



# Barrowby Parish Council

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## Complaints Procedure

### Document control

- **Owner:** Full Council
- **Responsible officer:** Clerk / Proper Officer
- **Adopted:** 11.05.2026 (Minute ref: 8e [26/008])
- **Version:** 2026.1
- **Review:** Annually or earlier if legislation/guidance changes
- **Next review due:** January-March 2027 at Full Council for formal adoption at Parish Council May 2027

### 1. Purpose

Barrowby Parish Council is committed to providing services lawfully, fairly and to a good standard. The purpose of this procedure is to provide a clear and accessible way for people to raise concerns or complaints about the administration of the Council, its procedures, or the standard of service it has provided, and to ensure complaints are considered properly, fairly and consistently.

This procedure is intended to help the Council resolve complaints, learn lessons where appropriate, and improve services and governance.

### 2. Scope

This procedure applies to complaints about:

- the administration of the Council;
- the Council's procedures;
- the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council;
- failure to follow the Council's adopted procedures;
- unreasonable delay;
- poor communication; or
- other concerns about the way the Council has acted, where another statutory or internal procedure does not apply.

### **3. Matters not dealt with under this procedure**

This procedure does **not** apply to:

**a. Complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor**

These must be made to the Monitoring Officer of South Kesteven District Council under the principal authority's standards arrangements.

**b. Complaints about Council employees**

These are ordinarily employment matters and will be handled under the Council's internal staffing, grievance or disciplinary procedures. The complainant will not usually be entitled to detailed information about the outcome.

**c. Freedom of Information, Environmental Information and data protection rights requests**

Requests for information, subject access requests, and requests relating to information rights will be handled under the relevant statutory regime.

**d. Criminal matters**

Allegations of criminal conduct should be referred to the police.

**e. Insurance, legal claims or contractual disputes**

These will be handled through the Council's insurers, legal advisers or other appropriate process.

**f. Matters where there is an alternative statutory remedy or right of appeal**

For example, planning decisions, monitoring and enforcement decisions, or other matters which are for another authority or tribunal.

**g. Vexatious, abusive or repetitious complaints**

These may be managed in accordance with the Council's policy on unreasonable or persistent contact, where adopted.

### **4. Principles**

The Council will handle complaints in a way that is:

- fair and proportionate;
- clear and accessible;
- timely;
- respectful and non-adversarial;
- mindful of confidentiality and data protection obligations;
- focused on resolving the complaint where possible.

A complaint will be handled sensitively, but the Council cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Information will be shared only where reasonably necessary and in accordance with the law.

## 5. How to make a complaint

A complaint may be made:

- by email;
- by letter; or
- by completing the Council's complaint form, if the complainant wishes to use it.

Where possible, the complaint should include:

- the complainant's name and contact details;
- the nature of the complaint;
- what has happened;
- relevant dates, times and locations;
- any supporting evidence; and
- the remedy sought.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered unless there is a compelling public interest reason to do so.

The Council will normally only consider complaints made within **12 months** of the matter arising or the complainant becoming aware of it, but may exercise discretion to consider older matters where it is reasonable to do so.

## 6. Where complaints should be sent

Complaints should normally be sent to the Clerk.

If the complaint concerns the Clerk, it should be sent to the Chair of the Council, marked **Private and Confidential**.

If the complaint concerns the Chair and the Clerk, it should be sent to the Vice-Chair, or if there is no Vice-Chair or it is inappropriate to do so, to another appropriate person appointed by the Council.

## 7. Informal resolution

The Council encourages concerns to be raised informally first where appropriate. Many issues can be resolved quickly by clarification, explanation, apology, correction of an error, or other practical action.

Raising a matter informally does not prevent a person from making a formal complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

## 8. Formal complaints process

### Stage 1 – Acknowledgement and initial assessment

The Clerk, or other appropriate person, will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint within **5 working days**.

The complaint will then be reviewed to determine:

- whether it falls within this procedure;
- whether further information is required;
- whether it may be resolved informally; or
- whether it should proceed to formal consideration.

If the complaint falls outside this procedure, the complainant will be told, where possible, which process or body is more appropriate.

## **Stage 2 – Investigation / consideration**

The Clerk, or another person appointed for the purpose, will gather the relevant information and prepare a report or summary for consideration.

Where appropriate, the complaint may be referred to a small panel of councillors, usually **three members**, appointed to consider the complaint. No councillor who is directly involved in the complaint, or who has a conflict of interest or apparent bias, shall take part.

The panel may:

- review the written complaint and supporting documents;
- seek further information from the complainant or others;
- meet with the complainant if it considers that helpful;
- attempt informal resolution where appropriate.

The Council aims to conclude this stage and issue a response within **20 working days** of receiving all necessary information. If that is not possible, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and given a revised timescale.

## **Stage 3 – Decision**

The complainant will receive a written response setting out:

- the complaint considered;
- the Council's findings;
- any action the Council will take, if appropriate; and
- whether the matter is regarded as closed.

Possible outcomes may include:

- no further action;
- an explanation or clarification;
- an apology;

- corrective action;
- recommendation of service or procedural improvements;
- referral into another appropriate process.

## **9. Hearing arrangements**

The Council or panel may decide that a hearing is necessary, but complaints will not automatically go to a full Council meeting.

Where a hearing is held:

- the complainant will be given reasonable notice;
- the complainant may be accompanied by one other person;
- the hearing will be conducted fairly and proportionately;
- the Council or panel will decide whether the public and press should be excluded for all or part of the meeting in accordance with the law and the confidential nature of the business.

## **10. Record keeping, confidentiality and data protection**

The Council will keep an appropriate record of complaints received, actions taken and outcomes.

Complaint records will be handled in accordance with data protection law and the Council's retention arrangements.

Personal data and confidential information will only be shared where necessary. Complaint outcomes may be reported to Council in summary form, but personal details and confidential matters will be restricted where appropriate.

## **11. Complaints about councillor conduct**

Complaints alleging that a parish councillor has breached the Code of Conduct are not dealt with under this procedure. Such complaints must be made to the Monitoring Officer at South Kesteven District Council under the principal authority's standards arrangements.

Where the complaint concerns the conduct of a parish councillor towards the Clerk, best practice is that any formal standards complaint should normally be made by the Chair or by the Council, rather than by the Clerk personally, except in exceptional circumstances.

## **12. Complaints about staff**

Complaints about the conduct or performance of Council staff will be considered initially by the Clerk, or by the Chair where the complaint concerns the Clerk.

Such complaints may be considered under the Council's internal staffing procedures. Because these are confidential employment matters, the Council will not usually provide detailed information about any action taken.

### **13. Unreasonable or persistent complaints**

The Council may restrict or manage contact where a complainant's behaviour is abusive, harassing, unreasonable or persistently repetitive, provided this is done fairly, proportionately and in accordance with any relevant Council policy.

### **14. Review of this procedure**

This procedure will be reviewed periodically and updated as necessary to reflect current legislation, guidance and best practice.

## **Appendix A: Complaint Routes**

**Ordinary council administration/service complaint** → Council complaints procedure

**Complaint about a parish councillor's conduct** → Monitoring Officer, South Kesteven District Council

**Complaint about a member of staff** → Internal staffing process

**FOI / EIR / Subject Access Request** → Information rights process

**Possible criminal matter** → Police

**Insurance / legal claim** → Insurers / legal advisers