



Complaints Procedure

Scarning Parish Council aims to:

- Make it easy for anyone to make a complaint.
- Solve problems as quickly as possible.
- Prevent problems from happening again.

What this procedure deals with

From time to time members of the public may have complaints about the administration, procedures and decisions of their Parish Council. This document deals with such complaints.

What this procedure does not deal with

The following complaints need to be referred to the relevant body and would not be dealt with by this complaints procedure:

For matters relating to financial irregularity, contact the Audit Commission (telephone 0844 798 3131).

For matters relating to criminal activity, contact the Police (non emergency 101).

For matters relating to a complaint concerning a Council member's conduct/failure to comply with the Code of Conduct must be submitted to the local Standards Officer. Write to Breckland District Council, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham, NR19 1EE, or telephone 01362 656870.

For matters relating to employee conduct, this would be dealt with through the internal disciplinary procedure via the Chair of the Parish Council, whose details can be found on the Council's website (scarningpc.info).

When we hear from you regarding a complaint

We will deal with any informal complaints about the Council as quickly as possible. We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days and contact you within ten working days of us hearing from you either to give you a full answer or to give you a progress report and explain why we need more time to investigate further. We will also tell you when you can expect an answer.

Confidentiality

Your complaint will be treated in confidence. Full details of the complaint will only be given to those councillors/members of staff concerned.

The following procedure has been approved by Scarning Parish Council as a way of ensuring that complainants can feel satisfied that their complaint has been properly and fully considered.

Complaints Procedure

1. Informal Complaint

1.1 The Council envisages that most complaints can be resolved easily and amicably through this route. Complaints must be directed to the Parish Clerk, or Council Chair if the complaint is about the Clerk. A complainant may advise a Parish Councillor of the details of a complaint, but individual councillors are not able to resolve complaints. The Parish Clerk (or Council Chair) will report any complaint disposed of by direct action with the complainant at the next Parish Council meeting.

1.2 If an informal approach does not resolve the issue, or if the complaint is deemed particularly serious, the formal complaint procedure outlined below will be followed.

2. Formal Complaint

2.1 If a complaint about the Council is notified orally to the Clerk or Council Chair and the complaint is unresolved, the complainant will be asked to put the complaint in writing to the Clerk. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days.

2.2 If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the Clerk or other nominated officer, he or she will be advised to address it to the Council Chair.

2.3 The Clerk (or other nominated officer) will carry out an initial investigation into the complaint and will, within ten working days, provide the complainant with an update on progress, or a suggested resolution. If the complainant is satisfied with the resolution the complaint is closed. The Clerk will report to the Council. The summary will exclude the name of the complainant.

2.4 If the complaint remains unresolved, or the complainant is not satisfied with the proposed resolution, the matter will be referred to the Complaints Panel of the Council.

3. Complaints Panel

3.1 When necessary, the Council will appoint a Complaints Panel to fully investigate the complaint. The panel will be constituted of all members of the Parish Council to ensure that at least three members are available, one of which will be the Council Chair. The Panel has delegated authority from the Parish Council to review and decide on complaints. A letter will be sent to the complainant with the date of the Panel meeting. It is expected that the Panel will meet within fifteen working days of being notified by the Clerk. If the Panel is unable to meet within this time, all parties will be notified of the date of the meeting and the reason for the delay.

3.2 The complainant will be invited to attend a meeting and to bring with them a representative if they wish.

3.3 Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant will provide the Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on. The Council will similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which it wishes to rely at the meeting and shall do so promptly, allowing the complainant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting.

4. At the meeting

4.1 The Council will consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and the press. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the Council meeting in public.

4.2 The Council Chair should introduce everyone and explain the procedure.

4.3 The complainant (or representative) will be invited to outline the grounds for complaint and thereafter questions may be asked by members of the Panel.

4.4 The Panel will have the opportunity to explain the Council's position and questions may be asked by the complainant (or representative).

4.5 The Panel and then the complainant will be offered the opportunity to summarise their position.

4.6 The complainant will be asked to leave the room while panel members decide whether or not the grounds for complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, the complainant will be invited back. The complainant will then return to hear the decision. If the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day the complainant will be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated.

5. After the Meeting

5.1 The decision will be confirmed in writing within ten working days, together with details of any action to be taken.

5.2 The announcement of any decision will be made in public at the next Parish Council meeting.

Approved: January 2022. Reviewed without amendment: February 2024.
Next review: February 2026.