

STRATFIELD MORTIMER PARISH COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

The Parish Council is committed to providing a quality service for the benefit of all those who live or work in its area or are visitors to the locality. We try to get our service delivery right every time, but there are occasions when users of our services may be dissatisfied with our performance, for any number of reasons.

This procedure is based on the advice provided by the National Association of Local Councils for handling complaints, is for complaints about the administration of the council or about its procedures. It does not relate to certain complaints, in which case the table below should be followed:

Allegation	Process
Financial irregularity	Local electors have a right to object to the Parish Council's audit of accounts further to s.16 Audit Commission Act 1998
Criminal activity	Refer to police
Conduct of a councillor	Complaints alleging a breach of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct should be addressed to the Monitoring Officer at West Berkshire District Council

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for managing all complaints unless the complaint is about the Clerk, in which case the Chairman of the Council will deal with it.

In **all** cases, the processes as detailed below will be followed.

Confidentiality

All complaints are treated with confidentiality with due regard for people's privacy. The Council is not at liberty to discuss a complaint with a third party.

Who to ~~C~~eontact

The [Clerk][Chairman] of the Council (*Chairman if the complaint is about the Clerk*)
Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council
Parish Council Office
27 Victoria Road
Mortimer
Reading
RG7 3SH

Email: the.clerk@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk or chairman@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk.

Informal Complaint

It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved quickly and amicably through this route.

Informal complaints can be made by telephone, email or a visit to the Council's office in the Library. The complaint will be handled by the Clerk (*but if a complaint is made about the Clerk it will always be dealt with by the Chairman under the formal process). Alternatively, informal complaints may be made via a Councillor, though the response

~~Adopted 9th January 2020~~November 2021

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will still be made through the Clerk. A response to an informal complaint will be made within ten working days.

It is expected that most complaints can be resolved through this informal route. However, the Council appreciates that on occasions if an informal approach has not resolved the complaint, or that the initial complaint is sufficiently serious, then the formal complaints process should be followed.

Formal Complaint

Submission

A formal complaint should be submitted in writing to the Council's Office (see above), addressed to the Clerk (or the Chairman if the complaint is about the Clerk), marked "Formal Complaint". Alternatively, the Clerk or Chairman may be emailed (see above) using the same title on the email.

The complaint should cover as much detail as possible and enclose any relevant supporting documentation. It will be acknowledged ~~in due course~~ within three working days.

Initial investigation and proposed resolution

The Clerk/Chairman will carry out an initial investigation into the complaint and, within ten working days, will either provide the Complainant with a suggested resolution or an update on progress.

If the Complainant is satisfied with the suggested resolution the complaint is closed and the Clerk/Chairman will report to the Council including summary details of the complaint and a brief summary of its resolution (but excluding the name of the Complainant and, if the complaint is made against a specific Councillor or Councillors, their name/s).

If the Complainant is not satisfied with the suggested resolution, or if the Clerk/Chairman believes that the complaint is sufficiently serious, a Complaints Panel will be constituted within ten working days.

Complaints Panel

Procedure

The Panel will comprise four members of the Council who have not had any involvement with the subject of the complaint.

In addition, at the discretion of the Clerk/Chairman, a Councillor who is not a member of the Panel may be asked to investigate and present their opinion of the complaint.

Meeting

- 1 The Panel will appoint a Chairman from amongst its members.
- 2 Members of the Complaints Panel introduce themselves to the Complainant.
- 3 The Complainant will set out their complaint and explain what action they want the Council to take.

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- 4 Where relevant the nominated Councillor will present their report on the matter.
- 5 The Panel and the Complainant will have an opportunity to ask questions of each other and of the nominated Councillor.
- 6 The Complainant will have the opportunity to sum up their case.
- 7 The meeting will close.

Decision

Following the meeting the Panel will consider its decision and Chairman of the Panel will provide the Complainant with that decision, in writing, within five working days of the meeting.

There is no further right of appeal.

Persistent Complainants

SMPC has a Persistent Complainants Procedure to:

1. Identify complainants who are unreasonable or unreasonably persistent and/or prolific in pursuit of their complaint.
2. Provide the means to manage their complaints appropriately.

A copy of the Persistent Complainants Procedure may be found at <https://www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk/the-council/policies> or by contacting the Clerk at the above email/address.

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