



Holme Valley Parish Council

Complaints Procedure

Document Control

Title: Complaints Procedure

Approved by: Annual Council 18-05-2026

Review Cycle: Every 3 years

Next Review Due: [Insert Date]

Version: 1.0

1. Introduction

Holme Valley Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to providing high-quality services and ensuring that complaints are handled fairly, transparently, and promptly. This procedure sets out how complaints may be made and how they will be considered.

2. Scope of the Procedure

This procedure applies to complaints about:

- Council administration, procedures, or service delivery
- Decisions of the Council or its committees

This procedure does **not** apply to:

- Complaints about councillors (refer to the Monitoring Officer)
- Staff grievances (see Grievance Policy)
- FOI/Data Protection matters (statutory processes apply)

3. Principles

The Council will ensure that complaints are:

- Handled confidentially and lawfully
- Investigated impartially
- Responded to promptly
- Resolved at the lowest appropriate level.

4. Informal Complaints

Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved informally by the Clerk or relevant officer.

The Clerk may:

- Provide clarification or information.
- Offer a practical solution.
- Seek to resolve misunderstandings.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may submit a formal written complaint.

5. Submitting a Formal Complaint

Formal complaints must be submitted **in writing** to the Clerk and must include:

- The nature of the complaint
- Relevant dates, evidence, and individuals involved
- The outcome sought

If the complaint concerns the Clerk, it must be submitted to the **Chair of the Council**.

6. Initial Assessment

Within **10 working days**, the Clerk or Chair will:

- Acknowledge receipt
- Confirm whether the complaint falls within this procedure
- Determine which Standing Committee handles the complaint.

7. Step-by-Step Procedure for handling a Formal Complaint

Step 1 – Receipt and Registration of a formal complaint

- Receipt of formal complaint is acknowledged by the Committee Chair as appropriate **within 10 working days**.
- The Complaints Procedure is shared with the Complainant.
- Confidential case file opened by Committee Chair as appropriate.
- Conflicts of interest declared as appropriate.

Step 2 – Preliminary Review

- The Committee Chair reviews the complaint and evidence provided to date.
- In consultation with the Chair of the Council the Committee Chair identifies the scope of any investigation needed and information required and appoints an Investigation Lead.

- Where the complaint involves the Chair of Council, or otherwise warrants independent investigation, the Committee Chair may seek the services of a suitably qualified independent investigator.
- The Investigation Lead keeps a log of actions taken to be reported to and noted by the Standing Committee at the next scheduled meeting.

Step 3 – Notification

- Complainant is informed of the scope of investigation required.

Step 4 – Investigation

- Investigation is carried out, including the holding of interviews and collection of evidence as set out in the scope of the investigation.
- HR/legal advice sought where appropriate.

Step 5 – Preparation of Papers

The Investigation Lead prepares Investigation Pack consisting of:

- Summary report.
- Evidence.
- Investigation findings.
- Legal/procedural advice.

Step 6 – Committee Meeting

- Held in confidential session.
- Investigation Lead presents findings.
- Outcome confirmed in public session.

Step 6 – Decision

- Complaint upheld / partially upheld / not upheld – reasons to be recorded.
- Actions agreed and recorded.

Step 7 – Outcome

- Complainant informed of outcome in writing.
- Complainant informed of the right of appeal to Full Council, within 20 working days.

Step 8 – Record-Keeping

- Committee Chair to keep records from outset on Council digital filing.
- Secure digital filing of all documentation in relation to the complaint.
- Complaints log updated.

Step 9 – Appeal

- Appeal to Full Council within 20 working days of the receipt of the written outcome of the complaint

8. Appeals Considered by Full Council

8.1 When Full Council Will Consider an Appeal

- Full Council only considers appeals against Standing Committee decisions.

8.2 Step-by-Step Procedure an Appeal to be considered by Full Council

Step 1 – Receipt and Acknowledgement

- Complainant requests that the outcome of their complaint is referred to Full Council as an appeal.
- The request to appeal to Full Council is acknowledged in writing, by the Clerk, within 5 working days of receipt.

Step 2 – Conflict of Interest Check

Conflicts of interest to be declared as appropriate and preclude councillor participation in decision-making.

Step 3 – Preliminary Review

- The Chair of Council reviews the investigation pack.
- The Chair identifies the scope of any further investigation needed and further information required and appoints an Investigation Lead. Where the complaint involves the Chair of Council, or otherwise warrants independent investigation, the services of a suitably qualified independent investigator will be sought.
- The Investigation Lead keeps a log of actions taken.

Step 4 – Investigation

- Investigation is carried out, including the holding of interviews and collection of evidence as set out in the scope of the investigation.
- HR/legal advice sought where appropriate.

Step 5– Preparation of Papers

The Investigation Lead prepares as necessary:

- Summary report.
- Evidence.
- Investigation findings.
- Legal/procedural advice.

Step 6 – Notification

Complainant is notified of the meeting date.

Step 7 – Full Council Meeting

- Held in confidential session.
- Council reviews evidence and deliberates.

Step 8 – Decision

Council determines:

- Upheld / partially upheld / not upheld – reasons recorded.
- Actions required.

Step 9 – Outcome

Written outcome issued to complainant within **10 working days** of the decision being made.

Step 10 – Record-Keeping

- Paper and digital documents and other evidence will be kept, in secure filing, for a period of six years.
- Complaints log updated.

Step 11 – Finality

Decision of Full Council is final.

9. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All complaints are handled in accordance with UK GDPR and the Council's Privacy Notice.

10. Unreasonable Complaints

The Council may curtail or otherwise refuse to investigate an unreasonable complaint. A panel of two councillors and an independent person appointed by Full Council will consider whether a particular complaint is unreasonable and report its findings to a future Full Council meeting.

Appendix F outlines the handling of vexatious complaints.

11. Review

This procedure will be reviewed every three years.

ENDS.

APPENDIX A — Public-Facing Complaints Procedure (Website Version)

Holme Valley Parish Council – Complaints Procedure (Public Information Version)

1. Introduction

Holme Valley Parish Council aims to provide high-quality services. If something goes wrong, we want to hear from you so we can put it right.

2. What You Can Complain About

This process covers complaints about:

- Council administration or procedures
- Council services
- Decisions made by the Council or its committees

3. What This Procedure Does Not Cover

- Complaints about councillors (these must be referred to the Monitoring Officer)
- Staff grievances (handled under HR procedures)
- Freedom of Information or Data Protection matters (statutory processes apply)

4. Step 1 – Informal Resolution

You may contact the Clerk to:

- raise a concern
- ask for clarification
- resolve misunderstandings

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, you may submit a formal complaint.

5. Step 2 – Submitting a Formal Complaint

Formal complaints must be made in writing and include:

- what happened
- when it happened
- who was involved
- any evidence
- the outcome you are seeking

Send your complaint to the Clerk.

If the complaint concerns the Clerk, send it to the Chair of the Council.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **10 working days**.

6. How Your Complaint Will Be Handled

1. Acknowledgement

2. Confirmation that the matter falls within this procedure
3. Allocation to the appropriate Standing Committee
4. Appointment of an Investigation Lead
5. Investigation (interviews, evidence review)
6. Committee decision
7. Written outcome

You will be informed of how to appeal if you remain dissatisfied.

7. Appeals

You may appeal to Full Council within **20 working days** of receiving the written decision.

8. Confidentiality

All complaints are handled in accordance with UK GDPR and the Council's Privacy Notice.

9. Unreasonable Complaints

Where behaviour becomes abusive, persistent, or unreasonable, the Council may limit contact or decline to investigate.

APPENDIX B — Investigation Lead Checklist

Investigation Lead Checklist

Before You Begin

- Confirm appointment
- Read the complaint and scope
- Check for conflicts of interest
- Open a secure case log

Planning

- Identify what needs establishing
- List interviewees
- Identify evidence required
- Prepare interview questions
- Set an investigation timeline

During the Investigation

- Notify the complainant of the agreed scope
- Conduct interviews
- Gather evidence
- Seek HR/legal advice where appropriate
- Keep factual notes
- Agree interview notes with interviewees
- Maintain confidentiality at all times

Investigation Pack

- Summary report
- Evidence bundle
- Findings
- Legal/procedural advice

Committee Meeting

- Present findings
- Provide clarification as required
- Record actions

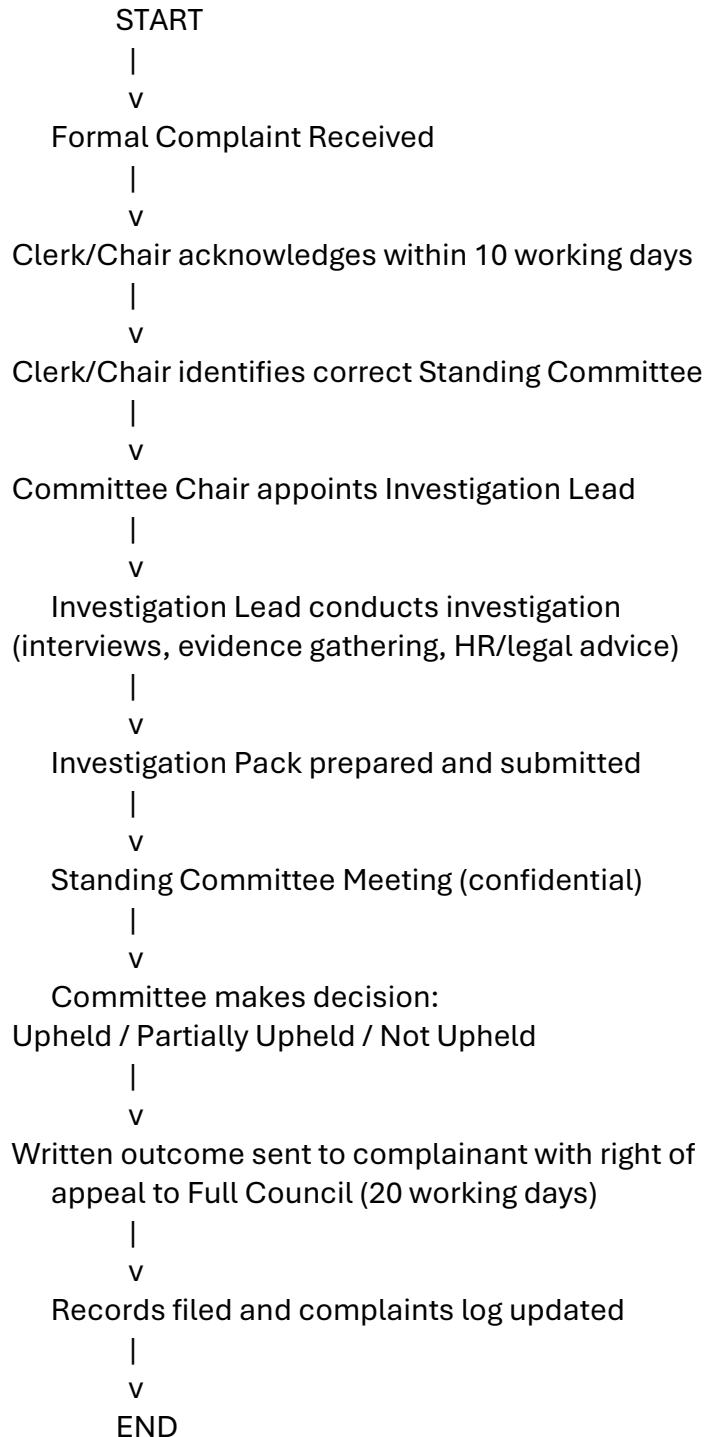
After the Decision

- Ensure written outcome is issued
- Update the complaints log

- Securely file all documents
 - Share learning points where appropriate
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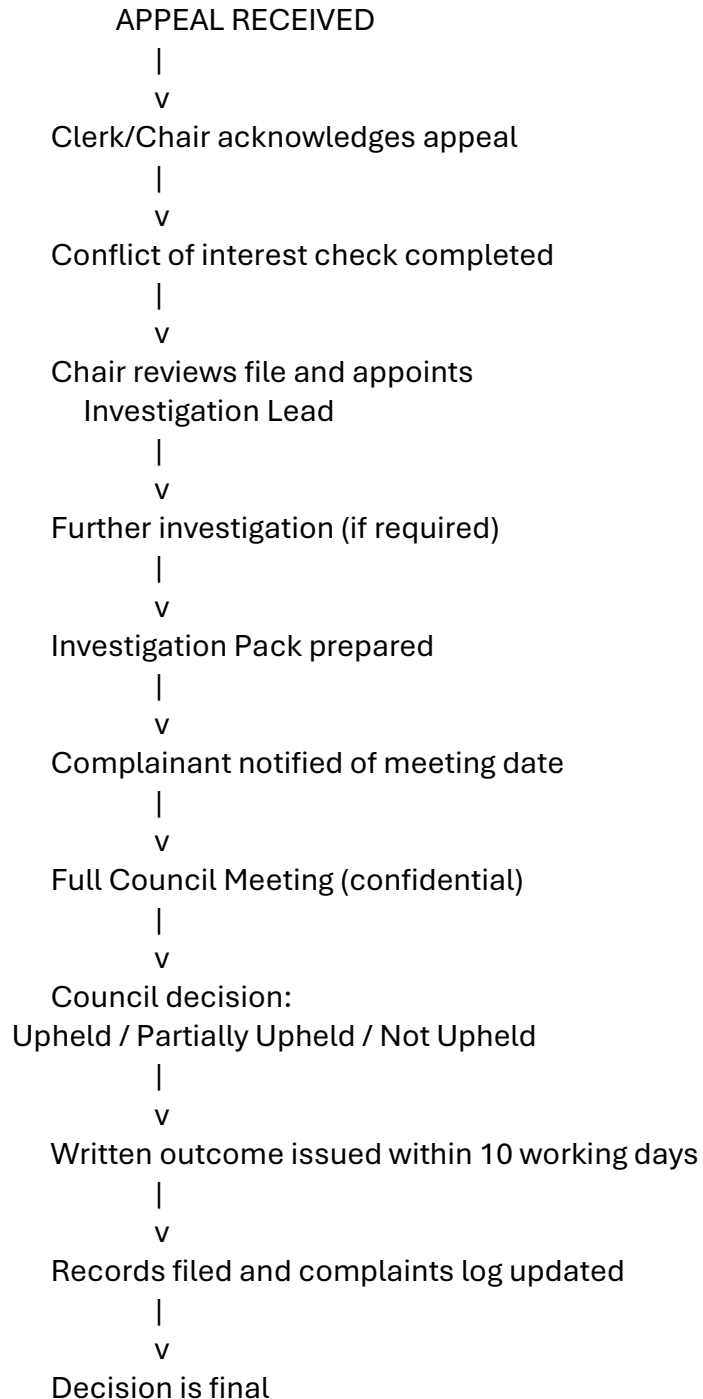
APPENDIX C — Standing Committee Flowchart

Standing Committee Complaint Process



APPENDIX D — Full Council Appeal Flowchart

Full Council Appeal Process



APPENDIX E — Staff Guide to Handling Complaints

1. When a Resident Raises a Concern

Staff should:

- listen respectfully
- thank the resident
- avoid defensiveness
- try to resolve the matter informally
- record actions taken

2. When a Concern Becomes a Formal Complaint

A concern becomes a formal complaint when the complainant requests formal handling.

3. Staff Responsibilities

Staff must:

- be courteous
- maintain confidentiality
- provide accurate information
- pass on complaints promptly
- not investigate unless formally appointed

Staff must not:

- promise outcomes
- discuss complaints with others
- delete or alter records
- contact the complainant outside the agreed process

4. Supporting an Investigation

Staff must:

- provide information promptly
- attend interviews
- maintain confidentiality

5. After the Complaint

- implement actions
- reflect on learning
- update procedures where appropriate

APPENDIX F — Unreasonable, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

1. Introduction

The Council is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and transparently. A small number of complainants may act in ways that hinder the Council's ability to provide services. These may be considered *unreasonably persistent* or *vexatious*.

2. Definition

A complainant may be considered unreasonable or unreasonably persistent if their behaviour:

- has no serious purpose or value
- is designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- harasses the Council
- is obsessive or unreasonable

3. Examples of Unreasonable Behaviour

This may include:

- refusing to specify grounds of a complaint
- refusing to co-operate with the procedure
- making groundless complaints about staff
- submitting complaints to multiple bodies simultaneously
- changing the basis of the complaint repeatedly
- raising trivial or irrelevant information
- recording meetings without consent
- making excessive demands on staff
- sending high volumes of correspondence
- refusing to accept final decisions
- repeatedly contacting the Council about the same issue
- refusing to accept matters outside the Council's remit

4. Decision-Making

This policy is used only as a last resort.

A written warning will be issued before restrictions are applied.

5. Aggressive Complaints

Abusive, threatening, or violent behaviour will not be tolerated. Incidents will be logged and reported to the Police.

6. Possible Restrictions

Depending on the behaviour, the Council may:

- require contact in a specific form (e.g., letter only)

- require contact with a named officer only
- limit the number of phone calls permitted
- refuse to deal with repeated correspondence on the same matter

The complainant will receive written confirmation of any restrictions, including duration and review arrangements.

7. Recording and Reviewing Restrictions

- Restrictions will be recorded and shared with relevant officers
- New complaints on new issues will be considered on their merits
- Restrictions may be lifted if behaviour improves

8. Ceasing Contact

In rare cases, the Council may cease contact entirely and advise the complainant to approach the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

APPENDIX G — A4 Noticeboard Infographic (Text Version)

Holme Valley Parish Council – How to Make a Complaint (A4 Noticeboard Version)

1. Start with an Informal Conversation

Speak to the Clerk to raise a concern or ask for clarification.
Most issues can be resolved quickly.

2. Make a Formal Complaint (If Needed)

Put your complaint in writing and include:

- what happened
- when it happened
- who was involved
- evidence
- the outcome you want

Send your complaint to the Clerk (or to the Chair if the complaint concerns the Clerk).

3. What Happens Next

- We acknowledge your complaint within 10 working days
- A Standing Committee is assigned
- An Investigation Lead gathers information
- A confidential meeting is held
- A decision is made
- You receive a written outcome

4. If You Are Not Satisfied

You may appeal to Full Council within 20 working days.

5. Confidentiality

All complaints are handled in line with UK GDPR.

Our Commitment

We will:

- treat you with respect
- investigate fairly
- keep you informed
- learn from complaints

ENDS.