline the grounds for complaint and, thereafter, questions may be asked by the Clerk or by members at the meeting.
3. The Clerk or the Chairman will have an opportunity to explain the Council's position and questions may be asked by the complainant.
4. The Clerk, or as the case may be, the Chairman, and then the complainant should be offered the opportunity to summarise their respective positions.
5. The complainant should be advised when a decision about the complaint is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated to them.

After the complaint has been decided

In normal circumstances, the complainant will be notified in writing (e-mail if appropriate) of the outcome within three months of lodging the complaint. This will include whether or not the complaint is upheld, reasons for the decision, details of any action taken and information about the right of appeal.

Appeals

If the complainant is not satisfied with how a complaint has been dealt with, they can appeal in writing to the Council, setting out what they are unhappy with and the grounds.

The appeal will be considered by a group formed of persons not previously involved in the investigation of the original complaint, led by the chair or vice-chair as appropriate. This will consist of a review of the original investigation and outcome, together with any action taken as a result.

Appeals received more than one month after the date of the decision letter/e-mail will not be considered. There is no further right to appeal.

Complaints involving members of staff or councillors, etc.

Where a complaint against the Council includes reference to the actions or conduct of staff or councillors, the complaint will be treated as a complaint against the body corporate, as opposed to the individual(s). If after the complaint has been looked into the Council considers there may be a need to take disciplinary action against a member of staff, this will be dealt with in accordance with its disciplinary procedure.

Allegations that a member has breached the Code of Conduct should be forwarded to the Monitoring Officer of Broadland District Council in writing (on-line form available Broadland District Council).

Councillors are free to raise matters of concern in respect of council business by the submission of motions on the agenda of the relevant meeting(s).

Where a member of staff has a complaint about the workplace, these should be raised in accordance with the Council's grievance procedure.

Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman deals with complaints against principal authorities (district, borough and county councils) and certain other public sector bodies.

It is not responsible for handling complaints against a town or parish council, except where it is working with a principal authority (through a joint committee), or it is exercising the functions of a principal authority.

Adopted by Blofield Parish Council - May 2024.