

# West Auckland Parish Council

## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

This procedure covers complaints about the administration or procedures of the Council. If possible every effort will be made to try to and settle the complaint directly without recourse to this complaints procedure. Where complaints cannot be settled directly a date shall be set for a complaints committee.

Complaints about individuals are a separate matter

- complaints about an employee would be dealt with as an employment issue through an internal disciplinary procedure.
- complaints about a Councillor should be made to Durham County Councils Monitoring Officer.

Other complaints

- about financial irregularity - a local elector has the right to object at audit of accounts pursuant to Section 16 of the Audit Commission Act 1998. On other matters, councils may need to consult their auditor.
- against policy decisions made by the Council shall be referred back to Council (taking note of Standing Order 14).
- about criminal activity should be referred to the police.

West Auckland Parish Council takes the views of local people seriously and need to be aware when there is dissatisfaction in the services which the Council delivers. The outcome of a complaint will assist the Council in reviewing and where necessary changing the way services are delivered.

Complaints shall be dealt with by a Complaints Committee, which shall be made up of 4 Members of the Council and convened as and when necessary. The complaints committee shall report its conclusions to the next Parish Council meeting following any hearing and any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the Council meeting in public.

### Making a Complaint

1. The complainant should be asked to put the complaint about the council's procedures of administration in writing to the clerk or nominated officer.
2. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the clerk or other nominated officer, he or she should be advised to address it to the chairman of the council
3. The clerk or other nominated officer shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the council or by the committee established for the purposes of hearing complaints. The complainant should also be advised whether the complaint will be treated as confidential or

whether, for example, notice of it will be given in the usual way (if, for example, the complaint is to be heard by a committee)

4. The complainant shall be invited to attend a meeting and to bring with them a representative if they wish.
5. Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on. The council shall provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting and shall do so promptly, allowing the claimant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting.

### **At the Meeting**

6. The Committee shall 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.
7. The Chairman of the meeting shall introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
8. The complainant (or representative) shall outline the grounds for complaint and thereafter questions may be asked by (1) the clerk or other nominated officer and then (ii) members.
9. The clerk or other nominated officer will have an opportunity to explain the council's position and questions may be asked by (i) the complainant and (ii) members.
10. The Clerk, or other nominated officer and then the complainant should be offered the opportunity to summarise their position.
11. The Clerk, or other nominated officer and the complainant should be asked to leave the room while Members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties shall be invited back.
12. The Clerk, or other nominated officer and the complainant should be given the opportunity to wait for the decision but if the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day they should be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated to them.

### **After the Meeting**

13. The decision shall be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.