



Image by Sheila Ashton

Clifton Parish Council Complaints Policy

Adopted at the Full Council meeting on 12th June 2025

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide Clifton Parish Council (the “Parish Council”) with guidance in order to comply with relevant legislation relating to complaints raised against the Parish Council.

The Parish Council provides many services to community groups, sports and social clubs, companies and individuals. The Parish Council tries to get services delivered correctly every time, but there are occasions when users of the services may be dissatisfied.

Informal Complaint

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

Informal complaints can be made by telephone (07547 129038), email (clerk@cliftonbeds-pc.gov.uk) or a visit to the Council's office (Clifton Community Centre, Tuesday to Friday 10am to 2pm). The complaint will be managed by the Clerk.

Complaints should always be directed through the Council office, not through individual Councillors. A complainant may advise a Councillor of the details of a complaint, but individual Councillors are not in a position to resolve complaints.

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 so serious, then the formal complaints process should be followed.

Formal Complaint

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for managing the formal complaints process. If a formal complaint is being raised against the Clerk, then the process as detailed should be followed, but the Chairman of the Council should be informed instead of the Clerk.

A formal complaint can only be submitted in writing to the Council's Office. It should be addressed to the Clerk, marked “Confidential – Formal Complaint.” The Council encourages contact by email and telephone, but as a formal complaint is a serious matter the Council will only accept these in writing.

The complaint should cover as much detail as possible and enclose any relevant supporting documentation. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days.

The Clerk 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, through an agenda item, summary details of the complaint and a brief summary of its resolution. This summary will exclude the names of the complainant.

If the Clerk is unable to resolve the complaint, or the complainant is not satisfied with the proposed resolution then the matter will be referred to a meeting of the Council's Review Panel.

Review Panel

The Review Panel is a properly formed committee of the Parish Council. The panel will be constituted of three members, to review a complaint. The panel will consist of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council and one Councillor.

The panel is subject to all meeting notification, agenda and minute requirements, as laid down in the Parish Council's Standing Orders. Arrangements for minute taking will be reviewed when a Review Panel meeting is called.

It is expected that the Review Panel will be able to meet within seven working days of being notified by the Clerk.

Prior to the meeting:

Seven clear working days before the Review Panel meeting the complainant will provide the Parish Council with copies of all documentation, or other evidence (such as photographs) that they intend to introduce to the Review Panel meeting. The Parish Council will provide the same to the complainant.

The Review Panel shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and press. (*1).

At the meeting:

1. The Chairman of the Review Panel shall introduce everyone and explain the procedure to be used in order to consider the complaint made. The meeting should be as informal and friendly as possible, without prejudicing the need to consider properly the matter under discussion. The complainant may bring a supporter if they wish.
 - (a) The complainant (or representative) shall be invited to outline the grounds for complaint and panel members given the opportunity to ask any questions of the complainant.
 - (b) If relevant, the Clerk will explain the Council's position and panel members shall ask any questions of the Clerk.
 - (c) The complainant is to be offered the opportunity of a last word as means of summing up their position.
 - (d) The Clerk is to be offered the opportunity of a last word as a means of summing up their position.
2. The Clerk and complainant shall be asked to leave the room while the panel members decide whether the grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties should be invited back. In any case both parties return to hear the decision, or to be advised when the decision will be made.
3. The announcement of any decision will be made in public, at the next Full Council meeting.

Timings

The Parish Council will try to adhere to the timings outlined in this policy, but in the case of a complex complaint, or the absence of a member of staff who is involved in the complaint, may mean that the timings have to vary. Complainant to be kept up to date with proposed timelines.

Impact on Council Staff

A formal complaint is a serious matter. A complaint against a member of the Council's staff could result in disciplinary action, or in the cases of gross misconduct dismissal from the Council's employment.

The Council will not under any circumstances enter into any correspondence, or discussion, with any complainant about any action taken, formally or informally against any member of its staff. This is expressly to protect the employment rights to which all employees of the Council are entitled.

Complaints Against Councillors

This policy does not cover complaints against an individual Councillor.

A complaint about a Parish Councillor should be addressed to:

The Monitoring Officer
Central Bedfordshire Council
Priory House
Monks Walk
Chicksands
Shefford
Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ

Central Bedfordshire Council can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a Parish Councillor. It will not deal with complaints about matters that are not covered by the Councillors Code of Conduct. Complaints must be made about a Councillor's failure to follow the Code of Conduct.

Anonymity

The Council will not consider, under any circumstances, informal or formal complaints that are submitted anonymously.

***1** Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 and the Local Government Act 1972 s100 & 10

REVIEW PROCESS.

This policy will be reviewed by the Full Council bi-annually, unless recommendations of policy changes are received.